

No Fat Chicks  
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## **No Fat Chicks**

*Most monsters are make-believe, but this one makes you believe...*

**Memoir By**

**Sandra Leigh Vaughan**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **Meeting the Monster**

In the beginning God created the perfect woman: then what the heck happened? Well, meet my monster, The Trickster. The nightmare started when I was thirteen and alone; I was fat and I was afraid I would never fit in. I was destined to be a fat chick and to prove it, all I had to do was look at my mom, my aunts and my grandmothers. If the women around me were any indication of my life, I was doomed. By sixth grade I had already failed at Weight Watchers once and by fourteen twice. I already knew how to

weigh and measure my food and myself. It was all about the numbers back then. At thirteen I was 5 foot 9 inches tall and one hundred and ninety eight pounds. Something had gone terribly wrong. The more the women who loved me tried to help and save me from their monsters in the mirror, the fatter I got. By seventh grade I was living proof that nightmares really do come true.

I was a teenager locked away, holding onto my stuffed unicorn, sitting alone in my bedroom listening to “Stairway to Heaven,” wondering where that stairway really went. What made things worse for me was my sister, Shelly, who was twelve years old and petite. The expectation of becoming a woman left me confused. How would I ever compete in the real world of women? My sister’s tiny ditto-pants and little tank top’s teased me; they lay all over the room giggling at my fat sweaty clothes trapped in the hamper. Everything was a constant reminder that becoming a woman was just around the corner.

It was right about that this time that I met the Trickster. The Trickster first appeared in my bathroom mirror one morning when I was fifteen. I was holding on to the sink, looking hard at myself. I could feel anger leaking out of my pores. My hands gripped the cold porcelain sink as I tried to face my own reflection.

There he was staring back at me: The Trickster. At first he was my friend; he just gave small suggestions about how to improve myself and how to try harder. It hurt of course, but I thought it was constructive criticism and I thought I needed it. Who knew how strong the voice would eventually become and how dependent I would become on its approval.

By sixteen I had learned how to stay away from the mirror. I did my make-up one eye at a time, sitting on my bed, with a tiny mirror that prevented me from seeing my whole face at once. This helped me get my make-up on without breaking into tears.

The Trickster's voice had grown beyond constructive criticism and insults, into a habit, and then into a belief. "*If you would just lose more weight you wouldn't be so ugly. You should take better care of yourself.*" I had to fix myself and that meant I had to diet, damn-it, diet! So I did.

After graduating from high school thin, I was damned if I was ever going to be fat again. Twenty pounds gone just like that, tuna and spinach were my fix. I knew what I had to do; I had to diet my ass off in order not to ever become a Fat Chick again. I moved out of the house and was on my own, working two jobs to pay the rent and put gas in the car. It was long before the annoying grown up questions like, *who am I or what do I want do when I grow up*, were introduced into my life. I was just a young chick running around chasing boys, drinking beer, and dieting, always dieting.

I was doing exactly what all uncomfortable twenty year olds do: dieting myself to happiness. I held on to my figure and stayed focused; determined and dedicated to making it. I knew one thing; I would rather die than be a Fat Chick and I would do whatever it took to be thin and happy. I knew I could be smarter and tougher than the women in my family, those mothers and grandmothers who came before me. It would be different for me, I had willpower and I was going to use it!

I had a figure and I had it all figured out! I was convinced I was unique and there was no way anyone could relate to me. The secret *real* me, the one who didn't fit in, the one who was different, like a mermaid swimming all alone in the ocean.

At twenty-five I moved to LA to begin my career in the film business and on to the little pink pills that a doctor at the local strip mall prescribed for me. All I had to do was give him thirty bucks once a week. The twenty pounds I'd lost from eating tuna and spinach had come back. I swallowed the pink pills three times a day and lost those twenty pounds again just like that. Everybody took notice and liked me instantly in Hollywood. I was making new friends, finding my way around the city, but damn-it, I was getting fat again. The pounds I had fought with the pink pills came right back. Only by now, two years later, it had doubled, turning my twenty regained pounds into forty.

I couldn't accept this so I welcomed a new fad diet into my life, Medi-Fast. Oprah and I were kicking fat's ass. She was shrinking and so was I. It was gorgeous in a glass. There were only a few problems; the dizziness, black circles under my eyes and long periods of confusion, but hell, I didn't mind. I was drowning in the compliments and glory of "*How did you do it?*" Even though my body was literally starving, my craving for acceptance was being fed daily.

