## 9. PASSION'S PRICE

I am the first one up in the morning. I feel a little freaked out. One moment I am in Scotland and the next I am in the countryside of Leeds. I wait for the others to get up before I get out of the bus.

It is an overcast day. It seems cold out there. Weird for the end of August.

Roddy is the first to come out. "I'm going to get you all squared away with your pass. Then you can come have some lunch with us."

I am getting used to this royal treatment. Being brought in through the private entrance and fed like a king.

Roddy adds, "I'm going to see how Passion is doing. I think they went overboard last night."

How unusual!

Roddy is in charge of the tour. He deals with nuts and bolts of the stage set up. Seth is the manager in charge of everything. He's got his hands full in the other bus.

I do what I can to clean up in the bus. I'm waiting to get out. Roddy comes back with my pass and my meal ticket. We're off to the races.

Roddy points out a girl with a towel over her head. "That's Juliette Lewis. I guess she's playing later on."

Captivate is a big event. With sister festivals in Leeds and Cornwall, it's the peak of the summer season. Captivate is an energy drink that is trying to penetrate the British market

I am becoming more accustomed to the UK version of the festivals. There is no let up. This early morning introduction is the calm before the storm.

I sit down for a little snack in the meal tent. The rest of the band show up at the table. I shake hands with Raf. There is a major problem going on. Sherry was wandering around the tent. But there have been some questions about her pass.

Roddy maintains, "I don't have an extra one for her. She borrowed one from Terry." Terry is the drummer."

Seth is more intense, "Passion doesn't want to see her. He wonders why she didn't just go back to London from the Peace festival."

"Am I supposed to tell her?"

"We might be able to get her a wristband so she can hang around in VIP."

Seth asks, "Isn't she a friend of Pete Doherty."

"I don't know. That's what I thought her row with Passion was about."

"Passion told me that she was smoking crack. But I don't know what any of them were up to at a certain point. Passion gets so moralistic."

No one is supposed to hear the conversation. But here I am in the middle of things. I'm just here for the music. All the other stuff is just over my head.

I leave the tent, and Sherry approaches me.

"Isn't there anything that you can do for me? They're treating me like shit."

I want to apologize. I feel like a vain hanger on.

I make a cheap excuse.

"I'm just a guest here myself!" I don't want to make waves, I'm just the camera winding

itself up and down.

"Please, please, please." She walks over to the toilets. Passion walks by me. "Hey man!"

He turns and waves back at me. I feel as if I no longer exist.

Roddy walks over to me, "Have you been able to quiet her down?"

I admit, "There's not too much that I can do."

Roddy's not sure what to say to me. "I guess you've tried."

"I sympathize!"

Roddy tells me, "I hear that Kate Moss is wandering around somewhere."

"Passion had something to say about her last night. She still hasn't learned the words to her own life."

Roddy adds, "I think that all these creatures are groping in the dark. It takes guys like me to plug them all in." I need a manager for my life.

I wander off to make something of the day. The first band that I want to see is at 1:30. It's Clor from London. I really get into their electro-fantasy. It's a demure Kraftwerk. In the afternoon, I'm able to catch The Kills. I am really digging the sexual tension bubbling under the surface. It's amazing that this duo can really be so entrancing without a live drummer. That is part of their desperation chic. I talk briefly with Motel as he makes his way to the VIP area. I go back to Of this Age's dressing room area. The Kings of Leon are getting ready in the trailer across the way.

I want to see the Mystery Jets. A girl approaches me when I walk through the VIP area.

"Are you a friend of Passion?"

"I've met him"

She whispers in my ear, "I adore Passion."

"He is cool."

She is enthralled, "He's more than cool. My friend is trying to get me in the mess tent. Maybe you can help."

The girl's name is Celeste. She is all of eighteen. Already a star, she has dreams of heading from Leeds to London.

"I'm going to design fashions. I'm going to uni down there. I've already got a place."

I love her already. I am trying to contain myself.

"I want to see the Mystery Jets," I tell her.

She perks up, "I love the Mystery Jets."

There is simply nothing like the Mystery Jets. They have a song about a sex change gone wrong. The singer beats out the coolest percussion lines. They are a real treat.

I am losing my direction.

"Let me try to find Roddy. I'll come back."

