

PRAISE

for Mark A. Rayner

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THE FATNESS

~a novel of epic portions~

by Mark A. Rayner

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is purely coincidental.

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This manuscript is set in Adobe Garamond Pro, a tasty typeface that is wholesome and nutritious. Chapter titles are in Futura medium italics, which is admittedly, high in refined carbs.

None of the satirical ruminations in this book should be taken as medical advice!



monkeyjoy press

For Shazzer, who loves me no matter my BMI

Also by Mark A. Rayner

Novels

The Amadeus Net

Marvellous Hairy

The Fridgularity

Collections

Pirate Therapy and Other Cures

THE FATNESS

~a novel of epic portions~

Part I

“He must have a long spoon that
must eat with the devil.”

~William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*

Chapter 1 – Eat Your Cake and Have It, Too

The weigh-in was a disaster.

Keelan Cavanaugh stood at the mirror in his tiny room, a wad of belly fat bunched up in his meaty hands. He cursed the roll breathlessly. The skin bulged and turned red as his hands gripped tighter, as if he could – through force of will and enough manual pressure – make the band of fat tissue magically disappear.

But it just hurt.

And for some reason it also made him hungry.

Intellectually, Keelan understood that it was more than the obvious roll of pudge around his middle that was the cause of his continued stay in the Uxford County Calorie Reduction Centre (CRC-17). In his mind's eye, he could imagine the fifty-one bricks of malleable, white, soft butter-like substance that were hidden inside his body somewhere – a pound tucked underneath his liver like cocaine stuffed into a smuggler's arse; some nestled around the heart and lungs, slowly choking him to death; and the obvious subcutaneous blubber that made corduroy pants a fire hazard ... Fifty-one pounds of pure fat that took him from a perfect, Adonis-like body weight, to his current state of crapulence, at 230 pounds.

It was his two-year anniversary in CRC-17. He'd spent that time trying to lose enough weight so that his body mass index – his BMI, which was a measure of his body fat, determined by his height and weight – would drop below the magic number. Thirty and over, and you were obese. A fat bastard, according to the Revised Canada Health Act passed five years before by the federal government. The Fat Act, as it was known to everyone in CRC-17, was an attempt to help citizens deal with their weight problems, because it gave them a simple choice: Stay at a healthy weight (i.e., not obese) or forgo your government-funded health care. (And in fact, any reasonably priced private health care policy, because obesity was listed as a pre-existing condition.)

The space structurally resembled a prison cell except there was a door, and a screen around the toilet/sink area. The decor was definitely not prison-issue: instead of a bunk, Keelan had imported a nice double bed. He'd decorated the walls with paintings he'd created in his years at art school, and he had a small workstation that ate up the rest of the free space in the cell.

A shadow appeared outside. Keelan could see the shape through the opaque plastic door, and he opened it.

"So you think you'll do it?" his visitor asked.

Wayne Falco was a large man – much heavier than Keelan, probably closer to a 40 BMI than 30 – who had been in CRC-17 since the Correctional Service of Canada opened it up five years before. Wayne had been in the first year of medical school when the Fat Act had been passed; he couldn't afford to pay for his own health care, and he knew he would need it. Plus the school had kicked out everyone who had a BMI higher than the normal range, part of a PR exercise supported by the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

He repeated his question: "So you want to do the surgery?"

It was tempting. Keelan had been diligent about losing the weight, but after two years, it was clear he was going to need some kind of special help to get out.

"Go over it again," Keelan said.

"No. I want an answer," Wayne replied.

"Please. I'm just worried about the side effects," Keelan said.

"Do you want me to do the amputation or not?"

Keelan had given it careful thought, and he believed the left leg was the better choice, even though it was the right leg that had been injured playing high school football. The right had a blown-out anterior cruciate ligament, but another (slimmer, less shady) surgeon had expertly reconstructed it fifteen years before (courtesy of the health care system), and it had been fine ever since. The left knee always gave Keelan trouble, and he suspected something was wrong with it anyway. Besides, he was right-handed, which meant right-legged, too, didn't it?

"I don't know," Keelan said. "Explain to me again why we

can't just suck the fat out."

"Because I don't have that kind of equipment. The only thing I can do – and not kill you – is a quick, relatively painless amputation."

Only that morning he'd told his buddy Greg Bestard he'd be an idiot to amputate a perfectly usable leg, but that had been in the morning, before he'd had his daily weigh-in. He'd somehow gained a pound overnight. And he'd snapped.

"And there's really no cost?"

"Unless you want some morphine. Which I *really* recommend. That's a hundred. The rest of the operation is free, provided I get to keep your leg."

"What do you do with the leg?" Keelan asked.

"What do you care? You're the one having it cut off," Falco said. He looked at his phone, as though he was bored by the whole conversation.

"Yeah, but that's just so I can get out of here."

"Then leave. Nobody is going to stop you," Falco replied.

"Don't be a douche. You know why I can't do that."

At the two-year mark of Keelan's stay in CRC-17, a couple of things happened. The first was that he reached a statistical milestone that meant his odds of ever getting out of the Fatness were very low. After being in the CRC for two years, fewer than 5% of inmates lost enough weight to escape. The other was that he would lose his job. He worked as a web designer for the local university's communications department. Under the act, employers were required to hold an employee's job for two years or until they lost the weight. After that, they were able to let the lazy, fat bastards go. So it was lose the leg or pay for his own health care. For his whole life.

"Lose the leg," Falco urged. "How much do you weigh?"

"Two hundred thirty at the morning weigh-in," Keelan said, keeping the despair out of his voice.

"Then your leg should be about ... twenty-three pounds," Falco said, plugging the numbers into his phone. "And you're what, six feet?"

“Five foot eleven.”

Wayne did the calculation on his mobile. “Hey, congratulations, man, that would do it. You’d be sitting pretty at 28.9 BMI! Well under!”

The BMI – the body mass index – ruled their lives.

Keelan looked a little sick to his stomach. He couldn’t believe he was even contemplating this. He thought about all the things he would no longer be able to do: no more hiking, no canoe trips (sure, he could do the water bits, but no portaging), no jogging – his main form of exercise. There were probably a zillion other things, but they had pretty good prosthetics these days, right?

Wayne could sense his indecision. “You know, I don’t often suggest this, but you have pretty good calves – lots of meat there.”

“Meat?”

“I mean muscles. Lots of muscle. They’re heavier, right? And all you really need to lose is what?”

“Up until my weigh-in, fifteen pounds. Now, sixteen, I think.”

“Look, the calf weighs about a third of your leg weight. So let’s say eight pounds. What if you lose eight pounds, and we just do the lower part of your leg? It’s really easy to rock a prosthetic if you’ve still got the knee. I’ll do it for you as a favour. I won’t really be fully compensated for the surgery, but hey, I’m not exactly busy, right? And then you’re out of here.”

Keelan’s friend appeared. Like the other two, Maximillan Tundra was overweight. Fat, actually (BMI 34.9). But he carried himself with a certain confidence, if not swagger. He had a medical degree and was once a psychiatrist before he’d lost his job for professional misconduct. Max was a bit out of breath, having learned from Keelan’s friend Greg that Keelan had gained some weight and that he’d been talking with Falco. “Falco – you fucktard – get away from that lad or I swear to god –” he took a big gulp of air and finished “– I’ll drug your ass back into the Stone Age.”

“Max! Buddy! I’m just doing a bit of business here. So let’s be cool, okay?”

