

Popcorn

I hear the front door slam shut and the key click in the lock. For a moment I just stand in the hallway, wondering what to do with the whole luxurious two or three hours that stretch ahead of me. Maybe I'll play music too loud, or watch an episode of something I'm not allowed to *without using headphones!* Of course, I do none of these things. Instead I go into the kitchen, over to the Cupboard of Shame, and look up at the shelves of junk that stretch from floor to ceiling. Terrifying and tantalizing, a wall of pure poison wrapped in shiny packaging. A glimpse of bubble-gum pink peeps out from behind the cereal boxes; three bags of coconut vanilla popcorn right at my eye level. I feel sick. Breaking my tunnel vision for a second, I glance from side to side like a child who knows they're breaking the rules. Oh God: the blinds are wide open. I quickly twist them shut, the skin around my eyes taugth with embarrassment. If someone saw me through the window I don't think I could take it. Immature tears would well up, and they would all be for nothing because I'd probably end up eating my weight in popcorn to comfort myself. No. No one can see this, because that would mean that it really happened.

The bag rustles indignantly as I take it out, interrupting my train of thought. I don't pour it into a bowl- it's worth the noise if it means I can't see how much I'm eating. I go into the living room and sit down on the sofa, painfully aware of the deflated *humph* it makes as I put my weight on it. A handful of popcorn goes into my mouth. The flavour is so familiar, bringing to mind countless evenings spent in quiet loathing. Another mouthful. Another. Is this what an out of body experience feels like? No, this is different. I'm hyperaware of everything I taste, yet I can't tell where one mouthful starts and another one ends. I'm not even aware of my hand moving; it's like it belongs to someone else. Everything, including my awareness of my own body, has been eclipsed by a blur of guilt and gluttony and sickliness. The crunch of the bag punctuates the room's heavy silence like salt sprinkled on an open wound.

I realise that I've been staring at a blank screen for the last five minutes and turn the TV on. *Firefly*, the last thing I watched on Netflix, instantly comes up on the screen. I compulsively shovel the popcorn into my mouth, now almost completely unaware of what it tastes like. An unwelcome image of the food being converted into useless fat plays over and over in my mind. Each handful of popcorn is just one more handful of excess blubber to squeeze in front of the mirror. Soon my thighs will touch, my tummy will bulge over my waistband, my body will be like a lump of butter. No one will ever love me. At family gatherings my skinny cousins will silently judge me, giving pitying glances when they think I'm not looking.

I turn off the TV. I don't want to associate *Firefly* with this feeling. Forced to pause for a moment, I look down at my hands: They are coated with a mixture of grease, sugar and

saliva, sticking my fingers together. What have I done? I stop myself from licking my fingers and go through to the kitchen to wash my hands. A strange, sudden calm has come over me.

I walk up the stairs as if propelled by an invisible force, go into the bathroom and pull up my shirt in front of the mirror to see how much damage I've done. My stomach comes out further than my boobs, crazily out of proportion to the rest of my body. I look like I'm pregnant. I tie my hair back and kneel in front of the toilet.