When I head back to the tent, Passion flags me down, "Sorry, if I've been a bitch. Sherry was dragging me down."

"No problem."

Passion says, "Don't leave us. I want you at the show."

"I'll be there."

I ask him, "Have you seen Roddy?"

"Not in a while. I'm going to have a rest. I'm wiped out."

Passion slinks over to the dressing room.

"I've got to do a signing at half six. I want you to come back for that."

I assure him "I'll be there."

When I look in the mess tent, Celeste is sitting at a table.

"My friend had a pass. Now you have to find her, and get her in here."

It's getting complicated. I find her friend and hand her Celeste's pass. Now we are all hanging out together. Her friend's name is Erin. Erin studies biology. She is more down to earth.

I am trying to maintain. I have to go over to see Passion at the signing tent. I want to see the Mystery Jets. I'm walking through the crowd when I see Paul from Hot Hot Heat. He's going over to the food tent. I'm trying to find Celeste. Erin is getting food. Paul is at our table.

The world is swirling around me. I am having trouble staying in character. I sympathize with Sherry. I am becoming this London model who's trying to hold a pose. I feel alone. Passion's dumped me. This is the worst thing in my life. I'm stuck in fucking Leeds. I never wanted to be here. I never wanted to go to Edinburgh. I never, never.

I have to find another form of self-abuse. I'm not thin enough!

The other girls are gaining on me. I can't eat. I need to eat.

"Girl, you are getting so think that you don't even have a face."

I answer (*I am Sherry now!*), "I don't need a face. I just need bones. Stick clothes on me like a coat hanger. I'm just one long tongue. I'll lick you up and down like a lollipop."

This is my new diet. I have hit the bottom. And I am struggling to go lower. I pass out. "Girl you need to eat. You look pale."

I don't want to be Sherry anymore. Sherry doesn't want to be Sherry.

I am again sitting at the table with Paul, Celeste, and Erin.

"I want another dessert." I say. But Sherry would never order another dessert. I am not sure what to do. As I eat the food, I feel like getting sick. Celeste has a full plate and is digging in.

"Look it, girl. You can never be thin enough. Look at yourself in the mirror."

I am in the tent. Mystery Jets are on. There are white balloons everywhere with question marks on them.

"This is our moment!" Yeah Mystery Jets!

Duh-duh-duh.

Blaine is singing, "You can't fool me, Dennis!"

I love that song. I am trying to stay upright. I am falling over. I feel that I am being crushed by the crowd. Celeste and Erin were going to come over here. They are nowhere to be seen. I am nowhere to be seen.

I pass out. They take me back to the Of this Age's dressing room to revive me. This is getting more bizarre.

"I was with these girls. Then everything went blank."

They ask me, "Have you eaten today?"

"Yeah, I had some desserts in the food tent."

"What do you want to do?" someone asks me.

"I want to get some more food."

I feel like they are trying to patch me up. They are shining lights in my eyes in the hopes of reviving me. What can I do?

"You have that autograph session."

It is Seth. He is directing me.

"You have to get over to the autograph session by 6:15."

I have become Passion. They sit me at a table next to Raf. It is the NME signing tent. Flashes are going off in my eyes.

These noisy little girls file past me. They treat me like a paper doll. I am an artist-A-R-T-I-S-T.

This squat little kid is now in front of me. He has the worst, I mean the worst, make-up job that I have ever seen. He hand me this sealed vial. In it this liquid rolls around. I know what it is. I have no doubt at all. The measly little tosser. What was he thinking when he did this? He was beating off to my video. I can feel myself writhing. The little monster is not worthy.

You scum! What are you doing to me. I should take off my pants and give him some of his own medicine.

"Have you eaten today, runt?"

Everyone around looks at me.

"What am I supposed to do with this shit. Heat it up and spread it all over my body. Oh baby, cum on me again. Cum cum cupiditas!"

I spit a gob in his face.

"Now swallow that!"

Raf and Seth restrain me.

"What am I supposed to do? Accept this shit graciously. It's tantamount to giving me a turd."

Raf teases me, "I think that it's a labor of love."

"Smack is a labor of love. This is a labor of can't love!"

Suddenly, I am even more in demand. A fourteen year old girl asks,"When are you going to have a coloring book."

