

## **1002 Nights**

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1002 Nights was first performed at the Cameron House November 2014

Stella performed by Tara Rosling

Directed by Tanja Jacobs

Choreography by Claudia Moore

Set and Lighting by Andy Moro

Stage Manager Tanya Greve

Produced by The Shed Company

## **1002 Nights**

Stella:

*She does a loud, grinding dance*

Hi. My name's Stella. Go ahead, laugh, I don't care, I heard it all before. I'm a stripper. That's my normal routine. Six shows nightly. Hey, put me through college. But I'm not doing my usual routine tonight. Peelers aren't usually the best 'conversationalists, but as long as they got their ass in your face, what do you care, right?

*She walks to one of the wings and grabs a bucket.*

See this? Worst thing that ever happened to the exotic dancing industry.

*She dumps the contents of the bucket, loonies, toonies, quarters, nickels, dimes, some pennies, onto the stage.*

Coins instead of bills.

Maybe you know this, what they do in clubs now. At the end of her the routine, the dancer sits on-stage, spreads her legs and men throw loonies and toonies at her. Or nickels or dimes or quarters. Whatever. The worst part? The dancer then has to pick it all up.

*She does a bimbo routine, bending over at the waist, picking up the change, Excuse me! Hey, quit looking! Tee hee!, etc.*

Fuck. They could at least get a guy to come sweep up the money between shows. Like a zamboni or something. Anyway, last night I refused to pick it up. Told the manager, "Fuck it. I'm not picking it up." He can kiss my pert little ass, his words not mine, if he thinks I'm gonna pick it up. What am I telling you this for? It's not your fault. You're not throwing money at me. I mean, don't let me stop you. It's just that I prefer bills. Bills in the g-string's less demeaning than throwing loonies at my...

So tonight I'm not doing my usual routine. Tonight I'm doing something else.

*She does a belly dance.*

I learned that at a community centre. Every Monday night there's a gymnasium down at the community centre filled with housewives, corporate executives, whatever, all shaking their bellies. All trying to dance the shame out of their bellies. I read that somewhere. You won't dance the shame out of your belly. Like that's where it lives. Try a little lower, honey!

You know, belly dancing's got a long and beautiful history. It's so sexy and old and exotic. And there's a total art to it. Like how you move your hip here or how your hands move over here, so that the audience follows every movement. Like you're telling a story with your body. And at the end, you always leave'em wanting more. You showed them just enough so that they wanna know what's next. That's the art, right there. Leave'em wanting more. See, I learned that from Sheherezade. You ever heard of her? The story teller in 1001 Arabian Nights. Do you know that story? Sheherezade's the

one who made up Aladdin and Ali Baba and all the rest. The behind the scenes story of a thousand and one nights. I read the whole thing. Makes War and Peace look like Curious George.

*Does a belly dance.*

So. 1001 Arabian Nights. The behind the scenes story.

There's these two brothers who are kings and basically, they catch their wives screwing the black slaves, which is every white man's worst fear, right? So, these two fuckin' geniuses figure out that all women are whores, basically, so Einstein figures he's gonna marry a woman every night, fuck her, then kill her in the morning, so she doesn't have time to screw around on him. Brilliant. His brother, too. So after three years of this, there aren't any women left, basically, except Sheherezade and her sister, who are the daughters of the king's personal servant, which is how they've dodged the bullet for so long. But then she volunteers to marry the king. Instead of her sister. Instead of anyone else. She volunteers. And she tells her dad that she's going to save all of the future daughters, or that she's going to die trying. So, that first night, after the king has had his way with her, Sheherezade starts storytime. And by morning the story's not finished, so meathead decides to wait another night before killing her. Next night, same thing. And the next night. And the next. This goes on for a thousand and one nights. And he's still having his way with her, 'cause she has three kids by the end, right, so she's not even getting out of that, but at least she's still alive. No one's dying for the time being. Always leave'em wanting more, right? It's as old as time that one.

