

Three Short Works by Jo Salmon

ANN SUMMERS

Yo! Hi babes! My name is Babs and I'm gonna be your rep for tonight. We're gonna have a great night taking a look at some of the sexiest gear on the market. Yo! Big up for Ann Summers. Hope everyone's got a drink. If you haven't go get one 'cos we wanna be havin' it large in a party mood. Yo!

Right babes, I want you all to go a bit easy on me this evening 'cos this is actually the first Ann Summers party that I have facilitated. Oops, sorry, repped. Believe it or not I was a social worker. Yeah, boring or what? So I thought to myself 'Well Babsie baby, you've always strongly recognised a need for women to assert their sexual identity so a move to Ann Summers would be an important step in your career development'. I must say it has been a real learning curve. I mean a challenge, no, sorry, I mean it's been a bit different. Yeah. Yo babes!

Before we begin I'm just gonna raise a few issues I feel need to be addressed. Sorry, what I mean is I'm gonna clear a few things up before we start. Yo!

Firstly, you will have noticed that it's just us girlies here tonight. NO BLOKES IN DA HOUSE! This is because Ann Summers is an inclusive forum for women only, regardless of gender, race, social background, ability or sexual orientation. Yo! Special Big up for the lesers yeah? We do, of course, have an active policy of positive discrimination excluding men on the premise that they're all bastards who don't know how to do a decent girl's night out. Yo!

Also, I notice we have some beautiful big babes here tonight so may I take this opportunity to distance myself from the company's collusion with institutionalised sizeism by their only offering the rubber wet-look nurses uniform in up to a size 20. I have made a formal complaint in writing about this and will be forming a pressure group who's remit it will be to aim to stamp out this particular form of fascism.

I am also in the process of lobbying the powers that be to re-produce the catalogue in such a way that makes it more accessible to women from minority ethnic communities whose mother tongue may not necessarily be English. I regret however, that there does not yet seem to be any progress to correct the DISGRACEFUL under-representation of women of Patagonian Lesbian Farming origin.

In a moment we will be looking at a sample product but, before we do, I would just like to assure those of you who are at risk of feeling financially excluded that funding resources may, I repeat MAY be made accessible for anyone on a limited income.

Ok. Yo! I would like to show you now a TOTALLY gorgeous little number called the 'Titillating Tracy'. Personally, I prefer the similar garment on page 32 of the catalogue called the 'Bawdy Brenda' because of the handy slits in the bra area. This, and I can testify personally, that it gives a real feeling of liberation and empowerment when breast-feeding. It has been brought to my attention that this outfit could be worn to give erotic pleasure to a casual or life partner. I don't think I am alone in holding the firm opinion that this kind of attitude serves to reinforce and perpetuate the cause of the male oppressors who, lets face it, think about NOTHING but sexual gratification and force us women into thin, scanty, impractical, restrictive clothing like this in order to satisfy their own depraved and selfish desires. WHAT this outfit represents SISTERS, is the domination suffered by our gender for generations.

And it's VERY good value at only £49.99 and what's more I'm gonna throw in a free garter for each one sold tonight. YO!

TIFFANY AND CHERIE

Cherie Blair? I could batter 'er anyday, mouche. No way am I scared of Cherie Blair.

She come round Chantelle's after school the other night, givin' 'all that' about 'er bloke bein' fuckin' God or summat. I wanted to smash 'er swede in right there and then, I did.

I tell yer, I ain't jokin'. I turned round to 'er, I said, "I don't care what 'e is Cherie. I can't be asked listenin' to ya, right? 'cos 'e sounds like a right gilly."

I've never met 'er bloke. She's never turned up round Chantelle's wiv 'im. She reckons it's cos 'e's always workin' or round 'is mate's. Too busy to come round Chantelle's and drink cider wiv us lot. Fuckin' antisocial I call it. Mind you, Cherie makes up for it, 'cos she can't half neck down some Strongbow, so fair play to 'er for that. Respect where it's due, innit?

She gets on my fuckin' nerves though, she does. She nearly got a kickin' off of me the other night 'cos she kept on and on moanin' about 'er bloke and 'is clothes. 'E won't wear a hoodie or nothin'. She even nicked 'im some bling for 'is birfday and 'e never wore it. I don't know why she don't just dump 'im. I mean, who wants to go out wiv a bloke who ain't even a chav? I wouldn't be seen dead wiv no greebo. She says he won't even let 'er wear a Burberry cap when she goes out wiv 'im 'cos 'e says it makes 'er look like a cheap slapper! What a prick! She says she don't like 'angin' round wiv 'is mates 'cos all they do is sit round talkin' about who they're gonna give a pastin' to next and who they're gonna get to join in. Sounds a pouff 'e does. Mind you, I wish she wouldn't 'ang round wiv us lot, either. And she'll be wishin' she didn't an'all after she gets a slap off me.

