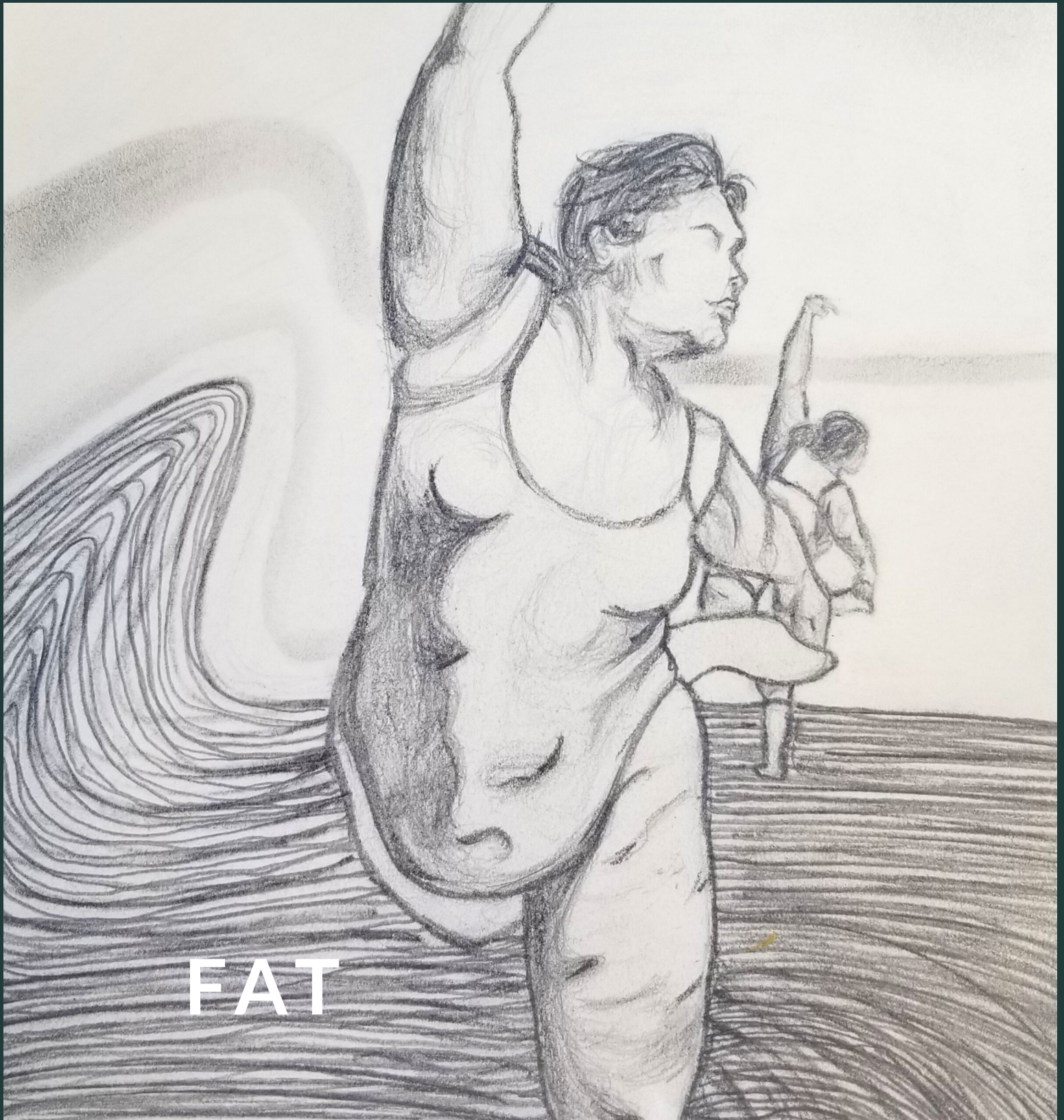


#2

OCT 2019

# ang(st)

THE FEMINIST BODY ZINE



angst: anxiety/ frustration

ang (अङ्ग): body/ part/ member

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# A Poem For My Fatness: It's About Damn Time

GAIL BELLO

My fat has been the bane of doctors and gym teachers alike.  
For years they have barraged me with their BMI bullshit.  
But I am not a body mass index.  
I am a catalogue of physical support.  
I turn to my arms,  
a bat-wing elephantine jiggly dream.  
I flip to my hips, thighs  
And back-pages of my bottom  
they squish firm in my palms  
Smooth eggplant and bell peppers.  
My centerfold rolls into a triple stack  
Breasts, upper belly shelf and grand pearl gut.  
I embrace the beautiful bigness to which my publication has grown,  
But please be aware of my editor's note  
That these positive words were not always in my lexicon  
But came with the courage of keeping two chins up.

