

Love At Large

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Love At Large

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Sue Ann Jaffarian
Nancy Trausch
Eileen Wilson

And Featuring a Collaborative Story
by the writers at
BBW Romance Writing

Draumr Publishing, LLC
Maryland

Love At Large

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Foreword

Danger – Large Love At Work!

by Sue Ann Jaffarian

I have a dream...

- That one day the lingerie billboard I pass on my way to work will feature a size 22 model in a fire-engine red teddy;
- That one day a plus size actress will put an imprint of her big fat behind in the cement in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood;
- That one day interviews with talented and accomplished women, who also happen to be large, will not include questions and comments about weight;
- That one day books with full-figured heroines will be the norm, not specialty fiction shunned by major publishing houses.

Love at Large is part of that dream; at least it's a healthy foot in the right direction.

Plump, fat, plus size, zaftig, full-figured, chubby...no matter what the word, it is no secret that in our weight obsessed society women who are defined by these and similar adjectives are treated as though they are invisible or seen as merely cardboard cutouts with stereotypical personalities.

Generally, in media, whether it is film, television, books, or even magazines, full-figured women are given the roles of good sport, helpful neighbor and/or gal pal. Seldom, if ever, is seen a fleshy vamp or a sexy and desirable woman who just happens to shop at the plus-size stores. They sell laundry soap and laxatives, not perfume, cars or beer; always a bridesmaid, never the bride. Sometimes, they don't even make the cut as a bridesmaid. After all,

what fashion conscious bride would want a double helping of lime green taffeta in her wedding photos? Right?

But the reality is that plump (fat, plus size, zaftig, full-figured, chubby, etc., etc.) women are brides and bridesmaids, as well as girl friends and significant others. They are as capable of being sexy sirens and exciting lovers as they are of being best friends and dependable employees. If not, then who is buying all that plus size lingerie? And please don't say it's that quiet man who lives on the next block with his mother.

Love at Large is a courageous book of charming romantic stories; each one a celebration of the lives and loves of full-figured women. It is a book of fiction featuring real women searching for real love and finding that men do indeed send long-stemmed red roses to women with double digit dress sizes.

Within the pages of Love at Large, you will find spunky, attractive, sexy, and smart heroines. These are women who love, are loved, and make love. They are all that and a bag of chips; and they make no apologies for not being the fat-free variety.

Sue Ann Jaffarian is the author of the award-winning Odelia Grey mystery series which features a plus-size paralegal as an amateur sleuth.

With Many Thanks

To Judi McCoy, for her endless editing and her constant support.
Judi is the author of the upcoming release,
“Wanted: One Special Kiss”

To Heather Donovan, for her creation and leadership of the
BBW Romance Writing Group.
Heather is the author of the upcoming release,
“Love and Kilts: Book One of the SpiritBadge Series”

To Jennifer Harrington, for all her time and effort in getting this
anthology organized and ready for publishing!
You can see Jennifer’s first release right here in Love at Large!

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATED WOMAN
by Elizabeth Angus
11

A WORK OF ART
by Judy Bagshaw
45

DIRTY LAUNDRY
by Jennifer Harrington
65

LOVE BYTES
by Sue Ann Jaffarian
95

A CHANGE IN DIRECTION
by Nancy Trausch
119

AN UNFORGETTABLE KISS
by Eileen Wilson
153

PASSION UNMASKED
by BBW Romance Writing Group
187

The Illustrated Woman

Elizabeth Angus

CHAPTER ONE



I'd been thinking about getting a tattoo for the longest time. It was far from a whim. I'd decided at last that acquiring one was a good way to celebrate turning thirty.

So there I was, in a tattoo place named Rip's Parlour. It was little more than a shopfront, consisting of a minute waiting room with walls plastered with sheets of potential skin art, ranging from the ubiquitous roses and hearts and skulls to dramatic Native American pieces that would decorate an entire torso.

At the rear was a tinier backroom almost filled with a sink topped with a cupboard and an adjustable chair that looked like a dentist's instrument of torture. The back wall boasted a huge mirror, presumably to watch the action as parts of one's body were adorned, parts not visible unless one was a contortionist.

"Go to Rip's," my friend, Jim, had said. "My sister-in-law Sharon knows him, and I hear he's good. Keeps a clean place."

No one else of my acquaintance had ventured into a tattoo parlour, and this at least was a little better than playing eeny-meeny-miney-mo with the phonebook. A little.

Now that I was there, about to consign my precious and virgin skin to the hands of a stranger, my nerves were dancing a military tattoo of their own in my stomach. I clutched the piece of paper with my design and willed the nerves away. It had taken me several hours of sketching before I came up with one I'd be happy to

permanently etch onto my person.

