



No Man's Land

Ruth Fowler

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First song, dress on...

“It sounds like an obvious statement when I say that girls don’t grow up wanting to be strippers, but you’d be surprised. Most people – civilians that is – seem to think that even in the cradle we were wrapping ourselves around a greasy pole and grinding our hips to Britney Spears....When we get drunk the regrets come out. ‘I’m a good girl, really I am,’ sighs one. She takes a drag of her cigarette and I think to myself, I’m not a good girl. Not really. Not anymore. But I sure as hell would like to be.”

With forty-three countries, twelve boats, dozens of flights, a fistful of “life experience” behind her and a lot of ambition fueling her dreams, twenty-five-year old Ruth Fowler arrives in New York City. A Brit with a Cambridge degree and a middle-class background, she doesn’t think it will be too hard to start a new life. But getting a work visa in post-9/11 U.S.A. proves to be tricky, and to kick-start a writing career, Fowler starts documenting her experiences. She funds her efforts with cash-in-hand jobs and a stint writing for *The Village Voice*, but it doesn’t take long for funds and hope to run out – sending her to the heart of Manhattan’s dark underbelly, the strip clubs and “Champagne Rooms” of Times Square. As “Mimi,” she has a chance of survival. But when this persona threatens to consume every vestige of Fowler’s identity, when her life spirals out of control and her true self remains so deeply buried that it seems impossible to resurrect, relying on “Mimi” seems like the biggest mistake she has ever made. *No Man’s Land* is a shocking, raw account about losing identity—and finding it again.

No Man's Land Details

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From Reader Review No Man's Land for online ebook

Caty says

Self-involvement, sex as melodramatic sin, and a sense of everyone around her as being even more revolting than she believed herself to be. Add that to a total lack of accountability attached to creating an alter ego that motivated her into stripping. Oh, and a truly disgusting store of racism and classism.

Patti Carroll-frey says

Not your typical memoir with a solid timeline of events in her life. More vague with many descriptives of times in her life. Incomplete sentences followed by more. An interesting way to write a memoir. Very hard to describe exactly her style. I found it difficult, nonetheless, to stay interested and truly follow it.

Devon says

Pretentious.

Tom says

I was a man who worked at a strip club and the 'insight' that is offered by Ruth 'Mimi' Fowler is nothing surprising to anyone on the inside or to anyone who has spent any length of time around sex workers.

Her view is the prototypical narcissistic one that is expected of individuals in the sex industry. It is a cliché look at an industry that is ripe to be viewed through a much less narrow lens. While she does briefly touch upon the others that are not the banal, vapid, self-loathing, materialistic, hedonistic individuals that she portrays herself to be it is in too narrow a focus. It is truly unfortunate that her view was one of hedonistic excess that could have been easily avoided. She tries to draw sympathy to her plight (and that of her duality [trying to pull upon the Jungian duality of 'man' and falling far short:]) and it is pathetic in its attempt. The dichotomy of sex as power and submission has merit, but she falls flat in her ability to actually portray this in any sympathetic or realistic fashion.

This book falls far short of the mark it tried to hit. It is neither truly informative to the non-initiated and it doesn't titillate enough to be engaging. It is a sophomoric effort by an author who is barely adequate to pound the keys she types upon.

Amy Goalen says

This book called out to me to be read. I picked it up and was just thumbing the first few pages and before I knew it I was 100 pages deep and couldn't stop. I read this book in about 2 days. This book is incredibly revealing of the author in what are her darkest days. The way she is able to write about a drug addled

existence and alcohol filled stupors are rife with abrasive language and a biting tongue. I am not saying that I am offended in any way by the language because it painted a very real, raw, and honest picture of this world-her world at the time. Because of her coarse language and abrasive writing style this book is NOT for the faint of heart. Having never been anywhere near the world that she describes in this book I found myself attached to her character and wanting to know that she found her way out of this hellish existence. I just HAD to finish the book as soon as possible. The last couple of chapters were a bit hard to follow at times, but you got the general idea of what was happening. The details, names and times seem irrelevant to the narrative anyway...excellent story, superb writing, and pretty dark.

Tere Burton says

No Man's Land is a fairly disgusting read but I certainly learned a lot about what goes on in strip clubs, yuck!

Rosemary says

What a hack. Entertaining just for the bad writing.

Katie says

What an awful book. I bought this because the description sounded pretty good. English writer comes to America, ends up stripping to pay the bills...I thought it'd be fairly interesting, but goes to show you, ya can't judge a book by it's description.

I think the biggest problem with Girl, Undressed is that the author just isn't likable. You don't really care if she wins or loses or how her story ends because you don't really like her. I understand that when you work in a strip club and then write a book about it, there will be some colorful language, and believe you me, I can swear with the best of them, but even I found her to be largely classless in how she writes and the language she employs.

The other big problem with the book is how she tells her stories. Prior to stripping in NY, she traveled the world, even having spent time on boats....but the way she integrates her different lives just do not work. The whole book is disjointed and unfortunately even the few stories that do hold you attention are overshadowed by how poorly the rest of the book is written. I can't really think of any reason to tell someone to read this.

