

MY THIRD DANCE

BY

MARCUS CLARK

The first dance I ever went to was a nightmare. It was just like the time I had agreed to recite *Mulga Bill's Bicycle* at the school assembly. I had been told to learn it thoroughly. And I did. Believe me. But when I stood up in front of the whole school all I could remember was the title, which I said in a loud clear voice: BICYCLE BILL'S MULGA. The English teacher, always a wit, wanted to know if I intended to recite the whole poem backwards, or just the title. My answer was drowned in the howling laughter of the entire school.

My first dance was just like that. What if I asked some girl to dance and she turned me down in front of the whole class? So I chose a quiet little nerd who looked like no one else would ask her.

She bellowed out: 'YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING! I'M NOT THAT DESPERATE!'

The real problem was she said this just as the band came to an abrupt halt; her voice filled the void, echoing from one end of the hall to the other, causing everyone to stare at me with pitying smiles.

Towards the end of the night, Joannie Roberts said she intended to dance with every boy. When my turn came—last of all—it seemed like everyone was watching. Joannie took me onto the floor, and my toes knotted up into little balls glueing my shoes to the floor. I couldn't move; it was as though I were wearing one of those old-fashioned diving suits with the lead weights on the feet. Let's not talk about my first dance anymore, because it's my third dance I really want to tell you about.

Luckily for me I had a friend, one of those people who know everything. How these people find out everything by the time they are eighteen has always been beyond me. Perhaps Zack had some sort of encyclopaedia handed down from his older brothers. He told me my problem could easily be overcome. I was too tense. What I needed, he said, was a shot of rum before the dance.

So at my second dance I sat in his brother's car outside the hall and took a snort of some revoltingly powerful concoction. No effect. So I took another little sip. Zack was getting impatient with me, but I really couldn't drink the stuff quickly. He said he was going inside, and I was to follow as soon as I'd finished the second drink.

By then I could feel a little warmth. But was that enough to unglue my feet from the floor? Three drinks. Okay, but was that enough to stop me stuttering? Four! Now I knew the lead weights had disappeared. Five. Six? When I woke up the dance was over. Technically I didn't attend my second dance, but I still count it.

By my third dance I had Zack's sympathy. He understood my problems, and assured me that this time he would guide me through the ropes, check on me at every step of the way, and lead me to the sort of lascivious success that all teenage boys dream about.

He had borrowed his brother's two-door Corolla. This was an advantage, he confided in me. 'Once you sit in the back with them, they feel uncomfortable about disturbing those smooching in the front seat, so they stay there no matter what happens.'

'Yeah?' I smiled in anticipation.

'Okay, two mouthfuls, swallow. Good. Straighten your glasses up and let's go.'

The dance floor was dimly lit, an experiment in disco lighting, done by using faulty fluorescent tubes; they flickered off and on. Original huh?

'Zack, one question. How do I dance? I mean which foot goes first?'

'Simple. Forget the feet, just concentrate on the sweet talk and walk her about the dance floor. If she's a good dancer she'll get you out of trouble. If she's not a good dancer she won't know the difference. Now go and pick out three chicks that you like the look of. If the first one turns you down just go straight on to the next without stopping.'

So I wandered around the hall carefully checking the talent. Zack was already dancing—dancing—not walking.

I approached the first girl. 'Would you like to dance?'

No thank you, I'm too tired.'

'But—'

Forget her, follow Zack's advice, move on to number two.

'Would you like to dance?'

'Not really.' Still that was getting encouraging, she hadn't definitely said no. As I moved away I saw "Too Tired" standing up and smiling brightly as she headed for the dance floor with a yuppie. Never mind, keep going.

'Would you like—'

'No way!'

I found a dark corner and sat in the shadows pondering my options in life. A monk. A research scientist in the Antarctica. I watched Zack dancing with different partners, they all said yes to him. Each time one sat down he moved on to the next, no trouble, no rejections, no psycho-analysis needed, no counselling from Lifeline required.

Later, when he was getting a drink of Coke I sidled up to him.

'How's it going Zack?'

'Great! Lovely girls, some honeys here tonight. But of course I'm still looking for a really ugly one.'

'Why?'

'They're the best; trust me. Beauty's only skin deep.'

'Huh?' What was he talking about?

He looked at me seriously. 'How are you doing? I haven't seen you dancing.'

'Me? Arr well, not much action yet. I'm still warming up.'

He studied my face carefully. 'I think I know the trouble. The glasses, take them off.'

'But I can't see! I'm nearly blind without them.'

'What have you got to see? The chicks are sitting down that end, the guys are standing down this end. You just go down there and ask one of them to dance with you. And don't pick a Miss World. Off you go.'

I headed down towards the darker recesses where he wouldn't see me fail him. Maybe he was right, but I sure couldn't see much without my glasses. I chose a plain girl who, even in the dark with my glassless eyes, looked second rate. I bent close to her like a used car salesman. 'Would you like to dance?'

The blurred face moved slightly closer, and as it did it came into focus. It moved closer because the guy who owned it was standing up.