Before I could turn tail and run, the man behind the counter looked up and smiled.

“Hi,” he said, proffering a paw the size of Texas. “My name’s Rip.”

I extricated my hand from his considerable grip with minor difficulty and returned the courtesy.

“Remy. Remy Martin.” I waited a beat.

“Like the brandy?” he asked.

“Yep.” I gave him full points for recognizing the derivation, which was far better than the blank incomprehension that often followed my introduction. “The one craving that my mother couldn’t satisfy while pregnant with me.”

I refrained from enlightening him regarding the cravings she had been able to satisfy: pickled onions and ice cream, gravy and vegemite sandwiches, choc-dipped parsnips. Grown men have been known to blanch at Mama’s gastronomic fancies.

I’d long been glad to end up with the more innocuous yet rather spirited appellation of Remy. Imagine going through life as Parsnip Martin. Just the thought made me shudder.

I offered Rip my sketch, glad to see that my hand had steadied.

“Nice,” he observed. “Did you draw that yourself?”

I nodded. We both gazed down at the sketch. My design depicted a delicate seahorse, about an inch and a half high, in shades of green and golden yellow. Sinuous strands of seaweed swirled around her, and her tail spiralled down a slender stem. Ripples of blue twining about both seahorse and seaweed suggested the currents of the ocean sweeping past, and the whole was outlined in black. I was pleased with the final result of my sketching.

“Couldn’t find something you liked on display?” Rip tipped his chin at the sheets of mass-produced designs adorning the walls.

Surprised at the question, I hesitated. I’d expected the tattooist to just take my money and get on with it. I wasn’t prepared for curiosity regarding my motives.

“Sorry, none of my business,” Rip apologised, shrugging. “I just wondered...”

“No, it’s okay.” I gathered my thoughts. “I didn’t want to permanently acquire something impersonal; something I’d chosen from a wall of mass-produced designs that anyone could have for the right price. I wanted something unique. Special.”

Great, now I sounded like a prize idiot.

“Ah.” He smiled, and suddenly I didn’t feel quite so stupid after all. “Is that the size you wanted it?”

I nodded.

“Where are you planning to put it?”

I made a vague gesture at my upper left chest.

He grinned. It was a lovely grin, I thought, bemused.

“Okay. It’ll take me a few minutes to draw it up on transfer paper and get my gear ready. We should talk price, too. How about eighty dollars? I prefer cash.”

He gave me another grin, and I felt a strange tingle start somewhere in the vicinity of my knees.

I hadn’t been sure what the cost would be, but eighty dollars seemed reasonable.

“Eighty’s fine.” I hoped I sounded like I knew what I was talking about. “Roughly, how long do you think it will take?”

“Well, maybe an hour and a half, two hours. Most people, though, find an hour is about as much pain as they can take. Some handle it well, some don’t. Is this your first tattoo?”

I nodded. Maybe I was in over my head?

“Okay. How about we see how you’re feeling after an hour, and if it’s bothering you too much, we’ll call it a day, and you can come back in a week or two and get it finished off?”

“All right.” The last syllable came out in a squeak. I was about to find out the hard way just how high my pain threshold went.

Rip busied himself with his preparations, gathering ink and, gulp, instruments. I leaned against the counter and studied him at my leisure while he was otherwise occupied. He was a tall man, with a well-muscled body. Shiny chestnut hair was gathered into a longish ponytail low on the nape of his neck. He had long legs clad in well-worn leather jeans topped with a black t-shirt, the sleeves ripped out leaving his arms bare. His feet sported black-strapped boots with Cuban heels. I wondered if the motorcycle parked out front belonged to him.

While he might never have been described as handsome, he had a pleasant and open face with a high forehead, deep brown eyes with lashes any woman would envy sweeping dark against his cheek, and a wide mouth with a full lower lip. There were laugh lines etched beside that mouth and matching ones crinkled the corners of his eyes.

I pondered my own reflection in the mirror stretched across the back wall. I only just reached the shoulder of the tall man I'd been watching. If short and fat were where it's at, I'd be there. My hair, a deep lustrous red that owed more to the chemical industry than nature, curled below my shoulders to brush the slopes of breasts that were more than generous. My hips flowed out in corresponding curves from a narrow waist – an hourglass figure, with several extra minutes of sand. I had wide-set grey eyes in a round face, tipped with a pert nose and garnished with a full mouth. It was far from meeting the narrow standards of conventional beauty, but it wasn't an unappealing package to the discerning viewer, if I did say so myself.

