Seven Things I Would Tell Eleven-year-old Me

by
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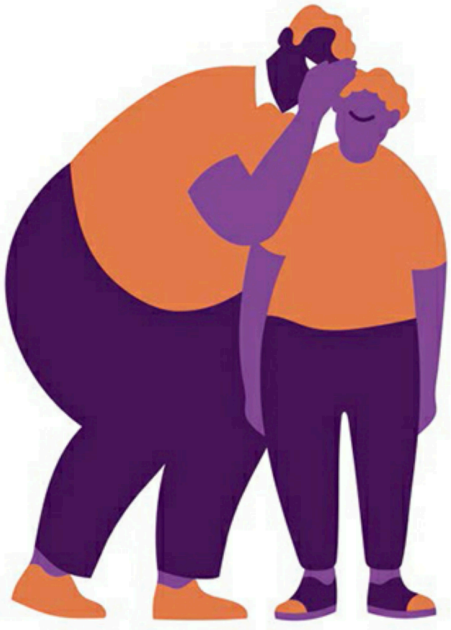

ONE

You're fat.
Eres gordo.
Not "llenito" or "big-boned."
Fat.

Y no *estás* gordo,
eres gordo.
Note the verb: "eres,"
not "estás."
This fatness is not
temporary, Güero.

It's part of who you are:
a short, fat, half-Chicano,
half-white kid
with a button nose and
red hair that's already going brown.

TWO

But, man,
here's the thing—
that's totally cool.
(Wait, this is the '80s . . .
how did we say it?)
Rad. Tubular. Something.

Verás, Güerito—
you're also brilliant
and kind and cute.

Sure, I'm you and all,
hardly objective,
but others will tell you, too.
Yes, even girls.

Wait till you see your IQ,
Wait till you have learned
Your seventh language,
Wait till you get that doctorate!

The nerdiness you're starting to hate
that you want to shrug off
like a serpent's skin
along with all that fat?
Oh, dear boy,
it makes you wonderful.

Come. Come on, carajo.
Look in that mirror.
How can you call this ugly?
Your brown-orange eyes
Those dimples That wavy hair.

You are beautiful.

THREE

Stop hating on Mexican culture.
There's nothing wrong
with your ancestors' food.

You're a mestizo kid
with genes from Europe
and Mesoamerica.
So's our family cuisine.

And it's delicious.
Steamy and rich with love . . .
your abuela's wrinkled hands
kneading the masa,
your father rolling out
his crooked tortillas.

Sure, your tíos call you gordo

(well, one ironic tía calls you flaco)
but look past the surface meaning,
see their intentions.

You are their favorite,
their gentle bookworm,
the first one to see college
as his destiny.

FOUR

I know what you—what *we*—
have planned.
It's bad. It's a mistake.
It's going to scar us.

Your body doesn't want to starve.
When we stop eating,
we're going to mess it up.
We're going to pay the price
of this fleeting skinniness
for a long time.

Oh, dear child,
get your fingers out of your mouth!
Stop! Stop!
If only I could stop you . . .

FIVE

Here's the secret
you haven't considered:
Skinny kids are unhappy, too.
Sometimes. Just like you.

Skinny kids can also feel out of place.
Their parents divorce.
Their dads leave.
They weep
alone
just
like
us.

Yes, I know. Society smiles on them.
No one looks at them
with those judging eyes.
But trust me,
a day will come
when skinny folks
will look with admiration
upon your fat frame . . .

Because they'll see it all at last,
everything you truly are—
mind, body, and soul.

SIX

Even if you weren't
supersmart and
cute like a Hobbit prince
and oh, so caring,
so ready to help, so eager
to take the weak in your arms
and carry them as far as you can . . .

You would still be worthy of love.

You are a human being,
unique and wonderful,
unlike anything that has existed
or ever will. Fat? Yes. In body
and in soul, brimming . . .

You overflow with stardust.

There is love in the world for you.

It surrounds you now. Don't you see it?
Intangible lines like a web
spread from the hearts of cousins
and tíos and abuelos and friends
and wrap you up so gently
that you barely feel
the warm gossamer
of their love.

SEVEN

I make you a solemn promise:
It gets easier.

You're going to force
thinness on that flesh,
but it knows what it wants
to be. You will be fat again.

Fat. And older. And wiser.
With a loving wife
and brilliant children.

They will throw
their arms around
your belly and whisper
I love you.

You will wear your fat
with the pride it deserves
because it is a comfort,
a warm, soft cushion
of empathy
of compassion.

You will cradle the sadness
that threatens to crack
your loved ones
like it almost broke us

And you . . . we . . .

I

I take that sorrow into my fat form
and make it fade.