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The Amazing Adventures of Dietgirl

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Introduction

I've got the biggest knickers in Australia.

I stood beneath the clothes line on New Year's Day, looking up at the washing I'd just pegged out. My sister's undies were lacy and impossibly tiny. Mine were made of sensible cotton and three times the width. They billowed in the sticky summer breeze, curved and enormous like the sails of the Sydney Opera House.

Just when did my smalls become so impossibly large?

They were Bonds Cottontails Full Briefs, size 26. I'd purchased them in a value pack of pastel shades – traditional white, baby blue and nasty beige. Now they were so stretched and faded they were almost transparent.

My mother and grandmother used to wear Cottontails and as a child I'd snigger at their gigantic frumpiness. But now not only have I embraced the family tradition, I'm in danger of outgrowing it.

For years I've been waiting for the perfect moment. The sign. The grand epiphany. Just something to finally get through to me. I was hoping to hear a voice from above, commanding me to put down the family-size bar of Cadbury's Dairy Milk and take back my life.

'Now is the time, Shauna,' the voice would say. 'Now is the time to go forth and lose your lard.'

But in the end it's just me under the clothes line, shocked and humiliated by the sight of my monster underpants. And I know I've really got to do something this time, because Cottontails Full Briefs don't come any bigger than a size 26.

DAY ZERO

15 January 2001

Half the population of Canberra was in the queue at Weight Watchers, spilling out through the door and down the footpath. We were a motley crew of plump-cheeked grannies, haggard mothers and besuited public servants, united in our determination and/or desperation to make 2001 the Year of Fighting the Flab.

I noted that I was the largest in the line. That's the first rule of Fat Club – when entering a room you have to see if there's someone bigger than yourself, because that could make you feel slightly better. But no such luck for me tonight, just as it always seems to be these days.

I craned my neck to get a look at the scale. It was one of those old-fashioned mechanical ones, metallic and clunky. It appeared to have a 22 stone (140kg, 308lb) maximum capacity. I tallied up all those bowls of Christmas pudding and leftover roast potatoes and had a sickly feeling I was heavier.

Too fat for the scale. I hadn't considered that possibility when I'd boldly declared I was finally going to Do Something About My Weight. I was going to be one of those sad cases you see on the news, so gigantic that they have to be taken down to a heavy vehicle weighing station to line up with cattle trucks and school buses.

I turned around and headed towards the door. But my sister Rhiannon, who had volunteered to tag along, grabbed my arm and thwarted my escape.

'Let's wait until after the meeting and get weighed when everyone else has gone.'

We sat up the back row as the meeting leader began her talk. Her name was Donna and she seemed lovely. She had to be lovely. I desperately wanted her to have all the answers.

They were still weighing the New Year's Resolutionists long after the meeting finished, giving me plenty of time to panic. Finally the room was completely empty save for Donna and her two assistants manning the scale. Even as Rhiannon stepped on, I still contemplated running away. Or waddling away, if you must be technical. But I knew if I ran I'd just wake up tomorrow feeling even worse than I do today.

Rhiannon was informed she had a measly stone to lose. She squeezed my hand and smiled. 'Your turn.'

'Hop on, darling!' said the weigh lady.

'I can't.' I could feel tears gathering. 'I think I'm too big.'

‘Too big?’ She looked confused. ‘For the scale, you mean? It has quite a generous capacity!’

‘I know.’ I stared at my feet. ‘But I think I’m bigger than that.’

She called Donna over and they whispered discreetly. They rummaged around in a cupboard and found an extra weight to hang on the scale, increasing its capacity to 26 stone. It took them ten minutes to find it, because they’d never needed it before. It was buried under a musty pile of discontinued cookbooks.

My face burned with shame as I climbed on. The scale rattled and groaned as Donna fiddled with the weights and tried to make it balance.

‘You look like you’re about to crack up!’ She patted my arm. ‘Don’t worry. We’re here to help you!’

The scale finally settled as I fought back sobs.

‘I’m not going to tell you what the scale read,’ said Donna as I stepped back down. ‘I’ll write it on your card but let’s not worry about numbers or targets or anything like that for now. You made the first big step coming tonight. Let’s just take it slowly from here.’

They were all looking at me with encouraging, sympathetic smiles. Why were they being so kind? I didn’t deserve kindness. Anyone who needed the Special Scale didn’t deserve kindness. I was so huge she didn’t even want to tell me how much I weighed! I fled into a corner and hid amongst the pedometers and Point Free sweets.

Donna came over and hugged me. The warmth of her gesture unravelled me, and I finally felt the enormity of what I had done to my body.

‘You’re going to be OK,’ she said as I bawled uncontrollably. ‘You’re not alone.’

I couldn’t speak, except to mumble ‘sorry’ over and over.

I cried in the car the whole way home.

‘Donna is right,’ Rhiannon said kindly. ‘Tonight was the toughest step. It can only get better from here, I promise.’

But I’d seen the number written on that card – 25 stone 1 pound (159.5kg, 351lb).

Twenty-five stone! And I’m 5_8_ tall, so I need to lose half my body weight just to be considered remotely healthy.

How could one woman weigh so much? Twenty-five stone is not just the equivalent of two people stapled together . . . it's practically the equivalent of two fat people stapled together!

Now it's almost midnight. The tears have dried and I'm cradling a cup of diet hot chocolate as I write this; the first entry in my brand new, top secret weblog. I am carrying so much shame and disgust that I've got to let it all out somehow.

I am going to call it The Amazing Adventures of Dietgirl. I like the idea of being an obese superhero, trussed up in Lycra and hiding behind a mask. There's a distinct shortage of fat superheroes out there, far slower than speeding bullets and unable to leap tall buildings in a single bound.

I also know it will take some sort of miraculous superhero effort if I'm going to banish over 13 stone. If there's one thing I have taken from today, it's that you have to be your own superhero. I don't want to feel as bad as I did tonight ever again. The only one who can rescue me from this big fat mess is me.