“Let’s be cool? You’re talking about mutilating my friend. I’m not going to be cool, you ghoul. You pit-stained, long-pig-eating, pre-med wannabe.”

“I’m close with Taggart, man. You can’t talk to me like that.”

Max flicked the guy’s nose and shouted, “*Touché malinga!*”

Falco had no idea what that meant. Neither did Keelan, but Keelan *did* think it was kind of menacing and funny at the same time.

“Later, kid. Tell me your decision when this maniac isn’t around,” Falco said.

“No, it’s okay. I don’t want to do it. I just wanted to know if it was possible.”

“Sure,” Falco said, trying to be magnanimous at the loss of his patient. “Besides, it’s only sixteen pounds. You could lose that in a couple of months.”

Keelan’s shoulders slumped, and Max waved his hand at Falco. “F-ffff.”

“You’re a fucking lunatic,” Falco said.

Max grinned and waggled his eyebrows as the hobby surgeon walked away.

“What does ‘*touché malinga*’ mean, Max?”

“Malinga is a Sri Lankan bowler, I believe. Cricket. Now, let’s go for a walk, because, clearly, you need some cheering up.”

Pre-med wannabe or not, Keelan thought there might be something to Falco’s diagnosis of Dr. Tundra’s mental health.

As they walked to the commons, Keelan asked Max if it was true about the cannibalism.

“Oh yes, the legs are eaten. They did the first one before you arrived.”

Max had been in CRC-17 for nearly as long as Falco; in fact, Max had been in and out of CRC-17. He’d lost all the weight he needed to get under 30 BMI and, within a year, gained it all back plus some extra. So he knew all the stories about how Colin Taggart and his Heavy Hitters took over the institution. Nominally, the CRC was run by Corrections Canada, but in fact,

the gang run by Taggart were the real power in the institution.

"I can't think of anything more repulsive," Keelan said.

"Kee, as you know, I'm not really into boundaries, but I agree. Anthropophagia always struck me as really disgusting. A taboo for the ages." Max paused, running his hand through his thinning red hair, and asked, "But have you ever smelled leg of human, roasted with garlic, honey, and loving care?"

"No."

"Then don't judge."

"Max, you didn't —"

"Of course not! I'm just saying it smelled pretty damned good. Plus, you know, it was like they were making a point."

"That they're disgusting pigs? That they deserve to be in a real prison, not just the Fatness?" There were many nicknames for the Calorie Reduction Centres: The Girth Gulag. Chubby Choky. Plump Prison. The Fatness. They all gave the impression, but not the facts: the CRCs were concentration camps for the generous of flesh. Sure, cushy, non-death-dealing camps with running water, full free Wi-Fi, and on-staff exercise coaches, but the facilities were designed to keep an unwanted population sequestered and out of sight of polite company.

"No. That they don't care about the rules. They're here and they don't care, and they are going to run things as they see them."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Which is why we have to fight them."

"Sure," Keelan said.

"What's that mean?"

"Max, I like you, and I know you've got your heart in the right place, but I'm not signing up for any doomed crusade. I just want to lose my weight and get the hell out of here. The only reason I'm talking to Falco at all is because I'm near the two-year mark. If I don't lose enough weight, I'll lose my job. I know you may not care about what you do for gainful employment, but I do."

"Fair enough. I'll be fighting the good fight alone until you

get wise. Until then, I'll papadums alone!"

They didn't talk as they walked through the common areas, the parts of the CRC that were open to all the "patients". On the subfloor they passed through the small gymnasiums, cardio pens, aquafit centre (a pool, mostly shallow end), and resistance training rooms. These were known, collectively, as the Dungeons to everyone but the Neckheads, who practically lived in the resistance training rooms, i.e., where they stored the free weights. Keelan was a regular user too, though he didn't have the body-fat ratio of the bodybuilders.

On the main floor, the large gymnasium had actual stands, almost like those you'd find in high schools, except not quite as flimsy – they had to support more than the lissome thighs of teenagers, after all. The idea behind the gym was the "patients" of the CRC would form sporting leagues and better their physical beings by partaking in regular athletic competitions. This pipe dream never materialized, and the gymnasium had become an ad hoc gathering place. At first the CRC administration had been unwilling to let their charges use the room for non-exercise purposes. A rash of suicides and the ensuing glare of titillated media attention convinced them they should be using all methods possible to keep their fatties happy. Now the big gym was a market, coffee house, and occasionally, it was used to hold dances. These were cringeworthy, but helped stave off cultural ennui and, if nothing else, gave people something to talk about.

This commons area was flanked by four wings of residences – two for men and two for women. Married couples were allowed to "blend" their BMI scores, and if their net score fell into the obese range, only one member of the couple was legally required to lose weight. The designers of the Fat Act did not like this exception, but it was too expensive to create the facilities for entire families to live in the Calorie Reduction Centres.

Not coincidentally, divorce rates were up around the 90% range for thin-fat marriages and now had the social acceptability of an antebellum mixed-race marriage.

The cost of housing all this human flesh was also why there

was a strict age range on the act. Only adults between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were required to keep themselves trim. Outside of that range (even Baby Boomers, older Gen-Xers, and those on the cusp) were allowed to stack on as much weight as they wanted. Kids got a pass too, but only until they were old enough to vote. Then they were pretty much fucked.

There was a rumour going around CRC-17 that the Subcommittee on Obesity, which had drawn up the legislation, had other criteria for deciding who would be asked to go to a CRC. The word was out that less attractive persons who were overweight were more likely to be sent than the hotter fatties. Nearly twice as many men were sent as women, but that was because amongst fat married couples, it was unthinkable that children should be without their mothers.

As they entered the commons, Kee spotted his friend Greg sitting at the coffee bar in the gymnasium with Tracy Bloomfeld, one of the staff exercise coaches. He waved at Greg, who smiled, but didn't seem to want to be interrupted.

"Our young African-Canadian friend has discovered Tracy, it seems," Max said.

"What do you mean *discovered*?"

"Heh. I'll let you ask Greg the next time you scalawags get together."

"What are you insinuating?"

"I'm not insinuating anything. But don't you think it odd that Ms. Bloomfeld should choose to work in a CRC, yet maintain a body mass index clearly in contravention with the act?"

"So she's heavy – so what? Everyone here is."

"Yet she leaves the CRC every night to enjoy the world beyond the Fux." This was Max's personal term for CRC-17, Uxford County, but it had never caught on. Kind of like the way he kept trying to revivify his childhood saying "No guff."

"Maybe she's rich. Doesn't need the coverage."

"Or perhaps she's found a way to eat her cake and have it, too."

"Don't you mean the other way around?"

“No. I spoke correctly. It is the only logical construction of that banana. One can always have their cake and then eat it.” Max held out one hand and pantomimed eating it. “One cannot eat the cake and have it, too. Because one has eaten it; it is consumed. Now, I’m going to head back to my capacious giraffe, where I plan to read for a while and try not to think of cake. Shall I join you and young Gregorovich for luncheon?”

“You give me a headache, you know that?”

“You can thank me for saving your leg by letting me eat some of your state-sanctioned Jell-O.”

“Sure,” Kee said. “I’m on a diet anyway.”

FACT

The Fat Cell

The average human has forty billion fat cells. These tiny, glistening, oleaginous buggers are designed to store energy for when we need it. Along with the brain, the liver, the pancreas, and the stomach, fat cells manage our energy needs as well, maintaining constant communication through our blood system.

This system is highly efficient and evolved over millions of years, during most of which humans were worried about starving to death.

