

An excerpt from

MEASURE BY MEASURE

PROLOGUE

From the Feb. 9, 1996 "Weekend" section of The Trib:

ROMANCE BLOOMS AT FAT DANCE

PLUS-SIZE PATRONS STEP OUT

BY TOD FRENTE

JEFFERSON LOOKS OUT across the dance floor of the Figs 'n' Dates Lounge at the trio of full-figured ladies doing a line dance. To him, the sight is "the most beautiful view in the world."

All three women, young and in their late twenties, are larger than average. "Fat," as Dr. Dexter Logan bluntly puts it. Fat—and proud of it. For this is the Winter Wonderland dance of the local RADFAM (Respect and Dignity for Fat Americans) chapter. It is, chapter president Logan says, "a place where fat singles and their admirers can meet in safety."

The group holds these dances bi-monthly on the first Saturday of the month, and, according to Logan, "they're always well attended." Tonight, one can count fifty men and women of all shapes and sizes in the room. Everybody seems to be having a good time.

To Jefferson, a tall, black man of average build, this is heaven. Jefferson is a self-professed FA, a "fat admirer." A white-collar professional, he's been attracted to plump and bigger women since he was a teenager.

ACCEPTANCE

"Most big women have trouble accepting themselves," he notes. "They've been told all their lives that being fat is no way to get a man. So they can't hear any of the honest compliments you give them."

At RADFAM functions, he says, you meet women who've learned to accept themselves "as the lovely creatures they are."

Connie, a striking brunette of indeterminate age, echoes Jefferson's sentiments. While unwilling to give her weight ("Let's just say I'm beyond the range of most mainstream plus-size shops"), she appreciates the dances for the way they give fat women a chance to "dress at their most glamorous."

The owner of a downtown plus-size boutique, InFatuation, Connie has been both chapter officer and a regular at these events. "For years, fat women were denied the chance to wear truly beautiful clothes," she states. "These dances are long overdue. I particularly love it when I see a customer on the dance floor in one of my outfits."

To Jefferson, the dance is a chance for him to truly be himself, too. "Most FAs spend their lives hiding their preference from friends and family," he says. "Here, you can be open and honest."

Greg, an FA and insurance salesman, agrees. "There's a good deal of pressure in the business world for FAs to pick a thin partner," he observes. "Thinness equates with success. It takes courage to come to one of these dances, but once you do it, it becomes habit forming."

Habit-forming and maybe life changing. Ask Carl and Linda, a recently engaged couple who both cheerfully call themselves "fat."

FAT AND HAPPY

They first met six months ago at a RADFAM dance. Linda had been a member of the organization for over a year; for Carl, it was his first dance. He'd read about the event in a magazine devoted to appreciation of larger women and had come on an impulse. "Once I saw her, I fell head over heels," he says. "I never dreamed I'd meet a woman so big and beautiful who'd also find me attractive."

Linda was a self-described "casualty on the dating scene" for years before joining RADFAM. "I'd go to singles bars with the girls from work, and it was like I was invisible next to them. Here, the situation is reversed."

The couple rises and heads for the floor, where they dance their way through a slow song. Even from across the lounge, you can see the pleasure on both faces.

"It's really a shame," Dr. Logan says, "that there are so few places where fat people can go and be themselves without risking ridicule. But as long as that's the way it is, we'll probably keep holding these dances."

For future listings of upcoming RADFAM events, keep watching Friday's "Goin' & Doin'" Directory.

EPISODE ONE

SO, WHAT ARE YOU WEARING to the Sweetheart Dance tomorrow night?"

Jenny Taylor glanced up to find her legal-eagle boss Lissa grinning down at her across the desk. "I d-don't think I'll g-go," Jenny stammered as she nervously shuffled the subpoenas she'd just finished typing. "I've got so much to do at home, and I really don't have a thing to wear, and—"

"Girlfriend!" Lissa interrupted. "You're not bailing out on me again. Hey, it's a dance, not a root canal."