This is all too degrading. I am supposed to be the country's prime sex symbol. And I am giving advice to babies. This is perverse.

I keep signing my name until my hand gets numb. I imagine my gift boy's hand is also getting numb. I should have shown him my bare ass. That would have really got him off

One kid asks, "Do you still get on your knees and say your prayers."

"Usually I say them when I'm standing up." I feel as if he's asking me how to take a piss. I need help just standing up as it is. A little spiritual comfort is what I really need.

I write these songs about getting sucked off, and some Mum is asking me to take a picture with her daughter. I never meant it to be like this. Next thing I'll be taking to my O level exams again.

It can hardly get any worse than this. The kid's cum vial is over there in the trash. I should have demonstrated it for all the adoring fans. Maybe I need to take it farther. Do something more outrageous on stage. I know a lot of American performers love that sort of thing. It's not as if I've ever been sucked off on stage. Have I missed something?

When my hand gets too weak to sign, should I lick the pages of their autograph books. Should I just bleed on their glossies.

I am Passion. I am your martyr. You give, and I receive. I will curl up and die for you. I will, I will, I will.

I stand up and wave. All of the band is arm in arm. Morris, our bass player pats me on the fanny. I give his a little slap on the face.

"If you were any thinner, you'd be dead."

Passion answers back, "I am dead."

Passion heads off to prepare his show. I am coming too. What a wild moment. I walk on back to the dressing room. Passion stops me.

"I'm sorry if I've been a dick. I've just had to deal with so much shit. Now this perverse stuff at the signing tent."

He tells me the story as if I wasn't there. I had been Passion for those wonderful 45 minutes. I want to kiss him on the lips. I want an identity that is my own.

"You're going to come to Cornwall."

"I have to get back to London."

"Be at the show!"

The band begins just as they did yesterday. But they start off with "A-Maze". It begins with a wild riff on the organ. Then they are ready to go. Passion slinks his way onto the stage in his inimitable style.

"It's not free will, it's free association. It's not in the head, it's in the incantation!" Smoke rises from the stage. The band is reflected in yellow light.

A flash!

"I did it. I tried to make sense!"

He laments his failure. His ideas have not made their impact. His only chance is to risk himself, his identity.

"I want to be touched, I want to be played, I want to be A-Mazed!"

The music is trailing behind him with its soul inflected beat. Raf guitar is reminiscent of Mick Ronson. The glam roots are showing.

The band continues this theme with "Don't Make Up, Make Me Up". In it he explores his gender bending as a way of staying immune from heartache. It is classic Passion. He is vulnerable because all his emotions are in the open. But he has no risk. He can never be pinned down. "I hurt you, you hurt me, that's the way it has to be." There is nothing that he ever has to do to adjust his behavior. He lives off the recognition of his perfection.

The crowd is only too willing to oblige. The adoration is unconditional. They are his lover. They want to be hurt. The more that they feel his pain, the more they are convinced that they are wanted. It gives him free rein. He is so immune from it all. His lovers never are. They live the very suffering that he denies. This is his sacrifice.

Does Passion even remember? Any memory is part of all memories. He is a god. He embraces the consciousness of the world. He can't waste his time with the trivial. Yesterday's failure with Sherry is just another drama to file away in his archive. He can recall it on stage when he needs to register that emotion.

He converts the faithful who surround him on his quest. He sings, "Do what you will to

me, I will accept." Now performance is process. They need to be convinced. They need to see miracles. After this belief will be automatic. They will cease to ask question.

He is after more than financial success. That is only a bi-product of belief. He is assembling his devoted. The throng on their knees. When he needs to, he can select his prophets to massage the fragile ego. This is the route to salvation. I only want to touch him. And he will touch me back.

I have undergone the same transformation. I have felt Passion's entreaties. As he frolics on stage, I feel that I am part of it. My closeness to the man will allow me truly to share in everything that he is offering everyone else.

I pull back. I have already seen the pitfalls of this path. Am I being prepared to be the prophet of a greater faith? The one that will supplant Passion. Or will I walk a nonconformist path, one without assured salvation. Is this Brenda's little bit of happiness."

Passion finishes the show in style. It is obvious that his command is at least equal to yesterday. Whatever shenanigans might happen off stage, it has little bearing to his actual performance. Love is love. It is a physical thing. It is his body. Passion is love.

