

How to Live Thin

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1. MEASURE YOUR WAIST WITH YOUR HANDS

The summer I weighed 92 pounds, I liked the aesthetics of my hip bones. The way they jutted like rock formations in the desert. The way the skin stretched taut over the hollow of my pelvis. The way the belly was actually concave. The opposite of a belly; its mirror image.

It was the summer after freshman year of college. When I sat with my knees together, my thighs no longer met. When I squeezed my waist, my hands could form a complete circle, fingertips and thumbs touching. There was something perfect about that.

My eyes concave, too, my cheeks. The rarified gauntness. Aesthetics that no one else appreciated. I hid my true shape under baggy sweatshirts so people would shut the fuck up. Because the deal was, if I started eating again, I might never stop. I had to get down to a level where I'd be in the clear.

2. DIG INTO THE CONCAVITY

I know I risk losing readers early in this piece. Because it's hard to read about. Anorectics aren't fun like alcoholics are. We don't wake up in outrageously hilarious places with no idea how we got there. We are humorless, severe. No one wants to get into our heads. I don't even want to get into the head I had back then.

But I have to, somehow. Get into that head, that body. Dig into the concavity. Find out what dwelled there.

3. TRANSCEND THE NEEDS OF THE BODY

During my first weeks at Stanford, I discovered my innate talent for transcending the needs of the body. I could live on the buzz of adrenaline fueled by the new friends I was making, the outgoing personality I was cultivating. Instead of breakfast I'd run the trails leading up to the old satellite dish on the ridge behind campus. Instead of lunch I'd pretend to read *The Iliad* on the sun deck but really just talk to people. My body didn't need what other bodies needed.

That included sleep. I would purposely procrastinate so I could stay up all night cramming for an exam or writing a paper. I enjoyed the deadline stress, the excuse to crunch air-popped popcorn, to stretch out a black cherry fro-yo until the wee hours. "Ya eat like a BIRD!" my roommate shouted once.

The widening spiral inside my head, the weightless and tingling upward expansion. It was fun until it wasn't. One morning after pulling two all-nighters in a row, drinking Diet Coke for breakfast in the cafeteria, I started laughing and couldn't stop. The friends at my table laughed with me, until they didn't.

4. GIVE A LOT OF BLOW JOBS

Food was the one thing I had power over. Everything else was changing too fast. My parents taking each other to court over my Stanford tuition. Mom, newly remarried, so I wasn't her closest person anymore. Me, on my own in a new state, pulling all-nighters, drinking until things spun, giving blow jobs to two guys in my fiction-writing class. I had gone from top of my high school class to just another college freshman who wasn't really good at anything. Except blow jobs. And not eating. It takes a lot of focus to not eat. I could've hired my body out to lose weight for other people, I was that good at it.

5. APPROACH WEIGHT LOSS IN A NEW WAY

Two writer friends told me that the topic of anorexia has been done. That if I want to take it on, I need to find a new angle. But hasn't it all been done—all the ways we find to be addicted, all the ways we try to do ourselves in, all the ways we sabotage love?

6. WORK AS A HASHER IN THE DORM

In my freshman dorm, at least 30 percent of the women were fucked up around food. This is by my own estimation and definition. But I should know, because as a hasher serving food in our cafeteria, I knew who came back for seconds and who never came to dinner at all. I knew who had gained the freshman 15 and who was headed for 30, because women confessed such things to me as I dolloped more mashed potatoes onto their plate. I knew who kneeled in the bathroom stalls facing the wrong way, and I knew who left the Domino's box in the hall after midnight with one piece left. I knew who scavenged that piece and ate the cheese off the top and threw the crust away and, minutes or hours later, rescavenged any still-edible bits of crust from the trash. That scavenger was me.

7. DON'T CROSS THE LINE

I never made myself throw up. That was a line I had no intention of crossing. On the other side of that line, you had a problem. You had a diagnosis. Like the women in my dorm who kneeled in the bathroom stalls facing the wrong way. I wasn't one of them.

