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“Maria, did you get my call? It’s Genevieve.” These days Genevieve is just a voice on the phone, a long distance relationship like Maria wants. Whenever Maria hears from Genevieve, she knows trouble is brewing. Genevieve is Maria’s only connection with Rathskell Levy since Maria stopped talking to Fran. Genevieve is Maria’s editorial assistant at Rathskell Levy, and the primary link to her boss Fran. The only link to Fran, thank God.

To be absolutely truthful, there is occasional communication between Maria and Fran, but it is always by email, and unfortunately for Maria once the email floodgates are open, the electronic missives fly back and forth too often for her liking. So Maria ignores as many of Fran’s emails as she possibly can, annoying Fran even more than just talking to her through Genevieve. A good part of Fran and Maria’s relationship, as you can see, is based on reciprocal annoyance.

Back to Genevieve’s phone call. “I stayed late last night to proof-read *Wise Acre*, and before she left, Fran wanted you to know she doesn’t agree with some of the changes you made. She said she’d email you.” More email from Fran, ugh.

Maria is sort of a drop out as an editor—more than just sort-

of-a. Fran is the main reason for Maria's permanent truancy. If Fran had the last word, Maria would drop dead rather than drop out; and Maria cannot think of anything more apropos for Fran either. This animosity is what finally got Maria to decide to be a writer's editor, pure and simple.

No acquisitions these days—and previously acquisitions were as few as Maria could get away with. After all, she isn't really an acquisitions editor. She prefers to be an editor's editor, work from home, seeing writers there, editing instead of traveling into the Big Apple. Fortunately for Maria, Rathskell Levy can't afford to lose her. And, they can't afford to have her in the City either. A mid-size publisher with all the overhead of a large publisher doesn't mind not having another body squashed in with the rest. There are too many departments and too many people working there already. Maria's exodus to the country is for the best, as far as her firm is concerned.

Maria used to love going to the City and going to work with all the hustle and bustle. She loved the camaraderie, especially when she was one of the interns. Working as an intern during the summer of her junior year at college was exciting. She was in awe of the editors, in awe even of the editorial assistants who did the editor's dirty work, and her awe took in some of the other interns as well. Fran Koppelman wasn't at the firm then.

The friendships Maria made at Rathskell while she worked her way up the ranks were good ones that lasted for many years. Somewhere along the line, probably when she was raising her children, she realized she didn't need the New York City, big publishing company hassle any more. She had her friends, she had her family, she had her work, she had her house in the country; what more could she want. That and Fran Koppelman brought an end to Maria's daily grind to the Big Apple.

Secretly for years and years, before she even thought of editing books, Maria wanted to own a bookstore. She loved reading and she loved just looking through books. Over the years, she had changed her reading interests from time to time, which gave her the chance to go through lots of different store sections for books. Her longest, most infamous section sickness was diet books. You could say she had an insatiable hunger for diet books. Whatever bookstore she frequented, she always went directly to the diet book section, usually buying at least one book, sometimes two or three. Maria read each and every one of her diet books. Okay, some she skimmed. She probably tried most of the diets, even some of those she skimmed. Back then, in her diet craze, Maria was trying her damndest to lose weight. She must have owned a hundred or more diet books. Just about one and three-quarter books for each pound she needed to lose. You do the math.

Times change. Maria conquered her weight problem—really squashed it out of existence, for good. She still went to bookstores, but her diet-book section sickness was over and her section selection changed. She never—that's never—went to the diet section first. Sometimes she didn't even go there at all during a visit. But her old diet book habit was hard to break, and every once in a while for old time's sake Maria found herself checking out the latest in diet fashion, every now and again.

2

“Hi-ee, Mareeia.” A woman’s voice with a distinct octave crackle. Maria was at a disadvantage. She was in the backyard of her house tending her plants with her back turned to the voice, repotting her plants into bigger containers, plastic to ceramic. Hearing her name startled her. She wasn’t expecting anyone. She didn’t hear a car drive up.

“Sophie. I’m Sophie,” the woman nearly shouted. Maria turned and looked blankly at the woman, and the woman, Sophie, started to introduce herself more fully. “Amy must have told you about meecie.” That octave crackle again. Maria had been caught off guard, and she was having a hard time processing what this very overweight woman in the ugly blue satin warm-up suit and a pair of bright white sneakers was talking about.