I see 'er on Wednesday night. We was all 'angin round the Waitrose car-park after youff club. And I see 'er lookin' at my Dwayne. So, I turns round to 'er, I says, "You better not be lookin' at my Dwayne, yer slag, 'cos if you are, you're gonna be shittin' teeth for a week, I tell ya." So, she turns round to me and goes, "Well you didn't say nuffin' about 'im givin' Chantelle one behind the science block last Monday." So I says to 'er "That's different innit. 'E was well pissed. And anyway, Chantelle's me mate ain't she? And anyway, Dwayne would't shag a minger like you, yer tart."

Well, she only runs off cryin', don't she? The stupid cow. It was alright, though, weren't it? 'Cos Chantelle goes and puts lil' Britney

in 'er push-chair and goes off after 'er, make sure she's alright. I
couldn't give a toss, could I? me.

Cherie Blair. I could 'ave 'er anyday, mate.

LOLLY AND THE PATH OF POPPIES

Once upon a time, in a realm closer than you would dare to imagine, there was an enchanted forest. The forest was rich with many shades of green. In Spring, bluebells spread across the forest floor as far as the eye could see. The trees in Summer offered ripe berries and fruits. Autumn brought reds and golds and when Winter came, the inhabitants of the forest huddled together, kept each other warm and alive and waited for the return of the bluebells.

Deep within the forest there lived a community of one hundred faeries. The community looked after and loved each other. They forgave each other's mischiefs and took care of each other in times of sickness and sadness. If a faerie happened to wander away from the community, they were pined for and looked for until they were found. However, most of the faeries who wandered away came back of their own accord, missing the love and warmth of the community. And the community always welcomed them back and loved them all the more by having missed them so much.

The Elder faeries, who had lived for a long, long time, were wise and knowledgeable in the ways of the forest and taught the Youngers about the magical powers that all the faeries held within themselves. These magical powers were namely; Courage, Strength, Self-worth, Love for others and Flight. The Younger and Middler faeries loved to fly but often failed to understand the importance of the other types of magic.

One night, not long after the bluebells had come, a strange wind blew through the forest. The Elder faeries knew the nature of this wind and the Youngers, sensing their unease followed them inside to safety. But the strange wind had a curious effect on the Middlers. To them it carried the scent of adventure and excitement. They became restless and began to look out through the trees to the darker forest and away from the community. The strange wind blew into the night and the Middlers stayed up late.

One faerie, a clever and thoughtful faerie, whose name was Lolly and whose wings shone with a brighter light than most, stayed awake all through the night. She sat on a rock looking out through the forest, knowing that adventure and excitement would come.

Then, in the hour before dawn, Lolly caught sight of a handsome and fiendish imp. The imp saw Lolly and, without her knowledge, cast a spell that caused her to fall in love with him. The imp came and sat on the rock beside Lolly and told her that his name was Zigzag. "This is a truly beautiful forest," said Zigzag, "and you are a truly beautiful faerie." Lolly was embarrassed and flattered and her usually golden wings flushed with pink.

"This part of the forest is new to me," went on Zigzag, "I blew in on the wind. I am from the other side."

"This is the only part of the forest I know." Said Lolly, "The Elders, who teach us magic and who are wise and love us, warn that there are some dangers that they cannot protect us from and places from where they cannot bring us back. Their hearts break if one of us gets lost."

Zigzag laughed and laughed so that Lolly felt foolish and naive.

"What magic have these Elders taught you?" enquired the imp.

"They teach us Courage, Strength, Self-Worth, Love for others and Flight." Replied Lolly and, seeing that the imp had no wings and wishing to impress her new love, she flew and fluttered above his head.

"Hmm," considered Zigzag, "Flying is surely a wonderful thing to be able to do, but the other things they teach you are not magical at all. All the other so-called magic doesn't inspire awe and wonder and cannot change the shape of things."

Lolly had never considered this before. Zigzag went on;

"The purpose of magic is to impress others. It should be a secret and unique to You. It is the power to influence others and the universe and cause metamorphosis in animate and inanimate objects. If all the faeries in your community can do what you can do, then what makes you special?"

