**Life of Haley**  
by Bobo the Hobo

**1 | Life with Mom**

Even if it hadn't technically been "her room" since high school, Haley hadn't once woken up with that hazy sense of unease that one got when sleeping in an unfamiliar place. If anything, she had spent more mornings back at her apartment in Charleston shaking off the feeling that she didn't quite belong there. For the past two weeks, Haley had slept like a baby and awoken contentedly in her fluffy pink comforter and her washed cotton sheets. She hadn't slept as well in the two years that she'd been away than she had in the two weeks since she'd moved back home.

"Haley!" Came a familiar cry from downstairs, "Breakfast is ready!"

She would never get tired of hearing those words. Living on her own had been hell. Exciting at times, but mostly hell. She hadn't eaten an honest, solid breakfast in years. Mostly because she was always waking up early to go to her crappy job. Most days, she wouldn't eat until noon. And it wasn't like she had the money to go out and eat all the time—rent was expensive!

Even if she would have much rather slept her day away, Haley couldn't resist the siren song of a home-cooked meal. The smoky smell of bacon and the sizzling of eggs on the pan made her mouth wet. She smacked her lips appreciatively and lumbered down the hallway as if in a trance.

Haley West had changed since she last lived at home.

When she had left she was a high school graduate, eager to live life by her own rules. Stay out as late as she wanted, hang out with her friends, and just be what she perceived as an adult. But that kind of lifestyle was expensive, and couldn't be sustained for long! Especially not without a college degree. So, she partied her way through the first few months before her roommate flaked out on her. Then she had to get another job. Then her other roommate had bailed. Her boyfriend broke up with her, so there went his $100 contribution. Then she found some new roommates on Reddit, but they were creepy. Then another one, but they didn't get along with the creepy one so they moved out... honestly, it hadn't been an easy time.

Now she was older, taller. A little taller, anyway. Her hair was its natural color again and she had started dressing like an adult. No more expensive band t-shirts, but she was still stylish. Usually. Not now, of course. Haley's cute little bob was curly and uncontrollable from all the deep snuggling she'd done into her pillow. Her eyes still had sleep in them, and she hadn't done her makeup yet.

But hey, it wasn't like her mom cared.

"There she is—my little college student!" Haley's mom practically cooed like a dove as her daughter dragged herself through the kitchen, "How'd you sleep?"

"Pretty good." Haley smacked her lips, "What time is it—eight, nine?"

"More like ten thirty." The older woman said with a pat of her precious daughter's cheek, "I figured you needed to get your rest."

"Mom, I told you I was going to try to get a job today." Haley exhaled nasally, "I asked you to wake me up super early."

"And I told you I don't even want to hear the word "job" until you're sure you can handle the pressures of being in college." Mrs. West said with a stern, but gentle tone, "Now sit. I made your favorites."

Without any further hesitation, Haley sat.

Before her laid the same spread that had greeted her every morning since she had told her mother that she wanted to move back in. Bacon, eggs, pancakes, sausage, and biscuits straight from the tube. There used to be muffins, but there were only so many to a box. After two years of living off of ramen noodles, sandwiches, and dollar menu items, Haley wasn't exactly one to complain. Even after two weeks, she hadn't said so much as a word against the prodigal daughter treatment.

Picking up her fork and starting to saw into her pancakes, Haley was happy to oblige her mother's newfound appreciation for having her around.

"You want some syrup?" Her mom asked, touching the table slightly, "Let me get you some syrup. You want the blueberry kind, right?"

"Heck yeah." Haley chuckled, "Lay it on me, mama."

Haley watched the sticky blue sweetener flow from the bottle like water from a pitcher and onto her fluffy flapjacks. Her mom had started her off with a stack of two every morning ever since she had gotten back, but today's plate was a little taller than usual.

"Hey, what's with the extra story on my pancake platter?" Haley asked, picking up where she left off

"Well, you kept asking for seconds." Her mother placed the bottle of syrup back in the cabinet, "I figured that it'd save time to just give you another pancake—I'm a mother, I notice things."

Haley bit into her first forkful of pancake—three layers of fluffy flapjack coated in blue sticky goo. She gnashed and chewed her mouthful, before noticing something warm between each layer.

"Did you put butter between all my pancakes?" Haley asked with a wry smile and half a mouth full of dough

"Just how you like them." Mrs. West winked, "I figured you deserved a special treat since you start your first day of college tomorrow."

"It's not that big a deal." The bobbed brunette rolled her eyes dismissively, "I'm just going for a business degree. Tara's already got hers."

"And she would have gotten hers faster if she was here instead of living on campus." Mrs. West sniffed, "Living off ramen noodles and the cafeteria. I'm a mother, Haley. And all I want to do is take care of my girls—as long as you live with me, I'll make sure you have everything you need to live a happy, comfortable life."

"If that's the case, do you think you could slide me some more pancakes?" Haley pointed over to the oven eye with her fork, "I don't know what you did different this time, but these are great."

"Extra love." Mrs. West said matter-of-factly, "Or... extra butter. I'm not sure."

"Definitely the butter." Haley said, cheeks bulging.

**2 | All You do is Eat in College**

Haley had heard that going from high school to college was a rough transition. But as it turned out, having a two-year gap between one education to the next had made things even more rocky for her. In the span of two years, she'd forgotten most of the stuff that was covered in her Gen. Ed. courses in favor of things like how to calculate sales tax, how much her employee discount covered at her old job, and exactly how many times they could eat out on the dollar menu without going broke. Haley was spending most of her time at the USC Upstate campus relearning her introductory math skills, and realizing that the piddly papers she'd written in high school couldn't hold a candle to the ten-page monsters that her professors expected from her now.   
  
Luckily, she wasn't entirely alone in her endeavors.  
  
"Hey, we're still good for our study sesh after Bio, right?" A smaller shape bounded up towards her as she exited the Humanities building.   
  
Courtney Caldwell was a familiar face, at least. They'd gone to school together back at Boiling Springs High (go Bulldogs!). She was in the grade below Haley, and they'd hung around the same group of friends. It was only by luck that Courtney had decided to take a year off herself, or she'd have been long done with the basic courses that Haley really needed her help with. She was shorter, with a fuller figure than Haley's. She had sandy brown hair in a boyish cut.   
  
"Definitely." Haley shifted her backpack, "Wanna do Big Daddy's again?"   
  
"Sure, I'll pay this time."   
  
They'd been coming to Big Daddy's since they were old enough to drive. After-Church dinners and impromptu lunches after classes were all held at Inman's one and only diner; a mishmash of eighties, nineties, and early naughties' sci-fi and NASCAR memorabilia that belied the best chili cheeseburger that you could find in the tri-county area. Haley hadn't been in since she'd been home until Courtney suggested it a few weeks back, but after a heaping helping of bacon cheese fries she'd begun remembering why she'd loved this place...   
  
"Whoa there. Hold up. *Two* patties? On *one* burger?" Courtney speared a stack of fries with her fork, "Madness."   
  
"It's really good." Haley took a wide-open bite from her burger. Chili oozed from beneath the bun and onto the wax paper it'd been served on, "Hey, can I steal some fries?"   
  
"Just order your own." Courtney made a face behind her glasses, "I think I can spare another five bucks if it keeps you from taking all the good ones. Again."   
  
"You sure?"   
  
"Yeah, totally." Courtney held a hand up, "Hey, can we get another order of bacon cheese fries here?"   
  
It seemed like lately, all Haley had been doing was eating. The big breakfasts at home hadn't stopped, and she'd been coming into Big Daddy's every Monday Wednesday and Friday after classes. Mom was going cooking crazy now that Haley was back home, making all of her favorites for dinner almost every. it probably didn't help that she'd been grabbing lunch at the CLC every day either. That commuter money was good eatin', and it was one less meal she had to pay for...   
  
By the time everything was said and done, Haley felt no better about the fit of her jeans than she did about her Math 102 course.    
  
"Thanks for paying!" Haley waved goodbye in the parking lot, trying to suck in her swollen stomach, "I'll get you next time!"   
  
She got in her car, tapped on her phone until Courtney had left, and then leaned back in her seat. Finally relaxing, her belly surged forward into a round turgid lump that curved against her t-shirt. *God,* she was full. The drive home was almost unbearable—five minutes down the road felt like twenty as she fought back the fullness of her own gut.    
  
"I've gotta start cutting back." Haley puffed her way up the walkway, "Or I'm literally gonna explode."   
  
Throwing her keys in the bowl by the door and tossing her half-done homework to the side, Haley collapsed on the living room couch. She laid one arm over her eyes to block out the sun as she rubbed her belly with her free hand. She felt like a garbage disposal—maybe she'd been eating too much of that greasy diner food after all. Her belly was just so round and soft. It hadn't always been like that, had it?   
  
