

Dontcha' Wanta' Fanta?

By Auriane de Rudder

At the time, this seemed like a logical idea. It started on a Thursday morning on the sofa with my friend Svana. Svana is a hot blonde girl who loves vodka. This, we had in common. Svana was also broke, another common thread between us. Svana wanted to go out that night. And wouldn't you know it? So did I. We agreed that nothing makes a broke girl feel less broke than a temporary hold on reality; a real girl's night out. But how would we afford it?

"We could panhandle. Do you play the guitar?" I asked her.

"You know I don't, and besides, I'm not some dirty street beggar. Leave that to the guys on Broadway," she rolled her eyes, "Ooh, maybe we can sell off my Adderall," she perked up.

"We're not fuckin' drugs dealers," I said.

"They're not even drugs. Besides they make me too jittery," she chirped.

"Okay, maybe. That's a solid start," I said, "But I'd rather do something less...white-trashy? Pills, you know. It's so trailer." We sat on Svana's sofa, pondering other money-making schemes as her television buzzed in the background.

"Dontcha', dontcha'...Dontcha' wanta'," both Svana and I bobbed our heads to the sing-song jingle coming from the television set.

We looked up and sang the song in unison, "Dontcha' wanta'...wanta' Fanta!"

“Man, I wanna’ be a Fantana. Maybe we can dress like them for Halloween,” Svana said.

“Oh my god how do you know what they’re called?” I poked her.

“Shut up! Whatever, I like them!” Svana was actually blushing, and I felt a little bad.

“Yeah, I guess I could rock that. Needs more glitter, but still, I’m down with the mono-chromatic thing. And I like her tights,” I said.

“Oh totally. And 10-4 on adding glitter,” Svana agreed.

“But Halloween isn’t, for, like...ever,” I pointed out.

“But...” Svana’s voice sweetened whenever she had a good/bad idea, “We should, like, do it anyway,” she smiled and stood up from the sofa.

Our plan for the day was then secured: Svana and I would dress up as Fantanas and sell sodas on the street. This was our great money-making scheme. I *know*, but, according to us, this was a good plan for several reasons. First, we would make awesome costumes, which was fun, and also would serve as our going-out ensembles for later that night. This meant we didn’t have to go shopping for a cheap girls’ night dress, and you know what they say about a penny saved. Secondly, this was our scheme! We could buy the sodas in bulk and use our sex appeal to make a fortune. We could easily charge a dollar for a soda we bought for 50¢. That’s 100% profit, ya’ll. We would have so much beer money, it would be ridiculous. We would have so much beer money, it would actually be vodka money! Third, lugging the sodas and strutting our stuff was going to be a workout. We would pretty much be exercising the whole time. This was the trifecta of good plans. We were going to be sexy, rich, and skinny. And as our reward for our work as

America's soda-selling sweethearts? We were going to have a fabulous girls' night. What could possibly go wrong?

I left Svana's apartment and returned to my own to put together the best orange Fantana outfit I could scrounge up. Svana agreed to do the same, and got to work putting together a citrus version for herself. We would meet later in the day, and, if our scheme took off the way we planned, we would be successful soda-selling machines before happy hour.

Svana arrived later that afternoon, toting a cooler full of different flavors of Fanta. While I was hard at work creating a huge sign that read DONTCHA' WANTA' FANTA, Svana kept herself busy by spray painting our cooler hot pink.

Our outfits were absurd. Svana pulled off her citrus Fantana look with a kind of apocalyptic panache. She had covered herself in torn neon yellow strips of fabric, layered over neon yellow tights. Underneath she wore a canary yellow body suit. She had tied a yellow strip of fabric around her head, creating a sort of hot-chick-Rambo thing I was very into. She looked like a Fantana who was ready to go into battle. Her look said, "Buy my sodas...Or else." My orange Fantana getup was a more cabaret meets Copa-Cabana meets (of course) the Pussy Cat Dolls. I wore matching neon booty shorts, tights and fishnets, all in a shade of hideous neon orange, along with a few layered neon yellow tank tops. It was cold outside, but we would not be deterred. Beauty, especially Apocalyptic/Copa-Cabana beauty, has no season.

We hit the streets. Specifically, we hit upper Broadway in downtown Nashville, since it was pretty much the hub of drunken commerce in the city. We paraded in front of my former workplace, the Broadway Brewhouse, a spectacle for all—including my former bosses--to see. We vlogged, holding up our spray-painted sign. We danced with scraggly looking homeless men

to draw attention to our cause. But what *was* our cause, exactly? Other than booze, we didn't have one. We weren't selling many sodas and Svana started to worry.

