

Saturday afternoon. Brent Cross. The queue for the women's changing room is silent. This is John Lewis after all. Bored looking women with arms full of expensive outfits wait for access to the cubicles for a private showing of their taste and wealth. I receive pitying looks with my one pair of designer jeans clutched in my hand. I can't afford them, but I need them to fit in.

Finally, the bored looking sales assistant, a misnomer if ever I heard one, offers me a cardboard square with the number 1 for all to see. I see pity in her eyes as she points to an empty cubicle with my one garment. Clearly, she knows I'm in the wrong shop. I suddenly feel like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*, as she is shunned by the snobby store before she has money and is transformed into a worthy customer.

Naturally, the cubicle's curtain doesn't quite meet the wall. I remove my comfortable elasticated waist trousers, and haul on the denim. They feel expensive. I try not to think about selling a kidney to afford these.

The legs slide into place and I'm starting to feel confident, right up until I realise the zip now forms a yawning triangle with no real hope of the two slides meeting each other. This is not just a tight situation, it's mission impossible. In my youth, several decades and sizes ago, I pulled on tight jeans lying flat on a bed, using a wire coat hanger to pull up the zip. The one metre square cubicle will clearly not allow that. Gritting my teeth and the two edges of the waistband simultaneously, I haul the jeans into place. There still seems to be an ocean of stomach fat bulging. I look like a middle aged Buddha. I stop looking in the mirror.

If I can just get the button fastened, I stand a chance with the zip.

I breath in, pulling in every part of me that once contained muscle. The button somehow finds the hole and catches. Before I can rejoice in this small victory, I mistakenly exhale. The button explodes out of its prison hole, ricochets off the wall and hits the mirror. It sounds like a bullet and I can almost sense the entire changing room duck, assuming we are under fire. The only thing that shatters is my body confidence as the mirror trembles but remains intact.

Wasting no time, I peel off the jeans, now tainted with my failure to fit in, and pull on my joggers like a comfort blanket. I rescue the errant button, tuck it into the jeans pocket, silently cursing poor design and sweatshops in third world countries. Mustering dignity and confidence to support my exit, and hoping nobody realises it was me, I dump the jeans with the bored assistant muttering 'No, thank you.'

She doesn't care, but I do. I reach for my phone and look up the number for WeightWatchers.

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