

# Crystal Passion

Bradley Stoke



## Contents

Chapter One .....	3
Chapter Two .....	26
Chapter Three.....	49
Chapter Four.....	66
Chapter Five.....	85
Chapter Six.....	104
Chapter Seven .....	121
Chapter Eight.....	141
Chapter Nine.....	159
Chapter Ten .....	177
Chapter Eleven .....	194
Chapter Twelve.....	214
Chapter Thirteen .....	233
Chapter Fourteen .....	251

## Chapter One

How well did I ever *really* know Crystal Passion?

I ask that because everyone says that no one knew her better than me.

And that's just not true.

It's obvious why so many people believe I know more about her than the dozen or so others who were with her on that last fateful tour. I'm the one who renowned American rock critic Polly Tarantella has elevated to the status of Chief Guardian of the Crystal Passion legacy. Of the rest of us who were there, does anyone remember Bertha? And what about the other Simone, the one also known as the Harlot? And I can't be sure whether Thelma's real name was Judy or whether Judy's real name was Thelma. Since there were two Judys on the tour and she was the second to join the band, because we had to call her something, the name we used was Thelma.

Whatever Polly says, I can't be credited the honour she bestows on me on the basis of my one and only English Top Forty hit record in the late 1990s and the accompanying album that shifted hardly any units at all. That's not enough to make me the primary authority on the music, soul or history of Crystal Passion. For a start, my hit single, *I'm Hanging Upside Down*, with its chorus of "Inside. Outside. Upside Down." can't be described a musical masterpiece (even by me) and it's by chance rather than design that this is the three and a half minutes of drum and bass by which Simone Kopernik, better known as Pebbles, became famous as a solo artist.

There was never a time when Crystal Passion was anything other than a mystery. She might even have been called an enigma, but when I was in her band in the 1990s that was a word you'd associate with the German electronic trio whose music

was reputedly inspired by the Marquis de Sade. And neither Enigma nor the Marquis directly influenced Crystal Passion.

I don't agree with Polly Tarantella's view that Crystal Passion's music was 'void of obvious influence' and 'forged from the vital essence of her soul', whatever that means. The music didn't appear spontaneously in a vacuum. I mean, you can easily tell what influences me and my music. I always loved 1960s West Coast pop. I adored Love, Spirit, the Beach Boys, the Mamas and Papas, and the sunshine and sand their music invokes. That was what informed *I'm Hanging Upside Down* and even more the other tracks on my album *The Way to San Jose*. The main difference between me and Crystal Passion was that her influences encompassed just about everything and everyone she'd ever seen, heard, read about or imagined. And that was a lot!

Back in the 1990s, when we performed together as the Crystal Passion band, Grunge was the coolest sound in American Rock and World Music was beginning to open ears to new possibilities on both sides of the Atlantic, but for us in the UK the sound that best defined the time was what the Americans now call EDM but we just called Dance. Mostly it was House Music, but there was also Techno, Drum & Bass, Trance and a whole load of shit that's since got lost by the wayside. There was some kind of Brit Rock scene emerging, represented by groups like Oasis and Blur, but the most notable British Rock groups at the time were the likes of Ride, the Happy Mondays and the Stone Roses. If there was anything that could be described as unique about Crystal Passion's music it was that its scope was way beyond the usual set of boundaries. It wasn't really Rock. It wasn't really Dance. It wasn't really World, Folk, Jazz, Soul or Pop, but it was somehow also all these things at the same time.

God knows how Crystal ever found the time to hear all the shit that inspired her.

From a brief listen, you'd say that Crystal Passion and her eponymous band was some kind of an electro-acoustic outfit. The few critics who mentioned her at the time referenced Nick Drake (obviously!), Joni Mitchell and Tracy Chapman. Her preferred instrument was the acoustic guitar and her voice had a peculiar breathy quality that superficially placed her in the Folk Rock tradition. But it soon becomes obvious as you listened to her that she was also inspired by a load of weird shit that included György Ligeti, Edward Vesala and Oumou Sangare. She understood twelve tone and microtonal music. She appreciated the essence of Krautrock, Cajun, Duduk and Mugham. She was as much at home with Nick Cave as with Stock Aitken Waterman. And if there was a musical legacy she most truly followed, it was the anarchic, free-form aggregations of the likes of the Sun Ra Arkestra, Funkadelic and Planet Gong. It was never obvious what kind of music Crystal Passion might play, what character of musician would play in her band, and what new ideas and sounds she'd come up with next.

There was much about the 1990s that was weird. The best way to describe the decade was as the period of time squeezed between the age of vinyl and family television and the coming new era of mobile phones and the internet. There were real expectations that a new defining chapter in the history of recorded music was about to arrive—for American Rock critics like Polly Tarantella—Crystal Passion's music sounds weird enough to seem to herald that long anticipated musical revolution. Perhaps sufficiently weird to support Polly's claim that her music 'defies definition'. But when Crystal assembled together her amorphous band of miscellaneous musicians I don't think her music was really that much out of step with the stuff you could hear most nights in those days on John Peel's show on BBC Radio One.

The truth is, of course, that not many people at the time much liked Crystal

Passion's music the first time they heard it. But it made more sense the more you heard it. And then it got under your skin and you couldn't get enough of it. It must have made a real impression on me because it persuaded me to abandon my studies in Marine Biology at Bournemouth Poly and join Crystal Passion's ramshackle group for what became a never-ending tour of crappy venues and muddy festivals all around the UK and, on occasion, as far afield as Belgium, Denmark, Spain and Sweden.

But that last concert tour in the United States was just one step too far.

For that was the tour that killed Crystal Passion.

Literally.

And, until Polly Tarantella championed her legacy after decades of obscurity, this was also the tour that killed off Crystal Passion's music and pretty much all public memory of the woman who was, for me, not just a colleague, an inspiration and a muse, but also a close friend and, most important of all, my lover.

You'd think—given the huge amount of attention now devoted to all things Crystal Passion—that our arrival in the United States was like the Beatles' British Invasion in the 1960s.

In fact, it could have hardly been more low key.

Our record label, Gospel Records, couldn't afford more than a partial advance on the projected (modest) record sales of what turned out to be Crystal Passion's final and posthumously released fourth album, eventually to be entitled *The Last Word*. So, to finance the tour, we had to dig deep into our even more modest funds and Crystal's mysterious personal allowance. I don't think anyone had even heard of us in America, but Crystal's agent, Madeleine Tartt, managed to book us gigs on the basis of America's continued fascination with British Rock and Pop music.

Like everyone else associated with Crystal Passion, Madeleine worked for her not because she believed that her uncategorisable, defiantly non-commercial music would ever sell in the vast quantities that it actually now does, but because she had an intangible faith in Crystal and everything she seemed to represent. And also because Crystal was so generous with her body to almost everyone who got to know her.

Madeleine's promotional material did well to advertise the facts that the Crystal Passion band was an all-woman group whose appeal bridged a wide spectrum of tastes, including House, Rock and Folk. Madeleine could also have mentioned Country, Jazz, Bluegrass and the Blues, if she'd wanted to claim that Crystal Passion's influences would appeal to every possible American palate, but she had to consider audience expectations.

And, most significantly, her publicity slyly omitted to mention the main reason why American Rock fans and their parents might get more than they expected from a Crystal Passion gig.

The flight across the Atlantic from Heathrow to JFK was on the cheapest possible seats. In the 90s, however, they weren't quite as cheap as they can be these days, but at least the food, the luggage space and use of the toilet was inclusive. We all tried to get a good sleep on the plane, because we knew that the five hour time lag between London and New York could be a real killer.

I don't know how many of us had ever visited the States before. I certainly hadn't, however much I'd fantasised about the West Coast and all that surf, sun and roller blades. I'm pretty sure Crystal hadn't been there either, even though she'd travelled pretty much everywhere else in the world. But however much an experience India, Morocco or Thailand might be, America was another place altogether. Like me,

I guess Crystal thought we already knew what to expect given all the American movies and TV shows we'd seen.

But as it happened the differences between America and Europe were greater than we'd anticipated.

Most of us were pretty much shagged before we'd even got on the plane. We'd all gone to an Indian Restaurant on Brick Lane the night before where Crystal had booked a table for everyone and most of us had rather too much to drink. Well, I did anyway. The restaurant was jam-packed from wall to wall, so it was a miracle that Crystal had managed to book a table for so many of us, but I guess she just called in a favour like she so often did.

Crystal was obviously anxious about the coming American tour. She sat between me and Judy, and spoke pretty much equally to both of us. She told us that America was going to be the band's make-or-break tour and that she was fairly sure our chances of breaking into the American music scene weren't very good.

"I just hope nobody's gonna split from the band during the tour," she confided. "That would *really* sink us." She seemed to address this to Judy who was discreetly looking away out of the window.

Crystal was right to be concerned about Judy's loyalty. In many ways, she was the most talented and most ambitious member of the band other than Crystal and she wasn't the only one who thought that it was just a matter of time till Judy left and went her own way. She was nominally the lead guitarist, but in a band like Crystal Passion she also played keyboards, sax and bass guitar. And in a band of so many colourful characters she stood out as the one who best fit the description of a Rock Chick. She dressed—when she bothered to dress at all—in a black singlet, black leather jeans and

knee-high black leather boots with stiletto heels. She had tattoos down both arms and pretty much everywhere on her body below the neckline. And these tattoos included fragments of Biblical text (but not the famous one from Ezekiel, as *Pulp Fiction* had only recently been released and there'd not yet been an opportunity for Judy to get the words engraved on what little of her skin could still be used as a canvas). The skinscape also featured images of Mythical Rock & Roll icons like Dragons, Demons, Skulls and, of course, Naked Women.

It wasn't like Crystal to even hint at discord in the ranks, so her remarks shocked everyone who heard them. But at the same time, everyone knew that Judy had written several pretty good songs herself and had events turned out otherwise, I think she'd soon have been recording her own album. But whether she'd use her real name, Judith O'Hara, or her stage name of Judy Dildo there's now no way now of ever finding out.

After we'd paid for the meal and were presented our complimentary mint sweets, a few of us returned to the shared house in Hackney that was Crystal's rather basic digs. This was where we intended to round off the evening with a few restful joints, but we didn't expect Crystal to be more than a passive presence. She wasn't known to indulge in drugs. She wasn't even a smoker. In fact I don't think I'd ever seen her smoke a joint before, even though most of us, including me, almost always had a stash of a few grams. But on this occasion, Crystal had scored some potent Paki Black which she crumbled into some borrowed Rizla papers and then rolled into a modestly functional spliff. And this she passed around with due ceremony. This was accompanied by a fresh bottle of red wine, which would have been a potent mix in itself, although I'd already snorted some Charlie and I suspected that Judy had sampled a tin-foil of brown.

“This is the last dope and booze we’ll have in England for at least a while,” said Crystal. “I hope this evening will be one we’ll all remember fondly.”

“I’m sure we will,” said Philippa as she took a long toke. “This is really hot shit. I certainly won’t forget this in a hurry.”

“We’ll be friends for life,” I said drunkenly, placing my hand on Crystal’s. “I’ll never deny you anything.”

“I don’t think I can be so sure of that, Simone,” said Crystal mysteriously and then, again uncharacteristically, changed the subject. “Do you think we’ll break America? Or do you think America will break us?”

“Whatever happens,” I said loyally. “We’ll stick together as a band. I’ll stay loyal. Come what may.”

The plane from Heathrow was a Boeing 747 with space to seat almost the whole band in a single row. Crystal and I sat together in the middle aisle beside Jacquie and Jane: the two sisters who made up the rhythm section of drums and electric bass.

Crystal was still not her usual self. Normally, she’d be bubbling with optimism, enthusiasm and energy, but on this occasion she was almost despondent.

“I’m really not sure about all this,” she confided to me.

“Sure about what?” I said, more intent on having a doze than a conversation.

“This tour.”

“I’m sure it’ll be no worse than our gigs in Sweden,” I said. “That was so bloody sweltering! Who’d have imagined that Stockholm could be so hot in summer?”

“Indeed,” said Crystal. “Anyway don’t worry about me. I’ll let you sleep. Just like the others. But if you could first let me squeeze by, I need to go to the loo.”

“Of course,” I said. “Shall we swap seats so you don’t have to disturb me when

you come back?"

"Feel free," said Crystal. "Sleep on now. Take your rest."

And then she walked down the aisle towards the toilets at the rear, nodding at whichever band members might still be awake.

I guess I should have tried to talk more to Crystal about her anxieties, but I was well and truly knackered. I didn't have the energy for a long discussion. But not so tired, of course, that I didn't accept the complimentary small bottle of Californian Red when the drinks trolley came by. And Crystal gave me her own complimentary bottle as well when she returned.

"Take away this cup from me. You need it more than me," she said as if it was actually true.

I glanced towards Crystal as I took her cup and the small plastic bottle of Californian Chardonnay. She seemed totally bathed in sweat. If I hadn't known her better, I'd have guessed she was suffering from withdrawal symptoms, but although Crystal didn't condemn other people's drug use, especially not mine or Judy's, she rarely had more than a single glass of wine or the briefest toke on a joint. I don't think she'd ever even dropped Ecstasy. She was about as clean as anyone could be in the Rock & Roll industry.

Our trials began almost as soon as we touched down at JFK.

It was inevitable really. We looked pretty much like the usual suspects, although the movie of that name hadn't yet been released.

Of all of us, Crystal seemed the most straight with her long light brown hair, her pretty and misleadingly innocent face, and a choice of dress that owed more to Laura Ashley or Liberty Prints than what is more often associated with Rock, Pop or Dance

music. In fact, she dressed like a Folk singer with an unusually good sense of style and virtually no interest at all in contemporary fashion.

The rest of us... well!

In those days, Judy was probably the most startling. Tattoos weren't nearly as ubiquitous as they are these days. Her peculiar hairstyle—a mixture of short crop and long hair—belonged to a time when no one could make up their mind where fashion was supposed to go. I also stood out with my shaved head (in the style of Sinead O'Connor), but my clothes were more in the style of the Riot Grrrl movement; that is, a kind of gross caricature of girliness. The rest of us were dressed in a motley selection of styles and fashions, hair-styles and body piercings. I don't think there was a single person on the plane and most certainly not at the airport whose head didn't turn and stare at us.

As we were about to find out, the United States of America, despite its history of Liberty and Freedom isn't an especially tolerant society and thanks to the efforts of Al-Qaeda it's even less so now. In a sense, we were already asking for trouble if we thought we could get through Customs and Passport Control without incident.

These days it's a much bigger hassle to leave the UK and enter the States than it was then. In the 90s, you didn't have to go through scanners; you didn't have to take off your shoes and trouser-belt; and you could carry your toiletries as hand luggage. But on the other hand, a bunch of weirdo women with rings in their noses, piercings through their eyebrows and dressed in clothes which were only technically on the right side of legal and decent: we were exactly what most Americans would consider undesirable aliens whatever our passports might claim.

And so it was that, with the sole exception of Crystal, the process of getting

through Passport Control was a lengthy and painful experience in which everything I'd written on that antique green card was checked, double-checked and cross-referenced with what the other band members had written. Yes, I was staying at the Gettysburg Hotel on 54<sup>th</sup> Street West. Yes, the rest of the band had also all been booked into the same hotel. And yes, we were going to be staying in America for less than three months while we toured a very miscellaneous list of destinations across the Eastern United States: both North and South. And I did play keyboards in the band. But eventually Simone Kopernik, more commonly known as Pebbles, was allowed onto American soil. And so too was Judith O'Hara (aka Judy Dildo).

Crystal was patiently waiting for us after the Passport and Immigration desks balancing the cloth bag that doubled as an all-purpose handbag on the lap of her knee-length floral pattern skirt and holding open a paperback novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky. We hovered around her, most of us smoking as you still could in airports in those days, while we waited for the other band members to get their passports stamped. It was actually Tomiko Morishita who got the most grief. I guess they found it difficult to believe that a girl who looked Japanese and dressed like a character from a Japanese manga might actually be Irish. I think the rest of us found it incredible as well, especially as her accent was cut-glass English public school.

We thought the worst was over, but we were wrong.

As before, Crystal had sailed through the *Nothing to Declare* channel, but she chose not to rush onward to the airport lounge where we were expecting to meet a guy called Kai Pharrel from Sanity Records, New York, New York, which was Gospel Records' distributor in the States. I could envisage him standing out there holding up a cardboard sign reading 'Crystal Passion'. He was so tantalisingly close.

“Just a minute, madam,” said one of the Customs Officers, a large black woman with a massive bosom and no evidence whatsoever of a sense of humour.

I ignored her in the hope that it had nothing to do with me and continued to walk towards Crystal, but the woman repeated her demand and a thin Customs Officer with a weird toothbrush moustache stepped in front of me.

“If you would be so kind...” he said as he gestured with an open palm towards a Formica-topped table where Judy, Olivia and my sister Andrea were also standing.

I walked over, dragging my suitcase behind, while hoping that New York customs didn’t have sniffer dogs that could smell Ecstasy tablets and also wondering whether it was an offence to import a copy of *Viz* into the United States (I was especially keen on *Johnny Fartpants* and *the Fat Slags*).

“Please place your bag on the table, madam,” said the black woman.

“This is fucking harassment,” said Olivia, whose uniform of ripped denim must have made her seem especially scruffy to the Customs Officers. “Why’re you picking on us?”

This was exactly the wrong thing to say, of course, and before long all of us with the exception of Crystal and Tomiko were detained by the United States Customs Service and our bags emptied in the search for contraband, illegal drugs and firearms.

It was typical of Crystal that although she didn’t have to, she let Tomiko go ahead with her bags, which were just a guitar case and a modest rucksack for her clothes, and returned to stand beside her band-mates.

“Can I be of assistance, officer?” she asked the large black woman, whose plastic name badge displayed the name *Kate Phillips*.

“How could that be, madam?” the officer asked as she held up to the light a

bottle of duty-free whisky she'd found wrapped up inside a towel in Philippa's bag.

Perhaps she thought it might contain dissolved Lysergic Acid.

“All these girls are members of my folk group, Crystal Passion. We’re on tour in the United States of America as you can confirm by talking to our record company. I’m sure none of my companions would ever break the law, officer.”

“What you’re sure of and what is the case, madam, might well be two different things,” said Officer Kate Phillips.

“You have a lot of phials in your case, madam,” the other Customs Officer known as *Miguel San Antonio* said to Judy. “What’s in them?”

He emptied half a dozen pills into the palm of one hand and theatrically exhibited what I immediately recognised as White Doves.

Fuck! We were as good as bust.

“Sweets,” said Judy straightaway. This was quick thinking on her part given that they were too uneven and unpolished to have been supplied by a pharmaceutical company. “English sweets. I’ve got a very sweet tooth.”

“A bit odd, don’t you think, that you keep sweets in this kind of container.”

“They’re sold loose in English sweet shops,” said Judy. “I had to carry them in something.”

“Hmmm,” said the Customs Officer, who nevertheless returned the tabs to the phial and therefore ensured that this modest flow of Ecstasy to America from the Netherlands via England could continue unimpeded.

Our suitcases, rucksacks and flight bags were emptied out onto the Formica desktop, but it was actually our array of musical instruments that the Customs Officers seemed most interested in.

“There have been cases of drugs and contraband being smuggled into the country in violin cases recently, madam,” remarked Officer Kate Phillips when Bertha challenged her about this.

However, we probably wouldn’t have been detained for much longer at all if a small plastic bag of Moroccan hash hadn’t been found discarded on the airport corridor floor just before the entrance to the *Nothing to Declare* channel. A corpulent self-satisfied Hispanic woman with bizarre schoolmarm spectacles waved the small plastic bag in front of us and asked sarcastically: “Do any of you claim this as your own?”

Although it wasn’t mine—my stash had already been seen and disregarded in the Tic-Tac container I’d popped them in—I was pretty sure I recognised it. It was the sort of sealable cash bag that Jenny used to carry her dope. Along with Bertha, she was one of the two roadies and famously could scarcely function at all without a joint either in her hand or mouth. I guessed that she’d panicked when she saw that we’d been stopped and just let her stash drop to the ground. A sensible plan, but not one that had worked as planned. The Customs Officers weren’t so stupid as to imagine that a bag of dope had appeared from nowhere. I just hoped they weren’t going to fingerprint it, although in that regard if it was Jenny’s stash, her affectation of wearing little leather gloves might well protect her.

“I think we’re going to have to detain all you girls for further questions,” said Miguel San Antonio who seemed to be the most senior Customs Officer.

“Does that include me, sir?” asked Crystal. “I’ve already been cleared by customs.”

Officer Miguel San Antonio glanced at Officer Kate Phillips and the Hispanic woman whose name-badge read *Costanzia Rodriguez* as if for advice, and then, spotting

Judy's surly expression, he said: "You claim this is your Folk group, even though they look more like a goddamn freak show like those Rock groups my son listens to. If you want to represent them, my dear, then I guess you'll also have to accompany us."

And so it was that my introduction to America, and that of most of the Crystal Passion ensemble, was to be in a bare detention room on the wrong side of the United States border where we all had to wait together until we were individually interrogated. The waiting room was in the midst of a series of corridors hidden well away from anything that international air-travellers would normally see. We had to sit on hard-backed plastic chairs of the kind I'd only ever seen before in a dentist's surgery. And, of course, just like at a dentist's waiting room we waited apprehensively for the drilling we'd inevitably get.

I got the impression right from the start there was no real expectation that we'd be exposed as international drug-smugglers and that the only real hope the Customs Officers had of finding anything was if we incriminated ourselves or if the stage gear the forensic staff were going to examine happened to be crammed full of heroin or crystal meth or acid or whatever else the Customs Officers were looking for. Which thankfully wasn't Ecstasy pills.

"All our gear!" moaned Philippa, who'd only recently bought a new tenor saxophone.

"My Fender Stratocaster," echoed Judy.

"And my Roland," I wailed.

"Well, not everything," said Bertha, the other roadie. "Tomiko's got the gear she needs for the sound desk and she's got Crystal's acoustic guitar."

"Fucking great!" said Judy. "So, our first gig in America is gonna feature solo

guitar and a huge fucking orgy of backing singers.”

And so we sat together in a decrepit waiting room that was pretty much crammed full with the dozen of us including Crystal. If anyone else was to be interrogated that day they’d have to sit and wait in another room.

As the most stroppy, Judy was the one to be interviewed first; leaving the rest of us to sit and wonder what she might be saying. I don’t think any of us had much to worry about really. Our bags had already been searched and cleared, and surely nobody was stupid enough to stash drugs inside the musical instruments or electronic gear. I knew I was alright anyway. I don’t think it’d have been easy to hide much stash inside solid state circuitry even if I’d wanted to, but I speculated whether there might be drugs stuffed into the violin case, the drum kit, or even the electric guitar. And with Judy being interviewed first, I couldn’t help wondering whether she might be pushing her luck a little too far.

“No sweat guys,” Judy announced when she returned. “The questions they asked were so dumb I didn’t have to lie even the teeny-weeniest bit. They don’t know fucking shit about anything. I guess they think ’cause we’re not like Joe Public we must be Public Enemy Number One.”

“And that’s crap, right,” chimed in the Harlot. “All we want to do is get out there and play our songs to the people of New York...”

“...Or Brooklyn at least,” said Philippa. “So, what actually happened, Judy?”

“A lot of the questions were just about who we were, where we came from and what we’re gonna be doing in the States,” said Judy. “My guess is they just want to find a hole in our story that make us seem like liars. And, of course, there’s the issue of the dope. They took my fingerprints, but I know for sure that my dabs aren’t on that little

plastic sachet..."

"Yeah right," said Jenny, who we all suspected was the real cause of our suffering but none of us could admit. "What would that prove anyway?"

"Quite a lot, I suspect," said Crystal diplomatically. She looked at Judy intently. "There wasn't any of that plea bargaining stuff you see in American legal movies?"

"What d'you mean?" said Judy.

"You know, like in those films based on John Grisham's crime books," Crystal elaborated. "You know: 'If you cooperate with us we'll make things easier for you.'"

"Nah! Nothing like that. They asked a shit load of questions about money though, so perhaps they were digging a bit. Y'know, how much an electric guitar costs. How much we each get at gigs. Whether I've got another job to make ends meet. Just general questions on how we manage to get by."

"I think we'd all like to know the answer to that," laughed Philippa, who in actual fact lived mostly off the generosity of her solicitor boyfriend.

"I guess what they want to do is find out whether one of us is so far from making ends meet that she'd be tempted to smuggle drugs into the US," said Jacquie.

"And who would we sell the stuff to anyhow?" said Andrea. "None of us know anyone in the States and I'm sure any Yank hip enough to be into our music would be well able to score shit cheaply enough for themselves without our help."

There wasn't much of a wait until Crystal was summoned for questioning. Her session was almost as long as Judy's, but no one after that was questioned for more than five minutes. My guess is that after they'd questioned Crystal and Judy, the Customs Officials didn't think there was much of a case to pursue, but that there was a small chance that one of the rest of us might say something incriminating.

“What happened in there?” I asked Crystal when they’d finished with her.

“Nothing much to worry about,” she said.

“You look a bit shaken,” Jane remarked.

“I’ve never been interrogated by Police or Customs or anything like that before,” Crystal admitted.

That was almost certainly true. In most ways, Crystal was the good girl in her ensemble. Even I had once been pulled to one side and searched at the Notting Hill Carnival. And that was before I’d shaved off all my hair.

“So do you think they’ve found anything to charge us with?” Bertha wondered.

“They asked about the band’s political philosophy,” said Crystal. “I guess they thought we might be anarchists or political extremists of some sort. I showed them the publicity stuff that Madeleine produced and pointed out there was nothing in it about our allegiance to a terrorist or extremist group of any kind. The officers in the room are that Miguel guy and a woman who looks like a specialist in interrogation. The name on her badge was *Anna* something. ‘But you’re all feminists, right?’ Miguel asked. I had to squirm a bit there. I was about to say that I didn’t think being a feminist was like having a political affiliation, but I asked instead: ‘Why do you think that?’ He then looked at this Anna a bit sheepishly. ‘You’re all girls, ain’t you? And you dress like a bunch of dykes.’ But before he could go any further on this line of interrogation, Anna said quite firmly: ‘I really don’t think this is at all relevant to our inquiries.’”

“Sisterhood solidarity,” Olivia remarked with a mock clenched fist salute.

“Maybe,” said Crystal doubtfully. “Anyway it was Anna who asked me in a kind of sarcastic way. ‘So, what kinda rock group, are you? Are you the next big thing? The next British invasion?’ So I said: ‘You mean like the Beatles?’ And she said, which

was a bit weird: ‘It’s been a while since you Brits came up with anything worth listening to. I’ve heard of this new pop group called the *Take That*. Are you like the *Take That*?’”

This assertion split those assembled in the waiting room into two camps. There were those who hated anything to do with Pop and immediately rolled their eyes and said things like “Fuck yeah!” and there were those, like me, who mightn’t like Boy Bands as such but were seduced by the notion of Pop success.

“So what did you say to that?” wondered the Harlot who was the most vocally anti anything that stank of commercial success. “Did you tell her where to stuff her ‘British invasion’?”

“On the contrary,” said Crystal with a conspiratorial smile. “I said that we were a relatively new group struggling to make a living and that our image was just a way to make new fans.”

“You what?” remarked Judy indignantly. “What fucking image? We just dress the way we would anyway, Crystal Passion or no Crystal Passion.”

“In fact, I said more than that,” Crystal continued. “I said that our biggest hope was to be just as popular as Take That and that we hoped that teenagers who enjoyed their music might also come to enjoy ours. I said that if all went well on this tour, we hoped to sell as many records as Elton John, Phil Collins and Rod Stewart.”

“Fucking Phil Collins!” Judy snorted. “You might as well have mentioned Val Doonican and Max Bygraves.”

“I would have done if I’d have thought either Anna or Miguel had ever heard of them,” said Crystal. “Look, the more we appear to be a non-threatening pop group and the less like Alt-Rock, Grunge or Punk the better for all of us.”

“And how did this Anna react?” I wondered.

“‘Waaalll!’ she said in that weird over-the-top way only Americans can get away with. ‘If you’re even half as good as that Elton John, I’ll be coming to see you on stage myself.’”

“Did that clinch it then?” Andrea persisted. “Can we all go now?”

“I don’t think so,” said Crystal. “But if we play this cool, we might still get to do our gig in Brooklyn as planned.”

My time for interrogation came not long after Crystal’s and that was when I again met Miguel San Antonio and this woman, *Anna Walentynowicz*, who, like so many American women, was exceptionally big and bosomy. She was probably older than my mother and sported a distractingly large hairy mole on her chin. It was obvious by this stage that our interrogators were just going through the motions and neither Customs Officer thought there was much more to gain.

“This Crystal Passion seems to have a reputation for having lovers of both sex,” remarked Anna Walentynowicz. “Obviously, it’s none of our business what you do in private, but I can still ask whether you two are what you might call ‘an item’.”

She was right. It was none of her business. But I wasn’t going to make it an issue.

“No, we’re not,” I lied.

“You’re not what?”

“We’re not lovers,” I elaborated.

“And you never have been in the past?”

“Never,” I lied again.

“Well, so many other girls in your pop group have been, according to what they’ve told me,” said Anna Walentynowicz with a weary smile, “that I assumed you

would have too.”

“Well, I’m not and I never have been,” I volunteered unnecessarily.

And then the telephone rang. Miguel picked it up and while he was replying with “Yes”, “No” and “Of course, sir”, Anna waved me away almost dismissively with the back of her surprisingly slender-fingered hand.

“You can go now, dear,” she said. “I don’t think we’ve got any more questions for you.”

It was about an hour later that the last of us was interviewed and that was Jenny Alpha. It was then that Anna Walentynowicz strode into the waiting room to address us, accompanied by another Customs Officer we’d not seen before who appeared to be even more senior and was apparently somewhat disengaged from normal day-to-day proceedings. He was a relatively dapper guy with greying hair and cuff-links that protruded from the sleeves of his official uniform. Unlike the other Customs Officials, his name badge was discreet and difficult to read, but it seemed to say ‘Peter Piper’ or something like that.

He regarded us all with an indulgent smile. “So here’s the British Pop Invasion of the 1990s,” he said. “The Beatles of the future.”

“We certainly hope so,” said Crystal with a winning smile.

“And none of you girls are smuggling drugs into the country or have any idea where the marijuana we found on the floor might have come from?”

“Absolutely not,” said Crystal emphatically.

It was Anna Walentynowicz who now addressed us.

“The good news for you girls,” she announced, “is that you can all now proceed to your hotel in Manhattan. I hope you have a good night and y’all beware the muggers

that hang around 54<sup>th</sup> Street. It's not always safe in the Big Apple."

She paused for affect and let the smiles of relief sweep across our faces. We'd be able to do the gig after all.

"However," Anna Walentynowicz continued after a pause, "the bad news is that we'll be holding onto your musical instruments and electronic equipment for at least until tomorrow. We have some extra checks we still need to carry out."

The relieved smiles on our faces were transformed into alarm.

"But we're due to do a gig tomorrow night," said Andrea, who hated to be parted from her violin for even a matter of minutes. "How're we going to manage without our instruments?"

"I guess you girls are just gonna have to find a way," said Anna Walentynowicz with a smile. "Contact the airport tomorrow and you'll know then whether you can pick up your possessions. In the meantime, y'all can walk out through Departures. Have a nice stay in New York, girls."

And so it was that the least of all our worries came to be resolved. We weren't going to be deported from America and none of us were to be charged with drug dealing (at least not yet), but the only equipment we had for the gig was Crystal's acoustic guitar and the sound desk equipment Tomiko had brought along.

Judy was the most annoyed of all of us. "What the fuck are we gonna do?" Judy asked Crystal. "Is it just gonna be an acoustic solo set. You, the microphone and a six-string guitar."

"I think so," admitted Crystal. "You'll all just have to sit it out, though Thelma and the Harlot can help with the vocals. I'll just have to manage most of it by myself."

"How the fuck is that gonna work?" said an equally aggrieved Olivia. "There's

almost a dozen of us. We're a big band. How can we do a gig with just you?"

"My first album was mostly just solo guitar and vocals," said Crystal reassuringly. "For most of the first year or so of Crystal Passion as a performer it was just me on stage. I can manage. It won't be as good as it would be with all you guys, but it'll work."

"The Yanks'll fucking crucify you," said Jacquie angrily. "They're expecting fucking Bob Dylan and the Band and all they'll be getting is Bob Dylan. It'll be more *House of the Rising Sun* than *Like a Rolling Stone*."

"Well, at least no one'll be shouting out 'Judas!' like they did at Dylan that time," Philippa remarked.

## Chapter Two

In her best-selling biography, Polly Tarantella makes clear that she ranks the most significant days of Crystal Passion's life as those from when she arrived at JFK airport until her fateful last day on American soil. It's probably not surprising that an American writer asserts that Crystal's few weeks in America should be her most important. Although Polly interviewed me for the book and we continue to exchange e-mails, there's a lot in her account I don't really recognise. And this is even though I'm so liberally quoted: to the extent that I seem to be by far the most important member of her band (with the possible exception of Judy).

The Customs Officers who interrogated us at the airport were just doing their job. I don't agree that their actions were either unwarranted harassment or a concerted effort to keep Crystal Passion out of the United States. The weeks we toured America were undoubtedly important but even though this was where her career as a singer and musician came to an end, I wouldn't say that this episode in her life is what defines her or what most makes her music worth listening to. Surely it's not the manner of your passing but what happens before that exemplifies the worth of a person's life. I definitely don't believe that Anna Walentynowicz framed Crystal or anyone else in our entourage. I don't subscribe to the theory that the drugs they found in the corridor had been deliberately planted as an excuse to charge and prosecute Crystal. I think they were dumped simply because if they'd been discovered on the person of Jenny or anyone else in the band, our tour would have ended before it even began. And I don't believe that Peter Piper the Senior Customs Officer was a reluctant partner in a shadowy conspiracy to bar Crystal Passion from ever entering America.

On the other hand, it would be difficult for Polly to make such grandiose claims for Crystal Passion and her music if she didn't present our disastrous final tour as one that had been deliberately sabotaged. I don't think she could have called the biography *Crystal Passion: Saviour of Rock* and make so many bold claims if our tour across the United States hadn't somehow been the victim of a deliberate policy of harassment rather than just an unfortunate comedy of errors.

Many people, including me, take issue with Polly's characterisation of our music as being Rock at all. In the United States in particular, but to a certain extent in the UK and Europe also, Rock Music has become so elevated in popular esteem for the older generation that almost any type of music needs to be marketed as such to attract the attention of the wider media. It can then be marketed as being sonically accessible and benefiting from a rich venerable heritage. Crystal Passion's music was a lot of things, but it probably can't easily be placed on a dotted line of musical progression that begins with Bill Haley and Chuck Berry, rises to its most lavish and pompous in the 1970s, and has ever since limped along as the music of middle-aged Dads and Russian Prime Ministers.

I don't blame Polly for how she's made such a big deal. Nobody would buy a book about Crystal Passion if they didn't think there was something special and compelling about her. Of course I *do* think she was special and compelling. It's just that when she was alive she attracted almost none of the attention she's getting now.

I think Polly addresses an apparent need to plug in the gaping hole in Rock Music's myth of popular music's cyclical reinvention. There's been nothing especially significant since Acid House burst onto the scene. And that was big mostly in Europe and hardly at all in America: the original home of House music. Rock critics like to

have a narrative to describe the history of popular culture. And Rock fans like to define their lives in relation to this narrative. 1967 was the Summer of Love. 1977 was when Punk shook up the musical establishment. 1988 was when clubbing went from the periphery to the heart of youth culture. Hair-length, trouser flare, attitude, turn of phrase, and record collections all become part of something bigger and more significant. And even though British Rock critics have a different perspective to those in the States, they all have a shared faith in a similar mythology.

And then come the 1990s, what happened? Where was the next musical revolution? And into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, what happened to that elusive next big generation-defining event?

My opinion is that teenagers and young people just switched the focus of their attention away from music. Now they've got the internet and mobile phones and computer games and all that stuff, what's so important about the music in the background? Is it any coincidence that the last noteworthy musical revolution (in Europe at least) came about in 1988 just before the time PCs started to appear in ordinary people's homes?

Nevertheless, if you're a Rock critic who's written for *Rolling Stone*, *Mojo*, *Q* and the *New York Times*, you're not going to buy into the idea that the history of Rock Music and its musical revolutions have just come to an end just because you can download *Angry Birds* and listen to music on Spotify on your phone and browse Google for previously rare records from Guatemala, Azerbaijan or Detroit. You're going to want a saviour of Rock—a messiah who heralds a new Second Coming—that'll be as exciting as the Beatles were when they cracked the American market; when Woodstock and the other Rock Festivals were major cultural events rather than well-organised

weekend family outings; and when the future seemed bright, hairy and sexually promiscuous.

Polly Tarantella's thesis is that there was some kind of conspiracy on our American tour to nobble Crystal Passion from the moment our plane touched down in New York City. Although I understand how it might seem like that was what happened, it didn't seem so at the time.

It was inevitable that once we'd finally got past Customs, Tomiko would have already departed for the Hotel Gettysburg with her luggage. There'd been a guy from Sanity Records to meet us at the airport, but it wasn't Kai Pharrel. Even for a tiny New York record label, the boss was too big a wig for the likes of Crystal Passion. Instead, Tomiko was greeted by Barnie, a lanky teenage kid with almost as many tattoos and piercings as Judy Dildo. He knew everything there was to know about Rage Against the Machine, Nirvana and Pearl Jam; and bugger all about Crystal Passion or what was happening on the UK scene that wasn't the Stone Roses. When it became apparent that the rest of the band wouldn't be joining them any time soon, rather than continue to wait Barnie drove Tomiko into Manhattan and 54<sup>th</sup> Street West in a van that would have been a tight fit for all of us but was pretty generous for just Tomiko and him.

And knowing Tomiko as we all did, none of us were surprised to find her in bed with Barnie when we finally got to the hotel well after midnight,. He'd been under the impression that we were all just a bunch of dykes and he couldn't have been more delighted to discover that Tomiko succumbed so willingly and eagerly to his clumsy passes. Mind you, even by the standards set by the rest of us, Tomiko was always willing and eager. It took almost no persuasion for her to divest her clothes and suck off a strange guy's dick. However, with all the HIV and AIDS and stuff around at the

time, she normally preferred sex with other girls where there was much less risk of a nasty surprise resulting from a night of unplanned intimacy.

We weren't at our best at all when we finally checked in at the Hotel Gettysburg. Tomiko's evening had been by far the most enjoyable of any of us—that was for sure. Even the journey from the airport to the hotel was a trial. None of us knew our way round New York. We didn't know anything about having to buy tokens or whatever for the subway. We didn't know where the subway lines went. First of all we detrained (as they say in America) at 54<sup>th</sup> Street East on Lexington Avenue. It was only after an hour or so of wandering about hopelessly lost in a district that was a lot posher than we expected that we discovered our mistake and somehow made our way via Grand Central Station to 54<sup>th</sup> Street West. At least, unlike the London underground, New York subway trains ran well after midnight. And all the while we were terrified that we'd get mugged or shot or gang-raped. All we knew about New York came from movies like *Taxi Driver* and we expected there to be junkies, hookers and criminal gunmen on every street corner.

The Hotel Gettysburg lived up (or down) to our low expectations. It was just the sort of dive I'd imagined all of New York was like. Clearly, Sanity Records spared at least some expense for us. This was definitely not America at its best. It was an America that smelt of cat's piss; where the carpet was kind of sticky; where there was the constant musk of stale tobacco smoke; where the escalator didn't work; and where the receptionist informed us that rooms were also available by the hour.

Despite it being so late, we had to decide who was sharing which bed in each of the four rooms that had been reserved. Only Tomiko knew where she might as well stay the night and Barnie was already taking up precious space. As band leader, Crystal had

first choice as to which bedroom she could sleep in and I don't know how many of us were hoping that she'd be the one with whom Crystal would share her bed. On this occasion, she offered to share a room with Judy Dildo and—despite being the one we all suspected as being the cause for our detention—Jenny Alpha. I'd be sharing my bed with Jacquie, while her sister Jane pushed two beds together so she could sleep with Bertha who was too plump for there to be space in just the one bed for both of them.

Jacquie was probably my first true love. We'd been lovers well before we first met Crystal and before I'd been given the stage name of Pebbles. In fact, Jane, Jacquie and I had become a kind of threesome—two black sisters with Zimbabwean heritage and a girl from Bethnal Green—who shared not only our bodies but seminars and lectures in Marine Biology. Jane and Jacquie were twins, but not identical ones. They also had African names that were a lot more exotic than the names by which they were mostly known. Jacquie's other name was Bonani and Jane's was Jabu. Jacquie had the bigger thighs and rounder buttocks, while Jane's tongue could reach places inside me that never ceased to surprise me when we progressed beyond our initial awkward Sapphic fumbling towards harder, faster and more visceral love-making. But that wasn't what I wanted tonight. I was far too tired. Jacquie had to content herself with just a kiss and a cuddle. That wasn't so for Bertha and Jane who were both loud and energetic. But they were no match for the trio of Crystal, Jenny and Judy, whose fucking in the room next door was loud enough to be heard across the corridor and during which Judy was as always the most vocal.

Having gone to bed so late, it was no surprise that none of us got up early the following day. Uncharacteristically, it was Judy who woke me up rather than the other way round. She banged on our hotel room door, not having bothered to cover her naked

body, and it was Jane who eventually answered the door.

“The gig’s off this evening,” Judy announced without preamble. “It’s been postponed till tomorrow. And that’s not all the bad news...”

“There’s more?” Jane asked.

“There’s still no news about our gear. Crystal got in touch with the airport and they said there were administrative reasons why we won’t be able to pick it up for at least another couple of days. It’s a question of getting the properly qualified officer to check our property: apparently because we’d designated it as valuable and easily damaged. And whoever that guy is, he isn’t immediately available.”

“But the gig’s still gonna happen before we’ve got the gear,” said Bertha who along with Jenny Alpha was one of only two of us who’d benefit from having nothing to set up on stage.

“And the gig’s not even gonna be at such a good place,” said Judy. “We got a call from Kai Pharrel: the top honcho for Sanity records, at least here in New York...”

“The record label’s based in New York,” Jacquie interjected.

“OK. He’s the number one guy for the whole deal. Whatever. Anyway, he didn’t have much to say even though Crystal was the one who took the call. There was a double booking or something at the club where we were supposed to play. So we’ve been muscled out of the way for a House DJ with a Latino name and we’ve got a last minute booking at a club in Upper Manhattan...”

“At least it’s in proper New York,” said Bertha. “Not one of the other boroughs.”

“Well, it’ll still be a shithole of a dive. And I don’t see how we’re gonna get even a dozen people through the door with the amount of time left to promote it.

Anyhow, we'll have the chance to talk about it with Kai this evening. He's invited us to his loft apartment in SoHo."

"Soho's in London," said Bertha.

"No, it's South Houston on the Lower East Side. They call it SoHo here. Weird, eh? But we'll get to find out more about it tonight. Kai's invited us to a party at his place. I guess he thinks we'll liven it up a bit."

"Fucking right we will!" said Thelma who appeared from behind Judy in the frame of the door. She was also naked apart from a cowboy hat incongruously balanced over her short-haired pixie face. "This Kai guy's obviously heard of our reputation."

"Speak for yourself, girlfriend," said Andrea who was generally rather more restrained in her appetite for drugs, drink and sexual partners. She'd slipped on a tee-shirt and nickers, and looked almost decent. She was my younger sister and thankfully respected the taboos regarding family intimacy rather more than did either Jacquie or Jane. We'd both been students at the same university at the same time and although she also studied for a Biology degree her specialist subject was Botany rather than Marine Biology.

"Lower East Side party or not," Judy elaborated, "it's just another fucking disaster. Kai had better deliver on the drugs..."

"...if not the Sex and Rock and Roll," said the Harlot, who liked to live up to the reputation implicit in a nickname she'd earned because her unpronounceable Polish surname sounded a bit like 'The Harlot' as well as because she was at least as promiscuous as anyone else in the Crystal Passion band.

We didn't get to Kai's apartment much before midnight but we were still amongst the first to arrive. This time we navigated the subway rather better than the

night before, but it was remarkable how soon we got lost in Manhattan. We'd thought the city was all Avenues and Streets at right angles to one another like in all those movies with yellow taxis cruising down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. It was nowhere near as simple as that in the district around SoHo and Greenwich Village where we hung out for most of that evening. We quickly discovered that bars in New York are nothing like as friendly or welcoming as even a London West End pub. In fact, we were more than glad for the lines of coke that Jenny managed to score. That is, all of us with the inevitable exception as always of Crystal who passed on the offer and imbibed nothing stronger than still mineral water.

Kai Pharrel and his boyfriend were both in their apartment when we ascended to the top floor in an antiquated lift with iron-framed elevator doors that was probably built before even the Empire State Building. Both Kai Pharrel and his lover were in their early 50s and I soon learnt from them that Sanity records was mostly just Kai's expensive hobby. While he fussed around with bottles of Californian wine and gestured towards the bowls in which he'd provided his guests with good quality Jamaican grass and Mexican hash, he explained that he'd always been a big fan of music, especially what he considered 'far-out' bands like the Velvet Underground, Suicide and the Talking Heads. So when he made his fortune from selling the real estate in Upper Manhattan he'd originally purchased for virtually nothing, he set up Sanity records in the hope of finding the next New York Dolls or Television.

"Instead what we've got," said Pedro, Kai's boyfriend, "is a bunch of East Coast would-be Pearl Jams and a rather more lucrative line in House and Techno..."

"...And us," I said.

"Yeah, you. And a few other limey bands that Kai's pal, Zack, sends him over

from Gospel records in London.”

“...And Madeleine too,” I said loyally.

“Madeleine?”

“Our agent?”

“Oh, Maddy. She’s your archetypal fag hag, ain’t she? Absolutely adorable!”

Steadily more people began arriving and everything changed as they did so.

Initially it seemed most likely that all there’d be was a polite evening of passing joints round the room supplemented by glasses of rather better plonk than we deserved and the background music of Cabaret Voltaire. However, as more people arrived—most of them men and not all of them exclusively homosexual—the mood began to change. And when some kids arrived who were younger than any of us, including Andrea, I began wondering about the safety of Kai’s abstract expressionist paintings and the massive stereo speakers that were by no means yet cranked up to full capacity.

But that cautious attitude amongst other things also changes. This was going to be an evening that could be celebrated by Ian Dury’s famous song after all.

First of all there was the Sex.

This was one of the few vices—if it can be described as a vice—which Crystal engaged in as actively as anyone else in the band. She looked like an angel and had the manners of a saint, but she fucked like the devil. She was equally as generous with her love in a physical sense as she was in an ethereal platonic kind. There wasn’t one member of the Crystal Passion entourage with whom she’d not had sex many times over, although Judy and I were her most ardent lovers—with the possible exception of her husband, Mark, who was exactly as ambisexual and carnally promiscuous as she was. But Crystal was only one member of the band. All of us were lovers of other

women, although in some cases this hadn't been until Crystal introduced them to the pleasures of Sapphic love. Most of us also enjoyed having sex with men, but to markedly different extents. I'd always considered cock to be second-best to pussy, but Judy was more inclined towards men than women, even if she sometimes used her set of strap-on dildos in ways a man mightn't expect. Neither Jane nor Jacquie cared for men at all, though they tolerated it in a group sex setting. Bertha would rather frig herself than let a man touch her.

With all the new flesh arriving on the scene and so much of it already buzzing on Ecstasy and coke, it was as inevitable as night follows day that pretty much all of us would get naked and writhe around together on the mattresses, sofas and rugs. And as several of us had shed our clothes almost as soon as we had the excuse, the opportunity for sex could hardly have been more evident. Crystal was never comfortable with textile against her skin. Her habitual nudity was really no more remarkable for her than it would be for someone else to remove their overcoat and shoes when they crossed the threshold to another person's house.

Together with the Sex, there was also the Drugs.

We'd all taken some Ecstasy tabs, which was about the only drug we'd managed to smuggle into the States. And, as we discovered, although a taste for E had crossed the Atlantic to New York it wasn't nearly as prevalent as in the UK where it was almost as popular as dope in those days. So, everyone was E'd up with the customary exception of Crystal. Kai was generous with the coke, but there was also hash, grass, and sulphate. And some of the other guests also brought smack and crystal meth along with them. That last was a drug that hadn't made much of an impact in the UK, however big it was in the States. I never touched meth, although I occasionally snorted coke. I can now

take the opportunity to dispel the misapprehension that Crystal Passion had even as much connection with crystal meth as the Chemical Brothers have with illegal chemicals or the Snow Patrol with coke.

Kai's later guests were already pretty much out of it, especially the gay men. I don't know on what. I guessed it was E, but it might well have been poppers. The younger kids all looked like your typical American Grunge and Metal fan and were all totally out of it: generally more in a messy than inspiring way. It's a cliché that Americans know shit about the drug culture, but I think that's only because the American scene is so different to the British one. These kids, mostly boys in their late teens, weren't really much different to any you'd meet in London. But then the New York scene's more like the London scene than it is any other city on the planet. And these kids definitely liked to fuck. There was a mix of those with superhuman skill at maintaining an erection even if they were less than skilled at using it and those who couldn't even slip on a condom before squirting semen all over the place.

Obviously, with the major concern about the big AIDS epidemic at the time, condoms were very much the order of the day especially with so many gay men there: including more Muscle Marys than there are in the Chippendales.

And to top it all, there was also the Rock and Roll.

At first it was just music on the stereo, which mostly pumped out a mix of Hard Techno, New York Disco and Nuyorican Soul. But with so many kids there in leather jackets, long hair and all that Metal shit that had been around in the UK since the time I was a toddler, it was no surprise that the music selection shifted away from club classics towards Grunge and Alt-Rock. And, also not surprisingly, it turned out that these kids had been invited to the party because they were Rock musicians who'd been

signed to Sanity records and that instead of listening to CDs they wanted to listen to live music.

I don't know where the drum kit and the electric guitars came from. Perhaps Kai kept them in his apartment for just this kind of occasion, but we soon found ourselves fucking, sucking and fisting not to the metronomic beats of the New York dance floor, but to a discordant, painfully loud and somewhat distracting set of Rock songs.

Those of us in the Crystal Passion band represented a wide range of musical taste. Some of us, like Judy, Bertha and Jenny were Rock fans. Others, like me, Jacquie and Jane, didn't like Rock music at all. And if there was any kind of Rock that annoyed me the most, it was the kind of unnecessarily loud, shapeless and (to my ears) cliché-ridden cacophony that our Sanity record label-mates were performing and which served only to fuck up the rhythm of the fucking.

So, it was actually quite a welcome respite to me when the music came to a sudden and abrupt end. I was in a Sapphic huddle on a black leather sofa with Philippa, Olivia and a teenage Goth girl with a ring through her nose, studs through her nipples and my fist up her gorgeously receptive vagina. I wanted to continue making love without the distraction of all that guttural yelling and predictable power chords.

But unfortunately this wasn't to be.

The impromptu Rock group had generated a din that was loud and shrill enough to upset all the residents in Kai's apartment block, so they called the police to break up the party and allow them a peaceful night's sleep. But when the cops arrived and unplugged the speakers, what they saw must have made the eyes light up of any police officer who wanted to augment their monthly tally of successful arrests. With all the

drugs and explicit sex on display, this was surely the opportunity for a king-size bust.

Despite Kai Pharrel's attempt to defuse the situation with, I guess, the offer of paying a generous fine to the three police officers, Crystal Passion and her entourage would now have intimate experience of American Law Enforcement just over twenty-four hours since our encounter with American Border Control.

“Right, guys,” said one of the police officers to Kai’s assembled guests, while another stood by the door to make sure that no one slipped away. “We have a situation here. We’ve had a report of a major noise nuisance and we’ve now discovered that there’s also been widespread consumption of illegal substances. However, there are far too many of you for us to arrest and take you all into police custody for questioning. So, this is what we’re gonna do. We’re gonna take Mr Pharrel to the station for questioning and the one who’s leader of the band that’s been making this ruckus. What’s the name of the Rock band?”

“They’re called Crystal Parcel,” volunteered one of the young metal fans. “They’re a bunch of English Rock chicks.”

“Yeah,” said another leather-jacketed guy who’d only a moment ago been playing guitar but was now standing nowhere near a musical instrument. “It’s the Brits.”

“Point them out, son,” said the police officer who was old enough to be the kid’s father.

“It’s these chicks,” he said, pointing towards the group that included Judy Dildo, Andrea and a naked tattooed metalhead boy.

“So, young lady,” the police officer asked Judy almost kindly. “Are you the leader of your group?”

Judy looked stunned. I guess she was anxious about the drugs she almost

certainly didn't have on her person as such—as she was as naked as the rest of us—but mixed up in the pile of clothes. "I'm sorry, officer?"

"Who's the leader of your group? Who *is* this Christine Purcell?"

"Crystal Passion," Judy corrected the policeman automatically.

"OK. Crystal Passion. Which one is him?"

"Her," Judy corrected him again.

"OK. *Her*. Come on, young lady. Could you please just point her out to us? Otherwise we'll have to arrest you instead."

A little shame-facedly, as she was the one in our group least likely to cooperate with authority, Judy pointed towards Crystal Passion who was standing naked and slightly apart from everyone else.

The policeman also pointed towards her. "So, miss, this naked woman is Crystal Passion?"

Although the fact that almost all of us were still naked and therefore Crystal was no different to any of the rest of us, it was obvious he meant her.

Judy nodded.

"Is your name Crystal Passion?" the policeman asked.

Crystal spoke up clearly and boldly. "Yes, officer. That's my name. I shall cooperate fully with your investigations. I shall take full responsibility if there's been a misdemeanour of any kind."

The policeman stepped forward and placed his hand on Crystal's shoulder. "Then you'd better get dressed, madam. You'll be coming down to the station house with us."

"If you're taking Crystal, you should take me as well," I volunteered with an

act of courage that was untypical of me. “I’m just as guilty as her.”

“That’s not true, officer,” said Crystal in her most authoritative voice. “Please just let everyone else go.”

“We shall do precisely that, madam,” the policeman said. “But not before we’ve taken a note of the name and address of everyone here. Now please put on your clothes and accompany Officer Malcolm.” He indicated a young officer with a strangely unfashionable moustache and rather longer hair than would be expected for a police constable in London.

And so, Crystal picked up the few clothes she’d set down in a neat pile beside mine and rather absent-mindedly trotted out of the room without bothering to put them on and had to be followed by Officer Malcolm who was clearly embarrassed by her promptness. “Excuse me, madam,” we could hear him say as he followed her to the escalator beyond the door.

The more senior policeman shook his head with apparent disbelief. “Well, girls, I must ask you all to get dressed and line up against that wall there. Please be orderly. We don’t want this to take all night.”

So, we got dressed and lined up as requested. And then, while the older policeman stood by the door, a third officer pulled a small notebook and pen out of his inside pocket. He then asked each of us for our name, our address in the United States and our address in the United Kingdom. Following Judy’s example, we each gave made-up names and an equally fictitious British address. And after each of us was questioned, we were allowed to leave the apartment.

“Name?”

“Tracey Thorne,” I said.

“Address in New York?”

“Hotel Chattanooga.”

“Same as the other girls?”

“Yes, officer.”

“Address in England?”

“84 Charing Cross Road, London WC2,” I said referring to the famous film starring Anthony Hopkins.

“Another one who lives there,” remarked the officer, looking at his notes.

“Doesn’t Miss Katy Lang live there as well?”

He was referring to Philippa who was something of a film buff.

“It’s a big house, officer.”

When I got to the ground level in the same escalator as about half a dozen of the rest of the band and a few of the Metal fans who assiduously avoided catching our eyes, I could see both Crystal and Kai Pharrel sitting on the back seat of a huge police car. Crystal was looking towards Judy and me with a miserable expression.

“Excuse me, ma’am,” asked a man in a denim shirt with a prominent paunch for someone so apparently young. He was holding a notepad and pen just like Officer Malcolm’s. “Can you confirm some things for me?”

“Sorry,” I said angrily. “Who’re you? What d’you want?”

“I’m a reporter from the *New York Post*,” he said. “You must have heard of it.”

“No,” I said. “And I’m not gonna answer any questions.”

“Oh fuck, Pebbles,” said Judy angrily and somewhat recklessly. “What the fuck difference does it make now? I guess you just wanna know what’s happened?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said the reporter. “That’s all.”

“Well, that woman in the car’s Crystal Passion. She’s the leader of our band: also known as Crystal Passion. The guy with her is our record label boss, Kai Pharrel. If you wanna know more, just contact the head office of Sanity records.”

The reporter made no notes. I guess he already knew the answer to these questions. “And is she always naked, ma’am?”

“Naked?” I asked startled.

“She was butt bare naked when she got into the police car, ma’am. Is she always like that?”

“Fuck off!” said Judy angrily. “Just fuck off.”

“Do I take that as an answer in the affirmative?” asked the reporter.

“Yeah, if that’s what you wanna write in your fucking rag,” said Judy who strode off away from him with me chasing behind. “Yeah. She’s stark fucking naked from fucking morning to fucking midnight.”

Of course, Judy and I knew, as the reporter didn’t, that this was no exaggeration at all.

We hung around the entrance door to Kai Pharrel’s apartment block until the police car holding Kai and Crystal drove off. I wept silently and bitterly as I watched Crystal’s pale, apprehensive face stare through the window of the car as it drove past us and along the West Side Street. And then we were once again grateful for the late hours kept by the New York subway service that took us back to our hotel.

It was weird to see Manhattan in the brilliant early morning sun. It seemed that even more than London this was a city that never slept, although the night-time hours attracted a very different set of people. We caught our first glimpse of the seamy side of the city that we originally thought would define it. There were dark figures lurking

in the shadows of the streets just off the main avenues. Some men selling drugs and some men and all the women selling sex. Jenny speculated how much these two different types of merchant exchanged the proceeds of one trade with the profits of the other.

When we got back to the hotel, most of the guests and staff, including the room maids, were getting up rather than going to bed. We had breakfast on the ground floor in the Hotel Gettysburg diner, which was all Formica counters, sullen Spanish-speaking waiters and a jukebox that featured the music of Bryan Adams and Meat Loaf on constant rotation. The breakfast was tasteless, soaked in fat and quite the opposite of what we wanted to eat before going to bed. And then I retired with Judy who was racked with guilt and remorse at having, as she put it, ‘ratted’ on Glade.

I told her that this was just a weird way to put it. We weren’t like the noble gladiators in Stanley Kubrick’s *Spartacus*. One of us would have to tell Police Sergeant Callaghan which one was the band leader. And Crystal would have volunteered the information anyway. Not surprisingly, this isn’t the gloss that Polly Tarantella latterly puts on the event. This is yet another occasion in Polly’s biography where Judy Dildo is the villain of the piece for having cowardly shopped Crystal merely to save her skin from being busted for heroin and cocaine possession.

We awoke late the following afternoon after a restless night’s sleep to find Crystal shaking our bed. She seemed rather more perturbed than I’d ever seen her before, but she was trying to disguise it.

“Bad news,” she announced, almost as soon as I was able to focus my sleep-starved eyes on her. “It’s not going to be for a couple more days now till we get our gear released from customs. The woman I spoke to on the other end of the phone wasn’t

very forthcoming, but she said there's been some kind of delay processing our case."

"Fucking bureaucracy!" snorted Olivia from the other bed. "What d'you expect?"

"It means for sure that our first gig in America will be without almost all our musical instruments," said Crystal. "It doesn't bode well for the rest of the tour."

"Fucking shit!" said Judy angrily.

"Never mind that, Crys," I said conciliatorily. "That just can't be helped. What about you and what happened at the police station?"

"Oh that," said Crystal dismissively. "They just asked me a load of stupid questions. They didn't even take me into one of those rooms with a one-way mirror you always see them interview suspects in American cop shows. I just sat next to Sergeant Callaghan at an office desk almost completely hidden by ring-binder folders and was asked to fill out this really pointless form which had questions about ZIP codes and SSN numbers, and had very little in it that was relevant to me as a UK citizen. Then this Latino woman police officer, Officer Benita Barbara, asked me questions about the procedures we'd followed to book gigs and hotel accommodation for the rest of our American tour."

"Nothing about drugs?" Judy asked.

"Nothing," said Crystal.

"Nothing about noise nuisance?" I asked.

"Kai was the one who had to deal with those questions," said Crystal. "He told me that he might have to go to court for that sometime soon and that he expected just to get fined and that was all."

"So why did they haul you in if they weren't gonna ask you about drugs or being

a public nuisance?” wondered Jenny who’d wandered in from her bedroom.

“I think it was to intimidate everyone,” said Crystal. “To set an example so we’d respect the law in future. Anyway, I didn’t have to stay long. I got back to the hotel late this morning and snatched a few hours’ sleep before I phoned up Border Control at the airport.”

“Well, let’s hope the worst is now over,” said Andrea who was arm-in-arm with a still-naked Tomiko.

Unfortunately, what we discovered after an evening spent roaming the local bars and restaurants and a third night at the insalubrious Hotel Gettysburg, my sister’s optimism was totally misplaced.

Although it was by no means a front page article in the *New York Post*, there was still the dreaded but expected lurid news story about Crystal Passion (or Crystal and the Passions, as we were known). The headline read ‘UK Punks Trash SoHo’ and the article was accompanied by a grainy promotional picture of Crystal Passion singing on stage with oversized black rectangles blocking out her crotch and nipples (and the same also but rather unnecessarily for Judy who’d not been offending anyone’s sense of decency on the occasion the photograph was taken).

“What’s it say?” I asked Judy who was laying out the paper on top of a bed and repeated choice phrases sprinkled with her own swear words.

“You have a look,” she said, standing aside and letting me squeeze between Bertha and Thelma who were also reading it.

A quarter of the article was the bold headline, a half was the unflattering picture and the rest was the prose which served more than anything else yet printed to herald Crystal Passion’s arrival in America. On the plus side, it was the first time an article

about the band had been printed in a national newspaper (even if in the States they pretend to be locally based). Until then, all the articles printed about the band had been in British music magazines like *Mojo*, *MixMag* and *NME*. But that was quite simply the only good thing about the publicity.

Just below the headline and to the right of the picture was the following:

Not since the Sex Pistols and the UK Punk Rock scene  
has Manhattan seen the like.

Wild London-based Punk Rock band, Crystal and the Passions, arrived in SoHo from the UK and made such a ruckus the neighbours had to call the cops.

Crystal (24), the slender blonde lead singer of the Passions, was taken for questioning to the NYPD 1<sup>st</sup> Precinct Station House.

The Passions are an all-girl Punk Rock group notorious for their deviant sexuality and wild drug habits.

Their manager, Kai Pharrel (48), who lives in SoHo said: "Crystal and the Passions are really going to rock

New York State. There's not been anything like them since U2."

But given the band's notorious reputation for wild lesbian sex, the Post's recommendation is that you lock up your daughters when they rock the Five Boroughs.

"Why did they even print the article?" Crystal asked in despair. "We never made that much of an impact and most of what it says is plain wrong."

"I guess the reporter must live locally," Judy hazarded. "It was an easy thing for him to roll out of bed late at night and write a few column inches for the newspaper on a slow day."

"But even so," said Crystal, "what do you think someone turning up to our gig tomorrow will think. They'll be expecting to see some kind of punk rock group and all they'll get is me with a guitar and harmony vocals from Thelma and the Harlot. It won't be so much the Sex Pistols as Peter, Paul and Mary!"

## Chapter Three

However much I admired Crystal's song-writing skills when I was playing in her band, I didn't really dwell much on the meaning of her lyrics. Certainly not with the intense attention to detail as Polly Tarantella. She quotes from Crystal Passion's lyrics as if it was poetry and uncovered depths of meaning in them that had never occurred to me.

I suppose it's natural to think you might glean everything about Crystal's philosophy of life from her lyrics, especially since she never explicitly expressed her political, moral or religious views anywhere else. But what did she really mean in the lyrics of, for instance, *Bread for the Fisherman* with its chorus of 'Where there was nothing, there's plenty today. / The baker eats fish and the fishes eat hay.'? It takes the genius of Polly Tarantella to uncover some kind of a coherent statement of Crystal's philosophy in such lyrics. What I'd most liked about the song was how the harmony in the chorus sounds as much like the Beach Boys as it does sixteenth century polyphony.

Something Polly doesn't elaborate on much is what a Crystal Passion gig was like. That's partly because the written record of our gigs is restricted to a few brief and remarkably coy concert reviews featured in contemporary Rock Music journals like *NME* and *Melody Maker* and now defunct feminist and lesbian magazines like *Quim* and *Lesbian London*. Maybe that was because being an all-girl group, it just wasn't cool for a male rock critic to be too obvious about the nature of our stage show. These were also the days when a mobile phone was the size of a brick and had no facility to take photographs or videos. And most cameras were generally far too big to slip into your pocket and could only take still photographs. This wasn't like today when cameras and phones are taken to every gig in the world, for however big or small the band, and used

to capture a permanent record which is then uploaded to YouTube. Consequently, there is no video or film recording of a Crystal Passion gig that I know of. The nearest is an appallingly amateurish video we made for the single *Travelling Light* that was lifted off the third album, *Seventy Doctors*. The video featured only our heads and bare shoulders over a backdrop of exotic holiday locations that was probably stolen from Michael Palin's TV series, *Around the World in 80 Days*.

What this means is that *Crystal Passion: Saviour of Rock* and every other book written about the group in the last few years omits to make clear the simple fact that at almost every gig where Crystal Passion performed—whether solo as in the early days or as part of her ever-expanding band—she appeared on stage absolutely naked.

In truth, this may not even have been obvious to everyone in her audience at the time given that her long hair obscured the subtly aureate nipples of her perky but medium-sized bosom. And, as the fashion for shaved or razor-sculpted pubes was nowhere nearly as ubiquitous as it is today, her crotch was hidden under a verdant, even hirsute, light brown mass of curly hair. But naked she was, even if she did always wear sandals or canvas shoes and very often a flowery broad-rimmed cloth hat.

Crystal Passion wasn't the only one in the band whose stage presence was less than entirely modest, but in Crystal's case her on-stage nudity was pretty much just an extension of the fact that she rarely wore clothes of any kind at other times anyway.

She wasn't a nudist as such. She never went to naturist resorts or subscribed to a philosophy of naturism but in practical terms she might as well have been one. And since honesty and integrity were very much part of her persona, either as a composer or as a performer, she probably thought it would be hypocritical to appear clothed even on a public stage.

Judy also hardly wore much in the way of clothes, but she used to stick black tape over her large nipples. And what she did wear was always black and made from either leather or rubber. However, with all her tattoos and the guitar strapped across her chest and waist, Judy's nudity was even less obvious than Crystal's. The rest of us also experimented (rather more self-consciously) with several degrees of undress. At one stage, I took the purity of my shaved head (along with my shaved pubes) to validate a statement of pure nakedness but I never felt comfortable being unclothed on stage, even behind a bank of keyboards. It was often unpleasantly cold while I waited to get on stage or even while performing.

There was rather a mix of expectations in our audience whenever we went on stage. There were those who knew exactly what to expect and these were mostly our lesbian and younger women followers. And there were those, mostly men, who didn't know at all, perhaps believing we were a UK version of Hole, L7, Bikini Kill or Huggy Bear, only to find that this Riot Grrrl group offered them a kind of guilty titillation and not very much of the kind of music Rock fans usually listen to.

I guess Polly Tarantella wants to maintain an untainted image of Crystal Passion as the natural successor in a line that can be traced back through the likes of the Beatles, David Bowie and Bruce Springsteen. And that this ideal vision might be somehow tarnished if it was associated with the image of nearly a dozen women on stage—far more than was ever strictly necessary—all in various degrees of undress. In any case, our repertoire sounded nothing like what you'd hear in a Led Zeppelin or Rolling Stones gig. The music we made was sometimes reminiscent of Hawkwind or Sun Ra and sometimes of Sufjan Stevens or Neil Young. Occasionally, the music strayed into decidedly electronic, even dance floor, territory which Polly, like most fellow American

Rock critics, regards as the antithesis of whatever she believes we represent. Polly's image of Crystal Passion is exemplified by her biography's cover page in which she sits almost romantically in the middle of a floral meadow adorned in a bizarre mix of Laura Ashley, ethnic chic and junk shop DIY. This doesn't exactly accord with my memory of a naked woman standing on stage with an acoustic guitar strapped over her shoulders equipped with a deceptively powerful voice for such a classically pretty girl.

It was actually through my sister, Andrea, that I was first introduced to Crystal while I was a University undergraduate. I didn't often go to live concerts even though Jane, Jacquie and I rehearsed together as a band in the futile hope of becoming the next Faithless or Portishead. We mostly only went to night clubs. Jane and Jacquie were my best friends and lovers, so I was closer to them than to anyone else. And that included my younger sister.

Andrea is different to me in more ways than we are alike. Her chief enthusiasm then and now is for folk music. She played an acoustic guitar as well as the kind of cheap violin that typically only folk fiddlers play. She was an avid fan of the River Bank and of course their lead singer and guitarist, John River. So, it was inevitable that she'd want to go and see Crystal Passion given her historical association with John River.

“I don't know a lot about the River Bank and I've never heard of Crystal Passion,” I said when Andrea asked me whether I wanted to go with her to the gig at the smaller of the two live venues at our university, generally used for stage plays and classical recitals. “Isn't there someone else you can go with?”

“She used to perform as part of a duo with John River,” continued Andrea, who can be fairly insistent when she wants to be. “So she must be good.”

“That assumes the River Bank are good,” said Jane who was lying naked under my bed sheets toking on the roach-end of a joint while my sister perched at the foot of the bed. I’d also have been naked if I’d not had the presence of mind to pull a baggy jumper over my head and shoulders. Despite a free and open sex life at college, I still wasn’t ready to appear naked in front of my sister or anyone else from my family. “They’re a kind of folk band, aren’t they? Won’t this Crystal Passion be the same? Simone would be surrounded by folkies with chunky jumpers and beards...”

“...And not just the men!” I joked. “Come on, Andrea. What makes you think I’d enjoy it so much? I’d much prefer to go clubbing with Jane here...”

“...And Jacquie!” said Jane loyally, even though her sister wasn’t in the room.

“Why don’t you *all* come to see Crystal Passion?” Andrea continued. “I’m sure you’d love it. It’s not just folk and singer-songwriter stuff she does. I heard she’s into a whole load of the dance stuff that you like.”

“Like what?” I wondered sceptically.

“Well, like House Music and Hip Hop. I read somewhere that she’s a huge fan of Eric B and Rakim. And other stuff like that.”

“A girl with a guitar doesn’t sound like someone who could rock the house,” said Jane doubtfully.

“Oh come on, Simone,” pleaded Andrea. “I don’t want to go all by myself.”

“And why can’t she?” wondered Jacquie, when Jane and I told her later about where we were going that evening.

“She’s my sister,” I explained.

“That’s no fucking reason,” said Jacquie angrily. “Me and Jane don’t fucking do everything together, do we?”

Jane and Jacquie both had something of a temper on them, especially Jane, so I didn't want to give a reply that could set them off. Although they were usually quite calm and even gentle, there were occasions when one or the other would fly off and I'd be caught between the two sisters yelling and screaming at one another, usually in English but sometimes in isiNdebele. And it was extremely unpleasant if either of them were to direct their fury at me. Nonetheless, I could have easily pointed out to Jacquie that in actual fact she and Jane more or less *did* always do everything together—even when making love with me.

"I promised Andrea I'd go," I said. "You don't have to come, but Jane said she would."

"This Crystal Passion is a big soul and R&B fan," said Jacquie, misquoting my sister. "It's not just gonna be folk."

"Is she black?" wondered Jacquie. "Is she gonna be like Joan Armatrading or Tracy Chapman?"

"No," I admitted. "She's a white girl and I don't think she's anything like either of those two."

"You don't have to come with us, you know," Jane challenged her sister. "You can stay home and frig to fucking Tracy Chapman. I bet she'd love to lick your quim."

"I bet she fucking would," said Jacquie, but not yet confirming whether she'd come to the concert. However, it was pretty much understood that whatever Jane did, Jacquie would do too.

And so it was that I went along to the Britten Room at the University Arts Centre along with Jane and Jacquie and my sister and a few dozen other curious students and rather fewer members of the general public. There wasn't even going to be a support

act. It would just be two sets from Crystal Passion.

At this stage in her career, she'd only released one album, *Triad*, and that was the album she was promoting on this tour. In those days, Crystal Passion really *was* just Crystal and an acoustic guitar. And, as I was now to discover, not a lot else.

And when I saw her, my heart almost jumped out of my mouth.

I don't know whether I'd have been won over to Crystal Passion's charms if it wasn't for her body. But I just couldn't take my eyes off her. I only half-heard the voice and guitar that should have been the focus of my attention. She was so beautiful and wore her nudity so naturally. Despite entertaining us with digressive introductions before each song, not once did she make a reference to her state of undress.

With just Crystal on stage, there was as much to enjoy in the amusing and somewhat surreal monologues between each song as in the songs themselves. It was like an intimate conversation: at times witty and discursive and at other moments like listening to one of those stories you'd expect to hear from a comedian. She was open about her sexual preferences, but not to the extent that those in the audience not sensitive to the signals would notice. There was an ethical core to what she had to say but nothing to alienate any but the most prejudiced. And then, even while chatting and carrying the audience's sympathy along with her, she would launch almost unnoticed into the next song.

I considered myself to be pretty hip as to what was happening on the scene. I was a regular listener to John Peel's show on BBC Radio One at a time when there was as good as nowhere else to hear the best new and exciting music. I thought I knew all I needed to about World Music, Hip Hop, Dub, House, Techno and the like. When I was in a record shop I would rummage through CDs that were outside the predictable Pop

and Rock categories. I listened to music such as Steve Reich, Fela Kuti and Miles Davis that was way beyond the normal range of an early 90s clubber. But it was pretty much apparent to me that for Crystal Passion the outer limits of what I listened to was just her jumping-off point.

Yes, just as Andrea claimed, the music incorporated elements of modern dance music even if it was set to acoustic instruments. Yes, there were elements of rap that might have had been inspired by MC Rakim or even Salt-n-Pepa, but just as likely by Gil Scott-Heron or Blossom Dearie. But the references and influences were so diverse, so transformed from the original source and somehow just so absolutely right. Like many others in the audience (but not the absolute majority), I was mesmerised.

And more so than by the music simply by the vision of her hairy crotch when Crystal stood up as she did for about half the concert and that beautiful bosom briefly exposed when she brushed aside her long hair to gain better access to her guitar. And there was also the beauty of a voice whose range was much greater than any folk singer I'd ever heard before, but more intimate and inviting than that of a trained classical soprano or contralto.

So, for the two sets of Crystal Passion's concert, there was laughter at her jokes, tears to some of her tunes and a profound fluttering of my heart in between times.

I was pleased to discover in the interval that I wasn't the only one in my group of friends who was smitten. Curiously enough, Andrea was the one least enamoured of us. I think she'd been hoping for a rather more conventional folk concert.

"Let's go and talk to her back stage after the set," Jacquie volunteered. "See what she's about."

"I'm not sure I'm so bothered," said Andrea. "I've got an early lecture

tomorrow.”

As it happened, Andrea was right to make her excuses. I didn’t realise then and I guess neither did Jane and Jacquie just how much our meeting with Crystal Passion in her dressing room was going to fuck up our studies the following day.

It wasn’t difficult to get to meet Crystal backstage. It wasn’t like a Rock or Pop concert so there were no bouncers and no expectation that musicians should maintain a good distance from their fans. In any case, Crystal even mentioned during her concert that she’d love to talk to members of the audience afterwards. I led the way with the two sisters behind and simply asked the first year student who was working as stage manager where the dressing room was. In fact this student took us straight there and knocked on the door.

“There are some fans to see you, Miss Passion,” she announced.

And there was Crystal Passion sitting alone on a hard-backed chair in the dressing room, still naked and sipping a cup of tea.

“I’m really pleased to see you,” she said with a warm welcoming smile.

I guess I don’t need to describe how things went from there. Here were three final year students one of which (myself) was utterly smitten and two others who were swept along in the wake of my enthusiasm. And there was Crystal Passion who was charm personified and the most subtle and effective seductress I’ve ever met. She soon realised that here was a trio of women united in love for one another and by the end of the night for a fourth person whose double bed at the local Travel Inn served to accommodate all four of us.

It’s more or less expected when you’re a student that you boast of a rather more full sex life than you ever actually had. My sex life was probably fuller than most

students, but I'd enjoyed more sex with Jane and Jacquie, either together or individually, than with all the other half dozen sexual partners of my life so far combined. And only one of those had been a woman. Most of my former lovers had been men and in one case, Freddy, for several years while I was at High School in Bethnal Green. In a sense, we'd never officially split up and he was the boy I first had sex with, but not very often and rather fumblingly. It isn't that I don't like boys. I just prefer women. And I most certainly prefer women like Crystal Passion who are beautiful, sexually accomplished and somehow able to bring me to orgasm more often than I'd ever had before (including with my two Zimbabwean lovers).

Jane and Jacquie experienced the same heights of ecstasy as I did. How could just one woman keep three others so satisfied and share her attention so effectively between us?

When I admitted that I played a synth, that Jane and Jacquie played drums and electric bass respectively, and that together we were a sort of band, it was Crystal who suggested we should audition for her because she'd recently been thinking of expanding her solo acoustic set to a four piece.

"But we've never played in front of an audience," Jacquie protested. "We've rehearsed together but that's all."

"Record a cassette of one of your rehearsals," Crystal said. "And let's see what I think of it."

"But don't you want musicians who've been properly trained and who've performed with loads of other bands?" I asked.

"That's precisely what I don't want," said Crystal.

So following Crystal's advice, we recorded a session on cassette for her. She

advised us just to keep the cassette running for the 45 minutes of one side of a C90 and then do the same thing for the other side. She said she was more interested in our interaction with one another than in hearing a polished set. But despite Crystal's suggestion that we do nothing special, we put together a list of those songs we could actually play, which were nothing like as hip and current and bleeding-edge as we'd have liked. And although Andrea hadn't joined us when we spent the night at Crystal's hotel, she agreed to accompany us on violin. Andrea was by a good mile the best musician of the four of us and the one who most made the cassette worth a listen.

With Andrea's assistance and my limited knowledge of what do with a Roland E-30, the set of songs we put together included an instrumental version of *God Only Knows*, a not very funky version of *Green Onions*, an extended violin solo on *River Man*, and, because Jane and Jacquie desperately wanted House represented, a rather weedy version of *Pacific State* and a plodding jam based on *Voodoo Ray*. I can't say any of us were particularly impressed by the results, especially not Andrea, but we popped the cassette in the post with a gushing note I'd put together that we posted to the address in Camden that Crystal had given us, which was the one-bedroom flat she was sharing at the time with Mark.

And the rest, as they say, is history.

There could be no greater contrast between the earlier gig that so gobsmacked me and Crystal Passion's premiere American gig at *Candy Cream*, a run-down Manhattan night club located somewhere between Harlem and Washington Heights. This wasn't the kind of concert to herald Polly's vision of a Rock group for the New Age. Nor did it showcase the shambling collective we usually were. It was more like the type of folk trio gig associated with Greenwich Village in the early 1960s than

Upper Manhattan in the 1990s. And what was worse, *Candy Cream* was a venue that usually hosted House, Techno and Latin nights. The venue was clearly designed to accommodate clubbers who'd dance to DJs spinning vinyl at upwards of 120 bpm and at the higher end of the decibel range.

Not that this was the audience who actually came to our gig.

Thanks to the brief news story in the *New York Post*, the majority of the audience couldn't be more unlike what you'd normally expect at a Crystal Passion gig, even if the number who paid to come through the door was much greater. There weren't many young women: the typical core of our regular audience. In fact, it was a predominantly male, Rock audience who were just like the kids who'd cranked up the volume at Kai's party. There were more men with long hair than you'd generally expect women with long hair at our London gigs. And the leather jackets studded and patched with the names of metal bands like Korn, Queensrÿche and Metallica were worn with absolutely no sense of irony.

The build-up to the gig already seemed likely to invite disaster. The *Candy Cream*'s default background music was upbeat and bouncy, but the venue was more than half full with young men who were vocal about how much they hated 'disco shit' and wanted 'real music'. However much I was enjoying the Nuyorican Soul, someone had to enter the DJ booth and switch the pre-recorded tape to something more to the taste of a Rock fan. Tomiko was the band member with the most technical expertise, but as sound engineer she, along with Crystal, was one of the few of us who actually had something to do this evening. As it happened, it was Judy who volunteered to take on DJ duties. She was the only one in the band who could tell Metallica apart from AC/DC and either of them apart from Slayer. In those days however, nightclubs still

played only vinyl and most new metal and rock records were released on CD, so the audience of head banging rockers was treated to a selection of definitely old school rock from the likes of Mötley Crüe, Bon Jovi and Van Halen, which to a Rock audience was probably a bit like playing music by Sister Sledge or Frankie Goes to Hollywood in a London club.

On the other hand, what the audience lacked in contemporary Rock music they more than made up for with alcohol: which seemed very much to be their drug of choice and almost exactly the wrong stimulant for a Crystal Passion gig.

As we all predicted, after Crystal Passion walked on stage to a huger roar of approval than we normally got at any of our gigs, with this audience the only way things could go from then on was downhill. When the rock fans saw a naked woman carrying an acoustic guitar and wearing only a pair of plastic sandals, they must have thought that Crystal Passion would be some kind of a pornographic live show. However, when she was followed by Thelma and the Harlot, who dressed for the gig in matching long flowing white dresses and looked about as unprovocative as it was possible to be it was clear to most of the crowd that this really *wasn't* going to be quite the night of sexual exhibitionism and raucous Rock music they'd hoped for.

Crystal had obviously put a lot of thought into the show. She decided to perform music from her first solo acoustic album, *Triad*, but also some of the more accessible songs from the other three albums arranged for just guitar and harmony vocals. It'd probably have been perfect for a folk club attended by about twenty folk fans in chunky jumpers and uncombed hair, but it was received with total incomprehension by the present audience. Tomiko on the mixing desk tried to boost the sound into something that more resembled Rock music by a subtle use of reverb and echo and a few sneaky

samples, but this was music destined to fall on the deafest of ears. It wasn't ear-bleedingly loud, it wasn't swamped by power chords and the accompanying vocals were neither screeched nor bellowed. And for those who cared to listen to the lyrics, none of Crystal's songs celebrated Satanism, hobbits or teenage angst.

The first song, *Roadside Blues*, which to my ears resembles Billy Holliday crossed with the Mamas and Papas was received with polite applause. I've heard that Rock groups often moderate the intensity and sameness of their music with a power ballad of some kind. Nevertheless, applause was almost totally absent at the end of the second song, *Pig and Prodigy*. The boos, catcalls and slow handclaps began early in the third song, *So-So Sower*. This audience could see no value whatever in Crystal's gentle pastoral tune with its subtle evocation of a traditional English folk song arranged by Vaughan Williams.

From then on, the audience response got steadily worse. Even Crystal—who was used by now to performing to mostly indifferent audiences—could see that the situation was hopeless. Her songs could hardly be heard at all over the slow handclapping and shouted abuse: some of which was very offensive to women, even one like Crystal who probably didn't really much mind being accused of promiscuity or of being indiscriminate in her choice of partners. And when the audience began lobbing empty bottles and beer cans at the stage, it was obvious that after only four and a bit songs, Crystal Passion's first American concert was now over.

“What the fuck do we do now?” Andrea wondered. She was standing just by me beside Tomiko and the mixing console.

Judy rushed back into the DJ booth and put on *Ace of Spades* by Motörhead which is famously one of the few Rock tunes that almost everyone likes, but this could

only be a brief stopgap on the proceedings. I could see Judy and Bertha in the shadows of the booth frantically flicking through its small collection of vinyl Rock albums for something that could calm down the discontented crowd.

I wandered over to the bar, accompanied by Philippa for moral support, to chat to the owner of the *Candy Cream*. He was sitting on a stool on the customer side of the bar with a huge lit cigar on which he hardly puffed at all.

“Your band’s not gone down very well,” Luigi said with an apparently unconcerned smile.

“It’s been a fucking disaster,” I said. “It’s all because our musical equipment’s still at the airport. If we’d had our guitars, keyboards and everything, I’m sure we’d have put on a better gig.”

“Don’t worry about it, dear,” Luigi replied as he waved his cigar uncomfortably close to my nose. “Kai warned me not to expect much. It was either opening the club for you lot or shutting it down for the night and not making any money either at the door or at the bar. As it happens, thanks to the *New York Post*, we got a fuck of a lot more people than I expected and this crowd like their booze a lot more than clubbers on ecstasy and poppers. The bar takings are up, if nothing else.”

“But what about the gig?” Philippa asked.

“Fuck it!” Luigi said. “If they don’t like your band, well fuck them. If they wanna leave, let them. If they wanna stay, we’ve got plenty of booze for them.”

“So, you don’t expect to reimburse any of them?” I asked.

Luigi’s face expressed incredulity and disbelief. “Fuck no! They got what they came for. If they don’t like it they can fuck off somewhere else. Anyhow, it’s about time those old Kiss albums got an airing. I’ve been thinking about chucking out that

Rock shit years ago. Who'd believe kids'd still be listening to the same old shit now as they did twenty years ago!"

So, what was expected to be an acoustic set for a handful of bemused Americans expecting the much larger Crystal Passion ensemble became instead a bad-tempered Rock Disco of precisely the kind that I'd avoid at any cost back in London.

I wandered backstage to where Crystal was sitting in the dressing room with Thelma who was puffing agitatedly on a joint. I don't think I'd ever seen her more desolate.

"I'm so sorry, Pebbles," she said, almost sobbing. "I've failed you all. I've failed everyone."

This gig, however, like so many other less than satisfactory events in Crystal Passion's life gets no mention at all in Polly's biography. It's as if it never happened. I suppose it just doesn't fit her narrative.

And it also didn't fit the narrative of a conservative DJ in upstate New York on a local radio talk show syndicated across American AM radio stations. Samuel Hedrick had seen the article about Crystal Passion in the *New York Post* and had somehow found out that we'd be performing at *Candy Cream* which, according to him, was a club frequented by homosexuals, drug addicts and drop-outs. None of us in the Crystal Passion band ever actually got to hear his syndicated broadcast of course. We didn't even know about American talk radio and even if we had we weren't likely to spend any time listening to the ranting of religious, political and social reactionaries. There were too many other things to do in America and some of these, we were beginning to discover, like bagels, Latin dance music and cable television, were not only novel but really quite addictive. The last thing we'd be interested in listening to were the narrow-

minded opinions of a middle-aged balding radio announcer who thought that Bill Clinton was too much of a liberal, that homosexuality was the mark of the devil, and who was utterly ignorant of the world beyond the 50 United States.

But had we listened to Samuel Hedrick's *Voice of Reason*, we'd have heard a sustained ten minute rant about English dykes, long-haired punk rockers and a supposed drug trail from London to New York of Ecstasy tablets and crystal meth, which last he was convinced was the drug after which Crystal and the Passions had been named. His listeners would have discovered that Crystal had vilified the name of Jesus Christ Himself by calling her second album *Passing Passion*, which he explained in a peculiarly convoluted narrative was intended to cast doubt on the truth of the Resurrection and thereby the entire foundation of Christianity.

We would also have heard Hedrick's advice to his listeners to actively boycott any concert in their locality by these lesbian agitators and dyke blasphemers. If our music was anything as crude and vile as that of the Sex Pistols, the Rolling Stones or Kiss, which Hedrick assured his listeners it most certainly was, then these apologists for Satan, these drug-addled dyke punks and scantily dressed whores should be sent back to London, England, from whence they'd come and where they should have chosen to stay.

## Chapter Four

It's often assumed that because I've been cast as Crystal's best friend, I'm also the one who knows most about her childhood or at least about her life before she became a musician. That's just not true. Her husband Mark knew Crystal's family far better than I ever did.

Mark was never really a close friend. In fact, I regarded him rather more as a rival. Neither Crystal nor Mark were jealous lovers but that wasn't what it was like for me, although I accepted Crystal's sexual promiscuity much more easily than I could her almost uncritical emotional promiscuity.

I know that Crystal Passion was christened Christine Giordano, that her mother, Marianne, was Irish and her father, Giuseppe, Italian. And I know that her family home was an unremarkable semi-detached house in Harrow, North London. I'd also heard the rumour that Polly Tarantella makes such a big deal about which is that Crystal was the bastard daughter of a millionaire who was paying her some kind of an allowance. That would certainly explain why Crystal managed to live relatively comfortably when Giuseppe's income was never any more than what you'd expect for a middle-ranking civil engineer.

As to why she'd adopted the name Crystal Passion, I guess it was just as accidental as my stage name of Pebbles. And mine was entirely because of a supposed resemblance to a character in the Flintstones cartoon series.

All I know about the circumstances of Crystal's birth are what Polly discovered in her research for the biography. How she tells it was that there'd been an outbreak of Legionnaire's Disease that closed the local maternity ward in Carlisle where her parents

were living at the time and the result was that Crystal was born instead in a Lake District cottage, but I don't attach nearly as much significance to this accident of birth as Polly does. I think the theory hinted in the chapter of her biography about Crystal's birth that her father was a man who wasn't her mother's husband is entirely speculative. Marianne was an old hippy and she gave birth to her daughter during that time in the 1960s when the practice of free love was flaunted as a statement of identity. It'd almost be more incredible if Crystal's parentage *could* be verified without DNA analysis and that wasn't available in those days. It's even more unlikely that this alleged real father would agree to take responsibility for an unplanned pregnancy.

I've met some of Marianne's friends from the time of Crystal's birth. They're all very nice people who're rather bemused and even dismayed that the fashions of their age, which appeared to herald a long-lasting—even permanent—change, turned out to be as ephemeral as every other fashion. And I can see where Crystal might have picked up her attitude regarding habitual nudity and polyamory.

I once spent a few days with Crystal in a New Forest farm house where her parents previously used to live. It had been a kind of hippy commune from the late 1960s to nearly the 1980s. It was now wholly owned by Zack and Liz who'd lived there for all of that time. They were real old hippies in every sense. Long greying hair, ethnic clothes and always smoking hash and weed. I really enjoyed their company, so it was pretty much inevitable that Crystal and I should join the two elderly hippies in bed. I'd never had sex before with people old enough to be my parents, so this was a first experience for me but not one I made a habit of until I was pretty much that age myself. I can't imagine Zack and Liz would be up to such a vigorous foursome nowadays, especially as, being the only man, Zack had to invest a disproportionate amount of his

energy.

I also met their son, John Aaronson, but not at the farm house nor indeed with either of his parents. He's rather better known as John River, of course: lead singer with the River Bank. In the early days of Crystal's musical career, when she was a History undergraduate, she and John were an acoustic duo prosaically known as John & Crystal. It could have been called Aaronson & Giordano, but that was too much of a mouthful. Polly Tarantella dedicates a whole chapter to this early partnership. She believes Crystal is the natural successor to the River Bank's legacy, but I don't think there's much in common between John's music and Crystal's. Nothing was recorded from the time they performed together, but Crystal told me they mostly sang other people's tunes. And a weird selection it was too. Songs by Bob Dylan and Nick Drake, of course, but also songs made famous by Billy Holliday, *Everything But the Girl*, Abbey Lincoln and an acoustic version of *Big Fun* by Inner City.

John and Crystal guested on each other's gigs later on, but this was before the River Bank did the music for that weird ballet with the Hereford Salon Ensemble that was infamous for its depiction of violence, nudity and explicit sex on stage. It was that rather than the River Bank's version of Al Green's *Take Me to the River* or their own *Thunder in the Sky* that is most in tune with Crystal's music.

