

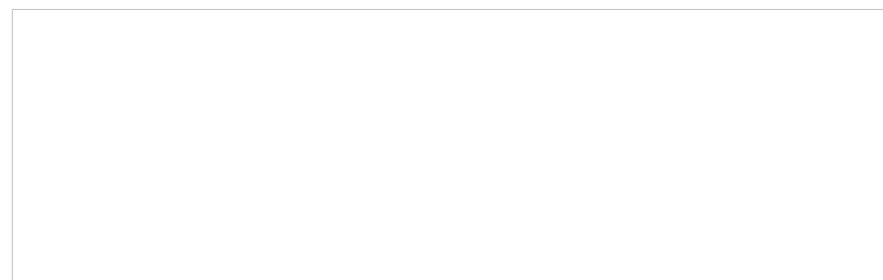
Pteromyini

by John Fowora

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(listen, friends, to the words we have recorded)

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MUSIC BY GOODMAN CARTER
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Whoosh.

Mildred had a dream before she left me, and she told me about it before she went. She had that crazy surgery where you staple your stomach and all the fat drains from your bowel movements. Or maybe you sweat it out so when it dries, all your visible skin looks like dried Crisco.

When you lose around 400 pounds in a matter of a few years, you have these cloth-like flaps of skin. Skin parachutes, even.

Fatachutes.

Flapachutes.

Flapaparafatachutes

And so on.

So imagine having a dream where you're on the roof of that building in Kuala Lumpur and there are armed guards with rice-burner bike helmets and they're dressed all in black and they're toting automatic weapons and they're chasing you to the edge. And you have a choice: plummeting a century to your death, or full clips emptied into your thinned-out new body.

In this dream, you decide to jump. Instead of you-chunks all over rich Asian businessmen, you open your skin-flaps.

Whoosh.

That's the sound that you make as your body glides from one building to another, from skyscrapers to mountain tops, and then from tree to tree. They couldn't catch you, those sci-fi guys. They wanted you to eat fast food and not to exercise, but you were vigilant. You wouldn't succumb to their non-stop advertising and marketing campaigns.

No, you'd dare to be free.

And when she woke up from this dream, all disoriented and sweaty and still four hundred pounds overweight, she decided right then and there to leave me. That

morning, Mildred packed her bags and walked out of the door with the help of some vegetable oil pre-slathered on her hips. She walked out without so much as a goodbye or a cupcake. I watched cable and ate frozen pizza for a straight week, no phone calls answered, no channels changed.

Let's Go Surfing

When I first ordered basic cable a few years back, I didn't expect so many home shopping channels. There were ten or so, and you couldn't escape them unless you turned the television off. All consumption, all the time.

0800-0900pm MOOKIE GOMEZ. NO MORE EMBARRASSING FLATULENCE EVER AGAIN!

It's a DVD of Mookie telling you to stop eating. No food, no gas. I ordered two of these DVDs. The impulse to shop was almost as powerful as my compulsion to eat.

My mom loved Mildred. They used to cook together during the holidays, and my mother was never one to share her kitchen with another female. Meals as far as the eyes could see. My mom, Milly, and Me would sit there eating for days at a time. We would eat until we fell asleep at the table and wake up startled and irritable until we took that first bite. We never said much but we always felt an abundance of love. It's what the holidays were for.

After thinking about Mildred for too long, I waddled over to the phone and dialed my mom's number.

"Hello? Hello? Heellooooo?"

She hung up. I dialed again.

"Hello?"

"Mom, it's me. Greg."

"Oh! Hi, Greg. Someone just called and hung up on me."

"It was me, Mom."

"Why would you hang up—"

"I didn't."

She has this problem with listening. She didn't listen to my Dad before he died of complications from diabetes, either.

"You haven't called in weeks."

"It's been one week, Ma."

I put the phone to my chest and caught my breath. She was still talking on the other end and I could hear her voice through the vibration.

"Has it been—"

"Milly left me, Ma. She did. I don't know. She's gone."

"Where?"

It wasn't the response that I'd expected.

"I'm not sure."

We were finished and so I sat back down on the sofa. My side of the sofa had an imprint in the cushion that looked like an overzealous Rorschach inkblot.

Milly-Ham

I would sometimes see Mildred's face when I opened my refrigerator. I would see it where the honey ham should have been, the pineapple slice on top looking just like an edible hair clip. I would take the Milly-Ham over to watch Home Shopping with me. Just like before.

0400-0530am LAPTOP COMPUTERS FOR OUR SENIOR CITIZENS

Me and the Milly-Ham ate a lot. And we loved watching television.

And when it seemed like the Milly-Ham was going bad, I ate her, too. Tears re-hydrated her dried-up pineapple hair-clip slice and made it soft. Her skin was tough and gamey, no longer the pinkish, vibrant Milly-Ham that I once knew.

Confection Affection

My mom loved me with an abundance of calories. She started with birthday cakes. Then, every so often, when I came home with a black eye from a fight or a boo-boo on my knee, she gave me a muffin.

And then fresh baked cookies.

And brownies.

And birthday cakes. Not because a year had passed; just because. Because that's what she had to do all day. I know this because sometimes I would ask her what she did all day and she would say "Oh, nothing."

Then it became more specific. Zebra Cakes. Stuff.

The time I came home with a black eye and she gave me a Zebra Cake, my initial reaction was incredulity. Should I apply this to my bruised eye like I would a cold compress, or a steak?

"I love you, Ma."

"I love you too, Greg."

I gained an extended nuclear family. Little Debbie was now my extra sister. Stella Doro was mommy part deux. I sent Grandpa Entenmann a mail-in rebate for soft bake cookies.

