

This Thanksgiving (and probably the Christmas to come) was (and will be) a reminder.

A reminder of what?

My eating disorder.

Why?

Why, you ask? Well, there's food, yes. Plenty of food involved. And the body can often feel like a casualty of the food.

But in many eating disorder cases, the focus becomes displaced. There is too much focus on food. There is too much focus on the body.

But beyond food + body, eating disorders often have something to do with a deeper idea – which, in turn, employs the body + food in metaphor.

Metaphor. I am a walking metaphor. We all are, really; I just have a history of using calories and body mass to communicate it. All along, maybe that's why I was developing a penchant for poetry.



My first book, core collection: poems about eating disorders.

Quick question: reader, how did you end up here, on this web page?

There are plenty of places to go on the internet.

Hell, there are plenty of places to go on the internet for eating disorder-related content.

- 1.) You could go to Reddit. Plenty of interesting forums on eating disorders there. Some give you tricks.
- 2.) You could listen to podcasts. *The Appetite* by Opal Food & Body is my favorite.
- 3.) You could read or listen to what a bunch of other souls have written or spoken.

Or you could read or listen to yourself.

(I know you've probably heard it a million times before – follow yourself, listen to yourself. But listen.

Listen to *me*.

This wretched illness has to do with listening.)

Back to Thanksgiving.

The holidays implicate being with human beings that you will forever be linked to, whether you want to or not, right?

And often, that link goes back to childhood.

And often, when that link goes back to childhood, you can be reminded of yourself as a child.

Right now, I'm living in Uruguay. I'm also following my childhood dream: studying film. I'm doing it now after years of thinking that I couldn't. And shouldn't.

And now, visiting home for the holidays, I feel like I'm finally accessing a necessary understanding from my youth – that I always felt inferior. Incapable. Inadequate.

In-

In-

In-

so deeply IN- and *inferior* in everything
that I soon found a way to feel *superior*
by *superseding* the *in* with the out. In numbing.
In denying my body to be able to feel itself. All the while, I believed I was
winning the game.

What game?

Why?

Well, the story I usually tell goes like this:

I've always had a larger body — taller, wider, more myopia than everyone. A cute, tall, nerdy, “plump” girl, and with glasses, and maybe with porky pigtails.

In school, every *girl* seemed to have the body that still many *women* try towards everyday: One *sin grasa*, without fat. *Sin senos*, without boobs (or, if with boobs, in a gross disproportion to your hips).

And because I looked different, I was made to feel different. People treated me different. Sure, you could say “everyone gets bullied,” but I guess not everyone has a complex arrangement of inner and outer appearance, of genetic and physical makeup, all working together within the backdrop fusion of family, society, and timing.

This was all a cycle that went so deeply
in-

in-

in-.

Much bullying. Much finding peace in controlling reality,
in video. In not making myself vulnerable to it, reality.

But then!

Then.

Then came puberty: a growth s

p

u

r

t

!

I got taller. At 12-13, I grew close to my adult height. I am now 5'10.

With spastic height growth comes instantaneous weight loss.

The whole world started being nicer to me.

EVERYONE showed me more

attention, and that

of the nice

variety.

For example. I'll break it up into male and female attention:

Male:

- More comments. More stares – both those of the lecherous variety, from dirty old men – as well as those of the playful, inexperienced kind from boys my age.
- More crushes. And, I mean, crushes that were *more* than daydreams. Crushes that like, led to lunch dates or something, that led to you being the one who a gushing yet hesitant note was passed to in class.
- Cute comments on Facebook (I started my account in 2007, when I was 12 or 13).

Female:

- Also more comments – both those of the cold variety from desperate, sad old women, as well as those of the hot, maybe even jealous, pubescent kind from girls my age.
- Dangerous remarks from grown-ass women. For example, my schoolteacher, in front of everyone: “Sarah! You look *so* good, you’ve lost *SO* much weight. What’s your *secret*?”
 - From women I’d known all my life, while packed in my apartment building elevator: “You’re a rubber band — it’s like someone just stretched. You. Out!”
- Congratulatory comments (laced with jealousy and criticism) from girls my age: “You’re so pretty now!” “I like you.” “Let’s have lunch?”
- Facebook photo comments: “Gorg!!!” “OMG Stop.” “Model.”

Keep in mind that I didn’t have plastic surgery. That the essential characteristics of my face didn’t change, so now that everyone was opening up to me, making the world easier for me, making me find joy in my appearance — I began to believe that the only way to be *pretty* was to be *skinny*. And you still wouldn’t be pretty with average weight-height proportion; no, it had to be *extreme*, because when I grew fast, I grew skinny. And because it was even less common in 2008 to see lionized images of women with 21.5 BMIs. That seems to be coming around now. But my models? The Olsen twins.