"With the money we spent on the cooler, the spray paint, and the sodas," she started to calculate, "There is no way in hell we are going to break even," she said, deflated.

"We could at least make *some* of the money back, right?" I asked.

"That isn't the point, Auriane. We need to step it up," Svana's Rambo thing was really working for her, here.

I did a quick mental inventory: We looked damn cute, and since neither of had been drinking, we were being unusually appropriate. There was no nudity, no profanity. I wouldn't call us a class act, but I wouldn't call us street trash, either. Still, the only people who seemed to want our sodas were the street bums of downtown Nashville. What were we doing wrong?

"Maybe we should give out some samples," I suggested.

"The homeless guys all want one," Svana pointed out.

We aren't monsters, and we needed some free advertising, so we happily passed out complimentary sodas to the local bums. Soon, we were crowded by smiling groups of homeless men. They sat with us, sipping grape, orange, or citrus sodas through the gaps between their missing teeth. Men with crusty beards full of crumbs, their clothing stained with urine and street muck, put their arms around one another in an odd act of soda-solidarity. Together, we chanted an off-key and down-and-out version of the soda brand's catchy theme song:

"Dontcha', dontcha'...Dontcha' wanta' Fanta?" We sounded like a group of Muppets on downers.

As our numbers grew, non-homeless people finally started to take notice. Our advertising campaign had worked. Svana and I, in our neon gear, looked extra bright in contrast to our hobo pals. Pedestrians and tourists stopped to take pictures with us, convinced we were the *real* Fantanas. I kissed babies, and shook hands. We tried to sell our sodas, but were still slapped with rejection again and again. Our public loved us, but they weren't buying the goods. What were we doing wrong? We were only asking a dollar, but even the more affluent looking of our fans refused to cough it up. Our homeless buddies were making more money than us just sitting on their pimply butts and panhandling.

"We need a new gimmick," Svana whispered to me as she posed with two short men in matching soccer jerseys.

"Tell them it's for charity," I joked.

Svana looked at me, and smiled. I smiled back.

"Tell them it's for kids," I added, "Whatever works."

Svana nodded in agreement. What's a good friend worth if they can't enable your worst ideas?

One young mother, pushing a double-stroller with two blonde, curly-haired children approached, her husband at her side.

"What are you girls doing out here?" She laughed a little at our ridiculous outfits, but seemed nice enough.

"We're raising money for children," I spat out.

"Cancer kids," Svana added.

“Yeah. Exactly. Sorry, we’ve been campaigning for hours. We’re working toward eradicating children’s lymphoma. So…donta’ wanta’ Fanta?” I asked.

The couple purchased two immediately and shook our hands in admiration.

Our lie brought a greater response than the boring old truth, and we started to sell a soda can here and there. Still, it wasn’t enough. The day was getting late, we weren’t making any money, and Svana and I sure as hell didn’t want to lug all these sodas back home. Even our homeless pals were starting to take off.

With each passer-by, we changed or embellished our lie. First, we were selling sodas for cancer kids. Plain and simple.

“Save the cancer kids,” we would shout in between verses of our Fantana song.

After some pointed questioning from skeptical customers, we specified that our “nonprofit organization” was actually the Make a Wish Foundation. This added to our credibility. People loved us, and our cause. The name recognition of the foundation, along with our energetic display had our cooler emptying faster and faster. But there’s a party-pooper in every crowd, and after being asked by one particularly savvy street patron to prove our affiliation with organization, we had to tweak our story yet again.

Svana had a stroke of genius and started telling people we were raising money for my little brother, who was only whispers away from death and desperately wanted to go to Disney Land.

“Poor Pinky,” I sighed to one customer, “That was his nickname, ever since he went bald…”

Svana had to cover her mouth to keep from laughing.

Then the police arrived. Seems Svana and I had failed to get the proper permit to sell sodas on the street. There was no mention of our lies, despite a growing faction of tourists mentioning our cancer-kid discrepancies to the officer. Seems Johnny Law didn't care much about the moral side of the argument. We didn't have the paperwork, we didn't pay to play, and we had to go. Shut down by the man, we passed out the last few sodas for free. A divided group of people comprised of our fans and our haters booed at the police and at us respectively as we lugged our cooler off into the sunset.

Around the corner and away from all the booing, Svana and I stopped to count our money.

"140. Not too bad. After what we spent, that's like, 50 bucks each," she said, "Should we, like, give some to charity?"