“Ameecie (octave crackle again) said you could help me,” the woman continued. “She said you lost a lot of weight, and wrote a book about losing weight.”

Maria still didn’t get it. “I’m Amy’s sister-in-law’s friend”, this extra-extra large woman said. “The one Amy told you about.”

Maria could see Sophie had a lot of weight to lose— aay lot. She

was big all right, big all over, probably seventy pounds overweight, or more—yes, definitely more. She would have been a pretty woman. (Isn't that always the case?) She had great features, only they were nearly obliterated by her big face. She seemed nice and friendly, and she looked like she would be easy to talk to. Sophie's friendliness, and the possibility of her good looks, stood in contrast to Maria's angry criticisms, the ones she thought but didn't say: *how dare you wait so long to contact me, and then come to my house without calling first.*

This was the beginning of Maria's new career, from editor and writer to helper of women who want to lose weight. Oh, yes, Maria was not only an editor. She had tried her hand at writing, too.

After writing *Escape to Thin*, a very slim volume about the emotional side of losing weight, Maria dutifully fielded calls and emails from women who read her weight loss book. She spoke to them and wrote back to them, but she turned down their entreaties for face-to-face help. She was strictly, according to her, a writer's editor and a bit of a writer but definitely not someone who would be a teacher, mentor, or therapist for women who wanted to lose weight.

Maria's wasn't one of those how-to book wonders (small *w*) either. She was not an author who wrote to make money from expensive consultations and speaking engagements. That was not her thing. She had scruples, she said to herself, and she was not a money-grubber. Her book was her entre into the world of writers. She was proud of it, and she wouldn't exploit it in any other way than just selling it as a book.

When it came to marketing her little book, she declined to do talks, and to appear anywhere on behalf of her book. She frowned on radio and TV interviews, which she thought, because she was a first-time author with a little book, would be just a sound bite or two anyway. And what can you learn from a sound bite? No, this was definitely not Maria's thing.

You might think this strange. Someone with something to say turning down the chance to let the world know she had something to say. But that was Maria. She had this kooky idea that her little book was like a widget; not the widget referred to all over the internet, not the component of an interface that enabled a user to perform a function or access a service, but the general term widget used in economics to denote an abstract unit of production or a product. Maria thought of her book economically as a widget, and widgets just were. There was no more to be said about them than that.

Her reasoning went like this: no one cares who manufactures the nails and screws you buy at the hardware store. The manufacturers of these products don't go on TV and give interviews. They don't extol the virtues of their products, toot their own horns, or take liberties with their position in life and comment on domestic and international matters. Yet their products are of unquestionable value to all of us. And their products, the nails and screws that are an essential part of our everyday lives, just are.

Maria didn't stop there. She rattled on, carefully buttressing her reasoning for not promoting her little book.

Take nails for instance, she thoughtfully reflected. A nail is not just any old nail. Different nails serve different functions. They come in all different sizes, from spikes to brads. They're usually made of steel, although they also can be made of other materials like aluminum, brass, or for that matter, many other metals. A nail's surface can be coated or plated to resist corrosion, to increase gripping strength, or to give it a certain decorative appearance. All nails have a head, a shank, and a point at one end of the shank. There are close to three hundred types of nails made in the United States today. Close to three hundred, can you believe that?

For some work you need a six-penny nail. That's a nail that's

two inches long. An eight-penny nail is two-and-a-half inches, and so forth. Some nails have large heads and some don't. The ones with large heads are usually hidden behind some covering like sheetrock or paneling. They are for framing. The ones with small heads just a little bit bigger than their shanks are always there at the finish, but you might not see them either. They work undercover too, hidden by putty or plugs; sometimes being deep undercover if the putty or plugs get painted so you don't even see the putty or plug. Nail manufacturers are certainly not tooting their own horns.

And screws. Manufacturers don't give interviews about screws either, and there would be no end in sight if a knowledgeable screw manufacturer gave a talk on his products.

