

Exercise Buddy
(Aka: The Haunted Treadmill)

By
J.E. Clarke

Janetgoodman@yahoo.com
917-328-5253

FADE IN ON:

INT. MEGHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shabby, but well maintained. The furniture's all mismatched. A TV flickers in one corner, a plywood desk nearby. On top of that, a beige PC.

FEET stomp in the hall. Something CRASHES into a wall. An unseen CARL howls in pain.

CARL (O.S.)

Motherf-

An equally absent KEVIN responds.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Carl, don't curse in front of customers!

CARL (O.S.)

Kev - the invoice says right here: we're don't have to carry this up stairs..

CREEEEEAK. The sound of metal being put down.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Great move, Dipshit.

CARL (O.S.)

And - who's cursing now?

KEVIN (O.S.)

Who's gonna pick this up again?

CARL (O.S.)

I had to take a break. The weight's fucking up my back!

Feet shuffle as Kevin turns around.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Ma'am, I apologize personally for Carl's horrid behavior. He's not himself today.

The door swings open. MEGHAN (late 20s) shuffles in. No makeup, pleasant face. Too round for her short height.

As she walks, she CHOMPS a Kit-Kat bar. Mutters past crumbs in her mouth.

MEGHAN

No big. I appreciate the help. Gentlemen: right this way?

Kevin and Carl stagger in the door. OK faces. Body-builder physiques. Their uniforms read "Goodwill."

The men balance a bulky old TREADMILL between them. One that's a *little* too wide for the door.

Carl limbos, contorts. Twists. GROANS as he maneuvers the machine inside.

KEVIN
Where next, Ma'am?

Meghan swallows. Points.

MEGHAN
Over there. That'd be fine.

Kevin and Carl crab-walk to a wall, and slowly lower the machine down.

An edge lands on Carl's foot. He jerks away. His back CRACKS.

CARL
Ow! Puss Sucking Piece of Marcy Sh-

KEVIN
Carl! What did the Boss say last week?

Carl glares at Meghan, more annoyed. Put on the spot, Meghan shoves more Kit-Kat in her mouth.

KEVIN
Ma'am -

MEGHAN
(mouth full)
Please. Call me "Meghan."

KEVIN
Meghan, I'm so sorry about Carl. Consider the delivery charge totally waived.

Carl's eyes drop to the floor and focus on the machine. The Treadmill's a big, metal behemoth. Carl plugs it in. The colorful panel lights up like a Christmas tree.

CARL
Fuck, this thing is huge. Enough to take shit-loads of abuse...

He rolls an eye towards Meghan, tabulates her weight.

Embarrassed by his coworker, Kevin thrusts a clip-board at Meghan's face.

KEVIN

Sign here. We'll be on our way.

Meghan signs carefully. Flashes Kevin a flirty smile. Kevin smiles back. He's attracted.. But shy.

He shuffles towards the door, stumbles over his own feet.

KEVIN

I hope our service... helped.

MEGHAN

(nods energetically)

It really, really, really did. I never could've got it in myself.

Carl swivels around and stares. His face betrays his punning, "filthy" thoughts.

CARL

"Got it in?" Seriously?

KEVIN

Ma'am - I mean Meghan - it was my pleasure. Please enjoy the exercise. And all the rest of your day.

CARL

If she needed exercise, *she* shoulda carried this up the stairs. And what's with all the candy? Everyone knows the formula - less calories in, weight out!

Kevin drags Carl away. He waves to Meghan. SLAMS the door. Which isn't solid enough to block sounds.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Dude, don't insult Meghan. That's rude.

CARL (O.S.)

You were flirting with her for a tip. Gimme a fuckin' break!

Meghan swallows the rest of her chocolate, frowns.

KEVIN (O.S.)

I wasn't flirting "for a tip."

CARL (O.S.)

You wanna do *something* with a tip, I bet.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Cut it out! Meghan seems... real nice.

Meghan hears. Smiles. Puffs her hair. In the unseen hallway, Carl and Kevin stomp away.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Her number's right here, on the invoice.
Maybe I should call her for a date?

CARL (O.S.)

It's against company policy. I wouldn't,
if I were you. Then again, we're
Goodwill. Give it a month, until the
records get archive. Then HR won't get
involved. And Meghan'll have time to use
that treadmill... not to mention, lose
that weight!

KEVIN (O.S.)

Don't say that. You're so cruel.

CARL (O.S.)

Ain't my fault I like 'em skin and bones!

KEVIN (O.S.)

What if she forgets, and won't take my
call?

