

WHAT GOES DOWN

The End of an Eating Disorder

By Callie Bowld

What Goes Down

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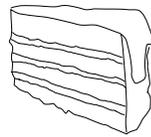
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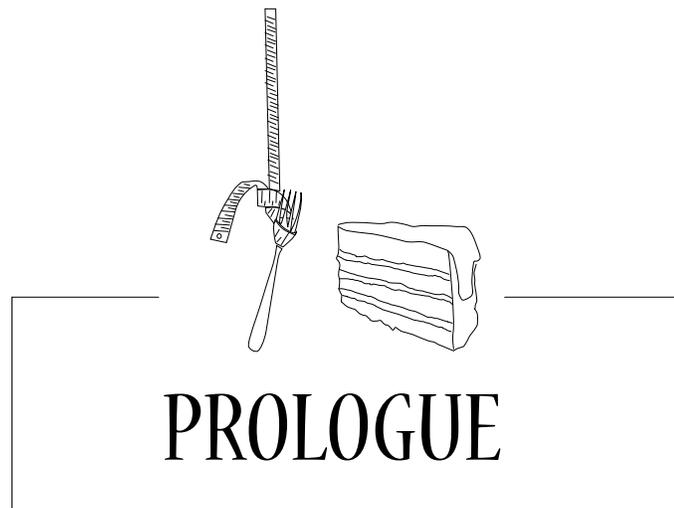
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To all of the Callies out there:

You are not alone. You are not weak.
You are brass and bold and stronger than this disease.
You are.

Let this be your story, your victory, your new beginning, too.



A WORD ON HUMOR: WALLS INTO WINDOWS

A great piece of comedy is a verbal magic trick, where you think it's going over here—and then all of a sudden you're transported over here. And there's this mental delight that's followed by the physical response of laughter, which, not coincidentally, releases endorphins in the brain.

And just like that, you've been seduced into a different way of looking at something because the endorphins have brought down your defenses. This is the exact opposite of the way that anger and fear and panic, all of the flight-or-fight responses, operate.

Flight-or-fight releases adrenalin, which throws our walls up sky-high. And then comedy comes along, dealing with a lot of the same areas where our defenses are the strongest—race, religion, politics, sexuality—only by approaching them through humor instead of adrenalin, we get endorphins and the alchemy of laughter turns our walls into windows, revealing a fresh and unexpected point of view.

Chris Bliss, Comedian

Humor. It is the most difficult way to approach a sensitive subject because it seems to make light of it, it flirts on the verge of offensive. But, if done expertly, it can be the most effective tool because it sneaks up quietly and slips into your conscience while your guard is down. *"It's just comedy. Nothing serious about it."* Then all of a sudden you've seen something big and important in a very different light, and it is now all too serious. But it is also now true and undeniable, because you laughed at it. This is what humor can do. It can allow me to help you see the blunt reality of your life with an eating disorder and finally decide to stop damaging yourself. By the time you've laughed, you can't take it back or un-see the honest truth exposed and I hope it will give you the strength you've been looking for to change it. Walls into windows.

Comedy is filled with surprise, so when I cross a line, I like to find out where the line might be and then cross it deliberately, and then make the audience happy about crossing the line with me.

George Carlin, Comedian

I feel like I'm sashaying saucily up to you: "Would you like me to seduce you?" Let's see if I can.

I distinctly recall the first time I tried to make myself throw up. Poised tentatively in front of the bowl, staring into the water, not sure if I was really about to do what I was thinking about doing. "*Really Callie?*" Then I did it. I jammed an awkward hand in, not knowing why or what I was doing but shoving it back there anyway—like a horny teenage boy trying to lose his virginity to a belly button—because something *had to work*. What I just did, all that naughty food I just ate, *had to be undone*. And you may imagine me as a sad teen, a hurt high school student. I was not. I was nearing thirty. About to get my J.D. And, I remember thinking for a fleeting second, as my dry throat was revolting in pain, what, exactly, in my life needed such extreme *fixing*? What had brought me to my knees on a grimy floor in front of a toilet? What was so terribly wrong that I ... ? Then before my mind could answer, my body responded. Foul chunks ripped through my throat and it was done. A little lever in my mind was flipped.