This is what Maria's widget reference was all about. If the nail and screw manufacturers of the world didn't give interviews about their products, why should she? And so she marketed her book, much to the consternation of her publisher, as a widget. Like her hardware idols, she made sure her product had the best distribution possible, and if it were needed, just like a nail or screw, her book would be found.

It had been months since Maria's good friend Amy called and sheepishly asked Maria if she could help her sister-in-law's friend lose weight. It was one of those Maria-Amy phone talks where both parties were nimbly holding the phone and talking while they did everything else they needed to do, including pee. Maria's flush obscured Amy's request for help for her sister-in-law's friend. After a few sentences, Amy, who was by then Swiffering the kitchen floor, repeated herself, and Maria, who was adding to her grocery list, understood. Maria didn't say yes, but she didn't say no either. That was Maria's downfall. This was months and months ago. So many months that

Maria forgot about Sophie.

Maria's friend Amy made a special plea, and Maria caved. At least, this is what Maria told herself. She was wrong. It was not simple caving or even altruism that made her accept. It was not pure friendship either. Maria lost the battle she'd been fighting—her conflict about getting involved with women who needed to lose weight. It was like her involvement with her beloved authors all over again, helping them get better too. So when Amy, her good friend, implored Maria, saying she gave out Maria's number already. "She's my sister-in-law's good friend..." Maria told herself she weakened for a friend. Not true.

This explained Maria to a T. She is a bunch of contradictions. Aren't most people? Maria had more contradictions than most, though; that's what made her so complete. Nothing pure. Inside herself, she covered all the bases. To start on the surface, she did book editing primarily from home. She was a country editor about fifty miles outside of New York City, married, two children, and she wrote about the emotional side of weight loss last year in a very little book entitled *Escape to Thin*.

Since *Escape to Thin* was received so favorably among disenchanted dieters, the word rather than the waistline spread. Maria's thesis was that diet and exercise aren't enough. In putting this disqualification right out there, Maria was violating the sanctity of "diet and exercise," the holy buzzwords of weight loss. All women worshipped at the altar of "the diet." If they didn't, they felt guilty. That's *the* diet to you, madam. Exercise is a different matter. No one really expects to exercise. It is too much like doing penance. Exercise is one chink in the diet-exercise holy duo that Maria exploited to the hilt. Heretic Maria.

Word of mouth led to phone calls and emails from a number

of women who wanted to know more about the emotional side of dieting and weight loss. And what about the exercise variable in the equation? Why did Maria completely leave exercise out? Wasn't this unethical, unforgiveable, irreligious?

Her women readers, previously beguiled, gung-ho exercise nuts with all the latest equipment, gym memberships, and at least one good friend to walk with, who all did as little exercising as they could, let Maria slip a fast one by them, just like they had always let their exercise regimen easily slip from their grasp. Maria in her *Escape to Thin* book had played divide and conquer with the exercise-diet dynamic duo. Women weight loss exercisers had left themselves unguarded, a chink in their ardor for exercise. Maria exploited this. An exploited chink needs to be a chink well exploited, and Maria did it fabulously.

Pre-Maria's book, it was diet or nothing. It was do or die with a diet. And many women, you could say, died trying. Maria, not the editor, not the mother and wife, not the plant re-potter, but Maria the author was who women wanted to talk to about losing their excess weight the emotional way. Exercise, according to Maria's reading of the research couldn't cut it, and that's the way Maria told it. This left the diet on its own, out in the open, and fair game for Maria.

With all that she was doing—writer, editor, wife, mother, house-cleaner, gardener, personal groomer, reader, sister, daughter, friend, acquaintance—could she put women's weight problems on her plate as well? Sophie was there with her soft brown eyes and fringe hairdo, and of course her ugly blue satin warm up suit. Sophie had come to Maria as big as life, definitely terribly overweight, and she was counting on Maria personally for help. As for Maria, could she? Would she? Why? Why not? Did she need this in her life?

Michael, Maria's husband of husbands, was—what else would a husband of husbands be, but sympathetic, although he didn't under-

stand why Maria couldn't move on and let go of the weight thing. Husband of husbands wasn't critical or condescending or disapproving, or anything that a husband of husbands shouldn't be. He reasoned: Maria had certainly conquered her own weight problem. She had more than conquered it. All the hard work, all the years, all the sweat equity, all the abject failure, always living for the future, frightened of returning to the past. Her weight had been Maria's private torture, and she had exquisitely laid its racks, thumbscrews, and pillories to rest.

