

# The language of the fat woman

by Elana Dykewomon

She's as big as a house. She wonders if this means as "big as all outdoors." Fat as a planet. A little planet. Big as a little planet, a bright marble sparkling above amazon campers, rubbing up against the fancies of the night. An orb of delight.

No, that's not what they mean.

Maybe it's as big as a house full of secrets. Yes, that must be it, a house of closets, each closet stuffed with candy wrappers. She listens for the sound of wrappers. A wind comes through the floor boards and sets them rubbing up against each other. Are they dangerous, flammable? A house on fire. She remembers "a house on fire" means ambition. Is she big enough to catch fire, to be a torch on the edge of imagination? You can see her flame for miles, surely her shame is bright enough, anyone can make it flare, but what good is flare when they turn away?

If she's going to ignite, she wants to be a beacon.

The  
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They cannot mean beacon. They must mean bacon. Fat as a pig. She goes to the county fair. Every year there's a mama pig with her newborns, the sucklings. Men inject pigs with dangerous chemicals to force them to gain weight. Once men forced her to take dangerous chemicals to control her weight. Men mutilate pigs because they're sold by the pound for meat. Much more valuable than she is, especially now that she's "out of control." She's read about pigs. And elephants, hippos, whales. All the great big mammals. The width of nature. At the county fair, there are prizes for the biggest pig. The fat lady hides in the side show. The fat lady is a freak.

They call her "fat lady." She lies in bed imagining writing a book of conversations with circus fat women. Traveling around the country, interviewing them over tea. She'd write a poem: *tea with the fat lady*, if she weren't afraid of laughter. The other writers wouldn't respect her anymore. They might not say "freak," but they'd think it. Sideshow: not the main event, just a tangent, at best a frivolous distraction. Freak.

A freak of nature. A freak act. Lightning splits the middle of an oak, earthquake causes the highway to collapse. It seems, then, that freak means: power. The power of an unexpected event to change the course of nature. They react with nervous fear. Now they have a mathematics to explain these rifts, these breaks in the fabric of pattern. They call it the science of chaos, it's in fashion. In fashion not to be taken by surprise. Everyone wants to believe they have control, personal control over destiny.

But freak means even the new technology doesn't explain her size. What can't be controlled must be explained. If there is no hard science, then there must be psychology. Some will to perversity

that makes her grow so large. There is no formula yet for chaos of the mind. Perhaps they will find it if they dissect her, label every ounce of fatty tissue around the heart, make it correspond to some unusual curve in the brain. When they notice her, what they see is a specimen. Miss 4 by 4.

“Fatty fatty 4 by 4, can’t get in the school room door.” Does that mean she’s square? She looks in the mirror. Still taller than wide. Fat as a square house? Language puzzles her. She wants to be hip, to be cool, not square. If fat women are, by definition, square, they must have no feel for jazz, poetry or political action. No feel, no feelings, no attraction. 4 by 4, the children try to make their painful words stick. Everyone knows that schoolchildren are mean. The secret is, we don’t grow out of it.

Now 4 by 4 is a kind of truck. They call her that too, a truck, a mac truck.

But that’s power again. They can’t mean to attribute to her the power of lightning or the internal combustion engine. After all, she’s just a woman. Just a woman who looks like a truck, a freak, a pig, a beached whale, as big as a house. A house that isn’t seen. A truck that doesn’t run, a freak behind a curtain, a pig kept off behind the barn, a whale on a deserted beach. The place where women who are not women go.

She knows a lot about the places where women who are not women go. She lives among the lesbians. There is a science for this — what the outcasts do to the most obvious, the ones who call attention to their mis-fit. Among the women who are not women there are pockets of refuge. But in refuge it’s her softness, the mother goddess with a low center of gravity. She becomes the refuge she seeks, and the lesbians call her brave. She rarely goes dancing at the bar. Her fat friend said, I can’t go there, they’ll think I’m as big as a house.

She wants to be as big as a house. As big as a house with a hundred rooms. Lesbians talking, political meetings, a resource center, a library of recipes, a shelf of videos on the rhinoceros, bear, buffalo. She wants to rise out of the sea not like a goddess but like a whale, ringing the world with the slap of her great body on the wave. She wants to be a pig, if by pig she is allowed to mean: a lesbian with appetite, gentle, intelligent and clean. She’d love to be a truck, a 4 by 4, all-wheel drive, going up the side of the mountain, hauling, carrying her house on her own chassis.

A freak. She is what she is. A little freak looking to other freaks for encouragement. In secret, because she is still afraid.



\* A note on language: My friend Louise Turcotte called and said write something for the Amazones D’hier/Lesbiennes D’aujourd’hui issue on fat politics, and send it soon, because it needs to be translated. I started thinking about language and translation, and wrote this piece, which I think may be close to untranslatable. Its concern is the prison created by idioms, the ways in which language is used to define cultural norms. I am sure, however, that there are parallel idioms in every language where fat women are oppressed. (Our language must contain the daily force of our hatred for any oppressed group, the metaphors which determine social position). I have requested that the translators focus on evoking the sense of the idioms over literal translation or the preservation of the internal rhymes and puns of the English.

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