

EXCERPTS from STRIPPED

By
Toni Kasper

-----COCO-----

(Crosses down Mainstage and addresses audience) Why am I smiling? Why am I happy? Because I'm beautiful and ballsy and black. I love the beat. With my killer stilettos and long beads. I'm beautiful because I'm black. I dance for the Irish and Italians, they love me because I am forbidden. They might have called my brother, "nigger", last night, hell, might have blown him away, but they're callin for me, the black beauty, to seduce them tonight.

Sick of vanilla? Try a chocolate treat. I love the music, the beat, the rhythm. I got the rhythm that no one else has. Because I am rooted and grounded with the drums and the funk because I'm the beautiful black braided or beaded girl in sync with the beat. I'm the exotic of the erotic. The cookies in the cream. Can you see me running along the trails of Africa? Topless African beauty catching snakes in an elephant world. I'm proud and I'm sexy and I'm somebody here. They say I should model and someday I might, but right now I'm Diana the goddess of the moon and the hunt and my feet run the beat.

Yesterday, my great grandmama's were sold to these people to be their slave. Today, they pay me to enslave them. Awed by my beauty. I'm the new generation. . I'm the beautiful black girl. I'm the beautiful black Brooklyn girl. And I'm not racist but I love rich white men.

-----AMBER-----

(comes alive, striking weightlifting poses) What is strength? To some, it's how much money you make. To others, it's Lee Press On Nails. To me it's how much you can bench press, and how much rejection you can take and still scare the money out of them. I'm Amber. But they think of me as Xena, the warrior princess. You want someone to hate you. I will.

I never had a date until one day I connected with a free weight and finally felt free. Something about that shiny bar above me challenging me onward... the smell of sweat and metal and I fell in love. I'm part of the game now and I'm winning. I was the only girl of five brothers. An Army Brat. But I can spit farther and piss longer than any of you losers.

Growing up, guys used to make fun of me. "Hey, skinny little toe head with no tits go home and play with yourself, we're playing ball, it's a man's game and you ain't pretty enough to be our cheerleader!" I'm part of the game now and I'm winning. Guys aren't pulling my hair anymore. They're paying me to pull theirs.

What are you lookin at? *(She grabs UNCLE CHARLIE, an overweight disheveled shoe salesman and throws him down on all fours. He smiles as if he enjoys abuse and hands her a twenty)* Get on your knees and beg for a dance you wimpy shithead. Hey, it's a gimmick but these dudes love it and so do I. *(Amber sits on Uncle Charlie's back)*

(Lights focus on NATASHA on pedestal).

-----NATASHA-----

I've been married twice already. First, for love back in Russia. From Russia with Love, Baby! Second, for my Green Card. And now I'm looking for money. No money, no honey! I just want to eat bon bons and watch my favorite soap operas all day long. Yes, I pray for the day when I can be what I really want to be. A couch potato!

Most American women marry for money, yes? What's the difference between the Upper East Side Married woman and me. We both want the same thing. A Provider. Security. And diamonds every year for our birthdays.

We both learn to love our millionaire man. The difference between those women and me is here, I'm open about what I want. I advertise. Better he sees what he's getting before the honeymoon. Yes? Why shop at Kmart when you can go to Tiffany's

But I'll be smarter than Marla Maples.

(Pause) So where is my Donald Trump? I want to meet him soon. He will love me. And if I don't find him, I'll just set up a dress shop in Astoria.

-----PAUL AND FRANKIE-----

PAUL I don't think so. I think you're beautiful.

FRANKIE. Look. I'm working. I hear allot of stuff in here and it doesn't pay the bills. *(She crosses to exit)*

PAUL *(Grabbing her arm)* Then give me your number so we can meet up in the real world.

FRANKIE I'm not allowed to do that.

PAUL *(passionately)* Then what am I supposed to do. Come here and watch you dance for other men. Degrading yourself. I really like you but I don't belong here and neither do you.

FRANKIE Oh. And who are you? My knight in shining armor that rides in and rescues me from all the fiery dragons. *(pointing to exit)*The same shit goes on out there, but at least, here, you know it's a game, out there it just sneaks up on you and stabs you in the back. Sorry, but I don't believe in fairy tales.

PAUL *(briskly)* Well, you sure do well at playing the princess locked safe away in her invincible tower.

FRANKIE Fuck you! *(crosses back to center)*

PAUL What are you afraid of?

FRANKIE *(defensively turning to challenge him)* I'm not afraid of anything.

PAUL Don't you want something real?

FRANKIE *(holding back tears)* Nothing is here is real except the money.