For the most part, Maria agreed with her sympathetic, wonderful husband. She wasn't interested in getting involved. She had her own life to live. She was doing enough already. Early mornings, late nights—editing and writing never seemed to end. Not that Maria was a workaholic. She was a lifeaholic. She loved everything in her life (well, almost). She didn't get enough of vegging out to watch old movies on TV, or sitcoms that Michael, husband of husbands, couldn't stand, sitcoms that she talked over with her sister-in-law by email almost every day because Michael, her life partner and husband of you know what, didn't have a sympathetic bone in his body when it came to Maria's sitcoms. If she were forced to tell the truth, Maria didn't think the sitcoms were very good either. But she tried her hardest not to admit this to H of H Michael.

Anyway, Maria had a life outside of work, vegging out being only a too-small part of it.

So the idea of helping women lose weight grew on Maria, and she went into her first weight loss case—the case of Sophie—with the idea that Sophie and her weight problems would grow on her too. Maria's doubts about working with women who wanted to lose weight had lost their punch over the time it took Sophie to get in touch. Maria started with Sophie when Maria was ripe to start.

Maria and Sophie talked and talked and talked, about Sophie as a person, about her weight history, about her dieting history, about her family, about her upbringing, about times when she had gotten thin. So many diets over so much time, it would take a weight loss detective to unravel the mystery of why weight was such a difficult villain for Sophie to defeat. While absorbing all that Sophie was telling her, Maria helped Sophie develop a weight loss plan, one that was in keeping with who Sophie is as a person. This is the proper way. One size doesn't fit all. Tailor it to the person. Maria had already said this in her little book, and she had done this in her own life too.

Sophie had timed it just right. Maria's change from a commute-to-the-city book editor to a non-commuting, stay-at-home country editor had taken longer than she liked. She made the decision, and then it took her almost all of four years to cut down city travel to a couple of days a week. Finally, she worked it so that she only had to go into the city for select meetings. Authors who wouldn't travel to the country, and these were mostly the bigs, were handed over to other editors. Maria got the littles, only she didn't look at it this way.

She liked her work arrangement. Lots of someone else's did the acquiring, the managing, the administrating, the producing, the copy editing, the rights and permissions gathering, while Maria did the working with, the rewriting, the handholding, the thinking right along with. This is why she had gone into publishing in the first place. She wasn't any good at the administrative part of it, she wasn't artistic in the art department sense, she wasn't a publicist-type, and she wasn't an acquisitions person. None of these jobs were for her. And she wasn't any good at them anyway.

Maria didn't have to acquire, to choose, to locate, to swoon over, to reject, to dislike, to put down, to manage, or to promote. The someone else's did all of that. And these someone else's needed Maria.

After all, who was going to take a nobody's manuscript and turn it into a treasure—only Maria. This was her job; it was her forte as well. Not that she always hit a home run—far from it. But she wasn't expected to hit a home run with her first-time authors. All she had to do was help their books get to first base, and then some of them would steal second; a few made a head first slide into third, beating the throw by inches. Fran and the firm couldn't ask for more. Well, strike the Fran thing.

Sophie coming to Maria, was just right for Maria. The prospect of helping women solve their weight problems had grown into a true desire, and Sophie had come to Maria knowing about Maria's *Escape to Thin* book, which told how to break the rules of women who stay fat.

To Maria's great disappointment, Sophie only wanted to lose weight by dieting and exercise. She wanted Maria's ideas about a good diet plan, not how to break the rules that were keeping her weight in place. She wanted a great exercise routine to go along with the diet. Pretty ordinary stuff. Sophie couldn't imagine losing weight without both diet and exercise. Since Maria had nothing against a person starting where she felt comfortable, she said to herself that it's best to start where Sophie wants to. There would be time enough to interest Sophie in a more sophisticated approach to losing weight—learning how to break the rules that keep a woman fat.

