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Miss Evelyn Portobello sat on her new bluejean sofa, munching lemon chiffons and stroking her Guenevere with great aplomb. The orange Pomeranian panted heavily beneath the cushy palm, barking now and again at the over-large high-definition plasma television which hung on the paneled wall of the double-wide.

It was mid-afternoon and Evelyn was watching her favorite reality show, *Big Boppers*. The program featured two teams of four morbidly obese corporate executives vying to shed the most poundage. The results were officially tabu-

lated at the end of each program by a sophisticated ton-weight scale. *Boppers* had long been one of Evelyn's secret pleasures. It made her laugh *and* cry.

On-screen a man in an immaculate suit named Maxwell Moe was being ushered down the red carpet of the candle-lit cathedral that was the show's set-piece. The CEO, as yet unable to walk, required the assistance of a gold-plated forklift. He was deposited, pallet and all, onto the enormous scale. Directly opposite, at an ornate mahogany desk, sat a skeletal man named Dr. Jamison Dyk with his esteemed colleagues: supermodel turned hydro-therapist Kimmy Klum, and master drill-sergeant Gunnar Stonegrimson, whose Scandinavian accent and chiseled countenance always sent the goose-flesh dribbling down Evelyn's baby-soft thighs.

"Now then, Mr. Moe," Dr. Dyk was saying, a mischievous smile creeping into his cheeks. His wide forehead and under-sized chin, covered as it was by a manicured goatee, left one wondering if his mother had had special relations with the Devil himself. "As you know," the doctor continued, "we set your challenge this week at a *mere* two pounds." And here the camera closed in on Dyk as he seductively fondled his chin. "How do you think you *fared*, Mr. Moe?"

A kind of aural glow (attributed solely to an accumulation of sweat) spread over the businessman's massive jowls, and he simply nodded an affirmative to Dyk and company.

“Well then, *big bopper*, let’s find out!” the doctor exclaimed. “Initiate the scales!” The stage suddenly illuminated like some futuristic landing-pad and the camera slowly closed in on CEO Moe’s perspiring face.

And then, just as Evelyn expected, the show cut to commercial. She growled, irritated by the disruption and the fact that she would have *to wait*.

“They *always* do that,” she whined, lifting Guenevere before her eyes. The dog’s snout was running profusely and its dark eyes regarded her mistress as if she were a bowl of dog chow. “Oh, Guen,” Evelyn cooed. “I’d be an absolute mess without you. You *anchor* me. You—”

A new commercial appeared, and with it a familiar voice.

Evelyn dropped Guenevere onto her lap. She began wringing her hands, daring the figure in the commercial to step forth and thus into her mighty death-grip. It was none other than Tiny Lizzel (if that was actually his *real* name), self-styled guru of the *Magic Morel Weight Loss System*.

It was the same commercial to which Evelyn had fallen prey, in a moment of weakness, nearly six months previous. In that fateful moment she had frantically dialed the toll-free number and ordered, but subsequently never received, the specified “Magic Morel Shake Mix” which Mr. Lizzel (and various paid actors) guaranteed would, if followed correctly, *shed the pounds*.

Evelyn had repeatedly phoned and written letters, without success, to Lizzel Enterprises, which was supposedly located in Panacea, Florida. By googling at the local library, Evelyn had discovered that this tiny hamlet was not too far from Tallahassee, where her younger sister, Mervyn Licorish, now lived comfortably as a man.

“Hey, Jere!” Evelyn yelled, throwing her voice to the back room where her boyfriend of seventeen years, Jeremy Toboggan, could be heard snoring. He worked second-shift at the Waugh-Waugh vault factory, but that was no excuse. He should have been up by now. Evelyn released Guenevere from her lap, with the express intent of having the pooch annoy Jere into wakefulness. “Go get him, sweetie.”

On-screen the diminutively buff Tiny Lizzel moved cautiously through an artificial-looking jungle landscape, as though in search of some fantastic species of snake or crocodile. It would be an understatement to say that the program was being filmed in *cinema verité*, for the camera stumbled drunkenly along, catching mostly images of the sky and grotesque close-ups of Tiny’s well-defined but hairless legs.

Evelyn sneered and at once imagined herself pursuing Tiny Lizzel through this fabricated bush, ready to pounce on the bronze-skinned shyster and tear him limb from limb as she might a broasted chicken. On-screen Tiny suddenly came to a halt, motioning for the camera to make its way to

an opening he had formed in a wall of foliage.