And long before the invention of the cheeseburger.

Chapter 2 – TEAM AWFUL

Kee met his new calorie supervisor, an enthusiastic, blonde, razor-thin woman named Brittany, later that day. Brittany was going to help him reach his ideal weight, or at least, something under 30 BMI. She was damned excited about it. She was accompanied by a gorgeous, curvy woman in an expensive red suit. Kee didn't know much about clothes, but he could recognize expensive when he saw it; more than that, he could recognize style. The woman in the suit was about his own age, around thirty-five.

Brittany noticed Kee noticing her and said, "This is Jacinda Williams; she's shadowing me today because she's working with the Subcommittee on Obesity."

"Actually, Brittany, I'm helping Christopher Ballard, a partner in my law firm and an advisor to the Subcommittee on Obesity. I'm just here to learn the ropes."

"The ropes?" Kee wondered.

"What this CRC business is all about."

"It's about getting the porkers, manatees, and jabbas out of sight," Kee said. "It's about putting young people in jail for no reason."

"The what?" Jacinda asked.

"Porkers, manatees, and jabbas," Keelan repeated. "The fat people."

"There are *classes* of fat people?" Jacinda said.

"Absolutely," Brittany said. "Obesity can be measured in many ways, but according to the Fat Act, BMI ranges from 30-35 are Class I, 35-40 are Class II, and people with a BMI over 40 are Class III."

"Yes," Keelan said. "Porkers, manatees, and jabbas. And the Fat Act is all about keeping that unsightly flab off the streets."

"Keelan, that is just not true, and those are terrible terms," Brittany said. "The act is about getting you to a healthy weight so that you can have a long, happy, productive life."

"And what's your BMI, Brittany?"

"It happens to be 17.3," Brittany said, obviously pleased with

her stats.

“So you’re underweight?”

“Of course not! Look at me. I’m tone, firm, and, and, frankly ... perfect.” She smiled.

“You’re skinny, I’ll give you that,” Kee said. “But did you know that being underweight is actually more dangerous to your health outcomes than being overweight?”

“Ah!” Brittany said, leaping like an anorexic salmon at the bait. “But not more than being obese.”

“It depends on *how* obese. I’m just over. You’re under the healthy range. Your health is at high risk too. Just like the really heavy inmates here. The only reason you don’t have your own prison is because you’re still seen as highly fuckable. God knows why. I’d probably cut myself on your hip bones.”

Brittany had never heard this argument before. She was simultaneously flattered and offended – flattered that he could tell her hip bones were prominent, and mortified at the thought of coitus with her flabby client. Brittany’s mouth opened and closed, much like a tasty salmon that had leaped out of the stream and landed on shore. Right before it was eaten by a large hairy mammal of the family Ursidae.

“Mr. Cavanaugh, you are being exceptionally rude,” Jacinda said. “I know I’m only here to observe, but I’m not going to sit here and listen to you abuse someone who’s here to help you.”

Keelan was ashamed. His face flared red.

“You know, you’re right. I’ve been in here too long. I am getting bitter. I *do* apologize, Brittany. I know you’re just doing your job. I just don’t know why they keep sending us so many young, tight, practically anorexic Hellmuth University grads.”

“Did you go to Hellmuth?” Brittany asked.

“Yes, for my undergraduate degree. And I work there too, in the communications department. That is, for the next couple of months I work there. After that, I’m in danger of losing my job if I don’t lose the weight.” Kee thought for a moment. “I’m guessing you got the health sciences degree, or did you do kinesiology?”

“Double major,” Brittany said. She could not keep the pride

out of her voice. “I had the lowest body fat percentage in my class, and I played on the varsity volleyball team.”

Jacinda rolled her eyes, and Kee laughed.

“What’s funny about that?” Brittany asked.

“Oh, I was just thinking how good BMI would look on a baseball trading card; you know, right between games played and at bats,” Kee said, grinning at Jacinda.

“Well, I was very proud of that stat. We all got to see our exact body fat percentage using hydrostatic testing – which is incredibly accurate. You have to dunk your whole body in the water and expel as much air as you can. I did it correctly on my first try! It was *so* awesome,” Brittany said, her eyes lighting up at the memory. “I do wish we had one here, but the best we can do is with calipers and a bit of pinching.”

“We’re not going to do that today, are we?” Jacinda asked.

“Oh, you wish,” Kee said. “I know you’re just dying to get a look at my spare tire.”

Jacinda laughed again. So did Kee. Brittany decided it would be best if she did too.

“No, we’re going to talk about the things that may be holding you back in your weight-loss regime. Think of me as a coach. I’m here to help you get the TEAM working together so that you can get out of here and back to your life in the real world,” Brittany said.

“What team?” Kee wondered.

“The T-E-A-M for your weight-loss success. T is for training. You have to *train* yourself to resist your urges. You have to train your self-control. You have to train to control the rest of your T-E-A-M. Train yourself to control your E: eating! Train yourself to find the joy in A: activity. And train yourself to find healthy ways to keep up your M: motivation! Training. Eating. Activity. Motivation. That’s the TEAM!”

Brittany was absurdly excited about this acronym.

Keelan was intensely aware of the presence of Jacinda. He’d dealt with someone like Brittany before. In fact, she was the third calorie supervisor he’d experienced. The first had been Jenny, who

had a BMI of 18.5 and was a Hellmuth kinesiology grad (with a health sciences minor). The second had been Ashley, who had a BMI of 18.1 and a Hellmuth health sciences degree (with a minor in health communications). It seemed that there was a downward trajectory in his calorie supervisors' skinniness and an upwards trend in their enthusiasm and credentials. Jenny and Ashley, for all their annoying perfection and cloying fervour, had never *shouted* an acronym at him. Keelan gave Jacinda a quick glance and was not surprised to see a hint of shock on her face. She was hiding it as best she could, but he could recognize the slightly slackening jaw, the glazed look in her eyes.

"TEAM!" Keelan shouted back at Brittany.

"Yay, go TEAM!" Brittany clapped her hands together. So did Keelan. He grinned like an idiot at Jacinda. He nodded his head, inviting her to join in.

"Yay team," Jacinda said. She couldn't muster up the hand clapping, but her tepid participation got just *oodles* of gratitude from Brittany.

"Thanks for getting into the spirit of this, Jacinda. And if later you want to do a little session with me, I can help you get your bum issues under control too."

Jacinda said, "Uh, thanks."

"Now, let's go over our plan for the next couple of months, 'cause you've got some blubber to burn. I've got you set up with one of our best exercise coaches, Tyrell, who's going to meet with you three times a week and help you get that A in motion – I mean your activities," Brittany explained. She laughed at her own wit. She also produced a paper schedule, with exercise times and gym numbers listed. She produced a second sheet of paper and said, "Now, this is the E-exciting part. What you'll be EATING this month!"

Here it comes, Keelan thought.

"For the first two weeks, I'm putting you on the Freedom Fries diet, followed by a modified Paleo-Portions diet for the next six weeks," Brittany said, as though she were still speaking English.

“What’s the Freedom Fries diet?” Keelan asked, hope creeping into his voice. “Do I get to eat French fries on it?”

“No, silly. It’s Freedom *from* fries. Nothing fried. It’s actually quite restrictive, but we’ll take off some pounds quickly. Here’s the menu for the first two weeks,” Brittany said, handing Keelan a piece of paper that was about the size of a Chinese fortune from one of those cardboard cookies. All it said was apples, cheese, chicken, celery.