click

I then knew I could do it. I had a whole new weapon in my eating disorder arsenal. Years before, I had chosen to make food my enemy. I had committed to punishing my body until it turned skinny and pretty, which meant nothing hurtful or bad would ever happen to me again. To accomplish that, I vowed to extract whatever way possible, whatever calories I had just put in because I told myself every single one was bad for me. Every single one that went in, they all had to come out. The 'how' did not matter, simply the 'out.' And now, I had found a new, way-easier-than-working-out way, to accomplish my all-necessary 'out.' The yang to my 'in.' Honestly, the first time I threw up, I felt happy. Relieved that food was out of me. I had found an answer. A solution. "*I'm in control, people! Can't you see?*"

My hand was covered in blood and gut slime, the taste and smell of it almost making me heave solely out of repulsion as I pushed it back into my mouth, sliding across my lips. But I kept at it. I didn't know then that the trick was to not let it touch anything until it was past my taste buds. You see? I know tricks. About how to be a good bulimic. So, really none of us need to *stop*; we just need to get *better* at it. I should become an instructor! Imagine me—in a floor-length black gown, tight bun and whip in hand (I believe this would be the appropriate attire, and who doesn't like yielding a whip?)—standing before a room full of skinny girls, all curled over their own toilet which now takes the place of their desk. "Tssk, tssk ladies! Two fingers, not three!" *whap!*

And there went the line. We just crossed it. Humor, you saucy little vixen you! But maybe you didn't. Maybe you're still standing stubbornly on the other side, your foul hands crossed over your bony chest, your red sweaty, snot-strewn face shaking 'no.' "*I like my little potty routine, thank you.*" Maybe you don't want to be converted because maybe you feel the way I used to about my disorder: that it was the only available answer for me. "*Everyone else in the world can eat normal and look normal and have beautiful*

bodies, but not me. That doesn't work for me. I've tried it. I ate a bagel once and got so fat. For me, this is my only solution."

Well, is it working?

We all know what I had just discovered—the fact that I could make myself throw up—was in no way the solution. Instead, I had just created the worst problem of my life. I had just planted the seed for a deeply-rooted, debilitating ten-year addiction.

You don't want a potty desk in my classroom because its laughable. It feels stupid and embarrassing, because it is. Incredibly dangerous too.

I share these vile moments to remind you, and myself, how repulsive it was. How repulsive *I* was. And how horribly I was treating this beautiful, strong, capable body of mine. Now that I have grown older and met people with despairingly sad health conditions—people who cannot easily walk a flight of stairs, who cannot swim, who cannot taste food, who have to empty the shit from their colostomy bag every couple of hours, people who cannot walk, run, surf, sing, climb—and I see that my body is thankfully, miraculously, by a stroke of sheer damn luck still able to do all of that and more. Yet some of the things I chose to do to it involved voluntary stomach convulsions, dry-heaving, sweating in the fetal position while an overdose of laxatives made their way through my miles of intestines, pressing a worried hand on my chest because my heart was beating so violently after a binge that I hoped pressure from the outside could somehow slow it down.

Body, I'm sorry. So unbelievably sorry.

Harboring an eating disorder is exceedingly selfish and completely indefensible when you imagine all of the people that would give anything to have the body you have, just as it is, or even with whatever extra pounds you deathly fear would instantly cake on if you (don't say it!) ate like a normal person. Those people would give anything to have your body and treat it right. The time I spent thinking about food, worrying about food, avoiding food, *eating* bad food, throwing up food, I could have done and experienced so many amazing things, including enjoying good food, which I now do every day. And it didn't turn me instantly into a fat heifer. It's a Christmas Miracle! And that's not even broaching the subject of the money I spent on my stupid food. Around forty dollars a day in my drive-thru days. We'll get there, that was my heyday. I should have won the Golden Toilet Award, with golden arches on top!

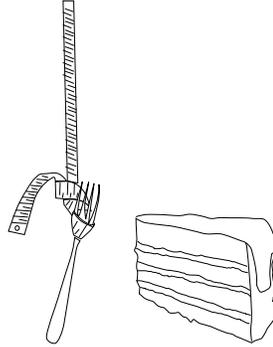
So, laughter. Humor. Comedy. It is intended not to belittle the danger and disgust of an eating disorder, but the *need* for it. Because there really is none. The hilarious truth of it all is that food is not the enemy, your messed-up mind is. The mere mention or thought of food triggers your mental response to immediately reject it, or plan how to eject it, without any real need to do either, but your mind refuses to let you believe that. It's like that snake eating its own tail. A fitting symbol for bulimia, right? Because if you follow it the other way, he's continuously throwing himself up, no? But once you stop the in-and-out, the down-then-back-up, you'll be amazed at how fantastic your overtly-grateful body will look and feel.

