

## One Night in Heaven

Last night (17<sup>th</sup> November, 1999) I had the pleasure of spending an evening in Stringfellows, and as a result I think my life has been subtly changed. I would like to share this experience with you, the reader, because I think you will be quite amused and, be you male or female, I refuse to believe that you don't harbour at least some curiosity for what goes on in London's most well-known and high-class strip-club.

I have made the decision to write this anonymously because I do not want to be accused of bragging, which I will inevitably do shamelessly throughout this article. I also know that I will fail to present the facts with any professional journalistic objectiveness, so right from the outset I will state that it shall not be my intention to do so.

First of all I will begin by saying that the entire evening was made possible by a person whose identity will of course remain anonymous, and secondly that the amount of money I spent (despite heavy subsidy from afore-mentioned benefactor) will remain undisclosed.

We entered Stringfellows at around 8pm and were shown to a table which had been booked for us. On first impressions we could have been in a normal restaurant. Everything was slightly cramped due to the number of extra tables that had been put in for the football and the décor was a little kitschy: mirrors, drapes, soft lighting, and that kind of thing, but apart from that it was not out of the ordinary. Unless, of course, you count the girls in various states of nudity, wrapped expertly around several strategically placed poles around the room.

At this point I need to interrupt the narrative and say something about these girls, who will unavoidably crop up quite regularly throughout this article. I fear that I might exhaust my supply of superlatives when describing them and that you will be blunted to them, which is why I will describe them only once, right here: these women were absolutely *fabulous*; they were creatures who populate only people's most daring and unspoken dreams, the kind of females who cause car crashes when they walk down the street. I think you get a general idea of what calibre of woman I'm talking about.

So there I was, trying heroically to concentrate on my steak (which incidentally, was superb) whilst beside me a breath-taking expanse of naked flesh was twisting lasciviously to the rhythm of the music. It goes without saying that this meal was without precedent in my personal experience, and to eat my whole plate consequently took me a some length of time. As we finished our meal and the wine and beer began to smooth over our nervousness, women who had been hovering discreetly in the periphery began to close in like predators for the proverbial kill.

The first one who reached us and sat down at our table was a Russian beauty named Tania, and whom – I will openly state – I am irretrievably in love with. The way she made contact was typical of most of the women that night. They would approach you unabashed whilst locking their eyes onto yours, a welcoming yet subversive smile curving their lips. Then a long arm would droop over your shoulder and she would casually introduce herself:

“Hi, my name is Claudia, what’s yours? Are you having a good evening? Would you like it to get any better?” After a bit of initial self-conscious mumbling I quickly got the hang of chatting about some inanity, without too much ogling and successfully keeping up the pretence that this was some sort of “normal” conversation. The girls were extremely quick at identifying our middle-aged benefactor as the most well-off in our little group and thus got the initial attention, especially from Tania. But since it was so early in the evening, there was a large surplus of females, and there were always...ah...enough to go round.

After I finished my meal and had gotten over the disappointment from the initial lack of interest from Tania, I decided – as there was a large screen on the wall behind me – that I would watch the football for a bit. So there I sat, cigarette in one hand, Belgian lager in the other, trying to see some of the game but being distracted by a half-naked Mediterranean stunner who was doing very innovative things with her pole, and I was asking myself, does it get any better? The answer turned out to be: yes.

I noticed that out of the corner of my eye that our benefactor had slipped Tania a ten-pound note and that she was asking us all to move our chairs back. She positioned herself in front of one of our group and proceeded to slowly dance and strip whilst a profound silence descended over our table. I will not attempt to put her actions into words as I would not do them justice, I will merely say that it was a full three minutes later before I realised that my mouth was still open. Whilst a younger version of Jerry Hall had the rapt attention of my colleagues across the table I struck up a conversation with a red-headed girl who had wandered over. I asked her about her job (clichéd, I know) and she answered with surprising frankness.

She said that she earned around £600 a night and that she worked 3 nights a week. She said that every night that she worked she never failed to get “utterly smashed” from all the drinks that the punters bought her, and furthermore that she absolutely loved her job. I have to confess that I felt sorry for her: she was only 18 (the youngest in the club, she proudly informed me) and when she had said that she really liked her job I sincerely think that she *meant* it. It struck me that most of the other girls were very professional in their attitudes and in the way that they saw the job as a “necessary” evil. I’m sure most of them do enjoy it to some

extent but they also realise that there's more to life than being ogled by sweaty, overweight, inebriated, middle-aged businessmen. This girl, however, really didn't appear to see the bigger picture and seemed to have reached the pinnacle of her aspirations. It sounds very cynical and judgmental of me to say that, probably because it is very cynical and judgmental, and I think I'll leave it at that.

After the meal was over we were escorted by a throng of beauties from the "restaurant" area into the "club" area downstairs and made ourselves comfortable in the executive chairs. A £110 bottle of whiskey was ordered and we foolishly set about quaffing even more alcohol. I was tremendously pleased to notice Tania appearing again and with sweaty palms delved into my wallet for a ten pound note. She accepted it with a gracious smile that made my heart melt and took me by the hand to lead me to an empty sofa. There I sprawled with a drunken grin on my face as she proceeded to engrave herself in Dolby digital and high resolution straight into the most private and guarded areas of my mind.

When you have your first dance, you feel extremely awkward about what you should be doing with your arms, face etc. Do you smile constantly and risk aching cheeks the next day, or do you watch with a cool detachedness, periodically raising one eyebrow to signify your appreciation. To be honest, by my second or third dance, considerations like these had been cast into insignificance by the amount of alcohol I'd guzzled.

The clientele was almost exclusively male, and I was astonished to see a "normal" woman sit down at the table next to ours with some male companions. At an advanced hour of the morning I casually leant across, tapped her on the shoulder, and stated that I had compiled three theories as to why she was in this place. I said that I had concluded that she must either: 1) have an exceptional amount of self-confidence. 2) be of the lesbian persuasion. Or 3) be mad. She laughed, indicating that 1) she was not offended and 2) she must have been as pissed as me. Then she proceeded to say that she was none of the above, but was in fact, Scottish. I told her that one of her male companions looked very much like David Gilmour (of Pink Floyd fame) but she assured me that he was not because he was in fact the managing director of the Bank of Scotland. Having received this particular piece of intelligence and feeling that I was possibly a little out of my depth I gracefully thanked her for her time and turned back to talk to my slightly less-illustrious friends.

The rest of the evening blurred together into one blissful and hedonistic haze, but I will spare you any further details. I seem to remember that I fell in love all over again with a sublime creature from Sweden but I cannot remember fully, and do not want present you with falsehoods. The last thing I do remember is confessing to Tania that I was not in fact

a management consultant from New York but a slightly overwhelmed and very drunk student from Imperial College. She forgave me.

At 3 o'clock in the morning, we finally staggered onto the street and I was thinking about lectures at 9.30, the brand-new chasm in my bank account, as well as the fact that my world would never be the same again.