

## TALENT

Niven Govinden

‘Your dancing is sick.’ Sweat stains on his lap and bald patch. ‘I’m hired?’ ‘It’s time for a fat girl on the poles. BYO tassels.’

First night, they jeer. Think it’s the comedy turn whilst the real girls wipe themselves off. Jukebox plays ‘Who Let The Dogs Out’. She holds back, intimidated.

Second night, they grope. Strange fingers trace the outline of her arse crack. Crisp banknotes giving paper cuts on her inner thigh. Fives, she sees later, not tens or twenties. Recession on. Stiffies on a budget. Confidence comes with a low squat. Sequined G-string lightly bussing the bar top. Pants on, she picks up ice cubes for her finale. No hands. They’re open-mouthed. Approving.

Day three, all eyes. They’ve caught the taste for big lasses. Cluster round her corner, closest fire exit. As heavy as their wives. Twatline tighter than a Vegas review. She feels twenties in her pants ’stead of fives. Ice cubes melt before finale. Laps at the puddle instead. Straight after the splits. Standing ovation in their crotches. Later, an anonymous note from the thin lasses losing custom. *Cut yer tits off!!!* Friendly advice from one professional to another.

Day four, gaffer’s good books. Moved to centre bar. Dances her arse off. Moves home-practised from ten ’til six. No different to an athlete in her training. It’s what narks the thinner lasses. Think a flat stomach and watermelon tits are all it takes. Dance like they have handbags at their feet. No eye for the art of it. How a body can make shapes. The synthesis of pelvis, hips and belly. Thirty blokes at her feet come end of night. Notes

dispensing faster than a malfunctioning cashpoint. Thin lasses in the back, conspiring.

Fifth night, sacked. Petitioned out. 'Best dancer I got, love. But it's dolly birds what get punters through the door.' 'I'm their fantasy.' 'Not the one they'll admit to.' Thin lasses agree to play with dildos. Concessionary measure. The downturn won't be ridden out without upping the ante. 'I wouldn't ask that of you, love. They're show ponies, but you're an artist. Gypsy Rose Lee of Blackburn.'

And she was.

## MOTH

Chris Powici

After wine my head sinks deep into the sofa leather and I let go a breath of Marlboro smoke. The dog lies dreaming by the unlit fire and a red moth flits between the window and the lamp like a spark of the everlasting fires of hell Vicar Gibbs described years ago in Sunday School; a bald man in a white, tea-stained nylon shirt whispering death and, worse still, *bad looks* from God if I lied or swore or stole. If I refused the light.

Today I walked into the hills and saw the grass and stones of Sheriffmuir swathed in no light but the rainy summer light of this unlikely rainy world, and then I heard the blasts of shotguns and a pheasant cry and clatter through the pines above Dykedale.

Now I hear a car door slam across the street.

Rain on the window.

The wings of the moth flicker poppy-bright against the green lampshade. The dog's eyes twitch. Vicar Gibbs, I imagine, is long since dead or passes his dwindling days sipping Earl Grey in the TV lounge of some musty south-coast nursing home. Perhaps he's praying.

If I could say a prayer right now it would go something like *may death, tonight, forget itself and let all pheasants sleep; let all moths live to see a sky smudged pink by rain and light and ...* I can't think what else. It's late, my wine is drunk. I want to dream a bit.