CARL (O.S.)

Then deliver a refrigerator to her.
She'll like that. I'm sure.

Meghan's face falls. Tears glimmer in her eyes.

She runs to the computer desk. Throws the Kit-Kat wrapper
and the receipt on top.

MOMENTS LATER

Meghan surfs the web: mostly makeup and hair hack sites.
Also, advice on "*how to lose that stubborn ten pounds*".

Her hand drifts - as does the cursor. Past a *Skype* tab,
to *Tinder*.

Meghan looks down at the *Goodwill* delivery receipt. And
spies on that: Kevin's name. (Under that, Crude Carl's.)

She glances toward the treadmill, almost wistful.

MEGHAN

If you help me get a date with Kevin,
we'll be best friends!

Good thing I bought you used. I'll need that money for a dress.

Determination flashes in her eyes.

Meghan's attention shifts - back to the *Kit Kat* bar. She mulls the options: a few moments, at least.

MEGHAN

Okay. Just one more. I shouldn't let this go to waste!

She shoves the bar in her mouth. Eyes the machine.

MEGHAN

(mouth full)

Don't judge me.

The Treadmill blinks - for a split second.

Meghan catches a "chewing" reflection of herself in the Monitor. She turns it off and walks away.

LATER

The TV blares an exercise show. The type that caters to middle-aged housewives: with Zumba, Lycra and tights.

Meghan hovers over the Treadmill, carton of Ice Cream in her hand. She gives the machine a critical eye.

MEGHAN

The store said you were almost new. But you look pretty worn. Whoever had you, put you through your paces. Lots. Bet you never got used as a drying rack for clothes. Well, you belong to me now. Guess I'll take you for a spin.

With great effort, Meghan climbs up on the Treadmill and turns it on: extra low.

She rests the ice cream on the panel display.

And walks for less than a minute. Chewing. Trotting. Quickly bored.

Meghan glances down at the rolls encircling her waist.

MEGHAN

Do I always jiggle like that?

She picks up the Ice Cream, and prepares to dig in. Looks apologetically at the Treadmill once more.

MEGHAN

Don't look. I'll start fresh tomorrow.
Today is... my "last cheat day."

INT. MEGHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meghan cuddles with a TEDDY BEAR, dressed in a plain white nightgown. She rolls over awkwardly and SNORES.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - MEGHAN'S DREAM - NIGHT

Tiny candles light the scene.

Kevin sits across from Meghan. He's in a tux, *Goodwill* name tag attached.

Meghan's makeup looks flawless. Though she's still dressed in the same nightgown.

Kevin stares soulfully into Meghan's eyes.

KEVIN

Sweetheart?

MEGHAN

Yes, Kevin?

KEVIN

I'm thrilled you came here tonight.

MEGHAN

It's my pleasure.

KEVIN

Mine as well. I have one burning question to ask. Humor me. It's very important.

Meghan's heart FLUTTERS. So loud, even WE hear.

MEGHAN

What do you wish to know, my Love?

Kevin raises a eyebrow, and takes a gentlemanly sip of wine. He leans towards Meghan, close enough to kiss.

KEVIN

(whispers romantically)

When are you gonna ever lose that weight?

Meghan stares down in horror at her lap. And sees rolls of BUBBLING, SWELLING flesh!

INT. MEGHAN'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meghan SCREAMS and bolts upright.

She holds Teddy Bear over her face, extended arms rigid with fear. She stares into the toy's black button, soulless eyes...

MEGHAN

You're not Kevin. Not at all!

She tosses Teddy as far as she can. The pathetic toy bounces off the floor.

MEGHAN

"Lose that weight"? How about I lose you!

A RUMBLE from another room breaks the spell. The Treadmill's started up on its own?

Meghan scrunches her face, concerned. She slides into fuzzy, pink bunny slippers. Tiptoes past Teddy into...

INT. MEGHAN'S APARTMENT - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Dark and deserted, of course.

Light flows from the kitchen. Meghan peers in.

Oops! Apparently, she never closed the freezer door. Puddles of sticky ice cream cover the floor.

Cold MIST pours from the appliance. Meghan takes a step to slam it closed...

Only to hear another Treadmill WHIR. Meghan whirls around, real eyes wide.

MEGHAN

(yells)

If this is a break-in, there's nothing valuable in here to steal. Trust me...

She stops and stares into the...

INT. MEGHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Treadmill's active. Green and red LIGHTS BLINK on its panel. Question is - who turned it on?!?

Through the icy mist, Meghan sees -

A dark fuzzy FORM. Walking along at an energetic clip...