3

Sophie had gone on numerous diets most of her adult life—and skilions of exercise routines too—but only successfully losing weight on crash diets—and crazy, crash exercise like biking or running for miles on end. Nothing, not even gaining back all the weight she crash-dieted and crash-exercised herself out of deterred her from wanting to do it all over again and again and again. Much later, Maria would find out that there were psychologists who had researched this very thing, this wanting to do it all over again despite pitiable failure after failure. The psychologists called it the false hope syndrome.

Believing in diets is not a bad thing. Diets aren't bad when they are used right. Neither is the combination of diet and exercise. After all, calories in and calories out make good sense thermodynamically. Maria knew from her years of reading diet books and reading about diets that not all calories have the same impact on your body. Fats, carbohydrates, and protein each have its own unique effect, and this is also true for the different carbohydrates like starch, fiber, and sugar. So calories-in can't simply be calculated as if all calories are the same.

“I was heavy through highiee (voice crackle) school, and then in my twenties I went on a crash diet—I knew I shouldn't do it, crash

diet I mean. Along with the diet, I rode my bike vigorously for at least twenty miles a day. I lost fifty pounds. I was in the best shape of my life.” Sophie sat with one leg tucked under her in Maria’s overstuffed chair and talked with great pride. Then she segued into “That was then, this is now, and I’m fat again, much fatter than ever. If only I could do what I did then.”

More than anything, Sophie wanted to lose her weight through diet and exercise. But even though she previously lost weight lots of times, she gained the weight back again with a vengeance. Now she was the heaviest ever, and she just broke yet another diet she was on. Sophie was desperate to lose weight, but this wasn’t happening. The way she foreclosed the possibility of trying a new approach would most likely guarantee that losing all her excess weight would never happen. A dieter’s false hope for Sophie was better than no hope, and so diet and exercise it was once again for her.

Maria asked Sophie, “What made you lose all that weight back then?”

“I was a lot younger.”

“Was there anything that motivated you to lose the weight?”

“I always wanted it badly. Losing weight was always hard for me, but I always wanted to do it,” Sophie said as she took her leg out from under her and adjusted herself more comfortably in the chair.

“Were you always heavy, or did you get heavy at a certain age?”

“I think I started gaining weight when I was in third grade,” she said, taking a moment to adjust her position once again. “When I was about eight. Yes, that’s it. I remember Mrs. Blinnerly. She was my third grade teacher.”

“Any idea, Sophie, what made you gain weight then?” Maria, who was sitting directly opposite Sophie, was sniffing around the same areas of interest: what made Sophie lose weight and what made

her gain weight. And Maria didn't mean the usual oversimplified explanation that most people give. She wasn't going to let Sophie get away with saying she ate too much. Maria was asking Sophie about the emotional reasons that were less obvious for Sophie's weight gains and weight losses. Sophie might not know them but they are there nonetheless, working behind the scenes.

Sophie made no real attempt to take a hard look at herself. She was eminently cooperative, but she didn't dig deeply. In fact, she didn't dig at all. For the amount of talking Sophie did with Maria, Sophie always stayed right on the surface. She didn't try to relate what was going on with her emotionally to the enormous amount of weight she was carrying. On the other hand, Sophie was acutely emotional about being too heavy, not looking like she wanted, having to wear larger and larger sizes, being embarrassed by it all. She was emotionally tuned in to the effect that being too heavy had on her, but emotionally tuned out when it came to the cause, to the whys and wherefores that got her to be so heavy in the first place and to what had been keeping her there all these years. Such irony. Sophie had no idea what had propelled her into such heaviness. But she desperately wanted out of it.

For argument's sake, Maria said to herself but not to Sophie, let's think of being overweight as a symptom. If being overweight is a symptom, what is it a symptom of? Here are the possibilities that occurred to Maria.

a hard life, a cover up for your feelings, not making your life into what you wanted it to be, an answer to a domineering mother, arrogance, bad blood between you and your husband, being at wits end about a number of things, can't stand anything bad, inability to emotionally separate from your family of origin, rebelliousness against

your parents, avoiding sexual intimacy, afraid of feeling vulnerable, having to soothe yourself

Maria liked her argument that being overweight is a symptom. She wondered, however, whether the causes she came up with were too far afield. Since symptom is a common medical term, Maria reasoned, she'd look up some medical symptoms and their causes and see how widespread the causes are. If she found that the causes for various medical conditions are as diverse as those she listed for being overweight, then her thinking is right on the money. Being overweight is a symptom, and as a symptom it has any number of possible causes.

