

Title: Thighs That Touch

By: Leah Vernon

“The reason why your aunt can’t get a job is because she’s fat,” Mom said matter-of-factly to my younger sister and I.

In my own fat thirteen-year old body I thought, *that’s not the reason why. It’s just a bad economy.*

Although Mom wasn’t as big as my aunt, her weight was up and down. Mostly up. She had suffered from eating disorders for most of her life including mild anorexia. To be honest, I never really recalled Mom eating ‘real food’ like the stuff she fed us. She was a closet eater who binged on cakes and doughnuts in the privacy of her bedroom. The sheets would be riddled with crumbs and the aroma of sugary frosting lingered.

Mom showed us old photos of her younger, thinner self in the 70’s with her short shorts on, a crop top, and rocking a thick, black afro. She said proudly while pointing, “See. My thighs didn’t touch back then. When they touched, I knew that I was eating too much.”

Thin was good in our house. Great even. Fat was unacceptable.

And I was fat.

My thighs touched. My belly hung over my panties. My boobs jumped when I jumped. My double chin greeted you before I was able to. My arms squeezed into jackets that didn’t stretch.

Obsession.

One day, I decided to turn on my own fat body. To mistreat it like it was my worst enemy. To destroy it until there was nothing left. I was tired of boys only flirting with my thin friends, I was tired of stuffing myself into jeans that only made it partially up my thick thighs, and I was sick and tired of obsessing over how other people perceived my fat ass! *Am I eating too fast? Should I get the salad instead? Should I just shut up? Who wants to hear what a fattie has to say?*

Scouring the latest teen fashion magazines, I ripped out dozens of pages of unrealistic supermodels, thin white actresses, and statuesque bombshells with straight teeth. I went on a rampage and started pasting them on my bedroom wall, the closet door, and around my dresser’s mirror. I wanted to see what I wasn’t, but what I could possibly be. Skinny and beautiful. Wanted and validated. Mom would be proud of me. But only if my thighs didn’t touch.

I went out and bought a pair of stylish jeans that were three sizes too small. When I got home, I placed them on a hanger and hung them on the window over my bed. Motivation. The person who could fit inside those jeans was better in some way. Outgoing. A fuckin’ boss.

I envisioned myself in those jeans every morning when I woke up before school, when I ate a handful of pretzels and drank a low-calorie drink for lunch, when I thought about having a slice of pizza, and right before I went to bed. My inability to focus and the migraines due to malnutrition didn't matter. Nor had the churning and grinding of my empty stomach. Not even the silent late night cry sessions due to gaining a half a pound the day prior meant anything.

After five months, I had lost seventy pounds. And how things changed. Everyone was sooooo happy. It was as if I had won some sick lottery. My teachers asked me how I did it. "It's easy," I lied. Guys started to notice me. Girls were jealous of me. I was living the life.

At home, when the cheers died and I was all alone, I was still fat. Inside. The scale said one thing, but my mind told me another.

Losing the weight was brutal. Maintaining it was different. My antics got wilder as I scrambled to stay thin. In the morning, I'd clear my bowels and bladder, strip, and hop on the scale butt naked. If the scale was even a pound heavier, my entire day would be ruined. If the scale was in the negative, the day would be amazing because I was closer to being more skinny. I was on the no-carb diet, so I peed on a stick twice a day (sometimes three if I got crazy) to see if I was in optimal ketosis, fat burning mode. I'd chew on no-sugar sticks of gum all day to curb my appetite. I'd go through packs and packs of gum. Mom bought them in bulk from Costco. She was trying to lose weight, too. I'd strip again, in the evening, and hop on the scale. Then I'd turn on the Style Network and watch models strutting down the runway in expensive clothes and cry.

Nothing ever lasts.

For spring break, I purchased a cheap flight to my grandma's house in the south. I finally arrived and plopped down in a chair at the kitchen table.

"What's wrong?" she placed her palm on the small of my back.

I held back tears. I hadn't eaten that day. "I'm just—I'm so hungry."

She fried shrimp and baked biscuits. I ate it all. Every morsel. Felt sicker. I wasn't used to the heaviness of food.

After that, I never stopped eating and gained the seventy pounds I'd lost, plus some.

Over the last ten years, I'd lost some and gained more. On this body awareness roller-coaster, I've hated my body, I've mistreated it, and allowed others to dictate how I felt about it. But I've also loved it, caressed it, celebrated it, and adorned it.

I'm at a point where I'm in complete awe of it. The way it breathes for me. Blinks for me. Allows me to type this very essay about it. I'm in love with myself and how it rolls and sways when I move. How it affects others so delightfully.

I'm happier in this fat body than I ever was trying to fit into those jeans that were three sizes too small.

My thighs touch. My belly hangs over my panties. My boobs jump when I jump. My double chin greets you before I am able to. My arms squeeze into jackets that don't stretch.

And that is very much so acceptable.