

Eating disorderly:
 Confessions of a
 starving bipolar bear...

A RETURNING APPETITE

JAY NEAL

It's 7:15 in the evening, dinner time, and I've walked into *Chez Michael*, my favorite restaurant. I say *favorite* when what I really mean is *usual*. *Usually* at dinner time I *usually* end up at *Chez Mike*. The food isn't bad, or particularly good, but the portions are large. I mean, a person my size doesn't get along well with *nouvelle cuisine* and dainty meals served by Snippy, the anorexic waiter.

Michael himself greets me at the door and offers to hang my coat for me. He's gotten to know me pretty well in the almost nineteen months that I've been without Ken, meaning since Ken walked out the door without saying as much as *bye-bye!* Michael is too discreet ever to mention I was seduced and abandoned by a thin man. Yet his knowing makes losing all one-hundred-and-fifty pounds of Ken all the easier to deal with. I'm single again. Ken and I set the world's land-speed record for the first civil-union marriage in Vermont and the first civil-union divorce in hell the next week. Michael escorts me to my table for one without drawing attention to my oneness.

Michael suggests the chef's special for the day: a pair of stuffed pork chops with new potatoes and asparagus. *Yes, yes, pork chops sound fine*. Naturally, it will be a couple of pork chops, exactly two pork chops, a pair of pork chops stuffed happily ever after, a pork-chop duet forever bonded and married, exquisitely stuffed. Nineteen months and

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[HOW TO LEGALLY QUOTE FROM THIS BOOK](#)

my heart still hurts from my eyebrows to my toenails. People told me the pain would get better. I'd get past it. Life would go on. But they never said when. Nineteen months of this fucking shit and no end in sight. It would be different if Ken had died.

It's so lonely being lonely. I hate the empty feeling that I can't seem to shake, the lack of any reason to get up in the morning. I hate the ache that kills my appetite for food or for sex. Look at all the people in here: pairs of people eating pairs of pork chops and enjoying every bite because they don't have to go home alone and try to remember how to keep on living. They will all go home tonight with someone who will keep alive their experience of sex, of love, of being with someone and feeling complete.

I'd like to feel happy again. Honest. I'm sure that I was happy once. I know that I used to smile a lot. Ken always said he liked my smile. Truth was Ken liked everybody's smile, particularly when the smile was around his dick. The whore. Clueless people once asked me why I would want to hide my beautiful smile with a beard. Now they tell me that my beard makes me look sad. Frankly, I think they've got pussy-whipped anti-beard attitude. I used to think my beard made me look sexy, really hot the way the brown fades into blond around my mouth, but I've forgotten what sexy was like, so who cares. I guess I keep bearded mostly out of habit now, and because a beard is a good place to hide.

Michael brings my plate of food. Sure enough: a pair of pork chops. They don't look at all bad tonight. I suspect Michael, who is cursed with being politically correct, is one of those anti-beard people. I bet most of the people in *Chez Mike* are anti-masculine puritans.

Except that bear in the booth against the wall. He has a beard and he's laughing right now, *ha ha ha*, not looking the least bit sad. He must be telling a joke to the guy he's

with. I wonder whether it's a business dinner, or maybe it's his friend, or more likely his partner.

He does have a nice beard. I only once convinced Ken to try growing in his beard, but that didn't last for long. He complained that the silvery patches made him look older than he wanted which was twice as old as his eighteen-year-old son who showed up as a big surprise from one of Ken's "youthful indiscretions." I couldn't convince Ken that the color contrasts were distinctive and that his beard was fun to chew on. Ken couldn't convince me that the eighteen-year-old was his son. Anyway, this bear's beard isn't so thick as Ken's, but it's short and it's a lush, dark brown that grows up high on his cheeks, right below the wrinkles around his eyes when he laughs. It grows in close enough around his lips to outline his smile. *Nice smile.* He could be a poster for Big and Tall.

What a nose this bear has. His may be the most beautiful nose I've ever seen. Long, but not too long. Long enough to give a certain elegance to his face, perfectly proportioned. His nose begins smoothly between his dark eyebrows and drops with majesty down his face, widens slightly, flows gracefully around his nostrils, and disappears into his lush moustache. He smiles and his nose curls up ever so slightly, making ovals of his nostrils. His is a decidedly erotic nose.

The way he eats makes his pair of pork chops look much better than they really are. His hands are pretty big, and I like his short, fat fingers with the little brown hairs between the knuckles, hair that gets enticingly denser as it crawls over his wrist and up his arm under his shirt sleeve. I bet his fur marches right up his arm to where the muscles twitch when he lifts the fork to his mouth. Without breaking rhythm, his lips part and his tongue reaches out to meet the pork chops as the fork slides into his hungry mouth, deposits its load, and slides

out again through his closed lips. *Oh, to be one of a pair of pork chops on his plate right now.*

He looks like he's a sensitive kind of guy, too, like he'd know exactly where to touch me when, how to hold me in those big arms of his and drive this loneliness away. He'd hold me hard and tight right up against his big chest, stroke my hair, and whisper in my ear that everything's okay, that I don't ever have to be alone again. How can one man be so sweet and caring?

Oh shit. How can I possibly think that I know anything about him from the way he looks? How stupid can I get? I've got to stop staring at him. He's going to look up any second now and see me sitting here, mooning at him like some teenage girl, and what's he going to think? Hey, why should I think that he'd think anything at all? Why should he even care if I am staring at him? Like I could ever get a date with him! Like why the hell am I even thinking about getting a date with him? *Stop staring and stop dreaming up this shit.*

Oh, damn, drop my knife right in the middle of my plate and wake everyone up why don't I! *Shit! Shit, shit, shit!* I hate it when people look because I do something stupid like I can't even hold onto my silverware while I eat. *Thank you! Thank you! I'd like to be your sit-com, but that's the end of tonight's dinner-theater entertainment. You can all go back to eating now.* I'm not senile at thirty-eight. I'll pick up my knife and continue eating and maybe we can forget about this little debacle.

He's looking at me. I can feel him looking at me right now. *Fuck.* Do I look thirty-eight? Can I pass for thirty-three? He sees me for the total idiot I am. Should I look up, show him that I'm not a wimp, maybe smile a little? Hey, it was an accident, could happen to anyone. I'm really a nice guy once you get to know me. Why am I even thinking that he's going to think anything? *Get over it.*

Look up.

What beautiful eyes. I hold my breath. *One...two...three...four...five...six.* Remember to breathe out. He blinks, releasing me, and looks back toward his dinner companion. I blink and exhale. I don't know why I was holding my breath. That must be what breathtaking beauty is like. What eyes he has: intense brown, penetrating right to my soul and reading me completely in that one glance. It felt like he saw my whole life laid bare looking into my eyes. His eyes are so deep, so complex, so caring, so sensitive. I could see that he is exactly the person I was imagining. *Geez, get a grip. Get a life.* I've got to trade in this over-active imagination for something a little more realistic.

Honestly, I don't have much of an appetite left for the pair of pork chops still on my plate, but I've got to finish eating or else he'll notice that I'm acting weird. Big guys always clean their plates. Did he smile? I'm sure that I saw a little bit of a smile before he looked away. He might have been laughing at me, a disdainful smile for the guy who can't hold his silverware. Maybe it was a prick-tease smile that said he knew what I was thinking, every absurd thought. Maybe he was thinking the exact same things though. Maybe his little smile meant he was thinking about me exactly what I was thinking about him. Sure, like that, I find perfect love while eating a pair of mediocre pork chops.

I've got to get a life, get real, before I fall completely to Patsy Cline pieces thinking crazy shit like this. But suddenly every time I close my eyes, ridiculous romantic images flood in. I blink and I'm on the beach at Bali Hai, the lovely hula sand still warm from the big red setting sun. Lying in his arms, my head rests on his furry chest. The sound of his heartbeat is so soothing. I smell his warmed skin, the salt water in his swimming suit accentuating his own scent. All I see is layers of damp

hair slaked against his belly, dotted with grains of sand. I hear his breathing in my ear, my head rising and falling with each breath. His arms tighten around me, and I know everything will be better from now on, because I subscribe to the Romance Channel.

Who am I to think that he'd ever hold me like that, or even say *boo* to me? What could a gorgeous bear like him possibly find desirable in a blubbering moby bear like me? No one likes a person who's sad all the time. But when you're sad all the time, how the fuck do you keep from looking sad all the time? There's polar bears and there's bipolar bears. What can I say?

I close my eyes and we're curled up together in front of a wonderful big log fire, drinking hot chocolate. Hot chocolate! We haven't said anything for what seems like hours. We sit close to each other, his hand over mine, being together, listening to the logs hiss and crack. Talking isn't necessary with a love as deep and close as ours. He sips some chocolate and looks over into my eyes, reflections from the fire dancing in his. He leans towards me and his lips meet mine.

I don't know why he's having this effect on me. My dick is hard as a thumb. I thought I'd given up this foolish romantic crap long ago. All I know is that I'm getting pretty worked up and need to ditch this depression or I'm never going to find my way back to sanity.

I close my eyes and his arm reaches around my naked chest from behind to pull me closer. My back is warm from his body next to mine. I feel him lying behind me, his breath on the back of my neck, the curve of his belly above my butt, his legs entwined with mine. As he moves his hand idly across my chest I feel his dick harden along the crack in my ass. My dick, too, starts to swell with desire. I want him more than I've wanted anything in a long time. I long for him to take me and give me the

sweet, tender loving I've been yearning for, like water for chocolate, like dick for days.

With my luck, and my dick, he's probably a size queen and wouldn't give a dick like mine the time of day. No doubt he has a perfect dick that gets big and hard and thick. And big balls, too. Such a dick the world rarely sees the likes of and he can command the attention of any man he chooses. Look at him. Look at his irritating air of self-confidence that says I've got a big dick so you can go suck rocks. I really, really hate people like that. Ken said I was jealous and full of penis envy. Ken said every twenty pounds over normal body weight takes an inch off your dick. Fuck Ken! If I was at normal body weight for my height, I'd have a twenty-inch dick.