I guess this started in elementary school, maybe the third grade. The chubbier I got, the more friends I lost. My ex-friends played with my boy boobs. They made fart sounds when I sat in my chair. When I got up from my chair. When I spoke out loud. When they saw me breathing for too long without interruption.

She's Smart, Too

0400-0500am REPENT: THE RAPTURE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Mildred calls me. It's been two years now since she left.

"Greg?"

"Yeah?" I'm eating.

"It's Milly."

I never spit food out, but here I am, spitting out chocolate-covered pieces of pork.

"What? I'm sorry. Hey."

"Hey."

"... I'm just surprised, you know?"

"I am too, sort of," she says. "I mean. I was watching television at the gym—you know they have the stationary bikes with the TVs on them—and I don't know—"

"No other time to call?"

She doesn't say anything.

"Never mind," I say. "Sometimes I think about you, though. I'm stuck to the sofa."

"What?"

"Yeah—I haven't really moved from my side of the sofa since you left. I mean, the bathroom, sure—but no showers, or—"

"Come on. You have to take care of yourself, Greg."

"I know..."

I know.

"You know, I've lost over four hundred pounds," she says.

"That's... good. How did you do it?"

"Just diet and exercise. And leaving you. I'm sorry."

"Oh. No, don't be--"

"--and I got a subscription to the Atlantic Monthly, now. We used to talk about reading more, together. I feel smarter, y'know? Maybe that's the confidence talking."

I love you, too.

Obesity-Induced Psychosis

Maybe Milly will come back if I get some malaria or something like that, I could lose it quickly, like ten pounds a week is healthy or maybe fifteen because ten isn't really enough but twenty is pushing it I think that maybe if I order a sauna for the apartment and turn it on full blast and close the windows that maybe it'll get hot enough and I'll lose it faster without dieting once the malaria runs out then I'll find something else I wonder if they sell diseases I should look on the Home Shopping Network schedule but it's all the way on the other side of the room and they never really have any breaks in price though and I'm not sure if my mom really has the money for a sauna but then again she really loves me and she doesn't really have to help me in this way but she's right though, I am her son which means I'm always her son even when I can't help myself in certain situations and I wonder if this is considered an addiction because I really don't want to go to rehab and it just seems like a total waste of time it's like they want to change you and either Milly comes back to me or I'll do something, I don't know.

Change Gon' Come

0700-0800am REVOLUTIONARY WEIGHT LOSS SYSTEM

I buy this.

Sip, saw, cauterize, and repeat. A revolutionary new weight loss system that combines the pain of amputation with the body numbing effects of binge drinking. See results immediately.

My mom drops off everything I need to make it work earlier today with some groceries. She tries to guilt trip me about only calling her when I need groceries, but she always comes over with them anyway. I love her, but she should stop complaining so much.

You should have:

- (1) 1.75 mL Bottle of Jack Daniels brand premium whiskey.*
- (1) Stanley Fatmax mini-hacksaw w/fine teeth.*
- (1) Stanley Fatmax bow saw with wood cutting teeth.*
- (1) Dreyfus electric steam iron*
- (1) Homedics digital bathroom scale*
- (1) Smelling salts (not necessary if using kit alone)*

Directions

- 1. Take a big gulp of Jack Daniels while pretending that it is a milkshake.*
- 2. Take another big gulp of Jack Daniels while still pretending that it is a milkshake. If this is difficult, pretend that it is a different flavor than the last gulp.*
- 3. Turn on the electric steam iron, but do not put water into it. The iron must remain dry. Sip the Jack Daniels while the iron heats up.*
- 4. Use the Fatmax bow saw on your right leg while still sipping the Jack Daniels. Make sure that you don't spend too much time on your right leg as you have to move quickly to your left for safety reasons. If for some reason you are stuck on your right leg, take another sip of Jack Daniels.*
- 5. When your right leg is removed, place the now hot iron where the wound is. You should still be sipping the Jack Daniels.*
- 6. Repeat this procedure with your left leg. If you have a helper nearby have him or her cauterize your legs for you as this will save you valuable time and blood.*
- 7. Use the Fatmax handsaw on your arm of choice. As a rule of thumb you should remove the arm that you use the least. Sip the Jack Daniels.*
- 8. Cauterize your arm and roll your body onto the scale that we have included in your kit.*

I pass out.

"Greg, this is Milly. If you're there, answer your phone. Ummm. I wanted to talk to you for a minute, so... I'm out of town right now, but I'll be back soon. I guess I just

wanted to stop by. It was weird, talking to you the other day. But it was a good weird, I think. I'll call you soon."

I look over at the telephone and then at the television and back at the telephone and right now I want to crawl over to the answering machine and replay the message over and over and over again.

* * *

"You look...good," Mildred says as she sits next to the new me on the sofa. I had the old one thrown away and my mom bought me a new one. My mom says I'm getting too skinny. She says that I need to eat a little more. She bathes me sometimes, too.

1700-1900pm CIGARETTES FOR NON-SMOKERS

"That seems interesting, huh?"

"Yes, it does. Maybe you should order it," Mildred says.

She looks at me and smiles. Her stare is focused. She doesn't blink.

I hold her hand tightly with my one arm and I swear I'll never let go.

ABOUT JOHN FOWORA

John Fowora sets low personal standards and consistently fails to achieve them. John was born in Brooklyn, New York where he was almost placed in special education in the first grade because he pulled his pants down to give his peers a free show. Look for him to pull similar stunts in his writing. John was previously published by Horror Quarterly Magazine and his dead mother's refrigerator (via pizza-slice-shaped magnets.) You can email him at juicyjayjj279@yahoo.com because he welcomes that sort of thing (send nudies pls, kthxbye.)