MEGHAN

Don't hurt me! Please - just leave. I
promise not to even call the police when
you're gone!

A PONYTAIL flops back and forth. Seen closer, the
intruder appears female. Pale, gaunt face. Angelic blonde
hair. And translucent skin, so it seems.

Meghan rubs her eyes - tries to wipe away the dream.

MEGHAN

Whoever you are - answer me. This isn't a
twenty-four hour gym!

The figure keeps walking, but turns her head towards
Meghan. EERIE LIGHTS glow in the apparition's eyes.

Meghan YELPS, and hops backward. She slip-slides in
melted ice cream. Falls on her ample butt.

Then looks up. The figure's gone.

LATER

Meghan chills at her computer desk - single finger types
as fast as she can.

Keeping a careful eye on the now-inert treadmill, Meghan
swivels back and forth in her wobbly chair.

Propped on the desk, "Teddy" watches too - a furry guard.

Meghan munches on a pack of Chocolate Covered PRETZEL
STICKS, and types "Haunted Treadmills" into Google.

Only finds a few bad Memes. Meghan types "Possession".

Almost jumps out of her skin at the sound of another
WHIR. Meghan swings aroundr, Pretzels in hand.

The Treadmill runs full blast. Creepy Ghost Girl has
returned!

Meghan stands up, petrified. Approaches the spectre
hesitantly. Lights from the Treadmill cast an eerie glow.

Meghan forms a Pretzel-Cross and inches closer. Terrified
determination in her eyes.

MEGHAN

Who are you really? Is this some sort of bad Halloween joke? Too late. It's November now, you know...

Ghost Girl keeps right on exercising. Seen up close, she wears old workout gear. Leg warmers, Jane Fonda style.

Babble flows from Meghan's lips.

MEGHAN

Maybe... you're an undigested bit of *Chips Ahoy*. A blot of *Mint Chocolate Chip Ice Cream*. A crumb of *Kit-Kat* bar.

The ghost breaks into an easy jog.

MEGHAN

A fragment of underdone Red Velvet cake. One thing's absolutely sure: there's more chocolate gravy than grave about you!

Emboldened, Meghan steps towards the ghost.

Ghost Girl yanks the "Safety Cord" on the Treadmill. The machine SCREECHES to a halt.

Ghost Girl glares at Meghan, points a finger.

Though silent, the meaning's clear: "How dare YOU interrupt my solitude? Not to mention, workout time?"

Ghost Girl's face flickers from human, to grinning skull. Then - so quickly - back again.

Meghan stuffs a Pretzel in her own mouth to stifle a SCREAM. Ghost Girl SLAPS it from her hand.

The Pretzel tumbles down, wedges between the treads.

Meghan drops to her knees.

LATER

The Treadmill HUMS and WHIRS. Ghost Girl's at it again.

A freaked out Meghan watches, splayed out on the floor. Scattered pretzels at her side. They look like edible "pick up sticks", in a way.

Ghost Girl's body morphs back and forth from human to corpse - every time her foot hits a tread.

The Treadmill COUGHS - the fallen Pretzel still jammed in its side.

Ghost Girl waves at Meghan: "Fix that, won't you?" The meaning on this gesture's clear, too.

A terrified Meghan complies - carefully snatches the Pretzel from the moving tread.

And SCRAPES the edge of her hand.

MEGHAN

Ow!

Meghan sucks blood from the wound. Licks a smudge of chocolate, as well.

Ghost Girl twists her face into a sneer, and runs faster. Meghan stares at her.

MEGHAN

Ok. I get it. You're dead. There's no doubt whatever about that. But there's no doubt you're anorexic, too. What gives you the right to body shame me?

Ghost Girl keeps her pace, doesn't skip a beat. Points a bony finger at the PC Screen.

The computer powers on, displays a FITNESS SITE. The title: *No More Excuses. Five Bullet Proof Ways to Lose That Weight!*

Meghan looks Ghost Girl up and down.

MEGHAN

Is that a hint? Did someone shoot you? With that attitude, I'm not surprised.

But there's no holes in GG's workout uniform. No bullet wounds to be seen.

MEGHAN

Or... You seem to exercise a lot. Maybe you died on that Treadmill, all alone. You ask me, that'd suit you right. It's not a good idea to obsess about workouts that much!

Ghost Girl nods at the PC again. The monitor displays:

A Medical Site: *Women and Heart Attacks - Know the Signs!*

MEGHAN

I knew it! You're haunting the treadmill - that's why you're here. But, why mess with me? It's not my fault you died!

