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Fat Ass

by Marc Simon

Howard sat naked on his bed, a dingy sheet twisted around his abdomen. It barely covered the rolls of flesh that sagged one on top of the next, like deflated inner tubes. His stomach rumbled, a familiar calling. He whispered a desperate mantra: "I will not eat, I will not eat, I will not eat tonight," as his teeth clenched on a corner of the sheet. I am not hungry, I am not hungry, and it was true, and it wasn't true, since it wasn't food he hungered for.

Weak winter sunlight leaked through the beige curtains, washing the room sepia. *I will not eat, I will not eat.* Three P.M. Work in one hour. He needed to find a clean shirt and a tie.

Instead, he groped for his penis, buried somewhere his bulky body, 354 pounds on five feet, seven inches. And he wondered, when will I be loved, when will I make love, who will ever love me. He pictured the other assistant manager at Well-Rite, Sherry Foster and her full lips, tried to make himself grow hard to stroke away his urge. *I will not eat, I will not eat.*

Three knocks on his door. Probably Morelli, the tenant from downstairs. Yesterday Morelli told him water was leaking into his apartment. Howard had called the landlord the same morning, twice. He went into his bathroom to check. Nothing was running. If he ignored the knocks maybe they would go away. He moved his hand faster.

Three knocks came again, more forceful this time.

It was no use. He was still limp. The knocking had killed the moment. It was 3:15 now. What had happened to the time? He had to get dressed. He couldn't be late for work again. Thompson said he was lucky to have the job, that he'd shit-can his ass the next time he fucked up.

Three more knocks.

He put his eye up to the peephole. White light shot through the opening and dazzled him for a moment. Morelli stood there, his arms folded across his chest. Howard opened the door. As he stepped forward his feet became tangled in the bottom of the bed sheet and he stumbled headlong into the corridor.

Morelli threw his hands up in front of him. "Jesus, back off, you wanna crush me?"

"I just got ...the sheet... I'm sorry."

"What the hell is wrong with you, come busting through the door like that? I've been knocking for five minutes. Didn't you hear me?"

Spring 2009

"No. I mean yes."

Autumn 2008

"What?"

Summer 2008

"I got tangled. I'm sorry."

Spring/Summer 2008

Morelli shook his head. "Sorry don't cut it, fat ass. Now you listen good. Your fucking tub is leaking again. All over my kitchen table."

Winter/Spring 2008

"But I called the super."

Editor's Note

"Well call him again, stupid. Take some goddamn responsibility, or do I have to do it for you?"

Guidelines

Contact

"No, I'll call him again. I didn't know."

"And for Christ's sake put some clothes on. Other people live here, you know?" He looked over Howard's shoulder, toward his apartment. "What the fuck do you do in there, anyway?"

Howard closed the door. His sheet caught in the doorjamb and pulled away. He stood naked in the middle of the room. Morelli's voice echoed in his head. *What the fuck do you do in there, anyway?*

He yanked open his refrigerator. He took out a jar of mayonnaise and a package of bologna. He jammed a clump of meat into the mayonnaise. The jar slipped and smashed on the floor.

By 10:25 P.M., he'd restocked the shelves, swept and mopped the floors, hung the Buy One/Get One shelf hangers. Everyone else was long gone.

He placed the cash drawers and the register tapes in the safe. It would be so easy, he thought, to walk out with a couple thousand in cash and postage. Then what? Run away to Mexico? Go on a food bender? He laughed to himself. It was so ridiculous. The same stupid fantasy he had every time he worked late and closed out for the manager. He twirled the combination lock.

It was silent in the store except for the hum of the fluorescent lights. Howard sighed. He sat in the manager's chair and sipped cold tea from his thermos. His arches ached. On his feet, up and down the aisles, from four to ten, then another half hour to clean up and close up. Fucking lousy job, assistant manager at Well-Rite, but what did he expect with a just two-year degree, and looking the way he looked, to be the CEO of Microsoft?

His left knee screamed at him. It felt squishy as he rubbed it. Partially torn meniscus, Dr. Mehlman had explained. Told him to lose the weight or face the consequences. Easy for him to say. As if you could just say to yourself, OK, now I will lose 200 pounds, just like that. People had no idea. Not a fucking clue.

A sound came from the front of the store. High pitched, like a sneaker squeaking on a hardwood floor. He glanced at the security camera monitor and saw a man in the pain relief aisle. He was wearing letterman jacket over a hooded sweatshirt. Howard recognized the jacket. Lincoln High. He'd gone to Lincoln, too.

Strange. The man hadn't been there minutes before, when Howard did his walkthrough. How'd he get in through the locked doors? He must have been hiding somewhere.

Now the guy was in the snacks aisle, throwing boxes of candy bars on the floor. Jerkoff. Probably high. Howard was about to call security when the man looked up, straight at the camera.

