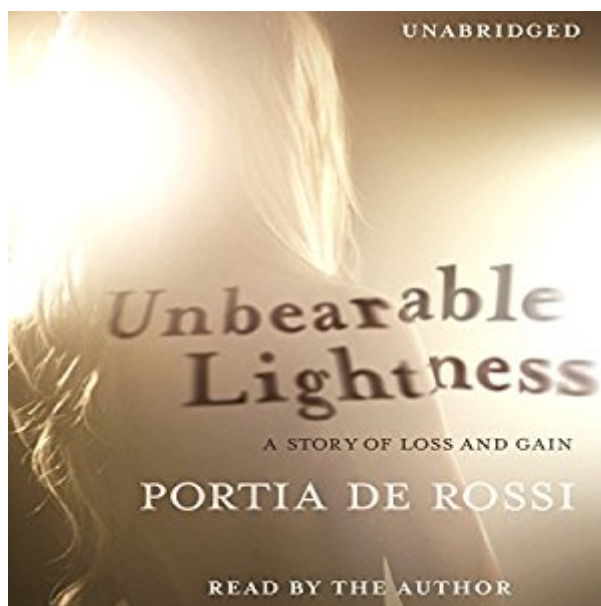


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# Unbearable Lightness: A Story Of Loss And Gain



## Synopsis

"I didn't decide to become anorexic. It snuck up on me disguised as a healthy diet, a professional attitude. Being as thin as possible was a way to make the job of being an actress easier . . ." Portia de Rossi weighed only 82 pounds when she collapsed on the set of the Hollywood film in which she was playing her first leading role. This should have been the culmination of all her years of hard work - first as a child model in Australia, then as a cast member of one of the hottest shows on American television. On the outside she was thin and blond, glamorous and successful. On the inside, she was literally dying. In this searing, unflinchingly honest book, Portia de Rossi captures the complex emotional truth of what it is like when food, weight, and body image take priority over every other human impulse or action. She recounts the elaborate rituals around eating that came to dominate hours of every day, from keeping her daily calorie intake below 300 to eating precisely measured amounts of food out of specific bowls and only with certain utensils. When this wasn't enough, she resorted to purging and compulsive physical exercise, driving her body and spirit to the breaking point. Even as she rose to fame as a cast member of the hit television shows *Ally McBeal* and *Arrested Development*, Portia alternately starved herself and binged, all the while terrified that the truth of her sexuality would be exposed in the tabloids. She reveals the heartache and fear that accompany a life lived in the closet, a sense of isolation that was only magnified by her unrelenting desire to be ever thinner. With the storytelling skills of a great novelist and the eye for detail of a poet, Portia makes transparent as never before the behaviors and emotions of someone living with an eating disorder. From her lowest point, Portia began the painful climb back to a life of health and honesty, falling in love with and eventually marrying Ellen DeGeneres, and emerging as an outspoken and articulate advocate for gay rights and women's health issues. In this remarkable and beautifully written work, Portia shines a bright light on a dark subject. A crucial book for all those who might sometimes feel at war with themselves or their bodies, *Unbearable Lightness* is a story that inspires hope and nourishes the spirit.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Portia is an amazing writer. Her tale is gripping, captivating, and horrifying at the same time. This book reads like a page-turner and most readers will really enjoy the journey that she takes you on. I also think it is a timely and true tale of how the influences of the media, Hollywood and the "thin-ideal" have come to dominate the way women feel about their bodies, that we are never "good enough" the way we are, and that we should always be comparing ourselves to others. In that way, I think that almost every woman will be able to relate to her story, eating disorder or not. But if you have ever had an eating disorder, you will recognize the triggers she writes about, and her story's darkness will be very familiar. For those who are looking for help in these pages for their own eating disorder, what I will say is that this is NOT a book that really encourages recovery, I mean it is obviously an encouragement to live a healthy life, but you won't find helpful recovery advice or direction here - just so you know. As another review states, recovery is almost an afterthought in this book. So, be careful if you are sensitive to books that trigger. I am not discouraging buying the book, but I just think it makes a helpful review to know what you are and what you are not getting. As someone who has "intimate knowledge" of living with anorexia and bulimia, I will say that this is like looking in the mirror. Family members who don't understand the pain may also find it enlightening. If you are looking for books to take you to the next step and point you toward recovery, or if you have a family member with anorexia or bulimia symptoms but is still very thin, I HIGHLY recommend to book "100 Questions and Answers about Anorexia Nervosa" by Dr. Sari Fine Shepphird.

I selected this book because I like Portia De Rossi. Especially in the last couple years, she comes across as very warm and approachable in interviews. The book tells why that is -- after years of self-loathing and deception, she can be her authentic self. The book is not celebrity gossip and her focus is on her own struggles and obsessions, because I think for a very long time that's all she could see. Very few stories of Alley McBeal, other than how the pressure to fit her wardrobe or look

good in her undies exacerbated her weight issues. No stories about Arrested Development other than she was at a point in her life where she wasn't hiding her love of women and told the producers she was gay right away. This book will absolutely not work for you if you want this to be more than the diary of a woman with eating disorders. That's the focus and remains the focus. She asks Ellen to read the manuscript she'd written, the one the reader just will have just read, and Ellen does and says, "Baby, you were crazy," and the reader can only nod along. The book makes it clear that Portia's thinking was distorted for a good 14 years and the book is a diary of that. If you happen to own Ally McBeal, you have only to watch the second season when Portia appears and is whippet thin and imagine her hating herself for not being thinner. The episode that really sent her into a tailspin is the one where she seduces Cage while wearing a bra and panties, ribs clearly visible, and with a figure that would make most women weep with joy and become nudists. All Portia could see was an unattractive woman who had to keep fooling people into thinking she was thin, beautiful, and worthy. What I enjoyed was Portia's efforts to bring you into her mind at this time.

I bought this after seeing Portia with Oprah then on Ellen. Here were the ups and downs (no weight pun intended) of the book to me - to help you decide if it's for you. - She's an interesting enigma - and an articulate, honest writer. Before I read this I found Portia a little fascinating. I think a lot of good-will has been generated to her from just being associated with Ellen whom many people adore. Yet, despite her stints on TV shows - she's really not that well known or remembered outside of her attachment to Ellen nowadays. So, it's an interesting look at a sort of enigma, told straight and with far more honesty than one would expect. - But, the period of her life the bulk of book is devoted towards - is a time of being a self-absorbed, emotionally unstable and rather stereotypically insecure Hollywood actress - which gets a little wearing at times. Sometimes, I found it seemed more like someone doing their journals for some self psychoanalysis, eating disorder project than actually trying to get a fuller tale across. The main focus is her descent into an extreme eating disorder, as she obsesses over how she'll look in any given scene and whether she'll ever be "perfect enough". While it's interesting to hear how someone that had it pretty much all in Hollywood terms (the money, looks, shows, etc.) is so self-loathing and insecure inside, it gets harder to care as she goes along what she's eating and not eating, how much she exercises and how the only thing that interests her is herself. The other aspect of her fear of being "found out" as a lesbian is more interesting, but wasn't so much a focus of that time for her.

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