Why did this happen to me? Why did, as a hurt and scared teenager so many years ago, I flip that switch

in my brain and cause myself to suffer an unnecessary disorder for so many years when I am a smart, capable, healthy woman? I don't have an exact answer for that. Because I'm very stubborn, driven, and exceedingly hard on myself. And I get royally pissed off when something hurts me and I respond irrationally. I decide to bend my poor body to my iron will and punish it for letting bad things happen to me? I don't quite know. All I know is I did it. For years and years. And hid it. For years and years. Maybe it was so I could become a voice for you and others, so I could save others from the same long-term horrid outcome. If that's one potential outcome, I know I will be proud. If this book saves one solitary person, it's worth every minute I put into it. I also know I have forgiven myself. And that it's okay to laugh at your mistakes, even the dangerous dumb ones. When you look back through all of your chapters—all the ironic coincidences and the trails and turns you took, and the times you found it all circled back anyway despite your best efforts—you have to find that life is just ... funny. I certainly think so.

So, let's get you healed already. If I was there with you, I would hold this book up and slam it against your forehead: "The power of my charisma compels you!" **bam!**

Now, go make some popcorn to nibble on slowly—so you'll stop thinking about all the other fatty, greasy, cheesy things you want to eat right now because you're sitting still, you're hungry and it's gnawing at you—and stay focused. Keep reading. Normalcy, happiness, and a healthier you awaits.



INTRODUCTION

WHAT GOES DOWN: IN A DISORDERLY MIND

Whether you are a full-blown bulimic, a habitual binge-eater, or just a chronic yo-yo dieter who is just starting to slip down the slope toward an eating disorder, this is where you are headed. This is how difficult, disgusting, and exhausting your life is about to become. This was the torturous mental tape I played daily. Over and over. For years.

“Let’s just pop in here and get a burger,” your friend says to you, which immediately makes her no longer your friend. “I’m starving,” she says. And you are too. But you’re *always* starving. You’ve spent half of your adult life feeling hungry. Fighting hungry. Shushing hungry.

But, you have an eating disorder. You can’t just eat ... A burger. What goes down—in a disorderly mind?

A burger, are you insane?

Do you know how many grams of fat are in there?

How many grams of fat are in there?

Those go right to my thighs. Yep, thigh calories.

And burgers come on a bun. Bread?! Please!

And burgers always come with fries. Fuck!

Why can’t they have those cool lettuce-wrapped burgers that Burger King did for a while?

Shit, they’re not going to have anything other than burgers.

And fries. Grease sticks ... really?

And, we’re going somewhere after this. I can’t ...

Maybe it’s a single stall and there’s a lock on the door ...

How long will that stay in my stomach? Maybe I can do it later?

Maybe I can just have a few bites.

And some fries. Mostly with ketchup.

Ketchup’s a vegetable, right?

*Damn burgers! Damn friend!
Damn ME! Why does this have to be so hard?*

It doesn't. But you don't know that. You can't see that. Rather, this torturous inner dialogue all plays out in about the span of three seconds before you sheepishly say, "Okay." If it's a good friend who knows you really well and knows you struggle with food (likely not; most people in your life have no clue), he or she will see the twist on your face in those three seconds and call you out on your shit: "It's. Just. A. Burger." But they love you and care about you and know, for whatever reason, for you, it's just tough. For you, food just ignites some weird internal struggle and gets you all anxious and balled-up inside. So she'll add: "We'll share. And you don't have to have any fries." *That's a good friend, right there. Keep her.*

But this will happen often when you get caught in what I used to call a "food jam." A forced meal. A real dilemma. For me, lunch was always the most common. When I was a highly-functional bulimic I would often starve through the day, drinking only coffee for breakfast. "*Why blow through so many calories so early? When I'm not even desperately starving yet?*" I would then—if I didn't get caught in a food jam at lunch—have a little nibble around noon, preferably a light salad or a little Special K bar (because those eighty calories are really going to hold you up). That would leave me with a whole saved-up bank of "food points" (those were real in my world) to spend that evening. Because the evening was when I liked to spend them, according to my pre-set, private, everyday routine. But, if someone wanted to go out for lunch, sometimes this would blow my whole plan. *A damn food jam!*