For the symptom of abdominal pain, the causes are just as far afield as the causes she listed for being overweight. They are:

constipation, stress, acid reflux, diarrhea, stomach virus, vomiting, menstrual cramps, food poisoning, gas, indigestion, lactose intolerance, irritable bowel syndrome, kidney stones, urinary tract infection, Crohn's disease, appendicitis, gallstones, abdominal aortic aneurysm, diabetic ketoacidosis, stomach cancer

Pretty far afield too, wouldn't you say?

With the issue of a cause being too far afield behind her, Maria with her old researcher's instinct read on about other medical conditions. What she nailed down for herself was something she already knew; that the same symptom could be the result of vastly different causes. This was an important piece of information for Maria. It proved to her that any cure for weight loss couldn't be one size fits all. In medicine again, Maria came upon the example of shortness of breath. Maria found the following variety of causes for the symptom

of shortness of breath.

congestive heart failure, arrhythmia, allergic reaction, interstitial lung disease, subglottic stenosis, anemia, lung cancer, inhalation injury, pulmonary embolism, anxiety, COPD, anaphylaxis, high altitude with lower oxygen levels, asthma (bronchospasm), carbon monoxide poisoning, hiatal hernia, low blood pressure (hypotension), pneumothorax (collapsed lung), sudden blood loss, pleurisy (inflammation of the membrane lining the chest), pulmonary edema (excess fluid in the lungs), scarred and damaged lungs, pulmonary hypertension (high blood pressure within the lungs' blood vessels), Sarcoidosis (collections of inflammatory cells in the body), Tuberculosis, Cardiomyopathy (problem with the heart muscle), Pericarditis (swelling of the membrane surrounding the heart), broken ribs, choking, Epiglottitis (swelling of part of the windpipe), foreign object inhaled, Guillain-Barre Syndrome, Myasthenia Gravis (condition causing muscle weakness), and obesity.

Week after week Sophie didn't lose weight, despite the once a week meetings with Maria. The recurring talks and the questioning led nowhere and Sophie wasn't affected in the least by them. So it seemed to Maria. In fact, during this time, Sophie gained nine pounds. "I was good this weiiiek," she declared. "I stuck to my diet." What? How could that be?

It couldn't be. Maria knew better, but she kept her mouth shut. Maria knew if Sophie stuck to her diet week after week, like she claimed, she would have lost some weight. Average weight loss is about a pound to a pound-and-a-half a week. Maria suspected Sophie was lying, outright maybe, or deluding herself, or just plain not aware. It was probably lying, concluded Maria. That's what women

who weigh too much do. It is right there in rule number two of the rules for women who stay fat. “Lie to yourself about how much you eat.” Sophie definitely was not trying to break that rule.

Maria couldn't confirm any of this. For Maria, it was a case of the I'm-just-starting-out jitters. Sophie kept saying how well she was keeping to her diet, and Maria kept from saying to Sophie *you liar you*. With Sophie insisting she had faithfully dieted, Maria was in a hailstorm where pellet-sized ice rocks were hitting her on the head; only she was being told this wasn't so. In retrospect, Maria realized she should have spoken up right away. Everyone knows if you say you are keeping to a diet and gain nine pounds, you are lying through your teeth.

Maria collected some hard evidence that Sophie violated her diet easily and often. There were whole weeks when Sophie said she ate only one or two meals a day. This was one of her ways of dieting off her diet. She had shifted from portion control to number-of-meals control. She tried cutting her portions and being more selective about what she ate, but she couldn't stick to that regimen. The Truth: Sophie was all over the plate when it came to her diet. And her nine-pound weight gain had increased to eleven pounds. What I'm doing with Sophie, Maria frequently thought to herself, isn't working. No kidding.

What was with Sophie's lying? Maria knew that women made lots of excuses. She also knew they told outright lies. She used to do this herself when she was chubby. Uh, oh! This was a lie if there ever was one. Maria, and she knew this better than anyone, was fat. Chubby sounds a lot better than fat. How could she nail Sophie if she still, to this day, couldn't be truthful herself? Maria had been one fat woman. She could see it and so could everyone else. No way to cover it up. Not with overshirts. Not by wearing black. Not even by

walking backwards. Walking backwards would have made her weight even more obvious. Chubby, hah! Liar, Maria.

