

An Evolving Menu

Appetizer..... 19.95

Finally, there are no teachers looking our way. I already finished my deliciously not-nutritious school lunch pizza, so now would be the time to do what I need to do. But is this worth the risk? My ten-year-old ADHD brain (which will not get proper recognition as an ADHD brain for 25 more years) weighs the pros and cons of my plan. It doesn't have the words or reasons to explain this but knows instinctively that if I follow through, it will get a hit of dopamine, which it desperately needs as it fights to make sense of this new life of changing houses between my mom's and my dad's every week. It needs the hit as it calculates what needs to be done to keep scoring 90% and above on everything in school, because anything lower earns scolding instead of praise. It needs the hit as a supplement to the daydreams of living in the woods with no one and nothing but my dog and a book, trying desperately to change what the idea of "alone" feels like by imagining a version of it that's on my own terms, and doesn't involve the darkness that comes at me from the inside when I'm trying to fall asleep at night, telling me I'm ugly and fat and weird. Yes, I decide, it's worth the shame of asking Emily if she's going to eat her pizza today (because a lot of time she doesn't, so she can be thin and pretty and popular) and if not, could I have it?

Main Course..... 20.03

It's the end of my shift at the media library, a windowless room in a warehouse that also stores the majority of this up-and-coming film school's production equipment. By senior year, it'll be replaced by a \$40 million facility complete with mini soundstages and a constant thrum of people, but it's freshman year so it's just me, this warehouse, a few abandoned buildings scattered down the street, and train tracks for ambiance. My parents have told me that whenever I have an evening shift, I should call campus security to come over in their little golf cart and drive me back to the dorms. I told them sure, I'd do that, but I never bother. That's what girls do if they're afraid of being raped, and I know, with the kind of certainty only an 18-year-old can have, that I am not at risk of such things. The rapists won't go after me, the fat girl. It brings relief, but sadness and jealousy, too. Because the truth is, right now, I'd rather run the risk of rape and all the horror that could accompany it, than be too fat and ugly for anyone to want to touch me. With every safe walk home for years to come, I reinforce one of the most toxic beliefs about myself I could have. That it is therapy rather than "being proved wrong" that finally begins to dilute this poison is a miracle.

Dessert..... 20.23

I wish I could say I've changed completely since those dark thoughts were my norm twenty years ago. I wish I could say that I no longer have a distorted body image. I wish that I could say that I am no longer overweight (and since we're being honest, I wish it even more than the healthy body image). The truth is, by clinical standards, I'm not just overweight but obese, which is a fittingly ugly word given the feelings it stirs up. But I now understand that my heart has been more strained by shame, anxiety, and self-recrimination than by the extra adipose stuck to my frame. It's time for a taste of something else before the check comes.