When I did join the normal folks, for a normal meal out, I was known to *always* order the salad when eating out, nothing else, while my normal friends and colleagues would order and eat normal things like sandwiches, soups, burgers, whatever. Sometimes (because I was starving) I would start nibbling on the crackers that came with my salad. Then perhaps one of the biscuits or cornbread they brought to the table. Then another; because, remember, I'm starving. Then perhaps a bite of a friend's burger. "Just a bite," I'd say with a smile. But as I swallowed that glorious burger bite I knew I was done. I'd crossed that "two-bites-too-many" line and suddenly everything had to come up. I had to drop everything for an hour during the middle of my busy lawyer day to fill the tank and pump it out. I had to. Because my stupid friend wanted to go out for lunch and my stupid body ate a bite of a burger. And, now you see why it's called a food jam. You can probably also see why I didn't have many lunch dates. "*Eat, rather than work, through lunch? Who has time for that?*" I usually didn't.

So, let's assume on a pretty average day, I'm able to do my lettuce-and-vinegar or Special K lunch routine, leaving my imaginary 1,500 food points to gloriously spend that evening. In real numbers, we're probably talking about the additional 1,500 calories I still *needed* to put in just to barely feed my body for the day. But do note, I already chose to do it in an irrational "back-loading" way where my choice is to basically starve all day, preparing to binge all night; so even if I take in an acceptable number of calories by day's end, I haven't spaced them out in any kind of healthy way to keep my metabolism up or my body properly fueled. So, I've already screwed myself over. But, let's forget all that and just see it for what it is: 1,500 food points I have now to spend. "*Whoopee!*"

I then had two options. I could (a) binge and purge that evening, preferably once, sometimes multiple times, to the point of exhaustion, so that I could fall quickly asleep before the urge to eat sucked me

down again. Sadly, this was often a way I looked forward to spending the evening. Passing fatty, cheesy, greasy foods past my lips while curled up on the couch, watching mindless TV. Then five minutes undoing it. *Never happened.* With the option to start right back in again if I wanted to, my half-eaten smorgasbord of food awaiting me on the coffee table. To me, that was a blissful way to spend the evening. Indulging myself with no one around to judge me.

Obviously I lived alone.

Or I could (b) justifiably gorge on a healthy dinner, even eating and keeping down what my disorderly-mind considered semi-bad foods. *Microwave veggies in a light butter sauce? Ummmm ... okay. But just three boxes, not four.* And, because I'd starved all day and kept down a meal that wasn't guaranteed to turn to insta-cheese on my thighs, I could wake the next day, even after four microwave-box-whatevers, and not feel like a total cow. But, what goes down ... must come back up ... or it must be worked off. This is the classic sign of an eating disorder. In and out. Everything is accounted for.

So if I, trying to be strong, chose option (b) and decided to actually eat something, like normal people do, by putting mouthfuls in, swallowing them and keeping them down. LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE DO! Then, I had to at least work those nasty food calories off. I couldn't just let food go in and sit there. *"Are you crazy?"* Jesus, the strenuous, exhausting workouts I used to make myself do, over a box of damn veggies. I would usually workout right before dinner because dinner was the ultimate reward. The Food Point Casino! I could jog for miles thinking about what delicious savory rewards awaited. *"A cracker ... No three!"* I would dream, as my feet pounded the pavement. And, because I was starved for calories—my body begging and pleading for fuel—I would often get light-headed. See stars. Pee my pants. I'm not kidding. My head would spin. My ears would pop. Very strange things happened. The little guy in my head was running around, flipping all sorts of switches and buzzers trying to get me to stop and do what normal people do. Just eat normal. Workout normal. And treat my beautiful, strong body right.

"Shut up little man. That's what weak people do and I'm stronger than them."

Stupider, too. I hate to say it, but I was sometimes proud when, after a workout, I would have strange sensations like this. Signs to a normal person that I had pushed myself too hard were signs to me that I was a full-blooded thoroughbred. *Way to go self!*

I was such an idiot. A foolish, dangerous idiot. But stubborn, too. Even after I had wrenched my body horrifically over the toilet until I was sure every last fat-laden calorie had come back out, if I burped later and tasted cheeseburger, panic would set in. There must still be some left inside.