Maria, had to do something about her mounting frustration, and she confronted Sophie with her helter-skelter dieting, but not about lying.

Some diet detective our Maria, nowhere near hardboiled enough to catch the perp up in a lie. Maybe Maria should confront Sophie with the evidence at the very beginning of each meeting. This way the suspect can't contradict the evidence of her fingerprints all over the kitchen, the dining area, the TV room, in the car, anywhere there was food. And no way Sophie could deny her eleven-pound weight gain.

What Maria didn't know about police detective procedure was that withholding evidence and then asking specific questions about the evidence provides a better basis for a correct judgment of a suspect's veracity rather than telling the suspect outright what the evidence is. What's more, truth tellers believe they have nothing to hide and they provide a lot of details and spend more time talking than do liars. Liars often provide information that contradicts the evidence and that have inconsistencies. And liars also tend to give shorter statements and a less detailed account so as to not risk contradicting themselves.

Maria rattled on in her thinking about hard-boiled police procedure. She had read that evidence never speaks for itself. That is all except in the law of torts where there is obvious and exclusive control of whatever caused the injury. Otherwise, evidence has to be interpreted. And while Maria was indeed sifting through and interpreting the mile-wide evidence trail Sophie left behind, she wasn't confronting the perp at either the start or the end of the interrogations.

Because Maria was such a softie, not as hardboiled a policewom-

an as she needed to be, Maria never tightened the rope and Sophie slipped through the loop time after time. “I have tried and trieied,” recited Sophie, voice still cracking. “I don’t understand why I’m not losing even a little weiiiieght.” Maria, come on, say something. Now’s your chance.

If Maria were braver, more assertive, less passive—a real detective—she would have found ways to get Sophie to cop to her lies. She would have found ways to break down Sophie’s denials and resistance and increase her desire to confess. Trickery and deceit would be in. The strength of the evidence against her would be exaggerated if need be. Sophie might be told that there is an eyewitness who will tell all. She could even be promised leniency to get her to confess. There would be coercion, lots of coercion, some subtle, some quite openly hostile and even demeaning if necessary. Anything to get Sophie to spill her guts. Come on, Maria. Get to it.

A real detective would make sure that the interrogation would be filled with psychological manipulation and negative feedback, making Sophie vulnerable to pressure and misinformation. To deal with these tactics, Sophie would have to rely more and more on her interrogator for acceptance, become dependent on her interrogator (that would be Maria) for support and approval, and in the process Sophie would be hard pressed not to open up.

Maria went on with this detective thing, reaping the benefit of having listened carefully to Michael, husband-of-husbands, recount many of his detective murder mysteries that he loved to read while she watched her soaps, old movies, and re-runs of Seinfeld. She, Maria, like Michael’s detectives, would use interrogator self-assurance and conviction to fool Sophie into thinking she knew Sophie was lying, and that there was evidence of this. Detective Sergeant Maria would try to convince her suspect that there was no point in denying

her involvement because she, Maria, knew it all. Then the detective sergeant, the only other person in the room with Sophie, would offer face-saving excuses so Sophie could more easily acknowledge her guilt. An experienced cop like our Maria imagined herself to be might even get Sophie to admit her lies by convincing her that other people faced with the same situation might have done just what she did.

Any denials by Sophie would result in the tough detective interrupting Sophie and redirecting Sophie to what she should be saying. If Sophie tried to explain away her actions, Maria would vigorously counter with reason and evidence to the contrary. The objective would be to get Sophie to her lowest, most vulnerable point. Then, in that small, bare room with nothing but a metal table, two uncomfortable metal chairs, and a two-way mirror on the wall, Detective Sergeant Maria would move physically closer to Sophie, touching her gently for emphasis, making good eye contact, all in the service of getting Sophie to be more attentive to Maria's suggestions.