“Do I get these with every meal?” Keelan asked.

“Of course not,” Brittany said. “That’s ridiculous. For the first four days, all you eat is apples, then one day of cheese, followed by four days of chicken, and you finish off with a nice celery cleanse.”

Keelan did the math. “So I’m going to be eating nothing but celery for five days?”

“Isn’t it wonderful? We’re having great success with it in CRC-16. Their gross tonnage is down by 1.2 percent.”

Keelan was absolutely silent.

“Gross tonnage?” Jacinda asked. She was now taking notes furiously.

“Sorry, that’s not the right term. Please don’t write that down, Jacinda. That’s kind of the, uh, colloquial term we have for it. It’s actually called the aggregate weight figure under losses.”

Jacinda worked out its acronym: “AWFUL?”

“We don’t use that short form,” Brittany said. “It’s undignified.”

“Can I clarify something?” Kee asked.

“Of course, Keelan. This is your time. Let’s get that TEAM on the right track.”

“How the fuck am I going to survive eating nothing but celery for five days?”

“I don’t care for the F-word much either, but you’ll survive. Don’t worry, Keelan. I *know* what I’m doing. And if you’re worried, I can set up an appointment with Dr. Fundarek if you want. I’m sure he’ll be able to reassure you.”

“No. No. I do not need to see him. I’m sure you’re right. I

don't mean to question your plan for the TEAM," Keelan said. Even the *thought* of visiting Dr. Fundrarek's office made him squeamish.

Jacinda made another note.

"Okay, well, that's about it," Brittany said.

"What about the T and M? When does Kee get the training and motivation?" Jacinda asked.

"We just did that, silly," Brittany said. "And that will leave us a bit of time to talk, girl-to-girl, about your thigh gap."

"Thanks, Brittany," Keelan said, standing up. "I'm sure we'll have great success together. And again, I apologize for my earlier outburst." He shook her hand and said to Jacinda, "Good luck with your session with Brittany."

Jacinda shook Keelan's hand. He thought she looked jealous that he was leaving. Instead, she was going to get ten minutes of uninterrupted "girl time" with Brittany.

Before he closed the door, Keelan looked in her eyes and said, "Celery you later."

Jacinda smiled at Kee despite the desperate lameness of the joke.

FACT

Goldilocks and the Bliss Point

Major food corporations ensure many of their products reach something they call the *bliss point*. This is the apex that gives a food optimum pleasure, and incidentally, the point which creates the most desire or craving for more of it. Not enough sugar, and you haven't reached the bliss point. Too much sugar, and you're on the sickly sweet wrong side of "maximum crave."

It's kind of like "Goldilocks and the Three Bears". In the fairy tale, Goldilocks gobbles down all the porridge that is "just right," that hits the bliss point, and then falls asleep. When the bears return, she runs away into the woods.

In real life, Goldilocks can't stop eating the delicious Delissio Pizza, becomes morbidly obese, and is unable to run away. She is fat enough that she, too, has reached her bliss point. The bears consume her and have to explain to their GPs why their cholesterol readings are so high.

Chapter 3 – Rascals

Colin Taggart guided his mobility scooter, a high-end Rascal Vision, into the office of Selwyn Seward, the director of CRC-17, for their regular meeting. Taggart was a “patient” of CRC-17, but as the leader of the Heavy Hitters, an important one.

Seward, as formal as always, stood up and walked around from behind his desk to shake Taggart’s hand. “Can I get you anything, Colin?”

“No, thank you, Selwyn. Thanks for moving the guest chair to the side. It’s nice not having to get out of my Pike-mobile.” Taggart grinned at his own joke, knowing Seward would never get the *Star Trek* reference.

Seward’s thin lips smiled back. “So how is the program going?”

“You mean my ‘weight-loss’ program?” Taggart asked. “Well, I suppose you could say there’s no danger of my release from our fine institution anytime soon. My bimmi is holding steady at 39.3.”

“Your BMI, you mean?”

“Yeah, I’m just picking up some of the slang from the fat kids. They call it their bimmi.”

“Well, I’m sorry to hear that, but I’m confident that you’ll be able to manage your weight with our help.”

It was almost a form of kabuki theatre. Now it was Taggart’s turn. “And how is the family?”

Seward smiled, a little more genuine this time, and said, “They’re doing well. They like the weather here in Southern Ontario. Though there’s talk of a few CRC directors being promoted to subcommittee positions in Ottawa.” The bureaucrat had been the director of one of the first experimental CRCs in Northern Ontario, and he had successfully brought the AWFUL down by nearly 20% in his first year. When the flagship CRCs were built, Seward was tapped to run one of the biggest: CRC-17.

“And that would be good? Would they mind the move?”

“My family would be thrilled if I could get that kind of

promotion. So let's talk about the aggregate weight figure under losses, shall we?"

And the true purpose of their meeting was about to begin. Seward was the person in charge of CRC-17, nominally, but Taggart ran all the illegal activities in the institution. Seward knew that Taggart ran all the illegal activities in CRC-17. And Taggart knew that Seward knew. That was what made their meetings such fun.

"So how is the gross tonnage?" Taggart asked.

"The AWFUL is down, thankfully, but only by about 1.6%, Colin. You promised me at least a 2% reduction this month."

"But that's still much better than the national average, correct?"

"Much. That's beside the point, Colin. This is Canada's premier calorie-reduction institution. We need to lead the way by leaps and bounds, not just edge out the rest of the pack. We're trying to show that this system can work for Canadians."

"Point taken, but this is the first month since we started bringing McDonald's into the Fatness. It was bound to play with our numbers a bit."

"I told you, Colin ..." Seward sighed heavily. "I told you I can't know any of the details. The only reason that I let you and your little gang of scamps bring in as much contraband as I do is because the economics work. If it ever got out that I allowed some inmates to eat Quarter Pounders while the rest dined on skinless chicken breasts and broccoli, my career would be over. Are we understood?"

"But we have these meetings every week, surely –"

"These meetings are down in my diary as 'client relations' and you are the chair of the CRC-17 Client Satisfaction Committee."

"Really?"

"Yes. I've had a brochure made, and I'd like you to distribute it amongst your people so they're all familiar with their roles as part of the committee," Seward explained. "Now, back to our gross ton – I mean, the AWFUL. What ideas do you have for this month?"

“Well, the latest products are very popular, and we’re having a little trouble restricting them. I suppose we could raise the prices again.”

“A good start. But I have a suggestion as well.”

“I thought you didn’t want to know anything.”

“It’s not specifics. But if we could help some of our patients lose enough weight to drop the aggregate, but not leave the facility, that would greatly help.”

“And how do we do that?” Taggart wondered.

“I suspect you’ll figure that out. Now, I have to get back to work on my regular report to the deputy minister,” Seward said.

“Fine, but I had one other matter of business. A few of my colleagues would like permission for their own mobility scooters,” Taggart said.

“Well, I can’t grant that unless the doctor prescribes them as medically necessary.” Seward frowned.

“Yes, I thought you’d say that. Here are the letters from Dr. Fundarek.” Taggart smiled. The implications were clear: he had the CRC-17 doctor in his pocket now too.

Seward sighed. “Very well, but I tell you, if the gross tonnage doesn’t drop significantly this month, those Rascals are going to be a goddamned necessity. Get it?”

Taggart smiled and put his scooter in reverse gear. It beeped annoyingly as he said, “All the best to your family. It would be a shame if you didn’t get that promotion, eh?”