*Does a little belly dance.*

So, I'm thinking this woman's a fuckin' hero, right, but no, they never talk about her. They never talk about the woman who saves an entire nation from these two psychobrothers. Right? Like, an entire generation, 'cause at the least, someone's gotta be having the babies, right? But no, it's all Ali Baba and Aladdin flyin' around on carpets and genies poppin' outta bottles, but they don't say shit about Sheherezade. I guess it's no big deal, I mean I guess it's all fiction, but talk about not getting your due. I mean, shit. You wonder if she ever got a night off to recoup, you know? Cause that's like 3 years of telling a story every single night. Disney comes out with this cute animated movie about Aladdin, but they don't talk about the storyteller who's trying to avoid being raped and murdered. Not suitable for family viewing. But then what is?

First time I heard that story, it was like I could feel the desert air. Like I could actually hear the silk tents flapping in the wind and see the silhouette of Sheherezade in the lamplight. She must have used every wile she had. Making those stories take shape in the air. I'll even tap-dance for you, she musta been thinking. Spinning stories like gold. Like Rapunzel. Like all those chicks in fairy tales who get fucked over by some twisted goon fuckhead. Just to keep goon-boy happy, right? Keep that violence under the surface. Just to stay alive. They get the violence, we get the shame. We get to feel dirty, we get to pick up the change they throw at our ...

Fuckin' Disney.

*She picks up a coin. Flips it a few times. She flips the coin in the air, puts it in her wrist and shows the audience - it's gone.*

Once upon a time there was a beautiful Fairy Prince. And every Monday night he would go to the strip club with his courtiers. He's beautiful and he's shy and he's gay, only he doesn't know that yet. His friends that go to the club with him kind of know. They don't know that they know, but they know. They egg him on, punching him in the shoulder, buy him lapdances. And he always blushes, which is totally adorable. And at the club there's this dancer who's not like any of the other dancers. She's not more beautiful or smarter than any of the other dancers. She doesn't have fancier costumes. But she does have a secret. . Sometimes when she dances, when she closes her eyes, she can fly. She can actually look down on her body from above and watch herself dancing for the audience. As if she had split into two separate people. The girl dancing and the girl flying up above. And when that happens, it's like everything in the world that weighs her down is no heavier than a single atom. But nobody knows about the girl that can fly. Nobody can see her. Except the Fairy Prince. And the Lounge Dancer knows that every Monday night, the beautiful fairy Prince is coming just to see her. He is so quiet, with all the noise all around, and he just watches her with a little half-smile on his face. Like one half of his face is smiling, but the other half doesn't know it. And the dancer looks into his eyes and I'm telling you, he's got the most beautiful brown eyes. These eyes are rich and warm, like teak. No. Fuck. What's that fuckin' wood called? Mahogany. Mahogany eyes. So something happens to the dancer. When she sees him watching her with those eyes, she wants to walk over and put her head right in his lap. Not like, I mean with her head sideways. Like, fuck. I can say exotic dancer all I like and you still think stripper, right? Peeler. Crack whore. Yeah, well, some of my best friends are crack whores. *[laughs]* No really. *[laughs some more]* Sorry.

Did I just totally ruin the mood of the story? I dance for money. That's it. I know it may look like I'm spitting distance from giving handjobs for crack but there's a difference okay? You ever wonder why whore and fag are two of the worst names you can call someone?

You know what? I'm not a whiner. I hate whiners. Especially whiners who make lots of money, and I do alright. Like buddy who comes into the club and wants sympathy 'cause his marriage is on the rocks and you're looking at him like, maybe if you weren't in a strip club there wouldn't be such a problem, right? Fuckin' moron. *(looks at change)* But wanting something better doesn't make you a whiner. Like Sheherezade. She wasn't all like, "Oh, you're so bad!" to the king. She made him want something better. Just by telling stories. She saved herself by telling stories, like the stories were her life raft and the 1001 nights were like the ocean stretching out in all directions. And she got through by telling one story at a time. · One story at a time.

So one night, the fairy prince comes in all by himself. And the dancer can tell that there's something different about the prince. Something about the way he's moving. Like he'd finally settled into his own body. And then she knew.

The fairy prince had come out. Out of the closet. Out of his shell. Out of the frying pan into the fire. She couldn't keep her eyes off him. He's sitting at a table right at the back of the club. And she's watching him sit at his table in a bubble of silence. And for some reason, she thought to herself, "Maybe he can fly, too." Something inside her clicked and she thought to herself, "Fuck it. I have to know."

