

Vessels



fiction writing

FALL
two thousand
& thirteen

"The Odyssey"

written

and

directed

by

Every Girl

starring...

HEART and MIND



is that
for
me?

yes!

i don't
want
it.

NO

that's
for
me

Consumer Report

You turn the handle and enter the dark house, but you don't walk towards the stairs.

Creeping across the echoing tile floors, you move towards the kitchen with purpose. First, you scope the refrigerator, pulling open its suctioned doors as slowly as possible as not to disturb anyone's sleep.

Your next venture is the pantry to the left but you leave the fridge open. It illuminates the kitchen just enough without giving your presence away. It's a tactic you've picked up as a result of countless nights, identical to this one. After the pantry, there's the dry goods cupboard on the right. Lastly, you return to your starting place, this time opening the freezer. Forty-eight minutes have passed. You decide that's enough. Defeated, you climb the stairs.

Left-over swordfish, green beans, rice.

Consumed. Two Pillsbury cinnamon rolls for tomorrow's breakfast. Consumed. Cream cheese frosting straight from the container - consumed. Ham, cheese, mustard, mayo sandwich. Consumed. First twelve ounce can of diet coke. Consumed. 4 meringues from Trader Joe's. Consumed. Two handfuls of candied walnuts. Consumed. Half a package of Oreos dipped in peanut butter. Consumed. A bag of kettle corn. Consumed. Ten Ritz crackers. Consumed. Second Diet Coke. Consumed. A chocolate chip Eggo. Consumed. Half a pint of Chunky Monkey. Consumed.

"I cheated again last night," you say to Emma as you get settled in the break area of the restaurant where you both work. Coworkers haven't yet joined to eat their post-shift meals. "Did you

binge?" she asks though she already knows the answer. She is your best friend of two years. You both have similar tastes and body types so she understands your struggle. You loosen the tie of your floor length blue apron and adjust your black polyester pants, making it more comfortable to sit down. The smell of balsamic vinegar burns your nose as you dress your salad. In public, you practice eating healthy but your rounding face, swollen belly, and puffy arms are beginning to betray you.

"What happened last night? Did dinner not fill you up?"

"No, I felt totally satisfied," you affirm with wide eyes and raised eyebrows, as if you're shocked by your own behavior, but traces of sadness speckle your tone.

“What do you think triggered it?” Emma asks.

Your face is a projector for the emotions you feel as an array of possibilities scroll through your mind like a slideshow of your worst nightmares.

Slide: Dad’s suicide. Slide: your first boyfriend cheating. Slide: the lover who won’t commit. Slide: your beautiful blonde friend with fourteen percent body fat. Slide: the size 2, high school version of yourself. Slide: the woman who will tell you that you’ve gained 4.8 pounds at your next weigh-in.

Slide: an old friend spreading lies about your family. Slide: your mom asking you who ate all the Oreos.

In walks the beautiful blonde with fourteen percent body fat, more commonly known as Kelly.

Disrupting your mental horror movie, she asks, "How's the tummy? Better than this morning I hope." She fails to notice any trace of sorrow on your face. "Yeah, it was probably just gas," you say. It's impossible for you to tell Kelly, a person with countable chest bones, about your hungry little secret.

You can divulge your indulgences to this other friend, Emma. She's different than Kelly. You met at work. She was your trainer. After your first shift, she shared dinner and conversation with you. It's been that way ever since. Back then, you weren't obsessive about clean eating. Both of you were about three pant sizes bigger. The body mass index of you and your best friend withered as your friendship blossomed. You and Emma bonded over *Skinny Bitch* (your newly decreed bible), a mutual

hatred for aspartame, and daily phone conversations documenting how little you each ate that day. Each other's cheerleaders, you were then. Fad diets consisting of ingesting hormones ruined your metabolism. You became even more obsessive about your weight, breaking down the number of calories, carbohydrates, fats and protein in everything you ate. You were on a strict regimen of apples, laxatives, and food paranoia. That was two summers ago and things have changed. In the past year, you've gained the weight back but you still maintain your friendship. She's loves you, small or big.

You are asleep but you feel a rough, tickling sensation on the corner of your mouth. It's moist enough to wake you. Opening one eye, the cat is staring at you. You realize what's woken you up.

"Why are you licking my face, Chalupa?" you say to the cat. Wiping your mouth, you realize there's peanut butter on it. The cat was licking peanut butter off of your face.

