

THE INDUSTRY

by JG

I'M FLAT ON MY BACK ONSTAGE, and three strippers are writhing around me, wagging their twats in my face as the cheesy sex-disco beat plods on like a retarded dinosaur. After about a minute of this fake dance of seduction, at a point when the girls start to take my shirt off, I feel someone tugging at my feet, dragging me down off the stage. It's my girlfriend, **The Strikingly Attractive Jewish Drum Majorette**, and she's witnessed just about all she can take. As I stand up and try to compose myself, she reaches down and cups my package with her hand to check whether or not I'm aroused.

Are you *kidding* me?!?
I'm shriveled-up like a jellybean!
It isn't the girls' fault...they looked fine and were only doing what the DJ was telling them to do.
It's the *situation*. So silly and cheap and stupid. So flat and soulless and phony. Such an embarrassment. A loud, wet, smelly fart on a crowded elevator.

Rather than getting a hard-on, I had wished that the stage would open up and swallow me in a single bite. At one point during the Phony Lesbo Love Dance, I looked up at the blonde topless stripper hovering over me and said, "I hope they're paying you a lot for this, because they aren't paying *me* anything!"

I had agreed to appear live at a local tattooed-stripper competition at the behest of the DJ, who for the last two years has been my coworker—one whom, it will soon be revealed, no longer works for us. He was the one who thought it would be cute if I staged an open debate with some local lesbians. But because the ad copy he'd hurriedly scribbled made it seem as if this was a private party, no real lesbians showed up, and,

well, he really didn't have much other entertainment planned. So he makes everyone sit around in an unforgivably smoky bar for THREE HOURS before he finally tells me to go up. So after I

sing a karaoke version of "If You're Going to San Francisco" (but with new lyrics about Southeast Portland bulldykes), I'm left standing there onstage with the mike as the DJ keeps spinning loud, gurgly-burgly, industrial shitrock. I vamp as well as I can, but it unravels quickly. The DJ and current *Exotic* Ex-Employee of the Month—did I mention that he's a fine, fine fellow?—then springs a highly theatrical "surprise" on me—namely, that I should lay on my back and have three strippers wriggle around me.

Apparently, within the industry, this is what is known as a "creative idea."
To me, it just looks like a loose pile of shit.
Later that night, as me and some other Studs of *Exotic* were driving back downtown, I said, "It's going to take a long time to wash all the shame off me."

INKY-PINKY EPIPHANY The next night, as the brilliantly conceived and highly tasteful tattooed-stripper festival moved to another club, I sat at my merchandise table, gazing disconsolately at the Porno Cattle wading around, these lost nobodies looking ACTUALLY EXCITED that there were nude twats wit' tats almost within arm's reach...I sat slumped, profoundly depressed at the spectacle of these pathetic, potato-normal shlubs shelling out their dehumanizingly hard-earned Benjamins to get a closer look.

Empty. Couldn't be emptier. You couldn't fit any more emptiness inside them.
And you know they're burning those real-live naked images onto their minds so they can weave down the road toward home all half-tanked, rush indoors and pull all their rage and rejection out through their little pink dicks in angry hot spurts.

I'll give you forty dollars if you say you want me. Fifty if you wink and say you really mean it.
Funniest moment of the night:

Little bottle-blonde bim nuzzles down to her only customer at the rack...stands back up and says, "A DOLLAR? That's all you got—A DOLLAR?"

Contestants come up to my table and ask me to vote for them. I tell them that I'm a felon and my voting rights have been stripped. That's usually enough to get rid of them.

At one point, the tattooist who had apparently been promised our table comes up and tells us that the event's organizer...the DJ from the prior night...the guy who up until only days ago had been with *Exotic*...the man who milked our publisher's kindness for all it was worth and then betrayed him severely...the guy toward whom I'd never done anything remotely underhanded or malicious...told the tattoo guy that he could have the table anyway because he was going to kick us out.

What a bitch.
You don't have to kick me out. I'm leaving. I don't belong here. You do.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE COLORLESS, crisp, early autumn afternoons where you almost brace yourself because your bones can tell that summer has finally given up for good and you're being rushed headlong into something darker and deader.

On gray, blustery Burnside Street that afternoon, he matter-of-factly told me about his betrayal. He said they came to him, offered him a lot of money, and it was time to move on, anyway, and he really loved Frank and didn't intend to hurt him, but, you know, it was a lot of money, so, really, anybody else would do the same thing in his position, so he really doesn't know why everyone thinks he's the devil.

"It's going to take a long time to wash all the shame off me."

It didn't seem worth mentioning that no one had called him the devil. Nor the fact that there are some people who won't do some things for money.

I ALWAYS HATE TO SAY that there's anything redeeming about humanity, but sometimes people will come along and fuck up my program by consistently acting noble and generous for no apparent reason. This rare strain of human is so good, so decent and fair in all their dealings with others, that I call them "asshole barometers"—anyone who'd dare say negative things about them would have to be an asshole.