Jenny inwardly balanced the agony of oral surgery with that of almost certain social suicide.

Lissa ran flawlessly manicured fingertips through her close-cropped Afro. “Jenny, when’s the last time you really pampered yourself? A massage. Or a new outfit. And I don’t mean something practical. We’re talking stunning, sexy, drop-dead-gorgeous!”

“You can’t get clothes like that in my size.”

“Sure you can. You just have to know where. Look at me!” Lissa twirled coquettishly as her hands skimmed her fashionably voluptuous form.

“But you’re a lot smaller than me!”

Lissa laughed. “How much do you think I weigh?”

Jenny blushed. “It’s not polite to presume—”

“I pack 220 pounds in this compact chassis,” Lissa replied, “and I’ve worked hard to make every single ounce of them beautiful. I’ll bet you’re not much more than that.”

“Well, I wear size 26, but they’ve seemed tighter recently.”

“And, I’ve also noticed, rather dowdy. How old are you, 28 or so? You look like your mother dresses you, for pity’s sake!”

Remembering several recent motherly comments, Jenny had to admit it was probably true.

“Okay, so much for your wardrobe. What are you really afraid of?”

“I won’t know anybody,” Jenny admitted.

“Sure you will. I’ll be there, and I’m sure you’ll recognize others from the meetings I’ve taken you to.”

Jenny’s ambivalence wavered, but she protested one last time. “I’m not a very good dancer.”

“So? Hell, with a body like yours, all you need to do is just stand in one spot and jiggle. The FAs will drool! Convinced? Good. Tomorrow morning we’ll go spend some of those ‘big bucks’ I pay you on a visit to my spa, a stylish ‘do, and some sexy rags. And then, Cinderella, you’ll be the belle of the ball.”

PAUL DAILY PICKED AT HIS HASH BROWNS, unsuccessfully trying to work up some enthusiasm for them. No good. His stomach was as jumpy as a fifth grade P.E. class.

Across the parking lot you could see the SkyAire Lodge. Every time a car drove up, he peered into the evening light to see if they were there for the dance. So far, he hadn’t seen any likely candidates.

His waitress, a plump black woman with wearily concerned eyes, gave Paul a motherly look when she came to pick up his plate. “Anything wrong with the meal?” she asked.

“Not at all,” he said. “Guess the eyes were bigger than the stomach.” He gestured over his cup for a refill, which pacified the waitress somewhat. Not the best idea, getting yourself wired on Denny’s coffee, but it beat the alternatives.

A large silhouette was stepping out of a minivan parked near the Lodge’s entrance. An officer, perhaps, there to get things set up for the Sweetheart Dance. He couldn’t make out any features, but from their size they had to be a member of the fat rights group.

It had taken Paul five months to get up the gumption to come to his first dance. Ever since he’d seen that writeup in the *Trib* (“Romance Blooms at Fat Dance”), he’d been garnering the courage to attend one of the bi-monthly events. He’d gotten this far; there was no point in backing out now.

He was a grown man, dammit. Why was he acting like a teen on his first date?

Because he’d never been to a dance where so many women looked like the ideal he’d been carrying with him all these years. Where women and men were the size they were and unapologetic about it. Where men who were attracted to a larger form were able to be open about this preference. Where he actually had a chance of meeting someone who was both physically and mentally compatible with him.

It was a lot to put on just one dance, Paul knew. But this was his first step into the size acceptance community, so who knew where it’d lead? He’d read that news feature to tatters, so he knew what he was called by people in the movement. An FA, a Fat Admirer—though “admiration” seemed like a pretty tame adjective for the fantasies he’d been having with increasing frequency.

His refill was cold by the time he actually thought to try some of it. In the meantime, at least a half dozen fat figures had made their way into the Lodge. Paul took a look around the restaurant, scoped out the men’s room, and rose to go straighten himself.

Now or never, he thought.