# An Echo Inside

KELLY DUARTE

In my dream I hold two sugar cookies  
as I lift them toward my mouth  
I hear my father.  
“You only need to eat one.”

How deep is my hunger  
of keeping my body free  
in a starving house  
where I carry a bag of Taco Bell  
under a sweater with a stomach sucked in  
wait until the house goes dark  
to see the light of the refrigerator  
yoga mat, dumbbells, workout shoes  
are ambushes in gift wrap  
on Christmas day  
where I am applauded for the hunger  
a growl that sits in the soul  
hate sitting in my belly  
thighs  
the creases in my arms  
my appetite

(or lack of)

keeps my world in haze  
where my mother congratulates me  
for dropping a jeans size

I sit in my mother's expectations  
fat melting from my thighs  
a popsicle dropped on the cement of a summer day  
I mold myself into a stranger  
who hungers  
even in her dreams

# Survivor Guilt

IONA MURPHY

I wish I could tell myself there was nothing beautiful about the way I looked, bashing out another poetic lyric about my spine, my ribs, my collar bone. None of those things should have been on show. But they were. Crying in the changing rooms, whispering *fat*, both at my highest and lowest. *It's not really about being fat*. I wish I could remind myself what it was like to sit on a chair without hurting, feeling my tailbone on the wood. I wish I could remind myself what it felt like to feel. What it felt like to feel anything but *hunger*. I wish I had boobs again. I wish I had a figure. Not the mental stability, but the body. I *hate* my body but I keep pushing and pushing, racing to the bottom. I wish I could see a rounded face rather than the hollow eyebags I've grown accustomed to. Constantly beating myself up over the number on the scale not being low enough. *Fat*. I wish I knew that it's not really about the number on the scale, the number will never be low enough. I miss having period pains, believe it or not. I miss having the energy to lift my hands over my head and wash my dead hair. I miss my smile. I miss *her*. In another white walled room, being asked what I meant when I said I'm fat. What does fat mean to you? Refusing to engage, I tell them all I mean what I say. *I'm overweight*.

And I know it says I'm not but it's what I see when I put the tape measure around my thighs. When I catch my reflection in a car window as I run, despite my broken foot. They probe me. How warped I had become, expressing my distaste for life in a single word: *fat*. But no one cared that I starved myself when I was heavier. They only care when you fit the Tumblr *thispo* image. Crying in the doctor's surgery because I'm starving and she praises my weight loss because I'm 'healthy'. *Why fat?* Why brush off everything that's killing you with a *it's because I'm fat?* It's not about weight. It's about a discomfort in your own skin from years of detachment brewing inside and the only way to kill it is to starve. But it's just not dying and I'll scream that I'm fat, and I'll feel bad that my sick brain uses fat to hurt myself when I make out like I'm some sort of body positivity goddess, calling out skinny syrups on twitter and sharing my story as if I'm trying to grow. I attacked every inch of fat on my body because my body betrayed me. I needed that control. I say *fat* because I take up space and I don't want to.

But I'll look them all dead in the eye.

*I mean I'm fat.*



# It Bothers Them

SHREYAA TANDEL

It bothers them  
My skin thick lying  
Everywhere  
Around my upper arms  
On my chin and cheeks  
Down round my stomach  
Beneath on the thighs too  
It doesn't stand well  
Smooth, to their eyes and heads  
Their eyes vague  
And heads fatigued, fixated  
Exhibit hate open, indirect sometimes  
And sometimes sly with mummied words  
Difference is not approved in a world  
Where everyone, everything is not the same  
You become ugly, bad looking  
A sack of puffed rice  
A bun with fritters  
And sometimes even a buffalo; or a hoggy cow  
Their eyes horsetacked see things limited only  
And sleep through everything else  
For what though, for what does this not fit their "perfect"?  
For what do they bother, laugh and bully?  
For after all nothing absolutely?  
Yes.  
For they do not have peace and a horsetacked, fixed narrative  
And a head and heart steady but not so to accept things certain only? Yes.  
It bothers the world my loose skin, it intensifies an insecurity within  
But i shall eat the pepperoni unbothered  
And let balustrade over my lower lip, the cheese.

