

TESSA CHRISTIAN  
GOLDILOCKS AND THE BEARS DOWNSTAIRS  
@ THE ROYAL DALSTON HOTEL (387 words)

You could be forgiven for mistaking this for a early production of a pantomine taking place at an upmarket hotel in a down-at-heel area ... but you'd be wrong. This was a one-off 'club night performance piece' at a former Turkish fabric shop just on the cusp of 'edgy' Dalston.

A specific event curated by flamboyant costume designer Lyall Hakkaria to coincide with Frieze Art Fair – visitors were required to s-t-r-e-t-c-h their imaginations and step into Mr Hakkaria's dimly lit premises. The shop front acted (there was a lot of pretence going on) as a lobby with witty receptionist – female burlesque artist Ilana International – checking-in customers' coats, hats, bags and money (£10 thank-you-very-much!). Mr Hakkaria, resplendant in one of his own peach evening dresses, greeted everyone like Basil Fawlty in a frock.

Installed in the kitchen upstairs was alternative drag performer Fabulous Russella as "GOLDILOCKS". This was no pantomine - just a dame in a blonde wig knocking up pancakes for the punters, saying "this one's too hot – this one's not got enough sugar." The living room hosted the 'Virgin Mary' (played beatifically by a beautiful blond boy known as Strawberry) hearing confessionals and ... a female pagan tarot card reader. Judging by the queues to get in, 'get rid' and 'get read', this blasphemous clash certainly worked.

Isolated in the bedroom (furniture removed for dancing) on the next floor up was legendary O.A.P. Jeannie Dee, a former winner of London's Next Top Tranny, keeping visitors awake with her rudimentary and hilarious DJ-ing skills. And way, way downstairs in the dark cavernous basement lurked the Big Bad Bears: a whole room full of large cuddly hirsute gay men boogieing the night away to disco music provided by Fred Mann of Fred Mann Gallery.

Presumably, this was the point when one was expected to scream "Help!" and run out into the night. However, since it was all make-believe and the other guests were all mingling happily on various floors, it was a case of finding a chair that was neither too big nor too small and sitting in it to enjoy the fun. Or – in the case of the dancing bears – being brave enough to jump in and bump n' growl on the dance floor.

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