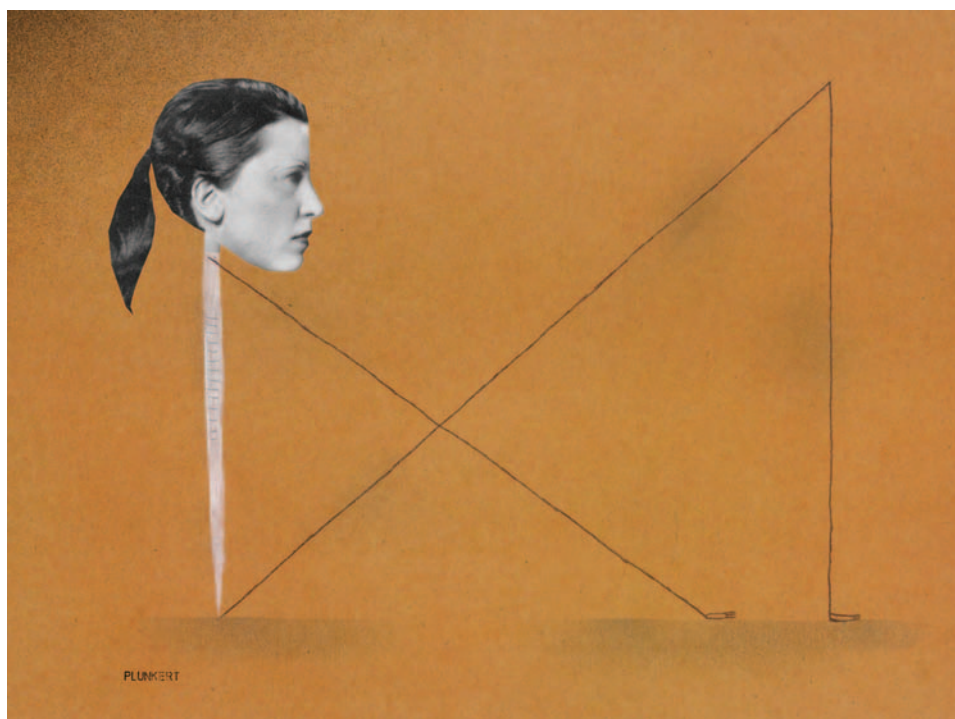


# Even in This Town, You Can Be Too Thin



Jay and I began to fight. It was fierce fighting. We threw ugly words at each other and we slammed doors.

"What are we doing here?" he said.

"I need to do this for my career," I spit back.

"You don't have a career!" he screamed. "You have a gym pass!"

One Saturday, I didn't get to the gym until late in the afternoon. I put my bag in a locker and went to the bathroom. There was a woman I'd never seen before, standing next to the sinks, putting on coral-colored lipstick. She was humming to herself.

"Oh, girl. Look at you."

I didn't know she was talking to me. She reached out, grabbed my arm and turned me to face the mirrors. I was wearing my peach shirt and my green sweat pants and my skin was some color between yellow and gray. My hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Just to do a little workout."

"No, darling. You're too thin. Look at you."

She turned me to face the mirrors. She was so close I could feel her breath, warm and moist. I admit part of me loved the attention. But most of me wanted her to leave me alone. I had 170 calories of dry cereal swimming in my stomach, knocking against my ribs. I had to get moving.

She turned me to face her. Her eyes were big and brown.

"You need to go home and have some supper," she whispered. "What are you going to have for supper?"

"Fish," I lied.

"You know what I'm going to have? I'm going to have chicken and a big mound of mashed potatoes. You like mashed potatoes?"

It was the mashed potatoes that did it. They were so big and they were pushing into my brain, up behind my eyes, warm and buttery, sweet and thick. I tried to breathe, but I felt too full inside my body with those mashed potatoes there. The tears fell down my face before I could stop them. She was crying too.

"Holy Jesus, please help this child," she said. "Please bring her back to us. She is trying to disappear. She needs your help to fight this devil. Please, Lord Jesus, give her the strength she needs."

I didn't tell her I was Jewish. Or that I didn't believe in the devil. I just listened. Then she pulled me into a hug. She smelled like cocoa butter and I could feel her steady pulse. I held on desperately. I clung to this stranger in the middle of a pink-tiled bathroom.

The next week Jay and I drove back to Chicago. I started an outpatient program at a hospital in Highland Park, where I learned how to eat again. Two years later, I continue to work with doctors on my recovery. I'm still pursuing acting, on the stage in New York. Maybe I don't know what "type" I am, but I've left L.A. far behind.

"You're not the L.A. type," my mom warned. She was wrong. I was an actress, and I fit the part perfectly. Thirty years old and 5 feet, 8 inches in my stocking feet, I weighed about 104 pounds and thought I was fat.

When my agent in Chicago offered to escort several of her clients to Hollywood and show them around, I signed up. My boyfriend, Jay, had just quit his job as a stage manager and agreed to go with me. We would spend a month house-sitting for friends in Pasadena while I made the rounds of auditions and worked on my screenplay.

By day three, Jay was ready to go home. "I don't think this is a healthy place for you," he said.

He was wrong. I spent hours at the gym and ate only dry cereal and fat-free cheese. Each morning, I packed a bag with a change of clothes and walked to the gym, eating my cup and a half of dry cereal from a Ziploc bag along the way. I put in an hour and a half of cardio, followed sometimes by a body-sculpting class or a trip to the Bikram yoga center. After a workout I sprayed myself with vanilla perfume—I had heard that you could stave off hunger if you surrounded yourself with warm, sweet scents—and sat in a café with mint tea and a Plenty-Pak of sugar-free gum, writing scenes in my movie. I was going to star in it. It was going to be smart and witty and new and daring. Except that all the characters couldn't stop eating.