And that's not all. As Sophie showed more and more that she was giving up, Maria as her insistent interrogator would play on Sophie's weaknesses in order to break down her remaining resistance. Then at some point Maria would offer Sophie two different motives for committing her crime, a face-saving motive and a coldhearted motive, forcing her to choose between them. The aim here would be to get Sophie to incriminate herself. Once she admitted the crime, what was left would be for Sophie to make a full confession giving details and motive.

Phew! Thanks to H of H Michael and his detective heroes, Maria had this detective stuff down pat.

Maria rebounded from her tough detective reverie with her head held high. Having discharged enough of her pent up anger and frus-

tration with Sophie's intransigence, Maria slapped Sophie with a five-column food diary sheet. "Sophie, you have to list the day, time of meal, what you ate, size of portion, and your thoughts that preceded and accompanied your eating."

Ah, not the hardboiled detective, our Maria, but crafty and on the mark nonetheless. Maria had come up with an alternative, a way for her to keep track of what Sophie ate. And Sophie could see for herself, not mislead herself (aka lie). The path would then be clear so both she and Maria could decide on how to proceed in a more successful way.

"That's a good idea, Marieea. I'll try it," Sophie said, as she got ready to leave for the day. Maria thought she did a good thing, but she couldn't be sure.

Sophie came back the following week with a crumpled up scrap of paper, not the pristine 8 ½ X 11 food diary sheets Maria had given her. On this scrap paper Sophie had scribbled the meals she had and on what days. "I kept track for four days," she said rather proudly. Four! What about the entire week? Maria was bursting with exasperation.

Nevertheless, Maria swung herself into gear and dutifully went over the purpose and the form again with Sophie, and Sophie promised to do better in the upcoming week. Of course, she didn't. And she didn't the following weeks either. There was always some excuse, some reason, until finally Maria, now irritated beyond exasperation, said diplomatically that she could see this was not working.

Sophie wouldn't cop to her dieting crime of not really trying. By contrast, she freely admitted to a different crime—that she wasn't exercising. (Police stuff coming up again. Looks like Maria is continuing her angry streak. But only in her own mind.) Sophie was confessing to not exercising; her way of getting a lighter sentence for

a lesser crime. Maybe so. But what she was also expressing was an excuse for not losing weight. Not exercising was the reason she wasn't losing weight, according to her. No exercise, no weight loss. This was Sophie's rationale. The no-exercise confessions, and there were plenty of them from Sophie, were simply a diversion. Maria was astounded at how Sophie could so easily deflect the fact that she wasn't doing anything consistent and effective about the calories-in side of the equation; using the no exercise gambit to cover up the not-watching-what-you-eat frame of mind—fugedaboutit.

Sophie went AWOL again and again undeterred by Maria's best efforts. "I have tried and tried," recited Sophie. "I don't understand why I'm not losing even a little weiight."

Maria's ability to get Sophie to choose a more balanced way of dieting and stick to it was that of a lightweight punching it out with a heavyweight. Each week Sophie altered the food plan and went back to eating only one or two meals a day, or just certain foods, or not eating at all. Maria warned Sophie that if she were too restrictive, she would go off her diet. And that's exactly what Sophie did. She went off her diet and she did so with great regularity.

How in hell's name can a modification of behavior approach help someone like Sophie if she doesn't even do what is recommended. Maybe like with laboratory rats, a good-sized electric shock would be something that could keep Sophie from going off her diet. Maria was not proud of her reaction.

There are a lot of Sophies out there was how Maria put it to herself. These Sophies might be trying to lose weight just by themselves or in some weight loss program. Either way, they would have a target for how much to eat daily or weekly: calories, fat, points, or amount of prepared food. Then there would be a physical activity goal: so many minutes per day, so many hours per week. There would be

some type of accountability for food eaten and exercise completed: a written record, sharing with the group, or talking to a counselor. What would get these Sophies to do right by their regimens? What would get them to stop foiling that someone who is trying to help them?

Don't mind Maria's hopelessness. It's warranted because you can only take so much frustration for so long. There were too many places where Sophie fell down on the job. Self-monitoring wasn't only one of them. Awful conclusion: you probably can't count on accurate or sustained self-monitoring from a bunch of Sophies, even when they say they want nothing better than to shed their unwanted weight. It's a losing proposition. But not losing in terms of weight.