

## **Forever Faith Book Excerpt**

Faith Oliver rolled over and opened sleepy eyes to the light filtering through her floral bedroom draperies. She caressed areas of her throat where the sensation of warm kisses still lingered, watching dust motes dance in the sunbeams. As her sleepy haze cleared, she chided herself for believing anyone would kiss her neck.

"Get real, Faith. It was only a dream."

Mornings were a severe disappointment.

Tossing aside the sunflower comforter, she struggled to lift her corpulent self to the edge of the bed; her breathing grew rapid from the mere exertion. People kindly referred to women of her size as "full-figured", but she preferred to see herself as a thin, sexy vixen trapped in layers of fat-unfair, ugly fat that she didn't deserve. Someday she'd find a way to lose weight, and be the person she'd always dreamed of.

Faith, nee Faith Marie Oliver, had been heavy for as long as she could remember. She still bemoaned the fact that she'd always been the last picked for teams in grammar school, felt out of place in junior high, and absolutely hated high school because she didn't get invited to dances or school functions.

She stared down at the chubby feet and ankles protruding from the hem of her nightgown. Boys hadn't wanted anything to do with a fat girl, and even the other girls had shied away from her. Now, twenty-eight and a working woman with lots of female friends, she'd still never been on a real date. It wasn't just high school boys who didn't find overweight women desirable; it was men in general.

Her idea to surround herself with other heavyweights in an effort to make herself feel better had failed. She'd outgrown all of them except Nila, her best bud who lived down the hall. They were neck and neck in the weight department--teetering around the two hundred-fifty pound mark.

As an only child, Faith never knew her father. He died when she was an infant. She wondered about him often. Would he have accepted and loved her despite her weight? She'd had a great relationship with her mother, even though they'd struggled to get by on what little money Faith's father had left behind. The two had shared some wonderful times; among them far too many rich, fattening meals.

Just thoughts of food stirred her hunger and gave her an idea. Nila's probably awake, getting ready for work. I'll call her.

Faith dialed her number. "Hullo," a groggy voice answered.

"Nil, it's me. What are you doing tonight?"

"God, how do I know? That's hours away and I'm just barely awake. Why?"

"I just thought you and I might grab a bite after work. I get so tired of eating alone. Besides, it's been a long time since we've done anything fun."

"I might be persuaded. What's on the menu?" Nila's voice piqued with interest.

Faith's mind flashed to the dinner her mom had always prepared when Faith did something to warrant a reward. "I'd love chicken fried steak with mashed potatoes and gravy, but I'll settle for a salad."

The imaginary aroma of her favorite meal hung heavy in the air, sending loving memories washing over her. She longed to recapture those moments shared with her mother, but a brain aneurysm had cruelly taken Faith's only remaining parent two years ago. Except for distant cousins, she was alone.

When Nila agreed to dinner, Faith wished her a good day and hung up the phone.

With difficulty, she spread up her bed, wondering why food was her comfort. Eating eased her grief. Any trauma sent her into a feeding frenzy, and she didn't understand why. Her only other coping tool was laughter. Mostly phony, of course. She tended to hide behind humor to mask her pain. She'd always felt that if she was the first to make fun of her weight, then there was no need for anyone else to mention it. Her sense of humor was a front for depression. Lately, she'd found it hard to find laughter enough to stifle the pain of having no special man in her life ... except when she slept and he came to her.

She perched on the edge of the bed, catching her breath. For the past two weeks, her dreams had been disturbingly realistic. Each day she had awakened to feel her nameless lover's hands still roaming her body, his lips paying homage to her most feminine parts.

She forced a half-hearted chuckle to hide her disappointment and, with the aid of the nightstand, pulled herself to her feet.

"For heaven's sakes, Faith, be real," she mumbled as she lumbered toward the bathroom. Her brow furrowed in thought as a name passed through her mind. Joshua. How strange. She didn't know anyone by that name.

She shook her head. "And probably never will."