Jacinda Williams returned to her office in downtown Landon after a long morning attending “client” interviews with her new best buddy, Brittany. Not only had she learned quite a bit by watching Brittany encourage her charges in their quest to lose some weight, she’d also gotten a bit of that treatment herself. One of Brittany’s patients had cancelled, so she had an unexpected forty minutes of free time to help Jacinda with her “largish butt”.

“I’m not saying it’s huge or anything,” Brittany had said in complete sincerity.

“Yes, well, it’s kind of the way I’m made, Brittany. Since I was a teenager, I had a little extra junk in my trunk,” Jacinda said, attempting to make a joke of it.

“That may be, but we can do some exercises and cut back a bit on our calories, and before you know it, your trunk will be empty!”

Jacinda, like Brittany, had grown up in a world where the female form was not only hyper-sexualized, but under the kind of scrutiny that made relative butt sizes somehow appropriate conversation between otherwise mature women. Jacinda, unlike Brittany, was at a healthy weight. Her body fat percentage had varied throughout her life, from about 20-24%, which was quite normal and even a little towards the low end of average. Everyone wanted to talk about her butt despite the fact that she was perfectly fit and attractive the way she was.

And despite her attempts to deflect Brittany’s “helpful advice” back to the topic of the effectiveness of the Calorie Reduction Centres, the morning had been a bummer, so to speak.

So she really wasn’t in the mood to talk to her boss, Christopher Ballard, Esquire, and partner in Ballard, Ballard, and Bones, who was waiting for her in her office.

“Hey, babe, you’re back from the Fatness, I see! How is life in the land of the lard?” Ballard chuckled.

“Hi, Chris. It was educational, that’s for sure. I think I’ll try to go at least a few more times this week before our trip to Ottawa to meet with the committee,” she said. They were scheduled to leave for the capital on Thursday, for a Friday meeting with the Standing Committee on Health and the all-important Subcommittee on Obesity (SubOb), which reported to them. Since the rewriting of the national health laws, SubOb had tremendous power and influence, and Christopher Ballard wanted to sway that influence.

“Uh, about that, babe. I’m going to take this trip solo.”

“What?”

“I’ve got them for an in-camera session, just me, and I don’t want to spook them with your presence.”

“Well, I can sit outside if you want ...”

“Sorry, babe. Already changed the hotel and flight arrangements. You can come next time. But if you could write up your findings this week by Thursday morning, you’d be my personal hero.” He smiled and Jacinda tried not to be persuaded. Ballard was the kind of charismatic, handsome man that always got what he wanted, even when he was obviously up to something. He squeezed her biceps muscle a bit more intimately than Jacinda would like, especially when she wanted to stay angry with him. He walked by her, brushing up against her hips as he did so, and he smiled. He turned at the doorway and ran his fingers through his thick, black hair. At fifty, you’d think he’d have a bit of thinning or grey, but he was blessed with the kind of genes that are just annoying to mere mortals. Jacinda knew that in addition to the perfect hair and teeth, Ballard’s body was just as slender as it had been in his twenties – and he seemed to be able to eat anything he wanted.

“Okay, Chris.” She smiled. “Next time.”

“And we’ll keep it strictly professional, I promise.” He looked around and whispered, “Not like last time. Now, get back to work, and I’ll see you on Thursday before I leave. Remember, I want to see that whole report.”

“Sure, sure, Chris. By the way, how should I be billing this? This isn’t exactly legal research I’m doing.”

“There’s a docket I’ve started with the initials PB-WWA. Put it all there.”

“This is pro bono? What’s WWA?”

“Yes, I’m paying for this myself, but someday we may be able to charge WWA. They’re taking an active interest in our little experiment up here in the Great White North, and they’re good clients from way back in Daddy’s day,” Ballard said. “Now, back to work! Don’t make me get my whip.”

Jacinda wished that she didn’t find him physically alluring, but, alas, sometimes the fundamentals just work against you.

FACT

The First Law of Thermodynamics

Is don't talk about thermodynamics.

No, just kidding. We can rap. This law is the principle that says energy can be converted from one form to another, but that it can't be created or destroyed. So you can burn calories worrying about whether you left the iron on, but that energy would have to come from somewhere. It wouldn't be possible to worry about the iron and turn it off without burning any calories.

That would be telekinesis, and it would be awesome.

Chapter 4 – The Physics Of Your Waistline

“So here’s how you lose weight,” Dr. Fundarek said to Keelan. “You expend more calories than you consume. It’s all about the calorie deficit.”

“But I’ve been reading that it’s a lot more complicated than that,” Keelan objected. He didn’t know why he bothered to argue with the CRC doctor, who was widely regarded as a quack by most of the inmates of the facility. He was meeting with Fundarek in the infirmary – a twenty-bed “state of the art” medical facility that was currently filled.

Fundarek was not a harmless quack.

In addition to its declining decrease in gross tonnage, CRC-17 had one of the highest rates of kidney failure in the entire calorie reduction system, mostly because Fundarek had failed the unit in renal care during his alleged career at the Grand Academy of Fine Arts and Medicine at Brno.

“It’s basic thermodynamics,” Fundarek explained. “Simple, really.”

“Well, then why am I not losing weight?” Keelan asked, not wanting to get into a conversation that was going to lead to the depressing idea of entropy and the heat-death of the universe. He changed tack. “Honestly, do you think this diet is safe?”

“I’m sure if Brittany thinks it’s safe, it will be.”

“But, Doc, she’s so skinny.”

“That just proves my point.” Fundarek smiled. He was a short man, probably just under five foot five inches, and he had dark predatory eyes that had a tendency to dart. His smile was shark-like and marred by his pack-a-day smoking habit.

“But they want me to eat nothing but processed cheese for one day. That can’t be healthy!”

“Oh, really? And where did you do your nutritional analysis of that?”

“I didn’t! But I’ve been doing a little research. According to

HealthWatch.com, the average slice of processed cheese product has almost 225 mg of salt. Brittany wants me to eat, like –” Keelan checked his menu “– twenty-two slices in one day. That’s nearly 5000 mg of salt! And that’s just one of the problems with it. Look. It’s not even listed as a food, technically. It’s called processed cheese slice *product*.”

“Well, I will admit that 500 mg is a little high,” Fundarek said.

“No, five *thousand*. It’s, like, more than two times the recommended daily allowance.”

“But it’s only one day, boy. You’re young and, except for your unfortunate corpulence, healthy, as far as I can tell. Your kidneys can take it! I’m sure Health Canada would never approve a food product that would be dangerous.” Fundarek was pleased with that phrasing, turning the cheese product back into a food.

Someone in the ward groaned.

“Now, would you like me to take some blood?”

The groan turned into a long moan of what Keelan could only assume was existential agony. “I know how that guy feels.”

“I seriously doubt it. The idiot had his leg removed by an amateur surgeon last week, and it’s the worst botch-up I’ve seen since my internship in abdominal surgery. Do you know I once sewed up a patient’s duodenum? Luckily we have access to some of the best generic antibiotics available.” He and Keelan walked over to the poor bastard’s bed, and the doctor checked his temperature, with a rectal thermometer, naturally. The patient’s fever was so high Keelan figured the patient probably didn’t even know he was there.

Keelan didn’t see how antibiotics today were going to help a patient he’d butchered in his days at medical school, but he wasn’t done trying to argue Fundarek out of Brittany’s deranged diet. He had one more idea.

“Well, according to the Fat Act, I mean the Revised Canada Health Act, ‘patients of a CRC are allowed to have at least 750 calories per day’, no matter what. The act also says that ‘proper nutrition is to be monitored at all times’.”