As he straightened from retrieving the last of his impedimenta from beneath the sink, a posture that provided a very enticing view, the butterflies in my stomach metamorphosed into elephants and shifted up a gear from soft-shoe shuffle to tap dance. I'd managed to distract myself from impending events in contemplation of Rip and my own vanity, but as he beckoned me toward the torturer's chair, I realised my moment of truth was at hand.

I lowered myself into the chair with trepidation.

“Show me again where you want this positioned,” said Rip, donning latex gloves as he seated himself on a wheeled stool and scooted it over beside me.

I felt a blush creep up my cheeks as I unbuttoned my blouse, my modesty grateful I'd had the foresight to wear a tank top beneath it. Not that I really minded being ogled if it were done with sincere admiration, but there was something very intimate about disrobing, even partially, while in such a vulnerable position with a man who, I had to admit, was getting to me in ways I didn't dare examine in detail.

I pointed to the expanse of upper breast thus bared and avoided his gaze.

“More to the left?” His hand, holding the paper with my design, hovered awaiting my assent.

I peered down my nose trying to see if that was where I wanted to put the tattoo.

“Don’t worry too much. I’ll apply the transfer, then you can have a look in the mirror and see if that’s right. It’s no hassle to wipe it off and try again,” he said, smoothing the paper over my skin.

His knee brushed my arm, sending another of those disconcerting flutters freewheeling through me. He peeled it away, leaving the outline of the sketch printed on my skin, and stepped back to allow me a view of my reflection.

I pondered. “Maybe a bit more to the left, please.”

Rip swabbed the first try away with a little alcohol, and repositioned the transfer.

“Better.” I smiled.

“Great. Make yourself comfortable, and we’ll start. I’m just going to adjust the chair, don’t be alarmed.” He raised the chair and lowered the back to a reclining position.

Getting comfortable seemed an impossible task in the face of the ominous nature of the contraption in which I was seated, as well as my puzzling reactions to Rip. I squirmed, feeling awkward, reminded again all too vividly of being in the dentist’s chair, fitting my knees over the long leg rests. I was about as comfortable as I was going to get, given that every tendon in my body had gone rigid with fear.

“So does your other half know you’re doing this, or will it be a surprise?” he asked.

“I don’t have an other half.”

“Ah.”

I wasn’t sure what his ‘ah’ meant, but I had other more immediate worries.

He pulled himself closer into my left side, so close I could feel his knee warm against my thigh while his breath stirred loose strands of my hair. He smelled of something herbal and spicy, and I had to drag my eyes away from his too close face.

I was blushing again.

“Ready? If the pain’s bothering you too much, tell me and

we'll take a break. Okay, here we go."

His forehead creased in concentration as the needle began to buzz. He dipped the tip in black ink and lowered it toward my skin. My right hand gripped the armrest so tightly my fingers tingled, as if I were in an aircraft and in mortal fear of flying. I hoped I didn't actually take flight when the instrument touched my vulnerable bosom.

I hadn't been sure what to expect, but the sensation that ripped through me was electrifying. Every instinct told me to swipe the source of the fire that burned into my epidermis away, right now. I steeled myself to remain still, though every muscle I possessed, and some I wasn't aware I had, screamed with tension. I gritted my teeth, determined not to whimper. This was a choice, I reminded myself, and I'd be damned if I wimped out with just a thin black line to show for drumming up the courage to get to this point.

"How are you doing?" Rip interrupted his excavation on my chest to re-ink the needle.

"O-okay," I gasped. The respite was welcome, but I couldn't summon breath enough for a more detailed reply. Both the tattooing and his proximity combined to suck all the air out of my lungs.

He gave me a sympathetic glance. "Worse than you expected? It won't feel this painful for too long. Most people say the outlining is the worst part. I'm not sure if that's true or if the body's natural painkillers, the endorphins, kick in after a bit and take the edge off it. Anyway, like I said, if it gets too bad, tell me and we'll stop."

I nodded, and he bent his head to his task once more. The buzzing of the needle so close to my ear sounded like a nest of hornets, a not unlikely simile given the sensations I was experiencing. I tried to concentrate on the music coming over the sound system, Santana followed by Janis Joplin, losing myself in the songs in an attempt to focus on something other than pain and the unnerving effect of an attractive man invading my personal space in such an intimate way. The frequent short stops as Rip re-inked the needle helped, though during those breaks I found my attention riveted to his person in an entirely disconcerting fashion.

Twenty-five minutes in, and I was feeling rather more in con-

trol of myself, both with regard to Rip and the pain. Either the outlining *was* the worst of it or my endorphins were kicking up a storm in my bloodstream. Whichever, while I wasn't exactly enjoying the experience, I was up to getting a crick in my neck trying to see what he was doing.