8. LOSE YOUR VIRGINITY

I thought the anti-belly would help my love life. And maybe it did, if love meant letting your boyfriend of two weeks talk you into having sex because "it's the only way we can move forward." If love meant not freaking out when,

during the heat of things, he handed you a sponge and its six-page pamphlet of instructions because it was your job to figure out how to cram the damn thing in. If love meant closing your eyes through the surprising burn and chafe and chemical smell; then sweating, whimpering for over an hour in a bathroom stall because you must have put the sponge in upside-down and your fingers couldn't quite grasp the string.

The most satisfying aspect of losing my virginity was that it gave me more to commiserate about with my best friend in the dorm, who had lost hers a month before. Dell and I spent late nights sitting on the stained carpet outside her door, talking about everything. Everything except what really bonded us. The fact that we were both doing the same thing to our bodies.

9. GO ON LATE-NIGHT BINGES

Sometimes Dell and I would run across wet, moonlit grass to the eating clubs behind our dorm. The eating clubs were alternative dining areas for students without cafeteria access. They were deserted at night and sometimes unlocked, so no one ever caught us raiding the refrigerators and cupboards for food that was better than ours. Variety plates of lunchmeats and cheeses and fruits. Castles of fro-yo topped with granola and cookie crumbles and those tiny M&Ms. Wedges of homemade bread smeared with peanut butter and jam. Those nights of shared transgression were our reward for weeks of subsisting on popcorn and Diet Coke. We giggled as we shoved more, more, more into our open mouths.

By morning, a period of penance would begin.

10. ENFORCE AUSTERITY

For anorectics, austerity is a virtue. A way to achieve the vanishing, ethereal quality that feminine beauty is supposed to have. In our culture, vanishing is a way to be seen.

But when I look up *austere* in the dictionary, I find clues to why anorexia is hard to read about. Its synonyms include *grim*, *rigid*, *harsh*. *Humorless*, *unrelenting*. *Chaste*. *Obdurate*, even. The image of a nun or grammar teacher comes to mind. Or Emily Dickinson, my favorite poet at the time.

Its antonyms are a lot more fun. *Extravagant, luxurious. Impassioned. Erotic.* These words could describe someone who just loves life and experiences too much. Zorba the Greek. Or Walt Whitman. Someone whose appetites are just too *voracious, insatiable, ravenous.* Someone whom you might judge but who probably won't judge you.

Is that it? Anorectics embody society's oppressive mandate to be thin. Our very presence carries a whiff of moral superiority and dogma. Most people would rather hang out with a Zorba any day.

I should point out that while *austerity* and *gluttony* appear to be antonyms, in reality they are just opposite manifestations of the same addiction.

11. WEAR CLOTHES SEVERAL SIZES TOO LARGE

I had dropped from a size 8 to a size 6 during Fall quarter. While I was home for Christmas break, Mom married her partner—now my stepdad—in our house in Denver. Mom and I got drunk on champagne, and I ate all the leftover wedding cake, including some random bits left on paper plates. There's a picture of Mom and me, arms around shoulders, cheeks flushed. I'm wearing a poofy wool sweater. I hung the picture on my bulletin board at college.

I was a size 4 by spring. When Dell took me shopping at Nordstrom's and Macy's in the Stanford Mall, I was a little shocked to see the new lines my body carved in space, the relative flatness of the geometries. For the first time ever, clothes looked good on me. But I couldn't afford those chichi stores, and anyway, by the time I reached size 2, I was glad I still had my size 8 clothing so I could hide what was going too far.

12. DEVELOP A FEAR OF MIRRORS

You hear that when anorectics look in the mirror, they see a fat person. I didn't, actually. I just wanted to ensure that I never would, as long as I lived.

When I was eight years old, I developed a fear of mirrors. A bicycle accident had left me with scabs for skin, swollen protrusions for cheeks and jaw. Eyes glinting from somewhere within a black and bumpy mess. More than 40 years after that accident, I still don't look at my face in the mirror when I pass by in the dark.