Her last clear thought before drifting off to sleep was that she needed to cut back...   
  
"Haley~!" Came the voice of her mother, hours later, "Dinner's almost ready!"   
  
And her first clear thought upon waking up was wondering what was gonna be for dinner.

**3 | Easy Street**

At first, it was hard for Haley to go back to living under her mom's roof. She'd spent the past two years learning to fend for herself. Whether it was balancing her budget, saving up for new clothes, or even something as simple as what she was going to eat that night, Haley had learned how to do all of that for herself. When she was living with her roommates, she was the de facto adult. And now that she'd moved back in with her mom, she wasn't given much opportunity to flex those muscles anymore.  
  
How do you go from earning a living wage and paying for your own things right back to asking Mom for money?  
  
"Oh Haley, don't you worry about that." Mrs. West would always say, "You moved back in with me so I'd take care of you, and there's no shame in asking your Mom for a little spending money while you're going back to school."  
  
At first it was hard. But Haley took to living by the purse straps of her mother quite well after a few weeks into the semester. She'd spent so long scrimping and saving, barely getting by on her own meager paycheck, she'd almost forgotten what it was like to not have to worry about money. It was like she was a teenager again! If she ever needed anything—money, food, you name it—all she had to do was ask.  
  
"Mom, can I borrow a couple of bucks for some new jeans?"  
  
"Mom, Courtney and I are gonna go grab a bite, and it's my turn to pay..."  
  
"Mom, do you think you could grab me a couple Pop Tarts if you go by the kitchen?"  
  
All in all, Haley took quite well to domesticated life. With no job and no other responsibilities besides keeping her grades up, the prodigal daughter fell into quite the sluggish lifestyle. Wake up, eat a big breakfast, go to classes, eat lunch, go to more classes, and swing by Big Daddy's with Courtney to study three times a week. Then she'd go home, take a nap, and eat dinner. It didn't take long before our formerly self-reliant protagonist to get more than a little lazy.  
  
It was a Tuesday, almost halfway through her first semester back at college, and Haley West couldn't have been more of a sight. With her only class canceled for the day (something about a flu outbreak) Haley had been living like a queen. She'd rolled out of bed at ten, eaten her biggest breakfast yet, and bundled up on the couch. Parked in front of the TV, wrapped up in a cozy comforter and pajamas, with her brown hair all frizzed, Haley couldn't have looked more spoiled if she'd tried.  
  
"Haley, sweetheart?" Mrs. West called from the kitchen, "Since you're home, do you want me to make you some lunch?"  
  
"What?"  called back, "No, I'm okay."  
  
"Well you've got to eat, Hun." Her mother peeked her head around the archway, "Besides, you're never home in time for lunch. You've got to be hungry."  
  
"I mean, not really..." Haley made a face, her cheeks catching against their newly acquired girth, "I mean, you just made me breakfast."  
  
"I could order a pizza?" Mrs. West suggested with a zealous smile, "So you don't feel like you're working your poor old mother to death. (Even though you're really not.)"  
  
"I mean..."   
  
Haley thought long and hard about it—she hadn't had a pizza since she'd moved out. She could barely afford dollar menu, let alone pizza. At least pizza that was any good. And where would Mom order from? There was a Pizza Hut down the road, and Dominos was all the way in Boiling Springs. Pizza Hut had that stuffed crust, and their sauce was so much better than Dominos. Plus, they could order pasta, those breadsticks that she liked...  
  
"Yeah, I could eat."  
  
Almost an hour later, and you would have never known that Haley had eaten a stack of pancakes, half a dozen eggs, and half a container of bacon by herself. Mrs. West had ordered her daughter a whole pie, and it would barely last the hour. Bundled up in her lazy girl fortress of blankets and propped up with all kinds of comfy pillows, Haley snacked her whole day away!   
  
A part of her felt guilty acting like this. The part of her that had learned the hard way that she couldn't just lay around all day. That there was work to be done and bills to pay. But as long as her mother kept insisting, Haley was going to oblige. And that felt bad shriveled up smaller and smaller was perhaps the only thing about Haley West that wasn't growing.  
  
"Well you look comfy." Her mother said, waking her daughter up from an afternoon nap, "Aren't you going to meet with Courtney or something?"  
  
"What? No, it's Tuesday. I'll see her tomorrow." Haley smacked her lips sleepily, her double chin catching slightly, "What time is it?"  
  
"It's about half past four." Mrs. West brushed a clipped brown lock from being stuck on Haley's cheek, "Why don't you head up to your room, and I'll bring you your dinner when it's done? Sound good?"  
  
"Mmmm..." Haley grunted sleepily, "Kay."  
  
With as much trouble as one might expect from someone who'd eaten an entire pizza pie and its accompanying breadsticks, Haley rocked herself to a hunched position on the couch before rolling to her feet. Still cloaked in her comforter, Haley shuffled off down the hallway and into her room, where she collapsed face-first into her pillow.  
  
"BURRRRRAP!" Haley belched as the contents of her stomach churned.  
  
"What's wrong with having one little lazy day?" Haley thought to herself drearily as she drifted back to sleep, "I deserve it."

**3.5 | Doughy Dani**

That was just one of the names that they'd called her in high school. There was also Danielle from Hell, /Chan/ielle, Hot Topic Girl, and (honestly, her personal favorite) Dani Daughter of Darkness. But "Doughy Dani" was the worst thing that could have ever happened to her at Boiling Springs High School. It was short, it was catchy, and more importantly, she fit the part. Whether Danielle Gosset liked to admit it or not, she looked like a hot mess in high school. She was poor, she was chunky, and she was in that weird transition between Emo Kid and Scene, all while on the budget of an upper-lower-class teenager with no job.   
  
Not that much had changed since she'd graduated—now she was just goth af.   
  
Working as a waitress at one of the greasiest spoons in Inman didn't give her a lot of opportunities (or money!) to afford a better life. She was still stuck in her Podunk home town living next to everyone who'd picked on her all throughout school. But what it *did* provide was excellent glimpses into just how hard everyone peaked in high school.   
  
So many people were pregnant. Like, so many. Autumn Conners, Kelsey Brannon, and Amanda Dunham all came in holding their snot-nosed brats by their grubby little hands or in a stroller. All of them screamed and cried, none of them left a tip (figures!). Justin and Hannah broke up, and now he was working some shit job making stadium seats or whatever while *she* was apparently getting tossed round the neighborhood like a party favor. But the best one—the *best one*—had to be that that skinny little poser Haley West was getting *fat*. She came in like every other day with... god, her girlfriend or something, who cares. And every time she'd order burgers or cheese fries or milkshakes. Revenge was *so* sweet.   
  
She could still hear that little bitch back at BSHS, talking to all the boys. Ian Krueger, Ethan Haynes, Jesse Sacks... all of them had ditched her for some flat little wannabe punk rock girl. Like, Danielle was *right* there, and had *way* bigger titties than Haley ever had. And everyone was just so stuck up her ass. It was unbearable. Plus, her bitchy older sister with that big ass nose? Why did anyone think those women were hot?   
  
But now Danielle got to watch by the week as Haley stuffed her face with greasy chili burgers and cheese fries, choking down so many calories that she was blowing up like a balloon. God, it was so great—she'd never felt more satisfied in someone else's suffering! To think that she'd ever been jealous of her. At least *her* pudge went to all the right places—not just to some great big gut!    
  
Sneaking one of the stray fries from her customer's tray, her black lips cracking into a wicked smile, she almost couldn't wait to see that little slut again. Hopefully she'd be able to talk her into ordering seconds this time...

**4 | Studying Doesn’t Make You Fat**

“We’ve got to start cutting back on the trips to Big Daddy’s.” Courtney said with a wry curl to one side as she bit into a forkful of cheese fries, “I think I’m starting to retain grease…”  
  
Haley suddenly snapped to attention, cheese rolling from the inside of her mouth and onto her lips. She’d been hunched over her phone, scrolling through Facebook when Courtney had dropped the bomb. The shock was enough to rip her out of her headspace and back into the real world.  
  
“What? But I like coming here!” Haley gasped, “These study sessions are the only thing that keeps me above water!”  
  
“Well, yeah, we can still *study*, just in a less…” Courtney winced, “…dangerous environment.”  
  
“Dangerous?” Haley made a face, “What kind of danger could we possibly get into at a Diner?”  
  
As if summoned by the great gods of timing, their waitress for the evening emerged from the kitchen, turned corner, and approached the collegiate cuties with their dinner for the evening. Two burgers, double stacked, with so much chili that it spread against the sides of the wax paper. A refill of bacon cheese fries, and two baked potatoes. It wasn’t often that their waitress—Dina, or whatever her name was—smiled at them, but Haley couldn’t help but think that she looked much more pleasant than normal as she carried out the heaping helping of caloric content and hauled it all onto their plates.  
  