Noticing my contortions, he straightened. "Gotta change colours and clean the needle. Want to stretch and take a look in the mirror, see how we're going?" He lowered the chair until my feet could reach the floor when I sat up, then stretched his arms over his head. The series of impressive cracks emanating from his spine were audible even over the music. I tried not to stare at the expanse of bare abdomen exposed as his t-shirt rode up.

I stood, grateful my knees weren't quivering more than a bit, and stretched myself, working the kinks out of muscles tense with apprehension. I took two steps to the mirror and pushed my shirt back.

There was my design, at least the outline of it, etched against skin slightly reddened from the trauma inflicted upon it. I pulled back the right lapel of my shirt and compared the pristine décolletage there to my now illustrated left. My stomach did its umpteenth nervous flip flop for the day, but I was grinning.

I liked it!

Rip stood behind me, looking over my shoulder at our reflection. He was close enough that I could feel the warmth of him all down my back. I suppressed a shiver and fought the desire to take a step back to find out how that body would feel pressed against the length of mine. Instead, I met his gaze in the mirror as he raised his eyes from the beginnings of my tattoo.

"What do you think?"

I regarded my inked bosom again and smiled. "Let's colour it in."

"Good! The way you were inspecting it, I was afraid you were having second thoughts or didn't like my work, or – well, anyway, it's a bit late to take it back now..."

"Oh, I don't want to take it back. I like it." I liked him, too, but I wasn't planning on saying that. Not just yet.

I arranged myself in the dreaded chair again, even more aware of the warmth of his body so close to my flank. He had gentle

hands, even wielding an instrument of torture.

The first few seconds of the incessant buzz, and the nagging prickling of my skin took me by surprise all over again, but after a stern word to myself I found my zone in the music once more. The short intervals of respite as he re-inked the tool brought me back to a too complete awareness of his closeness. I could see small beads of sweat forming on his forehead as he worked, and I resisted the impulse to wipe them away. I didn't want to startle him while he was etching something permanent upon my person.

At last he put down the needle and pushed himself back, casting a critical eye over the results.

When I glanced at the clock above the sink, I was surprised to see an hour and a half had passed. I'd have guessed at perhaps a scant hour since my panicky self had first reclined in the chair.

"May I take a look?" I could see my chosen colours emblazoned on my breast, but from the corner of my eye the image was blurred. I could hardly wait to see what it really looked like.

"I'm not finished, but I think that's enough for one day, hmm? Here, go ahead and take a proper look."

Rip lowered the chair for me again, and I made my way over to the mirror.

"So, what's the verdict?"

I parted my shirt where it had fallen together as I rose and looked.

My design was almost exactly as I had imagined. The graceful arc of equine tail followed the curve of my breast. Dark green shaded to palest along the seahorse's body, highlighted in yellow. Washes of blue water curled about both beast and the seaweed, the whole delicately outlined in black. I could all but smell the salt.

I could see it wasn't quite finished, but I loved it.

"Looks good, eh?" Rip seemed pleased with himself. "The blues need more shading, I think, and I'd like to do a little more shadowing with the black, but you can see how it will be."

"Yes." I wasn't sure if it was the approval, the heady proximity of a healthy specimen of male, the end of the torture, or the endorphins partying it up in my system but I felt great, as if I could take on the world and bite its head off if it didn't do exactly what I wanted.

“Come back in, say, ten days to two weeks. What we’ve done today should be healed by then and I can put in the finishing touches. Here, I’ll write down the name of an antiseptic cream to use, and this should explain everything you need to do to take care of the tattoo.” He scribbled on the back of a double fold business card and handed it to me. “And if you’ve got any questions, phone and ask, or drop in. Otherwise I’ll see you in around two weeks.”

“See you then,” I agreed, buttoning my shirt and pocketing the card. I was already looking forward to seeing him again.

The shopfront had filled up with several customers, a couple of them surely too young to acquire a tattoo without parental consent. Rip, depositing my payment in the cash register, had clearly encountered them before.

“I’ve told you a dozen times, I won’t tattoo either of you until you produce proof of age. Go on, clear out!”

He meant business, but his grin and the cheeky retort from one of the youngsters took the sting out of the exchange. He waved to me, hovering in the doorway, and turned his attention to the next victim, er, customer.

Out on the street, my euphoria only increased. Though the day was cool, the afternoon was sunny, blue skies boasting scarcely a cloud. Everything looked so clear, colours brighter than I’d ever realised, the breeze fresh and invigorating. I strode down the slope back into the main shopping precinct, reminding myself to pick up the recommended antiseptic cream before I headed home.

I could hardly wait to strip off my shirt for another, closer look at my tattoo.