"Oh," I had to think about it, "I guess we can," I wasn't entirely sold on the idea, because 50 bucks each isn't much.

"Bartenders here make, like, three bucks an hour. Isn't tipping them sorta' like charity?" I reasoned.

"Good point," Svana took very little convincing. She pushed the cash into her bra, and proceeded onward, lugging the hot pink cooler.

We walked toward Svana's car, a beat up, green tin-can, and loaded up the cooler and sign.

Directly across from our parking spot, there was an unidentified ritzy celebration being held.

There was a short line in front of the Hilton, and everyone waiting around was well-dressed and good looking. I glanced at Svana. I glanced at the Fanta sign.

"Hey," I said, pointing toward the event across the street.

“Wanna’ try to get into that party? Maybe they’ll think we’re, like, brand ambassadors for Fanta,” I asked.

“Or Make a Wish,” Svana laughed, “It’s not the worst idea. People have been taking pictures with us all day. I mean, we have *fans*,” she laughed again.

She grabbed our makeshift cardboard sign, and marched across the street. That’s Svana. Always down for a party.

Upon entering the lobby of the hotel building, one hundred eyes darted our way. We were in a Gucci-Pucci crowd. And us? We were dressed as sodee-pops. Slender women in stiletto heels clicked by, arm in arm with their tuxedoed dates. We didn’t fit in, and people stared. Even so, no one asked us to leave. We were surprised when no one flinched as we walked straight past the line at the door.

“I think it’s working; I think they think we work here,” I said, gripping the Fanta sign in my hands.

I looked around the lobby, trying to figure out what this event was all about.

“Look,” Svana pointed toward the front desk.

Strung up was a large, glittering white sign that read: Nashville Fashion Week.

A total fashion and style hag, Svana was flushed with anticipation, “Maybe we can see a fashion show!” She said and marched to the front desk. I followed.

“Hi,” I said, “I work with Format magazine, and we’re covering your event tonight. Tell me, which way is the next fashion show?” I handed the woman at the front desk an old business card from a magazine writing gig. I had held on to the card for just this purpose.

The woman at the front desk had an odd familiarity about her. Her sharp features; beaky nose, thin lips, and beady eyes, reminded me of someone. I couldn't quite place her. She examined us. She looked at my neon orange fishnets and at Svana's Rambo-headband. Her eyes stopped on our sign; Drippy paint on poster board, not exactly profesh. I guess I was a little off-brand for an arts journalist covering Nashville Fashion Week. But whatever. Svana quickly put the sign behind her back and smiled innocently at the woman.

"You're a writer?" She asked.

"Yes, yep. That's me. Hence the card," I replied.

I wasn't lying. Okay, I guess *technically* I was, but this wasn't any worse than lying about Pinky, my non-existent cancerous brother.

"Hmph," the woman narrowed her gaze, and looked slowly at Svana and back at me, "I thought you were selling sodas on the street and hanging out with homeless men," she said flatly.

"Oh my gosh, that's why you look familiar! You bought a soda from us," I gushed, nudging Svana.

"Oh wow, so you met us already, that's right. Yeah, my friend, my *writer* friend...she's helping me with my little fundraising effort. For the kids," Svana smiled innocently and put her arm around my shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

At that, the woman turned around, and walked away from us. We watched as she alerted two security guards, and pointed toward us.

"You know, these people are snobs," I said hurriedly.

"I agree, who wears a tux in Nashville, anyway?" Svana had already started walking.

“Yeah for real, and why is there even a Fashion Week in Nashville? Nashville doesn’t have fashion,” We were speed walking toward the door. We left the building before anyone could physically remove us.

“Where should we go now?” Svana asked as we plopped down in to the bucket seats of her 90s coupe.

“East side?” I asked.

“Oh my god, I almost forgot. Tiesto is playing at Limelight,” she said, turning the key in the ignition twice before the car started.

EDM has been dead to me since the 90s, but Svana adored it. We still had our sign, and we were still in our costumes. We hadn’t been classy enough to get into Faaaaashion Weeeek, dahling, but we could surely get into a lousy nightclub without paying cover, right? This time, I avoided using any outdated business card and used the oldest trick in the book: Tits and ass. We were past the line and in the door in no time. Plus, since we looked so crazy holding up our sign, people still assumed we worked for Fanta. People really go nuts for those Fantanas, and loads of free drinks started flying our way. I was unaware being dressed up as a soda could cause such a stir, but man, we had some hardcore fans!

