For the Love of Sasquatch

I am seven. I sit on the steps of the school, a cupcake in hand. My mouth waters as I stare at the whipped chocolate frosting.

"Hey, Sasquatch!" a voice booms.

Carefully, meticulously, I peel the wax paper wrapper away from the moist, fudgy dessert. Flecks of chocolate snow fall onto my navy-blue uniform. I lick my finger, press it to the crumbs, collecting them like precious gold nuggets.

"Sasquatch!" the voice shouts again, this time more pointedly. I glance up. A few feet away, the new kid, a boy with frizzy ginger curls and liver-spot freckles, is grinning at me. My deeply-engrained politeness tells me I should smile back, but something about him makes my insides shiver. His grin is torqued like a creepy clown mask as he tips his chin in my direction, his eyes locked on mine. I squirm as he puffs out his cheeks and pushes up his nose with his middle finger. "Sasquatch!"

An indignant tightness swells in my chest.

"Get lost, Carrots!" I holler. His peach skin turns red under his tan freckles as he glowers at me. I feel proud and rebellious (and a little shameful) at my comeback.

"Fatty!" he cackles before sprinting toward the playground.

My smugness dissipates as I stare down at the treat in my chubby hands. The moniker, Sasquatch, rings in my ears.

I shove the entire cupcake into my gullet. It pours into the crevasses of my chipmunk cheeks, smoothing the creases of my dimples into round orbs of baby fat. I can't breathe. I mash
it against the roof of mouth, creating a pasty ball of mush which I quickly swallow. It tugs at my esophagus, choking me as it slips into my stomach, my dirty secret devoured by shame.

I am in the fourth grade. Our teacher, a robust, grey-haired woman who wears floral polyester pantsuits and smells like an elevator of grandmothers, announces we are going to make 'Wanted' posters naming ourselves as outlaws (Catholic schools must come up with creative ways to indoctrinate deep-seeded guilt from an early age). She hands out grainy, photocopied 8x10 templates with a square in which we are to crudely sketch self-portraits. Our renegade sins will be listed below our pictures, along with our vital stats. I tap the eraser of my pencil against my desk, chew my lip and allow my imagination to soar.

Carefully, meticulously, I craft my story. I am a horse thief. I have stolen a palomino who was beaten by his cruel owner because he could not run as fast as the others. Together, we rob monocle-wearing fat cats and give their riches to misfits and outcasts. When my tale of bravery is complete, I turn to my portrait, laboriously drawing a beautiful face, erasing the left eye because it's bigger than the right, crafting a jawline and shading cheekbones into an exquisite creature. When I'm done, I look down at the space below. Age: Nine, Height: (mental note to check with Mom), Weight....

I crumple the paper. My fingers ache as I squeeze my story into a tiny ball. The next morning, I tell my mom my stomach hurts, and spend the day in bed watching Robin Hood and eating Kraft Dinner.

I am fifteen. Finally, societally acceptable fat has formed. Unfortunately, additional rolls have appeared too, reducing the effectiveness of the large mounds weighing heavily on my chest. I
have a friend. She has an older brother. He is tall, dark and beautiful. He has a car and a job. He plays the guitar and sings. I love him.

I find excuses to hang out at their house. Carefully, meticulously, I bathe in GAP Dream perfume and Vanilla Fields body spray, cake my mouth in Dr. Pepper flavored lip-gloss.

One night, we are all sitting on the couch watching a random movie starring Nicholas Cage, me sandwiched awkwardly between the siblings. I crush my elbows into my ribs, in an effort to deepen the crease between my societally acceptable lumps of fat and hide the muffin top spilling over the top of my jeans.

My friend excuses herself. She mumbles something about needing more pizza or diet coke or the toilet, I'm too focused on the fact that her brother's aura is touching mine.

When she leaves, he and I sit in silence, my body humming as I squish it into itself. Out of the corner of my eye, I see his hand move from the bulge in his lap to the back of the couch, his muscular arm reaching around me. His fingers clamp tightly around the soft, pudgy flesh of my bicep. A spike of adrenaline courses through my swollen body. The feeling is foreign, I can't tell if I like it – either way, I know I'm ashamed of it (Catholic scars run deep).

"If you ever tell anyone about this, I'll deny it," he growls into my ear. The smell of Old Spice and Dippity-Do hair gel overpowers me as he pounces, crushing me into the couch, splaying my fat like an insignificant bug on a windshield. I feel out of control. I'm not sure which is worse; fat or small.

A tiny voice from my past ruthlessly whispers, "Sasquatch."

I push him away.

He scoffs and mutters, "Frigid whore."
I instantly regret rejecting him, but the damage is done. My role has been cast – forever the fat friend. So, I lose. I lose him. I lose control, my identity, my personality. I lose weight, starve myself and struggle to morph into something, anything, other than the girl who is so uncomfortable in her own skin that she would push away a boy she's been lusting after for six months out of fear he might notice her back rolls.

Three months later, he sleeps with another one of his sister's friends. I cry. I eat a cookie. I eat again. And again. And again. I gain.

I am thirty-two. I can't walk up a flight of stairs without being winded. My body aches, aged beyond its years by the folds of weight crushing it. Carefully, meticulously, I eat entire bags of Doritos, hiding the evidence from the judgmental eyes of my cats, secretly concerned they will gleefully eat my painfully-single face if I drop dead of a heart attack.

Five... four... three... two... one.... Happy New Year. Trump is inaugurated, and I decide if he's going to blow the world up, I refuse to be fat when it happens.

I am thirty-three. The tags on my clothes no longer bear a mark of shame. The number on the scale no longer causes my soul to retch. My cats no longer hold out hope that they will get to dine on my face before I'm forty. I've grown to love spaghetti squash and hiking mountains, morphed from morbidly obese to curvy, slayed sugar cravings and fat cells.
Carefully, meticulously, I weigh my food, measure my portions and inches to keep my former body at bay. I pinch my collarbone, run my fingers down the bumps of my spine, grind the heels of my palms against my ribcage, just to make sure I can feel the newly-unearthed hardness of my bones. Because, buried in the fibers of my activewear and stretchmarks, she's still there. The freak of nature who never belonged, who exists to entice curiosity and live a life of solitude, struggling to remain hidden for fear of disparagement if she's seen.

Some of the time-faded details of my journey may be twisted remnants of childhood memories. I may have been eating a vanilla cupcake when I was bullied by Carrots; the movie may have starred Bruce Willis the night my friend's brother branded me. I cannot say with certainty that my grade four teacher wore polyester. But there is one thing of which I am positive: Sasquatch is real. She hibernates in the dark, cragged corners of my being. Licking her wounds, waiting to be loved, to understand her place in the world and to be accepted for the fragile, glorious monster that she is.