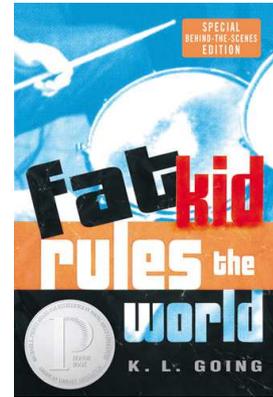


Fat Kid Rules the World, by K.L. Going

Chapters One & Two

Chapter 1

I'm a sweating fat kid standing on the edge of the subway platform staring at the tracks. I'm 17 years old, weigh 296 pounds, and I'm 6 foot 1. I have a crew cut, yes a crew cut, sallow skin, and the kind of mouth that puckers when I breathe. I'm wearing a shirt that reads, "Miami Beach - Spring Break 1997" and huge, bland tan pants - the only kind of pants I own. Eight pairs, all tan.



It's Sunday afternoon and I'm standing just over the yellow line trying to decide whether people would laugh if I jumped. "Would it be funny if the fat kid got splattered by a subway train? Is that funny?" I'm not being facetious; I really want to know. Like it or not, apparently there's something funny about fat people. Something unpredictable. Like when I put on my jacket and everyone in the hallway stifles laughter. Or when I stand up after sitting in the cafeteria and Jennifer Maraday, Brooke Rodriguez, and Amy Glover all bust a gut. I don't get angry. I just think, "What was funny about that? Did my butt jiggle? Did I make the bench creak so that it sounded like a fart? Did I leave an indentation?" There's got to be something, right? Right?

So it's not a stretch to be standing on the wrong side of the yellow line giving serious thought to whether people would laugh if I threw myself in front of the F train. And that's the one thing that can't happen. People can't laugh. Even I deserve a decent suicide.

That's why I'm standing here. Because I can't make up my mind. I'm thinking about what Dayle said. Go ahead... I wouldn't miss you. Go ahead...Go ahead... I'm telling myself my brother didn't mean it, but even I know that's a lie. Meanwhile it's hot and I've been standing too long... I close my eyes and imagine the whole scene as it might play out.

First, the train is coming, its single headlight illuminating the dark tracks. I to picture myself flying dramatically through the air but realize I wouldn't have the muscle power to launch my body. Instead, I would plummet straight down. Maybe I wouldn't even get my other leg off the platform - my weight would pull me down like an anchor. That's how I see it. The train plows into me; my fat busts apart, expands to cover the train window and the tunnel walls. I'm splattered. Except for my left leg which is lying on the platform untouched - a fat, bleeding hunk of raw meat.

Fat Kid Messes Up - coming soon to a theater near you.

I start to laugh. Suddenly there's something funny about it. I swear to God. There really is.

Chapter 2

"You laughing at me?" The disembodied voice is clearly addressing me.

"Huh...?!" I turn away from the tracks.

"You're laughing at me?"

"No..."

Who the hell is talking to me? I have to scan the entire subway platform before I find the voice. Twisted staircase, black gum covered tile walls, infested concrete pit... and then, ah, the source of the paranoid voice. He's right beside me, but he's sitting on the floor, which is why I didn't see him.

He looks like a blonde ferret. Stringy unwashed hair and huge eyes, jeans that are barely recognizable, stained white T-shirt, huge red overshirt, ratty old sweater... The sneakers, one converse and one Nike, are both untied and the layers are all partially buttoned even though it's got to be one hundred degrees in the subway. The guy is so filthy I can hardly look at him. I mean, he's caked - looks like an old war victim from some black and white film.

There's one more thing I notice - and if I'm telling the truth I should admit that I noticed it first. He's the skinniest person I've ever seen. Even in all those layers, the kid is skinny.

"You mocking me?" I say, angry. I want to say it with a snarl, but when your cheeks are puffy you don't snarl, you huff. A little puff of air escapes despite my best intentions and I end up sounding like an overweight dog farting. My eyes dart and I think, "did that sound funny?"

The kid laughs. His face wrinkles and he looks even more like a ferret. He says, "now that was funny." Except he doesn't hold his non-existent stomach and howl. And he doesn't try to keep a straight face to be nice while obviously choking on suppressed hysteria. He says it straight out. Makes me think. A little puff of air while I was trying to be tough? I guess it is funny. The dirty, skinny kid got it right.

I'm ready to give him full credit and be on my way, mosey along to contemplate some new non-funny form of suicide, (Fat Kid Gets Hit By a Bus?) but the blonde ferret stands up and extends a grimy hand.

"Curt MacCrae," he says. That's when I just about piss my pants.

Curt MacCrae is a legend at W.T. Watson High School. He's the only truly homeless, sometimes student, sometimes dropout, punk rock, artist, god among us. He's the only one who's ever played a concert at The Dump. The only one that bands like The Trees and KingPin invite to hang with them. He's the only one to get into five fights in one day, get the crap beaten out of him in all five and still have everyone's respect. He's the only fucking genius guitar player I've ever met. And, of course, he's the only one to get up in the middle of class on a Tuesday and disappear for good. Kids at school loved that.

Since then, no one's actually seen Curt MacCrae, and that was last year. The school newspaper took a poll and three quarters of the student body think he's dead. Everyone refers to him as the Blair Witch of the Lower East Side. And I just shook his hand.

"Troy," I say. "Troy Billings." It comes out star struck and I frown a little to compensate. "I know your music. I mean, I heard a bootleg of a show you played with Smack Metal Puppets. It was so great. Really great. Really, really great."

Curt makes a face, then glances at the tracks. He walks sideways two steps and cocks his head, thinking hard. The F train speeds into the station and the Sunday afternoon crowd climbs into the empty train. I should've thrown myself in front of it, but now I'm left standing there, awkward.

"That's my train," I say. I need to split before I do anything stupid. Anything else stupid.

Curt grins. "Hell it is."

"What?"

"You owe me lunch."

"What?" This, the only word in my vocabulary.

He hops twice.

"I just saved your life. It's the least you could do."

He says it matter-of-fact and I'm confused. I'm standing there sweating and I wonder if I smell. God knows he does. He reeks.

"I owe you lunch?" I say, further solidifying the impression that I am a moron incapable of conversation.

"Yeah. Mmmhmm. Handicapped elevator's this way." He shrugs in no particular direction and takes off. I'm insulted about the elevator comment and he's completely wrong about saving my life, but I'm hungry and by some freak occurrence in the universe Curt MacCrae appears to want to have lunch with me. So, I go.

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