A gasp rushed from Howard's mouth. The man in the monitor looked exactly like Robert Gordon. The sadistic jock bastard that had tormented him all through high school. But it couldn't be Gordon. Or could it?

Howard's face burned red, as all the years of repressed shame and anger rushed forward. He remembered Gordon's taunts in the boys' locker room—*hey Fat Ass, find your dick yet?*

He switched on the loudspeaker system and grabbed the microphone. "Hey, Ruh...ruh...Robert. Yuh...yuh...you're tres...trespassing."

The man looked up at the security camera. He grabbed his crotch and shouted, "Eat me." He turned and ran out the emergency door.

The alarm blared. Howard plodded down the three steps from the manager's office to the back room, to get to the control panel to shut it off. His knee wobbled and he had to steady himself against the wall. He punched in the code. Nothing. He tried it again. The noise was making him nauseated. He put his hands over his ears. Where was that fucking code written down? He climbed back up the stairs as fast as he could. Breath wheezed from his nostrils. His chest pounded. He dug through the manager's desk. There it was, in the bottom drawer, the code numbers written on a piece of tape.

He was really fucked now. Even with the alarm shut off, the cops probably would probably show up soon. He'd have to fill out a goddamn report. It would be midnight before he got home.

He limped over to the snacks aisle. His knee throbbed as he knelt down to pick up the candy bars. He traced his fingers over a box of Snickers.

Fuck it. He grabbed a handful and looked around. He grabbed a few more, and some Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Employees were supposed to pay for whatever they ate. The hell with it. Chalk it up to shoplifting. He stuffed two Reese's into his mouth and waited.

Two nights later, Howard sat opposite the clothes washer in the

basement of his building. He flipped through a discarded newspaper, but with the thrum of the washing machine and warmth from the clothes dryer he began to drift off.

Three taps on the concrete floor jolted him awake. A young woman sat opposite him on a folding chair. She leaned forward on a white metal cane, her chin tucked down toward her chest. She wore a black V-neck sweater, white jeans and a red crystal heart on a thin gold chain. Her dark hair had blonde streaks and fell over her shoulders. "Hi."

Howard swallowed. "Hi."

"You were asleep."

"Yeah, I guess."

"I hope I didn't scare you."

"No, I'm all right."

"So, anyway. My name is Terry. Terry lovanni. I just moved into the building. This afternoon, I mean. I was just walking around to get familiar with the stairs and where everything is. I don't know anyone yet, and I heard the washer, and you were sitting here, so I...you live here, right?"

Howard thought he smelled a faint odor of marijuana. "Yes. 4C."

"Really! I'm in 4D. We're next door neighbors."

"Oh. Well, I knew Mr. Freeman moved out, but I didn't know someone else moved in already."

"Yeah yeah, that's me! Oh, sorry, am I talking too loud? I'm just, you know, so excited about the new place. My first apartment on my own, I am so stoked! I even smoked a joint before, but it didn't calm me down, not really. But, whoo-hoo, I'm in."

"You need any help with your stuff or anything?" Even as the words came out of his mouth Howard was surprised he'd said them.

She reached out and touched his arm quickly. "Oh, thanks, that's sweet, but no thanks, the movers, they did it all, they were great, you know? They call themselves Good Karma Movers. Very cool guys. Even helped me unpack."

Howard tasted the disappointment. "Oh, so you're all set then. In that regard."

"Yes, all set."

A buzzer went off. "That's me." He began to unload the washer.

“So anyway, you didn’t tell me your name.”

“My name? Oh, sorry, that was rude of me, I’m sorry.”

“No no, it’s all right, gosh, you were asleep.”

“No, still. Anyway, I’m Howard...Howie Davis.”

“Well hello, Howard Howie Davis.”

“No, it’s just.”

“I’m *kidding*. Pleased to meet you.” She leaned forward, and the heart dangled above her cleavage. She extended her hand and smiled.

Howard pulled back involuntarily. Her eyes were like white marbles.

“Yes, I’m blind. Does that frighten you?” Her hand hung in the air.

“No, not at all, I mean, sorry. I mean I’m not sorry you’re blind. No, wait, I didn’t mean it that way. God.” He grasped her hand. Her grip was firm and warm. He hoped his hand didn’t give away how fat he was.

“Don’t worry about it. To me it’s no big deal. I was born this way, you know? It’s the way I am. I get around pretty well, don’t you think? But I know it puts some people off, they think you’re not normal because you can’t see. But we are who we are, right?”

“Right. Definitely.”

“I mean, everybody’s got something. Nobody’s perfect.”

Howard felt a lump rising in his throat. “Yeah.”

“I had a feeling you’d understand.”

Something warm spread across his chest. “Excuse me one second, I have to put some stuff in the dryer.”