His gang surround him after the show. He still zeroes in on me. He gives me a big hug. "I need you to come see me," he tells me.

"Passion, I have to leave for London."

"Come see me." He kisses me on the cheek.

I wonder around for half an hour. I really should take the bus back to Leeds. But I want to see Passion. I have already seen what I don't want to see. I am afraid of losing my independence around him. But this is not me. It is Passion on stage. I am only an appendage to this machine.

I suspect he is trying to tell me that he would never do to a guy what he has done to Sherry. This is how he keep himself complete. But there will be more Sherrys. The young teens who flock to the signing tent are the training so that they too can become his future novitiates. They will all take the vows and partake in the sacrament. His Holiness awaits his kiss.

"When you're old enough, girls."

That doesn't stop his disdain of the zealous. Down deep, that is all that he will ever feel. "Teeny boppers, back to your cages."

When I walk towards the dressing room, Raf stops me. "I wouldn't go in there."

"He told me that he wanted to see me."

"There's not much to see," he tells me. "He's cleared everyone out."

I look for Roddy. "He's pretty much a mess. But he did say at one point that you were the only one that he'd let in there."

I wonder why they are all so secretive. I need to take my chances. I am just afraid that I'll be sucked into something that I won't be able to escape.

I open the door. The lights are off. He is collapsed in a corner. He is reaching his hand out for me. I want to take it. I can't even move. I am paralyzed at the threshold. He is shaking. I don't want to see this.

"What's he on?" I mumble to myself. I know. I know his story. This is his moment of utter solitude. This what he craves. What he can give to no one.

I hope that he will forget that I was even in there. I start asking around if anyone is going

back to London. Maybe there's someone who's going to head off to Leeds. Then I can get the train back. If worse comes to worse, I'll hop the bus back to Leeds.

As I walk through the parking lot, I hear Clor's "Danger Zone." I feel empowered. I can see the buses in the distance. I hurry up my pace. I want to get out of here. I don't want to be left here over night.

When I get to the buses, I ask one of the attendants, "Is this the next bus?"

He looks harried, "The last bus just left."

"Damn!"

I walk around to see if anyone is driving to Leeds. No luck. I pace back and forth. Should I go back to hang with the band? They're going on to Cornwall. I need to be in London for business tomorrow. I have to get out of here.

I'm going crazy. I've heard about exorbitant cab rides. No one wants to share a cab back. I take the risk.

I approach a driver. "How much for a cab ride back to Leeds?""

"Where in Leeds?"

"The train station," I say very clearly.

"Twenty pounds."

I get in the cab.

"How was the festival?"

"Great. I'm friends of Passion and Of this Age."

He tells me that he does security. He's trying to get on permanently with the Kaiser

Chiefs.

"That would be a great gig."

I ask him about the trains.

He tells me, "There should be one to London."

I get to the station and there are loads of kids who have just been at the festival. They are huddled in chairs with their giant backpacks. Most are trying to sleep.

The next train isn't until 7 AM. I'm not going to spring for a hotel room at this point.

I'm still on a budget. It's only five hours until I make the connection.

"How much is the train?"

"Sixty seven pounds."

Shit! I should have never left my rail pass back in London. I was going to need it when I came back north to scout for gigs for the band.

I walk over to the bus station. Everyone is drifting around in the street looking for the latest club action. When I finally check on the bus, it seems at least half the price of the train. I figure that this is my best option. And the train leaves at 6. All for the best.

I find a spot on a bench. I spread out to sleep. I use my bag as a cushion.

Around 5:50, I wake up. I feel all come apart. There is still no activity at the ticket booth. I think for a second. It's a bank holiday. The first bus won't run until 10. I need to rush back to the train station.

I slide my credit card and get my ticket. My mistake hurts. But I am going to get back to London.

I need to sleep. Everyone crowds around the train. I find a good place to sit. There are

so many festival goers that there is hardly a place for everyone. Some people have so much stuff. Two packs and a tent. How can they manage?

I finally make it to London. I have plans to meet Tim, a friend who is going to help get the Sun Runners over here. There's some mix up. He's not answering his cell phone. I've rushed back for nothing.