Ghost Girl pulls the Safety Cord again. The Treadmill slams to a halt. SCREEEEECH.

Her eyes lock on Meghan's face. The ghost points to her own perfectly formed chest.

A translucent HEART beats through flickering bare ribs. She points at Meghan's chubby torso next.

A glow PULSES under Meghan's nightgown - a silhouette of her own HEART. Which shockingly, skips a beat.

The medical site screen scrolls down on its own. And highlights an entry:

The Role of Obesity in Heart Disease.

MEGHAN

I'm going to suffer *your* fate? Unless...
I change my ways?

Ghost Girl grins with white, skeletal teeth.

She crooks a finger at Meghan: "Climb on." Meghan grabs for a Pretzel. Ghost Girl HISSSES. "No."

Meghan rises slowly to her feet and SIGHS.

MEGHAN

Cold Turkey. If you insist.

LATER

Meghan sweats it out on the Treadmill, dressed in *Kmart* Workout Gear.

The panel shows it's just been five minutes. But Meghan's already about to quit. Ghost Girl glides at her side.

Meghan PUFFS. Ghost Girl increases the Treadmill's pace.

MEGHAN

There *is* such a thing as "easing into it." You wanna give me a heart attack? Are you *that* desperate for friends?

She shoots a guilty look at Ghost Girl.

MEGHAN

Not like I don't know how that feels.

Ghost Girl tries to "pat" Meghan's shoulder. But her immaterial hand won't connect.

Meghan LAUGHS. Relaxes. Keeps pace as best as she can.

MEGHAN

I guess you're not *that* bad. I kinda like having company around. Okay, Olivia Newton John - what's the plan?

Ghost Girl waves at the PC one last time. The Fitness Site scrolls waaaaay down.

INSERT: *Workout Hack #8: Exercise Buddies are Key!*

Supernatural wind blows the *Goodwill* receipt from the desk to the floor. Exposing: Kevin's name.

MEGHAN

You'll help me lose weight for a date?
You may be dead, but it's a deal!

She tries to shake Ghost Girl's hand. But their palms can't meet. And so, the...

MONTAGE BEGINS

Like in a Black and White movie, dates tear off the PC calendar as we go on.

1) Ghost Girl and Meghan trot on the Treadmill, side by side. Meghan wears a sweat-band. Works real hard.

Ghost Girl doesn't miss a step. Meghan flashes her the stink-eye.

MEGHAN

You're not even breathing hard!

Ghost Girl smirks.

MEGHAN

And you're cheating. You don't have breath at all!

2) The TV blares *Richard Simmons*. Meghan runs on the Treadmill solo; *Starbucks* Muffin in her hand.

A yogurt floats to her side. Ghost Girl materializes around it. Caught off-guard, Meghan stumbles on the Treadmill.

MEGHAN

This muffin's whole wheat. It's healthy!

Ghost Girl shoves the yogurt in Meghan's face.

MEGHAN

You keep it. I don't eat snot.

The spectre yanks the pastry from Meghan's hand.

MEGHAN

Don't touch my Muffin! Wait. Forget I said that. It doesn't sound quite right.

3) Meghan and Ghost Girl push the Treadmill as fast as it can go. Meghan sports much smaller clothes.

Supernatural WIND blows back GG's hair. Meghan glares.

MEGHAN

I wish I could do that...

Meghan glances at the PC calendar, then turns to "her friend", a worried expression on her face.

MEGHAN

It's been almost a month. Do you think Kevin'll ever call?

Ghost Girl shrugs; keeps jogging.

MEGHAN

If he does, what should I wear?

Ghost Girl thinks it over; runs flowing hands down her shimmering form... miming classic "sexy wear."

Which makes Meghan even more concerned.

MEGHAN

Maybe that'd work for you. But we don't have the same body type, at all.

She frowns at Ghost Girl's skeletal form.

MEGHAN

You're so skinny, it's insane.

Ghost Girl rolls her glowing eyes, and points at Meghan's tights. Meghan looks down - pulls the waistband back...

And sees for the first time: that pesky muffin top is gone. The exercise did the trick!

MEGHAN

I didn't even notice. What do you think I am; Size 6?

Ghost Girl holds up four fingers.

MEGHAN

And it's all because of you. High five!

Ghost Girl's hand passes through Meghan's, of course.

END MONTAGE

INT. MEGHAN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

A now skinnier Meghan sits at her computer desk.

Ghost Girl watches from the Treadmill. For once, it's not turned on.