From what I've been told, there was nothing very special about Crystal's school life. She was a bright pupil and excelled at school, but not so much that she was ever the star pupil. She was a sort of geek that no one could imagine was destined for a career as a sexually promiscuous musician. Although she excelled at Music Studies, she didn't pursue it as an academic subject. She played guitar with a school folk group that mostly played covers of Top Thirty songs. The photos of her at the time show a pretty girl

dressed unremarkably for a 1980s teenager. There are no pictures of her in the nude. Indeed, there are no nude photos of her at all until Christine Giordano became Crystal Passion. Even so, I'm sure she was just as habitually naked in the family home with her hippy parents and their hippy friends as she was in later life. And, despite Polly's lurid conjectures, I have no reason to believe she'd ever been exposed to inappropriate sexual behaviour from within the family circle.

Crystal's parents were separated by the time we set off on our American tour but they hadn't yet divorced. I think they were waiting for Crystal's brother, Justin, to finish university before making it official. I don't know why they split. Marianne always seemed to get on just fine with her husband, although Crystal hinted that another man was involved. And I got the impression that the extramarital relationship this other man had was with Crystal's father rather than with her mother.

Although Crystal had never been on holiday to America as a child, it was to San Francisco that Marianne chose to move when she separated from her husband and where she lived with some English friends who'd settled there in the 1970s. It was a natural destination I suppose, since San Francisco had once been the beating heart of the hippy movement. And so she should see her daughter perform on the Crystal Passion American tour, Marianne was staying at the time with some other friends who lived in the Pennsylvania countryside. She was scheduled to meet us at our hotel when we arrived in the City of Philadelphia for our second official gig on the tour.

Although I'd made love with Zack and Liz, I've never had sex with anyone other than Crystal in her immediate family. I don't think Justin would want to have sex with one of his sister's friends and Marianne quite simply wasn't a potential partner. I'm sure Crystal's mother had dabbled in Sapphic pleasure in her younger days, but it

was obvious to my now expert eye that she wasn't truly attracted to other women. And so I again disagree with Polly who says that Crystal inherited her sexual proclivities from her mother and that Marianne split up from Giuseppe so she could shack up with her friend Marcia in San Francisco. Marcia wasn't gay either. In fact, I don't think she's ever been in a permanent relation. She was far more devoted to her three young children than she was to any lover.

Before we set off from New York to Philadelphia, we had the opportunity to perform in the Big Apple as the full band—albeit at the last minute—in front of a very small audience in a basement club somewhere in Brooklyn. Homeland Security had finally released our equipment and Kai Pharrel, or his boyfriend Pedro, arranged a last-minute gig to support a Math Rock group with the suitably dull name of Attenuated Dissonance. The MF Club could hold at most a hundred people, but the number of people who bothered to come and watch us play was barely a quarter of that.

It was a real treat to have my Rolands back and even better to perform as part of a full band with Crystal at the front of the stage with Thelma, the Harlot, Andrea, Philippa and Judy gathered around her. At the back, and constantly being bumped into on the small crowded stage, was the rhythm section of Jane and Jacque and me. The set was mostly based around material from our third album, *Seventy Doctors*, and from the unreleased album, *The Last Word*, although nobody in America would know what was new material and what wasn't.

As always, the audience was totally bemused by what they heard. There was really nothing in common between a nerdy three-piece rock band and a ten-piece ensemble of diversely attired women. And, in Crystal's case and very nearly Judy's, not really attired at all. I was wearing a pretty flowery dress I'd spotted in the window

of a Brooklyn charity shop, so with my shaved head and blood-red lipstick I definitely looked the part of a Riot Grrrl, as did Thelma and Philippa. In their tight tank tops and shorts, Jane and Jacquie looked ready for a real work-out. And for some reason Andrea wore a check shirt with jeans so with her violin and bushy hair she more resembled a Country & Western fiddler than whatever else the audience might have expected.

I'd like to say the gig was a success. In fact, it was almost the highlight of our tour but at the time we thought it was just a warm-up for the gig we were due to do at the folk rock venue Mary Jane's in Philadelphia. So we were buoyed up with fresh enthusiasm as we squeezed into the twenty year old Volkswagen camper van loaned to us by a friend of Kai's which was festooned with a fading psychedelic mural and the words *Grateful Dead* emblazoned amongst other lesser tributes to Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Jefferson Airplane. The drive from Manhattan to Philadelphia took nearly four hours, which was rather longer than we'd expected, but more time was spent getting lost on the roads out of Manhattan and those into Philadelphia than on the nearly one hundred miles of interstate highway between.

The hotel in Philadelphia was better than the one in Manhattan, but that's not saying much. We still had to share three to a room and our only view through the hotel windows was of a disused car factory. As band leader, Crystal was assigned a room to herself but she almost immediately offered to share it with me.

And so it was that when Crystal's mother came to visit her daughter, she found me sprawled across the hotel room bed reading a copy of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in more hope than expectation of finding something that alluded to our upcoming gig at Mary Jane's.

"Is Chrissie not here, Simone dear?" Marianne asked after she knocked on the

door and we'd greeted each other. Her blue jeans were a tight fit on her matronly hips. She was wearing a red tee-shirt that celebrated the Philadelphia Phillies. Her bushy grey hair was as wild and unruly as ever,

"She's out with Tomiko and Jenny," I said. "They're doing a recce of the venue we're playing tonight."

"She knew I was coming, didn't she?" said Marianne. "I left her a phone message at reception."

In those days, when very few people had cell phones, even in the United States, you couldn't normally phone someone unless they were in.

"Yeah, sure," I said. "She'll be back soon. Take a seat. D'you wanna share a spliff?"

"I don't mind if I do, dear," said Marianne. "I have to tell you, I'm real freaked out by the roads in this city. I don't like to drive, but you just can't rely on public transport in America. How's the tour been so far?"

"Not so good," I confessed as I skinned up a concoction of half tobacco and half weed. I told Crystal's mother about our trials so far.

"It's as if the yanks have got it in for us," I said.

"Don't be silly, dear," Marianne said. "I don't think anyone pays attention to what's written in the *New York Post*." At this stage we didn't know about Samuel Hedrick's rant on talk radio. "Anyway, you have to expect a bit of the rough with the smooth. If nothing else that's what Chrissie learnt when she used to go backpacking."

"Backpacking?"

"Yes," Marianne said. "It was after she'd graduated and before she surprised us all by marrying her university boyfriend, Mark. Almost unannounced she boarded a

ferry from Folkestone and went hitch-hiking round Europe and Asia. And if that wasn't bad enough, despite having so many friends who'd have joined her if she'd asked, she decided to go all the way by herself. And she was away for very nearly a whole year."

"Crystal's mentioned her travels but I thought they were spread out over several years."

"Chrissie's always liked traveling. We visited places like Morocco, Kenya and Jamaica when she was a little girl. And she stayed with us at our friends' homes in France and Holland. But it's one thing to go on holiday for a couple of weeks. It's another to be away for a year in one stretch."

"No, I didn't know she'd done that," I said as Marianne passed the half-finished joint back to me. "But there's a lot about Crystal's life I don't know about."

"That's the same for me also, dear," Marianne admitted. "And for Giuseppe as well. Whatever I might have got up to when I was younger is absolutely nothing compared with my renegade daughter. We had no idea she was gonna become a folk singer or rock singer or whatever she is. I didn't really take her folk duo with John very seriously. I couldn't see the two of them doing that for very long, and he's done rather better for himself with his group, the River Bank, than he ever could have done with Chrissie. I think her musical ambition is more a result of her year of independent travel than her time with John."

"You don't think Crystal was simply inspired by John's example?"

"In the sense that she'd learnt a lot by playing with him, I guess she was. But I don't think they ever wrote any songs together, did they? And you can't hear much of the River Bank in Chrissie's music either. John's much more mainstream than Chrissie. I think she got more out of listening to Moroccan gnawa and those Steve Reich and

Iannis Xenakis albums that Giuseppe bought during the time he was into contemporary classical music. But it's good that Chrissie got John's blessing. I don't think she'd have got signed to a record label or found a manager if it hadn't been for him. And it doesn't do her any harm to be associated with a famous rock band."

"So where did Crystal go travelling?"

"Well, India was the most important part of her journey, though she also sent us postcards from Thailand, Burma, Nepal and Indonesia. She'd probably have gone to a lot more countries if she could, but there are so many places that aren't easy to enter even now the Berlin Wall's come down. We were out of communication for well over a month when Chrissie got stuck in a really out of the way place in the Himalayas, but I get the idea that this was the episode in her travels that had the biggest effect on her: you know, being totally out of touch with anyone who could speak much English. I imagine you discover a lot about yourself in that situation."

"So, what was Crystal like when she eventually got home?"

"Terribly thin, dear. Very thin. I don't think the climate and the diet did her any favours. She had terrible diarrhoea and sickness while she was away, but thankfully she didn't get hepatitis. We've got her habits of good hygiene and of not sharing soggy roaches to be thankful for there. And of course she was very enthusiastic about the cities, the deserts and the mountains she'd got to see: all of them much more impressive than anything in Europe."

"And then Crystal got onto a record label, found a manager and recorded her first album," I speculated.

"The way you put it makes it sound so easy, dear," said Marianne. "I really don't know how Chrissie managed to persuade that record label to put out her first

record. It doesn't sound much like anything else that was on the market and I have no idea who buys her records. But Chrissie can be very persuasive. And I'm sure her association with John helped her no end. But yes dear. That's almost exactly what happened. My darling daughter returned from travelling round the world, got married to a boyfriend she'd not seen for over a year and started a career as a singer-songwriter in the early 1990s when that kind of music was probably about the least fashionable it's ever been. That takes extraordinary courage. I have nothing but admiration for everything Chrissie's done. And even if it all ends in tears, I think the experience will have made it all worthwhile."

It was after another joint—this time using Marianne's stash—when Crystal returned to her room to find her mother in a decidedly mellow mood. She pulled her clothes off with no ceremony and hugged Marianne close to her bosom. As always I was fascinated by Crystal's openness in front of her mother. My parents would never be at ease if they saw me in the nude. In fact, they weren't remotely comfortable with even a single aspect of my career or love-life, however much they were sure it was just a phase I was going through.

*“Mum!”* Crystal exclaimed with her chin over Marianne's shoulder and her arms around her. “I tried to get here as soon as I could, but the hotel's nowhere near the subway and it wasn't an easy job to work out the best way back. But I'm glad to see that Pebbles has been keeping you company.”

“She has. She's been very good to me,” said Marianne languidly as she proffered the last hit to her daughter. “D'you wanna toke?”

“No thanks Mum,” said Crystal firmly. “I'm fine just as I am.”

“You know, Chrissie dear,” continued Marianne as she stubbed out the roach in

the ash tray, “Simone and I were chatting about how you gave up everything and took up a career as a singer songwriter. Didn’t you once tell me that when you were in India you met a guru who told you that you were destined for great things? Is that why you became Crystal Passion?”

“There are lots of reasons, Mum,” said Crystal sitting down on the edge of the bed beside her mother. “But yes, you’re right. I did meet an Indian guy who predicted that one day I’d become world famous and that my dream of musical success would live beyond me. But how much of a guru this guy was, I can’t say. India’s a weird place when it comes to religion and there are loads of these sadhus and holy men everywhere. It’s no big deal, Mum. They’re all naked with long hair and bushy beards. I guess that’s why he liked me. But he knew nothing about the international music scene. And you can never be sure with these mystics whether they’re talking metaphorically or literally.”

“So, Crystal. What did this sadhu have to say?” I asked intrigued, as this wasn’t a story I’d heard before, though inevitably it’s got a prominent place in Polly Tarantella’s biography.

“Oh, the usual nonsense,” she said dismissively. “There was something to do with former lives and predestination. And how my music would bring light into the darkness and life after death.”

“Those are bold claims, Chrissie dear,” said Marianne. “You don’t believe any of it, do you?”

“Of course not,” said Crystal. “It doesn’t make sense. There’s always something you have to sacrifice or repent for a prophecy to be fulfilled, isn’t there? And I haven’t given up or repented anything.”

“You *did* get married to Mark,” said Marianne probingly.

“That doesn’t mean I gave up anything,” said Crystal in reply. “And well you know that, Mum.”

“I must say yours is a marriage like no other,” said Marianne with a sigh. “Giuseppe and me, we thought *we* were open-minded and free-thinking, but you and Mark... Well!”

“What more did this sadhu say, Crystal?” I probed further.

“Lots of weird stuff. Like my music would be enjoyed more in foreign lands rather than in the land of my birth. That my music wouldn’t be accepted in my own country...”

“I don’t think that’s so true, dear,” said Marianne. “But I *do* think you’re very brave not to compromise. But that’s not an attitude likely to go down well in America. I’d be surprised if you ever got to be more popular here than in England.”

“What else did he say?” I persisted.

“That I should focus on making music that came from within and which was meaningful to me. That one day such music from the soul would be appreciated by the many rather than just the few. But most of what this guy had to say was well-meaning gibberish. I think he was just grateful that we’d had sex together. I don’t think these sadhus get much opportunity for that.”

“I’m sure you’re right, dear,” said Marianne.

“You *are* coming to the gig tonight, aren’t you?” Crystal asked her mother.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world. But let’s hope the Philadelphians appreciate it more than that crowd in Manchester. If it hadn’t been for what you and your band look like and dress, I don’t think you’d have had any audience left at the end of the gig.”

“We *were* playing support,” Crystal said. “And I don’t think anyone there had ever heard our music before.”

“I haven’t heard your music anywhere on the radio over here, Chrissie dear,” said Marianne. “It’s not played on the Top 40 stations or the Country stations, and not all on the African-American radio stations. No one knows what to expect. Are you going to be the headline act tonight?”

“Yes, Mum.”

“Do you have a support act?”

“I’m not sure. I think so.”

“Well, Chrissie, let’s hope that if there is one, they’ll put the audience in the right mood for you, Simone and the rest of your all-woman ensemble.”

Marianne’s concerns about the support act were well-intentioned but in the event it was more their evening than ours. We’d never heard of Josh Jackson and his group the Shackamaxons. Who had outside of Philadelphia? And despite Mary Jane’s supposedly being a folk club, there was virtually no folk in their songs which was rock music firmly in the Bruce Springsteen tradition. Josh Jackson’s songs celebrated an American blue-collar culture whose concerns were meaningless to an all-woman band from Central London. But in Philadelphia his music was very popular indeed.

When we arrived at the club, we were delighted to see a queue gathered outside the venue even though it was very different from the kind of audience you’d normally expect at a Crystal Passion gig. Our music didn’t often appeal to an audience of mostly young men dressed in a uniform of leather jackets, blue jeans and check shirts. Of course hardly anyone in the queue had heard of Crystal Passion. They were all there to see Josh Jackson who, in spite of not having yet finalised a record deal, was going to

have no difficulty in selling records to his already devoted fans.

Although the music and its cultural references were alien to us (especially to those like me who weren't rock fans), Crystal seemed to really enjoy it. And Judy, despite her loyalty to the main event, echoed Crystal's favourable assessment.

"These dudes can play!" she exclaimed pointing at the lead guitarist who, like Josh Jackson on rhythm guitar, dressed pretty much the same as his audience.

"It's the lyrics I like best," said Crystal.

I focused my ear on what Josh Jackson was singing, but it was scarcely poetry and not at all as allusive or evocative as Crystal's lyrics.

"It's all about car washes, drug stores and Walmart," I said. "And the rhymes couldn't be more obvious. 'Blue jean' and 'you know what I mean'. 'Cadillac' and 'bivouac'. It's not gonna give Bob Dylan sleepless nights."

"No," admitted Crystal. "But look at the crowd. They know the words off by heart and it means everything to them. The songs aren't like the Beach Boys: all sunshine and sand. That last one was about a car factory closure."

"Was it?" I said, genuinely surprised as I thought it was just a conventional love song.

"And this one's about the Gulf War. George Bush isn't exactly flavour of the month here..."

"Good thing they got rid of him after just one term then," said Judy.

Nevertheless, despite Crystal's good opinion of Josh Jackson, the audience who'd been so enthusiastic and lively during his set were clearly rather less bothered about seeing us perform. Indeed, after Josh Jackson's second encore when the lights came up to his fans' obvious disappointment, the general flow of the crowd was towards

the exit. And by the time we came on stage, there was probably only about a third as many people in the audience as there'd been before the interval and almost all of them were clutching bottles of beer.

It was a mix of subdued cheers and wolf-whistles that greeted the Crystal Passion band as we came on stage. And the latter was mostly because Crystal was dressed, as always, in absolutely nothing and Judy with a strap-on dildo and black stickers over the nipples of her otherwise bare breasts. The rest of us, including me, took no such risk, although my shaved head, tee-shirt and tight denim shorts might well have raised eyebrows in an audience more used to watching mainstream rock bands.

Crystal made an effort to give a performance that Josh Jackson fans might enjoy. She selected a repertoire of those songs most likely to appeal to Rock music devotees and she subtly changed the lyrics to refer to automobiles, side-walks and freeways rather than cars, pavements and motorways. The audience applauded her politely, but as the concert went on more than half of our already depleted audience either made its way towards the bar at the back of the club or left altogether. None of us were surprised when after the first song, a long-haired bearded guy, dressed much the same as Josh Jackson but somewhat older, sneaked onto the stage and whispered to Crystal in an obviously embarrassed way. This wasn't the first time in Crystal Passion's history we'd had an intervention like that so we knew exactly what instrumental riff to play while Crystal and Judy slipped off-stage to return more modestly attired. Judy came back dressed in a short leather skirt with a bikini top, whilst Crystal just slipped on an oversized tee-shirt that oddly enough celebrated the Franklin Institute, Benjamin Franklin Parkway: not that any of us had actually visited it.

This concert was scarcely a huge success although we were politely applauded

by the fifty-odd young men and women who hung around to the end, drinking from bottles of beer and smoking innocuous cigarettes. We didn't earn an encore and didn't really expect one. Indeed, it was something of a relief to get off stage. I took on the duty to sell copies of our CDs to the audience after the gig, but I wasn't too surprised to have sold only three CDs and they were all copies of *Passing Passion* with its artistic portrayal of a clearly naked Crystal crouching by the Serpentine in Kensington Gardens. That CD was almost always guaranteed to sell more copies than the other albums whose covers showed no nudity whatsoever.

I wasn't the only one selling Crystal's records. Marianne turned up to the concert just as she'd promised and helped me sell records at the make-shift stall we set up by the small bar just outside the concert hall. It was probably more because of Marianne's selling skills than mine that we managed to sell any records at all. When the last guest had left and before she drove back to her friends in rural Pennsylvania, Marianne chatted about her new life in California and made me even more eager to travel there some time.

It was only as Marianne and Crystal were saying goodbye to one another that I remembered that I hadn't taken my equipment off the stage. I tried to get back into the concert hall, but the door was locked. Through its small smoked window I could see my Roland D-50 on stage along with the rest of my gear, but I couldn't see a way to get to it.

“Was that your synthesiser, honey?” asked the long-haired bearded guy who'd asked Crystal and Judy to cover themselves up.

I nodded. “Can you let me in to pick it up?” I asked.

“Fraid not,” he said regretfully. “I don't have the keys. I think Ben's the only

guy with keys and he usually quits as soon as he can. Anyhow, he ain't round here no more, I can see that. Come back tomorrow and I'm sure old Red will let you in."

"Red?"

"Yeah, he looks after Mary Jane's during the day when it's more a bar than a club. You'll recognise Red. He's got red hair. That's why he's called Red. I reckon you can't miss him."

So there wasn't much I could do about it. As we'd be leaving the following day to drive the 300 miles North-East to Boston, I'd have to go to the bar about midday, which was when it opened. And that also meant I couldn't accompany the rest of the band on their planned tourist trip of the historic city of Philadelphia.

Unlike Judy or Crystal who were never concerned at all about what people might think of them, I always tried to look as inconspicuous as possible during the day in an unfamiliar city. Especially over here in America, where I was expecting gun-toting red-necks to be standing on every street corner, although Philadelphia seemed to be more a city of check shirts and trainers rather than Stetsons and Cuban heels. So, I covered my freshly shaved head with a woollen cap and dressed in jeans and tee-shirt just like almost every other woman in the city. I wasn't sure whether a tee-shirt celebrating Orbital would make sense in Pennsylvania, but at least it wouldn't antagonise anyone.

"Yeah, Red, that's me," said the ginger-haired and ginger-bearded barman at Mary Jane's when I approached the bar. His hair was shoulder-length and tied back, but more prominent than the colour of his hair was the huge paunch that flopped over the lip of the bar. "What d'you want?"

"I need to pick up some equipment I left behind on stage last night," I said.

“You’ve got a weird accent, honey,” Red remarked. “You weren’t one of them English dykes we had last night. Fucking awful they were, I’m told.”

Shit! I didn’t want trouble. “No, not me,” I said. “I’m a friend of Josh and his band. I just gave them a loan of my keyboards.”

“Josh Jackson!” said Red warmly. “He’s one hell of a guy.” He glanced around the bar and spotted another middle-aged man who was too bald to have long hair, but compensated as best he could with a luxuriant beard. “Hey, Bob. This chick’s looking to pick up her gear. You wanna help her?”

“Yeah sure, Red,” Bob replied as he accepted the keys thrown at him by Red. “Come on, hon,” he said. “Let’s pick up your electric piano. I saw it there this morning and I thought: there’ll be someone missing it who’ll be coming round for it tomorrow. These electric pianos ain’t cheap, are they?”

“No,” I said as I followed Bob through the doors to the club and into the eerily empty and echoing space inside.

“So, hon,” said Bob while I gathered up the leads and packed away my Rolands in the cases I’d also left behind. “You weren’t with them Limey rock chicks, were you?”

“No, not me,” I said. “I’m a friend of Josh’s. They borrowed my...er...electric piano last night.”

“I didn’t know Josh played piano,” said Bob. “Still, I’m glad you ain’t one of those rock chicks. I’m told a couple of them were goddamn butt naked. Can you believe it! Mary Jane’s is a music venue, not some kinda strip joint. There’s plenty of them down by the Delaware if that’s what you want.”

I followed Bob out of the venue and back to the bar where Bob returned the keys to Red.

“Hey, honey,” said Red with a quizzical expression. “You sure you’re with Josh and the Shackamaxons? They’ve played here plenty times and I ain’t seen no chick with them. You sure you ain’t with this English rock group, what’s it called, Crystal Fashion? You look like you could be.”

“Not me,” I said. Even though I’d collected my Rolands and didn’t need to curry any more favours, I’d dug a hole for myself and I had to stay there.

All of a sudden there was an awful shriek. I looked around startled, half-expecting to see some kind of wild monster.

“Fucking juke box!” Bob exclaimed. “Always starts up too loud. And it’s some fucking heavy metal crap some kid’s put on.”

“I don’t know what kids get out of that horse shit,” agreed Red. “Though from what I’ve heard, this Crystal Fashion chick band’s even worse!”

## Chapter Five

“Where *is* everyone?” I asked when after an exasperating journey on Philadelphia’s public transport system I’d finally got back to the hotel and found Crystal sitting in the hotel lobby with only Jenny Alpha and our luggage for company.

Crystal pretended to look around the hotel lobby at the scuffed velour chairs and the sticky linoleum floor. “They’re not here, that’s for sure,” she said with a smile. “In fact, they’ve all left in the camper van for Boston.”

“They left without me?” I wailed.