Our publisher is one of the finest asshole barometers I've ever met, and I've met some world-class ones in my time. A stunning testament to his highly evolved character and eminently likeable personality is the fact that in the two years I've known him, he's never done *anything* that came close to annoying me. That's nearly a miracle. And the few people I've met who've spoken ill of him or wished him harm have, invariably, been assholes.

I'm not getting paid to say this—I mean, I *am* getting paid to say this in the sense that I get paid to fill this space by saying things, but he's never told me what to say or what not to say.



There was no pressing need for him to hire me at this magazine other than the fact that I was ten days out of prison and needed a job as a condition of my parole. Basically, he created a job for me because he knew I needed one. And throughout the all-too-frequent personal crises in which I've found myself during the two years since he gave me a job, he's always been levelheaded and helpful. I've probably had a hundred jobs in my life, and I've never worked for a better person, nor someone more tolerant of his workers' limitless personal and professional defects.

Look, if you know anything about me, you know that I'm pained to say good things about *anyone*, so my persistence here should give you some inkling of what a solid, stand-up cat this **Mr. Franklin J. "Flatch No More" Faillace** is.

He'd shrug and say he's really not that good, but so does everyone else who really is that good. Trust me—he is. He's *that* good.

But one of life's cruelest truths is that goodness isn't always rewarded. It often seems to get punished instead. I've seen it happen to Frank again and again...whiny, tantrum-throwing, under-performing, talent-deprived ex-editors who blamed him for the fact that they weren't getting anywhere with their writing...and whose pissy, infantile behavior Frank stoically endured like the world-class gent he is...and who wound up trying to sue Frank, anyway. And, of course, there's that one worker at Dante's who everyone in the city knows should have been fired a long, long time ago...but who is still there because Frank is so tolerant, scientists should use his blood to make a vaccine to fight intolerance.

And I've never seen his tolerance muscles tested so thoroughly as they were by an *Exotic* staffer named John over the past year or so. John had been selling most of our ads and shooting most of our photos during most of my nearly two-year stint here, but the past twelve months had seen a serious erosion in his duties...and job performance...and personal behavior.

Most of his downward spiral...and I'm merely speculating...seemed linked to an unhealthy ongoing relationship with a girlfriend who, as luck would have it, was also a member of the industry. At least that's what John told me, oh, a month or so ago. He blamed it all on her. She got blamed for all his office fuckups and how he tested our nerves every month on deadline. She got blamed for all the property damage he caused in our office building. She got

blamed for all his self-destructive episodes, and believe me, there were a lot of them.

For a year, it seemed as if I was watching John slowly disintegrate. Concerned about his well-being, I counseled him to be careful about the dangerous direction his relationship seemed to be taking. When I chose him as Employee of the Month, I went really, really easy on him because I could sense he was mired in some deep ongoing crisis, and I didn't want to make his condition any more fragile.

Month after month, I was amazed he was still alive. It seemed only a matter of time before the inevitable crash into the wall.

Through it all, Frank was good to John. When John had a heartbreak-related mini-nervous breakdown and was curled in the fetal position on the sidewalk near Powell Blvd., Frank rushed to the scene, rescued him, and put him to bed. He took care of him, even though John's business performance and personal behavior really didn't warrant it.

And then John turned around and stabbed Frank in the back.

AS LOW AS THAT BITCH MOVE WAS, consider that John pulled it while he was living under the roof of our business manager **Bryan Bybee**, who, like Frank, was being perhaps a little more kind to John than might have been wise. As much of a jackhole as everyone in the office knows Bybee can be at times, he also has a soft side, and he can do the occasional nice thing from time to time, despite how he's constantly reminding you about it. And since John is paying rent, Bryan can't legally evict him, even though John's recent shenanigans directly threaten the livelihood of Bybee and everyone in the office. So Bryan tells me that he came home at 3AM in the morning this week to find a drunk John standing in his underwear in Bryan's kitchen, laughing about how he's going to bury us all.

And Karla says John called her and said her worst nightmare is coming true. And last night he apparently threatened to call the cops on pretty much the whole *Exotic* office, quite a bold move considering his own vulnerabilities on the criminal-behavior tip.

But his character...really, his lack thereof...fits the mold of a snitch. They're always the guiltiest ones. John is apparently under the impression that I was going to wag around a bunch of embarrassing personal secrets about him, but he's apparently missing the point. There's a lot of dirt I could have written about, but dirt mostly clings to the surface. He's quite a tacky fellow, and I mean that in a way that runs much deeper than his silly fashion proclivities or weird sex practices.

I just wanted to write about what he did, and to note for the record that despite all the trash he's talking about us in his quest to sell ads, he's a lower form of life than everyone who still works in this office. John is Industry Standard, really. Straight off the assembly line. Rocker boy speak with forked tongue.

At its core, there's something stilted about the idea of paying for sex. It would follow, then, that there'd be a lot of bullshit surrounding an industry rooted in phoniness, and John is one of the industry's Bullshit People...cheap, replaceable, airbrushed figurines who think money or attention somehow make them less of a cartoon and enable them to squeeze into some identity a bit less grotesque than what they are.