Meghan peruses the *Goodwill* website. A PICTURE of Kevin and Carl in uniform loads.

MEGHAN

He was cute, wasn't he? Maybe he got a girlfriend. Do you think?

Ghost Girl steps off the Treadmill and floats silently to Meghan's side. Meghan notices her last minute - startle jumps!

MEGHAN

Do you *have* to scare me like that? Wait - of course you do. You're a ghost.

GG leans over Meghan's shoulder, resting her hands on a paper notepad. She catches a glimpse of Carl and smiles.

Meghan doesn't notice. Her foul mood renders her blind.

MEGHAN

(mutters to Ghost Girl)
I'm still surprised you walk around.
You're not tied to that Treadmill - even if you act like you are.

Ghost Girl grins, and spread her arms inhumanly wide. A gesture which proclaims: "This is my home."

MEGHAN

Did you have a boyfriend - you know, before?

An ethereal tear trickles down Ghost Girl's cheek. But a self-absorbed Meghan doesn't see.

MEGHAN

I wish we could talk more directly.
That'd speed things up. Hey, I've got an idea!

On the PC, she scrolls over to a "Type to Speech Translator" site.

MEGHAN

Here's a way you can talk. Wanna try?

Ghost Girl shakes her head, almost afraid.

Rejected, Meghan touches Kevin's digital face with a finger. Mopes.

MEGHAN

Maybe I should call him. Take the initiative for once. After all, I've lost the weight. The least Kevin can do is come and see!

She grabs the Goodwill invoice, still on the desk.

MEGHAN

(to Ghost Girl)

I bet you're wondering why I've kept this here. Don't judge me. It's not pathetic. Just a motivational tool. And now - time to collect my just reward!

Meghan finds the *Goodwill* phone number, starts to dial.

Which is when HER phone rings. A male voice rumbles on the other side. It's Kevin... finally!

MEGHAN

(whispers to GG)

It's him!

(into the phone)

Do I remember you, Kevin? Of course! Do I want to go on a date tonight? Lemme check the calendar.

Meghan pretends to type on PC keys. CLICK CLICK CLICK.

MEGHAN

I've got one open slot. What time?

Kevin's voice MUMBLES on the other end.

Meghan writes down details on her note pad - right through Ghost Girl's intangible hand.

Kevin hangs up seconds later. CLICK.

Ghost Girl yanks her arm away and sucks on a finger (as if she could really ever be hurt.)

An excited Meghan swivels her chair around. Gazes deep into GG's eyes.

MEGHAN

I couldn't have done this without you.

The two lean close, and "hold hands".

MEGHAN

You and me - BFFs for life! Or is that Death?

Ghost Girl rolls her eyes. Shrugs. Either phrase is fine with her.

LATER

The doorbell RINGS.

Meghan answers, dressed in a clingy, sexy dress. She swings the door open with a flourish.

Kevin stands there with flowers - dressed in the tuxedo from Meghan's dream. He does a double take.

KEVIN

Hi. You look amazing!

Meghan blushes, shuffles awkward feet.

MEGHAN

Well, I worked out a little this month. You haven't seen me 'til now. Does it show?

KEVIN

It does - please don't tell me you didn't do all that... for me?

MEGHAN

Um, a girl does it for herself as well.

She glances back towards the Treadmill.

Ghost Girl sits on the metal edge and hugs Mr. Teddy Bear. She's invisible to Kevin, of course.

MEGHAN
With a bit of help from an old friend.

KEVIN
(blinks)
Is that Teddy Bear *floating*?

MEGHAN
Um - no... I propped him up!
Kevin guides Meghan out into the hall.

KEVIN
Ready for our date?

MEGHAN
Sure - I've been ready... for weeks!
Making sure Kevin doesn't see, Meghan wiggles fingers
towards Ghost Girl.

MEGHAN (MOS)
Bye! And thanks. Don't wait up!

LATER

The TV blares an exercise video. The room is empty. The
Treadmill continually WHIRS. A never ending Hell.

But Ghost Girl isn't on it anymore.

Instead, she sits at Meghan's computer desk. Pouts and
"Crushes" at the picture of Carl on the PC screen.

Her eyes drift down to the *Goodwill* delivery invoice.

Carl's signature's at the bottom. Along with the company
phone line.

Ghost Girl traces it with a wistful finger. Then her pale
face lights up!

She toggles to the Speech Translator site Meghan showed
her before. And types in:

"Hi, can I speak to Carl?"

Then Ghost Girl logs into Skype and dials...

FINAL FADE-OUT: