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Chris Thomas

- *Appetite for Destruction*

A one act play - drama

Running Time: approx. 10-15 minutes

Period: Modern Day

Synopsis:

Appetite for Destruction is an almost one-man piece about the character's inner turmoil over his weight. Yet he is not fat – he is thin by most people's standards. But he used to be fat... and this has caused major dilemmas in his mind down the track, as he fights all the desires to eat while trying to live up to some impossible ideal male body. The audience is privy to what goes on in his mind and this is embellished by a chorus of four that occasionally interacts with the main character.

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About the Playwright: Chris Thomas



Born in Perth, Western Australia, Chris Thomas is a writer, actor, journalist and broadcaster who has developed diverse experience in these areas over several years.

He has many eclectic acting credits to his name and broad journalistic experience, working for mainstream newspapers, independent publications and freelancing for numerous titles, as well as extensive work in media relations and flexing his dulcet tones as a radio announcer.

Chris Thomas is also the author of the novel *Journo's Diary*, the *Doctor Who* short story *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* and the plays *Which One?*, *Reality Matters*, *Appetite for Destruction*, *The Bonza Land of Oz*, *King Bling* and *SMS Mess*.

Which One? received an encouragement award for writing at the 1994 Bunbury One-Act Drama Festival. Chris himself has received numerous accolades including an Excellence in Performance Award at the 2001 South West Drama Festival for his role in *Disposal* and Best Male Supporting Actor at the 2008 South West Drama Festival for his role in *The Return*.

About the Play:

Be the first to produce this play.

Appetite for Destruction has not been performed as yet but was short-listed as one of the 18 finalists for Blacktown City Community Theatre's *4 Short Plays Plus* season.

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APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION

By Chris Thomas

CHARACTERS:

ERIC: He seems like just an average, normal guy – with a normal weight. But he suffers from an intense inner torment over his weight and has an ongoing battle in his mind that no one understands.

CHORUS OF FOUR: Four people stand behind Eric in a semi-circle, inactive, but come to life as Eric remembers something or wants to illustrate his point and interact at various moments during the play. It is the director's choice as to whether they stay on stage, in darkness, or go on or offstage as needed.

SETTING: While designed as a piece that can be done on a bare stage, if a director wants to add props and/or a chair and table for more variation, he/she has the discretion to do so.

SOUND EFFECTS: There are various points where background noise, reflecting what is happening, could enhance what is going on, complementing the CHORUS action, if deemed appropriate (such as background pub noise, for instance).

[ERIC steps into the light. Looks around the crowd a little; hesitant at first. It's like he's not quite sure how to say something – but then just blurts it out]

ERIC: I used to be a fat bastard. Hard to believe, I know. Everyone says I'm skinny now. But I still don't feel that way. Don't go shaking your heads... I used to be a fatty fatty boombah. Teased in the playground. "Chubs" they used to call me. Or "Battlefat". That one stemmed from the old *He-Man* cartoons and his sidekick Battlecat.

[Lighting changes as he remembers. The CHORUS comes out and goes around and around ERIC, taunting him the way schoolchildren do]

CHORUS: Fatty fatty boombah! Battlefat, battlefat! Hey, Chubsy (*repeated over and over, as they skip around him, ad libbing for as long as deemed effective, before stepping back, silent*)

ERIC: I can see some of you are still tut-tutting away. Not believing me. But why would I lie about being fat? It's the truth, I was. I even have the photos to prove it. But here's the rub... logic tells me I'm thin now. Or slim. Or average. Whatever that means. But something else makes me feel I am *still fat*. Like I don't measure up to what people expect. People go on about women's magazines showing wafer-thin models with body ideals no woman could ever live up to. Well, I see people on shows like *Big Brother* with guys that have well-defined sixpacks and muscle tone and it makes me think there's something wrong with me because *I'm not like that!* (*comes down from this slight intensity*) Oh yeah, don't get me wrong. I know I've been

brainwashed by the fat Nazis. (*declares this next bit in grand Shakespeare style*) I feel fat, therefore I am! Is he fat or is he not fat – that is the question! Whether it is wobblier in the thighs... (*ERIC realises he's caught up in his own little world, suddenly notices audience around him again*)

Sorry, I digress. But I can't help being paranoid I have man boobs. Or "moobs" as someone jokingly called them the other day. I still feel like I have a jelly-belly. I feel I have to be "all that"... and I'm just not "all that". And never will be.

I constantly scrutinise labels in the supermarket aisles, checking how many grams of fat are in tins of tuna or rice pudding. Have a look at the potato chips one day – it's 30 grams of fat! (*ERIC gets very passionate here*) One look makes you put on 5 kilograms straight away. If anything, you wake up to little tricks they play with labels. Let's use tuna as an example. The fat free can has a small "98% Fat Free" banner on it. The same company does a tuna soaked in oil with exactly the same packaging. Instead of the fat free banner, they've put "Fresh Tasty" instead (*ERIC puts up his hands and does the "quote mark" symbol*) – and unless you look carefully you'd never know the difference. And in this rush-rush workaday world, who's got time to look closely at tins of tuna in the supermarket?

Well, a tosser like me, obviously. That's how obsessed I am. I panic just about every time I eat. Imagine what it's like going to a restaurant.

[The CHORUS comes out and starts trying to tempt him as if they were waiters in a restaurant]

CHORUS: (*each CHORUS member variously goes up to him and asks the following; they should be really "in-your-face" in their approach*)

Ah, sir, do we have a treat for you this evening!