I've got to talk to him. He can ignore me or laugh at me or spit in my face, but I've got to talk to him before I leave or I might never get out the door of fucking *Chez Mike*. His check's come. He'll be leaving soon. Quick, think of something before he gets away. What would I say? I can't say, *Gosh, you're beautiful! Would you like to spend the rest of your life with me?*

I wonder what he looks like naked. I bet his entire body is hairy. I bet that smooth, thick hair sticking out the top of his shirt goes all the way down to his toes. Big toes, big feet, and hairy ankles. He'd probably close his eyes and grunt if I sucked on his toes, brushing the hair up and down his leg with my hand, pressing my tongue between each toe. I want to lick his ankles, lick his legs all the way up to his ass. Thick legs, meaty thighs, and a big hairy ass. Instead of this pair of pork chops I should be eating his hairy asshole, licking the hair on his butt into swirls up his cheeks. That would make him grunt all right, sticking my tongue up his asshole and licking his pair of pork cheeks.

Grunt, bear. Turn around so I can see your dick, your

perfect, big, hard, thick dick. I touch his balls with my tongue and inhale deeply his sweet, luscious scent. The soft flesh of his hard dick rests gently on my cheek. I brush it with my beard and caress it with my lips, kissing up its stiff length until my mouth is at its very end. With the tip of my tongue I draw little circles around his piss slit and his dick jerks away each time my tongue slides over the top. I grab his dick with my lips, holding it still so I can tickle it with my tongue, breathing hot air out to make cool spots where it's wet. I draw his dick into my mouth and hold it. I can feel his pulse in my mouth, in my moist, warm, mouth.

I close my eyes, hold his dick in my mouth, and move my hands slowly up his hairy belly until I reach his pair of pork-chop pecs and feel his hard nipples between my fingers. I squeeze and rub and he starts to squirm and tries to pump my mouth with his dick. I'm rubbing his candy-kiss nipples and thinking how good it would feel to have him fuck me right now, to have his fat, stiff dick stuck up deep inside my ass, to ride his dick like he's never felt before, riding him until we're both ready to cum.

Shit. He's gone. Where'd he go? I didn't even see him leave! *Shit. Fuck this! Fuck, fuck, fuck!* How could I let him get away like that? I mean he was here and now my last chance for love has left. He was so beautiful, so perfect, and I let him walk away without saying anything to him. I've never seen him eating here before and he'll never be back again. Never! He looked so warm, so sensitive, so caring, someone I could finally love for the rest of my life.

All right. Leave the money. Put the wallet away. Get up and walk towards the lobby. I don't know whether I can make it home or even get out the door. *Keep moving. Get your coat. Put it on. Keep moving.*

Behind me someone comes out of the hallway from the bathrooms, talking to someone else. I really don't want to

see anyone, look at anyone right now, maybe never look at anyone again. I wonder what it takes to become a hermit? You probably have to belong to a church first. I'll stand here and fiddle with the buttons on my coat till they leave.

Why haven't they gone yet? I must keep my back to them. How long can a couple, a pair of porkchops, stand there talking on and on about stupid stuff, and who's calling out the name *Bill*? Honestly, all these cell-phone freaks and social misfits who don't know how to have a private conversation these days. Maybe I can slip out the door while they're all talking about this Bill person.

I turn around to leave and my heart stops. It's him, standing right there, saying "Bill," looking right at me with those beautiful eyes, a little smile turning up the corners of his lips. Now he's walking towards me, reaching out his hand and saying "Bill? Bill Morris, isn't it?"

I've seen lots of movies. I can do this scene. I take his hand, but who's this Bill Morris? Did he wink at me?

"I'm sure you don't remember me. Bruin Atkins. We met at the Atlanta convention last year."

I have no idea what convention he's talking about, but I'm beginning to catch on. *He wants me to pretend I'm Bill Morris*. I let go of his hand and nod knowingly, trying to think of something to say, so I won't look a total idiot in front of his dinner companion. Aha! Not his boyfriend, some guy he's having a business dinner with. *Fuck, yes*, not his boyfriend.

So I become Bill Morris.

"Oh, of course. Bruin. How've you been?"

"Great, great. Say, it's been a long time, way too long. Bill, good old Bill. Can we get together for lunch or something? Here's my card. Why not give me a call tomorrow and we'll set it up?"

I don't trust myself to talk again. I nod, wave a little goodbye as they walk out the door, like nothing at all

happened. I look at the business card in my hand.

Bruin Atkins.

What a perfect name. What a fucking perfect name!

I knew he'd think of something. I knew he wouldn't abandon me, leave me. Maybe this time I'll be lucky. I knew he'd be a great guy, warm and friendly like that, with a name like *Bruin Atkins*. Lunch or something. Right. Or something. Damn, it's been such a long, long time. Way too long.

Bruin Atkins.

I repeat the name over and over.

Bruin Atkins. Bruin Atkins.

Married in Vermont.

Mr. and Mr. Bruin Atkins.



Chris Duffy, *Sunset Bull/Sunset Bear*
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