BEING MALLOMAR

If you’re a chocoholic I should be familiar to you. And even if you’re a vanilla person, or worse, a *dieter*, you may know me. I’ve been known to break down the resolve of the snobbiest of eaters. Who could resist a round Graham cracker topped with a puff of marshmallow and enrobed in a hard shell of dark chocolate? It’s a rhetorical question, of course. I’ve been around since 1913 and my lusciousness continues to attract many. The secret is preservatives. Not a big deal in this age of Botox and best of all, you can’t taste them.

This is a story about me and Jessica. You may be wondering why I would remember someone so inconsequential. It’s not that she was more special that any of the others. In fact, our tale is a familiar one. But in this tell-all era of Oprah and Dr. Phil and the preoccupation with weight, there’s a story that’s been missing from the lexicon of dieting. It’s the one about why I still matter.

When I met Jessica, she was a 9-year-old lonely chubby girl who needed a friend. Her parents introduced us; she fell in love and became obsessed with me (what else is new?). Despite being called “fatso” by her sisters and teased about her weight by schoolmates, she stood by me and we became very close. From time to time she would stray with Oreos, Duncan Hines cupcakes, and even go vanilla with Vienna Fingers, but she always returned.

When she was 15, her mother put her on diet pills; she lost weight, met a boy, fell in love, and I’m guessing had sex because that’s usually the reason why I get dumped. She dropped me for 20 years, during which time she got married and divorced, moved to San Francisco, lived in a theatre commune, became an actress and a vegetarian, cut out all sugar from her diet (imagine!), and eventually became a raw “foodie”. Do I need to tell you how that worked out?
It’s the mid-1980s, not a perfect time to move back to New York, but that’s what Jessica does. There’s a recession and Ronald Reagan is president. I’m encouraged to learn that Jessica wants to re-establish a relationship with her family, with whom she’s been estranged for years. Troubled family relationships are a specialty of mine. Don’t get me wrong. I don’t enjoy saying this and I’m not an ogre who feeds on the misery of others (remember, they feed on me). But I’m a realist and that, along with preservatives and my belief in capitalism, are what have made me successful.

My reunion with Jessica took place in her parents’ apartment. No longer a vegetarian, she still held on to some outdated beliefs, like chocolate is bad and carob is good. She looked first-rate, though. Her body was toned from studying dance and she wore clothes that showed off her figure. There was an air of triumph around her, as if her weight was linked to her success, and her parents validated that.

Dinner was over and her stepfather was saying that Ronald Reagan was a greater president than that anti-Semite FDR, and Jessica looked uncomfortable. Knowing she was a liberal, her stepfather enjoyed goading her with his extreme views and she was trying hard to restrain herself. Their disagreements often could end up with him exploding.

Jessica began to look around distractedly until her eyes rested on me. There was a slight smile and her breathing seemed to quicken. Her stepfather was talking about how minorities are lazy and that’s the reason they’re poor when, as if in a trance, she reached into my box and picked me up, nearly crushing me. She dropped me into her mouth whole and ate the entire box.

We hung out for a couple of years after that, which happened to coincide with her futile attempts to forge a bond with her parents. Again, I had to share her with others -- waxy Kisses,
tiresome Oreos, and sometimes Toblerone chocolate (which was a little expensive), but she always came back. And like before, she gained weight. The bigger she got, the less I would have to worry about those other rivals: boyfriends.

Then an odd thing happened. She started cutting back on her own (no diet pills this time), and began exercising. It might have had something to do with her parents -- her mother encouraged her with such helpful advice as to think about food as poison -- or it might have had to do with her interest in a man, who just happened to have chocolate skin (what a coincidence). For whatever reason, she dumped me again and the next time I encountered her was when she moved to Chicago to go to graduate school. Chicago is a very lonely place in the winter and, as you can imagine, I’m extremely popular there.

We resumed our liaison, though it wasn’t as hot and heavy as had been before. She would get distracted by love affairs but I took solace that, if nothing else, I was a great rebound relationship. I thought we would go on forever (she was in Chicago for nine years), but when she moved to Los Angeles she never connected with me again. For some reason (maybe it was being back in California), she became very strict about not eating white flour and sugar. I’d see her in the supermarket but she always walked by me, with not even a glance, when she was in the cookie aisle.

Now I hear she’s back in New York and eating white flour and sugar again. But still no word from her. Good riddance. I’ve decided to eliminate relationships I consider “toxic” from my life. That may sound odd, since you probably think that’s what most of my relationships are. Yes, I’ve heard how I’m contributing to the obesity problem and that nutritionally I have nothing
to offer. But understand this; I fill a need. Until that changes, those nutritionists and diet experts don’t have a chance. And maybe Jessica doesn’t either.

Jessica Copen's writing life has spanned various genres, including journalism, speechwriting and playwrighting. She also has worked as a press secretary for a mayor and governor. Jessica is currently working on her memoir.