“So?” Fundarek asked.

The patient became somewhat agitated, probably because he was suddenly aware of the cold thermometer in his butt. “What’s happening? Am I out yet? Belinda, I’m coming for you, babe.”

“Tsk,” Fundarek said. “That’s sad. Belinda is his wife.”

“He’s just delusional,” Kee said. “That’s not sad.”

“No, it is. His wife remarried last week. That’s why he did the leg.”

“Oh,” Kee said, remembering his own brush with this particular insanity that morning. But he was on a mission. “Look. I’m required to get 750 calories per day by law.”

“That’s true,” Fundarek said. “And you will get them. In celery form, for five days.”

“But that’s crazy,” Kee said. “There’s hardly any calories in celery. How much would I have to eat?”

Fundarek consulted his datapad. “According to Brittany’s kitchen instructions, you are allowed up to forty cups of chopped celery per day.”

There was a stunned look on Kee’s face.

“I took the liberty of figuring out how much that is, by the way, in gallons. It’s just over 2 gallons, or 9.4 litres.” He smiled his brown smile at Kee and pulled the thermometer out of his patient’s ass.

The patient had obviously been listening to the whole exchange; he looked over at Kee and said, “You poor bastard.”

QUOTE

“A journey of a thousand miles
begins with a single step.”

~Lao-tzu, *The Way of Lao Tzu*

Chapter 5 – Lao Tzu Didn't Have a Treadmill

Jacinda watched the display screen of her treadmill as she ran in the gym. She was jogging as fast as she could, getting nowhere. She'd been on it for thirty-five minutes, she'd run nearly five miles, and she'd burned 507 calories exactly. According to her new BFF, Brittany, she needed the kind of exactness her display had. To be precise, her butt needed it. Her posterior needed a guidance system, a measure, some method of quantification, and Jacinda was worried about what that might mean for her overall health.

She had been hyper-accurate before, when she'd been a young woman finishing high school and starting her university career. Her precision actually had a clinical name: *bulimia nervosa*.

It had started later in high school, when she began dating one of the most popular boys in the school, Joshua Smith. Josh was the kind of dreamy guy that all the girls wanted to be around: he was athletically talented, playing varsity football, hockey, and soccer. He was also a pretty well-rounded individual, and he played guitar in a fairly popular band, The Knuckleheads, which had a following in the school and around town. She had started out as a groupie and then graduated to girlfriend status. She knew he played around with other girls. He always came back to her, but there seemed – to her, anyway – to be a congruence between her weight and the moments of Josh fooling around. Every four weeks or so, sometimes more, sometimes a little less, she gained anywhere from three to four pounds and it was usually during these time periods that Josh drifted. She never made a big deal about it.

But she did work extra hard to make sure her weight stayed down in those times. She'd see the scale tip up, and bang – it was time to get down and dirty with the exercise. She'd spend all her spare time working out, jogging mostly, to keep her weight down. When that didn't do it, she'd wear a garbage bag and bang away at her mother's treadmill in the basement. (God forbid someone see

her running in a black garbage bag, even if it was at night.) If she ever slipped and ate a bit too much food – well, she'd take care of that with her finger and the toilet later.

Josh said he loved her when she was thin enough. She could tell you what the exact weight was when the love kicked in: 116 pounds. At 118 he didn't say anything. At 120 he drifted.

Jacinda later recognized this coincided, almost exactly, with her menstrual cycle, which was how she'd gotten her bulimia under control, more-or-less; occasionally, the old thought patterns would reassert themselves, and she would spend an afternoon over-exercising.

She'd managed to snag Christopher Ballard through a combination of good looks, sex, and wit.

She'd joined Ballard, Ballard and Bones as an articling student; she'd actually worked for Jeremiah (Jed) Bones, who was one of the most famous litigators in Canada, mostly because of the high-profile defense cases he took on. It quickly became apparent that litigation – arguing in front of a judge and jury – was not going to be Jacinda's *métier*. Her intelligence, acuity, and insight were obvious, which was why she was transferred over to Christopher Ballard's office. If the aging Jed Bones was the media star – the face of the firm – then C. Ballard was the intellectual force behind it and the black heart of the firm. Christopher directed who Jed should be defending.

His father, Valence Ballard III, had been the co-founder of Ballard, Ballard and Bones, but he had died before Jacinda joined the firm, so she never had a clear understanding of the part Christopher's father had played in this dynamic. The firm's gonads, perhaps?

Everyone in the firm knew they would take on another partner at some point, and this was the whip that helped BBB get so much out of its roster of junior attorneys, Jacinda included.

The treadmill beeped to tell her she'd been running now for an hour solid. She checked the display. Her pace had obviously slackened, and she frowned: 8 miles. 7:30/mile. 847 calories. She did the arithmetic. The average pound of fat contained 3500

calories, so that was less than a quarter of a pound. Her legs were wobbling. And she already felt hungry.

But she kept going.

Brittany's whole calorie-in-calorie-out philosophy was going to kill her. But then again, Chris had just bumped her from the Ottawa trip, which could only mean one thing – they were off again.

At first it had gone so well. She'd been transferred to his office and immediately made a great impression, not only because of how she filled out her sharply tailored Dior suit, but because she'd spotted an error in the documents they were about to present to Proctor and Gamble, one of BBB's many corporate clients. Corporate law was Ballard's expertise; he had developed a serious and deep expertise in health law and policy as well.

The trip to P & G's head office in Toronto turned into an overnight affair, with a shared hotel suite, champagne, and an "exchange of briefs". They loved spending time together, they worked well together, and the sex was fantastic. This provided the basis for an on-and-off-again relationship as she finished her articling year, passed the bar, and was hired by BBB full-time.

They'd been lovers for about three years now, but they didn't have a "relationship" per se.

Like Josh, Chris took a keen interest in Jacinda's weight, appearance, and even how she dressed herself. *It's kind of humiliating*, she thought as the sweat poured off her now. It sluiced down her back, between her breasts. She was panting, but she was damned if she was going to quit before she hit that magic 1500-calorie mark. That would be almost half a pound.

Since her undergraduate years, Jacinda's weight had been creeping up, slowly, year after year. It was natural, she thought, that she would fill out as she matured. She still weighed less than 140 pounds, which put her squarely in the "normal" category of the BMI. Her body fat was even slightly lower than average, and *it sits in all the right places*, she thought. But at 140, Chris was guaranteed to lose interest in her.

Just because Brittany had a flat ass didn't mean she should.

Goddamn it, Jacinda thought, why the hell do I let skinny bitches like that manipulate me? Why do I keep taking that bastard back?

“Fuck,” she said, and hit the emergency stop button on the treadmill. She was exhausted.

And starving.

She looked at herself in the mirror and tried to imagine what they saw. She was wearing a black tank top and black Lycra running shorts. Her skin glistened with perspiration and looked healthy, glowing. She didn't like her arms. They were too fat. She would have agreed with Brittany about her arms, but Brittany never mentioned them. Jacinda turned and looked at her profile. There was nothing wrong with her ass. It was fine! It was fucking awesome. *Jesus, that skinny bitch is just jealous*, she thought.

Jacinda remembered how the patient – Keelan, that was it – had put Brittany in her place, and she smiled. Keelan seemed like a good man, even if he was a bit overweight.

But she had to admit, her thighs looked a little heavy.

