

B462. "A Diet That Works For Us All." Los Angeles Times, (August 24, 2004) p. A13.

The day starts with a ritual. Not prayer or meditation, but Mounting the Scale. It reveals whether you heeded the do's and don'ts, whether you ate right. The scale frames the day to come: Will it be guilt-riddled ("I should not have had that candy bar") or marked by quiet elation ("I did well, skipping lunch")?

Friends call and say, "We have not seen you for ages; let's go out for dinner." They cast a quick, scrutinizing eye: "You look terrific; you must have lost 10 pounds."

Everyone wants Indian food, but it is on the taboo list, along with Chinese, German, French and Italian. Places that have buffets are beyond the pale; no one's character is that strong. "How about that place with great salads?"

The food arrives, but the waiter forgets the request for "dressing on the side." The glistening salad is tempting but rejected with righteous outrage ("I cannot eat this!"). The waiter wants to know if we want wine. "God, no," it is twice bedeviled: The book says it is not only rich in calories but also lowers one's resistance to temptation.

Choosing the main dish poses a heavy dilemma: A second appetizer, instead of an entree, would be much better for the cause, but the waiter will react as if he had been cheated out of his birthright.

The discussion then turns to books recently read. "We just finished the new Atkins; it's the best yet." Someone begs to differ. "I think that South Beach is better." The meal is over in a jiffy.

The next day is a regular workday. At its end, there are choices to make: Visit a friend recently admitted to a nearby hospital? Attend a fundraiser for a political candidate? Or go to the health club? The health club wins. Without it, the book says, dieting does not have a prayer.

All this thought and effort come to naught. The scale ends up disapprovingly higher. If the devotion and moral energy allotted to dieting were dedicated to moving mountains, or at least mending societal ills, the world would be a great place.

There is so much that must be done, there would hardly be any time to stuff your face.