

Word Count: 923

Beyond Desire: Working It Out
by Marie Cartier

APRIL 14, 1982, Vanessa would remember that date. Why? Because that was the date, she found Jane Fonda's *Workout!* video. She was one of the very first to find *Workout!* At the drugstore, as she was checking out with cigarettes. She took it home, and tried it that afternoon.

She knew it would change her life.

Jane was *fun*. Jane was famous and here with Vanessa in the living room. And...the clothes. Vanessa had never worn clothes like this - orange leotards and pink and orange leg warmers. No one wore clothes like that before Jane. Jane changed everything for everyone, Vanessa secretly thought.

Because she didn't talk about Jane. Jane was her secret.

She certainly didn't talk about *Workout!* with Tim, her husband. She didn't talk about *anything* that mattered with him. And that was easy—because he never asked.

“Is the coffee ready?”

And she would pour his coffee and he would drink it, staring at the paper. And he would leave. “See you at dinner.”

His kiss was quick, on the cheek, with his eyes focused on the car.

She watched him leave, and then...she did *Workout!* She started to talk to Jane. And then she wanted to keep talking, so she'd repeat the video.

“Oh, Jane, come on!” she’d yell good naturedly as the kicks went higher. Then, “Jane, what do I do? What do I do?” she’d hear herself say, but Jane didn’t answer.

Vanessa knew Jane was famous, she was on the screen, she wasn’t in her living room—but then, Jane *was* in her living room. Same routine, same leg warmers, same music... so Vanessa kept asking the same question, “What do I do?”

And Jane would say *Workout!* And Vanessa did.

Then...she joined a gym. Why? Because Jane was on a talk show. She heard Jane talk about her daughter—also named Vanessa! It was a sign she should take even more advice from Jane. In the show Jane talked about her how women doing *Workout!* could do it with others—at the gym and meet other women doing *Workout!* Vanessa went --the gym had child care! She thought the other women would talk about Jane, about the clothes, but... they often also talked about their husbands. And Jane stopped talking.

But she did *meet* those other women, and felt—*something*. She took classes and became a *Workout!* instructor. And she still didn’t talk to anyone about Tim...she wore leotards that covered ...and didn’t shower at the gym...and didn’t talk about the late nights holding the video alone in the kitchen...waiting for morning. Waiting for --something.

And when morning came...she talked to Jane. *Workout!* And she did start to talk to Jane... about Tim. She told Jane about the wedding dress day.

She went shopping with her best friend, for a wedding dress. Tim came to find them, red faced and pointing, “How could you buy a wedding dress without me?”

Vanessa stood on the street, in front of the brownstone her best friend lived in, holding the powder pink and champagne bag with all its promise zipped up inside. She said, “But the groom doesn’t see the dress before the wedding, right?”

He took the dress from her and slung it over his arm, “Wrong. I pick out the dress.”

He walked towards his car, opening the back door and throwing the cloud of white dress now spilling from the open zipper into the back seat. He turned and yelled, “Let’s go.”

Her friend said, “You can stay here.”

Vanessa had looked between her friend and Tim’s car, with the dress in the back seat. The promise of the dress, alone without her. She moved towards the dress, and her friend stayed on the sidewalk watching the car pull away.

Tim said, “I don’t like her.”

Her best friend was the maid of honor at the wedding, and she cried coming down the aisle. Her friend’s mother leaned out and said in a stage whisper, “No one cries until the end of the wedding.” But Vanessa had felt like crying, too. For one thing, she hated her dress.

That was five years ago. Vanessa had gained weight, Tim said. And that was why everything had gone wrong. That was why, in the night, Tim said he had to teach her a lesson. That was why...Tim would....

After those nights, she did *Workout!* with Jane. Sometimes many times. She worked out...and worked out.

She needed to lose twenty-five pounds. And then—maybe thirty. And then...she was losing pounds in her orange and purple leg warmers, in her sky blue and green leg warmers, in her hot pink leotards... they stretched over her body and she watched the scale creep lower.

And then...just when she weighed less than one hundred pounds, she broke all her fingers leaning back for the first move on *Workout!*, a move she had done over and over. At the hospital they said she had...an eating disorder. Which was impossible Vanessa thought because...she never ate.

When Tim came to the hospital, he whispered to her, “What the hell are you doing? Why are you so fucking thin?”

And nothing had changed. Even though she lost weight.

And so...she got a divorce.

She didn't blame Jane.

But she did leave *Workout!* in the storage unit she had for the first six months after the divorce. She left it on top of a pile of striped leg warmers and pink and purple leotards-- a small altar to her past self.

But she didn't blame Jane. No, she knew she couldn't blame Jane.

Because in the end, even she had to admit, everything *had* changed.

She started talking, got some friends, met someone else.

She became -happy.

Because her life, surprising even her, had *worked out*.