She towed off a bit and faced the mirror again. Yes. Her thighs definitely looked a bit fat. The way the Lycra cut into them. Maybe that was what the problem was with Chris. He always said he loved her legs, even though they weren't the long, willowy legs of a model. But he hadn't said anything recently.

She should lose some weight off her thighs. Definitely.

She turned the treadmill back on and began jogging again.

MYTH

Calories In, Calories Out

Talk to many medical professionals about how to lose weight, and they will explain that it is very simple: “You just need to eat less and exercise more.”

Technically speaking, if this myth was true, you should be able to lose weight just by eating less than you need to keep alive. This calorie deficit would force your body to burn your stored fat and voila: weight loss! Of course, this is a myth. One that is so pervasive that maybe even your own doctor believes it to be true. The truth is actually much more complex.

There are pixies inside your bloodstream, and when you stop feeding them the calories they require, they just order in Chinese.

Chapter 6 – The Calorie Dispensing Hall of Shame

A lively crowd of jolly people gathered in the Calorie Dispensing Hall, known to the inmates of the Fatness as the cafeteria. But not tonight. Because it was pizza night.

The pizzas in question did not come from any of the major chains. Instead, they had been created by some of Corrections Canada's most talented nutritionists and chefs. They were designed for weight loss rather than taste. According to the two dozen participants of the focus groups who tested the pizzas, the overwhelming flavours attributed to them were "cardboard" and "despair". But those participants were all free to have a pizza delivered to their homes, or, in a pinch, they could put some kind of frozen pizza-like substance in their ovens. There were even hot pockets, which might come out of the microwave with all the nuance of lava, but they still didn't taste like "despair". But for the denizens of CRC-17, anything pizza-like was a welcome change from the usual boiled chicken and broccoli.

Unless you were on a special dining plan, like Keelan. As everyone waited anxiously in line for their slice, Keelan dreaded his meal. It was the first full day of the Freedom Fries diet. For breakfast, he'd been served some kind of applesauce served with a few slices of apple on the side. Lunch was simply two apples – one Red Delicious and one Macintosh. Everyone seemed genuinely interested in his lunch, because they didn't get to see fresh fruit too often in the Calorie Dispensing Hall. If he hadn't been so famished, he would have sold the apples to someone, but he was too hungry to even make it to his seat. He wolfed down both apples, cores and all, before he left the line.

He got to the "special diet" queue, which was for people like him, whose calorie supervisors were trying something new to help them lose weight. His buddy Greg Bestard was in line in front of him, waiting for his meal. They shared the same calorie supervisor, but apparently she was trying another tack with Greg. He had

been in the Fatness a little longer than Kee. Greg was the same age as Keelan, thirty-five, but his BMI was higher than Kee's: 34. At five foot nine and 230 pounds, he was a bit farther away from that elusive goal of under 30, i.e., not fat. He was about to say something to Kee, when he was distracted by a flash of blond hair walking by the food line.

Kee was sure he'd seen the woman before, but he didn't know how. She was obviously not an inmate, as she was wearing civilian clothes. She was short, muscular, and Greg couldn't keep his eyes off her.

Kee was transfixed by the presence of Jacinda Williams, who was walking with the blond woman.

They watched as the inmates retrieved their pizza from the warming trays. Her eyes flashed with annoyance, and she said something – Kee thought it sounded like another language, but he couldn't be sure. She shook her head and stared out at the sea of jowly faces stuck into their government-approved faux personal pizzas. Something was wrong, according to this woman. Jacinda said something to her.

Kee was trying to catch Jacinda's eye, without looking too dorky. He succeeded at the former, not the latter, as he caught her attention with a wave. She smiled, and the two women approached Kee and Greg.

"Keelan, right?" Jacinda asked.

"Yes, and you're Ms. Williams."

"Jacinda, please."

"This is Greg," Keelan said, introducing his friend, who was trying not to stare at Cindy.

"Hi," Jacinda said. "I suppose you both know Cindy Vandenkieboom?"

"Pleased to meet you," Kee said to Cindy, who nodded.

Greg opened his mouth, but no discernable sound emerged. Jacinda covered the awkward moment and addressed Kee: "So how's the celery treating you."

"Ah, we haven't started on that yet. It's apples first. I've had applesauce, apple slices, and actual apples today. You could

say I'm not at the core of the diet yet."

Jacinda smiled. Greg rolled his eyes. Cindy was still muttering to herself.

"Well, nice to see you again, Keelan. I suppose we better peel out of here."

Kee laughed. "You just made my day."

"Good luck with the diet, Kee. I'm rooting for you!"

As they walked away, Greg said, "Wow, she is just ... gorgeous."

"I know," Kee replied. "And she came over to talk to *me*." He was unable to keep the surprise out of his voice.

"What do you mean?" Greg said. "She was just tagging along with that Jacinda woman."

"What?" Kee asked.

"I ... Oh, you think Jacinda is gorgeous."

"Yeah. And obviously you have a thing for blondes. Who is Cindy anyway?"

"She's gorgeous!" Greg said. "Look. How can you not know Cindy Vandenkieboom? She's legendary."

Kee could see that Greg was truly smitten, so he was careful about what he said next: "Vandenkieboom?"

"That's her name. She's Dutch."

"Ah, well, that explains it."

"And she's ..."

"Gorgeous?"

Greg nodded.

"Why didn't you say something?"

"Like what? I'm just another fat bastard to her."

"No, you're not," Kee said. "Just because you're a little overweight doesn't mean you don't have lots to offer. You're a person. A good person. With, uh, emotions and thoughts and all the wants and needs and frailties that thin people have." He was trying to do better and added, "You're a nice guy, Greg. The best."

"You think so?"

"I know so. And you're kinda sweet and funny too, right? Women like that."

“Yes, they do like that,” Greg said, unsure.

“And confidence. The right kind of confidence. Women like that too.”

“Hmm. Well, I don’t have that,” Greg admitted.

“I wonder what she was saying?”

“Garbage,” Greg said. “The Dutch word for fat garbage.”

“Oh,” Kee said. Maybe he was giving his pal some bad advice if Cindy was calling them fat garbage.

“She meant the pizza, Kee, not us. She’s radiant and a really good person too. She’s a calorie supervisor on the women’s side of the Fatness. I asked Tracy. Cindy’s well known. Even the women she treats like her.”

“Really?” Kee wondered. He’d yet to meet any calorie supervisor that he liked. He remembered he wanted to ask Greg what the deal with Tracy was, but it was their turn to get their meals. Kee steeled himself. The server scanned the bar code on his wristband and said, “Keelan Cavanaugh? You’re on the Freedom Fries diet?”

Kee sighed. “Yes.”

“Here is your meal – apple pizza.”

Kee looked down and was horrified to see they had constructed some kind of pizza-like abomination out of apples. Instead of a crust, the deranged chefs had created a lattice of apple peels. On top of that was what Kee assumed was some kind of applesauce, and the *pièce de resistance*, pieces of apple cut to look like pepperoni, mushrooms and green peppers. They even had the colours right.

“That took us nearly an hour to make,” the server explained, obviously pleased with their effort.

Kee could see there were a couple of other cooks looking over, as if to see his reaction. He managed a smile and said, “Well, I’m sure I’ll enjoy this. Thank you.” The cooks looked pleased, and Kee kept the smile on his face. “Really. Great job.”

He looked over at Greg’s tray to see what he was eating. It looked like ... well, it was a pinkish medium of some kind, and suspended within it were little pieces of corn, along with some kind of yellowish chunks. There really was no getting around it.