"Time to go jog till I see stars." And off I went. This would happen over and over again. It was my continuous loop. I wonder sometimes how I was even able to study, work, write, and accomplish all of the very impressive things I did during that time—college, law school, passing the Bar Exam, becoming a trial lawyer—all while I kept this ridiculous, exhausting in-and-out routine. I truly think it takes a Type A person to maintain an eating disorder. Through some sick re-wiring of our brains, we take pride in how much punishment we can inflict on ourselves. Have you ever felt that way? Well, here's the thing. Do you know who cares that you can exercise until you faint, make yourself hurl until your stomach is concave?

NO ONE.

Absolutely no one. The number of people you are impressing? ZERO. In fact, if most people saw the rigorous lengths you go to, only to fail time and time again at what you are trying to accomplish (to look and feel good), they would in no way be impressed. They would be horrified, sad, and embarrassed for you. They would think, if you can't see the ridiculousness of what you're doing to yourself, then you must be a pathetic joke. The armless Sisyphus with cracked, bleeding teeth.

That's harsh, I know. But it's exactly why you work so hard to hide it. You know the shame you would feel if anyone found out, because it is gross. It is embarrassing. It is weird. And you have to come to terms with that. You hide it because if anyone knew—if anyone could watch you stuffing your fat face, shuffling toward the toilet with your pants unbuttoned and your body hunched over (because your belly is so distended you literally cannot stand up straight), and shoving your repulsive vomit-covered hand into your mouth time and time again—they would feel embarrassed for you. They would probably no longer want to spend time with you, work with you, shake your hand, or think about this: kiss you, touch you, have sex with you.

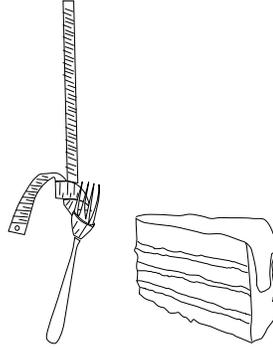
I hope some of this is really hitting home for you. Is whatever release, pleasure, or mental empowerment you feel you get from starving or binging worth losing all of that: friends, your job, your lover? Even perhaps your life? Just because you wanted so badly the rush of pleasure you get from eating a whole cake? Where might that rush lead you?

Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness.

<http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/>

What you are doing shows only that you are weak. Nothing more. A stronger person can eat just one piece of cake and have their life, too.

Be that person.



CHAPTER ONE

HOW IT STARTS: A CARE BEAR TUMMY

How did all of this begin for me? What was the root? For some, that may be a difficult question to answer. For me, it's not. While the watering of the seed, the growth of the disease, and my decision to actually start nurturing a disorder was a far more difficult question for me to answer, pinpointing the seed was not. For me, this all started with my rotund muscular gut that pooches out further than my tits. I have a Care Bear tummy.

But, everyone has one—not an eating disorder, thank God—but a part of their body they hate. Anyone with an eating disorder likely has three. Most people, healthy or otherwise, have some part of their body that they hate. But for someone with an eating disorder, we do not just *hate* this part. We *loathe* and *despise* it. We may often pinch, punch, or scream at it. If we could take a scalpel and cut it off our bodies, we would. No matter how much it might hurt or how much it might cost. There's a reason they call plastic surgery *cosmetic*. It's all about looking good; changing some part about yourself that you have decided is so hideous, so unacceptable, that you literally can no longer live with it. It must be surgically changed.

It may be tiny, wayward tits. Chunky blubbery fat around your tummy that jiggles hideously when you jog in place in front of the mirror (*because we all do that*). Pounds of cottage cheese on your thighs. Big, bulbous upper arms that have forbidden you from ever wearing anything short-sleeved. Whatever yours is, this is the part of your body that you will always instantly shield once it is exposed, that is if you ever let it be exposed. It's the area you pull and stretch clothing around every time you sit down or stand up. When you sit, you double over and cover it as best you can with your hands and arms. "*Oh God, don't look there. Look anywhere but there!*" The thought of going to the beach, where people wear bathing suits, makes you nauseous because you know *it* will have to come, too: that stupid, despised part.

For me, as it is for many women and men who struggle with their weight, it was my stomach. My big, muscular, rotund stomach. While I am of normal height and build, my stocky gymnast body does have one very unfortunate downside. My ribs and hips are literally about six inches apart. I have a short, squashed boxy frame. With no beautiful curvy hips to stretch and thin out my stomach, it tends to protrude in one direction and one direction only. "*Onward and outward!*" shouts my tummy, leading the pack. I can