“It was much too cosy together on the way down and everyone complained about it,” said Crystal. “Especially Thelma. So, we’ve hired a car to share the load. The rest have gone ahead so they get a chance to settle into Boston and maybe see the sights.”

“What type of car did you get?”

“It’s some kind of Chevrolet,” said Jenny. “They call it a *compact* over here, but it’s plenty big enough for us and our gear. I’ll do the driving. It should be a cinch what with all American cars being automatic.”

“It’s not as if you have to change gear very often anyway when you get onto the freeway,” Crystal commented. “So, come on, Pebbles. Let’s get your equipment into the boot of the car. Or automobile trunk as they call it over here.”

“Trunk of a Chevy!” Jenny exclaimed in delight. “Now I *know* I’m in America!”

The drive from Philadelphia to Boston took some six or seven hours including a couple of stops at roadside diners just beside the freeway. Crystal sat with me in the back of the car while Jenny did the driving and constantly twiddled the radio dial to

find a station that wasn't either Country & Western or Top 40. And when she found a station that was at all tolerable, it was never long until the reception got so poor that she had to retune the radio to something else.

"We've had a stroke of luck," said Crystal. "There's a guy in Boston who knows our agent, Madeleine, and he's a real fan of the band. He works at Harvard University, which I'm told is in a suburb aptly known as Cambridge."

"I'm surprised anyone in America's ever heard of us let alone could claim to be a fan," I remarked.

"Well apparently he is. And what's more this guy—Professor Simon Kurrein he's called—has some influence in the university's music department and he's organised an extra gig for us at the John Knowles Paine Concert Hall which is normally reserved for classical music..."

"Do you think we'd be a good fit there? It's not as if we're a string quartet or whatever."

"I don't see why not," Crystal said. "We'll be at least as good a fit as we were at Mary Jane's. We've got the gig because another concert's been cancelled. A group of Persian musicians who couldn't get their visas, I was told. So there's an empty slot for us to fill."

"So how did this Simon get to know about our music? And why does he think it'd appeal to classical music fans?"

"Well, it's more likely to appeal to those who listen to Steve Reich and Terry Riley than those who enjoy Schubert and Mendelssohn, but I think it was the track *Dave's First Words* that won Simon over. You might remember I used an interleaved chant in a kind of counterpoint. Simon recognised the Reich influence and wanted to

hear more. So, how good is that?"

I remembered the tune very well, of course. *Passing Passion*, the album it came from, was the first record I recorded with Crystal Passion. In fact, it had been a big deal for all of us. Crystal had performed solo on her previous album and now, rather than Crystal Passion being the assumed name of a singer-songwriter, it had become the name of a band. And this was the band that when we went into the studio for the first of our two sessions featured me on keyboards, my sister on violin, and Jane and Jacquie on drums and bass.

We recorded just over half an hour's worth of music, but this wasn't nearly enough for a whole album, especially not in the early 1990s when most CDs were over 70 minutes long. By the time we went into the studio for the second session, the band's membership had grown to include Judy Dildo and Tomiko Morishita. Crystal Passion had made the journey from solo artist to quintet and then to sextet and sound engineer in the space of just one album. And it was at about this time that Bertha joined the band as our first roadie, so including Crystal there was now already eight of us.

This was a huge change to the band's complexion and even more so the music we were playing.

It was inevitable that an expanded band should need both a roadie and a sound engineer. Crystal had got to know Bertha through a lover who frequented a lesbian bar that she'd somehow found the time to visit while still being sexually active elsewhere. It was no surprise that Bertha agreed to work for the band when asked. She'd already been roadying for lesbian Rock groups like the Nathanael Sisters (whose sisterhood was political rather than fraternal) and Peerless Ploughwoman.

It was through Mark that Crystal recruited our new sound engineer and in a

fashion that was so typical of her. She'd come home after a gig to find her husband horizontal on the living room carpet and fucking an Irish-Japanese woman who was, of course, our future band-member. His prick was deep inside Tomiko's arse when Crystal opened the door and he continued to fuck her while Tomiko and Crystal discussed how much the services of a qualified sound engineer would improve the sound of the Crystal Passion band. And, inevitably, she and Crystal were soon also making love together and sharing Mark's cock as a kind of handshake to cement the deal they'd just made.

Tomiko and Bertha were only part-time band members in the sense that they were also working on other projects, but Crystal ensured they were treated as equals with the rest of us. But most significant change to the band was when Judy Dildo became a member. Although she only played on four tracks on the *Passing Passion* album, the presence of a rock guitar made an immediate and noticeable impact on the Crystal Passion sound. When the band consisted of Jane and Jacquie, Andrea and me, we were an electro-acoustic outfit backed by the steady metronomic beat that was the inevitable product of the passion for club music I shared with my Zimbabwean lovers. When Judy joined, we now began to sound more like a rock band. This wasn't surprising seeing that Judy Dildo had already played lead guitar for several years in a series of women-only and mixed-sex rock groups.

It was Judy who'd sought out Crystal rather than the other way round. Although she enjoyed the company of women, both sexually and socially, she was actually more comfortable when performing with men, even when she was the only woman in the group. She strutted and postured on stage just like a male rock star. She was almost more macho than the men she performed with. The bands she'd played with had typical Rock Group names like Gog, Six Demons and Silver Payola. You'd never have thought

that a rock chick covered in tattoos and with an aggressive attitude to match would be drawn to Crystal Passion's eccentric and unclassifiable music, but like me she'd had an epiphany when she'd heard Crystal Passion playing support to Six Demons at a gig in Leeds. That was bizarre enough in itself. Who on earth would have booked Crystal Passion to play on the same bill as a death metal group whose songs weren't remotely ambiguous or subtle and which they performed at an excruciatingly loud volume? At least when she saw Crystal Passion sing at the Leeds Pilot Cellar Club, it was in a group with the four of us backing Crystal rather than just a single naked woman on stage.

Judy sought out Crystal immediately after the gig and there and then offered her services to the band. Right from the start she was offering practical suggestions as to how to make the band's sound more up-front and punchy and Crystal was listening intently.

We weren't so sure about Judy. She was a very different kind of character to the rest of us. She didn't go to night clubs like Jane, Jacquie and me. She wasn't interested in folk music like Andrea. The music she most enjoyed had to have energy, power and an instant impact. And this proclivity had to be overlaid somehow on the groove-based rhythm and melody that we were contributing to the Crystal Passion mix.

Within a week of Judy approaching Crystal, she was a full member of the band and joined us at the disused retail unit we'd hired to rehearse the remaining few songs for the *Passing Passion* album. It was Judy who's the chief author of the sound that rock critics like Polly Tarantella rate as the very best of Crystal Passion. This is ironic, of course, given that Judy Dildo is portrayed as the arch-villain in Polly's account of the Crystal Passion tragedy. In fact, I'd say that if it hadn't been for Judy Dildo's impact on the band, it's highly unlikely that Polly would ever have been attracted to Crystal

Passion and her music at all.

The track that Professor Simon Kurrein most enjoyed, *Dave's First Words*, isn't one of the tracks Judy played guitar on. In fact, it consists mostly of Jane and Jacquie providing a steady beat with me adding an electronic pulse and voice samples, while Crystal intones over the top. It's peculiarly mesmeric and nearly became a signature tune for the band. It's almost always the first Crystal Passion tune that people ever get to hear, usually on the radio, and although it doesn't fit well into Polly's thesis of what the band is all about, she quotes the lyrics (in their entirety) more than once in her best-selling biography. She seems to view it as Crystal's manifesto. And, for all I know, she may even be right.

The recording of *Passing Passion* was enlightening and instructive for all of us. Crystal was extremely disciplined in her approach to composition. She'd taught herself to read and write music and whenever she presented us with a new song she'd already written it down in her neat handwriting on song sheets with annotations to mark where we could throw in our own individual flourishes or samples. Although she got us to rehearse each song in its entirety for hours on end, this was never a *Trout Mask Replica* ordeal in pursuit of perfection. Rather, it was a collaborative process in which Crystal sympathetically discussed how each song might be improved.

Nevertheless, there wasn't that much space for improvisation in the early quintet. Although Judy Dildo boosted the sound when she joined the band and sometimes jammed almost like a jazz guitarist, the rest of us weren't really competent to do more than play what we'd rehearsed. Even Andrea, who was a much better musician than me, didn't have much skill at improvisation. All that came later. But there was still a sense that the music was the collaborative creation of the whole band,

although Crystal could never be deemed as anything other than the songs' composer. I had ideas about rhythm and sound collage that I'd plundered from my collection of Detroit techno compilations and Balearic mixtapes. Andrea knew stuff about East European and Arabic music as well as English and Celtic folk. Crystal threw all this into the mix and this helped give the music its distinctive sound.

*Cheese* was a kind of rap that Crystal half-improvised to the extent that although the rhythm and measure of each line was always the same the actual lyrics changed from one performance to the next. Unlike the lyrics of NWA and other East Coast Gangsta Rappers, Crystal's rap didn't contain a single profanity or swear word. *Roast Peanuts* was almost an instrumental which Crystal overlaid with the kind of swooping vocalese you might associate with the Cocteau Twins. Then there was the upbeat *Electric City* which was the most danceable track on the album and has been extensively remixed since Crystal Passion was rediscovered by DJs as diverse as Daniel Avery, Pearson Sound, Flying Lotus and Erol Alkan. The catchy chorus "There's electricity in the Electric City" has been stretched and sampled and distorted beyond all recognition. *Hidden Glory* is a song which builds up like a bolero from an almost inaudible first bar to a distorted climax which I sampled from the soundtrack to the movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

There are two stand-out tracks on which Judy Dildo performs. There's *Dusty Eyes* where Judy plays a frenzied guitar solo which somehow works in counterpoint to Andrea's violin and Crystal's interweaving lyrics that go "I see you see me see you see them see us..." and so on. And then there's *Three Little Pigs* which is broken into three sections which mirror one another but where the final section breaks into a heavy metal style rock guitar riff that in isolation could have come from a Metallica album.

There's a lot more to the album, of course, and Polly Tarantella is effusive about every single track. But I do know that the choral singing on *Lustful Lady* that she attributes to Crystal was actually a sample I'd taken from an obscure 1970s Italian horror movie.

When we at last entered Boston's outer suburbs, Jenny steered the car towards the Hotel Syracuse where the band was staying. By the time we arrived, everyone else was already getting to know the bars and tourist attractions in Boston's town centre. Needless to say, the Syracuse was no more salubrious than any other hotel we stayed at and Crystal heard my groan of dismay at having to spend another night in a grotty American dive.

"Look, Pebbles," she said. "We don't have to stay here. We can drop off the gear and drive out to this Simon Kurrein's house. I half-promised I'd visit him when we arrived and maybe he'll let us stay the night."

"I don't think I'm in the mood for sex with a middle-aged man," I said wearily.

"What?" said Crystal, who seemed genuinely startled at my interpretation of her remarks. "No, of course not. We don't have to have sex with every man we meet and in any case I don't think he'd even want to. He's a university academic who's married with adult children. I just think it'd be courteous to take the trouble to meet him in person since he's been so helpful and that it would also be nice if you came along."

Professor Simon Kurrein of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, lived in an almost stately home in Concord, not far from Walden Pond and the family home of Louisa May Alcott. This was a side of America I hadn't seen before. This America was liberal, affluent and open-minded. And, reassuringly, it seemed almost European to me.

The professor couldn't have been more delighted to see us.

"So you must be Pebbles," he said proffering a hand, although I could see that he was wondering whether he should also kiss me on the cheek. In those days, not so many English or Americans were as touchy-feely as they are today.

He led us into a living room that was large enough to host one of our gigs and introduced us to his wife, Alexandra, who was sitting at the console of what at the time was a very high-spec beige PC. Simon Kurrein and his wife were both academic sophisticates whose clothes seemed almost casual at first glance, but with closer scrutiny could only be very expensive. I wondered how it was that university teachers could be so affluent. Although they were both at least as old as my parents, they dressed and acted like a much younger couple. Crystal was perfectly relaxed in her inexpensive Liberty print dress (of which she did not divest herself on this occasion), but I felt very much the slattern in my jeans and tee-shirt. I even kept on my woolly hat in the probably misplaced fear that the professor would disapprove of my shaved head.

"How's America treating you so far, my dears?" Simon asked after we'd settled down in the plush leather armchairs and were both offered a glass of what he claimed was a very modest red wine.

Crystal gave the couple a reassuring account of our stay so far in which she made no reference whatsoever of our difficulties or the disappointing audience reaction to our shows, but laced it with amusing anecdotes and fulsome praise for the other band members. All the while, Simon and Alexandra nodded sagely and made the occasional encouraging remark. I glanced around their living room at the many books and neatly arranged records (both CDs and vinyl) of which the majority were classical and modern jazz. I glimpsed a Fela Kuti album sleeve besides those for Miles Davis and Sonny

Rollins, but most records featured the names of pianists, violinists, string quartets and orchestras I'd never heard of playing the music either of composers I'd also never heard of or those, like Brahms, Purcell, Schumann and Paderewski, whose names were familiar but their music wasn't. I felt very much the ignoramus in this company, but I wouldn't have been at all surprised if Crystal were to start discussing the relative virtues of symphonies by Dmitri Shostakovich and Arnold Bax.

"And did you know that you're now famous in America?" said Alexandra with an amused smile, holding a wine glass poised in her left hand. "There was something about Crystal Passion on national television."

"Famous?" Crystal said. "I knew there was an article written about us in the *New York Post*, but I didn't know anything was broadcast about us on television."

"Well, I imagine it's mostly thanks to that newspaper article and a scurrilous radio campaign from one of those forthright and opinionated Christian Radio disc jockeys," Simon said. "You were mentioned in a discussion on a cable television talk show."

Crystal sighed. "I didn't know about any of that. I didn't know the band was the subject of any radio coverage whatsoever. And I didn't know that anything was said about us on American television. Please, Simon, tell us what you know."

Neither Simon nor Alexandra knew much about what was actually said on Samuel Hedrick's radio show *Voice of Reason*. They were no more likely to listen to the rants of a right-wing radio pundit than a listener to such a radio show would the music of Crystal Passion. Or indeed anything that wasn't reassuringly safe and familiar. Which would exclude them from getting to hear pretty much everything in Simon's extensive record collection. But the couple knew that Hedrick's tirade had been

negative, vituperative, ill-informed and inflammatory. What else could it be?

Similarly, they'd have only known for sure what was broadcast on *The Daytime Show* with its regular presenter Peter Pilton, if they'd chosen to tune into CBS at three o'clock in the afternoon Eastern Standard Time, which, of course, as a professional working couple who more often watched their television programmes on PBS, they were never likely to do. But the fact that it was daytime television and that the only two likely reference points were the stated opinions of the *New York Post* and Samuel Hedrick, Simon and Alexandra more or less knew that it wouldn't have given Crystal Passion a fair and balanced hearing. So, although neither they nor anyone they knew had actually listened to the broadcast they were confident that it had presented Crystal Passion in the worst possible light. And Simon Kurrein, who'd been exposed to a lot of radical and determinedly uncommercial music and theatre, was under no illusion as to what the Crystal Passion band might be like as a performing entity and how that might be construed by the media. In truth nothing we did was remotely as radical as what came out of Andy Warhol's Factory in the 1960s. Nor was it as revolutionary as anything propounded by Ken Kesey, William Burroughs or Timothy Leary. But considering the outrage that a group of English yobs like the Sex Pistols could generate; or the voyeuristic fascination with a pop singer like Madonna; or the ability of the media in both Britain and America to demonise almost anyone: it was unlikely that Crystal Passion would ever be reported as anything other than dangerous, mad and subversive. And despite Polly Tarantella's efforts to make it seem otherwise, incitement to revolution had never been Crystal's intention.

I didn't get to hear Samuel Hedrick's pillorying of Crystal Passion, though it was repeated in different contexts over the next few weeks and became steadily more

inflammatory. I've seen the transcripts that Polly managed to uncover in her research. As they were written from memory, no one can be certain that they are Samuel Hedrick's words, but having since heard the rants of other reactionary American radio presenters like Rush Limbaugh I have no reason to doubt their veracity. And vicious and bizarre in equal measure they are too.

I guess I half agree with Polly's view that Samuel Hedrick had put Crystal Passion on trial and that the outcome was decided in advance, as this seems to be precisely what the purpose of such rants are, whether directed at politicians or musicians or even doctors and social workers. When we were touring America, the right wing media was only beginning to get its teeth into Bill Clinton, but it's actually much worse these days than it was then. You'd think President Obama and Nancy Pelosi were devil-worshippers if you believed half of what they say. But I don't suppose Crystal Passion got it worse than any other musician who's outraged conservative opinion.

I also didn't see the broadcast of *The Daytime Show* that discussed Crystal Passion until after Polly had published her biography. I'd always assumed it was the kind of thing you see these days on Fox News, where obnoxious presenters bully and shout down anyone whose opinions they disagree with and compete with one another to be the loudest and least reasonable. But back in the early 1990s, Fox News didn't exist and the general tendency was for discussion shows to be conservative with a decidedly small 'c'. So, although Polly quotes a lot from the radio discussion, I don't think it was as insanely vituperative as a similar discussion would be these days on a show presented by Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly or Glenn Beck.

Nowadays, when there's a discussion on television it's posted on YouTube within minutes. In the 90s, the only way such a discussion could survive was if someone

bothered to video-tape it. But Polly Tarantella's research almost inevitably came up with an instance of someone in the United States who'd thought it worthwhile to record that particular edition of *The Daytime Show*. The elderly woman who did so was much less interested in Crystal Passion and her legacy than she was in a cloying interview with a romantic novelist. And so, thanks to Polly Tarantella, two decades after the event I've actually got to see the interview she claims was more or less Crystal Passion's death warrant.

I don't think I'd go along with that, although the discussion wasn't especially sympathetic towards Crystal. Peter Pilton was one of those silver-haired, chisel-jawed, ever-smiling television presenters that are more often seen in America than in Britain. Inevitably he had that half-indulgent 'what are kids going to get up to next' attitude towards the story, although he'd at least got Crystal Passion's name right, even if his two guests gave the band names such as Bristol Fashion, Crystal and the Passions, Chrissie Passion, and Chrysler Passage. It was obvious that neither of these apparent experts knew anything about the band at all.

The two guests were predictable in terms of both who they were and what they had to say. There was the conservative Christian, Bob Farrow, who reminded me of televangelists like Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart. To an American viewer, I guess, he might seem reasonable and sane, but to me he was swivel-eyed and entirely obnoxious. He was the sort of man I was very glad my father hadn't been. The other guest, Jeff Barrett, was a Rock Critic of some kind, though it was never mentioned what he actually did other than appear on programmes like this. He was another kind of stereotype; the sort of Rock personality even then virtually extinct in Europe. His hair was long, blond and bouffant and he resembled an extra from a glam metal band

like Mötley Crüe or Bon Jovi. He dressed in a mixture of leather and denim and had an annoying habit of saying words like ‘cool’ and ‘hip’ as if the quotation marks were still very much in place.

Neither of them knew anything about Crystal Passion and there was nothing in the discussion that would enlighten a viewer who might genuinely want to find out. The pictures they showed were of all-girl rock groups that I’d never heard of before such as Red Abyss, Fabulous Disaster and Jack Off Jill. Bob Farrow had a lot to say about the sinfulness of homosexuality, the decadent lyrics of rock songs and the bad example rock musicians were setting kids by taking drugs and foreswearing Jesus. Jeff Barrett had a lot to say about American rock music and how chicks had found a welcome niche for themselves within its embrace. He heaped praise on a bunch of American Rock groups that I don’t much like, such as Kiss, Poison and W.A.S.P. He mentioned very briefly such British pop groups as Talk Talk, Stone Roses and U2, and quite clearly thought we were nothing more than a Chick Rock group that took our clothes off on stage to give the guys a thrill.

Even though Crystal Passion came out of the programme apparently either an emissary of Satan on the one hand or trivial to the point of utter irrelevance on the other, I don’t really go along with the rage expressed by Polly who describes it as “crowning Crystal Passion with thorns”, “stripping Crystal Passion of all dignity” or “acting as both judge and jury to damn for eternity the most significant musical revolution since Bruce Springsteen or the Beatles”. The discussion show might have been an unfair representation and it certainly wasn’t going to win us many friends amongst American conservatives, but the true damage had already been done. And that was to bring to the attention of an intolerant vindictive American community a band who in its opinion

could only be infuriating, irritating and maybe even immoral. I don't believe it was really Crystal Passion *per se* that was the object of criticism, but what a British all-girl band represented and the sexualised fantasy of cultural subversion that it invoked. And the more they found about Crystal's habitual nudity, her open marriage, the sexual preference of most of the band and the defiantly non-commercial music, the more Crystal Passion would be feared and despised.

Nevertheless, I most definitely did not feel like the member of a reprobate satanic lesbian cult while Crystal and I were being entertained by Simon and Alexandra. Indeed, I don't think I'd ever felt more like a lady. This was an evening soiree of sophisticated discussion, a very filling Mexican dinner prepared by the Kurreins' cook, and an entertaining impromptu solo performance by Crystal on, of all things, a lute. It was most peculiar to hear her song *Mustard Birds* played on a mediaeval string instrument with its very contemporary references to the Big Bang and Cosmic Inflation. Crystal played several of her own songs, including *Dave's First Words*, *Travelling Light* and *Muscle Mary Magdalene*, but she accompanied Alexandra, who had a classically trained singing voice, on a selection of more familiar songs such as *Norwegian Wood*, *Tears of a Clown* and *I'm a Believer*. It's unlikely that either John Lennon or Stevie Wonder, let alone Neil Diamond, ever expected their songs to be performed in such a way.

I was quite relieved that Crystal kept her clothes on all evening and that towards the end neither Alexandra nor Simon suggested that we should join them in bed. There are occasions when sex is best reserved for the person most close to you and in my case that was Crystal: as it had been from the moment I first cast eyes on her. Although I knew her love was spread equally between so many, the love she expressed to me never

felt any less passionate, intense or genuine.

The bed in which we slept that night was probably the most comfortable and luxurious I'd ever slept in until that time. The sheets felt just right against my skin and smelt so fresh and unsullied. The mattress was firm but not too hard. And it was spacious enough for both Crystal and I to make love without the risk of falling off the edge and onto the floor. We were both naked and writhing and cuddling and fisting and snuggling as the mood took us.

"You know, Pebbles," said Crystal, as she ran her tongue over the blue stubble of my pate. "Much as I love your shaved head, I *do* miss your beautiful bright yellow hair."

"It was very short," I reminded her. "Shaving it off wasn't such a big deal."

"It was longer when we first met," Crystal remarked. "Not as long as mine, but well over your ears..."

"And it was streaked red and blue," I said, with a whimsical laugh. "Don't fret, Crystal, I won't keep my head shaved forever. But it's good on a tour. I don't ever have to get it styled. Maintaining it is just a question of scraping off the stubble with a razor. You'll soon see it long again."

But that, alas, was a promise that I could never fulfil.

I could have stayed in the Kurreins' bed all day, but, as Crystal made sure I remembered, we had a gig to perform at the John Knowles Paine Concert Hall. And this was the gig Crystal enjoyed the most on our tour even though the venue was less than half full and that by a somewhat mixed and rather bemused crowd of students and people two or three times our age.