“Ah, here’s what we’ve been longing to find,” the guru said. “And it appears to be the *morel load*.” He could hardly contain his excitement as he moved into the open expanse where the mushrooms rose from the soil like some crazed phallic rug. “Ah, the precious *Morchella*,” he whispered, as if the morels might chance hear his voice and flee. “Look at these beauties, just waiting to help you *shed the pounds*.”

The next scene carried with it the absurd dislocation experienced in dreams. All at once an overweight woman burst into the clearing on all fours, attacking the morels like a veritable Poland-China hog, grunting and tossing her head. In a series of cheap film overlays (similar to those employed in low budget horror films wherein the unfortunate protagonist transforms into a feral beast) the woman actually seemed to grow thinner. When she was finally able to lift herself to a standing position she resembled nothing less than one of the airbrushed creatures featured on the cover of *Maxim* magazine. During this remarkable metamorphosis the woman’s sweatpants had somehow shrunk into a radiant pink bikini.

The newly-formed woman now approached Tiny Lizzel, who at present was quivering with delight, and threw a seductive arm around the guru’s thick neck, the aorta of which was pumping orgasmically. She faced the camera and Tiny Lizzel followed suit, showcasing a broad smile to his viewing

audience. There was a noticeable bulge in his chinos. “Now *that’s* what I call results!”

The screen then cut to an overlarge 800-number (which incorporated curved morels for each digit), with a voice-over by Tiny Lizzel: “Life can once again be *grand* with these tasty morels, infused as they are with a fat-negating special formula that I have spent the last five years perfecting. Don’t delay! Eight easy payments of \$19.95. AND, if you call within the next *thirty seconds* I’ll slash this price in half *and* throw in a Magic Morel bobble-head for good measure.”

Just then Guenevere returned with a somewhat irritated Toboggan in tow. The Pomeranian leapt back into Evelyn’s lap, circling and yapping like some deranged whirling dervish. Her snout was covered with cream filling.

“Oh, Jere,” Evelyn complained, “you didn’t go and give her a twink, did you?” Jeremy blushed and scratched a wad of sleep from his eye. He was wearing a pair of zebra-patterned Zubas and an undersized purple t-shirt which put on display his anemic midriff.

“Well, what is it, Ev?”

“Get the Plurabelle, would you?”

Jeremy nodded sleepily, turning on his bare heels and shuffling down the lone hallway of the double-wide. Evelyn raised Guenevere once again to eye-level. The poor thing shivered and snapped, driven insane by the sugary gift which

Jeremy had bestowed.

“Guen!” Evelyn barked. “You settle down now or I’ll have you *shipped* next door.” Guenevere immediately went slack, knowing that it would be in her best interest to do so. *Next door* equalled neighbors equalled despair. “That’s better,” Evelyn said, returning the Pomeranian to her lap. The dog fell into a death-like trance, taking no chances whatsoever.

Just then Jeremy returned with the typewriter, or “Plurabelle” as it had come to be known. It was in fact a mint 1950s Olympia SM3, which was painted a glossy pink. It had once belonged to Evelyn’s eccentric and now deceased aunt, who once wrote under the *nom de plume* Anna Livia Plurabelle. This aunt had made a fortune writing highly successful self-help books, and in fact had sold nearly six million copies of *Being & Boing!* (which was still marketed as “the only guide to contentment you will ever need”). When “Plurabelle” passed away she not only bequeathed the SM3 to her favorite niece but a sizable inheritance as well.

“Set Plurabelle here, Jere,” Evelyn said, pushing the plate of lemon chiffons to the farthest corner of the coffee table. Jeremy, well trained, had already positioned a sheet of paper into the machine. Evelyn handed Guenevere over to Jeremy, and the salivating pom-pom immediately began to fixate on his chocolate-brown eyes. Evelyn hovered over the SM3 and began to compose yet another letter to Lizzel Enterprises,

plunking one thick digit after another.

Dear Mr. Lizzel, this being my third request....

Before she could finish the first sentence Evelyn felt an intense pain in her calf. She sighed at her varicose vein, which bore an uncanny resemblance to a bolt of lightning.

The last time the blemish had acted up was the day Mount St. Helens had blown its top, and that was *years* ago. Something eventful, Evelyn was sure, would soon occur.

She returned her attention to *Big Boppers* and came fairly close to pitching the SM3 at the plasma screen shortly after the spritely announcer exclaimed: “Stay tuned as the Giant Calibrated Scale determines this week’s winning team!”