

Dear Fat Girl

*“Shame is an ocean I swim across.” -Lambert, *The Art of Shame*¹*

Babies are born “chunky”. You adore them anyway; nibble on their innocent cheeks. Blow raspberries on their full, voluptuous bellies. Feed them when they cry because their deafening sobs can only be the voiced agony of *hunger*. You must satisfy their needs with Gerber and Similac. Pat their backs; wait for a burp; pray the undigested Similac doesn’t come back up on your blouse. The blouse that fits “just right”. The one that hugs every curve and swell of your disproportionate body in a way that it *seems* seamless. The one that hides your arms and extenuates your chest. The one that looks perfect with your gold-chained necklace. The one that makes your imperfect body *feel* perfect.

But say, you don’t have a baby. Instead, you will feed yourself because *you* are hungry. You’ve always been hungry; filled with the insatiable desire to feast. You can’t just have one potato chip. Or one cookie. Or one M&M. Whose ever heard of eating a single baby back rib? You’ll eat the whole slab. You’ll eat the slab and the fries. And the mashed potatoes too. Consume every starch without considering the damage they’ll do to your body. Forget, for a *second*, that feeling of being rubbed raw; that awkward walk your inseparable thighs make you have; the disgusting way your stomach hangs over your blue jeans. It only takes a *second*.

But you won’t have a diet Coke with that. You’ll have the red labeled 24-ounce bottle of Coca-Cola. Feel the phosphoric acid eating away at your enamel. Feel the carbonation sliding down your throat. Wallow in it. Let your tongue savor every drop. And when you are done, you’ll have another. You can’t just have one of those either.

And you’ll lay on the couch, wasting the day away, watching TV and obsessing. Flipping between America’s Next Top Model and Keeping Up With the Kardashians. Watching the perfect people live their perfect lives; envy them for having the things you never could. Watching their bodies pose effortlessly. Watching them strut and glide. Watch them and see. See the woman you’ve always wanted to be. You’ll hang on to their words; mimic every mannerism they own. Claim them as yours.

And when you are done, feel shitty. Feel fat. Feel ugly. Feel worthless. Feel like the woman you are and not the one you want to be. Feel like you will never amount to anything. Feel unattractive and undesirable.

¹ Mary Lambert is a singer, songwriter, and spoken word artist. She released her second book of poetry entitled *Shame Is An Ocean I Swim Across* about sexual assault, mental illness, and body acceptance. “The Art of Shame” is a poem in her book.

But never let them know that it bothers you. Put on a smile. Put on makeup. Put on layer after layer of clothing, so that they never truly see you. Add hair extensions and say it's because they make you "feel good". Never let them know that you are weak, that you are modeling clay. Say, it's just "life," and move on. Say you don't care when you know you do. Say none of it matters when you know it does. Pretend. Pretend you have not tried to mold yourself to model those around you. Pretend the world has not claimed you as its own. Pretend that you are fine.

Go to work. Hide in your cubicle. Type aimlessly on your computer. Keep yourself busy. Pretend you aren't wondering what you'll have for lunch. Tell yourself you won't go out. You're done with carbs and you've ended your tumultuous relationship with sugar. Eat a salad, coat it with a vinaigrette that will never taste as good as Hidden Valley ranch. Eat a sandwich— wheat bread, no mayonnaise or cheese. Eat tuna from a pouch. Watch your portions. Only have one pouch. Or don't: go to the nearest vending machine that you don't have to walk too far to get to, put in 4 colorless quarters. Choose B6: Lay's Classic potato chips. Your mouth waters, and your eyes grow wide in anticipation, as you watch the spirals twirling their release on the object of your desire. Suddenly, they stop, and your potato chips teeter on the edge; the corner of their yellow bag gripped ever so slightly by the spiraling rings.

