

Belinda the Bubble Dancer Belinda loves to dance. It's the only thing she's ever wanted to do, and she does it better than anyone else. As a matter of fact, Belinda is the only known bubble dancer in the world. She invented it. Bubble dancing, Belinda's own peculiar art form, is what she does when she dances nude, not naked, while blowing bubbles made with a little plastic ring and a jar full of dish soap.

First, she drops her clothes to the ground, then purses her lips and blows the first bubble away, like a kiss. They float up, then waft and dip down, to land safe on her skin.

Belinda could be a live Christmas tree, decorated with billions of glowing, clear and yet colored breakable balls that shimmer when she sways in the wind. Waving her arms as she does never hurts all her layers and layers of pumping, breakable hearts, that quiver all the same as she moves with a gangly, yet graceful flop-flying of limbs. She becomes, as she spins, an immense, flashing diamond, a crystallized rainbow shooting off colored sparks, tinted from behind from Belinda's pink skin.

The happiest day of her life, she thought, was when she found out she could actually get paid for dancing the dance of a thousand dreams.

And so, that is how the Cha-Cha Taco Bar and Grill becomes known, after Belinda steps in, as the first fast food joint in the world with a stripper. They've found the system really works well, because the bumps and grinds are timed just long enough for her to bounce off a few tables and then into the back room before all her bubbles start to pluck and pop off. This gives some starving wolf with huge greedy eyes time to tackle a taco and beer while whistling and staring at Belinda's young body through bubbles, while he salivates to the beat of the music, unaware of the hot sauce dribbling down his chin.

So in bounces Belinda, onto the front counter, skipping and twirling and tripping and swirling her long curly hair encrusted with bubbles, in the usual way. She circles slowly, almost floating at first, then spins faster, jumping up and around, never touching down. She hops blithely over the paper plates and plastic cups, steps nimbly between the elbows connected to lip-smacking gringos who call out and clap loudly, spraying food all around. The glittering crystal cocoon protects her from all the leering red eyes. So she laughs and continues to dance. And all goes well — she's an unusual talent, so the manager never fails to slide her cheque under her dressing-room door, and provides the lustre-glow dish soap, which says nothing at all about tips — until the day that the man with the mustache comes in to try a chile surprise.

He's tall and he's thin, sharp nose, beady eyes, with an oily black mustache shaped like a frown. A black and white pancho, from what it looks like, is all that separates his neatly folded face from his dusty, sandaled feet.

Well, this confused cretin finds Belinda annoying, as he keeps missing his mouth when her dainty feet come too close to his plate. The whole thing, he thinks, is in very bad taste.

"Carramba!" he shouts, and spits on her dreams, using his straw and some kidney beans as a makeshift peashooter. She snarls and shouts as he picks off her pretensions, with laughter so taunting that she misses her beat. She starts feeling clumsy, and claws at the air, feeling so much like a freezing, freshly plucked chicken who finds out she can't fly that she notices the stares.

The others laugh and join in, spitting beans and shouting and running round her in a ring. Belinda screams. The dance becomes tribal, and they hoot and they holler and slobber, as the circle goes faster, gets wider, and the deadly kidney beans fly.

"Shut up," she spits out through clenched teeth, "you cactus, you pinhead, you prick!" These all rate, by the way, as the worst insults she knows.

This makes him angry, so he tries to kick her, but she lunges and bites off his toes.

"Well, there's no talking to someone like that," he decided. Then he turns, and finally goes. But he walks with a limp, leaving a thin trail of fresh guilt for her to follow should she ever begin to think straight.

After that, she gives up on dancing, and takes to playing with a large cellophane ball, which she confuses with the famous crystal



"Please, no!" she shouts, afraid that they'll burst all her bubbles.

"But not now," she shrieks, as all her happy-maybeday hopefuls pop off.

So she falls, deflated and naked, down to the ground, and lies whimpering and snorfling into the back of her hand. Exposed, she feels like a heavy and huge shapeless lump, burbling and sputtering and frying in her own ugly fat.

"It's for your own good," says the man with the meat sauce covered mustache severely, "now go on living instead!"

With that, her features prepare for attack: chin drawn up, eyebrows pulled down. Her whole rubbery face is gathered tight and scrunched up into her nose, so that she looks like a balloon tied too tight, about to explode, if her sharpened stare pokes through.

kind. So now, she always runs away from what she thinks she sees coming. It's only if she's sure no one else is around that she'll strip off her clothes, and dance the old dream.

Like all crazed helium addicts, if you look at her wrong, she might snap at your toes. She's quite utterly mad, it's a pity, but she's really quite harmless. She keeps hoping, however, that one day her head will burst open, explode in a puffy cloud of pink smoke.

"Then," she says to herself once again, "Yes, then I can float off the lips of the breeze, like a kiss, and finally dream."

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