So she put on one of her favorite songs, the one she always played when she wanted to fly, she walked on stage, smiled at the prince, closed her eyes and started to dance. And as soon as she closed them, he was there, right there in front of her. She put out her hand, like this, and he took it, and then they started to fly. And the more they danced, the higher they went. Pretty soon they were swooping about and playing in the air like butterflies. They were flying.

Together. When the song finished, she opened her eyes and he was looking right into them with those mahogany eyes. And he smiled. He knew. He had flown with her. They had left the ground together so that everything else just dropped away like dust. And that was the night the Dancer and the Prince fell in love.

*She stops.*

I was in love once. I know what that's like. When you feel like no one else in the world could possibly know what you're feeling. 'Cause it's so huge and unique, it's like, there's no way anyone else could've felt this way.

I met him in a bar. The Guy. Should've been my first clue, really. I'm all hammered at this bar and I ask him if he wants to go "for a walk". You ever use that one? Let's go for a walk. I need some fresh air. Hauling on a smoke. It's just that Let's go for a walk sounds better than Let's hop a cab back to my place. Actually, it's the walking part I like best, I think. No, really. I guess I prefer the before to the after. Which was what was different about this guy, right. In the morning it was still there. That feeling. I actually preferred the after. I woke up, rolled over and was glad he was still there. No coyote arm, no stick your underwear in your bag on the way out even though it's your apartment, you know what I'm sayin'? .

I've still got photographs of us where we look like little kids. Big goofy innocent little kids. You look at me and innocent probably isn't the first word that springs to mind. Maybe it's the g-string. What? Like some of you ladies aren't wearing g-strings tonight. I know, it's so there's no panty line, which is fuckin' stupid, cause there is a g-string line, but it goes up the crack of your ass instead of across your cheeks. You know what? You probably don't want to hear about my butt-floss theory.

On our one year anniversary he gave me a ring. No diamond, it wasn't an engagement ring or anything. But still, it was nice. Gold. We had this thing, where he'd say, "I love you", and I'd say, "I love you infinity", and he'd say, "I love you infinity plus one", and I'd always say, "There's no such thing as that." And so on the inside he'd had 'Infinity plus one' inscribed. So, anyway, one day I'm in bed having a nap. He comes home with a buddy, drinking beers, and his buddy starts asking questions about me. "What's it like dating

a stripper? Doesn't it bother you? I dunno, if it was me I couldn't stand my girlfriend out there showing off her tits for all those guys." That's what he says, "showing off". And my boyfriend says, "Yeah, but she can't do anything else, she isn't educated." Okay. Not "doesn't have an education". Isn't educated. How do you answer that? You don't. That's like a racial slur, or I dunno. It's like educationism instead of racism. Isn't educated.

So, okay, I'm going ballistic in the other room, right, but I manage to keep it calm. Save it. So you know what I did? Later that night he and his buddy end up at the club and I walk over to my boyfriend. I sit down and we're talking and his buddy's staring right here, it's like I don't have a face, right? And the subject of arm-wrestling comes up. And I'm thinking, I know my boyfriend, and he's pretty -hammered, and I'm pretty strong. I think I can take him. So we talk some more and I challenge him to an arm wrestle, which I win. So I look him right in the eyes and say, "Pussy" and give him his ring back. Last time I ever seen him. Fuck him anyway.

See, the Fairy Prince had been born that way. There was nothing he could do about it. Even as a baby, his parents would watch him as he slept and they could see that he went somewhere else. When he slept, he would smile with half his face and roll his head from side to side and stretch his arms like they were wings. They knew that in his dreams he was flying. That every night he would left them so that he could soar through his own world. And the parents grew to be very jealous of their baby boy's journeys. They couldn't believe he would leave them like that. And so they did everything they could to keep him with them. They would wake him in his sleep when he got that look on his face. They would keep him from his friends. They tried to teach him to be just like them. They taught him to play hockey and to joke and run like the other boys. They taught him to laugh at girls and other dumb things. And for many years it worked. The boy believed he was like all the other boys, just smaller and maybe a bit softer. He believed it, that is, until he met the Lounge Dancer. When he saw her it was like he'd been split in half, and when he saw her, he felt like he became whole again. And when he looked in her eyes, he discovered something that he had always known. That he could fly. And that was the best moment of his life.

