



be•liev•a•rex•ic

---

J.J. Johnson



be•liev•a•rex•ic





For Sam—

We all have monsters.  
May yours be a friendly, loyal luck dragon  
who will fly you in the direction of your dreams.



Published by  
PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS  
1700 Chattahoochee Avenue  
Atlanta, Georgia 30318-2112  
*www.peachtree-online.com*

Text © 2015 by J. J. Johnson

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Design and composition by Nicola Simmonds Carmack

Printed May 2015 in Harrisonburg, VA, by R. R. Donnelley

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Johnson, J. J., 1973-

Believarexic / JJ Johnson.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-56145-771-7

Summary: An autobiographical novel in which fifteen-year-old Jennifer Johnson convinces her parents to commit her to the Eating Disorders Unit of an upstate New York psychiatric hospital in 1988, where the treatment for her bulimia and anorexia is not what she expects but her future self helps her through it.

[1. Psychiatric hospitals—Fiction. 2. Anorexia nervosa—Fiction. 3. Bulimia—Fiction. 4. Depression, Mental—Fiction. 5. Family problems—Fiction. 6. New York (State)—History—20th century—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.J63213Bel 2015

[Fic]—dc23

2015002404





be•liev•a•rex•ic

---

*J. J. Johnson*

  
**PEACHTREE**  
**ATLANTA**







## — Before —

Thursday, November 17, 1988

It's 2:04 a.m.

Your eyes are dry and big.

You are in your bed,

burrowed under blankets and quilt.

Spike is curled in a sleeping curve at your feet,  
barking quietly, a bad dream.

You stroke his ears until he relaxes, soothed.

You are not soothed.

You are the opposite of soothed.

You are wretchedly hungry.

But you won't eat

because you are too tired

to make yourself throw up again.

Somehow, for no good reason—

or at least no reason you can figure out—

you have a monster inside you.

It is hunting you from within.

It waits around corners; it stalks.





## Before

Thursday, November 17, 1988

A horrible beast—  
greedy, disgusting, toxic.

The monster tells you,  
*You are not what you are supposed to be.*  
*You are not good*  
*unless you are sick.*

*Be the broken one,*  
it tells you.  
*Pare yourself down,*  
*do everything just so,*  
*empty your stomach,*  
*scrape lines in your flesh,*  
*throw yourself down stairs,*  
*drop to your bare knees on gravel.*

You want it gone, the monster.  
There is no safety or comfort while it lives.  
You yearn for it to be slain.  
You want it dead.

And yet: you need it.  
It is what makes you  
special.  
It sets you apart.  
It helps you.





Before

Thursday, November 17, 1988

It focuses your whirling vortexes of thoughts  
and your frenzied typhoons of feelings  
into the exact precision of  
hunger.

The meticulous control of  
losing weight.

The sparkly glamour, the pride,  
of being the  
skinniest  
person  
in  
the  
room.

But you are sick.

Sick, as in unwell:  
shaking, dazed, light-headed.

And you are  
sick, as in tired:  
sick of wondering why you are so sad,  
sick of feeling alone at a crowded party,  
sick of thinking happiness is simply  
not meant for you.

You are sick of being sick.

There must be a way.

A questing hero finds a weapon  
and slays the dragon.





## Before

Thursday, November 17, 1988

You are no hero.  
But you have looked everywhere for  
a monster-slaying sword.  
Where is it?  
Not inside a shrunken stomach,  
or on the scale,  
or in the tang of bile, vomit.  
Not in the pop-fizz of diet soda,  
or the melted, muddy pools at the bottom  
of a pint of Ben & Jerry's.  
Not in the glinting edge of a razor blade.  
Not in the bitter swill of stale beer,  
or letting boys inside you.

Not even in the right things:  
confiding in your friend,  
or trying to tell your mom,  
or your guidance counselor,  
or your dog, with his sweet brown eyes.

No sword.  
No exit.



There's one thing you haven't tried.  
One last thing.





Before

Thursday, November 17, 1988

Maybe a hospital.  
A place for you to heal,  
with clean white sheets and  
smiling nurses and doctors  
and vases filled with flowers  
on the table by your bed.

Last week  
you saw a commercial  
for a place like that.

The commercial showed bare feet  
stepping on a scale,  
but instead of pounds,  
the dial on the scale showed a phone number  
to call  
for information.  
Or help.

Specialists  
who may know the way out  
of this labyrinth  
and  
how to fight the monster  
until you kill it.

Or else maybe it will kill you.





## Before

Thursday, November 17, 1988

At least then it would be over.  
One way or the other,  
you're getting too tired to care.

But then again  
of course you care.  
You care so much it hurts.  
You want  
you want  
you want  
more than anything  
for someone  
to understand you,  
for someone  
who will  
reach in  
and  
pull  
you  
out  
of  
this  
maze  
and away from the monster.





Before

The monster howls with laughter.  
You are not skinny enough for a hospital.  
You are not sick enough.  
If you lose twenty more pounds,  
then maybe.  
Thirty would be better.

But.  
There must be something more than this.  
There has to be light  
somewhere.

And so tonight, you  
throw back the quilt and  
make your way to your parents' room.  
Spike follows you,  
his toenails clicking on the wood floor.

Your mom and dad  
are asleep and snoring.  
You feel around for the phone.  
You tug the cord gently so it will stretch to the bed  
and, with shaking voice,  
whisper, *Mom?*  
*Mom?*

Thursday, November 17, 1988





## Before

Thursday, November 17, 1988

With  
volume rising in increments,  
you make a whisper ladder,  
until your words  
break through and  
your  
mom  
finally  
hears  
you.