After a few more cocktails, and a few opening acts, the main attraction took the stage. The crowd swelled toward the front of the room, enclosing both Svana and I, squishing us against our crumpled sign. The beats began and I started to feel an uncomfortable grinding against my ass. I turned around and saw a sweaty, underage, blonde raver-type, pushing his groin into my hip violently. His jaw jutted well in front of the rest of his face and plastered with a goofy grin, the guy looked *special*. He was not, indeed, special. He was just on Ecstasy.

Now, look. I'm no prude. I am certainly no angel. Maybe I deserved to feel this creep's nut-sweat all over me that night. But if there's one thing that will send me into a fury, it's having to repeat myself. So, when I politely asked this moron to get the fuck off of me three times, and he just kept hideously humping away? I was furious.

I wanted to hit the guy. But as I had learned with Paul, hitting was not the answer. I pushed him away, but E-face just kept humping toward me, grinning that hideous grin. Since there was no escape in sight, I decided to teach him a lesson. I leaned in and pulled him closer, wrapping my arms around his waist. I smiled and groped him, lower and lower, until I found his wallet, and removed it from his pocket. I danced a slow dance in a circle, grinding against him as I did.

“Oh yeah, turn that ass around,” the idiot shouted out.

I removed the cash from the wallet and tossed it to Svana.

“Get rid of that, will ya'?” I asked.

Not one to ask questions, Svana was game.

“Sure, I gotta' pee anyway,” She turned and started walking, “Be right back!” She shouted.

E-Face was confused when I went back to pushing him away. This alerted him that something was amiss. But what could it be? He stopped his idiotic dancing and stood, looking at me, and around the room. He turned in a full circle, as if lost. Then, he started reaching his hands in each pocket again and again. His face went from blissfully stupid to stupid and angry. Maybe somebody should have kept their hands and groin to themselves, hmm?

“Where's my fucking wallet?” He yelled over the bass.

“I don't know what you're talking about, man,” I turned toward the stage and continued dancing.

I danced for two lengthy songs without any interruption from E-Face or his boner. I was surprised he had given up so easily, especially since it was clear that I had robbed him.

“I knew he was dumb, but Jesus that’s really dumb,” I thought.

I was getting sweaty and I was getting sober. I wanted to hit the bar, and started scanning the crowd for Svana. I surveyed the room. She wasn’t at the bar. She wasn’t near me in the sweaty dance pit.

“Hmmm. Where else would she be?” I thought.

My eyes darted to the speakers on each side of the stage. She wasn’t dancing on those, either. Weird. I looked toward the entrance, maybe she had stepped out for a smoke. And there she was. Svana was at the front door, in handcuffs. I stormed over, pushing sweaty bodies out of my way.

“What in the hell is going on here?” I demanded of the police officer imprisoning my friend.

“Well she’s a pickpocket according to this guy,” the officer gestured at, you guessed it, fuckin’ E-Face.

Ugh.

“No, no, no. She’s not a thief. No way, no day,” I told the officer, who looked unconvinced.

“She is, too! Both of them are fucking thieves! The blonde and the brunette, they stole my fucking wallet!” he yelled.

I mean, yeah, we did. But this guy had, like, *zero* sense of humor.

“Look,” I reasoned with the officer.

I had a plan. I had been lying all day, and saw no point in stopping now. Besides, what kind of friend would I be if I left Svana to hang for my crime? I have morals.

“These two are always pulling this shit. He pretends he doesn’t know her, she pretends she doesn’t know him, they get into some weird situation, and you know...it’s, like, their thing. Their *sexual* thing,” I raised an eyebrow at the officer, and ran my fingertips down his arm, slowing down the word ‘sexual.’

“Frankly I’m a little tired of getting caught up in the middle of it,” I said, rolling my eyes again.

I leaned in to the officer more.

The officer didn’t budge. But he was listening.

“He said he doesn’t know her,” he replied, his eyes fixed on my cleavage.

Tits and ass, ladies and gentlemen. Tits. And. Ass.

“That’s the point,” I told him, “Of course he said that. That’s the *game*. But seriously? He’s taking it too far.”

I turned to Svana, “You should really break up with him, girl. This shit is getting ridiculous.”

The music was too loud for Svana to hear what was going on, so she just nodded, tears streaming down her trademark angelic face.

“Hmph,” the cop grunted, considering my story.

He looked at Svana, a svelte blonde with swimming pool blue eyes. He reached toward her cuffs, and began unlocking them.