Here. Tell me if you ever do this.

*She does the goofy dance we do when we're by ourselves.*

Not great for tips, but it's a lot of fun.

You ever think of dancing as freedom? You know, just unleashing everything. I go to clubs sometimes, and I watch these girls dancing, probably call centre managers or something, and they're doing stuff I don't even do. For free. You know (*does an imitation of sexual, grinding club dancing*). Because it makes them feel good. Sometimes dancing makes me feel good. But it's never for free.

What do I get? Some guy who looves my tits.

Maybe that's all the chicks in the clubs get back, too.

I do have nice tits. Breasts, right? But let's be honest. I mean, I've seen a lot of tits in my time, and these are way up there. 100% natural, free range breasts. Real's back in. Which is funny, 'cause now there's all these girls with giant silicone boobs and nobody fuckin' wants'em 'cept maybe for flotation devices. Me? I knew it was a fad. See, guys want to think they're getting the real thing. But all the girls are like, "I make three times what I used to make a week", and I'm like, "Yeah, well I got my own tits."

That may not seem like a big deal to you, but we all got our line in the sand, you know what I mean? If some guy's gonna fall in love with me, he's gotta fall for the real me.

That story about the ring, about calling him a pussy, that's not true. They did come in that night. Him and his buddy. They sat at the table and watched me dance. And at the end of the dance, I spread my legs and all the men threw change at my pussy. And they just watched. I just moved out when he wasn't home one day. I left the ring on the coffee table. I changed clubs. He never came looking for me.

I started taking some college courses after that. English Lit. That's where I met Sheherezade and her 1001 Nights of hell. All those stories. I'd come home from the club at four in the morning, spark a phatty and read until the sun came up. Made me feel less lonely.

That was the first time I ever actually read Streetcar Named Desire. Mr. Tennessee Williams. Only someone named Tennessee would write a play like that. Can you imagine someone here doing that? I'm gonna name my kid Saskatchewan. And he's gonna write plays. I hated that movie growing up. Hated it. Like fuckin' loathed it. Like ... you don't understand how horrible it is to grow up with Stella for a name. "Stellllaaaah". My mom loved that movie. "It's so romantic." We used to have to watch it every Christmas holidays. She loved that part where Stanley howls her name to the moon. Guess that's why she left my dad. Wanted to hear him howl.

Stellllaaaaahhhhh !

The other thing my mother gave me, besides a stupid name, was tap dancing lessons.

*Does a little tap dance.*

My first dance lessons. Who knew? Like Dad said, "Best to have something to fall back on." Trouble is once you start falling, gravity kinda takes over, you know? Soon's you know it you got some pasties and a g-string. It's a slippery, jello-covered slope. Every Christmas when the family'd be in town, they'd get me to dance for them. My uncle'd always do this one on me (*she pulls a quarter out from behind her ear*), after I'd danced. And I always fell for it. I loved that. He'd say in this Southern accent, "Stella you're just as pretty as a flower." And then I got to keep the quarter.

Last time I saw him was at Christmas. I'm fourteen. All the relatives are over at Christmas and Dad says, "Stella, show'em what you got." (*Does a little tap dance*) And they all applaud for me. I'm feelin' pretty shit-hot 'cause I never

had this big an audience before, and then Dad looks at me real close and says, "When'dyou start growin' tits?"

*She dances a madcap tap dance.*

So, hey, can I buy anyone a soda pop? Anyone need change for parking? How about a game of quarters? Laundry? Maybe we could make a modern art mural out of money. Make it in the shape of a clock and call it Time is Money. Nono. Time for Change. Time for a change, that's a laugh. Change of life, maybe. Run away. Go into the Stripper Protection Program. Change my name. My name. Stella. Fuck. Stellaaaaaah!

Let's talk about you. Actually, this is nice. I don't get to talk to women very often. Except the other dancers. There are some women that come to the club. But they're all women's studies students, dykes or actresses. Usually women get totally uptight around me. They hear stripper and it's like kangangangang, rigid, like every last unshaven hair on her body is standing upright, ready to protect her man. It's okay, relax. Two things you should know. One: and I think I can speak for most of us in the exotic dancing industry, we don't want your men. Two, they all come to the stripclub. Even the sensitive ones. In fact, they're the worst, because they want to treat you respectfully, so they don't have to feel bad about themselves. So they want to talk, get to know you. Which takes time. Time spent not making money. And the married guys, they come too. They tip the best, cause they got the most guilt. You can tell too, cause they always take off their rings and you can see this big white ring of fleshy skin that's been hidden from the light. It's like when you pick up a board and there's all those white things growing underneath it.

