

Large as Life and Twice as Lovely

“Large is lovely.”

Lisa gritted her teeth, and tried to remember what her boyfriend had told her. Daniel, of course, was slim and gorgeous, and had just gone off to work in America for six months.

“Don’t worry, darling,” he’d reassured her, the night before he left, “I love you like this.” He patted one of her most wobbly bits. “Anyway, the women over there are bigger than you.”

Lisa was not entirely convinced by this. She waved him off at the airport, wiped away her tears, and wandered into one of the boutiques; where, between the shelves of slinky clothes, she came up with a drastic plan. Her eyes still red from crying, Lisa bought a shocking pink tracksuit and set out to get slim by the time Dan returned.

At first, she only jogged under the cover of darkness. Lisa lived in a seaside town where the prom was strung with fairy lights, blurred by the winter drizzle. No one was there to see her, apart from a group of youths lurking in a shelter, who laughed as she ran past and fell about as if she were making the ground shake.

Lisa felt the sweat mingle with the rain that dripped down her tightly-stretched pink velour, and felt utterly miserable; but then she looked out to sea, at an ocean that was wider and more rippling than her own body, and thought of Daniel on the other side of it.

He phoned her often for late-night chats, and they batted emails back and forth across the Atlantic. She told him all about work, what was going on with her family, and even kept him up-to-date with the soaps; but she didn’t say a word about her exercise plan, or how the daily seafront jog was slowly starting to pay off.

Now, as she panted along, she sometimes had to stop and hitch up the tracksuit trousers, which were definitely getting looser round the waist.

“He may have liked me large,” she grinned as she ran, “but I hope he’ll find me twice as lovely like this!”

Then it all went pear-shaped, and Lisa nearly did too. Running at dusk, soon after New Year, she tripped on a bottle top tossed by the boys in the seafront shelter, and broke a toe. She sat on the promenade, trying not to sob, expecting them to laugh

at the pink elephant woman; but one lent her his mobile phone so she could call her mum, and one hauled to her feet. None of them joked about the earth moving.

After that, Lisa had to sit on the sofa till her toe healed; and it seemed that all her hard work would be undone by crisps and biscuits. Dan phoned, and though she didn't say what had happened, he could tell she was glum.

“Do what I do,” he comforted her, “eat chocolate.”

She could hear the wrappers rustling in his hotel room thousands of miles away.

“Mmmm,” she said softly, “that sounds good.”

“When I come back,” he whispered, “we'll cover each other in melted chocolate, and lick it all off.”

“Bad boy!” she giggled, and felt better. He was half way through the trip now, and the thought of what else they would do when he came back, made Lisa more determined than ever to look slim and gorgeous as she waited for him at the arrivals gate.

So first she hobbled, then she walked, then she jogged, then she ran along the seafront as winter turned into spring. It grew lighter in the evenings, and Lisa swapped the baggy tracksuit jacket for a skimpy vest top. The boys on the benches cheered now when they saw her running past; but she kept her eyes fixed on the hazy horizon, and thought of Daniel who would be home soon.

Lisa had her hair done to meet him from the airport, and smiled at herself in the salon mirror to think he might not recognise the new model. She'd bought a pair of size 12 jeans to wear. Waiting for his plane to touch down, she spotted her old pink tracksuit in the boutique window; now reduced to half-price. Even that didn't spoil her happiness.

This was the moment she'd been waiting for. Lisa positioned herself by the doors Daniel would appear through, ready to feel his strong arms around her slender middle. People were coming past her; bored businessmen and frazzled families, but she only had eyes for one arrival.

When the stream of travellers started to thin, Lisa was worried. He would have let her know if he'd missed the plane, wouldn't he? A roly-poly American couple struggled through the double doors, and then wham! Dan almost knocked her off her feet with a giant hug.

“Darling!” she gasped. “You've grown!”

She stretched to get her arms all the way round him.

“Too many donuts,” he said, between the sweetest kisses ever. “But I’ve never seen you look more beautiful, Lisa. Now how about taking me home.”

First thing tomorrow, they would see about a tracksuit for him, in blue. For tonight though, what Daniel said was true: large is lovely.

By Alison Habens