Now in my kitchen I shut off the water and stared at the tempting glass full of Medi-Fast. I was stuck between the trap of staying skinny and the trap of making another promise--this time to start eating... Carefully.

While I stirred the powder I exhaled remembering the exact day I hit my perfect number on the perfect scale and was my perfect self. I had gone to the doctor's office in West Hills. She had been careful about monitoring my progress for the past three months. Every day on Medi-Fast you count! You count everything; each day you make it, each package you stir and drink down, and each time you pee. Counting on freedom, freedom

from being fat, freedom from hating yourself and freedom from confusion. You hold that small package of magic and rip it open with the promise of a new life, the one where you are a princess with infinite beauty that makes all the monsters of your mind disappear.

I sat there in the doctor's office, not fat any more, when the *fat* nurse called my name. It occurred to me, *if this is so good, why don't you lose fifty pounds*, but who cared, I was skinny! I followed her down the hall to my room where my throne awaited. The giant white scale sitting in the corner reached out to me with love and acceptance; I couldn't wait to weigh in. It was so important to know the number. Judgment Day. I stripped down to my underwear and slipped on the paper robe, wishing I could take it off too. As I stepped onto the scale, I could feel it. The nurse slid the bar down and down but I already knew it in my gut, my flat gut-- I was free.

One hundred and fifty on the nose, perfect! "*I did it!*" I squealed. The nurse reached for my arm. "We need to check your blood count. Go sit over there."

I hopped up there happy to give. I would have given a foot if it would get more weight off. She poked the hell out my arm and drew three ampoules. I had to lay back. I felt woozy. "What in the hell?"

She applied more pressure. "Sometimes our patients will do this after losing a lot of weight, it's normal."

"Normal"... I swallowed hard. "I don't like this dizzy thing."

"It probably means you need to start eating again." She put the cotton ball and tapes on my arm. "The doctor will be in a moment to talk with you." She wrapped my arm up so nothing else could spill out and then left me alone.

The doctor, a striking woman of about forty wearing make-up and high heels came in clicking. “So I hear it’s the big day for you.” She read the chart and nods to herself, as if she was saying, *I did it, another fat chick off the streets*. “Now it’s time for maintenance.”

I felt the cold steel of the table against my ass as I moved around and the robe didn’t. My arm was throbbing under the tight bandage.

“So when reintroducing food into your diet, you’re going to have to take it really slowly. I mean it, if you go straight to solids you could get sick”. She handed me a pamphlet. “For the first few weeks that means juice, soup, and vegetables steamed soft.”

I pictured me in a baby bib with mush all over my face. I nodded as she went on and on. “...and it is important to drink lots of water. It will help balance the food back into your system.” My mind rolled away, introduce me to food, hell I know food. “Now listen to me, this is important, your body is going to need time to readjust itself. If you’re constipated more than three days, take these.” She shoved a bottle my way.

I’m thinking burger and fries as I read the bottle, Stool Softener. “Okay, that sounds great,” I wanted off the hard table and out of the office. I wanted to go running down the beach naked, proving once and for all I was free.

But sitting on the kitchen counter in my underwear staring out the picture window into the garden, my stomach growling, I didn’t feel close to perfect or free. I was twenty-six and sick and I was lost. There was nothing in my refrigerator; I mean *nothing*, except for one package of soda crackers. I shuffled into the kitchen like a robot on autopilot ready to rip them open. Instead I found myself being ripped apart: the empty glass sitting on the counter next to the box of Medi-Fast demanded I not eat the crackers. I stumbled

around searching for something, not food, but something. I had trained myself to not eat no matter what; *You can't eat food* was what I told myself over and over again and that was the magic of Medi-fast and my new mantra. I pulled myself up onto the counter, thinking how proud I should be of the new discipline in my life. I was unstoppable, as long as I didn't eat.

I could feel the cold counter under my ass as I leaned back against the cabinets remembering what it was like to be a "Fat Chick," where I had come from and what I had learned so far. Everyone was so happy for me, but even with all the compliments and congratulations pouring over me, I was sinking. Of course, I smiled and acted like I finally had this thing in the bag. But alone, in the kitchen, in my bra and underwear, I was mad. I was lying to them and to myself. I didn't have this thing in the bag. After losing forty-five pounds I was sinking into a deep dark place. How was this possible? How did this happen? I thought I was smarter than this... I was in hell as I poured myself a glass of water, and the old familiar dread was there; *'What's wrong with me?'*

I had learned by an early age that all the women of my time were damned in the strangest way. In order to survive life as a Fat Chick, we had to act like it was okay, pretending, by lying our way through it. With the lies we also formed a bond; we all hated Skinny Chicks. Even though being a Skinny Chick was always our secret goal. But I wasn't a kid anymore and strangely enough I soon learned that all the skinny chicks thought they were fat chicks too.