13. THINK ABOUT NOTHING ELSE

Skin stretched over the hollows between bones. The tension of taut skin, the tension of a mind that carves the same circles all day, all night. The hollowness of soul.

I could count calories and pounds, but I couldn't begin to count the revolutions of my thoughts, which left no room for other things like calculus class or boyfriends or the fact that I wasn't excelling in school anymore and if Dad didn't pay the court-ordered tuition I would have to transfer to another college.

Fast-walking the trails to the Dish when I didn't have the energy to run, writing a villanelle in my head about Dad. The obsessive rhyme scheme trapping my thoughts, giving them somewhere outside of me to go.

Not long after this story ends, Dad would cut off all contact with me. Except for the tuition checks he sent until I turned 21, wrapped in blank pieces of paper folded into thirds.

14. SPECULATE ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

I had a tip in here where I considered whether my body issues were related somehow to growing up nerdy and kind of chubby and my shame around that. I wrote about how in middle school I'd been called a "dog" by three different boys. How I'd been kicked against a fence by two other boys, one of whom had run up from behind me and shoved his fingers up my pussy through my jeans one afternoon as I walked home from the bus. How I didn't know exactly why that would be related, but I also didn't believe it could be unrelated. The culture of assault on women's bodies.

That tip didn't really work, though, so I cut it out.

15. STUFF A PILLOW IN YOUR BELLY TO SLEEP

Alone in the dark with my hunger through each long night. I'd stuff a pillow into my hollow belly, then lie on top of it, to quiet the pangs when it was time to sleep. The pillow dug the hole deeper, filled it with something I could hold.

The pressure helped me make it through until morning. What hunger is sated only by more hunger?

Maybe I secretly relished the withholding of love.

Still today, I occasionally put that old pillow technique to use. If, for whatever reason, I don't eat dinner and I wake starving in the middle of the night. For those few hours I'll be back there, hunger burning down to ash on the sheets.

16. FILL THE HOLE

What did I want to dwell in the concavity that I refused to fill with food? Or maybe the question is—what did I fear might dwell there, if I filled it?

I wanted love, but it scared me. Parental love was so fraught. Romantic love was just about the way bodies looked. And if I filled the hole with food, the overpowering hunger could no longer numb all the other feelings—my resentment of my parents, my fear of living far from them, the aching exhilaration of freedom.

Was it about loving Dell? I don't think so. I wasn't yet conscious of my capacity to love women. Our bond was something else, something buried even further down.

17. DON'T STOP UNTIL YOU'RE SURE

Most people loved me for my accomplishments, and I didn't really accomplish anything freshman year. I wrote papers with false epiphanies and slept through calculus class.

But I had started college at 127 pounds. It was so gratifying to watch that hated flap of belly get slowly metabolized out of existence. Such a buzz of pride to see how bony my hips, how fragile my ribcage, how wide the gap between my thighs.

When I returned home to Denver for the summer, I was at an even 100. A number beautiful in its wholeness.

Until I decided I'd better make extra sure—and go for 95.

18. WRITE ABOUT IT AND TEAR UP THE DRAFTS

I can't really count the number of times I've tried to write about this. As fiction, poetry, prose poetry, flash nonfiction. As a lyric essay organized according to units of measure such as pounds, calories, hand widths. As tips for how to live thin.

One of the poems worked. I wrote it junior year, and it won a prize, and my poetry professor sent it to a friend whose daughter had anorexia. I still know it by heart. *Let me crawl into a cave and ache / alone, where your compassion / cannot reach me / where I will not hear your warnings . . .*

19. PRETEND EVERYTHING IS FINE

The summer after freshman year, I lived with my mom, stepdad, and younger brother in our suburban Denver home. Dad lived a few miles away in a house with nothing on the walls and one lamp on at night. So he wouldn't have to see the things he didn't want to see. When Dad picked up my brother and me, we waited at the entrance to our housing development so he wouldn't have to see his former home. Mom was dead to him, so we knew not to mention her; in turn, Dad didn't comment on how baggy my clothes were getting. That exchange worked well enough for me.