You'll sigh in exasperation. Tell yourself it's a sign: you didn't need them anyway. Think about their salty goodness on your tongue. Think of the pouch of tuna in your fridge. Shake the machine with maximum strength. Think of the golden crisps held captive by those evil black coils. Think about putting in 4 more colorless quarters. Because you know that the machine will inherently drop one bag and then another: one for a friend, you'll say. Anything to convince yourself to give in and indulge. You've had a hard week. You're a wreck, and that bag of Lay's Classic potato chips is going to solve it all, you think to yourself as you insert the last 2 quarters. The spirals twirl once more, and down falls two bright, yellow packages with your name on them. Suddenly, that friend you thought about giving them to doesn't exist anymore. You take the chips back to your desk. Eat one bag. Put the other in your purse, save them for when you are stuck in rush hour traffic. Self control, you say. That is, until you see the black and white lines of the nutrition facts etched on the back of the bag. One hundred ninety milligrams of sodium. One hundred fifty calories. Your head spins, and you try to take comfort in the three hundred sixty milligrams of potassium— maybe you won't have high blood pressure. Toss the half eaten bag of chips you worked so hard for in the trash can. Grab the cerulean blue pouch from your fridge, tear along the dotted line, analyze the packaging. Wonder who decided to make a blue tuna fish with a red beret their mascot: Was it supposed to make this garbage seem more appealing? Sorry, Charlie.² Eat it anyway. It's good for you. Take two bites, and realize that your lunch break ended twenty minutes ago. This is your life: calorie counting and body contorting. Because a

² Charlie the Tuna is the cartoon mascot and spokes-tuna for the StarKist brand. He wears a red beret and coke-bottle glasses. Charlie is always rejected in the form of a note attached to a fish hook that says, "Sorry, Charlie," because StarKist was not looking for tuna with good taste but rather for tuna that tasted good.

single bag of chips will go straight to your ass. A burger to your stomach. Add fries, and you'll be saying farewell to your waistline. And those baby back ribs will take the fastest route to your meaty thighs.

When you get home, after the day you've had, proud of yourself for not devouring the chips hidden in your purse, while you were stuck in rush hour traffic, draw yourself a bath. Take off all of your clothes, wipe away your makeup, take out your earrings; remove all of the things used to distract from your inadequacy. Look at your reflection in the mirror; feel disgusted. Stick one foot in the water, and then the other. Slowly settle in, let your body get used to the warmth. Drop in a bath bomb. Feel the breeze on the tops of your thighs. The cold air hitting the parts of you that the water doesn't cover. Pull them close to you. Sit there, arms wrapped, head on your knees.

Look at the dove etched into your ivory soap. Feel the soft fibers of your washcloth against your skin, as the soap and water create a soft lather. Begin to scrub your skin like it is the icky, brown gunk at the bottom of the lake you visited as a child. Scrub as if you are peeling back the layers of your body and you start to shrink smaller and smaller. Scour away your stretch marks and your "extra". The extra that does not fit in the bathtub when all you want to be is submerged; when your lunch breaks consist of arguing with a vending machine; when the baby you do not have spits up on the blouse that fits you just right; when your thighs are made up of cellulite and excess skin, when you are a fat girl living in a Barbie³ world.

And when your bath bomb has fizzled away, and your skin has begun to prune, watch the water drain beneath you. Feel the cold air against your soggy, wet skin. Grab a towel; wrap yourself in it. It will not cover all of your parts, but nothing ever does. Dry yourself off, feel the moisture escape your body.

Look at yourself in the mirror. Consider what life would be like if you were thin, the freedom you'd have, to be able to eat whatever you wanted: sweet tea with *no* Splenda, *unlimited* breadsticks from Olive Garden, *bacon*. There'd be no more sugar free Jello cups or fudge pops. You could drink a Coke and feel no shame.

To be thin, is to be shameless. To wear a bikini and not feel the stares and glares of society sitting in beach chairs. To go on a date with a hot guy and not be asked if he's your brother. To go to the movies, order popcorn, and want extra butter without being asked, "Are you sure you want *extra* butter?" To have jeans that fit. To order any and everything on the menu. To actually eat "all you can eat" at an all-you-can-eat buffet. To not have a constant calorie calculator in your head. To be thin is to be beautiful.

³ Song reference to *Barbie Girl* lyrics, "I'm a Barbie girl in a Barble world" by Danish-Norwegian dance-pop group Aqua.

When you are fat, you are not beautiful. You do not have such luxuries. You have oatmeal-colored Spanx and cottage cheese thighs. You have weight loss ads and metabolism pills. You have entire stores that do not carry clothing to fit your ugly. You have doctor's visits that never fail to diagnose you as fat. You have severed belt loops and hip dips. You have a whole genre of jokes tailored to your excess.