Who here has a job? Pretty much everyone does something you could call work. So. That's something we have in common. We're all kinda like organ grinder monkeys tap-dancing away, right? Working for the Man. Some of us more than others. I know, bills gotta be paid, you make compromises, but come on. Which one of you can say you aren't stuffing down some part of yourself in order to be able to do your job. Right? We stuff down who we are, what we care about, so we can make room for how much we want to be a team-player, and how much we care about I don't fuckin' know and yadda yadda yadda, all day long. Varying degrees of bullshit. And in a way I'd rather be paid for my body, 'cause you can't have my mind, it's not for sale. You ever notice there's no amateur night's at strip clubs? No open mike nights? But who here hasn't wondered what it would be like to be me? But haven't you girls ever wondered what it would be like? To be me? You boys aren't so dumb. You keep the good girls and the bad girls apart, cause you don't want the bad girls going good, and you sure as hell don't want the good girls going bad. Don't get me wrong, that's fine by me, I make a living off it. You know, that's it. I was born looking like this. So if people want to pay me for looking the way I do, fine, whatever. But don't treat me like a child. That's the thing. Like not being allowed to leave the table until I eat my brussel sprouts. I'm not a fucking child. I pay my bills, I pay my taxes, some of them, and that makes me a fully functioning member of society.

What would you do if you didn't have to earn money? Who would you be? I'd tell stories. A professional storyteller. To anyone who cared to listen. Kids

maybe. Little girls. They'd crowd around with their big eyes and they'd sit on pillows, and I would tell them stories that would teach them that there's no such thing as normal. That all kids have weird families. All day, I'd tell them stories like the one I've been telling you. The Dancer hadn't always been able to fly. It happened one day, when the dancer was, well when she was a girl. Not a little girl, but certainly not yet a woman. One day she came home from school and she found herself totally alone. She said goodbye to her mother in the morning, like every day, tiptoed past her father's bedroom, like every day and then she went to school. And when she came home the house was empty from top to bottom and from bottom to top. She ran through the rooms, calling out for her mother, who was only a trail of cheap perfume and gin by then. The house was filled with echoes and not a thing more. Except in the basement. In the basement was her father, who was sitting in a chair. And when she came down the stairs, he looked at The Dancer, who wasn't even a dancer yet, and said, "The Bitch left."

So you know what she did? She packed her bag and put on her shoes and she started to walk. She walked past miles of houses with lights behind the curtains and smoke coming from the chimneys. She walked through neighbourhoods with houses like castles. And she walked past people living in cardboard shacks. She walked until she was so tired, she couldn't walk anymore. And so she started to run. She ran so fast, she didn't even look at the trees whizzing past her or the dogs barking at her feet. She ran so hard, all she could feel was the air pumping through her body and her feet driving into the ground. She ran until her muscles screamed and her breath was sharp and ragged like knives in her lungs. She ran until she was too tired to run anymore. And that's when she stopped running and she started to dance. She danced like a whisper at first, her breath still heaving from exhaustion. And the dance spread like a warm cup of chocolate through her aching muscles until her whole body was spinning and catapulting about. She danced so hard and so fast that her spirit left the ground and she soared way above her tired body and her tired feet. And that day, she discovered that she could always dance, no matter what. No matter how tired, how lost or how lonely, she could always dance. And as long as she could dance, she didn't have to walk and she didn't have to run, she could fly. That's how the girl became The Dancer.

See that's the thing. That's where I get Blanche. Not Stella. Blanche is on the run. From the past, from everything tying her down. She's a dame on the lam. At one point she tells the story of finding her husband with an older man. And one night, soon after, they're dancing the Varsouviana at the Moon Lake Casino, and in the middle, he breaks away and shoots himself. He couldn't bear the truth, the double life. She always describes him as a boy, as if there was a softness about him that hadn't hardened yet. There's a line where Blanche is describing the man she married. Her husband who killed himself because She says, "We loved unendurably." God I love that! Like the world couldn't support that kind of love. It was too much, too pure, too painful. I get that, loving something you can't have. Loving the dream more than the reality.