# Weighted

ROSIE CARTER

I walk barefoot in summer  
Hair flowing down my back  
Thighs touching  
I want to feel pretty

Hips wide  
She caresses my body  
Lips, teeth, tip of the tongue  
Arms crossed

Hands interlaced along my backbone  
My ribs don't stick out quite as far  
I still want to be slimmer  
Though she doesn't care

I care  
When I weigh myself five times a day  
And head to the bathroom after meals  
When I drink my body weight in water

I live for the emptiness in my stomach  
And the shooting pains  
And the curve of my hip bones and ribs  
I fight every pound

My features hollow out  
And my mind is a slave to its thoughts

I stand in the mirror  
Somewhat of a ghost, of what I used to be.

She loves me  
Rocks my body against hers  
I hear her heartbeat slow  
But don't let myself enjoy it.

I am dimming inside  
Nowadays, fainting  
I hide with shame,  
Become languid, and quieter still.



# I'll Eat Breakfast Tomorrow

LYNNE SCHMIDT

I am friends with hunger,  
the dull ache in my stomach that says  
if I don't find food soon  
my hands will take on a tremor  
my vision will close in around me  
dark walls cutting off the larger room.  
Strength will fade in and out like a concert drum beat that rings in your ears days after.  
In two breaths I'll eat.  
In seven exhales I'll make dinner.  
I'll make sure to eat breakfast tomorrow.  
And yet this hunger  
is something I wait for nearly on a daily basis.  
It fits itself around me  
a dress I've worn so many times  
the fabric has started to develop rust stains from the rinse cycle.  
It is so well worn the fabric has become soft, welcoming  
and my perfume lingers on it.  
It reminds me I can wear it whenever I'd like,  
that it hangs in my closet with a hand picked silk hanger making all other dresses  
inadequate.  
When a boy takes me out,  
I will spend a half hour carefully picking out my outfit.  
Pulling on a different shirt and turning sideways, making sure my body does not extend further  
than it should.  
I pull on  
different jeans  
that pair of boots instead of those.  
And my hunger will stare back in the mirror  
peeking out from the darkened closet  
a reminder that at all times  
my skeleton fingers can reach out  
and wear this dress any time I want.

# The Plucked Fruit

LARA YILDIRIM

The itch starts from the collar of my shirt. My collar bones, themselves, have begun to suffocate under a thick layer of flesh. All I see are swollen flabs of fat that have latched onto my facial structure, dancing in the spoon's reflection.

I watch the waves of brown fluids reach out for me. The spoon becomes my anchor. I search, by parting seas, in order to avoid the chicken or cheese and instead find the buried gold nuggets of carrot. 41: 100g of carrots. 165: a chicken breast. I chose the carrot. Forcing the metal into my mouth tends to be the hardest part most days. The liquids claw my throat on their way down to the dark pit, tickling my mind into submission. The rattling unfamiliar sounds of swallowing repeat in my head, accompanied with an invasive thought.

Grab your tummy.

The silk curtains never do anything for light. I do not understand the purpose of shade that cannot keep the sun from burning your eyes. If shadows still hid in nooks and corners while the sun over powers the essence of the room, what is the curtain even there for? Decoration I suppose. The things people do for decoration sometimes is incomprehensible.

I am aware of the bloating in my mid region but as my hands invade my body, by grabbing and tugging at the excessive flap that hangs forward, I can no longer reach for the spoon in front of me. Then, moments later, there it is again. The smug glance of the spoon. He laughs, pointing at what I try to disguise.