Mom, though, mentioned my body constantly but obliquely. She tried to persuade me to get my iron checked, my kidneys checked. Weekends, I would spend hours tanning on a towel in the backyard, admiring my hipbones, reading women's magazines. Mom would bring me saltine crackers laden with peanut butter and jelly, trying to fatten me up. Of course I would refuse them, go back to reading tips about how to lose weight, how to give better blow jobs. I could have written more informative articles on those topics.

20. ANALYZE YOUR PAST

I was 11 when I found out that Mom was having problems with Dad. I started having nightmares about a boiler in the basement that was going to explode if I didn't intervene. I would wake unable to catch my breath. Mom would

give me a paper bag to breathe in, talk me back into my body. On one of these nights, I started asking questions, and Mom began confiding in me. Together we deconstructed every fight they had, protected each other from Dad's rageful outbursts, isolated ourselves from him and him from us.

Becoming Mom's best friend was a way I could have some control over a situation that was spinning out of control. I knew she was planning to file divorce papers weeks before Dad did. By that point I was 16 and I supported the idea.

But by the summer after my freshman year of college, Mom was remarried and I was replaced and I couldn't tell her everything anymore anyway.

21. RUN THE STAIRS AT LUNCH

That summer, I worked for five dollars an hour as an assistant at a real estate company downtown. The owner was an Englishman who called his women employees *whores* and *sluts*. Like, *Janice, you slut. What's happening with the Curtis Street renovation?* Janice and the others would just laugh wryly and shake their heads. He spared me, maybe sensing that I wouldn't have laughed it off. Remember, anorectics are humorless, grim. At least about being called a *whore* by the boss.

Each morning, running up the stairs to our office on the tenth floor. At lunch, running down, up, down, up. Until tiny fireflies lit the edges of my vision. At my desk later, my head still floating upward. I loved the feeling.

22. EMPTY YOUR POCKETS OF CHANGE

Sometimes during lunch I locked my purse in a filing cabinet and walked the 16th Street Mall. If I accidentally had change in my pockets I would give it to a homeless person before entering one of the little grocery stores along the Mall. I wandered the aisles, just breathing the warm wheat smell of fresh baked goods; just gazing at the colorful pyramids of produce, the wedges of fancy cheese. I could live on sight and smell. It was a pure sensory experience. It was enough.

23. STEAL YOUR FOOD

Of course a few calories were necessary for survival. Five mini Reese's peanut butter cups. The crust of a piece of pizza rescued from my own trash can. Half a banana-nut muffin stolen from Safeway. I told myself, *If you steal the food, if you pull it out of the trash, it counts for less.*

One of my rules was that I could break society's rules in order to follow higher laws—my own.

24. FANTASIZE ABOUT HELPING STRANGERS

A few days ago, at the library, I saw a teenage girl walking ahead of me through the stacks. Long, spindly legs in jeans so skinny I didn't know jeans came like that. When she turned to face me, the sunken eyes, prominent cheekbones, smile disarming enough that I wondered if she knew what she was. In the way that I didn't know what I was.

The woman who used to fast-walk around my neighborhood in Berkeley, her cheeks looking punched in. The rail-like women in grocery stores, stealing a few chocolates from the bulk bin and leaving.

I want to stop their forward motion. Say, *You can find a way out.*

But I have no idea how to talk to someone in the throes of it. What could I say that they could hear? How could I even explain how I recovered? I know these women so well that I know to say nothing.

25. REBUFF CONCERN

That summer in Denver, one friend said, "You'd actually look better if you weren't so fucking skinny." Another compared me to a prisoner in a concentration camp. If this was caring, it was an odd way to express it. Of course, if someone had approached me with actual understanding and compassion, I'd probably have hissed like a cornered cat.

No one said the "A" word to me. Even though they surely knew, long before I did. Why are some "A" words just really hard to say? *Anorexic, alcoholic, addict.* Also, *admit.*

26. GET YOUR KIDNEYS CHECKED

Spoiler alert: I lived.