Flash says

Why the hell would an obviously highly intelligent Cambridge graduate want to become a stripper? Well this book charts the authors journey into the seedy world of the sex industry. She starts out using it as an easy way to make a quick buck, with no intentions of it ever becoming a career move, but soon it becomes a way of life, it's grip getting ever tighter.

I'm not sure if this book is more disturbing for men (I can never go into a lap dancing club again after reading it) or women who may think that they are not the sort to do these things, but then again, neither was Ruth at to begin with.

Tracey says

Adult nonfiction/memoir. A stripper tells all, but rambles a bit in the process. Fowler is a writer that turned to stripping when she couldn't get work (due to visa problems)--she comes off as one of those bad spoken word poets sometimes--loves to rant, hear herself speak.

Dawn Betts-Green (Dinosaur in the Library) says

This wasn't a bad book, and I'd like to give it another 1/2 star. But I can't really place my finger on the exact reason I didn't particularly care for it. Fowler seems schizophrenic at times rather than living two lives, which she says is what occurred even though both lives seem rather blended. She jumps back and forth between tales of the stripping life and past experiences that don't really connect in any way most of the time. I think I would have liked it better had it been more organized in that respect. I wasn't there, so I can't say how much is actually true and how much is poetic license. However, the way she writes leaves one wondering is it's more of the latter than the former. She also discusses writing articles on immigration, etc., but never really gives us any of it. Given the context, she might have come off as more truthful if she had.

Daniel says

This book is really not much more than a first-hand look at one person's self absorbed descent into so-called depravity of stripping/promiscuity/sexual excess as told through the looking glass of a really decent education (something you are reminded of FREQUENTLY). But if you don't mind taking your mind for a field trip through the gutter, it's a good read. Not for the squeamish. Not for the faint of heart. Not making Oprah's bookclub any time soon, but entertaining enough for a commute or a stint on the beach.

Mazola1 says

No Man's Land is the memoir of a British Cambridge graduate with aspirations of being a writer who does a turn as a stripper in New York. It's a fairly unpleasant book, full of nasty little stories and ugly little descriptions that make everything from a cup of coffee to sex seem unbearably sordid.

The writing is sometimes interesting and edgy, but mostly it smacks of trying too hard to be original and gritty, almost to the point of seeming to be a self-conscious parody of Joycean stream of consciousness. It's littered with stuff which seems more pretentious and forced than creative and original. Like this: "The climax is a little death, that long awaited, never-talked about spatter of liquid dissemination," and this: "People from the past always turn up again in New York, circle around like fetid water in a blocked sink, a scuzz of oil, a jism of grease."

Or this passage, which could serve as a metaphor for the entire book: "I turn abruptly, walk over to the

bathroom, squat over the toilet taking care not to let my dress trail on the floor, and then violently and efficiently expunge the contents of my intestines into a toilet stinking of piss, traces of white powder on the floor, sopping rags of pulped tissue paper around shards of glass, and the sour, stale smell of old alcohol, cheap perfume."

These, and countless other dreary and somewhat nauseating passages are used to chart Fowler's experiences in New York and on a yacht sometime before. The timeline is fragmented, the images sad and tawdry, the characters petty and cruel. The whole book seems pointless. But maybe, when all is said and done, that's the point.

David says

I want to start out with the fact that I did enjoy this book. I wasn't sure I was going to, deciding to read it after seeing Fowler's review where she is supposed to be saying why she doesn't like Obreht's book but ends up mainly bashing the MFA system in an overgeneralized kind of way, but I did. There is some really good writing here, some moments of wonderful insight and humanity where Fowler really connects with the reader. However, there are other times where it falls apart. Some parts seem more like posturing, more bitter and angry than really works for the writing. Strangely, some of it feels elitist. Granted, Fowler has reasons to feel bitter and angry, as well as elitist. Still, I think this would have been a better book if she had more distance between the writing and her rage. Fowler seems to be of the have-to-live-to-write school and whereas I think that is true to some extent, that isn't the only requirement. Just having darkness isn't the final step, in my opinion. Of course, some of this could have been what the publisher did to make her book, in their minds, more marketable. I just don't know. Regardless, though I did enjoy this book, some of it was hit or miss. However, I think Fowler will be one to watch in future. She is a good writer and I think her next book will be better, now that she's gotten this one out of her.

Anubis says

This book was a complete chore to get through. The narrator is so vapid and self-involved that I found myself disliking her from the beginning. For a book that sells itself as a truthful memoir of someone who works in the sex industry, this book lacked a major component - a narrator you can trust. She self-edits so much out of the book to protect her ego and make her appear more like a victim than someone who chose the path she walks - reminding the reader at every step that she is extremely intelligent, beautiful, and has lived a difficult life before coming to New York. While she briefly touches on lives of those who work the clubs out of desperation, the story as she constantly reminds the reader is all about "me, me, me." Her narrative jumps from the present to the past, but rather than making her story seem more complete, the transitions are cumbersome and the glimpses into life before her move to NY don't add to her story; they just remind the reader that there was no dramatic difference between her past and present self (other than the addition of a glittery G-string).