I need a place to stay. I was going to stay with Nick. But his ex has come back. Not a good time. I know of a cheap hotel near Bayswater. I head over there and book a room on the fourth floor. It's going to be stairs and stairs and stairs.

I head back to Nick's to get my luggage and my rail pass. I'm going to be off tomorrow. I just need to sleep. I'll be OK. I will be OK.

In my hotel room, I find the bed and give in to sleep. I'm not going to wake up until the evening. I'm glad that I could get in her so early.

After sleeping, I decide to head over to Trash. I have to catch the tube to make it there early enough. I don't want to get caught in the line. One minute I am hanging with Passion. Now I am back with the hoi polloi.

When I finally get into the club, I am excited. A band is there ready to play. It is the Mystery Jets. They are coming off of their festival successes. They actually play their material here all the time. The DJ has done a remix of their stuff.

Barry from the Futureheads is hanging out. He is a big fan of the Jets. I feel that this performance is a gift.

Some freaky kids has attached himself to me. He tells me that he's seen the guitar player William hanging out here before. He's sort of a regular. Blaine's dad plays in the band. It is so cool.

The thing that I love about the Mystery Jets is that they completely do their own thing. They don't care. Their fans are not so blind as Passion's. They all love the band's sense of humor. It is loveable. There is none of the feeling of fear that exists in the music of Of this Age.

The Mystery Jets build slowly. They become part of you. They tickle you inside. They are irresistible. Tonight my favorite song is "The Boy Who Ran Away."

I've planned my trip so that I am going to make it back to Trash next week. Liars are playing.

I almost feel that Celeste and Erin should be here tonight. I know that they are both still up north. But this should be there thing.

More than ever, I feel that I am alone in my search. No one is going to do it for me. I have gotten so close to the source. But it has just pulled away at the last moment.

After dancing for a while, I need to make my way back to the hotel. I walk a couple of blocks to the bus. Then I am waiting on a night bus. I am overloaded. Too many things happening in such a short period of time. I need to find my bed.

I make my appointment the next day. Tim has outlined a series of gigs for the Sun Runners. This is all contingent on a UK release of the album. I will have to negotiate that when I come back to London. Things are looking great for the guys. I keep expecting something to go wrong. I think that I'll be able to cover the expenses. Tim should be able to get guarantees because he is packaging the tour with some other well known acts. There seems to be nothing standing in our way. I go back to the hotel to pack up my stuff. I'm heading on to Manchester. I will have just missed Jason.

The ride on the train is uneventful. I have all my notes for the band. I am looking through them. There is a woman across from me reading a movie script. I try to catch her eye. She seems so involved in her work.

I am able to glimpse some details of the story. A girl from Newcastle heads for uni in Manchester. She is a little naive to the ways of the city. She starts to hang out with a rough crowd. Kids dealing drugs. They always keep her in the blow so she doesn't complain. She thinks success is on her side. Then she begins to have trouble in school. She is missing too many of her classes.

The woman pulls the script off the table so that she can see it at an angle. I want to know what is going to happen to the girl. The story is a little trite. But it is engaging nonetheless. The viewing audience wants the danger. The script writer is appealing to those who live in comfort. They are afraid to walk on the wild side. But they find that life appealing. The film allows them to take that risk.

The woman is editing the script. She is trying to breathe new life in the character. She is trying to motivate the move from Manchester.

I want to talk about her writing. She has to finish her read for an early meeting. As I prepare to get off the train, I pack up my notes. I see everyone scatter to get off the train. I am in a hurry.

I get to the hotel. I look for the folder with my notes. I can't find it. I rush back to the train. It has already left for London. Damn, damn, damn!

I check with the authorities.

"You need to ask the cleaning staff."

I ask the staff. All of them shake their heads. Nothing has been found. I am frantic. What if it has been tossed out and destroyed. The folder has all my plans. All the material for the band. My business contacts. I feel like such an amateur.

The supervisor agrees to have one of his crew members search the garbage. I am in a suit jacket. I'm crawling through trash to find something. It's not working.

I leave empty handed. I have the phone number of the train manager. I call him.

"We had one stop at Macklesfield. I checked everything after that. I never saw a folder." I ask him to check again.

One thread has been pulled out of the fabric. I am at wit's end. I try to collect myself. Try to make sense of it all.