This concert was one that not even a viewer of *The Daytime Show* with Peter

Pilton could describe as a rock concert. Jeff Barrett would have been very disappointed and probably at least as bewildered as our audience. Although Crystal appeared naked as always (which raised no objection or comment), Judy Dildo was relatively subdued. She dressed in a baggy tee-shirt and corduroy trousers that made her look nothing like a rock chick. This is evidence (that Polly Tarantella disregards) for the case that Judy was more than willing to make compromises in her appearance and musical style when she believed it served the greater interest of the Crystal Passion band. Although I was always more comfortable on electric rather than acoustic keyboards, there was a glorious Steinway Concert Grand piano at the venue which I self-consciously tinkled on for a couple of songs. But it was Crystal, Andrea and Philippa who put the piano to best use and gave Crystal Passion's music an almost classical timbre. In fact, like Judy, I also played a rather lesser role in this concert. This was a venue better suited to acoustic than electric or electronic music, but Crystal with her experience of being a singer-songwriter restructured her compositions for the venue's ambience.

Although it was the best presented and most sympathetically received concert on our tour, it probably wasn't the kind of gig most suited to the Crystal Passion band. The audience were polite and responsive, but scarcely enthusiastic. And the compositions they most enjoyed were precisely those with the least potential for commercial success and, it has to be said, the least likely to appeal to Polly Tarantella and the rock critics that have so successfully revitalised her legacy. The audience politely requested an encore, but I got the impression that it was for form's sake rather than from a genuine desire to hear more. Crystal closed with a solo rendition of *The Sage and Stupid Sluts* that despite its title (which Crystal didn't announce) is a tricky composition with an alternating 10/4 and 5/4 rhythm and abstruse lyrics that don't make

at all clear that it's a celebration of the right a woman has to be sexually promiscuous if she should so wish (or, at least, that's how both Polly and I interpret it). I wonder whether the applause wouldn't have been rather more subdued if the more senior members of the audience had known the song's title.

Crystal was very satisfied with how the concert went and grateful to Simon for having made it possible. Judy was less happy, but she made no comment other than a dismissive remark about having to wear such crappy clothes to keep Crystal happy. She tugged off the corduroy trousers as soon as we left the stage and pulled on a short leather skirt. And of course she wore nothing under her baggy tee-shirt.

Polly's account of the actual concert is rather perfunctory: possibly because she views classical and acoustic music as peripheral to the main thrust of her epic tale of Crystal Passion's revolution in popular culture. But she praises Professor Simon Kurrein's achievement in booking a concert at Harvard as being a life-saver for Crystal after all the negative publicity the tour had so far attracted. Although I was also grateful for everything that Simon had done, I don't think any of us at the time put it into such a context. After all, if Simon hadn't told us about the discussion on *The Daytime Show* with Peter Pilton, none of us would have known about it and, in any case, at the time we thought it was more amusing than worrying. There'd always been a long tradition of newspaper, television and radio totally misunderstanding popular culture and of finding the worst possible light in which to present it. We probably felt we'd got away relatively lightly compared to the furore that accompanied the rise of Acid House and the ongoing persecution of rave culture in the UK.

I'm fairly certain that no one in the audience knew much about Crystal Passion other than what was hurriedly put together in the publicity material which confusingly

described our music as ‘avant-folk’ and our live concerts as ‘lively and deceptively chaotic’. The poster advertising the gig featured a print of Jacopo Tintoretto’s *Women Playing Music* which might have been strictly correct (especially since the women are all naked) but a 16<sup>th</sup> Century painting was more likely to remind an English audience of the Renaissance club in Derby than whatever it was that Crystal Passion represented.

“I don’t know what we’d have done without you, Simon,” said Crystal after the concert just before we drove back to the Hotel Syracuse for what couldn’t possibly be such a good night’s sleep for either Crystal or me.

“It was my pleasure,” he said. “I just hope I can be of help if you should ever need it again.”

## Chapter Six

“We’ve been invited to her home!” an excited Andrea announced after she and Crystal emerged from the hotel lobby’s public phone booth.

“Whose home?” I wondered, not really having paid much attention.

I was sitting splayed across one of the Crown Hotel’s most threadbare red velour sofas. We were now on the latest stop of our trans-American tour and in the city of Providence, the capital of the tiny Ocean State of Rhode Island. I’d been browsing statistics about the state in a tourist brochure the hotel handed out to its guests and, compared with most states of America, they were on a reassuringly modest, even homely, scale. Rhode Island had a smaller total population than most English counties and was almost as small in area. I’d also been taking advantage of the fact that I was just out of the receptionist’s line of sight and had surreptitiously rolled a joint. I was in desperate need of narcotic recreation after the drive from Boston. At least we were scheduled to stop for three or four days this time. An opportunity at last to relax.

“Veronica Wilson,” said Andrea.

“Sorry, who?”

“Veronica Wilson,” Andrea repeated. “You must have heard of her. Singer-Songwriter from the seventies. She used to perform with the likes of James Taylor and Carole King. She made a name for herself at the Newport Folk Festival in its heyday and she’s a regular now it’s been revived.”

“So, she’s a folkie,” I said dismissively.

“She’s very good,” said Crystal who ambled towards us. “Your sister’s got good taste, Pebbles. I’ve always been a fan. We’ve been invited to visit her at her home in

Newport. On Bellevue Avenue Would you like to come along?"

"Shouldn't we be preparing for the gig?" I said, even though I'd have much rather lit up my joint than rehearse.

"That's not till tomorrow night," said Andrea.

"Judy and Olivia are already practising at Thorn's with Tomiko, Bertha and Jenny," said Crystal referring to the venue where we were due to appear. "I have absolute faith in their ability to rehearse without us. There wasn't anything else you were planning to do, were you, Pebbles?"

"No, not really." Although Jane, Jacquie and I had discussed getting out to investigate Providence's night clubs, nothing had been decided. "Will we be going in the Chevrolet?"

Crystal nodded. "There's no other way to get there."

"And you want me to do the driving?"

"It'd be good if you could, Pebbles. As you know, neither your sister nor I know how to drive."

And so it was that rather than smoke a spliff, I volunteered to drive Andrea and Crystal in the back of the car, who brought along their instruments with them: namely, a violin and an acoustic guitar. The two chatted enthusiastically about the life and discography of Veronica Wilson while the more I overheard the less engaged I felt in the conversation. I'd never had much interest in Andrea's collection of LPs by the likes of Joan Baez, Pentangle, Bert Jansch, Al Stewart or even Bob Dylan. And the more my sister enthused about Veronica Wilson and her falsetto voice and her idiosyncratic blues-influenced plucking style on the six-string guitar the more I regretted not having brought along a Techno cassette to listen to in the car.

Crystal and Andrea had always been fans of folk music and singer-songwriters. In fact, Crystal's first album, *Triad*, featured nothing more than Crystal's voice, Crystal's guitar-playing and occasionally Crystal on piano. There were no overdubs and hardly any post-production. It was Crystal Passion as naked as she could be (and in her case literally as well as metaphorically). It wasn't my favourite Crystal Passion album, but then it was also the only album I hadn't played on. On the other hand, it was the music from that album that had enticed me in the first place and, even unplugged, her songs were more than good enough for me to enjoy without having to imagine how much better they'd be with a kick-drum, a bass line or extra colour. Although the music on *Triad* was simpler in terms of arrangement or instrumentation than it was on later albums, the songs were no less daring in lyrics, rhythm and structure.

There was a certain relatively naïve romanticism in some of her songs. The one Polly Tarantella likes most, *Rambling Woman*, has the sort of verse you'd imagine a Romantic poet like William Wordsworth might have penned given all its references to valleys, mountains and glades grazed on by sheep, rabbit and deer. It reminds me of the American folk song *The Wayfaring Stranger*, which Polly also mentions although I guess the version she's most familiar with is the one by Jack White rather than, say, Johnny Cash or Emmylou Harris. Then there's *Mercy Mistress* which is now best known from the Disclosure mix, though I personally prefer the one by Floating Points. It lends itself to a House or even Trance mix with its slow build-up to a swooping chorus, even though its lyrics are a down-to-earth confession of personal failure and frustrated ambition. The song that's most controversial is *All On My Own* which Polly's interpreted as a plea for help and understanding and which others have interpreted as a bold statement of Crystal's spiritual beliefs. I'm not sure it's either of those things, but

it's the song on which Crystal is at her most anguished. This is especially so in the lines where she sings: "Strip off my clothes and throw them away. / Put a conical cap on my head and turn me to the wall. / Tie me up and pull me down. / Take away my soul. Leave nothing at all." There's been a lot of speculation as to who she was supposed to be addressing, but all she ever told me was that it was an allegory on self-reliance.

I don't know whether Veronica Wilson had ever heard of Crystal Passion before. It's possible I suppose. Andrea had heard of Crystal through her folk music friends, so she must have had some small degree of fame in that scene. Maybe it was the association with John River that piqued the interest of this moderately famous American singer-songwriter. But however little or well Veronica Wilson knew about Crystal Passion, we were greeted like long-lost relatives when we turned up at her door.

In so many ways, Veronica was exactly what you'd expect an American singer-songwriter from the 1970s to be like. She was a woman in her mid-forties with long straight hair that she almost certainly continued to dye blonde. She had a good figure for a woman of her age, though she was no longer as slim as she once must have been. Her bosom was full and almost matronly, her thighs were squeezed into tight denim from the crotch to the knees, and her well-scrubbed face was no longer left to only nature's whims. She wore a baggy orange sweater and designer jeans, but no shoes or socks.

I'd expected a grander home for such a relatively successful musician. Although Bellevue Avenue was one of Newport's more expensive streets, with many relatively old New England houses, her home was relatively modest compared with, say, Professor Simon's. Nonetheless, it was detached, had a large garden and boasted more space than one woman would need just for herself, even though, according to Andrea,

there was no husband, partner or child currently sharing her life.

I parked the Chevrolet on the driveway while Veronica ushered Andrea and Crystal into her house, both clutching their instruments. I deliberately took my time till I followed them in as I had my joint to smoke which I did in her front garden behind a tree that hid me from the gaze of the street. I'd been promising myself a toke ever since we arrived at the Crown Hotel and I could now take the opportunity to gather my thoughts together. I discreetly stubbed the roach out on a tree trunk and tore it apart before scattering it to the wind. And then I walked into Veronica's house.

I had no difficulty in finding where Veronica, my lover and my sister were gathered. The sound of guitar, violin and piano led me down a long narrow hallway past closed doors to Veronica's living room. This was an impressive space with a sturdy wooden floor, like the rest of the house, dominated by what in those days was a very large television, many times deeper than wide, and a Sohmer mini-grand piano. And sitting on the piano stool was Veronica who was singing as I entered.

I'd stumbled on an impromptu concert recital and one where I was not at all at ease. I plumped down on the leather sofa with an apologetic smile, while Veronica, Andrea and Crystal performed songs which as far as I knew might have been traditional American folk songs, contemporary folk-rock classics or the Veronica Wilson songbook. I could tell that it was being performed exceptionally well, that the songs had catchy melodies and that the lyrics were possibly profound, but I didn't share my sister's ear for acoustic music in those days. I'd probably appreciate it much more nowadays. I've since bought records by Veronica Wilson and other singer-songwriters I never thought I could enjoy, but I'll never be as much an enthusiast as Andrea.

My pleasure in watching the performance was less from listening to the music

than from just admiring the trio. Veronica was a handsome woman, however much at that time of my life I couldn't ignore the gnarly veins on the back of her hands, the creases around her eyes or the glimpse of grey at the roots of her hair. These days, in my own early middle age, I'd consider myself lucky to be half as well preserved as she was. Andrea was pretty as always. Her bushy hair made her look like a romantic heroine while her checked shirt and jeans made her seem almost more American than British. She handled the violin as if it was an extension of herself. It seemed to grow out of her chin while, as she sang, her mouth moved with the same sweep and flourish as her bow. But as always it was Crystal who was the centre of my attention. My eyes rested on Veronica and Andrea for only brief moments before once again settling on my closest friend and most favourite lover.

It's probably because I knew Crystal so intimately and seen her naked so often that it only belatedly became apparent to me that although Andrea and Veronica were dressed just as they were when we arrived, Crystal had once again removed all her clothes. She was wearing nothing, not even shoes, as she plucked her guitar and joined in the chorus when Veronica prompted her. How had this woman whom we'd never met before not only accepted Crystal and my sister as accompanists at such short notice, but showed no sign of embarrassment when Crystal took off her clothes? This is the kind of incident that I find most miraculous about Crystal, rather than the many apocryphal stories that so excite Polly Tarantella.

Between each song Veronica would glance at Crystal and Andrea in turn, a broad grin on her face, and suggest another song. She might say for instance: "*I Carry the Victory*" or "*The Face of My Love*" or "*Strange Fruit*" and either Crystal or Andrea would nod and with only a couple of notes on the piano as a cue, they'd launch into a

new song. Or she might say: “*Banks are Made of Marble*” or “*This Land is Your Land*” or “*Dark Night Blues*” and there was a general incomprehension followed by a few bars of rehearsal and Crystal and Andrea would then be playing along to a song that neither had ever heard before.

After I’d sat through nearly an hour of what was almost entirely unfamiliar music to me, instead of suggesting another song, Veronica said: “Hey guys. How long you planning on staying in the Ocean State?”

“Another three or four days,” said Andrea.

“We’ve got a residency at Thorn’s Folk and Blues Club,” Crystal elaborated. “We’re there for three evenings in a row.”

“So where you guys staying?”

“The Crown Hotel,” Crystal said.

“Never heard of it.”

“It’s a dump,” said Andrea.

“That doesn’t sound good,” said Veronica. “You’re not gonna perform your best at Thorn’s without a good night’s sleep. You wanna stop over here at my place? I’ve got plenty of room for you guys.”

“As long as it’s no trouble...” said Crystal.

“Not only is it no trouble, but I absolutely insist.”

“What about our luggage?” said Andrea, who was never content unless everything was properly organised.

“I can go back and fetch all that,” I volunteered.

“If you could?” Crystal pleaded in a way that left me no space to change my mind.

It took me less than an hour to drive back from Newport to Providence and as always I was grateful for America's wide roads and relatively good drivers. As a Brit, I was often bemused by signs that directed me to ostensibly homely destinations like Warwick, Coventry and Greenwich. If it weren't for the fire hydrants on the roadside and the fact that I was driving on the right, I could almost believe I was driving through the West Midlands. I parked the car just outside the Crown Hotel and rushed through the lobby and up to the bedrooms where Crystal, Andrea and I'd been booked to collect the bags. Although I was pleased at the prospect of staying at a grand historic house in Newport rather than yet another crappy non-descript American hotel, I still felt that I'd be very much the odd one out in a company of folkies. I'd almost prefer to stay with Jane and Jacquie, even if the beds were rather too small and lumpy to be truly comfortable.

I was just about to stumble downstairs to the lobby loaded down with luggage when I heard the high-pitched sound of a clarinet coming from one of the other bedrooms that we'd been allocated to. It could only be Thelma. I knocked on the door and was let in by Olivia who wore only a pair of denim shorts and plastic bangles on her wrists. Thelma was wearing a large baggy tee-shirt under which there might have been a pair of knickers.

She laid down the clarinet and asked straight away: "Have you seen the paper?" "Newspaper? Which one?" I asked as I sat next to Olivia on the edge of the bed. "This one," said Olivia who passed me a copy of the *New York Post* that was open somewhere in the middle.

I could see a picture of Crystal Passion and Judy Dildo that had been taken at the concert in Philadelphia just before they'd been told to put more clothes on and in

which crudely painted black bars both highlighted and obscured the otherwise bare nipples and crotch.

“What’s all this?” I asked.

“It’s another fucking roasting,” said Thelma. “The bastards have really got it in for us here.”

It didn’t take me long to read the whole newspaper story. As in the earlier story in the *New York Post* more than three-quarters of the allocated space was taken up with the photograph and the headline: **English All-Girl Punk Outrage Hits East Coast.** A headline like that could just as easily have been praise as censure, but prompted by Thelma it was with a sinking heart that I read the text of the article:

Philly, Boston and now Rhode Island are trembling in the wake of the latest English pop sensation to invade America.

Punk Rocker Crystal and her band the Passions continue to cause shock and outrage at their concerts. It’s not only their music that’s wild and filthy. The girls are too!

Jeff Buckminster (47), owner of Philly Rock Club Merry Jane, was so shocked by the girls’ naked antics that he asked them to cover up right away.

“We don’t run a Strip Joint,” he told our reporter. “We mostly showcase good local boys like Joe Jackson.”

Loyal fan of Joe and his group the Shackabacks, Phil Stewart (18) agrees. “I don’t think Crystal and her group is right for Philly,” he said. “I don’t think they’re right for America.”

Crystal and the Passions have also outraged NY DJ Samuel Hedrick who’s urged his listeners to boycott their concerts. “It’s the worst possible kind of lesbian filth,” he says.

Reverend Bob Farrow was so scandalized by the Punk Rockers that he appeared on *The Peter Pilton Daytime Show* to warn off impressionable kids. “These English girls are not the example for American schoolgirls that parents want to see!”

Crystal and the Passions have future tour dates in states from Illinois to Virginia. Look out America!

Although it was obvious that this article was by no means four-square behind Crystal Passion, I could see that it was as likely to attract people to our gigs as it was to deter them, and that would mostly be for the prospect of seeing Judy's dildo or Crystal's nipples. Since the tour was intended to get the band better known in America and to profit from the proceeds of concert sales, such publicity might actually not be such a bad thing. However, I knew Crystal would get upset and that mostly by how the article had described her. And, as far as I knew, she didn't even listen to, let alone identify with, punk rock.

“Can I take this to show Crystal?” I asked.

“Sure,” said Thelma. “She’s got to know the worst, hasn’t she? Where is she?”

“She’s with a local singer-songwriter, Veronica Wilson. She and I have been invited to stay at her place in Newport.”

“Veronica Wilson,” said Olivia. “Never heard of her. What’s she like?”

“Er... OK, I guess. It’s not my thing really. But it’s the kind of stuff both Andrea and Crystal are into.”

“You and Crystal aren’t spending much time with the rest of us, are you?” said Thelma, slightly accusingly. “There was that professor in Boston and now this folk singer...”

“Crystal’s got to make new friends and contacts in America,” I said.

“Or go to bed with every last one of them,” sniffed Thelma.

I decided not to defend Crystal’s honour and integrity, about which I felt somewhat guilty as I drove back to Newport with Thelma’s copy of the *New York Post*. However, as it happened there was nothing that I should have felt guilty about.

After I’d arrived at Veronica’s house and parked the car in the drive, I endured

more than ten minutes of angry frustration as I intermittently rang the doorbell and then impatiently waited for an answer. I was absolutely sure that everyone was in the house. Veronica's station wagon was parked exactly where it had been earlier and I'd been told that no one in America ever walked anywhere unless they had to. I assumed that nobody could hear the doorbell over the din of their music making.

"Hiya!" said an American woman's voice from behind the gauze screen to the porch. "It's Pebbles, isn't it? Have you got all the bags and stuff?"

"Of course," I said, slightly peeved not to be let straight in. "It's all here."

But when I walked onto the porch beside her I could see why Veronica was so reluctant to open the door. And that was because she was totally naked. She had a large pendulous bosom over a slightly more round stomach than she'd had as a younger woman and a thatched mess of pubic hair that was much more common in those days than it is today. I made no remark about her nudity—there could be nothing less cool—but I'd already guessed what was happening.

As usual, Crystal had wasted no time at all in seducing Veronica, although she'd probably done it so subtly that the famous singer-songwriter would think it was she who'd taken the initiative. And when I made my way to the living room, I was no longer witness to a concert recital but to a small-scale single-sex orgy. Crystal and Andrea had their arms around one another and limbs spread out over the couch.

"Make yourself comfortable, honey," said Veronica who left me in little doubt as to what she really meant.

I hesitated while I considered my options. There was no doubt in my mind that it could be fun and certainly a memory to cherish to make love to Veronica and her impressive and enticing bosom. There was also the opportunity to snuggle up towards,

fist, frig, and otherwise make love to Crystal who I adored more than anyone else in the world.

But there was also the troubling presence of my sister.

Amongst the complex weave of possible sexual combinations practised by the members of the Crystal Passion band, what I'd always avoided at all costs was any that involved me being intimate with my sister. Carnal knowledge within the family was something I simply could never contemplate. I'd never discussed it with Andrea, but I'm sure she felt the same way. It puzzled me sometimes that Jane and Jacque weren't likewise shy of sibling sex, but I guess the relationship between twins, even if not identical, is of a different order from that between sisters separated by a few years. And although in the orgies and group sex sessions, it is possible that my lips or fingers might have engaged with her crotch—or vice-versa—this had never been intentional.

But despite my reservations, I could see no way out. It was still necessary for me to make every conceivable effort to avoid physical engagement with Andrea however difficult it was to avoid when four women were engaged in passionate embrace on the sofa and thick woollen rugs of Veronica's massive living room.

Although the pivotal centre of our activity was Veronica whose body had probably not been so lavishly stroked, kissed or violated for many years (judging by her awkwardness and the frightening intensity of her orgasms), for me it was always a case of how to navigate past Veronica and Andrea towards Crystal who, for reasons of fairness with regards to Andrea and of artistic respect towards Veronica was equally as assiduously manoeuvring her attention in the opposite direction. So it was inevitable that of the four of us it was me who was the least satisfied and most eager to continue late into the night.

But this was not to be. It was Crystal and Veronica who nestled together in Veronica's huge double bed while Andrea and I slept in separate beds in different rooms. This was my first solitary night for quite some time. Normally, I relied on one or both of Jane and Jacquie to keep me company throughout the night. Now it was just me by myself and no other woman's body against mine.

And, to be honest, I rather enjoyed the novelty of it.

Even if nowadays I'd be rather more grateful for and certainly more appreciative of the attention of as many passionate, frequent and regular sexual partners as I had then.

I almost certainly had a more restful night's sleep than Crystal. And when the opportunity at last came for me to show her the article embedded somewhere towards the middle of the *New York Post*, her reaction was much worse than I'd expected. She gripped the newspaper article in her hands as if it might otherwise escape and compulsively read it over and over again.

"Don't fret, sweetie," said Veronica as she pulled Crystal's head down onto her bosom. "You shoulda seen what they said about me when I was dating Tim Buckley. It's just good that no one ever found out about me and Laura Nyro."

"I just feel that instead of being treated like a song-writer or a musician, I'm being pilloried as a freak," Crystal wailed. "It's as if the American media were stripping me bare, beating me with a whip and holding me up for ridicule."

"It's not as bad as all that," I said.

"No?" said Crystal with a look of mock disbelief as a tear trailed down her cheek and onto Veronica's bosom and across the wide expanse of her areola. "What does it say? 'Naked antics'. 'Lesbian filth'. And what about this call to boycott our concerts?

What have we ever done to deserve this?"

"Are you sure it's not because you play this 'punk rock' music the kids dig these days?" Veronica remarked.