When I finally told Mom that I was anorexic, I thought she'd be relieved at my admission. But no. *You're not anorexic*, she said. *I really think there's something wrong with your kidneys. Can I make an appointment for you with Doctor White?*

We stood there in mutual confusion. To be in the position of convincing her of what I thought she'd known all along—what I finally had the guts to say—it was surreal. *Yes I am. Anorexic. I've been doing this on purpose. Not eating.*

She cried. *If that's true, then it's my fault. It's your dad's fault. I'm sorry.*

I didn't go to hug her. Comforting her, counseling her, was an old role I'd had to vacate. I wasn't prepared to step back in. But I did say, *It's not your fault. It's no one's fault.*

27. REMEMBER THINGS WRONG

Mom doesn't remember this conversation and can't believe, now, that she would have said, *You're not anorexic*, that her denial could have gone so deep.

And maybe she didn't say that. Maybe I'm the one who's remembering it wrong. In fact, this whole essay could be a collage of details remembered right, remembered wrong, left out, invented. Would that make it less true?

28. EAT ONLY IN SECRET

You'd think I'd have wanted people to see me eat, so that I could better hide from them my addiction to not eating. But when I ate I did it strangely, picking food apart in a way that invited scrutiny and snark. Better to do that alone. I firmly believed that for everyone, the act of orally masticating food should be performed in private.

I still eat pastries that way, picking them apart. People still pick at me about it the same way I pick at the pastries. But the thing is, everyone is weird about food. Food, sex, and money. Everyone. If that's the worst vestige of a serious mental illness that could have killed me, then I think I'm doing okay.

29. ENFORCE UNSPOKEN RULES

In the middle of that summer, my family left on a two-week road trip. Their absence gave me the break I needed from Mom's little worried comments, from the interminable meals where I watched everyone chew and swallow and they watched me move stuff around on the plate and we watched each other watching each other.

While they were away, I flew to the East Coast to visit Dell. We walked barefoot on sand, drove to neighboring states, did tourist things while keeping up our continuous dialogue about guys and friends and parents.

And on the level below all that, our food thing had gotten competitive. If she refused a meal, I refused it too. And vice versa. We went running together every morning and tried to outsprint each other, out-ab-crunch each other, out-pushup each other. Dell was a real athlete and always won. But I was skinnier. Our days of late-night refrigerator raids were over; now, we were using each other as enforcers of a stricter set of unspoken rules.

30. FIND A PRO-ANA BUDDY

I'm glad the pro-ana phenomenon hadn't started yet when we were in college. Today, pro-ana websites will "thinspire" you with affirmations like *Pretty girls don't eat* and *Skinny is never skinny enough*. They'll give you tips on the best enemas and purging techniques. Tips like *Wear clothes several sizes too large* and *Stuff pillows in your belly to sleep*.

These sites will help you find a "harsh ana buddy" who will keep you on task with the "Thin Commandments." Like: *Thou shalt starve yourself. Thou shalt not eat fattening food without punishing yourself afterwards*.

Your harsh ana buddy will do what Dell and I did for each other, only far more explicitly and deliberately. Your buddy will talk to you like your addiction does. Will tell you that you should drink a glass of water instead, do 30 sit-ups instead, eat just one bite of that doughnut and throw the rest in the trash. Will help you cross that line and stay there—if that's what you want.

31. KEEP PUSHING OUT THE GOALPOSTS

When I returned home from visiting Dell, my family was still away. With no one around pressuring me to eat, I could take things farther.

My new goal was 90 pounds, a number low enough that after I reached it, I could start eating again, and I'd still be skinny forever. Of course, I'd thought the same about 115, 110, 105, and 100. Even about 95. But this time was for real. Maybe. You can keep pushing out the goalposts without crossing the line.

32. DON'T LET HUNGER TAKE OVER

I remember one evening of their absence more clearly than the rest. I was driving home from work on I-25, one hand on the wheel, the other a fist crammed deep into the raw locus of my hunger. Keeping the car aimed straight between the white lines. Those fireflies dancing in my eyes, morphing to larger spots of dark and bright. Something, the traffic or maybe blood, rushing in my ears.

