THE FAT WOMAN

He was really, really fat. The children next door called her sek Bab (Snarr, hngorr, o, mek bab, makan banyak sangat ati gila bab). Sometimes they called her Jabba the Hutt, after the obese glutton of a villian in the Steven Spielberg movie, Return of the Jedi.” She definitely was not a pretty sight.

Her chin bore triplets. One slab of a chin, and another below another blob of a chin. She did not have a jaw. Her profile looked like it had three rounded steps hanging upside-down which ended at the top of her chest. For a face unmassed in fat, she had round eyes. A face like that should only have two dots in it, like a pig, but it had eyes instead. Her physical self was totally unbalanced. It was disconcerting to look at her.

This woman had thin and wet lips. Because of the flesh that surrounded that pale fish-flesh lips, no one could tell whether her mouth turned up or down or simply did not do either. All the grandmothers in the neighbourhood told their grandchildren, “... that girl there, she got the loosest lips in town... she was born with dung in her mouth.” She did not speak much to anyone but she knew she could swear any man out of his sarong. She could “puki” this, “pantat” that, she could “asshole” any man, woman, child or animal out of his, her or its asshole.

Yet, once upon a time, her lips had uttered honey-words. She once had said to Aziz that his eyes shone like the Christmas lights she had seen on television. She had confessed to Aleng that she loved him very much. Then, she touched a man’s mouth for the first time. And then her lips met Chong’s cushions, vacuumed Mir’s tongue, oh her lips greeted a lot of people.

Her stomach jutted out like a watermelon, under the curtain of her mouldy, grey, faded flower print kaftan. Her front view projected three shapes. Two big floppy long balloons next to each other rested on top of a beach ball. The
little boys next door were fascinated; they always asked their mother, "Mak, Mak, why does that lady have huge tetek and Mak has small tetek?" Slap, slap, the boys cried and stared at the fat neighbour again.

Her stomach was filled with decay. Her heart did not have any more space for new revenge, bad blood and hatred. So now what had always been there resided in her deepest pit. Everyday they stirred, especially so when she got restless or angry. They had been there so long that they could never be vented, ever. The last time she spat them out, she was beaten, beaten by Din. Din kept seeing her sister (Jalang) so she screwed him up. Except that her face got more screwed up. Three teeth gone, a bloody nose and sight that had become half of what she should be seeing.

Her stomach also knew life. Its womb had eight children. Not all together, but one after a rape, one after an accident, one with no prophylactics and others because she got tired of caring. The first one ended in a dustbin because it was a dirty thing, it had to go. The second came out with a hanger. The others through a backstreet doctor and the last fell out of her as she sat on the toilet.

She never wore a bra. They were too expensive and anyway they didn’t fit her breasts properly. When they were twenty years old, they were firm. All the boys came out to play with them everyday. Her breasts were sagging like old monkeys’ breasts now, all shrivelled like prunes and wasting away. Old teeth stains and bruises were stamped here, there.

Her breasts hid a heart. Not that it did not care, love, not that it did not hate - it had just stopped feeling. It was not cold. It was just there, like a chunk of clay. She felt a lot before and she cried like the monsoons and howled like the storm-wind. So she did not allow herself to care any longer. She knew she had to stop feeling. She had to be that way because there was no way to deal with life if one felt.

III

If the wind had lifted her kaftan up, anyone who saw her legs would not be aroused. Legs were sensual vines meant to wrap men, but her legs were ugly. See them as semi-hard plasticine, rolled and made big, like out-of-shape sausages. The skin covering her cellulite and wastes tried very hard to stretch itself over the shameful sight.
Perched on the misshapened fleshy pillars was her 
*buntut*. Her backside was lumpy, like a sack filled with porridge. It itched a lot, and many times when she scratched herself with dirt-filled nails, her skin would flake off, a fine power rising and dropping to the floor. She had very dry skin.

If her thighs could talk, they would tell any person listening stories. Of how they got irritated with the floppy fringe their mistress had underneath her watermelon belly. Or of how she was bestowed with the name "Virgin Killer" - she took all the boys in the neighbourhood to her room and slept with them. Her legs would curl themselves up the boys' *buntuts* while they finished whatever they had to do. They left their boy in her woman and left her as men.

But of course no one ever saw her legs. Nobody particularly wanted to, anyway.

IV

She was standing next to a gas stove. The stove had curry streaks running by its side. It looked like it was crying muddy tears. Spinach, lentil and carrots dandruffed the top of the stove.

She used it to cook for herself only. She cooked whatever she found in the refrigerator. She threw whatever she had into her sole pot. She ate the food right out of the pot. The pot was black, after many years of cooking and boiling. It was the only clean utensil she had. “Food must be clean.” The stove only knew her. It did not know of a man’s presence or cooking dinner for two. It did not know, meet or observe romance. All it did was to serve its function: to help her cook and eat.

The stove and her were enveloped by a swatch of darkness. It was late evening. There was no light, save for a thin ray of sunshine that surprised its way in through a slit in the curtained window. You could not see anything except for her fatness and the stove. She ate on her bed. The square room had no table or chair. The refrigerator was in her room too, in case she got hungry.

So she was there, the fat woman, facing the wall. Next to her was that stove. Between them, a long streak of light. The grey and faded flower print kaftan provided some colour. Darkness shaped itself softly around them.
That day, she heard a song liltting from the apartment above. "Geylang, si-paku geylang..." She remembered it from her childhood days. She could actually see herself dancing to the song, a long time ago when she was four.

Her feet lumbered to the left. Then to the right. She broke wind, a loud staccato smelly whistle not keeping in time to the song she was dancing to.

"Marilah, marilah pulang..." She stopped remembering. She stopped moving. She went to the stove and thought, she had not danced for a long time.

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