

SEÑOR MARQUEZ WEIGHS IN

He had been—even the fat kid admitted—a big baby. According to the birth certificate: eleven pounds, three ounces. What he could not find at the office of Vital Records in the city in the valley was his mama's death certificate. But the fat kid did know that he came as did Caesar, head-first through a bloody aperture. If that had killed his mama, as the fat kid's daddy claimed, the fat kid never learned for sure.

In line at the morning assembly the fat kid stepped out of line, trampling his neighbor's toe. The mountains and pines above the lake had been doused with fresh snow, this foregrounded by the nation's fluttering flag, to which the children pledged allegiance. The kid the fat kid stepped on, the boy himself not a fat kid, said to the fat kid, You fuckin fat-ass.

The fat kid stored images and language, memories like files he tagged Reasons to Hate, Evidence for a Deserving Death, and Fuck Everyone—files filled with faces.

The fat kid had once seen a film where a character says, Those who can't do, teach; and those who can't teach, teach gym. He thought this way about Señor Marquez. The children filed from out of the icy morning to the inside of a trailer. Mist suspended above the waveless lake. The school had run out of buildings. They trucked in trailers and unloaded those trailers in a laboriously long process involving chains and men that neither the fat kid nor any other student ever saw, for such things occurred at night when the children got tucked lovingly into beds and kissed upon their foreheads. All but the fat kid, whose daddy sat at the bar, lifting beers and occasionally a frown from off his lips.

Inside the trailer at the end of the line sat the fat kid's

PE teacher, a young Mexican, already balded, his moustache covering his upper lip like a pushbroom in miniature. Señor Marquez, his clipboard held sheets of facts. The children inched in, a step, wait, a step, wait. A scale. Marquez weighed each boy, pulled a long and thin metal bar, measured height. Marquez called out numbers to no one but to every boy, the boy to whom said numbers corresponded, the boys in line, the boys beyond the trailer's open windows—opened in the misty early spring morning, before the snow had begun to melt, but when said snowmelt anticipation sat on the town's shoulders and every townsperson felt it, like the horses who stamped in their stalls and snorted, waiting for the mountain meadows that would soon open green with tufted hairgrass.

The fat kid dreaded his turn. He felt his fat moving on his body. It spilled over his jean's waistline. He hefted it around like an extra backpack, heavier than the backpack that contained his books. He rattled upon the scale. Marquez let loose a whistle. The fucker whistled. The fat kid entered Marquez into his file of People to Hate and People Who Deserve Death, and he later would've gone back to find Marquez and kill him, but Marquez had disappeared and the fat kid hoped he'd suffered some terrible fate. In the fat kid's fantasies Marquez had been deported somehow (for Marquez was a citizen of the nation in question, though such a detail mattered not at all in the fat kid's fantasies), his head would be found on a lawn in front of some Mexican school—another beheaded teacher, victim of the cartels.

Marquez called out, One hundred sixty-eight pounds! The boys snickered. The fat kid's face burned. He whimpered. The boys' laughter carried, infectious, out the trailer, into the schoolyard where the line lined, a parade of laughter. The fat kid cried silently, his tears pooling in the little space under his eyes, above his baby-fat cheeks.

The fat kid was eleven years old.

THE FAT KID SNACKS AND LOUNGES COMPLETE WITH VIOLENT ENTERTAINMENT

The walk home from school along the cracked streets, under the shade of a storm's clouds and the pines, the fat kid reached the wind-tossed house. The fat kid's daddy, greasy, sweaty, and tired, would soon finish his shift with the DOT, and afterwards he'd take himself to the bar where he *Put his elbows up for a rest*, and used his biceps to curl back mugs of beer. The fat kid was alone.

He changed out of rain-soaked clothing, his jeans a plop on the bathroom tiles where he left them, water puddling. He found in the cupboards the box of imitation name brand chocolate cupcakes individually wrapped in clear plastic and withdrawing one, and, from another cupboard, a tall glass which he filled with cold milk (2%) from the icebox, the fat kid sank himself into a worn spot on the couch, the left side, where the fat kid could place his cupcake upon the couch's armrest and next to that sat the cathedral radio.

Sometimes the fat kid imagined what might happen if his daddy, instead of secluding himself at the bar, should come home after work to find the fat kid, lounging on the couch, his feet up on the coffee table, his radio programs blaring, and chocolate smeared across the fat kid's lips. The fat kid imagined this insufferable embarrassment, and so took precautions to guard against it, such as a napkin, with which the fat kid wiped his chocolate-covered face, and he regularly practiced shoving the remainders of his cupcakes into the spaces between the couch cushions to hide them, should his daddy come home. The fat kid retrieved the crumbled remains of these cupcakes and devoured them. But still, the crumbs and cream filling both caked the innards of that sofa.

The fat kid listened to his programs through the afternoon: three o'clock featured military men engaged in dubious battle against a group of technologically advanced rogue terrorists. The fat kid might've looked back on this program and remarked upon its violence—had the fat kid awareness to recognize the influence of such violence on his own adult tendencies—yet not one character was ever described in the throes of death. In great airborne battles jets lined the sky, their missiles hissing toward targets, and the fat kid imagined streaming airstreams behind them, then the explosions in great bursts that shook the radio console. But out of the falling jet debris fell a parachuting pilot to safety, the wind whistling as he lofted toward earth. In this, the program never failed, and so one got the sense that great war took place without ever incurring a single casualty. At four o'clock began another violent program, this one built on the premise that human children had discovered, while inexplicably bicycling a barren desert, a cave in which they find great and ancient machines from a distant alien planet. Inadvertently activating these machines, the children learn to their delight that the machines are not only communicable, but friendly. That is until the friendly machines encounter their equally awakened nemeses, whose propensity for destruction nearly outmatches the friendly machines' penchant for goodness. But only nearly. As with the fat kid's three o'clock radio program, these machines battle against each other using laser weapons. The lasers came as shrieks and zaps, zoops from the big speaker. But none, it seemed, ever caused significant damage or destruction to its target.

The fat kid unwrapped his individually-wrapped cupcake and enjoyed it through his three o'clock program, along with his two percent milk that he swilled, washing the chocolate down his throat in a satisfying swirl. Each cupcake was on the small side and the fat kid could devour a single serving and the accompanying milk before three-oh-five, or oh-six,

depending on the fat kid's walking pace and gaining his house for this afternoon entertainment. Thus, it was not uncommon for the fat kid to eat two or three cupcakes and drink an equal number of milk glasses during this two-hour duration, and that at such idle times, with a single-serving cupcake plus milk equaling 360 calories, and multiplying that by the number of consumed snacks and drinks (it was not uncommon for the fat kid to reach for that third cupcake and glass of milk) the total exceeding a thousand calories. Combined with the fat kid's three daily meals, it was no wonder that the pudge the fat kid pushed continued to push against his t-shirts and jeans. And the fat kid's daddy, oblivious, left the grocery money sitting atop the kitchen countertop for the fat kid to spend, and some of this money the fat kid diverted in order to clothe his expanding girth.