The chef's special tonight is the cheese-stuffed marbled beef, covered in splashings of gravy made from the beef's own juices.

Would sir like to try the curried jambalaya featuring three different meats heavily soaked in special coconut curry sauce?

And for dessert we have chocolate pancakes, filled with melted Belgian chocolate, drizzled in a choc-brandy liqueur, served with coffee ice cream made from the creamiest buttermilk!

(then all as one, overlapping each other) Yes sir, step this way! We'll leave you completely satisfied! Indulge, indulge, indulge! You want to have a good time, don't you? *(They step back again, silent)*

ERIC: They're always going on about "indulging yourself". Never mind that, *what's the bloody fat content?* (*ERIC delivers with an almost insane-like zeal, yelling, then PAUSES and composes himself again*) I mean, my rational side knows the restaurant owner wants people to enjoy themselves. It's not up to them to give a complete breakdown of what's in their food. But it sure would help people suffering from diabetes and coeliac as well, wouldn't it?

By now you're wondering "What's this guy's problem? He's thin, isn't he?" People certainly keep telling me that. But I used to be a fat bastard. Yes, so I keep saying.

So what happened? How did I lose the weight? These days, I look back at myself and sometimes want to be physically sick at how repulsive I looked. Of course, people are very cautious when they ask how you lost weight. They don't want to put their foot in it. They ask if you've been sick first.

[The CHORUS comes to life again, this time they are just curious people going up to ERIC, asking similar questions, perhaps circling him]

CHORUS: You haven't been sick, have you? Have you lost a little weight there? My God, you look about one-third the size you were! Hey man, you're so skinny now! What the hell happened?

(They retreat, silent again)

ERIC: There's not just one reason you end up losing weight. I can tell you there have been many failed attempts over the years. You hate yourself even more for not succeeding and then eat and eat and eat. But sometimes you have a couple of life-changing experiences that are the catalyst. Like a long-term relationship ending. Somebody dying. Losing a job. They all happen around the same time and, in the midst of this, you come across something that makes you understand why you eat. (PAUSE) Emotion.

We don't realise we have these emotional links in our brain. They equate to food equals feeling better. And this probably stems right back to when we're toddlers and, to stop us crying, our mothers give us something to eat. Or when we're good we get rewarded and get a chocolate. When something bad happens at school, Dad buys you an ice cream to feel better. It's not their fault, their own parents probably did the same thing. But when you're picked on by bullies, you tend to need more comfort. And as you get fatter, you get picked on more. So you seek even greater solace in food.

[As the CHORUS comes to life, ERIC is upset or looks hurt and needs consoling. They variously mime offering him food as comfort, perhaps starting to overlap their lines]

CHORUS: Hey Eric, don't cry it's going to be okay
This will make you feel better.
Forget about her, have some chocolate.
Do you want pizza for dinner to cheer up?
Maybe if you eat something it won't seem so bad?
I know cheesecake always put a smile on your face.

[The CHORUS can ad lib more, if appropriate, as they go right into ERIC and smother ERIC with their good intentions, before pulling back, silent]

ERIC: You're not conscious of this happening; it's just the way emotions and feelings get linked up in your head. You don't know why eating a giant hamburger will make

you feel better – it just does. And fighting against those cravings is a huge struggle. People might scoff about food addictions but how many of you simply cannot function without your morning coffee? Or have no confidence without your make-up on?

I didn't believe I was losing weight when it was happening. I hopped on the scales and saw I had dropped 5 kilos. I couldn't believe it was right. So I hopped on and off, on and off (*mimes this*) thinking there was something wrong with the accuracy of the scales. But they were correct. Yet this on-off, on-off game on the scales continued week after week, as I simply wouldn't believe the facts in front of me. Until one day I was suddenly 25 kilos lighter... I know I'd been fighting against gorging myself when things went wrong. But it wasn't easy. I slipped up. I ate food I shouldn't. And I hated myself so much when I did.

[The CHORUS comes to life, maybe bobbing up and down in front of ERIC, representing the push/pull torment in his mind]

CHORUS: Fight it... fight it.... You have to fight it!
But *he* feels so terrible, *I* feel so terrible
Mmm, have a burger, you'll feel better then
Eat an apple, cup of tea, celery stick, carrot juice... come on now!
Craving comes, craving goes, craving comes, craving goes.
Oh you want it, don't you? Then have it... have it!
No, must be strong.... Break the links...
Hungry, so hungry... you need food, glorious food!

[CHORUS retreat, perhaps fading their dialogue away, ad libbing as they return to position]

ERIC: A dawning realisation finally came one day when I was looking in the mirror. I was busy. I was doing too many things. I thought I had sunken, tired eyes with dark rings under them. I prodded under my eyes. And that's when it hit me: I wasn't tired. Those were my cheekbones! I'd never seen them before.

People started pointing out that my pants were too big. I had to buy new clothes. But I wouldn't believe it when shop assistants said I had to be a medium or small. I mean, you're talking to a man where the phrase "extra large" was completely stock standard when out shopping.

You'd think I'd be happy about this. The positive comments and so on. Don't get me wrong, it was nice. I just wasn't ready for it and still struggle to this day when people say they consider me thin. Realistically, I know I'm smaller than I was – but in my head I still think I'm fat. Not as fat as I was, but not the right size for everyone else.

**This is not the end of "Appetite For Destruction"
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