

A Short Story

FAT #1

TEEN & ADULT



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He walked into the arcade the way a battleship docks: huge, lumbering and awkward. The effort to move so much flesh made the boy sweat even in the cool of the air conditioning. Sad 'piggy' eyes, scrunched to mere specks, were lost in a face composed entirely of flushed and glistening cheeks.

“Hey kid, can't ya read? The sign says nobody under eighteen until three o'clock on school days.”

“Yes sir,” he whispered, “but school's out today. Teachers conference. Really!”

“Yeah sure, kid.” The man looked doubtful, but money changed and the boy clumsily scooped up the card with fingers the size of giant sausages.

The machine stood in the middle of the room, beckoning with flashing lights and simulated engine roars. In spite of being generously overweight, the boy approached as if dancing, with a surprisingly light step. His face almost a caricature of pleasurable anticipation. The laughing theatrical mask.

“Take a look at fatso, the race car driver.”

The mask collapsed.

“Shut up why don’tcha! Hi Jim.”

“Hey, you know this tub of lard?”

“You are a real pain. Listen jerk, Jim can play this thing better than you ever will.”

“Oh yeah? I doubt if two-ton can even get in the seat.”

It was a real squeeze. Jim slowly worked his legs in under the dash. Painfully he wedged himself behind the steering wheel.

“Man, if he even breathes the whole thing’s gonna explode.”

As the machine chimed and came alive, so did Jim. The seat realistically tilted, bumped and vibrated in sync with the track. And the boy, grossly overhanging the seat and back, jiggling like some monstrous

bag of Jello, became a seasoned racer. Like a professional, he confidently challenged the course with smooth, swift and flowing movements. So much like a well-tooled machine himself, Jim faultlessly maneuvered through traffic, swerving around cars, obstacles and pile-ups. With precise steering, feet furiously pumping brake and gas, and shifting hand a constant blur, he racked up point after point.

“Lookout, lookout!”

“Shift it!”

“Brakes, jeez use the brakes.”

Unhearing or unheeding, Jim mastered one course after another, each more difficult than the preceding one. They got harder; he got better.

“Man, I didn’t know there were so many. I’ve never seen half of ‘em.”

“This kid’s unbelievable!”

Jim was so intensely absorbed he didn’t notice the sopping wet clothes clinging to his skin, the plastered-down hair, the beads of sweat dripping off his nose. He never heard the gathering crowd until after the last bell and flash as he rocketed past the finish line.

They all cheered.

At the unexpected sound, Jim’s head snapped up. From bliss his expression abruptly changed to confusion, then to pathetic embarrassment.

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t know anyone was waiting to play.” Puffing with exertion, Jim hurriedly tried to heave his bulk out of the seat.

“Sit down. Sit down.”

“Where have you been?”

“Pal, you are the best I’ve - - any of us have ever seen.”

“Really?” Such a tiny voice from so huge a body.

“Yeah and nobody’s waiting to play either. Nobody wants to look like a fool.

“Kid, what’s your name?”

“Jim.”

“What’s the champ’s name?”

“Uhum - - Jim!”

“OK Jim, let’s see you do it again.”

Someone’s card slipped into the slot and with more flashing and ringing, the screen lighted and the seat jumped.

“I love it, “ Jim muttered as the starting flag came down and he tromped on the gas and slammed the stick to change gears. “I love it!” he shouted. The seat tilted, his mass sagged and slumped to the right as he passed a car on the inside corner - - at a mere 120 mph and still accelerating.

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