Lolly did not know the answer to this question and looked down at her knees, feeling a little disenchanted. Zigzag saw this and added;

"Even flight, when you think about it," he said, "Birds can fly and they are not considered to hold magical powers."

Lolly felt miserable, not very special and not very magical. The bright glow of her wings faded a little. She stood up to walk away. Just as she did so, Zigzag pointed out into the forest and Lolly saw that there were beautiful bright sparks flying from his fingertip. The sparks were lighting a path through the forest and landing on the ground. As each one settled, a bright red poppy grew. Thousands upon thousands of sparks and each one grew until there was a path of bright poppies leading far away, even through into the dark side.

Lolly was amazed at what she was seeing. Zigzag must have read her expression, for he said, "Come with me Lolly. Come with me down the path of poppies. I promise that I will love you and take care of you. I will never go to bed leaving you outside and alone as your community has done tonight. I will teach you about REAL magic and not tell you lies about it as your Elders have."

Lolly, who had felt herself outside the community since the strange wind blew, agreed, for she loved Zigzag and believed that she would return to the community before she was missed.

And so Lolly started out with Zigzag down the long and winding path of poppies. Zigzag treated Lolly as if she were a princess. He made her

feel beautiful and special so, by the end of the first day, she loved him and trusted him completely. She was astounded by the magic he could perform. Lolly was so happy that day that she could not help flying and fluttering around him. Faeries always fly at their best when they are happy.

At the end of the second day, Lolly asked Zigzag if he would teach her how to perform real magic.

"The source of my magic comes from a potion that gives wisdom and knowledge and the means to fly whilst lying on the ground. It's magic is powerful and that power is envied by many. Those who benefit from the potion are often scorned by those who do not."

Lolly wanted very much to be a part of Zigzag's strange and wonderful magic and so she asked for some of the potion. Zigzag gave it to her and Lolly flew higher than ever whilst lying on the ground. The path of poppies towered above her head where she lay. Never before had she felt so safe and warm. Never before had she felt more like she was at home.

On the following day, Lolly found herself feeling a little disenchanted after the experiences she had encountered and so she asked Zigzag if she might have a little more of the magic potion. Zigzag agreed but gave Lolly one condition;

"That you promise never again to fly above the level of my head."
Lolly remembered that she had flown higher than ever whilst lying on the ground and so she agreed.

On the following day, Lolly felt even more disenchanted than she had before. If she had been able to look at her reflection, she would have seen that her wings were not shining quite so brightly. On asking Zigzag for some more of the potion, he agreed but again gave Lolly one condition;

"That you never fly by using your wings again."
Lolly, wanting to fly higher than ever whilst lying on the ground, agreed.

On the following day, the path of poppies did not seem quite as magical. Lolly's wings were no longer shining and Zigzag seemed to treat her a little less like a princess. But Zigzag was the 'Keeper of the Potion' and so she dared not complain. Instead, knowing it would make her feel better again, Lolly asked for some more magic potion. Zigzag agreed but again gave one condition;

"That you give me your wings." Said Zigzag.

"After I give you my wings I will have nothing left to give you," said Lolly. "My wings are all I have that make me a faerie. Without them I will no longer be who I am."

"That is the condition I have set." Said Zigzag and left it at that. Lolly, needing the magic potion to fly higher than ever whilst lying on the ground, took the potion and watched as Zigzag attached her wings to

his own back. Then Zigzag began to fly, up and up, higher and higher into the sky.

Now, Zigzag had not had the benefit of the Elder faerie's knowledge of the magic of flight. If he had, then he would have known this; that his happiness was a twisted happiness, brought about by his own cleverness at getting Lolly to part with her wings. Faeries can only fly properly in true happiness. Twisted happiness never lasts and so Zigzag came crashing down to the ground, landing with a big 'thump'. There he lay, dead. The bottle of potion lay next to him, smashed, with it's contents seeping into the soil.

Zigzag's magic was gone. The spell that caused Lolly to fall in love with him was broken. But oh, how she grieved for that potion. Looking up from the patch of dead ground where the potion had spilled, Lolly saw that the path of poppies had disappeared. She had walked so far along it that she was not even any longer in the forest. The forest was no longer in sight. Lolly found that she was lost in a bleak and desolate landscape with a blackened sky. She was all alone in a place she did not know. Lolly cried for her potion, her wings and her community.

The community, now consisting of only ninety-nine faeries, had watched and waited for Lolly to return. They knew she was far, far away in a place unknown to them, but none of them really understood quite how far away or quite how unknown to them that place really was. The path of poppies was one they could not, dare not follow as the fast decaying flowers carried a foul stench of confusion, selfishness and death.