My hunger was trying to take over the steering wheel, drive us off an exit. Off University, there were Dairy Queen Oreo Blizzards, smooth and cold with bits of chocolate crunch. Off Colorado, there were TGI Friday's potato skins loaded with sour cream and bacon, and there was Beau Jo's pizza with crust so thick they gave you honey to slather on top and let drip onto the cheese. Off Hampden, chocolate glazed doughnuts, the way the oil and the chocolate mingled and formed a kind of shell.

I reminded my hunger that the rule was *I don't spend money on food*. I made a bargain with my hunger that if I could resist the truly sinful stuff, I could fashion an actual meal with what I could find in the cupboards and fridge when I got home. Like I hadn't done in weeks. Sometimes you had to make concessions, just to keep up your strength for the challenge ahead.

33. COUNT CALORIES, OF COURSE

Then there was me filling the empty, echoing house of my childhood, me with that parched kind of emptiness at the core. That maybe couldn't be filled with food, so did it make sense even to try. Opening a can of chicken noodle soup.

Cutting a sesame bagel in half, sprinkling parmesan cheese over both halves, browning them in the toaster oven just so. Fully tasting each thick, peppery spoonful of that soup, each pinched-off morsel of melted cheesy goodness.

I didn't even want to count how many calories. But 240 plus 360 plus 100 makes 700, because my mind wouldn't stop with the math. I jumped up and brought the remaining half of my meal to the sink and stuffed the bagel down the garbage disposal and poured the soup over it and turned on the switch and faucet to rinse and grind it through.

I lay enervated on our Southwestern-style couch, reading the same paragraphs of a book over and over. Why had I thrown out half my dinner? Another promise to myself broken, like all the other promises over the past ten months. I had taken self-deception to the level of *technique*. While deceiving no one.

I had to remind myself that every micro-betrayal was in service of the greater good. *You can't stop now. You're doing so well. Never crossing the line; always moving closer to your new goal. Of 90.*

34. MEASURE YOUR BMI

A few months ago, a change in diet for health reasons put me into the underweight category of BMI again. I admit I kind of liked this.

But I didn't like that people started asking me whether I was okay. I am okay. I could never go back to that hell place even if I wanted to. Anorexia takes a level of twisted willpower I have a real aversion to now. I can't even find the discipline to kick off the covers when my alarm goes off. I hit the snooze button four times, five. I can't even find the discipline to finish this fucking piece.

35. DECEIVE YOURSELF

It was still light outside, but I fell asleep on the couch, for how long I don't know.

I woke in the dark, standing in front of the open refrigerator, its light and cold breath falling over my body. Fragments of a dream at my feet. Something about blood coursing down my legs. Something about being in jail, grasping the cold metal bars. Trying to slip between them, getting my hips wedged, stuck. I was not quite thin enough to escape.

As I stood in front of the refrigerator I saw that I was still wearing the T-shirt and shorts I'd changed into after work. I closed the door. In the fridge and the surrounding cupboards was enough food to feed a small village. There was too much. I didn't know what to do with so much.

I left my clothes in a pile on the living room floor and lay back down on the couch. Checked my panties. No blood. I hadn't seen my period for eight months.

What I was doing to my body—wasn't fun anymore. In fact it was fucking terrifying. But could I muster the wherewithal to escape? Once I reached the magic 90, would I trick myself again, the trick that wasn't a trick at all because I knew precisely what I was doing? Or would I be able to steer the battleship of my willpower 180 degrees around, until it was pointing toward an equal and opposite intention? I honestly didn't know whether I could. I had gotten thin by myself, but I didn't know whether I could stop getting thin by myself.

36. HIT BOTTOM

On the couch, I lay on my stomach with a pillow stuffed into it to quiet the pangs so I could sleep. What is concave remains to be filled.

In retrospect I see that night as a kind of bottom. For the first time, I had tuned into, had really felt, the desperation that was underneath all of this, that I'd been pushing away with all my tricks and rules and methodologies. Had grasped the level of brutality that mind perpetrated on body.