His buddy was just served what looked, for all intents and purposes, like a plate of vomit.

“Okay then,” Kee said, nodding his head towards the rows of tables and chairs. “Let’s get this meal over with, shall we?”

FACT

Fitness Can Trump Fatness

According to recent stats, the Canadian fitness industry has about \$3 billion in revenue yearly. You read that right. Three. Billion.

Most of that is spent by consumers in January, right after the saturnalia of chocolate, cheese, and regret we call “the holidays”. Shortly thereafter, a large majority of us give up our exercise regimes, which is too bad.

That’s because there’s growing evidence fitness is a better barometer of health than obesity. And also, because \$3 billion is a lot to pay for a branded gym bag.

Chapter 7 – Stupid Human Tricks

The next morning Kee and Greg met their new trainer, Tyrell Taylor. Any “client” who had been unable to get their BMI under 30 in two years, using the facilities and the calorie supervisor-approved meal plan in the Calorie Dispensing Hall, were given more “help”. Thus, they were both working out under the tutelage of Tyrell, another Hellmuth grad from the kinesiology department. Unlike all the other exercise coaches Kee had met in CRC-17, he immediately liked Tyrell.

Kee had encountered three of the other coaches: Bud Freeman, Magnus Pendergrast, and Tracy Bloomfeld. Freeman and Pendergrast were malignant mesomorphs who once had careers as high school gym teachers, and they ran the “group training” sessions, which were available to all inmates of the CRC free of charge. Freeman, especially, was a nightmare. He hated fat people. There was really no other way to put it, and he ran his training sessions like it was the last act of *Lord of the Flies* and everyone but him was Piggy. Pendergrast was a serious weightlifter – he’d once gone to an Olympics (Kee never found out if it was a Special or Regular variety) – and he naturally thought that the key to losing fat was to turn it into muscle as quickly as possible. That just seemed to drive up BMIs in the short-term, so neither Freeman nor Pendergrast had many people voluntarily go to their classes.

Kee had yet to hear Tracy Bloomfeld’s story, but he had no idea how she’d landed a job as an exercise coach – her BMI was at least as high as Greg’s and probably even higher. She got out of breath whenever she did the exercises along with her charges, and she would often come to the gym looking hungover. Sometimes she’d smoke, which was a clear violation of the CRC rules, but she never seemed to get busted for it.

Tyrell was cut from another cloth entirely. Like Brittany, and Tiffany before her, he was a fairly recent grad from Hellmuth – Kee guessed he was probably around thirty, judging from his looks. But Tyrell had a master’s degree, not an undergrad, so why

he was working as an exercise coach, Kee couldn't figure. But he knew his stuff.

The first thing Tyrell did was measure them both. This included the humiliating part, where the measurer had to grab a wad of skin in selected places (upper arms, legs, waist, love handles, man-boobies) and use calipers to measure the full scope of the blubber in his grasp. Whether this was as humiliating for the measurer as it was for the measuree, Kee was not sure. Nobody made any eye contact while this was going on. At least the measurer had something to concentrate on. Having a witness to the entire procedure would have made it worse, but Tyrell kept up a spate of banter the whole time, distracting both Kee and Greg from the slight physical discomfort and the indignity of the pinch test.

"So you guys have been in here for two years, eh?"

"Yep," Kee replied. Still careful not to make eye contact. Tyrell had two fingers and a thumb wrapped around Kee's left man-boob while they talked.

"I've been in even longer than Kee," Greg said, eyes wide. His big black boobies would be the next measured.

"Just three months," Kee said, oddly defensive.

"Hey, three months count, brother," Greg said.

"He's got you there, man," Tyrell said. "I wouldn't want to be here one day, so three months." His eyes crinkled a bit as he smiled. "That's serious time, in my book."

"Fair enough," Kee conceded the point. "Hey, if I'm the newbie, why am I getting the pinch test first?"

"Gives me a chance to limber up my fingers," Tyrell said, "before I tackle my brother Greg over there."

It was a risky joke, but both Kee and Greg laughed.

And then they got to the questionnaire. Tyrell asked them all kinds of questions: how much do you sleep every night? What kinds of foods do you like? He tortured them with a series of pin-point-accurate questions about the sorts of food that really made them lose their shit. For Kee it was potato chips. Greg agreed that chips were good, but ice cream was better.

"Now, what about stress? What's stressing you guys?"

“You mean, apart from living in a prison for fat people?” Kee asked.

“Obviously, that’s stressful. What are some of the key things that stress you out about it?”

The list was long. The communal showers. The line-up for food. (Sometimes the Calorie Dispensing Hall ran out of meals before everyone was fed.)

“Really?” Tyrell asked. “That happens?”

“Yeah,” Greg said. “About once a week or so. Seems to be on Fridays and Mondays.”

“So you have to skip a meal?”

“Yeah, man,” Greg said. “They tell us it’s good for our long-term weight-loss plan, so not to worry about it.”

“Unless you’re on a special diet. Then you won’t miss a meal, no matter how desperately you’d like to be able to skip it,” Kee said. He was on day two of his Freedom Fries diet and was already sick of apples. He was dreading the celery cleanse at the end.

“Well, that’s not good. Skipping meals is about the worst thing you can do for weight loss,” Tyrell said.

“Really?” Kee asked.

“Yeah. The secret to losing weight is making your body think that it’s got lots of food available to it so that it doesn’t store everything as fat. As soon as you start skipping meals, your body goes into starvation mode. It says, ‘holy shit, I’d better store this food away for when I really need it. Who knows when I’ll get food again?’ Skipping meals – especially breakfast – is the worst thing you can do. It will make you gain weight, long-term.”

“Well, that explains why I gained five pounds after my last diet,” Kee said.

“You’re lucky it was only five,” Tyrell said. “So no more skipping meals. Even if they are feeding you garbage.”

“What?” Kee asked.

“Sorry. Shouldn’t have said that,” Tyrell said. “It’s just that they aren’t exactly doing what I know will help you guys lose weight on the nutrition front. But don’t worry, we have lots of other things we can control, and that will help.”

Kee could tell he wasn't saying something, but he didn't push him.

The measuring continued, and when they were done, Tyrell put them both on the treadmill. First he tested their overall fitness, and then he had them do another forty-five minutes of cardio. Kee had been jogging for a while, but Tyrell had the treadmill set to do steep elevations at intervals, so he was panting heavily by the end. Sweat sluiced off his face. He didn't even want to think about what all the moisture was doing to his crotch.

Greg was wheezing and practically in tears, but there was no way he was going to fall behind Kee's pace, even if he did feel like he needed to throw up his vomit-like lunch.

Tyrell encouraged them the whole time and, while they could answer, even asked some more questions – where they came from, what their families were like, and so on.

Maybe it was because Tyrell was black and had fought prejudice his whole life too. But they both loved it that he treated them like they were actual humans, not sacks of animated lard. And even though the whole session was a little humiliating, and hard work to boot, they left feeling a strange thing: hope that they could actually lose the weight.

FACT

Fat Rats & Cats

Experiments in rats have shown that processed, high-fat, high-sugar, high-salt foods can be as addictive as cocaine and heroin.

When given the choice, rats prefer to eat these foods, and their brains produce the same chemical, *dopamine*, that is released when drugs like cocaine and heroin are taken. Eventually, this dopamine overloads the pleasure centres in their brains, and they have to consume more and more of the drug or food to get the same amount of pleasure.

The same basic process works in any large corporation regarding the generation of profits versus what is good for society.