

[Home](#)

[Spring 2006](#)

[Winter 2006](#)

[Autumn 2005](#)

[Summer 2005](#)

[Spring 2005](#)

[Autumn/Winter  
2005](#)

[Summer 2004](#)

[Winter 2004](#)

[Summer 2003](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[SNR's Writers](#)

[Mail](#)



So in walks this fat chick. This one couldn't even pass for chubby. She's plodding along, her sandals thwopping against the linoleum. It's Monday morning and the fans over the checkout lines are whirring and there's a plastic bag scuttling across the floor. She negotiates the aisles from the donut wall to the frozen meat bank; thwops thwop closer and then thwop away. Every so often they stop, and all you hear are the lights buzz, the fan whir, and the plastic bag scuttle.

"Hey, Sponge!" I call over two empty checkout lines.

"What the hell you want?" he calls back.

The guy's a real mess. It's probably why we call him Sponge. He's hunched over the tabloid rack and knee-deep in the Mary-Kate Olsen anorexia saga. He probably didn't even feel the whale flop through the door.

"You ever seen a fat chick alone before?" I say.

He crinkles up the tabloid, stuffs it into his vest pocket, turns and sticks a thumbnail between two lower teeth. It's what he does when he's done looking busy.

"Whaddya mean?" he says.

"Like, you ever seen a fat chick witout a buncha otha chicks around her?"

"Nah-uh. It's gravity. Okay, so here's the hippo," he says and traces an orb in the air with both his hands. "It's just chillin'." Then he sets the orb on the conveyor belt and plucks six Snickers bars from the candy shelf. "And here's all the other chicks." Then he slides all the bars toward the invisible ball and says, "Voilà, gravity."

Then I throw a Snickers from my aisle at his lumpy paunch, and it clacks on the floor behind his register. "Where are all of your chicks, then?"

His stubby hands paw his breadbasket. “No such thing as a fat *man*.” He crouches down to pick up the Snickers and when he stands his stumpy self back up, he’s face-to-face with the sea cow.

He double-takes. I’ve never seen his eyes bulge that far for anything less than the promise of Crisco-dipped hot dogs. He’s lucky the Kool-Aid Manness is flipping through Mary-Kate Olsen. Then, to no one in particular, she mutters, “Still looks kinda big.”

I sputter. She doesn’t hear, or at least she doesn’t turn or anything—just drops a box of Smacks and a quart of milk on Sponge’s conveyor belt. He rings her up in a silence that’s stretching like a balloon. He keeps looking over at the Snickers bars left on the belt. His cheeks round like tomatoes. He hands her her change real slow, ahems, and says all professional-like, “Would you like the Snickerses for here or to go?”

I can’t hold it in. I’m crying. Sponge doubles over on the conveyor belt, fist pounding, seizing. Humpty collects her cereal supplies and thwops out. Then Big Lars’s door slams and we hear shoe patter in dairy. We’re both still misty-eyed when he gets over to us, so we don’t even bother looking at him.

“What’d you crankheads do this time?”

Sponge all too willingly volunteers, “We made the Bucket O’Thighs cry.” Our rioting renews.

“I can’t believe I pay your lard ass.”

**T**he funny thing is Big Lars isn’t even big. There isn’t a thing big on him, except for his big old schnoz and Frisbee-sized glasses.

“We swear we didn’t know she didn’t want the Snickerseses, sir,” I chime in.

“I’ve had enough of your shit,” says Big Mad Lars. “Take off that apron. You’re done here.”

Sponge lolls about on the belt. “Larsey,” he guffaws, “you’re too much.”

Big Mad Lars is shaking. He wipes his beak, adjusts his glasses, and then lays down the law, “And *you’re* about to lose your SmartShop card.”

Sponge’s face goes stolid. He slowly raises himself from the belt and hooks Big Lars’s nostril with his finger. “Now you just wait one goddamn minute,” he says as he walks out from behind the belt. “No man, but no man, comes between me and Super-Saver Tuesday.”

Now he’s got Larsey back up against the next aisle over. His slick shoes slip on the free roaming plastic bag and he lands with his back on register and the drawer pops open with a ching. He releases Big Lars go and snuffs, “Don’t you forget it.” He unties his apron and lets it fall to the floor. He drops his nametag on top of the heap and the “Sponge” lands face up. While Big Lars is patting his nose to find some trace of blood, I slip out of my apron, toss it on the floor, and scuttle out after Sponge.

It’s hot as balls outside. Sponge is just outside the automatic door, holding it open, looking out at the parking lot with a hand over his eyes. He scratches himself. Then

he flops over onto a row of shopping carts in the shadow of the awning and his pudgy paw plops over his face. He chuckles at something in his head.

“Ha,” I break the summer drone. “That was classic.”

“Hm,” says a satisfied Sponge. “Yeah...”

“It’s one of those stories that should be, like, required high school reading.”

“Heh. That’d be a,” and from somewhere buried in his throat, “crock.”

“Yeah,” I agree. “A crock.”

Sponge lets his other hand fall over the side of the cart and hang in the air. I stand by with my fingers poking at the lint balls clinging to the inside seam of my hand-me-down jean pockets.

“You know, Sam,” he pipes up. “You’re okay.”

Don’t exactly know what to make of it. I just stare out into the parking lot through squished eyes and try to clump the lint into a single massive ball inside those pockets. “Excuse me, there,” someone grumbles behind me.

I sidle aside and watch a middle-aged man bent over his cart wheel past. And the friendly plastic bag is tagging along behind.

“I’m starved,” Sponge declares and hoists himself upright on the carts. “Let’s get some grub.”

So we walk out of the parking lot to find somewhere to get something to eat.

**Matthew Smith**, a rising Harvard junior, writes for the *Harvard Book Review* and will cut out of Cambridge to study at Italy's Universita di Ferrara this fall. For the past two years, he has freelanced for and twice interned with *Time* magazine, penning two article last summer. A Jaromir Ledecy Fellowship scholar, he will intern for *Time* in London. He has studied fiction with James Wood, creative fiction-writing with Hamaica Kincaid, and screenwriting with Andrew Arthur. He recently placed second in a business proposal competition for providing private semi-independent housing for the mentally disabled and invites correspondence from those interested in the area <mssmith@fas.harvard.edu>.

**Copyright 2006, Matthew Smith.** This work is protected under the U.S. copyright laws. It may not be reproduced, reprinted, reused, or altered without the expressed written permission of the author.