I go back to the hotel and sit in the lobby. I am glum. I settle into the doldrums.

The desk clerk calls me over. "Did you stop at a restaurant along the way?"

"I just bought a lemon muffin."

"They have your folder. They found your reservation to the hotel and dialed the number. It's waiting for you."

I breathe a sigh of relief. I feel together. I rush over to get my folder. It's not a long walk back. I head up the hill to the store. Then I grab the bag and head back.

I am walking on egg shells. A push either way, and I am ready to come down. I need something to hold myself up. This is no life for me. Where is the security? I need a drink. It's

too early in the day. I need a nap.

When I get back to the Britannia Hotel, I am able to get in my room immediately. I get ready to take for my rest. The room is hot as hell. The air conditioner is on full blast. It is a room without any windows in the center of the hotel. At least the air is circulating.

I am about to settle in when I hear a commotion in the hall. A crazy Manc is banging on the door across from mine. It turns out that his 17 year old daughter is in there. I have no idea how she made it in there.

He keeps knocking. I think the girl figures it's room service. That they've left the food outside the door. He forces his way in the half-opened door. He's pulling his daughter outside. I am watching all of this through the peep hole. The next thing I know Colin Heath of the Belles Lettres is trying to pull the girl back in the room.

Now the door is open. There's a girl dressed only in her panties, and there's a tug of war between Colin and the girl's dad. This is totally nuts. Everyone is screaming. I just want a nap. I wonder what I can do. I could open the door and help. I'm not sure which side to take. The girl needs help the most. Maybe she could hang out here until it's safe.

Eventually the hotel people come up. The father is not a guest, and he has to leave. Colin gives the girl a peck on the cheek after she is dressed. She even asks for his autograph. She has a story to tell her girls at school.

That evening I see Colin in the bar. He wants to play the piano. But they won't let him. I offer to buy him a drink.

"Did the Belles Lettres have a gig here?"

Colin tells me, "Yeah, we played the Roadhouse."

"Wow! I wish that I had known."

He further informs me, "It was last night. We have an extra day in town before we go to Nottingham."

"What was that about this afternoon?"

"I met some girl after the show. I thought she was 18 or 19. So we hang out that night. The next day, he catches wind that I'm at the hotel. He's banging down the door. He's blaming me for the moral turpitude of his daughter, whatever that means."

"I thought that was pretty funny. It looked like you were sawing her in half."

"We did!" he laughs.

Maybe it wasn't all that funny. Colin is a minor version of Passion. He believes that he is invincible. It's not as if the girl is going to visit him again. She'd never make it past security. I wonder if he can even tell me her name.

It's one of Passion's lines, "Too much destruction have I seen, makes for beauty now unclean."

I take care of my business in Manchester. I also spend a couple of days in Glasgow, and then it's back to London. It's a long train ride. It gives me time to rest.

I wake up from sleep, a little ill. I have to walk around to create some kind of balance. I feel as if my head is going to fall off. I open a window lean over. I need to get cold. I'm burning up.

I go to the concessions and get a water. I keep walking back and forth until I'm back to normal for what that's worth. I can't look anyone in the eye. I just want to get back to London.

By a weird coincidence, I'm in the same hotel as Jason. I see him in the lobby of the Columbia.

He hugs me. "I thought that I lost you along the way."

"I couldn't keep up with Passion."

Jason says, "I should have warned you. I've heard about him before. He's a great guy. But sometimes, he can just suck you dry."

"I think that I felt the sucking."

We both laugh.

Jason says, "Come down for a drink later."

I meet Jason for a drink. I tell him about my adventures. He is just wide-eyed.

Afterwards, I head for Trash. The Liars are on the bill.

I make my way between the seedy and the outre. Angus is dancing around the stage as they play "Broken Witch". The drum beat is relentless and complements the screeching guitar tones. Angus starts to scream.

"We're not the fucking Arctic Monkeys." He tells the crowd. They are all in awe. This is not too comfortable. No Passion. The blood is in the songs.

A cute Italian girl is screaming, "Die, die, die, die!" back at Angus. I want her to come back to the Columbia and do that for me as I am getting ready for breakfast. A tall thin guy with dark hair plants a kiss on her neck.

She laughs and shrieks, "Pazzo!"