So she ran. She runs to her sister Stella, because there, she thinks she'll be safe. And she lies about her husband and she lies about her past. She tries

to build a present. She tries to make her dream real, but she hadn't counted on Stanley. Goonboy. Who's just waiting for his moment. People are the same wherever you go. I've worked in 5 countries and 19 cities. And no matter where you go, there's always some man willing to give you a quarter and tell you "Yer just as pretty as a flower." Anywhere in the world. But you get addicted to moving, right? Always something new, every morning you're somewhere else. It reminds you you're alive, like breathing. Like holding a mirror up to your mouth. Just to make sure you didn't die while you weren't paying attention or something. Right? Because the stupid thing is that when you stop moving you start to feel like a shitty person, and I don't get that. I'm not a shitty person. I'm really not. Just the other week one of the other dancers said to me, "Stella, you are the nicest person I ever met." Right out of the blue. Sure, she was on crack at the time. Hah!

Yesterday, I'm reading the paper and there's this story about junkie mothers. Junkie mothers who mistreat their kids. And I'm sitting there and I can imagine them wanting to be good so badly, really, genuinely wanting to be good. Like I can picture them getting up in the morning and seeing their kid and thinking, "It's sunny and today we're gonna go to the park and I'll drop it for today, and we'll have a good meal and we'll just act like a family for once." Or something like that. But it's hard to be the person you dream of being. What's that saying, "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak"? That's what drives me crazy. How can I want to do something and not be able to do it? It's like, if you went to move your hand, and you couldn't, you'd think something was pretty wrong. You'd be at the doctor's in about 2.5 seconds, right? But try to quit smoking. Okay, even that's an addiction, but, like okay, eating meat. I'm now a full-fledged vegetarian, but I was a non-practicing vegetarian for a long time. I was ethically opposed to eating meat, like I thought it was gross fuckin' barbaric thing to do, right, but I did it anyway. By the time I got to my break I couldn't be bothered and I'd eat this whole plate of chicken wings or something. And I'd hate myself the whole time I was eating it. Like wanting to puke, that bad, but stuffing it down anyway. I don't get that.

Like me and men. I'll be like, don't have another drink, don't have another drink, "Sure I'll have another." And then Don't tell him your name, whatever you do don't tell him your name, "Stella what's yours." Go home now, "Wanta go for a walk?"

*She picks up a loonie. Flips it for heads or tails a few times.*

Do you ever dream you can fly? Some people do, some don't, maybe it's like being able to roll your tongue. I sometimes dream I'm like a loon trying to take off. Have you ever seen a loon trying to take off? It's pretty funny. It's like they're running across the surface of the water, beating their wings for all they're worth, just trying to get enough speed together before they run out of lake and go smacking into a pine tree or something. And you're thinking, "How did you survive evolution? You need a country this big to have a bird like that." But, that's what it's like in my dream. It's like slow motion, where I'm flapping my arms like crazy, just trying to get off the ground, trying to beat gravity. Funny, eh? You'd think you'd either be able fly in a dream or not be able to fly in a dream. But you don't expect to have to work at it. You don't

expect to have to work in a dream. That doesn't seem fair.

You ever hear a loon? Most beautiful sound in the world. I've always wished I could make that sound. This one, absolutely pure totally fucking clear sound that says, "Here I am".

*She closes her eyes and listens.*

One day the dancer tried to seduce the Prince. He was at the club, sitting at the back in his bubble of silence. And it was one of those days where the dancer just wanted to bust out of her skin. The Dancer was lonely.

So she put on her favorite song because she didn't know what else to do.

And the Prince smiled his half-smile, because he always smiled that way when she played that song. And the Dancer began to dance, all slow like Marilyn Monroe or Greta Garbo or someone. And right in the middle of the song, the Dancer stepped right down off the stage and walked over to him with her cigarette holder and held it out for a light. Their eyes held each other for a moment, and then she started to dance just for the Prince. She drew her mink stole across the tender skin at the back of his neck. She brushed her hair past his delicate earlobe. She circled the chair, she arched her head back so he could see the curve of her neck. She pulled out all the stops. And all the while, she's watching the centre of his pants. She's looking for a whisper, a stirring, some kind of movement. "Come on, you're still a guy." Nothing.

