

Zumba, Meet Depression

by Lori Lou Freshwater

The decision is made. I am going to a Zumba class. What better way to achieve behavior modification than to leave my TV and fuzzy bear slippers behind for some hot Latin aerobics in a strip-mall? I try to pull my hair into a ponytail that will make the two inches of black roots leading to once was blond a little less screaming. I find a pair of sweats that hides all that I want to hide.

The timing is bad, of course, because I have to drive during the Friday goop-up in and out of suburbia. And it is a fight getting out the door, but I make it to the car which makes me reasonably sure I will find the forward motion needed to continue on. The sun slides away as I follow the red ribbon of lights snaking up the road in front of me. I pass so many nail salons it makes me wonder if that may be a better idea. I should get my nails done to help my depression. It must be working if this many places are needed to keep up with the demand. But I keep going, out of the manicured squares of the getting-by and over the bridge and over the clogged interstate, past the old row houses, the busy barber shops, the delis and the Chinese restaurants filling the cold air with garlic and grease.

I pull into the gym parking lot and inside the front glass wall I immediately notice a man at the reception desk. Strike one against this whole idea. Idiot. Part of the reason I kicked my ass over here was because it was listed as a gym for women only, which meant, I thought, that I wouldn't have to even get a whiff of testosterone or have to deal with one of those half-hanging mouth leers from some guy who spends his day looking at porn.

"Hi, you haven't....this is your first time here isn't it?" The reception dude asks in between phone calls.

"Yes."

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He hands me a clipboard so I can sign his papers saying I cannot sue *Fit For A Queen Workout World* if they kill me. I walk over to the seat in the corner and sign it all away. I hand it back to him along with the free Zumba class coupon I printed out on my ex-husband's new girlfriend's computer.

I look up and notice a black and white poster of Marilyn Monroe on her back, lifting or play lifting dumbbells. Fit For A Queen wants me to know she had to work to look like that. She had to use dumbbells. I wonder how many jokes they made about her with those dumbbells.

More women start to rumble in from the parking lot. They immediately form their own micro-groups. Cackle. Ha ha. Cackle cackle. I sit and watch the pods for a while. At some point, one of them butt-scoots one inch too many and goes right over the back of the bench she is sitting on.

I look away from that whole thing and notice the magazine rack in the corner. Shape magazine EAT PASTA! LOSE WEIGHT! Women's Health LOOK GREAT NAKED! Women's Fitness LOSE YOUR BELLY Ladies Home Journal EAT MORE WEIGH LESS! Glamour MEN'S BEST SEX AND LOVE ADVICE Good Housekeeping GET THIN, FOR FREE! Good Housekeeping? *Good Housekeeping?* What the fuck? I look out the window.

A loud thump of a beat begins to come out of the room where the Zumba will occur. I go in. The instructor is an Hispanic woman in her fifties. She's wearing all black. Black hat, black draped shirt, black pants, black Reeboks, black socks. But the thing that makes it all that are the big tennis-ball-sized hoop earrings hanging there and shouting at me that I am not and never will be worthy.

She smiles. She begins to shift and shuffle side-to-side to the

Zumbasalsarumbamusical. Her hips no longer belong to a human but to an earth-goddess. Where does that rhythm come from? How does she step like that? Like she's putting her foot down on the earth's core and it is relenting. And her hands, how do they fall from her wrist like that. Like the earrings.

"This is a beginner class," she says, "No judgment and just have fun," she says louder and even more like a mother worried about her child's self-esteem issues.

I watch her feet. I try to make mine do that.

Mine do not do that.

The gigantic wall made of mirror is not helping.

My legs are as high as the shoulders of the woman in front of me.

I look like a giant cricket. No, worse a giant grasshopper. A science-fiction grasshopper.

I dance. I got this. I watch her feet. I move. When I get into rhythm with her I am high. I shuffle. I even shake.

She smiles like oh-hell-yes-here-it-goes and she throws her head back and she...unleashes the shimmy.

Shimmy! Yes. Woo! Shimmy, again! Is there anything that instills more power in a woman than a good shimmy? Here you go world, you may want to sit down cause I'm going to create an earthquake with this shit.

I'm doing it. I am doing the Zumba! Areba!

W.O.M.A.N I am that. I am not a depressed grasshopper. I dance

on.

This goes on a while, but after a few songs bleeding into each other and thirty minutes of Zumba glory it comes to a oddly abrupt end.

What now? I want the instructor to take me home and cook for me.

The pods re-form this time in the Zumba room. I smile at them. My smile feels stupid. They are stupid.

On the way out the door I stop to get my coat and purse. I look back up at Marilyn. Poor girl full of holes. Nothing but fragments. No one could ever give you unconditional love. Maybe Zumba would have helped.

The pod noise-level seems to be louder than the music was a few minutes ago. And more high-pitched. Why are they staring at me?

Back out into the cold, I get into the car. I shut the door. The chatter is mercifully dulled.

I feel the warm blanket of profound sadness wrap around me.

I wonder if they make Zumba tapes for home.