But that realization wasn't enough. When my family returned from their road trip, I hugged Mom and she cried a little, trying not to show me. She asked me whether I would please see a doctor. I rolled my eyes and said in a sharp voice that I was fine. I have a picture of myself from that week. It's the only one taken during that whole era. I'm trying to smile but it comes out garish. Collarbones jutting out, hair sprouting from my scalp almost like a wig. I look like a prisoner in my own skin.

37. BLUR REALITY WITH ITS OPPOSITES

That thing about memory. For sure there was the drive, the fantasies that rose nearly to the level of hallucinations, the thrown-out dinner, the couch, the pillow. The absence of my family. The dream—although I think that happened a different night. Half of a chocolate glazed doughnut may have been involved. The photograph serves as documentary evidence and can be produced if necessary. The other details of the above scene may be memory or they may be imagination, which, at a certain point, become indistinguishable anyway.

38. ABSTAIN FROM YOUR SUBSTANCE OF CHOICE

Most addicts have to abstain completely from their substance in order to survive.

But if you abstain from food, you die. I was already almost doing that. My task was to learn how to abstain from abstinence—to eat.

39. READ WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

One weekend near the end of summer, my dad picked up my brother and me at the entrance to our housing development. We drove to Breckenridge, where we stayed at our time-share condo at the bottom of a ski run. Dad grilled hot dogs for lunch. As we avoided the topics we had to avoid, I ate three Ruffles potato chips, ridge by ridge.

After lunch, I walked to the grocery store down the hill with 50 cents in my pocket. Thinking, *92 now. When you get to 90, you can start eating again.* I wandered through the bakery section, lingered near the roasted chicken. Touched a green apple, cool and smooth.

In the newsstand section, I looked over the covers of the women's magazines. One headline popped out in white: "Surviving Anorexia." Above the headline, a model with cheekbones and collarbones like mine, hair blown back. I couldn't tell whether she was the model for that story or just the regular cover model.

40. DON'T DIE THIN

I read the article with the magazine cover facing to the rack so no one could see. The story profiled three women who had been hospitalized with anorexia.

One was being force-fed through a tube and the doctors weren't sure whether she would live. In fact, she didn't want to live. She was 42 years old and she weighed 67 pounds. That's when I read the sentence: Only 10 percent of anorectics fully recover.

I could do math.

That article contained the first words I'd ever read about what I was doing. And that line I was so proud of never crossing? I had already crossed it without even realizing. I had already gone too far.

I didn't want to die. This was never about wanting to die. It was about wanting to be thin for the rest of my life so I'd never have to worry about it again. So I'd be noticed; so I'd be considered beautiful, different, worthy. So I'd be loved from here on out. In the air-conditioned grocery store, I got chilled and started shaking, deep shakes from the core that made my back hurt.

I couldn't be in that 90 percent. And this could not be the rest of my life.

Back in the produce section, I found the same green apple I had fondled earlier. Marched to the cashier. Paid for the apple. Forty-seven cents. It was the first item of food I had bought for myself in a very long time.

41. ADMIT IT

Outside it was warm and I stopped shaking. I hiked past our condo and up the ski run, fists clenched and pumping. *Admit it, admit it.* Pushing through the dizziness. Admit it first. Figure out the rest later.

42. BELIEVE IN GRACE

The afternoon clouds had assembled and were spitting rain. I lifted my face and invited the wetness onto my cheeks. Halfway up the hill, I noticed that the light around me had taken on a charged quality, as if the air itself were

glowing gold. It threw everything into sharp relief: my hands, the baby pine trees poking through mounds of dirt, the clusters of fireweed and bluebells and Indian paintbrush emerging at my feet.

I turned around and kept walking backwards up the hill. Across the valley, above the mountains above the town, was the source of that glow: the sun worrying the narrowest fissure in the charcoal-dark clouds, its brilliance fanning out in separately visible rays.

I took the apple from my pocket. The first bite was tree flowers and sap. I had forgotten that apples taste like flowers.

I sat on the damp earth and ate my apple. It was so bitter and juicy and full of rain, I cried.

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