'You little faggot!'

And he shoved my face with his hand so that I fell backwards into the crowd, somersaulting onto the dance area. If I had more self-confidence I could have pretended it was a rap dance. Slinking back to the brighter end, I put my glasses on. I might be celibate, but at least I'd live long enough to enjoy it.

Then I saw her. An absolute raver sitting by herself. No boyfriend holding hands with her in the dark. She had a glorious face, superb padding about the lungs, and a delicious low-cut dress. I had already been humiliated as far as possible, now I had nothing to loose. Why not?

'Would you like to dance?'

'I might.'

'Huh?'

'If you dance with my friend as well as me.'

'Where is she?'

'Getting a drink.'

'Sure, I'll dance with both of you.'

This was weird, two for the price of one! She was the most exquisitely sexy girl in the hall, and this time I was wearing my glasses. Where was Zack? Now I could show him how it was done. The only problem was that Janice wasn't dancing—like me—she was walking. After one walk she said, 'Well that's that! Let's sit down till I find my girlfriend.'

But when we sat down she said. 'You don't have to dance with my friend now,

she's already dancing.'

'Alright. Which one is your friend?'

'Over there, with the black socks and thongs.'

My God, she was dancing with Zack! And she was built like a Tarago van, back and front, wearing thick Coke bottle glasses, huge knee length shorts, her teeth urgently required an orthodontist, her hair was different colours, blonde, brown, black, tied up in two ponytails. Poor Zack.

But wait. Could this be some scheme by Zack to move in on my raunchy Janice? He was devious, ruthless, and cunning. He was up to something. But when their dance finished they stayed on the floor, they just didn't sit down at all. They had dance after dance while I sat on the sidelines with Janice, who I discovered only had one interest in life: picking Gold Lotto numbers.

'That's what I usually do on Saturday night. It's exciting when some of your numbers start to come up.' And I thought: tonight, with any luck, we're going to do something even more exciting.

Sitting close to Janice, I notice how beautiful she was. Her make-up was perfect, like a model, her hair was stunning, every strand fluffed out like a shampoo commercial. And now I discovered she had one of those soft, sexy, come-and-get-me voices that sent shivers down my back. Trouble was she wouldn't dance again but just sat waiting for her friend to come back.

Soon it was time to go. The band wound up, Zack came over with someone I didn't want to stand near. Janice introduced her girlfriend, Marlene, who kept telling jokes which I couldn't understand but made Zack laugh uproariously. I took him aside while they were fiddling with handbags. 'What's the plan Zack?' I intended to watch him like an eagle. Was he planning the old switcheroo? 'Do we go parking? I'll sit in the back with Janice.' I wanted that part clear; who was with who.

'We'll take them straight home, they live in a two room flat on Estate Street. Janice is a stunner, isn't she?'

What was he up to? Buttering me up. Did he think I'd fall for that old trick, he praises Janice, so I praise Marlene, then he tells Marlene what I said and does a swap? No way. I wasn't going to acknowledge Marlene existed, even though there was ample evidence. 'What about all those other girls you danced with, aren't you going to—'

'Look, forget the honeys. My advice is to go for the ugly ones.'

'Then you're home and hosed!'

We walked them to the car. Marlene with her left arm around Zack, the other inside his shirt. Janice, I discovered, hated to hold hands—in fact she had an aversion to being touched at all. That's because we're in public, I told myself. Her voice, I believed, gave away her real desires: hot, smouldering and sensual. God help me when we were alone!

After Zack opened the car doors we stood waiting for Janice who had decided to pick some flowers out of a nearby garden. While we waited Zack and Marlene went into a passionate embrace. Was he trying to seduce Janice by some sort of example? What was his method? And more importantly, why was he punishing himself like this?

In the car I began to feel a little nervous. I had to establish myself with Janice quickly, or she might take a fancy to Zack. Compliments might work.

'I wish I had brought you some flowers tonight.'

'Why?' Her simmering voice was barely audible, soft and caressing.

I whispered close to her ear so only she could hear. 'Because you're so sexy.'

'I don't care much for flowers, but if I count the petals I could get my Gold Lotto numbers.'

When we arrived at their place I noticed a sleek red Porsche parked out the front. 'Wow! Who's the rich neighbour?'

'Oh that's mine,' Marlene replied.

Zack asked, 'Why didn't you drive it tonight?'

'Oh, I find this more friendly.' She patted his thigh.
I couldn't believe it was hers. 'Is it your father's?'
'No,' she laughed. 'He drives an old HQ. I'm a computer software debugger at IBM; that was part of an offer I couldn't refuse.'

Inside the flat Zack turned out to be right. I wish I could get hold of his encyclopaedia. Marlene took him straight into the bedroom and locked the door. I never saw either of them again that night, although from time to time I could hear them.

Zack was in the bedroom, the light out, eyes tightly closed, doing all the naughty things I dreamed of doing; while I was stuck in the kitchen with a fabulous little beauty, filling in Gold Lotto coupons.

END

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