He loaded his sweatshirts and sweat pants. He glanced back at her. She was still there, smiling. He put the coins in the machine. “Having these machines in the building comes in handy.”

“Oh, I always send my laundry out. They do a great job. I could give you the name.” She stood. “Anyway, I guess I should be going. A girl has to get her beauty rest, right?”

Howard wanted to say, but you’re already beautiful. Instead, he said, “OK.”

“Well, good night, then.” She leaned forward and took his hand again.

“Your skin is nice. Cool and soft.”

He watched her tap her way toward the stairs. “Terry?”

She turned and looked in his direction. “Yes, Howard Howie?”

“Uh, could I get that number sometime? For the laundry?”

“Sure, any time.”

“O.K. Thanks.”

“Hey. Why don’t you come by next Monday, around dinnertime? Sevenish? Is spaghetti all right? You know us Italians, we have to have pasta three times a day.”

“Wow. Thanks. Can I bring anything?”

“Just yourself. And your appetite.”

He watched her climb the steps, thin hips and black boots. He reached into his laundry basket and hugged an armful of warm underwear.

The following Monday, Howard bought a full-bodied vintage Bordeaux. It cost \$95, almost as much as he made in a day. He ripped off five twenties from a roll of bills and asked for a gift box.

At 6:30 that evening, he retied his tie for the third time and slipped on his new blazer. The tailor at Brooks Brothers had done a terrific job, finishing it for him over the weekend. He could even button all the buttons, although he wasn’t sure if he should keep it buttoned or keep it open. He could come into her apartment buttoned, and then unbutton it when they sat down to eat. Or vice versa. He slipped the blazer on and off, relishing the silky feel against his arms and shoulders. The double-breasted design really hid his stomach. Or maybe it was the three pounds he’d lost in over the weekend.

How did it get to be 6:55 already, he wondered. Five minutes to go. He didn’t want to be early, but he didn’t want to be late, either. He cupped his hand in front of his mouth and exhaled to check his breath. Better pop a Cert, just to be sure. Sugarless, of course. He whispered, “I will not stuff myself, I will not stuff myself tonight.” He would eat like a normal person, politely refuse seconds—well, maybe have just a little more, to be polite and show how much he appreciated her cooking—and have just a spoonful of dessert, if she made any. Or he could suggest they go out for dessert. Something low fat for him, or a sorbet. Or maybe a drink. A light beer. He’d cleaned the van. It was pristine inside and out.

He gathered the wine in one hand and the long-stem red roses in the other. He imagined the glorious smile on her face as she inhaled them. He hoped two dozen wasn’t too much, but what the heck, it was

too late now.

Three knocks on his door.

He froze for a second. That damn Morelli. Could the bastard have picked a worse time?

Three more knocks.

“Get the hell away from my door, Morelli. I called the super, all right?”

“Mr. Davis?”

His spine shivered involuntarily.

“Who is it?”

“This is Sergeant Gordon. Now open the door, please.”

“Gordon? You’re a thief.”

He heard laughter. “I’m a cop, pal. Just open the door.”

He glanced through the peephole. Two uniformed officers and a man in a suit stood outside. “What’s going on? Did something happen to Terry?”

He watched the officers glance at each other. “Sir, you need to open the door.”

“What’s this all about? I called the landlord about the leak. Morelli called you, didn’t he?”

“Mr. Davis, I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about. But I do know that if you don’t open the door in two seconds it’s gonna come down in your face.”

“But what’s this about?”

“Just open the door, sir.”

“I just want to know if Terry’s all right.”

One of the officers said, “Who the fuck is this fucking Terry?”

Howard screamed, “You watch your mouth, asshole.”

“Mr. Davis, would you happen to know anything about \$2200 missing from the Well-Rite where you work?”

Urine rolled down the side of his leg, dampening the inseam of his trousers. He tamped his pants against the wetness. Couldn’t they

have let him have just one night? Just one? "Fuck you, you bastard."

"One more time. Open the door."

"Go away."

The door burst open. He caught the first uniformed officer flush on the side of the neck with wine bottle. A second later a Billy Club smashed his nose across his face. Another blow struck his temple, and he went down in a slow heap.

Terry stood in her doorway, her head cocked sideways, listening. As the gurney passed by, she asked, "What's going on?"

One of the EMTs said, "The guy in 4C tried to brain a cop."

"Oh my God, Howard."

"You know him?"

She folded her arms across her chest and shook her head. "Not really. We just met."

Marc Simon's stories have appeared in several literary magazines, including *The Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Poetica Magazine*, *The Writing Disorder*, and *Slush Pile Magazine*. He is a three-time winner in the Sugden Theater One-Act Plays contest. His debut novel, *The Leap Year Boy* was published in December, 2012. Marc lives in Naples, Florida with his wife, Linda, and his dog, Annie.

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