You ever really look at a soap bubble? It's all this illusion, how the light hits the soap. But if you are gentle enough you can actually touch that bubble. Like your skin is occupying the space right next to the bubble, like the next atom over. But you have to be so careful.

When the song ended the Prince stood up, put all his change on the table and left without saying a word. And the Dancer didn't see him the next Monday night. Or the next. Or the next. He was gone. Pop! And what was worst of all, the Dancer discovered that she could no longer fly. Without the Prince, it was like there was a chain attached to her ankle. And no matter how hard she would dance she could never leave the ground. *Music stops abruptly*

You ever feel like that? Like everything's going just fine until you open your big mouth and ruin it all? So how do you think the story's going to end? Think she'll get him to go to bat for the other team? Switch hit? I bet you he goes straight, she quits dancing and they live happily ever after. Cause they couldn't possibly be happy the way they are. Then there'd be no story. Happy people make bad stories. It's not Ali Baba and the forty helpful community-minded citizens, is it?

You know, at a certain point, Sheherezade must have started to freak. I mean she must have thought she was eventually gonna run out of stories. She didn't know that all of a sudden the king was gonna change his tune. That after a thousand and one nights he was gonna be like, "Okay, thanks, sorry about the killing people thing." She might have had to keep talking forever. Because she couldn't win. If she stops, she and her sister die. She just had to keep going. She didn't know she would win in the end. Not everyone does, you know. Win in the end. Some people lose. That's why I love Blanche. Everyone sees through her. You know she's lying, but she's trying. She's trying to imagine something better. Blanche wasn't crazy. That's

the thing. She was romantic. She went to the nuthouse because she was romantic! Because she invented stories that were better than sweaty, drunken poker games. Because she bought a paper lamp shade for a dingy apartment and made it a palace. Because she lived in her imagination. That's not crazy, that's brave. It doesn't take much to be practical. It takes pure gut strength to dream something better. Blanche. White. The starting place. "I've always depended on the kindness of strangers". God that's such a beautiful tragic line. Kindness. You know what drives me crazy? The end. Blanche is getting lead out by the doctor after she's been raped and treated like shit and exposed, and he's just sitting there, playing poker with his buddies. And everyone thinks, Oh poor crazy Blanche, and there's the devil sitting right in their midst, playing cards. And I think, that could happen you know. Every day things happen, little things, small tragedies that you just let go by. And you think, you know, that could be the devil sitting right there in our midst. But don't rock the boat, right? But you know what rocks the boat? Imagination. Beautiful, romantic Blanche rocks the boat, not plain jane, ratty old seen it before. Stella doesn't rock the boat. And she doesn't do a thing to save her sister. Not a thing. Not like Sheherezade. She stays by Stanley's side. So what happens? Fuck beauty. Fuck imagination. Fuck it. Why not, eh? Why not fuck it all? And what does my mother name me? Stella. Fucking Stella. Who sleeps with the devil. That's me, and hey there you go, right? There you fucking go. Shitty fucking slutty whore, might as well spread my legs. Well, fuck you! I'm not a child. I'd sooner fucking die than pick up this money.

*(Stella flips a coin, places it on her wrist and looks at it - there's nothing there.)*

As the months went by, the dancer became more and more wretched. She was losing weight. She had almost stopped speaking. And every night she tried. She would close her eyes as tight as she could and she would try with all of her might to fly. But it was no good .. She was like a bird that had her wings clipped. She felt like the stage was shrinking and shrinking around her. And one night it happened. The men were all yelling, the music was too loud. There was one table at the front, screaming Show us some pink! And the Dancer said to herself, "It's now or never." She closed her eyes and she pictured the Prince in her mind and she started to dance. And she started to feel it. Just the slightest feeling of weightlessness. Like the atoms were dropping off her one at a time, like the stake was being pulled out of the ground. "It's now or never", she whispered out loud. And as she moved, there was a little half-smile on her face. Then one of the men at the edge of the stage grabbed her leg and in a moment it all came crashing down. She weighed a thousand pounds. The whole bar erupted in screams and catcalls. And the Dancer started to cry. Right in the middle of the stage. For the first time in her life, cheeks burning with shame, she started to cry on stage.

