



1-1-2016

# A Heavy Burden

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## Recommended Citation

Yung, Sarah (2016) "A Heavy Burden," *Calliope*: Vol. 47 , Article 8.  
Available at: <http://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/calliope/vol47/iss1/8>

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## A HEAVY BURDEN

SARAH YUNG

The lip of her stomach spills out and over the waistband. It hangs there, pasty and lumpy and accusatory, a tangible testament that her latest “revolutionary” lifestyle change has, yet again, not been particularly effective.

Beneath her skittish fingers, the stretch marks that map the rolls and hills of her body tremble, expanding like fault lines, like coffee stains, across her sallow skin.

She prods at the generous pillow of lard encasing her hips.

*If you dug down about five more inches, you could almost excavate*

*my hipbones*, she thinks, and the bitterness spreads through her very being until she can almost taste it settling on her tongue: heavy, and gritty, and inky, a flavor she is all too familiar with, thank you very much.

She settles herself down gingerly onto the plush velvet stool, shifting to accommodate her excess. Smoothing the puckered fabric of the waistband under her thumb, she bites her lip, deep in thought. She can reinvigorate her diet tomorrow—cut out a couple hundred more calories no problem, no more sugar or gluten or dairy, map out a more strenuous exercise

schedule somewhere in there, too—but for now, maybe her anxieties will be soothed, at least for a short while, by squeezing into a smaller size.

*Size is just a number*, she scolds herself, reciting from the healthy lifestyle magazine she’d flipped through in line at the grocery store. She attempts to block the image of the fit models on the cover from her mind’s eye in vain.

*It doesn’t matter what size you wear as long as you’re comfortable in your own skin. Size doesn’t matter. Size is just a number. You cannot predicate your sense of*

*self on the relative growth and shrinkage of your body. Your body is a vessel. Your body, a temple.* Nevertheless, she cracks open the dressing room door, beckoning the retail assistant close with one pink sausage finger. (Even the fingers obese, the skin bloating around small rounded shells of fingernails.) The assistant is tall and blonde and willowy—the kind of girl who looks like she could parade around naked under these damning fluorescent retail lights and still appear a supermodel—and she approaches in deliberate, mincing steps.

And there it is again, that familiar look. She can see it in the sales

associate's eyes: the initial reel of revulsion, the hint of sympathy curling instantaneously around her perfect, full mouth—but she doesn't need this retail worker's sympathy. What she needs is a smaller size. She needs the fleeting sensation of satisfaction that comes with the laboriousness, the sore fingertips, with straining to button something just out of reach. To transform the body. To reshape the vessel.

She tilts her double chin up and clears her throat, mustering up the last of her dignity as the assistant's eyes flit down toward her thighs.

"Can you get me a size smaller than these? They're a little... they don't fit properly around the waist."

Her throat burns in shame as the sales associate's artfully arched eyebrows rise ever so slightly. The associate purses her lips and then swallows before speaking, her swanlike neck bobbing with the effort.

"I'm sorry, miss, but we don't carry anything smaller than a 00."