When you are a woman and you are fat, you're hilarious. The chubby comical relief. When you are a woman and you are fat, you're a world renowned vocalist. The belly of the ball. And it's not over 'til the fat lady sings. Except, you are the fat lady, and you have yet to sing. It's not over. It's never over when your body is the punchline of every joke; when being fat has become the only thing you are known for, when being fat means the only talents that you can possibly possess are the abilities to crack a joke or hum a note. When you are a woman and you are fat, you're a preconceived idea that the world has claimed as truth. Nothing more than a body that takes up too much space. When you are a woman and you are fat, you are matter that does not actually matter.

And when the self-loathing is over, you'll make the decision to do something about it. Realize the absurdity of complaining about your reality when you've done nothing to change it. Go to the gym. Convince yourself that *you* want this. Get on the treadmill. Increase the incline. Increase the speed. Don't make things easy for yourself. Turn your music to the loudest setting. Pay no attention to the warning notification about the damages listening at high volumes can do. Look down at the buttons on the machine. Look at your feet. Look at your phone. Don't look up. Don't look in the mirror. You'll only get discouraged.

But in that same moment, you only glance to your right, and see the two little boys snickering and pointing at you in the corner. Their mother is running next to you with her earbuds in. You try to let it go. They're just kids, you say. Maybe they aren't laughing at you. Maybe they're laughing at her. She looks like she's no stranger to the gym. The type to run marathons every weekend. You envy her, admire her. If she can raise two children, and be a regular at the gym, why can't you? You are your only priority. She has two kids and probably a husband waiting at home. Maybe he takes the kids when she is running her marathons. Maybe they wait for her and cheer her on at the finish line. Maybe they do not teach their children respect. Maybe they think they are too young to understand. Maybe they don't care. Maybe they don't teach them at all. Maybe boys will be boys will be boys. The same ones that tormented you in high school and bully you at work. It is a never ending cycle of abuse. One you don't even bother reporting because all you will receive in return is a voucher for a free Jenny Craig membership. Feel your stomach churning. Stop the machine, and head for the door.

Go sit in your car. Sit and feel embarrassed. Feel ashamed. Feel like a failure. Wonder how those boys will grow up. Feel crazy for letting their ignorant teasing bother you so much. Vow that your children will never behave like them. Remember that it takes “two to tango”. And who could ever “tango” with someone of your stature? Who could love someone so massive? Who could love all of you? Who would want to? They say, “Big girls need love too.” As if being fat means you shouldn’t be loved already. The only love you have are your love handles. You are a monstrosity among men. Who could possibly love a fat bitch like you?

Go home. Get in bed. Put on sad songs. And as you drift away to the soft melodic sounds and slip into a stream of subconsciousness, begin to dream. Dream about the life you wish you had. Dream about walking down a runway in Milan with your size 2 body and designer clothes. Your eyes wide and hair curled to perfection. No cellulite or gapless thighs in sight. Confidence exudes your pores.

Don't kid yourself, your *real* body does not exude confidence. It radiates repulsion. You are the one no one sits with at lunch, the supporting role in all the best movies; second best, the one no one ever remembers. You're never the “hot girl”. You're the funny one. You will always be the funny one.

Awake from your dismal dreams and spend the whole day in your pajamas. Watch the new episode of Real Housewives. Wonder what your life could be like if you had someone to share it with. Someone to make you breakfast in bed. Someone to hold your hand and make you feel safe. Someone to love you for all that you are. Someone who fancies your fat without fetishizing it. Someone who does not only see you as a conglomeration of body and flesh, but as beautiful. And not beautiful like them, but beautiful, gargantuan and wide; beautiful as you.

But maybe you are better alone. Maybe your life is not meant to be shared. Maybe it's simple: no one is capable of loving you, and not because you are fat, but because you are *you*. This world is not tailored to fit you. There's not enough bolts of fabric to fit your surplus of a body. And yet, the notion that you are just simply unlovable has yet to cross your mind. Because the *only* reason someone can't love you is because you are fat.

Dear fat girl, do not let your circumstances be because you are not small. Do not let your size define you. Don't let it hinder your happiness. Stop seeking validation from the mouths of predators when you are their prey. You do not owe them anything, so you eat whatever the fuck you want. Devour it. Lick the plate clean. And if they ask why, tell them because you want to.