When Lolly cried, the whole community heard her heart breaking and called out in her direction. Lolly walked in the direction of their voice and the Elders walked in the direction of hers. They found each other when each had walked a thousand miles. The Elders were both overjoyed and filled with sadness when they found her.

"I need potion. Help me get some potion." demanded the tired and wingless Lolly.

"We thought you cried out because you wanted to come home." Said one confused Elder.

"I do. I love you all. Get me some potion and I promise to come back with you."

"But look what this potion has done to you, Lolly. Where are your wings? Why is your heart really breaking? Now that we have found you, we cannot allow you to return with us yet. That potion you have in your veins and in your mind may poison the whole community and we cannot let that happen. When you do come back with you must be one of us. Please be one of us again, Lolly. We are only ninety-nine in number now and many will be lost to broken hearts if you are gone forever."

The Elders decided that the best course of action would be for Lolly to

spend some time on The Mountain of the Two Witches from where she would see the whole world. There, she might be able to recover and re-learn the magic of Courage, Strength, Self-worth, Love for others and Flight. "Those things are not magic!" protested Lolly. "I have travelled far, along the long and winding path of poppies. I have learned things that you did not teach me. I have experienced magic so powerful that I do not need wings to fly. With my potion I can fly higher than ever whilst lying on the ground!"

But there was no more potion and there was nowhere else for her to go. So Lolly went to The Mountain of the Two Witches from where she could see the whole world. The witches lived next door to each other. One was VERY ugly. She ate snakes and foxes and even the souls of faeries when she could. The other was VERY beautiful, loved the world and the realm she lived in and everything contained therein. When Lolly met them, she could not tell them apart.

Lolly stayed on the mountain for many days and nights. During the days, Lolly would look down the mountain at the world. She could see the lighter side of the forest from where her community were sending their love. She could see the dark side where she had walked with Zigzag and it seemed that the sun never shone there no matter what time of day it was. Beyond the forest she could see the bleak and desolate land with it's blackened sky.

Every night the witches came. Standing either side of her, they said strange and confusing things and some things that made perfect sense. Lolly could not tell whether she was awake or asleep or whether she was hearing truth or lies. Pain would shriek through her hot and cold sweating body and her mind screamed for the potion that Lolly believed to be her home.

Gradually, as the nights passed, Lolly began to realise that the beautiful witch was talking about things that Lolly was more familiar with; Love, bravery, beauty. The ugly witch began to look somehow smaller and further away. She was diminishing and so was the misery she inflicted on Lolly with her wicked spells and dreams of sharp objects.

Time passed. It was a long time and the ugly witch had gone. Lolly learned that the remaining witch's name was Mandika and that she was the great-great grandmother of all the Elder faeries. Mandika reminded Lolly of who she was, where she came from and where she really belonged. Lolly learned once more about the nature of true magic, happiness and realised that she was strong enough to resist the twisted magic of the potion.

Then, one day, Lolly saw that very bright lights were coming up the mountainside towards her. As the lights drew nearer, she saw that the lights shone from the wings of the ninety-nine faeries of her

community. Lolly was overjoyed to see them. The ninety-nine faeries were led by five Elders, each carrying a golden box.

"These boxes contain gifts of magic for you." said one.

Lolly opened each box. The first contained Courage. The second, Strength. The third contained Self-worth and the fourth, Love for others. But it was the contents of the fifth box that made Lolly cry tears of joy. In that box was beautiful pair of wings.

"But where did these come from?" asked Lolly.

"Every faerie in your community gave a little of their magic." said one of the Elders "That included a little piece of each of our wings in order that you may fly with us again. The magic of one faerie is truly wonderful but the magic of all the faeries put together is the most powerful magic in our realm."

Lolly put on her new wings containing the magic of flight of ninety-nine faeries and her light shone brighter than ever before.

"Come home Lolly, you've been away for a long, long time." said an Elder.

"I'm coming home." said Lolly.

Ninety-nine faeries had come up the mountain and a whole community of one hundred flew home together.

One night, many years later, when Lolly herself was an Elder and one of the greatest teachers of faerie magic, a strange wind blew through the forest. The Middlers became restless and stayed up late. Lolly waited until the hour before dawn and went outside. There she saw a Middler faerie sitting all alone on a rock, looking out into the forest, waiting for the adventure and excitement to come. Lolly sat down on the rock beside her and spoke of the magic of Courage, Strength, Self-worth, Love for others and flight.

But the Middler faerie wasn't listening.