

# CAN THIS BE LOVE?

## DISASTROUS DANCING

### Can a person do the two-step all alone?

Ten seconds into the first record at my fifth-grade dance, I realized that all those people searching the wilderness for Bigfoot were way off base: He was right there in the gymnasium of Eli Whitney Grammar School, about to break one, if not several, of my toes. At that moment, I rejected my until-then uncontested belief that dancing is inherently romantic. Time has not proved me wrong. Today, a lot of couples I know are dancing in the dark in more ways than one.

My friend Janice reports that getting her husband to dance takes roughly the same amount of patience as getting a chicken to dance. Whenever they go anyplace where music is being played, Janice has to use persistent pestering before he reluctantly agrees to, as he puts it, cart her around the room. Once among the other dancing couples, he moves as stiffly as if he didn't have knees. "Loosen up," Janice hisses in his ear, "they're not playing 'Pomp and Circumstance.'" The trouble is, she says, that he has the idea that real men don't dance, except in a boxing ring. This is a notion of which she cannot seem to disabuse him, even when she reminds him of Dennis Quaid and Patrick Swayze, who, although they may be dancing fools, are certainly no cupcakes.

Men aren't the only ones who have to be hauled out onto the dance floor like so many sacks of unbleached flour. My friend Annie would as soon wear cement shoes as dancing slippers, probably because she's felt like an unutterable clod ever since that day in June 1972, when she tripped over a microphone cord on her way to get her junior high school diploma and went sprawling across the stage in front of seven hundred vastly amused fourteen-year-olds. Her husband finds all this difficult to understand. "What are you so embarrassed about," he asks in exasperation as she hangs back from the dance floor as if it were an icy lake. "It's the fox-trot, not the 'Dance of the Seven Veils.'"

Sometimes, even though both partners like to dance, they like to dance differently or to different kinds of music. Marcia, for instance, likes to hop around to frenetic disco sounds, while Stan prefers moving at a leisurely pace to more sedate strains. He won't get up on the dance floor with Marcia because, he says, he feels like a jerk standing there while she dances around him like a witch doctor performing an exorcism. "If you're dancing," he says, "you should look different from if you're having a convulsion." Marcia retaliates by waiting for the

strains of a slow dance tune and then commenting that they are playing Stan's favorite dance—the minuet.

Nancy and Les are the perfect dancing partners, except when they dance with each other. "I can follow anybody except Les," says Nancy, a fact that Les suggests is less a matter of physical dexterity than principle. "She worries that following me on the dance floor will set a dangerous precedent in our relationship," he contends. He also thinks it's fishy that she can't follow him at a dance, while she can follow him around a party like gum on his shoes.

If you and your partner are having similar problems, there's no reason to give up hope. Many couples do manage to work out their dancing difficulties. There was a time when Sue's husband hardly ever asked her to dance. "Gil looked upon dancing as an unwelcome civic responsibility," says Sue, "like cleaning up after your dog." Finally, at a wedding they attended one evening, she pointed out that dancing would be good exercise for someone who'd just tucked away nearly three dozen shrimp puffs. She also told him that she'd just read about a study that said seven out of ten couples who dance together have sex the same

night. Now they dance all the time, with Gil sporting an expression that can best be described as hopeful.

My friend Sarah used to complain that her husband seemed to think dancing required the same aggression as one of the more ferocious martial arts. "He didn't so much lead me," she recalls, "as *push* me around, until I began to understand what it must feel like to be strong-armed by hoodlums." So Sarah started alternately renting Fred Astaire and Chuck Norris movies, and pointing out to Charles how little cheek-to-cheek dancing resembles hand-to-hand combat. "Eventually," she says, "he got the idea, and I was able to throw away all of my protective clothing."

Even Annie's husband finally stumbled upon the fact that if he keeps filling her wine glass long enough, she'll go out on a ballroom floor and dance like Pavlova. And while the only things I ever stumbled over were my partner's feet, time and perseverance finally brought us into sync with one another. In fact, I can honestly say that today we exhibit more harmony on the dance floor than on any other hard-level surface. And I've discovered two things: that (1) dancing together really *is* romantic, and (2) it's nice to hear them strike up the band without feeling the urge to strike down your partner.

by Bette-Jane Raphael

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