“You seem like nice girls,” he said, slipping the cuffs off Svana’s wrists, “But I don’t want to see you girls in this--“

“Fucking run!” I yelled the second Svana was free.

And we did. We ran past the officer; we ran past the entrance line. We ran past the parking lot, and past our parked car. We ran across the intersection, darting through traffic. We ran and ran and ran, all the while, still hanging on to our cardboard Fanta sign. Our platform yellow and orange shoes clomped like horses’ hooves as we trotted away. Two streaks of orange and citrus soda, we were, sprinting down the street at top speed, never looking back to notice that no one was following us.

Almost a mile into our run, I stopped to heave for air. My stopping point happened to be right next to my favorite East Nashville Bar.

“Maybe, we should stop!” I called out to Svana, who had continued to run.

She stopped suddenly and bent forward a little, wrapping her arms around her ribs, also heaving.

“How convenient,” Svana said nodding toward the bar entrance.

“I feel like we earned this,” I said.

And hadn’t we? We had completed our plan for the day, and then some. We had made friends, made money, and worked out. Sure, the friends were homeless, and the money was gone. And yeah, the work out was running away from cops, but we had done it. Mission accomplished. It was time to kick back and celebrate our successes, right?

Once inside Red Door East, Svana and I got a good look at how haggard we looked. Sweaty, panting, and sporting sagging and ripped versions of our original outfits, we looked less like Fantanas and more like fugitives.

“Fugitive life,” I held up my tall vodka soda and clinked glasses with Svana.

“How are we paying for these? I spent my money at Limelight,” Svana sighed.

“Girl, I *just* said fugitive life,” I told her, pulling a small fold of bills—E-Face’s bills—from my cleavage.

Svana laughed and raised the torn and battered Fanta sign high above her head.

“To Fanta!” We said in unison.

“DONTCHA WANTA FANTA!!!!” She screamed at the top of her lungs.

The bar quieted, people turning in their chairs to observe. A true warrior and a party animal, Svana yelled again, “DONTCHA WANTA’ FANTA...BITCHES!”

The next morning, I awoke with a start. Where was I? What was that noise? The jarring, grinding sound that filled the neighboring room stopped, and Svana emerged from the kitchen holding two green smoothies.

“Hey girl, want a smoothie?” Svana asked, “They have spinach in them, but you can’t taste it. They’re really good.”

She looked rough, and still had her yellow Rambo-Fantana head-band tied around her head. I looked equally as terrible, but in orange.

“What happened last night?” I had no memory after our last uproarious Fanta toast.

“Beats the shit out of me. I looked at my credit card statement this morning and apparently, we spent a hundred bucks at least at Red Door. I don’t even remember being there,” Svana plopped down on the edge of the sofa.

“Shit, we were supposed to use that guys money, it was, like, at least a hundred bucks. Where’s your car?” I rubbed my throbbing forehead.

“Should be at...Limelight still. Right? Wait, what guys money?” Svana really didn’t know.

She had blacked out even harder than I had.

“Svana, do you not remember running from that cop!” I sat up.

It all started to come back to Svana in mental Polaroids, I could see it in her face. She looked around the room, and every second or two, would shake her head, like an etch-a-sketch, and get a brief look of horror on her face.

“We RAN FROM COPS? Oh my god, we ran from cops,” Svana started to laugh.

“We totally did,” I joined her, my laughter eventually turning into a wet smoker’s cough.

I was still rubbing my temples, my eyes bloodshot, makeup smeared across my face.

“Hey,” she pointed at me, “Who’s Donnie?”

“Huh? Donnie?” I asked.

She pointed again, this time to my right hand.

I looked. There was a phone number written there. And a name. Donnie’s name.

“Well *hello* Donnie,” I rolled my eyes and curled back into a ball on the sofa, where I had slept.

“Ew, is it that gross guy you were dancing with at Limelight? He had such a boner,” Svana asked.

“What? Oh God, no. That idiot? I hate that guy! That’s why I stole his wallet,” I laughed.

“That’s why I got handcuffed!” It was all coming back to Svana now.

“Damn, girl, you were drunker than I thought last night, did you do anything at Limelight?” I popped my head up from under the covers.

“No?” Svana smiled and batted her eyelashes.

“Well I’ll tell you what,” I said.

“What’s that?” Svana plopped down onto the sofa next to me.

“I’m never, ever, ever drinking again,” I hunched even farther under the blankets.

“Oh my god me either,” She agreed, “Until, like, Tuesday.” Svana pulled back my blanket and winked.