And we go from there. You could say it spun even more out of control in college. It often goes that way.

But now that I’m back home — childhood friends, arguments with my brother, comments from people who saw my whole evolution from plump, piggy-tailed girl to growing, graceful teenager

and woman — it's like we all revert. Even though we love each other, we're using our old tricks. Our old fire. That old flame that boils us down to our last nerves.

So now I'm faced with the question: How can we keep loving, but do it in a different way? How can I have that conversation? Will we ever be able to see past the instinctive comfort we find in each other, by virtue of sharing blood? Will we ever be able to be logical about thoughtless love?

Blood bonds aren't always the closest bonds, even when I'd like to believe so.

Is it shameful that I decided to stay in a foreign country, half a world away, where I think I'm finding my true self in happiness, instead of my true self in shame?

I'm trying to be more deliberate about loving. I'll see how it goes this Christmas.

△△△

For now, a poem from the book:

famine in the family

My aunts tell stories and I tell everyone they are crazy.
But I don't want to hear it anymore:

There are five of them, sometimes four
sitting
zigzag along a dinner table,
five Irish bodies post-
menopause bodies forming a double *v*
there's just a single *u*
and you are surrounded, swallowed
in the mouth of the first *v*,
the zigzag three nearest the porch door.
It is dinnertime in December.

*That's **solid weight** you would be putting on girl.*
You space out and think of the space
between your thighs,
the girl is
in
a
space they probably can't hear: *Where is your mind at?*
The girl listening to the gap, not
eating right!
They are waiting for her
to come back
to the conversation,

to show up
to the dinner table,
to show up
to the hearty stuff
at the dinner table.
The aunts are waiting for their girl to
come back,
show up,
and sit down her **solid weight**.

Finish your plate. What are we having tomorrow?

They are again already planning. Already planning can you
pass the salad?

Finish your plate.

What are we having tomorrow?

They hand me the bowl I know
is just a short-term filler, really:
Salad can make your plate look full, abounding, a bounty.
But it doesn't fill. Your body is a famine –
but your aunts, they are green goddesses.
They make the pour of dressing seem slow and
easy.

That wasn't so hard, was it?

But I said no to the dressing.
I told them I never liked dressing anyway.
But really it was all the oil it had all
that fat!

I press my tailbone into the wood of my dinnertime seat:
They are already planning.

*That's **solid weight** girl. Eat your steak –*

*I am running to the store tonight, what are we having for dinner
tomorrow?*

But I didn't want steak today.
Yet, it is not a problem because of this.
It is a problem
I am a problem
because of Irish heritages.
At dinnertime with my aunts,
it is the ultimate form of disrespect:

*She won't eat, she's not eating
enough, look at her!*

Not look at you.

Look at her! Look at our girl!

I thought of when they were girls.

Of course the photos of the five back in '65 all
lined

up

in black-and-white

solid weight

in black-and-white, *hard*

and learning.

Learning of their parents' famines.

Developing a fear of famines.

Developing a hard fear of famines of

being incomplete of not

having enough to eat of not

being **solid** enough to sustain –

learning. Learning of

hard times

in the '30s. Of

eating off every dime waiting

for the milkman eating

out of cans dressing

up the Spam! these

are

hard

lessons

for soft babies.

From the photo, you can tell how many potatoes they'd eaten before.

You can tell how many times they'd seen the eyes of their mother quiver

at not having enough to provide not

eating right

quite enough getting

instead dependent

on potato juice.

If only it had not been so cold.
If only we had sewed our sock-holes –
If we had only enough money to eat:
A family history of famine.

But now we are comfortable Irish people

in the Midwest.

Famine is not the problem.

In all this excess I am choosing what to eat,

to stay skinny.

This makes me the *princess*: I have the nerve to stay skinny!

This makes me the *problem*.

But I have a problem! I want to be skinny!

So skinny so to be gone.

*She won't eat, she's not eating
enough, look at her!*

Not look at you.

Look at our girl!

Look at her!

So I looked at her too:

I saw her at the dinner table.
I saw her pass the bread on.
I saw her refuse the steak away,
I saw her salad-camouflage her plate.

You know we are already planning a meal for tomorrow,
like our fathers did,
like our Irish fathers did –
what stories are you listening to?
We told you how mom used to stack up on cans and cram
us
fill *us*
with
potatoes.
Don't you know that we have to eat?

It is the greatest hypocrisy of the family, which tries its best to fill you.
But if they had just heard the famine filling my soul,
the voices stealing fat and bounty
from my bones.
All cold. Hard and cold.

Yes, I am sick.
Yes,
like the way your grandfather died of potato juice
and your mother became a psychiatrist.
Can you be my psychiatrists?

I promise the reason I don't eat is not to spite the family tree