“Order up!” their black-clad waitress said with a smile as she started doling out food, “Which one of you had the extra cheese, extra chili— “  
  
“Ooh, me!” Haley raised her hand like a kid in a classroom as her burger was placed in front of her. A heavy slap against the table sounded at the impact.  
  
“See, this is what I’m talking about. Haley, that’s like, your third chili cheeseburger this week.” Courtney cut her eyes at her gorging classmate, “All that can’t be good for you.”  
  
“Hmm?” their waitress sounded as she doled out Courtney’s equally unhealthy helping, “Your food’s not good?”  
  
“What?” Courtney blinked, “No, that’s— “  
  
“Lemme talk to Petro about getting you some milkshakes.”   
  
“No, Danielle, don’t— “  
  
But it was too late! The goth girl skulked off, back around the corner to speak with the manager. Courtney rolled her eyes and let her head fall into her hands.  
  
“Who’s Danielle?” Haley asked, her lips smacking loudly as she masticated her burger into mush  
  
“I’m surprised with how often we’re in here, you still don’t know our waitress’s name. We went to high school together.” Courtney sighed, “Seriously Haley, I’m starting to get burnt out on Big Daddy’s.”  
  
“Well, hey, that’s no big deal.” Haley slurped her sweet tea out of the Styrofoam cup, “We can always start hanging out at Waffle House or something. That’s close to campus.”  
  
“We’re trying to *escape* greasy spoons, Haleykins.” Courtney said with a stab of her pile of fries, “Waffle House is probably worse than here. At least here we won’t get mugged.”  
  
“Then… we could always eat on campus?” Haley searched her thoughts, “Oh! Or my Mom’s house—we’d save money at least.”  
  
“The last time we studied at your mom’s house, I popped the button off my jeans.” Courtney grimaced, “I’m not going back there until I lose the twenty pounds I’ve put on since school started.”  
  
In all honesty, Haley wasn’t listening. You never seem to realize how hooked you can get on a certain high throughout the day. And on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays—barring a couple Tuesdays where she was hankering a grilled cheese and couldn’t be bothered to go to class—Haley had certainly gotten used to having fatty, greasy food in her system. While Courtney blah, blah, blah’d her way through dinner about healthy choices, Haley was relishing in the flavors afforded to her by her staples. Chili. Cheese. And Burger.  
  
“Sorry about your food, guys.” Danielle reemerged from around the corner carrying two more white cups, “These are on the house.”  
  
Haley was practically drooling—she hadn’t had Big Daddy’s milkshakes since before she moved out!  
  
“No thanks.” Courtney curled her nose, “I’m not feeling it tonight.”  
  
“I’ll take hers.” Haley added greedily as she leaned across the table, her soft stomach cut against the edge, and palmed the side of Courtney’s shake. “Thank you!”  
  
“Don’t mention it.” Their waitress smiled before walking off.  
  
Far be it from Courtney to bring up anyone’s weight, but she was beginning to get worried about her friend. They’d known each other for years, and Haley had always been a little slip of a girl. But ever since they’d enrolled in college, she couldn’t think of a time when Haley *wasn’t* eating. On campus, here at Big Daddy’s, the random takeout they’d get when they hung out… and if her mother was anything to go by, Haley must live like a queen at home.   
  
“Haley, are you okay?” Courtney asked after a long pause, “You’ve been eating a lot lately…”  
  
“College is stressful—it’s called a coping mechanism.” Haley snorted as if it were the most obvious thing in the world, “It’s not a big deal.”  
  
“Not yet it’s not.” Courtney furrowed her brow slightly, “But it’s gonna be a great big deal if you keep eating like this.”  
  
“That was the lamest comeback I’ve ever heard.” Haley answered dismissively, “You’re worrying over nothing, okay? I’m totally in control.”  
  
Haley slurped on her straw as creamy, sugary shake tickled her tongue.  
  
“*Total* control.”

**5 | Waffle House Woes**

Coming home had its ups and downs for Haley. The ups were no rent, she didn’t have to have a job, and just about everything that her little heart could want was taken care of. The downsides were that she had to go to college, her classes were stressful, and she didn’t exactly have a lot of spending money. Her mom mostly took care of that kind of stuff, but still, she felt bad for asking. However, one of the unforeseen plus sides was the fact that she was given a great opportunity to reconnect with some old friends—at least, the ones that hadn’t gone on and done something with their lives yet.  
  
Haley had known Mackenzie since they were in grade school, and while they were never “close”, they had been well enough acquainted that when Haley had met her at the beauty parlor it wasn’t weird that either should mention that they get together and catch up.   
  
They were around the same age, but it was apparent that their lives had taken drastically different turns. Whereas Haley had moved out, had roommates, and eventually came back home to take a swing at college, Mackenzie hadn’t left their little home town for longer than a family vacation. She’d already settled down, had a baby… when were her friends old enough to start having babies?!  
  
“God, I don’t think I could do it.” Mackenzie speared the fluffy egg portion of her All-Star Breakfast platter, “Go to college and actually finish, I mean.”  
  
Haley had remembered Mackenzie as this toned, stringy Christian Athlete that had gone to the same Youth Group as her on Wednesday nights. Instead of sitting across from the fit sixteen-year-old athlete that she liked to remember, Haley was instead sitting across from a doughy mother of one who couldn’t seem to stop herself from wolfing down pancakes. She never would have guessed that she’d ever get fit, active Mackenzie Hollifield in a place like the Waffle House off of I-26, but wonders never ceased to amaze her. Then again, she’d never been able to picture Mackenzie as anything other than a size 0, and that had clearly changed as well.  
  
“It’s not that hard.” Haley said with a little pride in her tone, “I mean, it’s only my first semester and I’m pretty sure I’m gonna get at least A’s and B’s.”  
  
Haley was honestly sort’ve fading in and out of the conversation. It was pretty late, and she wasn’t used to staying up this long past dinner. She had class in about twelve hours—she needed to get home soon so she could get a full eight hours! That way she could wake up, get ready, and eat a big breakfast before her Bio exam tomorrow. Not that she wasn’t exactly *interested* in catching up with good ol’ Mack, it was just… well, past her bedtime!  
  
The one thing she *hadn’t* regretted about this meeting was the food. She and Courtney got Big Daddy’s every other day or so, and she peppered her weeks with takeout here and there. Mom cooked for her at home too, but it had been so long since she’d been to the Awful Waffle! She’d ordered an All-Star Breakfast with extra bacon and toast, plus an extra pancake or two—she’d better not tell Courtney about eating so much after dinner; she’d probably wet blanket all over the fact that she got to catch up with an old friend!  
  
“Oh yeah, no, the first semester’s easy.” Mackenzie said dismissively, the way she spoke made her double chin catch ever so slightly, which is something that Haley couldn’t help but notice as it struck her as particularly odd, “The second semester, that’s what got me.”  
  
“Wasn’t… having a kid what got you?” Haley joked as she took a sip of her milky coffee, “I mean, I can’t imagine. It must have been really hard.”  
  
Mackenzie took an equally big bite of her own late-night breakfast—two biscuits covered in gravy and ham with a side of eggs. Haley hadn’t thought much of her own, much bigger order. But to see skinny little Mackenzie Hollifield eating like this was so scandalous! It helped distract her from her own portion sizes—practically double the size of the mother of one’s.  
  
“Oh, I didn’t have Tiffany until after I dropped out.” Mackenzie said as if it were the plainest thing in the world, “I just couldn’t deal with it all, you know? I just wanted it to be over with.”  
  
“Yeah, I can relate to that.” Haley said. Bite bite.  
  
“Totally.” Mackenzie snorted, “And it all just gets harder from there.”  
  
“Yeah?” Chomp chew, “How… how so?”  
  
“Well you’re in Gen Ed classes now, right?” Mackenzie continued, unfettered, “By the second semester, you’re going to be taking specialty classes!”  
  
“Uh…” gnash gnash, “…huh?”  
  
“Yeah, and they’re *super* hard.” The meaty mom laughed obliviously, “I had like, super good grades, and I only just barely managed to pass any of my classes!”  
  
And as Haley let her friend’s words sink in, she felt the weight of her academic life fall heavily on her shoulders. How could it get harder? She was barely managing to keep her Life scholarship now! If she got low enough grades, she’d lose her ticket in! And then she’d have to start paying her way in, or take out loans! She was going to have to get a job, and… and…  
  
“Are you okay, Hay?” Mackenzie leaned in, “You don’t look so good.”  
  
“Y-Yeah! Totally okay!” Haley answered curtly, “Hey, do you think I could get another order of hash browns here?”  
  
Haley’s cheeks swelled with potato, grease, and gravy.  
  
