

THE LOVE DIET

by Julie Britt

On the first day of my diet, I only cheated once. But I sort of made up for it by taking the stairs at work and parking far away from the entrance to J.C. Penney.

I went to the mall to look at the sexy outfits I would buy as soon as I could get rid of the ten pounds that jumped on me as soon as Bud left me for that hussy who sold him a cell phone and a roaming plan.

After trying on a bunch of overpriced clothes that were way too tight, I had one more good-riddance romp with Bud. I figured the stairs, the long walk across the parking lot in high heels that sank into the sizzling asphalt with every step and the almost-but-not-quite orgasm burned off all of the calories from that emergency hot fudge sundae. Well, maybe. I got nuts on it, which probably requires an honest-to-goodness orgasm to metabolize.

I had let Bud in to pick up some of his stuff, the odds and ends that I hadn't already thrown at him or in the Dumpster. I screamed at him a while, then he apologized a while, saying "Oh, Baby" a lot: "Oh, Baby, don't talk mean to me." "Oh, Baby, I won't do it again." "Oh, Baby, she don't mean nothing to me." On and on like that.

That got me real hot. Bud was always "Oh, Babying," when he was in the throes of passion. I couldn't help remembering that, and he looked real sincere and sorry. So before I knew it we were doing it on the floor right on top of the duffel bag full of his stuff.

I was sorry the second it was over. First I was sorry about the lack of orgasm. I mean, if you're gonna humiliate yourself and ruin a perfectly good break-up scene with sex, you ought to at least get a quiver or two.

But I was mostly sorry that I had set myself back another whole day in the getting-over-him cycle. According to my best friend, Vera, the sequence goes like this:

“No. 1. You're gonna be miserable. Accept that, Trish, eat the chocolate, wear the pants with the elastic waist and watch a lot of bad TV. This is the time to be kind to yourself.

“No. 2. You're gonna have to wait a while until you feel better. If this stage lingers, just wear the muumuu and eat more chocolate while watching Oprah. If she has a segment on diet and exercise and fitness and such crap, change the channel. You're not ready for that yet.

“No. 3. You're gonna want a man. This stage might coincide with stage one, since men and misery often travel together. But you will resist because you know you can't get one while you're wearing baggy pants stained with hot fudge and strawberry sauce. If the desire for a man hits you at stage two, watch Oprah. She often has segments about being happy with yourself even if you don't have a man. Course, that's easy for her to say. There is a certain income level you can attain that cancels out the man-repulsing flab. Oprah is there. You are a receptionist. You will never get to that level, unless you marry your boss. But forget that plan because his girlfriend is both skinny and rich, and she is allergic to chocolate. But if you get to the man-wanting stage after wallowing for a while, you are cured and ready to embark on your makeover and search for true love, again.”

According to Vera's little system, doing it with Bud after we broke up was worse than prematurely buying Oprah's fitness book and some walking shoes. So after I kicked his satisfied butt out again, I took a shower, and then took stock.

In order to get over this, I had to go all the way back to stage one, even though I was sure I was really ready for the manhunt. So I put my fat pants back on, ordered a pizza and flipped the channel to the USA Network. Halfway through a movie about some man who killed people and kept their faces in jars, I got hungry and turned the kitchen upside down until I found some M&Ms. Plain. Only 200 calories per serving; only ten servings in a bag. I decided to eat only half the bag, but I got scared at the end of the movie when the detective and the maniac were playing cat-and-mouse in that dark

warehouse. Before I knew it I had scarfed down every one of those candies. At least my hands were still clean.

The next day I decided I felt good enough to skip step two and move right into the manhunt. Course, my confidence would have been more convincing if I hadn't had to try on everything in my closet just to find one skirt that didn't choke me.

"So you'll have a salad for lunch, dressing on the side," Vera said when I called her for advice. She knows everything.

But before you know it I was back to the men-and-misery stage. Mr. Wright, my boss, called me into his office to explain something about whatever. He is so smart. I noticed he seemed to have an extra little twinkle in his eye. Maybe I was sending out I'm-available vibes. He had never smiled so much or stared at me so hard. Pretty soon I was tuning out his lecture on telephone courtesy or typing without errors or whatever it was this time. Instead I just nodded and smiled like I was paying attention when what I was really doing was checking out his crotch and wondering "Boxers or briefs or nada?"

He finally finished his boss stuff, and I was ready to make my move when out of his private bathroom came the lovely Lucy. Her hair, her expression and her twisted pantyhose all screamed: "I just had sex and you didn't, nya-nya-nya-nya-nya."

But all she said was, "Oh, hi, Trish. Putting on weight?"

Bitch.

I escaped to lunch and ordered my green salad, dressing on the side. I also ordered a cheeseburger, fries, baked beans and a slice of chocolate cheesecake. The kind with the curly things on top. And a Diet Coke.

After work, I went back to the mall. I parked right outside the door, took the elevator to level two and bought three pairs of stretchy pants and some big tops. If I was gonna be miserable, I was gonna be comfortable.

All that shopping made me hungry, so I moseyed over to the food court. Cold and Sweet had a special: a fat-free, fake-sugar frozen

yogurt brownie sundae. Whipped cream optional, fifty cents extra. Yum.

I sat down with my healthy treat and a Diet Sprite and started people-watching. You see all kinds of weird people at the mall. I don't know where they come from. I finished my dessert, discreetly licking the bottom of the dish. Just then I saw Bud coming toward me.

Oh, my. He was fine. Had on those tight jeans I like so much. And I knew what he had on underneath: nada darn thing.

"Trish, oh, baby, I'm glad I found you. Vera said you were shopping," Bud said.

So what was Vera up to? Was she confusing the stages of overcoming the loss of a love by siccing my lost love on me? Or was this some kind of test? I was so confused. I didn't know whether to be miserable, hungry or horny.

Fortunately, I didn't have to debate it for long. Bud went on and on about how he missed me and how good we were together and how that new cell phone didn't even come with a battery charger. Then he just stopped in mid-sentence and started laughing.

"Oh, baby, you look so cute sitting there all cuddly with that chocolate fudge on your nose."

Then he just leaned over and licked it right off.

"That's almost as sweet as you," he said. "Oh, baby, let's go home."

Oh, well. I guess I'll be back on step one tomorrow.

Bud took my hand and started pulling me toward the door. I almost did it. I almost went back to him. But I just couldn't stand the thought of another Oprah marathon; I'd already blown my Kleenex budget.

"No," I said, pulling my dainty hand from Bud's slimy grasp.

"Oh, baby, come on, now," he said.

"Don't you 'Oh, baby' me, Bud. It won't work this time," I said.

Then I just turned around and headed for the other exit, leaving him looking surprised and shocked and all. I almost bounced along,

in spite of all the food I'd inhaled that day, as I looked for my Chevette. Then I heard laughter and applause.

"Hey, you go, girl!" Vera shouted through the window of her pickup. "You just passed the final test: refusing to take the rat back."

"You set me up?" I asked.

"Had to, girlfriend," Vera said. "It was the only way to prove you're ready to move on to the final stage: Getting a new man."

"More Oprah?" I asked.

"Nope," Vera said, opening her door and patting the seat next to her. "Come on. We're going to get you a membership at Spa Diva. You'll be ready for some slinky polyester outfits in no time."

I climbed in, confident that Vera would put me on the right track. Thin thighs in thirty days. Buns of steel. Absolute abs. Just wait until Mr. Wright sees the new me. Bye, bye Lucy.