And then, from the midst of the swirling noise, he appears. She looks up and there he is, offering her his hand. And she looks at him, wipes her tears away, and says, "Why thank you, sir. I've always depended on the kindness of strangers." She takes his hand, and they begin to dance. And the bar goes silent, not a noise as the stripper and the gay boy do a graceful waltz across the stage.

We were stunning. The air grew brighter around us, and a gentle rain of silver and gold fell as we danced. And then we began to fly. Together. Laughing and swirling and looping through the rain of silver and gold. It was what we were always meant to do. We were free.

And then out of the corner of her ear she hears a whistling sound and out of the corner of her eye she sees a dark shape and a beer bottle splinters and explodes on the side of his head. And they're still looking into each other's eyes as she sees the blood begin to well out of his temple. And they fall, they come crashing down. He sinks to his knees and the crowd screams again like they're at a bullfight. The crowd's pelting them with silver and gold, throwing money like stones. They're still looking into each other's eyes when the bouncers leap up on stage and drag him away from her. All she can hear is Yaaah, get the little faggot! And then he's gone and she's left alone on a stage glittering with silver and gold. And then they expect her to pick it up.

I know there's no such thing. As flying. People don't fly.

Did you know that in some countries they have professional mourners? Least that's what I heard. Women in black robes who roam the countryside, sniffing the desert for death and grief. Within hours of a death, they'll show up. No one knows how. Well, except them, I guess. And these women are there to teach. They hold thousands of years of grief right in their bodies because it's been passed down one person at a time. And when they pick up the scent of a death, they go there to teach the family and friends how to grieve. They wail and they keen and they pound out the rhythms of grief, so that the others will know. So that others can feel. Just like a baby has to learn to breathe, to change from liquid to air, people need to learn how to grieve. This is grief and this is sorrow and this is grief and this is sorrow, and the people, the friends, the lovers feel that rhythm in their bellies and they take it and make it their own. This is my grief and this is my sorrow and this is my grief and this is my sorrow. These women give them the gift of their grief. And when they have finished dancing, one of the relatives of the deceased joins the mourning women, and one of the mourning women is released. She is released of her grief, of her sorrows. She is freed. And this goes on for generations. One woman at a time. I think I'd like that. To be picked up by a roving band of wailing women. Women who knew what they were doing in life. Who had something to give, even if it's only their pain and sorrow.

So fuck it. I will teach myself to grieve. I will dance this shame out of my belly. Because it's not mine. I didn't earn it and I don't deserve it. It's thousands of years old and it's been passed down generation by generation, down to me. I will pound this shame out of my body, down through my feet until it seeps like blood into the stage.

*Slowly, Stella begins to dance a rhythm of anger, pounding her heels into the stage. The anger turns to grief and she starts to cry. She picks up a quarter off the stage.*

When I was a little girl, I would put my tongue just under the edge of a loose tooth and I would push and twist it with my tongue, sometimes for days on

end, until it finally came out. And I would feel the gap it had left, running my tongue over it and over it. At night I would put my little baby tooth under my pillow and in the morning, I would look under the pillow and there would be a quarter. One day somebody at school said there was no such thing as the tooth fairy. And the next day I woke up and I didn't believe in the tooth fairy anymore. And I never put another tooth under my pillow. And I never woke up to find another quarter in its place. I've had a pit of pain in my belly since I was a girl.

Sheherezade told stories to stay alive, to keep breath in her lungs, but what I want to know is what happened on the thousand and second night. After the last story had been told. Once there was no more audience. Just plain old Scheherezade. Did she live happily ever after? What does that mean? How are we supposed to believe in the ever after if they never tell us what it is. At least for a thousand and one nights she had something to do. A reason to get through the day. An audience for her stories. But the stories aren't true. They're just the dance that gets us through another day.

I am Sherezade and the sister of Sheherezade. And I am Stella. And I am Blanche. And the person I have to save is myself. Time to stop running . . .

Here I am.

*She takes the bucket of change and throws it towards the audience, as if it were a bucket of water. The audience is showered with silver and gold confetti. Blackout. We hear the call of a loon.*

*End*