

## Chapter 8 Food and hunger

It is a few minutes before midnight when Dagwood Bumstead lifts his blankets and ever so quietly slips from bed. Blondie is sleeping on her side with her back to the room and is undisturbed by Dagwood's movements. He tiptoes to the door. The dog watches his furtive gait and follows to the head of the stairway where Dagwood pauses, now confident his departure has gone undetected. A gleam that stretches from ear to ear lights up the hallway, and the two merry companions scamper down the stairs. When we next see Dagwood, he is seated at the kitchen table admiring a skyscraper sandwich, at least a foot tall, and layered with every imaginable leftover a refrigerator can hold. It is a thing of beauty, bulging with tomatoes and beef, pickles and cold cuts. Lettuce and baloney, mayonnaise and mustard are spilling out from between ten stories of fresh bread and the whole thing is crafted with enough care and skill to rival the Empire State Building.

And in his moment of triumph, before he takes that first impossible bite, Dagwood Bumstead pauses and looks us in the eye. The gleam has doubled. The master of the nap is glowing like a three-year-old who has found his blanket. Though he has been secretive until now, he does not feel caught. He does not feel hand-in-the-cookie jar embarrassment. A puppy feels more shame than Dagwood. He can look at us with unabashed delight because he knows we understand and share in his exuberant victory. He can look at us without a trace of self-consciousness and proclaim for every white American man, "I have it all." His is a triumph over hunger. The defeat of longing. He can eat when he wants. As much as he wants. There in the privacy of his kitchen it is all in his hands and nothing can take it away. Not the list of jobs Blondie will have for him in the morning. Not the demeaning blows Mr. Dithers will pummel him with on Monday. He is alone with his catch, ready to devour every last crumb, ready to fill his stomach to its maximum capacity. His jaws will unhinge like a snake's to take in the towering meal. And his mouth, the happiest part of his body, the home of his voracious appetite, will explode with sensations so exhilarating as to satisfy every molecule of his desire. He will eat until the plate is empty. He will lick his lips and sigh. The dog will look at him and smile after scarfing up the last of the droppings. When he is finished, Dagwood Bumstead will walk the stairs to his bedroom. He will tuck himself in beside his unsuspecting wife, roll over on his side, smile, and sleep like a baby. Content with a full belly and the knowledge that he lives in a land of plenty.