PAUL *(placing Frankie's hand on his heart)* I'm real.

FRANKIE *(long pause)* Look, I don't mean to be a bitch. But I have to make money. I gotta go.

-----HANK, CHARLIE and BUDDY-----

HANK. *(Giving money to Coco and Samantha on Main Stage)* God, I love women. Definitely the superior sex. Because see they can do something that men will never be able to do. Bear children. *(sits with Charlie and Buddy)* I've often wondered what that would be like to have something growing inside of me and to let it out into this world in all it's splendorment. And nurse it with my breasts. The reason there is breasts, but god I still love those breasts. Well, with all the new science, cloning and shit , hell, maybe men will soon be able to bear children. But that's not the way it's suppose to be. *(beat)* You know what my favorite place on a woman is?

CHARLIE. Her tits.

BUDDY. Her ass.

CHARLIE. Her feet.

HANK. Nope. Right here. *(Touches Buddy's gut)* Right there. *(Touches Charlie's belly)* It's magical. Women, any kind of women are wonderful. Short, tall, dark, blonde, small breasts, big breasts.

SAMANTHA. *(Crossing off Mainstage over to Hank)* Hi Hank! I've been waiting for you Cowboy. Wanna dance next song? *(she plops down on his lap)*

HANK. I can't refuse a dance because I love all kinds of women. Except women that are really men. And I have only been fooled once by one of those...transies, but nothing happened. Thank the good Lord!

BUDDY. The good Lord, who's really a woman.

HANK. And this women loving women thing. You aren't one of those are ya?

SAMANTHA. What?

HANK. Into girls?

SAMANTHA. Is that what you like? *(She caresses Natasha dancing on pedestal behind Hank)*

HANK. Nope.

SAMANTHA. *(pulls her hand off Natasha)* No way.

HANK. Cuss a lot of these girls are or at least say they are. Well, that just ain't the way it was suppose to be. God created Adam and Eve, not Eve and Eve. You know why I come here?

BUDDY, CHARLIE, SAMANTHA. *(sarcastically)*Cuz you love women.

HANK. *(standing and lighting a cigarette)*You know, I'm from Houston But in New York, it's hard to talk to women. And if you're nice and southern well, maybe they think I'm a dumb shit or something like that but at least, HERE, women talk to ya.

BUDDY. If you have money.

HANK. I mean, you need to have money, dick for brains, cuss these girls are working and working people go to work to make money. But here, beautiful women come up and talk to ya. And they just make you feel so good inside. And I see how these New York men operate. Expecting women to give them sex right away. Where I'm from, half the fun is the courting. Sex is overrated anyway. I just want someone to talk to. Companion like. That's why many women are jaded, and it's so doggone hard to break through. That's why I really like the strip club.

Even Vinnie and Big Ed make me feel at home. And lots of times when I have a girl dance, I tell her to leave her dress on. Because women are such beautiful, beautiful things even with their clothes on.

-----SAMANTHA and TRUDY-----

SAMANTHA. *(taking up the bathroom)* Sometimes I just float out of the club. And pretty soon the club disappears and the city lights get smaller and smaller like specks of glitter on a postcard. And I fly through the City like a witch on a broomstick that's escaped her sisterhood to float among the stars and the moon. And suddenly I don't hear the club music at all, but I hear the sound of peace. Contentment. And as I'm hanging there suspended in my happiness. I look back at earth and see it as a whole not just a "slice of life" as I search the skies and wonder.

TRUDY. Wonder what?

SAMANTHA. Wonder what I was put here for. I ask myself *(looking in mirror)* "How can we all feel free and be at peace with one another at the same time?" And that's when I realize it doesn't matter what you do whether you're a doctor, a mayor or a stripper. Man or woman. Black or white. Gay, straight. We're all in this "thing" together. All looking for some sort of answer. And that's when I hear it calling to me.

TRUDY Hear what?

SAMANTHA. The answer. Wrapped in a whisper from something far away like...

TRUDY God?

SAMANTHA. Yeah. But right when I'm about to reach out and grasp it (*extending arm ballerina-like*), someone bumps me or hands me money and I'm flung back down to earth. Back on this planet. Back into this Hell like a retarded little child being spit out by Zeus because she's not a goddess. (*examines her figure in the mirror*) Or because she's not good enough. Or because she's not immortal and perfect. Thrown back down by the zap of a lightning bolt and echoing thunder just because she's human. She's human and doesn't deserve the answer.

DJ(offstage) Samantha, Main Stage!

SAMANTHA (*exiting bathroom to mainstage*) Or maybe because none of us are suppose to find the meaning of it all anyway.