Why did she ever think that she could do this?  
  
"And, uh... make 'em country..."

**5.5 | the Successful Sister**

Tara West hadn’t exactly have it easy growing up. Aside from, yes, the well-off family and the loving mother and the good job and the fact that she’d gone to Wofford on a full ride and…   
  
Okay, so she didn’t exactly have it rough, either.  
  
But you don’t understand—it was hell having a younger sister who was cooler than her. Like *so* much cooler than her. Haley was more popular, she’d always had more friends than her, a lot of guys liked her. Tara could barely keep up, and she was three years older than her! Guys were trying to date her in high school just so they could get to Haley *who was still in Middle School*. Gross! And it was *always* like that—Haley could have gotten away with murder if she had wanted to!  
  
Even now that she was out of college and making waves in the corporate world, Tara still couldn’t help but feel like she was missing something. Her competitive nature had leant well to working at Gilbert & Heil, but it hadn’t exactly left her with many friends. Or boyfriends, as of last month. Things hadn’t exactly worked out well with Grant and…  
  
Haley let out a dejected sigh as she checked her Tinder app for about the billionth time. No new matches, no new messages that weren’t creepy or inappropriate. She clicked the TV on and nestled down into her armchair, a furry white friend coming to greet her.  
  
“At least I have you.” She said sweetly to Boots the cat, “Who needs a man when I’ve got my sweet little puss-puss?”  
  
…  
  
“Yes I do. Yes I do.” Tara coochey-cooed her kitty obnoxiously, “Who’s a sweet little puss-puss?”  
  
Her affection was only met with a distant, somehow judgmental stare as Boots the cat turned tail and sauntered off back into the apartment. Tara could only roll her eyes, grumble to herself, and pour another glass of wine. It was a big glass, enough to hold half an entire bottle…  
  
Okay look, it had been a hard day, okay?  
  
But another night spent binge-watching Friends wasn’t the worst thing in the world. Drunk Tara would probably go on a surprise shopping spree on Amazon, and she’d get a couple of surprises in the mail in a few days. So that was something, right?   
  
God her life sucked.  
  
“Still, could be worse.” Tara leaned back after a big bitter gulp, “I could *not* be in my own apartment and I could *not* have a job.”  
  
She’d taken the news of Haley having to move back home very well. It was about time that something in their lives hadn’t fallen in Haley’s direction. Now she was stuck at home because she couldn’t make it, but *Tara* was a career woman, had her own nice apartment, a tv, some wine, and a great wi-fi signal! And really, wasn’t that all anybody needed for a fun Friday night?  
  
No—but she’d probably feel differently after another glass.

**6 | Playing Hooky Makes you Fat**

The West house was a rather modest looking one. It was a three-bedroom, two bath, and was one of the many additions during the degentrification of the Boiling Springs area. Courtney had never actually driven there, and picking it out from the many other cookie-cutter homes proved to be somewhat challenging. She stood there, in the doorway, rang the bell, and pulled the hem of her shirt down over her bulging belly. It must have rolled up on the drive over…  
  
“Hello Courtney, are you looking for Haley?” Mrs. West cooed as she stuck her head through the doorway, “She told me you might be coming by.”  
  
Like her daughter, Mrs. West wasn’t the tallest woman. She had brown hair, though it was a bit more faded than her Haley’s, and held that same sense of benevolence about her. She was dressed very casually, in a loose Clemson sweatshirt and a pair of dark mom jeans. Her long brown hair was pulled up in a messy pony. Like Haley, she wore her weight well. She was a rather full-figured woman, but unlike Haley, she developed a full motherly set of breasts and wide birthing hips as opposed to her daughter’s spoiled gut.   
  
“Hi Mrs. West!” the bespectacled chubster said with an awkward smile, “Yeah, I’ve got some homework for her from the past few days.”  
  
The last time Courtney had walked through the threshold of the West family home, she’d left with a packed paunch and one less button on her pants. She’d wisely worn sweats to this little outing, and definitely not because they were the only things in her closet that fit her anymore.  
  
“Oh sure, she’s up in her room.” Haley’s mom stepped aside and allowed the curvaceous cutie room to get inside, “I don’t know if she’s told you, but she’s not exactly feeling well…”  
  
Courtney could smell the kitchen from the living room, and she could tell by the myriad aromas and scents that Mrs. West wasn’t taking her daughter laying down… laying down. She’d obviously taken a step up with her treatment of her doughy daughter—something that Courtney was admittedly a little concerned about. It had been a week since Courtney had last seen her friend, and she could only imagine the treatment that she’d been getting since she’d come down with the flu.  
  
“Her room is right up the hall, the last door on the right.” Mrs. West said sweetly, “Make sure you knock, just in case she’s asleep!”  
  
Down the hall and to the right later, Courtney Caldwell tapped lightly on the door.  
  
“Mama?” Haley’s voice came from inside, sounding no worse for wear, “Is that the pancakes? Are my pancakes done?”  
  
“What? No, it’s Courtney.” The plump brunette furrowed her brow, “Can I come in?”  
  
There was a long pause as Haley’s tone corrected itself.  
  
“C-Come in…” she said weakly from the other side.  
  
As Courtney opened the door, she couldn’t help but feel that something was amiss. Plates, cups, and silverware were piled high next to Haley’s bed. Beneath the cocoon of her soft gray blanket, Courtney could see a mountainous gut rolling high into the air.  
  
“Hey Courtney…” Haley managed in her most pathetic voice, “What’s up?”  
  
“Not much.” Her friend answered flatly, “Just… wondering why you haven’t been to class for a week.”  
  
Haley’s bright blue eyes widened in what was surely an attempt to look even more pitiful. She coughed sadly.  
  
“I’m sick.” She whimpered, “Stomach bug.”  
  
“Uh-huh.” Courtney folded her plush arms, “Is *that* why you’ve got your mom cooking you chocolate chip pancakes?”  
  
“…are they ready?” Haley arched her neck ever so slightly to look past her friend in the doorway.  
  
“Haley!” Courtney stomped her foot, “You’re not sick at all!”  
  
“Shh!” Haley whispered, disrobing her blanket and exposing a big round gut, full of food and sloshing with fat, “Keep it down, Court! You don’t want my mom to find out, do you?!”  
  
“I don’t know, Haley!” Courtney said in an intentionally loud tone, “Would that mean she’d stop feeding your fever and you’d have to come back to school so you could take your finals?!”  
  
“SHHH!” Haley toddled to a standing position, “Alright, alright, just… just keep it down!”  
  
And that was when Haley explained her recent string of absences. It wasn’t just her MWF classes that she had missed either, she’d missed both of her TR classes! Haley told Courtney about meeting up with Mackenzie and her recently recapitalized fears of not being good enough for college. And then a side note about how her mother had really enjoyed having her home, so it made the guilt a bit more bearable to see her so happy…  
  
“So lemme get this straight—you decided that you were going to play hooky for a week so you could lay around and get waited on hand and foot by your mom?” Courtney raised one of her thick brown eyebrows, “Haley, come on. You could have seriously hurt your chances of passing all your classes—what are you gonna do if you fail your finals and lose your scholarships because you decided to take a week off?”  
  
“I know, I know…” Haley whimpered, her double chin creasing, “I just… I’m worried, okay? Mackenzie was way smarter than I was and she dropped out around this time, and—”  
  
“Didn’t Mackenzie get pregnant?” Courtney cut in  
  
“Y-Yeah…”   
  
“Then she obviously wasn’t that smart.” Courtney put her hand on Haley’s shoulder, “Look, if you’re worried, I get it. But you can’t just… run away from your problems, okay? Let me help you out.”  
  
“Okay… no more hooky.” Haley smiled gently, “Do you… want to stay for dinner?”  
  
“What?” Courtney grimaced, suddenly green around the gills, “No, I—”  
  
*”Girls!”* came a familiar voice from deeper inside the house,” I *hope you’ve still got your appetites!”*  
  
And it became clear as Mrs. West entered the bedroom with enough food to feed four girls, that the decision had been taken entirely out of Courtney’s hands.

**7 | You Deserve It, Haley!**

“See, now that wasn’t so hard, was it?”  
  
Another heaping helping of mashed potatoes were plopped onto Haley’s already overloaded plate, situated next to the green beans and buttery creamed corn. They had already run out of chicken breasts, but there were plenty of sides still left sitting on the counter. Haley must have emptied a whole coop by now, but there was no stopping our greedy undergrad by now. She was on a roll, and all of her mama’s home cooking was just too good to pass up!  
  
“All your frettin’ over whether or not you were gonna pass your exams.” Mrs. West purred with a bemused little laugh, “Don’t you feel silly?”  
  
“Yeah, I guess it was pretty dumb.” Haley’s cheeks bunched, her smile widening as she leaned over to grab the gravy boat, “Hey, do you think I could get some more corn?”  
  
Haley had been eating for what felt like hours. Once she’d gotten her grades back from her finals she’d wasted no time in telling her mother. Her sneaky suspicion that she’d be rewarded for her good—not great, but good! —grades were right on the money. As soon as Mrs. West saw that her baby girl had made straight B’s, she got right to work on planning quite the celebration. All of Haley’s favorite homemade dishes, all on one table!  
  
Haley’s stomach domed out in front of her. She was thickset now, with a wide set of hips and a heavy chest. When it was empty (which wasn’t often) Haley’s pudgy paunch rolled out in all directions as a squishy mass of meat. But after partaking in such a gastronomic feat, Haley’s gut had hardened and distended drastically. It sat heavily atop her pillowy thighs, emitting a heat not unlike a machine in use. It churned and squelched dutifully as Haley eagerly popped bite after bite into her awaiting maw, tongue lolled and her mind clouded with hunger.  
  
“Of course, sweetheart.” Mrs. West said with a pinch of Haley’s softening cheek, “You can have as much as you want—after all that studying you’ve done, I’d say you deserve it.”  
  
As soon as her mother sauntered over with the bowl of home-made creamed corn, Haley dolloped two heavy serving spoons of the stuff. She couldn’t get enough of this—now that she didn’t have to worry about classes, Haley just felt so free! No more Mr. Casper ragging her about her word usage, no more of Mrs. Waddell’s boring lectures, but lots *lots* more of laying around at home and plenty *plenty* more extra helpings—it’s like her mama said, she deserved it after everything that she’d been through!  
  
By the time the two West women had cleared the table, Haley had never felt fuller. Pounds of poultry, fields of corn, and more potatoes than Ireland could have handled had been pushed into the awaiting mouth of Haley West, who was officially almost halfway not a freshman anymore. With the help of her always doting mother, Haley hoisted herself to a standing position as her stomach swelled out in front of her. Arching her back and cradling the dome of her gut with her free hand, Haley toddled as far as her sluggish self could make it—the living room couch. Once there, she plopped herself down belly up and began to groan.   
  
“Looks like I’m crashing here tonight.” Haley chuckled dimly as she smacked her stuffed stomach, “Oof… pass me the remote? I think I’ve earned that too…”  
  
“Sure.” Mrs. West grunted as she bent over to fetch the remote from its place on the coffee table, “Think you’ve also earned some dessert? Maybe some *ice cream*…?”  
  
“Ooh…” Haley pressed on her stomach with five outstretched fingers, “Don’t tempt me… I’m already gonna explode…”  
  
“Come ooooon.” Mrs. West cooed, “Live a little—you’re in college!”  
  
“Alright, alright.” Haley caved, “Just one bowl though.”  
  
Mrs. West returned with an entire carton of Mint Chocolate Chip and a serving spoon in hand, and passed it to her daughter.   
  
“Just put back what you don’t eat.” Mrs. West said, fetching a blanket for her poor overfed daughter, “Wouldn’t want it to melt.”  
  
“Ugh… I don’t think I’ll be getting up any time soon…” Haley burped, already working on her first spoonful, “Seriously, dinner was great—thanks again for cooking.”  
  
“It’s no big deal.” Mrs. West replied with a little peck on her daughter’s forehead, “Now you just rest up and take it easy now that you’re out of classes—call me if you need anything, okay?”  
  
“Okay.”  
  
“Anything, I mean it.”  
  
“Okay.” Haley snorted, “Anything, got it.”  
  
“Good.” Mrs. West trailed down the hallway, “Because your sister’s going to be here in a couple of days and I wanted to make sure we got to celebrate you getting through your finals.”  
  
“That’s nice.” Haley blinked sleepily… “Wait, what?”

**8 | Sibling Rivalry**

Haley and her older sister had never really seen eye to eye on many things. Tara was older than her, was always more popular than her, and always seemed to have a stick up her ass about something. There were never any small problems with Tara—everything was always the end of the world. When she and whatever boy of the week she’d been dating broke up, everyone in the neighborhood heard about it. And when Haley started dating those same boys not even a week later… well, to say that wars had been waged with less upheaval would not be an understatement.   
  
So, imagine Haley’s discomfort when Tara waltzed through the front door and registered that the chubby chick squeezed into PJ pants with her belly hanging out of her t-shirt was, in fact, her not-so-little sister Haley! Tara’s expression had to be seen to be believed, all of her pearly whites bare as she did little to disguise the humor she found with her younger sister’s expansion as a genuine excitement to see her baby sister once again.  
  
“*Haleyyyy*!” Tara exclaimed as she held her arms out wide, “Oh it’s so good to see you—I almost didn’t recognize you!”  
  
“Yeah, good to see you too.” Haley cut her eyes as she and her older sister embraced, the tension between them almost as thick as one of her thighs, “You look good.”  
  
“Oh and so do *you*!” Tara nearly squealed as she separated from their embrace, “College agrees with you *so* well!”  
  
Tara emphasized her point with several pats at Haley’s well-padded shoulders, which caused her ample bust to shimmy inside its fabric prison. Haley could have died right then and there—she’d known that she’d been putting on weight like crazy ever since she’d moved back home, but did Tara really have to look so happy about it?  
  
“Doesn’t it though?” Mrs. West crooned, petting Haley’s rounding cheek in the way that only a mother could, “I’m so proud of her—you know, she’s making all B’s so far?”  
  
“Really?” Tara’s eyebrow fish hooked inquisitively, “Because they look more like C’s from here.”  
  
Luckily for the West girls, the oven timer went off—enough of a distraction for Mrs. West to completely miss Tara’s jab at her younger sister’s weight.  
  
“Oh, that’d be lunch.” The older woman said with a smile, “You two get comfy—I’ve got to put it back in for another few minutes and then we’ll eat.”  
  
Leaving the two West women alone, it wasn’t hard to tell that they were sisters. They were about the same height, and aside from the ample amount of weight that Haley had packed on, they didn’t look dissimilar. Where Haley kept her hair short and brown, Tara wore hers about shoulder length and box-dye blonde. They had the same eyes, the same ears, high cheekbones. If it weren’t for Tara’s big nose and Haley’s big… well, everything… it’d be pretty easy to think that they were twins.  
  
“So.” Haley attempted, “How’s life? Charleston, being out of school… your cat?”  
  
“Good, good, all good.” Tara nodded, “How’s… you know…”  
  
Here Tara’s smile turned devilish.  
  
“Living with mommy?”  
  
“Oh my God, shut up.”  
  
“Woah there, those are big girl words there—I’m not sure someone who can’t live on their own, pay rent or… you know, make all A’s should really use that type of language!”   
  
Haley’s cheeks grew flush as her brown brow furrowed in frustration.  
  
“I mean, you’re plenty big, buuuut…”  
  
“You’re impossible.”  
  
“You think *I’m* impossible, try—”  
  
And it just sort’ve went on like that. Things were never quiet with the two West girls in the house, for one reason or another. Screeching at each other was almost as common as them screeching about each other, and it had been like this ever since they hit puberty. However, all it took for them to settle down was for their dear mother to come back into the room, whereupon their snarling faces became happy grins that couldn’t have looked more forced if they tried.  
  
Thankfully for them, the West matriarch wasn’t nearly as apt to notice their infighting as she was when they were younger. Perhaps it was having Tara out of the house, perhaps she just wasn’t as observant as she was when they were teenagers, or perhaps she was simply overlooking their squabbling in lieu of the holiday season. But for whatever reason, she wasn’t about to start a ruckus to calm one down.  
  
“Now, I’ve got another half hour or so before the turkey’s done.” Mrs. West announced proudly as her daughters’ facial muscles strained to maintain their smiles, “Come come, sit sit. Tell us all about Charleston.”  
  
“Oh Mom, stop.” Tara was dripping with fake modesty, “You’ve been to Charleston before.”  
  
“Yeah mom, stop.” Haley huffed as she sat down, her tummy coming to rest between the spread of her thighs  
  
“Well, I have a *great* view of the city.” Tara began with vigor, “And I make *so* much money at my job that I can finally afford to *not* have a roommate—Haley, you had roommates when you lived on your own, didn’t you just hate them?”  
  
Haley rolled her eyes.  
  
“Anyway, blah blah blah… blah blah blah…”  
  
This was going to be the longest three days ever, Haley thought to herself as she reclined into the sofa. What she wouldn’t give to be back in Mr. Casper’s class right about now. Or at Big Daddy’s with Courtney. Or Waffle House… maybe Denny’s…  
  
Her soft stomach began to gurgle at the thought of her favorite greasy spoons. Lunch could not come quick enough for Haley’s tastes. At least then she didn’t have to listen to Tara’s bragging about how awesome her life is…  
  
“Hm, did you say something?” Tara interrupted herself  
  
“What, uh… no.” Haley stuttered, “I didn’t.”  
  