# Reunion

SUPRIYA RAKESH

It is my college reunion this evening. I don't want to go, I really don't! But then I think, what the hell, it's been ten years! The guys will all have turned into paunchy dads - most of them. The gals are of course skinny. They're all over my Instagram with their GM diets, avocado smoothies and egg whites, their svelte sculpted bodies in their hot Yoga pants.

I approach the venue like a crab, calculating my distance and plotting my moves. I know I have done well in life. Decent job, check. Marriage, check. Travelled around the world, yup even to Czech. Published my short stories, check and mate!

I stand in a corner and watch from a distance. They all look so smug in their designer outfits - eating, sipping, laughing, catching up. "Oh! Is this food vegan?" "I don't eat gluten any more..." "Can I have some low-cal champagne?" I observe them like a birdwatcher studying a rare species. Pretty much how I got through four years of college. I stand my ground, waiting for my friend Sally. I need a buffer, I really do.

Until one of them spots me. "Oh my God, Mandy..." she coos in her high-pitched voice. "There you are! Come on over." The bait is ready. I approach unsteadily, just as the group gets ready to devour me. "Oh wow, you have put on weight! Looking just a bit fat!" A unanimous guzzle.

Fat! From that moment on, things start to blur. Is it the fresh trauma or memory of older ones? Perhaps, it is low blood sugar. I did skip my post-lunch tea and muffin in anticipation of the food here.

I strain to take in all the jibes and counter-jibes. Only the most important information is digested. Yes, there is clear consensus. I have packed in some kilos, 5 to 10 is the guesstimate. I neither confirm nor deny anything. Then, a platter of suggestions. My responses rise like reflux but never escape my lips.

"Completely cut out carbs." I veto the keto!

"Just eat every two hours!" Ummm, why not more often?

Then well-meaning Veena and sharp-tongued Shapira close in on me. "Hey girl, loving your curves." "Yea! Love-handles mean more action!" Being touched inappropriately under my shirt snaps me out of my reverie. I excuse myself, saying I need to look for Sally.

Ten minutes later Sally is nowhere to be seen. I have gulped down two glasses of strawberry sangria and have no choice but to head for the buffet. A rumbling stomach confirms my decision.

I pick up the plate and stand in the line. I manage a polite smile at a few faces I remember vaguely. But inside, I am fuming. What the hell do these women think? That I am clueless of my own weight? I haven't looked in a mirror since 2008? Even the clothes I had to throw out gave me no clue? They are doing me a favor, by their astute observations and wise revelations?

Grinding my teeth, I load up my plate. I need comfort food right now. I skip the weirdly brown lentil soup (how can I eat it standing) and approach the hearty tomato spaghetti with parmesan cheese. Or should I go for the veggie brown rice pilaf? The 'healthier' choice?

Ugghh, it's all their fault! Causing such gut-wrenching dilemma in my otherwise sorted brain - my grad student, published author brain. Again, did they expect me to look the same 10 years later? All the things I've done, achieved, mean nothing against my slightly bulging waistline?

I find myself a table in the corner, and tear into my spaghetti. Yes of course I've gained weight, but only a bit - couple of dress sizes at most. I'm not technically fat. Just full-bodied. A real woman. Living in a normal, healthy way. No fad diets or surgeries. Why do we swallow up these beauty standards dished out by fashion, media, society? I slurp my arguments down with my vanilla-bean smoothie.

My plate is almost empty now. I feel a little better. Cold dairy always soothes my nerves. Complex carbs give me perspective. A happy buzz in my head from the strawberry sangria. It's just one evening, after all! Sally will be here soon. She'll get me. Sally's beyond everything. She'll have some sage advice for me, or some philosophy about self-acceptance.

My phone pings as I head towards the dessert counter. Thank god she's almost here! It's a tough choice, but I pick up a bowl of fresh caramel custard. Goopy brownies are for little children. She wants me to meet her outside first. Looks like she needs a buffer too. I'm so excited, I haven't met Sally in the longest time!

There's a slight drizzle outside but I'm distracted by the zesty orange drizzle in my bowl. As I dive in to soak a last sumptuous bite, there is a slight tap on the shoulder. I turn to greet her with a full-mouthed grin... My jaw drops, as does the spoon in my hand.

"Wow Sally! You're looking so fat!"

Our bodies speak. Are you listening?

# ang(st)

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