Fat or Skinny we all shared the same ritual, The Dieting Dance. It went something like this: *good girl* by day and *liar* by night. Cheating seemed to be the rhythm of the music, dancing with the lie, sweating through the nightmares of who we wanted to be and

who we were not. At night voices tricked us into trying harder, stealing our smiles, and by morning the pillow was stained with fresh tears of shame. Hating ourselves as we tried like hell to act happy.

There seemed to be a secret club for fat chicks and everyone belonged, skinny, fat, tall, short, beautiful and ugly, it didn't matter. All you had to do was hate yourself in the morning and swear to God at night you'd try harder tomorrow. The constant need to change was like an addiction. "*What's the matter with you?*" was always right there, pounding away.

Loser if you weren't on a diet and loser if you had to diet. Either way we couldn't stop the compulsion to do something about ourselves. Beating on ourselves was all we knew and we believed it would make us stronger. A fat chick never denies another one access back into the club; in fact we encourage it, that's the game. Never being satisfied with yourself is how we all earn lifetime membership in the club, and where all Fat Chicks go-crazy. This is where the merry-go-round spins faster and faster as we drag ourselves around; dieting, wishing, wanting, and waiting for our lives to finally begin.

I thought it was just a part of being a woman, part of the rules.

I filled the glass with tap water watching myself rip open the package of magic white powder while promising I would change tomorrow: *I will start eating again, I promise.*

I just wanted to be left alone and to fill the glass with magic potion that would *keep* me skinny. I didn't want to think, I wanted to be thin so I could be free.

What was wrong with that? The water was still pouring into the sink as I sat on the counter trying to drown out the nightmare of me.



The food was too much; I could feel it making me fat. I couldn't digest a thing, not food or reality. It was like making a deal with the devil every time I threw up. I promised myself I would stop drinking magic potion and eat again tomorrow.

The last thing I wanted was a membership in the bulimic and anorexic club; that was the worst club of them all. People die in that club. And now I was barefoot and sitting in my underwear, lost in my own kitchen, half dressed and half crazy. My hair was dull and not brushed. Brushing my hair didn't feel the same; it was thinner and falling out. My breath stank and my bra was empty. I stirred the powder around and around in the glass, smelling the sickening sweet chemical concoction as I put it to my lips. I drank every last drop and slammed the glass down on the counter.

*That's right, tomorrow you can eat.* It was my old friend from the dirty laundry hamper whispering sweet nothings in my ear. The Trickster jumped out of nowhere and plopped next to me on the kitchen counter like we were best friends. I had no idea where to go from here. I had to keep it together, and keep the pounds off. I promised myself I would finally get it right this time. But the dull headache saying *stop it* and the Trickster pounding back harder, *You've done it*, made it impossible to choose. I said nothing while he applauded my insanity. I dangled my feet over the edge, kicking the cabinet door with both heels.

Back and forth I had struggled for a month, eat or not eat, throw up or not throw up. I would have a couple of good days and then feel bloated and fat. I'd freak out, rip open my stash of Medi-Fast and take five long gulps slamming down the empty glass. My intake mostly consisted of soup, chicken, apples and Wasa crackers with tuna. Sadly,

it all felt like cheating. But I kept trying over and over again to stop depending on the packages and eat food.

*That's right, don't eat. You're looking so good. What are you thinking?* It spoke again. I was scared to be alone with that voice. It just would not shut up.

The Trickster usually only came around when I was fat. I wasn't fat anymore. But lately, he'd been coming around again. The voice was strong, commanding, and perfect; part shape-shifter and part bully. It was like little pieces of debris flying around in my mind that formed a funnel like-tornado, full of hate, doubt, and fear. Why was it here now, rattling me? I thought being skinny would finally kill the The Trickster...

I stopped kicking my heels and waited, watching the second hand tick, my toes playing with the cabinet handles. *Will this be the day you pull it together or not? Are you going to eat like a normal person?* Sanity showed up for a brief moment, *I'll eat. I promise.* I didn't mean it.

*I'm insecure about everything, because...I'm never going to look in the mirror and see the blond, blue-eyed girl. That is my idea of what I'd like to look like.*

*Cher*