Dear Stephanie Evanovich,

A mother’s thoughts when she sees her baby for the first time go like this: “Oh my goodness she’s so cute and chubby! She is so adorable!” At a certain age that cute baby fat turns into something to be mocked and made fun of. Usually people lose their pinchable cheeks and butterball toes, but mine has stayed with me for much longer.

I’ve been on the chunky side of my whole life. Just like 35% of America, I know how it feels to be self conscious all the time and comparing yourself to others. It’s hard to live in a world where they’ve created the perfect girl, to mold others into who they think they should be.

Through middle school I knew I wasn’t as pretty as the rest of the girls. I knew that I didn’t fit in with everyone else, but I had a few friends and was oblivious to the gossip spreading around the room behind me. Ignorance is bliss. I was happy, until one day the truth of what people thought hit me like a wrecking ball, in a place where I felt safe, safer than anywhere else... In the sanctuary of my home.

When I was in seventh grade my aunt and uncle moved into my house along with their two sons because my uncle couldn’t hold down a steady job. One day I was chatting with my aunt Valerie and her son Sebastian. We were looking through my yearbook and I pointed out my best friend.

“She’s fat just like you!” Sebastian exclaimed not knowing that his words had sliced my heart open. I knew I was big, but never in my life had someone called me fat to my face. He didn’t know he had said anything wrong; he was just stating a fact, but I couldn’t move. I stared open-mouthed at Valerie waiting to hear what she would say.

“We don’t use that word.” she told him softly. I excused myself quickly and ran to my room wanting to release the sobs that were building in my chest. My safe harbor had been invaded and my soul was attacked. I wept, just like I do now recalling the memory of that night. I cried for hours... Eventually, there was a knock on my door, and my uncle Jesse popped his head in.

“Stephaney, I’m sorry, but it’s eleven. Could you please keep it down?” He gave me a small, pitying smile, and closed the door. I cried myself to sleep that night.

The next morning I woke and wiped the remaining tears off of my cheeks. I was no longer unaware to the thoughts of those around me. My world had changed forever.

Since then I’ve dieted, not eaten for months at times, and even lied about my age to get dieting pills. Yet I still look like I ate a horse. Nothing was working, so I gave up. I hated my body, and I hated myself for not having more self control.

Near the end of my eighth grade year I got in a fight with my best friend. She attacked my weight because she knew that was my most sensitive subject. I don’t remember what we fought about or why. All I remember is her telling me I was fat over and over again. “You have more rolls than a baker!” “The great recession was caused because you stopped eating for a day!” “You’re the reason they created double doors!” I was so hurt by her words but I couldn’t show her my pain. “Wow, how long did it take you to come up with that one?” “Good to see you know how to use your tiny brain for SOMETHING.” I responded to her hiding the misery.
After our fight she turned the few friends I had against me. I was alone. My teachers were my only friends and even they didn’t like me very much. I ate lunch in the bathroom to avoid the laughs and sly smiles aimed in my direction, so when my mother gave me the opportunity to switch schools for ninth grade I jumped at the opportunity.

I went to Summit Academy High School for my freshmen year. I thought it would be a good opportunity to make friends and show my personality more. But things don’t always go like you want them to.

Walking into the school for the first time I was shocked. It was ten times bigger than my old school but the kids were ten times smaller than me. I was one of the four bigger kids that attended my new school. I tried to push that hard to ignore fact out of my mind and make friends but it didn’t work. Everyone went to middle school with each other already so I was the loner again.

Every chair I sat in squeaked and everyone turned to stare. My cheeks would redden and I wished to blend into the scenery.

One day in Geography class everyone came in and the desks were set in tables. “Is this seat taken?” I asked a girl sitting alone at a table. “Oh. Well, I was sort of saving it for my friend..” Embarrassed I walked away and sat at an empty set of desks. As people filed in they gathered in their groups and started chatting and laughing. I kept my eyes down focusing on anything but the fact that I was alone. As class started I looked up. Every table had all of their desks full except mine. I felt like God was playing some kind of sick joke. Showing me how alone and different I really was.

I had even less friends than I did in middle school, and I lasted a month before I begged my mother if I could switch schools. But it was too late, I was stuck. I feigned sick, hid in the gym during lunch, and sometimes just skipped school to avoid the loneliness and the judging eyes of others.

I blamed all of my problems on my weight. I no longer hated myself, I loathed myself. I questioned my existence thinking I was born by mistake. There was no possible way God would purposefully make a creature as disgusting as me. I started cutting and planning my death. Thinking how easy it would be to hang myself in the locker room, or shoot myself with one of the many guns we had lying around my house. It would have been so easy and the pain would have been gone...

Then I read something that made me take a second look at my life. Your book. It was the first book I’ve read where the main character wasn’t picture perfect. Your book gave me hope. Hope that I could be happy. If someone like Holly could turn her life around, then so could I.

I run a mile three days a week, eat healthy, and have started Nutrisystem. I’m taking control of my life just like Holly did, and I wanted to say thank you. Thank you for changing my life and the lives of so many others around the world.

Sincerely,
Stephaney Farley