“Alright, so as I was saying, my cat *loves* my new place…”  
  
Worst. Winter Break. Ever.

**9 | Tara Turns Tail, Haley Hefts Up**

Three days wasn’t much of a vacation. It may have been the holidays, but Tara still had a busy work life ahead of her back in Charleston. That didn’t leave much time for getting to know one another, but it certainly left enough time for plenty of family meals. At least, if Mrs. West had anything to say about it. With two girls to feed, the already overworked woman couldn’t help but kick herself into overdrive. Breakfasts led into lunches, which led to dinners. Sometimes there was only handful of hours that her daughters may lay at rest before she whipped up another caloric onslaught for her baby girls!  
  
Haley had grown accustomed to it, but Tara had been left far behind.  
  
“Okay, like, I don’t mean to sound ungrateful, okay?” Tara belched softly into the breadth of her palm, “But if Mom makes me eat anything else today I think I’m gonna barf.”  
  
“Tell me about it.” Haley answered, nonplussed by the excess mass occupying her stomach, “Hey—you be the one to tell her to stop. I’ll wait.”  
  
The lanky blonde was already bottomed out, but her greedy guts of a sister was merely picking her teeth, already looking forward to the treat that was going to be dinner. She knew that her mama was sure to go all out now that Tara was here. The only question is, what could it be? She’d been talking about turkey lately. But she saw her mom wrestling with a honking heft of ham the other day when she came home from the grocery store… had she already eaten that? Had they already had ham? All this food, it was getting so hard to remember…  
  
“Goooood… I’m gonna spew…” Tara cupped her stomach on either side, poking quietly into a cute little rock-solid pot belly, “No wonder you’re so fat.”  
  
“Don’t make me poke you in the belly button.” Haley cut her eyes  
  
“No don’t, for real… the thought alone makes me wanna…” Tara wretched, “Gawd…”  
  
They had managed to survive one of their mother’s many meals together, yes, and it had leant Tara an understanding as to why her little sister was looking like such a porker these days. Just imagine if Tara herself had to deal with such vicious stuffing day in and day out—she’d be a whale by now!  
  
“Like, what’s *wrong* with her?” Tara continued to whine, “She never used to cook like this when we were kids.”  
  
“Empty nest syndrome? Who the heck knows.” Haley snorted dismissively as her hands came to rest on the chubby belly that splayed out in front of her, “All I know is, her cooking’s a lot better than when we were kids.”  
  
Tara looked at her little sister, with those round cheeks and that double chin. Those gross love-handles and that supple stomach that flopped out over her pants—something had to be done about this. She had enough trouble getting dates now, but with her luck and metabolism, she’d put on ten pounds before she got back to her apartment in just a few days! The food *was* good, and it really was nice to see Mom again, but there were somethings that she just wouldn’t sacrifice…  
  
She had to look her best for that New Year’s party, and binging on southern home cooking was definitely not the best way to get into her little black dress!  
  
“Look, sis—”  
  
“Don’t call me sis. It’s expositional and clunky.”  
  
“Fine, *Haley*, do me a solid.”  
  
“Anything for you, sis.”  
  
“Could you… maybe… I don’t know… cover for me?” Tara winced, “I love mom and… I mean, you’re kinda cool sometimes. But if I sit down at the table, she’s going to want me to eat and… this is just too much, y’know.”  
  
“Yeah, sure.”  
  
“What, really?”  
  
“Totally. I’ll lie and tell Mom you’re sick.” Haley rubbed her jelly belly contemplatively, “Like… stomach bug or something. You’re violently, horribly wretching in the bathroom, and food is the *last* thing that you need.”  
  
“You’re the best.” Tara said with a quick awkward hug as she hobbled to her feet, “Oh, here she comes, I’d better—”  
  
And just like that, one West woman left and another one entered. Mrs. West came bounding into the room looking pleased as punch until she saw that only one of her daughters had remained. A confused, disheartened look spread across her face as she put her hands on her wide birthing hips.  
  
“Haley, where’d Tara go?” she asked, glancing side to side, “I could have sworn that I heard her voice…”  
  
“Oh she’s in her room. Puking up buckets.” Haley answered nonchalantly as she watched TV, “Said she’s not up for dinner, blah blah blah, “y’know, right?” and so on.”  
  
Mrs. West blinked.  
  
“Oh, and that she’s sorry.”  
  
If the thought of having her visiting daughter out of culinary commission bothered her, she only showed it for a moment. She was perturbed momentarily, an annoyed noise escaping from somewhere low in her throat, before she sighed dejectedly.  
  
“Oh well.” She hummed, “I made so much to eat though, I hope she feels up to some leftovers a little later.”  
  
“Not to worry about that, Ma.” Haley licked her lips as she rocked herself to a standing position, cradling her distended gut, “I think that between the two of us, we can knock it out…”

**9.5 | the Return of Doughy Dani**

Waitressing was hard. So, you’d think that waitressing during the holidays was even harder, right? As it turns out, a little tiny slice of Conservative Christian pie out in the middle of Nowhere, SC meant that there wasn’t a lot to do at Big Daddy’s. They still kept her on for the full amount of hours—they even gave her some extra ones since Christy got too pregnant to stay on her feet all day, and the tips were *great*. Nothing like a good ol’ seasonal reminder to these Jesus freaks that the chick in black clothing bringing your food needs to eat too, right?  
  
“Hey Wednesday, your regular’s at the corner table.” came a voice from the kitchen, “You wanna get her?”  
  
“Yeah, I’ve got it.” The girthy goth rolled her brown eyes and hoisted herself up.  
  
*Call me fucking Wednesday one more time.*  
  
Dani’s coal black lips formed a tight scowl as she tugged at the bottom of her Big Daddy’s t-shirt, pulling it back over the porcelain plumpness that had managed to escape during her dinner. It wasn’t enough that she was known around here as “the goth waitress”, but on top of everything, she was getting fat.  
  
Fat*ter* as her ex-boyfriend’s voice reminded her in the back of her mind.  
  
Everyone put on weight during the holidays, not just her. And had he *seen* the rest of her family? She was fighting against genetics, boredom *and* comfort food, for Christ’s sake. Twenty pounds in two months wasn’t *that* much—and it wasn’t like he minded her fat ass when they first hooked up. She was better off without him anyway. The decent fucking wasn’t worth all the redneckery that came with dating someone with a truck that big and a dick that small.  
  
God, when had she started jiggling when she walked? Was that recent? Like, was it the big lunches she’d started having here that did that, or all the chips. Or the sitting around all day playing Xbox. Or… maybe it was being on her phone all day looking at makeup tutorials. God, she was out of shape.  
  
“What, no Haley today?” Dani grumbled as she lowered Courtney’s regular order down in front of her.  
  
Christ those titties were huge.  
  
“Oh, no… she just texted me.” Courtney sighed dejectedly, “Something about her sister coming to town.”  
  
“Blegh.” Dani curled one nostril, “The one with the nose?”  
  
“The one with the nose.” Courtney giggled, sipping on her tea, “Haley’s not too happy about it either.”  
  
“I can’t imagine why, given how unpleasant she is.” Dani chuckled huskily, “And I thought Haley was bad.”  
  
Oh shit. Had she said that out loud?  
  
“Right? She can be such a ditz, but at least she’s not a bitch like Tara.” Courtney snorted, “Remember back in high school when she chewed out her entire French class?”  
  
“I was there.” Dani groaned, letting the plastic red tray fall to her fluffy hip, “She was so serious too— wait, hold on…”  
  
Dani hung the corner  
  
“Hey Petro!” she shouted to the older man behind the counter, “I’m taking a lunch!”  
  
And despite the fact that that was the second lunch she’d taken since she’d gotten there, Big Daddy’s Burgers and Fries wasn’t exactly busy enough to warrant her manager saying no to a little catching up…  
  
Over cheese fries, naturally.

**10 | …And Company**

“So, this is what you do on a daily basis, huh?”  
  
“I mean, there’s not usually this many *people* over, but…” Haley took a moment to glance around the room appreciatively, “Yeah, pretty much.”  
  
The living room was livelier now than it had been in years. Since even before the girls left home. The girls had never had more than one or two friends over at a time, but to think that all these people could fit in their modest three-room cracker box was almost unheard of!   
  
“Why am I not surprised?”  
  
No one was quite sure why the waitress from Big Daddy’s had decided to join, even if she was just going to act like a pill the entire time. Haley blamed Courtney. Tara didn’t know Courtney’s name, so she just blamed the busty chick with the glasses. But the plump, pitch-black pouter was the least of Haley’s concerns…  
  
“It’s also not usually this… *uncomfortable*…”  
  
Haley hadn’t had to share the couch in forever! And never with more than one other person. Her sister, her mom, Courtney sometimes… but how was she supposed to get comfy with Tara, Courtney, *and* that fat waitress from Big Daddy’s all squeezed onto one couch?!  
  
Haley’s wide hips pressed tightly against Courtney’s flaring thighs, leg meat chafing uncomfortably against leg meat as the chunky freshman tried to wriggle her way into a more comfortable position. All of her ample flesh didn’t exactly make such a feat easy—but neither did Courtney’s or Dani’s! Even Tara’s skinny butt felt like too much… someone had to go!  
  
“Jesus could you not?” Danielle’s stomach wobbled from side to side  
  
“Haley, knock it off!” Courtney whined  
  
“Mom’s gonna be so mad if you get salsa on her couch.”  
  
“Oh my God everyone just *shut uuuup*!”  
  
“Girls, is everything okay in there?” Mrs. West called from her ever-present place in the kitchen, sounding as if she were scolding a bunch of children rather than the (overly) grown women that she was speaking to.  
  
“Uh… yeah Mom!” Haley lied, “We’re fine!”  
  
Haley leaned back into her seat. Her stupid, uncomfortable seat. This was why they needed an armchair. Not just so it would tie the room together (instead of just having a stupid TV against one wall and the couch against the other!) but so other people could *sit*! Gawd, it wasn’t that hard! All this stress was making her grumpy… and hungry.   
  
“Okay, look, someone sit on the floor.” The chunky brunette insisted in a hushed tone  
  
“I don’t wanna sit on the floor.”  
  
“Um, I’m a guest here.”  
  
“Your ass is the only one with enough padding to not be bothered by it.” Tara cut in, “I say you sit on the floor.”  
  
“Why are you always picking on me—you’ve got two other chicks just as chubby as I am.”  
  
“You wish we were as fat as you are.”   
  
“Okay, who invited Wednesday Addams?”  
  
And the debate sort of escalated like that. They may have been whispering in hushed tones so as not to anger the queen of the kitchen just a few feet away, but their whispers were just as hairy and equally as counterproductive! Our three fat friends and Tara couldn’t have been less egalitarian if they tried!  
  
But it got worse—all of their arguing meant that they were getting quite worked up! Bodies started moving, arms waving, cheeks shimmying and fingers pointing. And with four girls at once, three of them hardly as light as they liked to think that they were, that meant that the poor couch beneath them was taking quite a bit of strain!  
  
“Girls?” Mrs. West asked again, this time with a much firmer tone of voice, “Don’t make me come in there.”  
  
“We’re fine, Mom, just—unf!” Haley grunted, “Having a little trouble figuring out *seating arrangements*!”  
  
Unconvinced, the older West woman rolled her eyes and put the utensils down. Dinner would be fine for a moment, certainly long enough to qualm whatever was going on in there. So she took a few steps forward, poking her head into the living room, with the intention of giving a stern “Mom” look and quieting everything down. All she needed was another half hour and supper would be ready!  
  
But instead, her eyes widened in terror as she saw one of the legs on her couch begin to bend, and bend… until it snapped!  
  
Cheap wood shattered, knocking the already off-kilter couch unbalanced. The uneven distribution meant that all four legs practically exploded in splinters, and unfortunately all four girls were knocked out of their seats by the couch’s bucking! Three pudgy bodies (and Tara) came tumbling down without a clue as to what had happened.   
  
“Great job fatass.”  
  
“Again—two other asses, just as fat as mine!”  
  
“I am *so* sorry Mrs. West.”  
  
“My ass had nothing to do with it!”  
  
And even though they were now on the floor, their bickering continued. At least until Mrs. West let out a strong, sturdy  
  
“ENOUGH!”  
  
Which was sufficiently frightening enough that it scared each and every girl (even the ones that didn’t live there) straight enough to settle down. Everyone moved to the kitchen table where they did their best to keep things civil until dinner.  
  
“Now, this is part ‘Goodbye Tara’, part ‘We Have Guests’, so I made plenty for everyone.” Mrs. West said with a proud smile, her hands planted firmly on her wide hips as everyone looked on in awe of the spread that she’d whipped up for them, “So that means don’t be shy—eat up, everyone!”  
  
You didn’t need to tell anyone twice.

In life, we are often puzzled by that which could have been. And in writing, we are often tantalized by the very same idea. One little change can make a world's worth of differences, and it is our job as readers and writers to explore that concept. What follows is four potential 500 word explorations of scenarios based on some questions raised by readers, where just one little change could have meant an entirely different Life of Haley.

**“What if Tara had moved home instead of Haley?”  
  
What If? 1| Life of Tara**

Five meaty digits traced the circumference of her swollen stomach, sinking slightly into the pliable pudge that padded her ample frame. A low rumble escaped her mighty form as she felt the great weight in front of her press on the inside of her thighs. Tugging at the straining fabric of her shirt, hiking it further along the curvature of her gut, plush meaty arms began to pump in concentric circles in hopes of soothing the beastly belly before her.

“Tara, sweetie, did you want anything else?”

Crap.

“No Mom, I’m fine!”

It wasn’t that Tara didn’t appreciate her mother. Just the opposite. After she’d lost her job, she had nowhere else to go. She had no savings, no boyfriend, and it wasn’t like Haley could afford to keep her broke ass up until she found another job. And here her mother was, letting her move back in. She didn’t need to get a job, she didn’t need to pay rent—her mother was so nice to let her move in until she got back on her feet.

It was just, well… Tara didn’t spend too much time on her feet these days.

“Are you sure, sweetie? I know you like to have a little dessert sometimes.” Her mother held up the half-emptied pint of Bluebell from the kitchen doorway.

“I mean… since you’ve already got it out…”

It wasn’t that Tara hadn’t *tried* moving back out. It was just hard! There weren’t that many jobs in the fields she was looking for, and the thought of settling was just so depressing, y’know? Weeks turned to months, pounds turned to inches… and with her mom so ready and willing to let her live at the house rent-free, cooking for her and cleaning for her, why would Tara ever *want* to move out? Two years later, and Tara had gone through some pretty noticeable changes…

“Are you going to sleep out here tonight or in your room?” Mrs. West asked as she handed her doughy daughter the pint of ice cream and a spoon

“I think I’m gonna crash here tonight.” Tara yawned, stretching her pillowy arms high in the air and stretching like her overfed cat, “M’tired.”

“Alright, just don’t leave the TV on too loud. I’m going to bed.” Mrs. West said with a kiss on Tara’s chunky cheek, “Can I get you anything before I go?”

“Another blanket?” Tara asked in an especially needy tone, “I’m cold.”

“Well that’s ‘cause your tummy’s out.” Mrs. West said with a motherly tug on Tara’s upridden shirt, futilely dragging it back down the expanse of Tara’s tonnage only for it to ride back up again, “Here, give me just a second.”

In moments Tara was bundled up nice and warm beneath her favorite blanket. The remote by her side and ice cream balanced precariously on her belly… why would she ever want to get up?

With a spoonful of cold creamery in tow, Tara couldn’t possibly imagine a better Friday night…

**“What if Haley and Danielle were friends in High School?”  
  
What If? 2 | Life with Doughy Dani**

“I can’t believe he broke up with me!”

“I know.”

“We were so great together and he was *soooo* hot…”

“I… Y-yeah he sure was!”

“I’m just so depressed, Haley.”

“I know, I know…” Haley tugged her lips to the side contemplatively, “Hey, this one’s on me, okay? Don’t tell Petro.”

As she watched her friend and waitress walk away, Dani couldn’t help but sport a small black smirk that failed to so much as spread her marshmallow cheeks. After all this time working at a place like this, it was about time Haley started filling out.

They’d known each other for years—in fact, they’d been best friends ever since Ethan Haynes tried to date the two of them at the same time. And after pigging out at all their sleepovers, the *days* at a time they’d spend laying around eating junk food, and… Christ, just living with her crazy Mom, Haley was *finally* getting fat.

It wasn’t much, at least not yet, but Danielle Gossett could place every extra pound to be found.

Honestly, it was about time. Dani had been the fat one for forever, and she was about damn tired of being known as “Haley West’s fat friend”. At least when she was a kid they were creative. Doughy Dani or /chan/ielle… even fucking Gothblob was better than that. But ever since they were in high school, all anyone could talk about was Haley this and Haley that. Haley can see her toes and Haley doesn’t get tired going down the hall. Haley doesn’t get stuck in the desks, and Haley this and Haley blah blah blah blah…

Well now it was Dani’s time to shine. Haley may have been her best (and only) friend, but she’d put in her time as the fat one. Those extra inches marked a new day in Dani’s life—one where Haley’s hyper metabolism failed her, and they could start living life as equally overweight equals!

Speaking of the devil…

“Here, plate of cheese fries, on the house.” Haley smiled as she placed the butcher paper of greasy fries in front of the swell of her bestie’s stomach, “Extra cheese, extra bacon.”

“You know me.” Danielle wiggled her chunky fingers and dove right in. The spread of her belly on the table in front of her didn’t impede her one bit, despite the fact that it was bigger and more intrusive than ever.

Nobody could make heart attack sticks *quite* like Big Daddy’s, and the extra effort of working around all her fluff was worth it.

“So that sucks about Ryan.” Haley sat down across from her friend in the only spot she could—on the other side of the booth

“Yeah, he was a pig.” Danielle snorted as she lowered a fry into her parted black lips, thick chins quivering in piggish delight. “So, what are you doing after you get off?”

“I don’t know… why, you wanna come over?”

“Is you Mom making dinner?” Dani piqued a curious black eyebrow

“I mean, isn’t she always?” Haley laughed a little, “I don’t know if I’ll eat at home though. It’s been super crazy, I just got my lunch…”

“D-Do you think I could come over tonight?” Danielle’s pillowy cheek dimpled deviously, “Maybe we could hang out? I just don’t want to be alone…”

“Y-Yeah, sure thing D.” Haley’s expression softened as Dani’s tone broke, “I get off in an hour, okay?”

“Girl’s Night!” Dani put her wide wobbling arms up in the air triumphantly, “After dinner, of course.”

**“What if Haley had never moved home?”  
  
What If? 3 | Life of Mom**

The life of a stay at home mother could be a lonely one; especially considering that she hadn’t had anyone to mother ever since both of her daughters had left home. Claire West would never admit it, but a not-so-small part of her wished that her little girls had never left home. Even one of them laying around the house would have been preferable. But no; Tara had her job and Haley just wouldn’t listen to reason and come home already. There was no way that either of those girls could have been having a better time in Charleston than they could have been having if they were home with their poor old mom…

“Oh, it’s just so dull around here lately, Brenda.” Mrs. West made a face as she whisked the cake batter, “I got so used to having my girls home for Christmas and now it’s just… it’s lonely, y’know?”

As the other end gabbed and gabbed, Claire inspected her mixture for lumps. Listening to these boring housewives talk and talk and talk was so tedious sometimes—they always wanted to make it about themselves. While Mrs. Elliot prattled on, she raised the whisk to her mouth and licked off a bit of the sweet brown mixture.

“Hm? Oh, I’m sorry.” Claire smacked her full pink lips, “I just… oops!”

A dollop of batter fell onto her lemon-yellow sweater, running down the slope of her swollen teat. Nestling the phone between her fluffy cheek and her insulated shoulder, Claire hurried and placed the bowl down. Grabbing a paper towel and running it under the sink for a bit, she began dabbing at her chest.

“Sorry, just a little accident…” Claire made a face at the surely stained sweater before continuing, “It’s just… I don’t know, a “book club” isn’t really for me. I mean, if you read it on a kindle does it really count?”

Running her fingers along the hem of her sweater, Mrs. West removed the ruined top. Freed from its confines, her generous swell of a stomach crept forward that much further. She had really outdone herself this holiday season—these jeans of hers were such a struggle to get on this morning! She’d really lost control of her weight sometime last year—but then, what exactly was there to do around town but eat? Or take a baking class…

“I mean, if you’re sure they wouldn’t mind having me…” Mrs. West stuck a plump finger into the mix and suckled it clean, “I… could bring brownies?”

The woman on the other end of the phone gushed and gushed and gushed—it seemed like *someone* wanted to spend some time with her, at least.

“Alright, I’ll see you next Tuesday.” Mrs. West said with a smile, “Talk to you then.”

As she hung up the phone, Claire pulled the batter bowl close to the swell of her stomach. Hugging it tightly as she mixed, she hummed a happy little tune.

Looks like her taking all these cooking courses weren’t going to go waste after all!

**“What if the Yeng Corporation moved to Haley’s home town?”  
  
What If? 4 | Life with Yeng**

Haley West hadn’t been home since she moved out. Coming home little old Inman, she never really expected anything to change. They never had before—what was two years to stand in the way of the longstanding stubbornness of her home town?

The answer was a lot, apparently.

In just the short amount of time that she’d been away, plenty of things had changed. It had all started when that Yeng company decided to make themselves at home not long after Haley left. By the time she’d come back, you would have never known that Spartanburg County had ever existed without it. Pretty soon that stuff was everywhere, supplying product to just about every one of Haley’s old hangouts. The chains were mostly safe for now, but good old-fashioned staples like Venus Pie, Mellow Mushroom, every Meat & Three in the county had fallen in with that shady distributor. Even Big Daddy’s—Inman’s premier diner since 1995—had thrown their lot in with them, and Haley couldn’t have been more shocked!

“Here’s your order.” Came the gruff puff of their girthy goth waitress, “Lemme know if you need anything else.”

“Thanks Dani!” Courtney waved a pillowy arm as the big black ball tottered in place ‘til she could turn herself around, “Hey Haley, pass me a fork—I’m gonna dig into these cheese fries.”

“Ethically I don’t think I should.” Haley made a face

“Fine, be a pill.” Courtney’s lower chin creased in displeasure, “Mack, pass me a fork?”

“Sure thing!”

Pound upon pound of overfed ex-athlete poured itself on top of Haley in massive Mackenzie’s attempts to reach past the most svelte member of their trio. Her quaking fat smothered Haley as it pressed her hard against the back of the booth, arms jiggling as she struggled to wrap her doughy digits around the silverware.

“Thanks Hun.” Courtney reached passed the ocean of her own titflesh as it surged on top of the table, “Pass the ketchup?”

Every day it was like this—Haley had thought it strange when Courtney had porked up so much since high school, but it was downright weird that Mackenzie had gotten so big too. Looking at them now, you would have never recognized them!

Courtney’s jowls bunched as she shifted in her seat, the booth below her behemoth butt creaking ominously. Both of her sloping saddlebag milksacks pooled heavily on top of the table, the bespectacled brunette was breathing heavily as the girth of her gut wrestled with the table. Her shallow breaths as she pounded back greasy fried potatoes with cheese and bacon made Haley a bit nervous. It sounded like her friend was going to have a coronary right then and there, and the icky moans she would make while she ate didn’t help. Likewise, the big blonde blimp beside her wasn’t any better off. How could one girl pack so much weight into so much belly?

“So, where to after this?” Mackenzie half-asked as she dreamily eyeballed her heart attack of a burger, “I’m thinking Venus Pie.”

“That’s nice, we haven’t been there in a while."

Haley gulped—how was she supposed to avoid the Freshman 15 when all anyone around her wanted to do was eat?!

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Bobo the Hobo is an aspiring author from South Carolina. He’s been writing weight gain stories and erotica since 2007, and hosts multiple free interactive stories on writing.com. For thousands of free chapters written by Bobo and other authors, please check out the links below!

[Buttercombe Academy for Growing Girls](https://www.writing.com/main/interact/item_id/1856959-Buttercombe-Academy-for-Growing-Girls)

One of the biggest and most sprawling interactives on-site, Buttercombe Academy allows you to follow the journey of a student or faculty member in one of the fastest growing private schools in North America. But there’s something not quite right about this place… everyone’s fat! This pudgy prep school classic just celebrated its 6th year and 2200th chapter!

[Super-Sized: the Mel Carlyle Story](https://www.writing.com/main/interact/item_id/2041198-Super-Sized-the-Mel-Carlyle-Story)

Spinning directly out of Buttercombe Academy we follow Melanie Carlyle, an SSBBW with a passion for pudge and a hunger for more, More, MORE! Join Mel in her quest to gain as much weight as possible. The possibilities are endless, just like her appetite!

[Daven's Port](https://www.writing.com/main/interact/item_id/2072923-Davens-Port)

Dakota Johnson moves from Texas to Daven’s Port, North Carolina, and her whole world changes! Sometimes literally. This is a weirder, wackier interactive where just about anything can happen. Boys & girls of all ages find themselves at the mercy of the mysterious Yeng Corporation, twisted ancient evils lie within the Liponomicon, and all fall in wonder at the Machine that goes Boop Boop! 600 chapters and counting!

[Packing on Pounds: the Piper Black Story](https://www.writing.com/main/interact/item_id/2141026-Packing-on-Pounds-the-Piper-Black-Story)

Piper Black proved so popular that Daven’s Port alone couldn’t contain her! This dark horse character indulges in get-rich-quick schemes, delicious overconsumption, and just plain getting her greed on as she shrugs off poverty and her own embarrassing family. The Black women are known for being big, bombastic and busty, but Piper takes it to a whole new level!