You roll to your side. Sharp pains shank your insides. You wonder why your stomach hurts. Your fingertips graze your swollen belly. Like an earthquake, comprehension rattles your brain, sending shockwaves of nausea from your stomach to your mouth. Your stomach is a volcano ready to erupt-a result of your binging the night before. A combination of air and vomit invades your mouth and you rush to the toilet to release the bubbly concoction. Your taste buds are violated with the flavor of peanut butter that you have just burped up. Your tongue scans the roof of your mouth, raw from eating an entire box of half-pretzel, half-saltine

crackers. Turning around, you retreat to the toilet and bend your head into the porcelain bowl. Green stripped toothbrush in hand, its bristles harass the uvula at the back of your throat. Your tongue retracts, ensued by a gag. Four minutes later and nothing from your wastebasket of a stomach has resurfaced. You sink to the floor sending more stabs of pains through your abdomen as three small layers of fat stack upon one another. You fiddle with the drawstring on your pajama bottoms, untying the bow that's constricting your protruding tummy. Worse than the physical pain caused by overeating is the guilt and self-hatred that consumes you because you can't control your own body - the one thing that's supposed to be yours in this world that has stolen so much from you already.

You traveled through Ireland and Italy last summer, eating whatever you wanted. When you came home, no one was particularly alarmed by your slight weight gain, but you began another diet, the one which had worked so well for Kelly.

But then, you started feeling defeated by your slow progress so you went home and ate.

Then, you were stressing about college transfer applications so you ate. Then, it was the anniversary of your dad's passing so you ate. Then, your new boyfriend broke up with you over text so you ate. A lot. Then, your nutritionist told you that you gained 6 pounds so you ate more than a lot. Then, it was the holidays so you ate. Then, your ex-best friend told people that your mom was bankrupt and your dad killed himself because of her lavish lifestyle so you ate.

“What made you decide to finally go?”

Emma asks, wrapping a blanket around herself on your couch. You asked her to spend the night, bribing her with wine. In reality, you want her there to make sure you don't binge.

Rewind to yesterday morning: You groggily enter the kitchen on a quest for coffee and see your mother.

“Morning,” she says, glancing at you through glasses that sit at the edge of her nose.

“Hi,” you yawn in return and pour yourself a cup of magic, better known as coffee.

“Kara.”

Pause.

You turn and look at her. You're uncomfortable.

"Do you know what happened to the pumpkin pie that was in the fridge? I was saving that for the Christmas party at the office tonight. Did you use it for something because I wouldn't have minded picking up a second one if I would've known and I'm so busy today because I have to buy decorations and now I have to go to the grocery store again and that's a pain in my butt so I was just wondering if you knew what happened."

Your cheeks are warm. "I didn't use it for anything."

"Well then what happened?" she asks, dumbfounded.

Tears that were streaming down your cheeks
only moments ago are now splattering on your cold
bare feet.

"I ate it."

"What?" your mother asks. She's squints her
eyes at you as if you're speaking a foreign
language. "No you didn't. You couldn't have eaten
an *entire* pie."

"Why would I lie?" You raise your head and
look at her. Humiliation and shame don't even
begin to summarize how low you feel in this
moment.

"Oh, honey." Her face is foiled with concern
but she makes no movement towards you. She looks
like she's going to be sick. If she vomits, that makes
one of us.

Fast forward to the present:

"I'm proud of you," Emma says with a comforting smile.

You try to imagine yourself on the therapist's couch. "Hey doctor, I'm fan-fucking-tastic, thank you for asking." Except a therapist probably wouldn't ask you how you were doing. They would say, "So, Kara, what brings you in today?" Ponder. Well, it definitely wasn't the fact that your father killed himself on his sixth day of taking Prozac. It also wasn't the desire to forcefully reflect upon and discuss your internal issues. Hmm, what could it be?

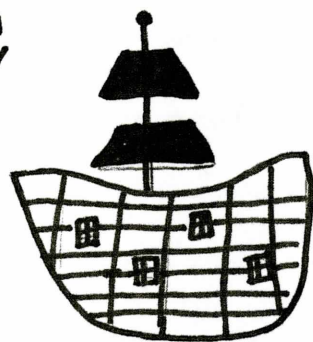
The fact that I refer to myself as "you" instead of "I" because I can't come to terms with the person I've become; I can eat entire box, not

bag, of popcorn, in one sitting; I refuse to associate my mind with my physical body anymore; all of my friends, even the good ones, are obsessed with their weight; no one tells me I look good anymore; I drink more Duralax than water; I have no self control; I woke up to my cat licking peanut butter off my face after a binge; all the boys stopped calling; pretty sure I'm becoming the fat friend; I never leave my house except to go to work and school; none of my clothes fit; I live in a society that tells me I will never be thin enough; it was either therapy or cocaine; I'm tired of feeling defeated all of the time; I can't remember what it's like to feel beautiful or proud or confident; I want to fall in love with my life again.

As midnight approaches, I drive home from work, recalling the stresses of the evening. Tonight

I was faced with challenges that would have caused me to binge in the past. I pull into the garage and close it behind me. The screen of my phone is enlightened by a message that reads, "I hope you remember that you're enough for me, even if you're not enough for you yet." I turn the handle and enter the dark house.

fantasy



REALITY