"There's no 'punk' in our music at all," said Crystal. "Judy plays a mean rock guitar, but that's about it. Crystal Passion is more *Everything But the Girl* than Dead Kennedys. It's more Portishead than the Damned. There's absolutely nothing about Crystal Passion for anyone to get upset about."

"There's the nudity and the lesbianism," I pointed out.

"As I said," Crystal repeated firmly. "There's absolutely nothing that should upset anyone about Crystal Passion."

As always, Polly Tarantella has plenty to say about the *New York Post* article, though I suspect that if she were familiar with UK newspapers like *The Sun* or *The Daily Mail*, she might have a different attitude. In her biography, it really does seem as if Crystal were spat at, stripped of all modesty, beaten with a whip, paraded naked down the street and forced to wear a dunce's cap. The chapter regarding this incident is even entitled *America Scourges Crystal Passion* and she portrays Samuel Hedrick and Reverend Bob Farrow as party to a grand conspiracy whose objective is to humiliate Crystal and drive her out of America. Much as I'm sure both pundits would have been delighted to see Crystal Passion fly back to London before we'd completed our tour, I doubt that this was the only campaign against the encroaching tide of permissiveness and immorality they were engaged in.

Polly makes a great deal about Veronica's role in comforting a distressed Crystal, although she discreetly overlooks the fact that they had sex together. However, in Polly's defence, Veronica wasn't quite as eager as Crystal was to share her body with

more than one other woman. And nowadays this is something I can readily relate to.

Polly also expresses regret that there isn't a recording of Veronica Wilson and Crystal Passion playing together, but in the days when mobile phones couldn't even take still pictures let alone films and when cameras were too heavy and clumsy to carry in a pocket, this isn't surprising. But it's thanks to Veronica that our gigs at Thorn's Folk and Blues Club were sold out and attracted a more than usually appreciative audience.

And that's mostly because she agreed to perform on stage with the band: a decision which led to a frantic last-minute publicity campaign by Barry and Anita Thorn who pasted a sticker on all the concert posters they could find so that it now read: *Featuring A Guest Appearance From Veronica Wilson!!* And this publicity most definitely attracted a bigger and more enthusiastic audience for Crystal Passion.

There is no sense that Crystal changed our set simply to suit Veronica Wilson. She *always* adapted the choice of songs and arrangements to fit wherever we were performing. So, in this gig, there were some songs she performed with only Andrea rather than with the whole band. And she was more than content to perform as Veronica Wilson's accompanist on her Rhode Island lover's songs. This was probably much like her early days when she played in a duet with John River. But along with songs that appealed to Veronica's many grateful fans, there were the more upbeat songs in which Judy Dildo took full possession of the stage and where the larger ensemble, including saxophone, clarinet, percussion and, of course, my electronic keyboards, made a clamour which disorientated those in the audience with abundant grey beards, long white hair (if there was any hair at all), chunky jumpers and leather sandals. They must have thought they'd been accidentally transported to a night club, though I doubt

whether any of them would appreciate the difference between Michael Jackson and the Jungle Brothers or between the Temptations and Orbital. And, most crucially of all, Crystal performed as she mostly always did: in the nude, unannounced and unabashed. Nobody else, including Judy, exposed more than the usual amount of flesh that a female musician in a hot and sweaty cellar venue might normally display.

Polly's wrong to say there wasn't a record of Crystal Passion performing with Veronica Wilson. There were no photographs, film or recording. That's true enough. But there was a brief review of the concert in *The Brown Daily Herald* under a picture of Veronica taken some ten years earlier which was captioned as *Veronica Wilson Plays with the Crystal Passion Band*. This review focused almost entirely on Veronica's music though it does admit that "the Crystal Passion Band were spirited accompanists" and that "the English all-girl electric folk and blues group acquitted themselves well and much to the appreciation of Providence's folk fraternity."

And this was probably the warmest praise Crystal Passion received during the entire duration of our American tour.

## Chapter Seven

“Detroit!” Jacquie exclaimed as she looked up from the tour itinerary she’d been reading. “That’s where our next gig’s gonna be. I’ve *always* wanted to go there.”

“Home of the MC5 and Iggy Pop,” remarked Judy Dildo.

“And much more importantly,” I said. “The home of Techno.”

“It’ll be good to see Juan Atkins or Derrick May on the decks,” said Jane. “I absolutely *love* that *Nude Photo* album.”

“You’re irrepressible!” giggled Philippa who excitedly gripped Jane’s shoulder. She was still glistening with the afterglow of their having slept together the night before and responded rather more to the album’s name than the music which the rest of us knew had nothing to do with nudity. Philippa had never been much of a clubber.

“It’s a long drive to Detroit,” said Bertha who’d be the one taking the wheel of the camper van all the way from Providence. “It’s over 700 miles! We’ll need an early start.”

And a long drive it most definitely was, with most of us squeezed into the camper van, while Crystal rode in the Chevrolet with Jenny, Judy and the Harlot. The route even traversed a stretch of Canada, which for me was only the second country I’d ever visited in the New World, even though it didn’t appear appreciably different from the United States.

It was while the camper van drove along the King’s Highway in Ontario that Jane, Jacquie and I decided between us that as soon as we arrived in Detroit we’d head to Belleville on the city’s outskirts and hunt out the clubs where Detroit’s finest might be on the decks. The ground plan determined, our discussion from then on was about

which DJ should take precedence: Kevin Saunderson, Juan Atkins or Derrick May. Jane had read somewhere that Detroit's top club was called the Music Institute while Jacquie was sure that it had closed down. I misunderstood them and thought the sisters were discussing an actual American college of music. Our entire knowledge of Detroit and its Techno scene was based more or less entirely on the small collection of twelve-inch singles we'd amassed back in the late 1980s. None of us had followed the scene with the close attention required to know how much the musical landscape might have changed since then. We'd heard of Carl Craig, Plastikman and, of course, Jeff Mills, but we had no idea where to go or even who were most likely to still be active in the Detroit night clubs. We were adrift in a strange place without a map or compass.

And this we learnt for sure when Jane, Jacquie and I ventured out just after midnight into Detroit's dark unfamiliar streets with me believing that because the sisters were black and because the founding fathers of Techno were also black I was in possession of a mystic charm that would somehow protect me from the horrors lurking in the city's shadows and which would also miraculously guide us towards the world's greatest Techno. We excitedly discussed what treats were in store for us, which in our imagination would be the American equivalent of Hardfloor, Autechre and Carl Cox. Perhaps we'd hear the most cutting edge sound from the likes of Robert Hood, Richard Hawtin or Terence Parker. Surely we wouldn't be disappointed.

It was almost inevitable that rather than us chancing upon the best night club Detroit had to offer, the taxi we'd hailed instead dumped us on a dark forbidding street where we had no clue as to which direction to go. Three girls in a foreign city looking for a good time and we were already wondering whether we oughtn't just hail another taxi and hasten back to our bargain-basement hotel. And we weren't at all prepared for

the chill wind that had descended on the State of Michigan from the nearby Great Lakes.

It was freezing!

“Fuck this!” said Jane, who wasn’t known for her love of wet and cold weather.

“If we don’t find a club soon, I swear I’m gonna fly off!”

“You and me too!” said Jacquie whose temper was no more reserved. “This is your fucking fault, Pebbles! Where’s the bloody Techno? There’s fuck all here!”

“Perhaps the decent clubs are hidden away somewhere,” I said, while wondering to myself how my instructions to the taxi driver could have led us to a street of boarded-up shops and that unfriendly kind of American bar we were getting to get know all too well: the type that only welcomed a kind of woman who, whatever our clothes might suggest, was very different from the kind of woman we were.

“Where then, Pebbles?” said Jane. “Where? I can’t fucking see anything!”

“I’ll ask,” I said, spotting a pair of dark-skinned young girls in tight skirts tottering by on exaggeratedly high heels. The way they were dressed wouldn’t be considered remotely stylish in London, but this was America where good taste in fashion, we’d discovered, was mostly confined to New York.

“Yeah!” I said when I’d returned to the sisters carrying the memory of a garbled message inflected with a thick Hispanic accent. “There’s a club round here just two blocks away. *The Cross* it’s called...”

“And fucking cross is what I’ll be if it’s as fucking shit as everything else in this shitty country!” said Jane.

“Honestly, Pebbles,” Jacquie chimed in. “This is *all* your fucking fault. I told you we should have looked for some kind of listings magazine. If they’ve got *Time Out* in London and New York, surely they’ve got a *Time Out* in Detroit...”

“...Or something like it!” said Jane.

I knew Jane and Jacquie were being unfair, but I was never up to standing up to them when they got irate. Although this didn’t happen very often, when it did the twins made up for the respite with sheer unremitting ferocity. I just wished Crystal was there. Even though she hadn’t known Jane and Jacquie for as long as me or even quite as intimately, she was far better than me at defusing bad situations and then to somehow steer everyone towards smiling cooperation with grievances both forgotten and forgiven.

“Is *this* it?” asked Jane in mock incredulity when we took our place at the end of a none-too-long line (as they call it in the States) leading into *The Cross*: a club whose undistinguished entrance was guarded by well-muscled black bouncers in unadorned sleeveless tee-shirts. From inside came a muffled thud of what could have been any kind of music: maybe, we were hoping, something good. The other people in the line were mostly like the two girls I’d got directions from and I was now more pleased than ever that Jane and Jacquie were black. Although I wasn’t the only white woman there, those who weren’t black or brown were chatting in heavily accented Hispanic English. And although we’d all dressed in anticipation of a hot night out of four-to-the-floor sweaty action in our flimsy dresses, handbags and pumps (and, just in case of trouble, a beret to cover my shaved pate), the majority of women in the line (and there were nearly three times as many as men) were dressed in decidedly down-market chic with perilously unsteady high heels.

“This is gonna be a disaster, I fucking know it!” said Jacquie between clenched teeth. She was so angry she couldn’t say another word while we continued to stand in the icy wind waiting to be let in and out of the cold. Jane more than made up for her

sister's intemperate silence with a tirade about what a shit-hole America was and how she planned to quit the Crystal Passion band and get back to her studies at Uni as soon as the tour was over or, maybe at this rate, a fuck of a lot sooner than that.

I didn't have much hope that things would be much better when we got inside *The Cross* and I wasn't wrong. The club was the kind we normally avoided at all costs back in England. What wasn't in the shadows was garish, brash and camp. There was even a 70s style disco ball. The poster outside advertised House and Techno and something called Neo Soul hosted by someone with the promising name of DJ Stumble, but I was already far from expecting to enjoy an evening of full-on high intensity Robert Hood and Plastikman.

We spent hardly any more time in *The Cross* than we had waiting to get inside. When the music was unfamiliar to our ears it sounded like high energy Soul or R&B, and the tunes we did know were the kind of commercial House that occasionally creeps into the English Top 40 and gets played on day-time radio. K-Class, Robin S and Rozalla are good in their place but it wasn't what we'd been hoping for. Nothing we heard could really be called Techno. This was not a Night of Dancing to remember for very long at all.

“So much for fucking Detroit!” said Jacquie when we at last got back to the hotel. “A cheap fucking club with plastic music for plastic people! And here we are in a cheap fucking hotel with piss on the stairwell, stains on the carpet and a TV that's tuned to only the worst fucking shit that's ever been broadcast. If this is the fucking capital of Techno, you can fucking keep it!”

“And if you think you can share the same bed as us after this fucking fiasco,” said Jane with unnecessary spite, “you've got another thought coming! After all that

glitzy mirrored disco ball shit we need as much sleep as we can to get over it.”

I hadn’t been expecting much intimacy with the sisters after our disappointing night out so I sheepishly curled up in a ball in the single bed while Jane and Jacquie shared the double bed.

Things weren’t going very well for us in Detroit at all.

Perhaps we’d all had unrealistic expectations when Marianne told us she’d arranged a tour for the band in America with Sanity Records. There was so much of America we knew about and even idolised. And here we were in the birth place of Techno and, as Jane and Jacquie said, it was all shit. But when Marianne made her announcement, we’d only just finished recording the third album, *Seventy Doctors*, and all of us were enthusiastic and ready for anything.

By then, the Crystal Passion band had expanded from a performing sextet with roadie and sound engineer to an altogether more ambitious and larger ensemble. We were already preparing to record the fourth album. Crystal was brimming over with new songs and compositions. The plan was to get the new album out, record the next one and then head off to the States where we almost truly believed that we’d crack open the world. No longer just the occasional late-night play on Radio One and Capital (not to mention innumerable pirate radios that never paid a penny to the Performing Rights Society). No longer small venues and crappy cellar bars. No longer the small time. We were off to America: the Land of Opportunity and the flashing dollar sign. Surely just over the Atlantic was a future where we could politely decline Grammy awards and enjoy more money than we had sense of how to spend.

Crystal Passion now had four new musicians: Philippa, Olivia, Thelma and the Harlot. And we even had a second roadie, Jenny Alpha, to set up the extra equipment

that came with the inflated numbers. The band had continued to grow even though we all wondered how Crystal could stretch from not having enough to remunerate six musicians and two crew, to not having enough for ten musicians and three crew. But I had to agree that the extra accompaniment of Saxophone, Clarinet and Trumpet, various types of percussion instrument and backing vocals had given the Crystal Passion band a richer, more intricate and even rather sophisticated sound. It had come a very long way from one girl and her guitar (and very little else!).

Philippa played other instruments besides the Tenor and Alto Saxophone. In fact, she'd studied at the Royal College of Music and was already a professional musician; but not one who'd made much money despite having played regularly in a classical saxophone quartet and several jazz bands. Like Judy and me, she'd had a kind of epiphany when she saw Crystal Passion on stage, though of all the band she was the one least enamoured of Judy Dildo's guitar-playing and on-stage theatrics. She said it detracted from the music's essential integrity. Ironically, she was also rather more like Judy than she was to anyone else in Crystal Passion in the sense that we could all imagine her having a successful career outside the band. We thought her stint with us was just a way to pass the time before she graduated to a more challenging musical career, but whereas you'd predict that Judy Dildo would be the axe-woman for a metal band, you'd expect Thelma to sign to ECM or Harmonia Mundi; even though from her appearances alone you'd take Philippa for the archetypal Riot Grrrl.

Olivia had been a Civil Servant—working for the Inland Revenue, I think—who used to perform in a Pub Rock band, some fifteen years after Pub Rock's finest days. Her taste was for the kind of Rhythm 'n' Blues that was a light year away from the African-American pop music that's called R&B these days. This Rhythm 'n' Blues

emphasised earthiness, earnestness and, of course, rhythm: which last, of course, was where Olivia excelled with her imaginative array of miscellaneous percussive instruments. When Crystal saw her improvise on kitchen utensils, washboard and hollowed-out stereo speakers she was determined that Olivia should join the band which, with her remarkable powers of persuasion, she made sure would happen.

I'd never got to know Thelma or the Harlot as well as I should have done I guess, although I must have had sex with either or both of them at one time or another maybe even at the same time. They didn't know one another before they joined the band, but on stage they were inseparable. They not only provided backing vocals, they also both played brass: the Harlot on trumpet and Thelma on clarinet.

In her account of the Crystal Passion band, Polly Tarantella hardly mentions the Harlot at all and never by her real name which, like mine, is Simone. What were the chances of there being two Simones in one band? I don't know how she got to be called the Harlot, but this dated from long before she joined the Crystal Passion band and the name suited her well. I'm sure it was more her sexual appetite than having a shared musical vision that had compelled her to join the band, however good her trumpet-playing was. The Harlot loved sex—really *loved* it. She was always either in the midst of having sex or in between times of having sex. She was the one who most enjoyed making love with multiple partners and she didn't care at all about which gender. I don't know where she drew the line and I never cared to ask. Was it with transsexuals? With animals? With children? All I know is that we never came across a sexual adventure to which she was loath. Indeed, she was invariably the most enthusiastic. A cock up the anus, two fists up the snatch, two cocks in her mouth and semen dripping down her cheeks and chin: these are my abiding images of her. Those along with the

bruises, welts and love-bites that provided evidence of her vigorous and inventive sexual activity.

Thelma was otherwise known as Judy, but you couldn't mistake her for Judy Dildo. Thelma resembled more a little pixie, with very short hair (but not shaved off like mine) and she wore feminine clothes with a kind of Riot Grrrl feel to them. She was a good friend of Jenny Alpha and I think it was probably through our second roadie that Thelma got to know Crystal and then joined the band. Not surprisingly, given the vitriol she visits on Judy Dildo, nowhere does Polly Tarantella ever refer to Thelma by her other name.

Thelma's relationship with Jenny Alpha was probably the most like a conventional two-person relationship of any of us (however much I strived to make this so between Crystal and me). Jenny enjoyed her dope: that was for sure. But she also enjoyed sleeping in the same bed as Thelma and making passionate love with her. It was very romantic. Jenny Alpha was pretty much the physical opposite of our other roadie. Bertha was big, muscly and very much the butch dyke. Jenny Alpha was lithe, toned and had a sweaty kind of femininity that sat well with her penchant for sports gear and trainers. And whereas Bertha always made her presence felt either in bed or in a social setting, you were often not aware that Jenny was even there until, say, she had to pack up the gear or get everything ready for a gig, or, in different circumstances, because you found her fist between the lips of your vulva, her tongue in your mouth and her crotch rubbing against yours.

But it was Jenny Alpha's hand on my shoulder that woke me up after my abortive night of Detroit clubbing. I gazed up through sleep-encrusted eyes at a Jenny wearing only a slip and knickers accompanied by Thelma in just a tee-shirt.

“Plans have changed again,” said Jenny without troubling to welcome me to the new day. “We’re not gonna be playing at the Detroit Fall after all.”

“You what...?” exclaimed Jane who’d also woken up.

“We’re gonna be playing at a strip club instead.”

“...The fuck!” exclaimed Jacquie.

“It wasn’t as if the fucking Detroit fucking Fall was such a great venue to start off with,” declared Jane who strode over to my bed, her pendulous bosom swaying and her long fingernails poking into Jenny’s lightly raised chest. “I don’t fucking know what Marianne was fucking thinking in the first place, but...a strip club! You must be having a laugh. And not in a good way.”

I could see that neither Jane nor Jacquie had slept off their anger. This wasn’t going to be pleasant.

“So, what’s this about?” asked Jacquie when she threw open the door to the bedroom Crystal was sharing with Philippa and the Harlot. “We’re booked into a fucking strip joint? What the fuck are we gonna do? Wear fucking tassels on our nipples and swirl them at the fucking punters?”

“I’m not gonna fucking dance on any fucking cunt’s lap!” said Jane. “I’d rather shove my fist up his arsehole. And I ain’t gonna cut my nails first!”

Crystal was obviously already upset. Her reddened eyes gave the unmistakeable impression that she’d been weeping and if she ever wore makeup it would now be streaked down her cheeks. She bit her lower lip and looked around at her audience of Jane and Jacquie and me, along with Philippa, the Harlot, Jenny Alpha and Thelma.

“I can’t pretend it’s anything but bad news,” she said meekly.

“So, what happened? What’s this Jenny and Thelma are saying? Is it true?” I

asked, sort of still half-expecting Crystal to laugh and declare that it was all a joke: not that this was ever the sort of prank you'd associate with her.

“While you were out last night I got a telegram from Kai in New York telling me to get in touch with him urgently,” said Crystal in a small voice. “So I called him, but it was a while till he picked up the phone. I had to speak to Barnie while waiting: you know, the guy Tomiko got to know... He didn’t know much but he knew the gist of it. And that was that the proprietor of the Detroit Fall had got wind of the negative publicity we’ve been getting and decided he didn’t want us in his club, thank you very much! He didn’t want a bunch of naked sex-craved punk dykes giving the Detroit Fall a bad name, when what he’d originally been expecting was a folk-rock group. But he didn’t want to break the agreement he’d had to give us a gig and, of course, neither did Kai, and, I guess, in America where they call out the lawyers on the smallest excuse neither do we. So, he arranged for a friend of his to stage our show instead and this friend runs a strip club in the city...”

“You’re fucking kidding, aren’t you?” said Jane angrily.

“Kai backed up what Barnie said,” Crystal continued. “I’m going to have to contact the manager of this strip club today. But what Kai also told me is that, given what’s been said about us on TV and in the *New York Post*, they want each and every one of us to perform in the nude.”

“*The nude!*” exclaimed Jacquie loudly enough to be heard on not only every adjacent room but probably on the floors above and below. “*Fucking naked!*”

“You might not fucking mind being nude on stage,” stormed Jane at Crystal who was currently as naked as ever, as incidentally were almost all of us. “But that’s a step further than Jacquie and I have *ever* taken before. It’s fucking insane. And we’re

not fucking doing it!"

Jane and Jacquie were right, of course. We might appear naked in front of each other and, indeed, on occasion in front of very many more people, but none of us, except Crystal and Judy Dildo, ever took off all our clothes on stage. That wasn't the sort of band we were. In any case, it was always unspoken that neither Crystal nor Judy did so for any reason other than the exercise of their personal preferences. And, furthermore, there was another reason for our reluctance besides our understandable aversion to pandering to the pornographic fantasies of a male audience. And that was that Judy and Crystal were also the two members of the band for whom nudity was somehow both most natural and most flattering. Jane and Jacquie might have been my lovers, but neither had the figure of a magazine model: their bosoms were pendulous with large areola, their arses protuberant, and their thighs and waist fleshy and overflowing. I loved their bodies dearly, but they weren't the object of most people's erotic fantasy. And, of Andrea and me, it was my sister who was the most slender and evidently attractive. Although I had no excess fat as such, I was (and still am) quite thick-boned even if I'm not at all above average height. And with a below average-sized bosom, a waist not much slimmer than my hips and, of course, my shaved head: I was plainly not the obvious candidate to be a stripper or sex performer.

But there was a kind of inevitability to the subsequent stream of events along which I flowed while never feeling in control. Kai Pharrel emphasised the legal consequences of renegeing on a deal in America. Marianne in London expressed sympathy for our plight, but totted up the punitive costs of a tour that was already losing money. And then there was the fact that we would have two successive nights at *The Purple Robe* and it was over a week till our next scheduled gig in Kansas City: the

home of Charlie Parker and not much else.

What else could we do till then?

The gigs were promoted on unsubtle garish posters pasted throughout the city that featured photos of naked women that resembled not a single one of us strumming Rock guitars and bashing it out on drums. And emblazoned across the poster under the thick purple italic letters proclaiming the club's name was the name of a band called Chrystal and the Passions who we half-hoped no one would associate with us. In small print were a few choice quotations that were attributed to articles about us: 'Notorious and Naked' 'Anarchy from the UK' and 'Lesbian Punk Sensation'. None of us cared or were at all bothered to confirm whether the *Detroit Sunday Journal, USA Today* or the *Philadelphia Daily News* were correctly cited.

Crystal was probably the most distraught of any of us, however much she struggled to appear outwardly calm. Her mood was worsened by Jane and Jacquie who maintained a tireless tirade of how shit Detroit was, what a cesspit America was and how much they were looking forward to quitting the band. Every day they threatened, with attendant tantrums, to fucking walk away and leave the Crystal Passion Band mired in shit up to the fucking chin. Their mood was not improved by the fact that on this occasion it was the band's rhythm section that couldn't be spared. A set that had been adapted to emphasise the more rhythmic and guitar-led side of the Crystal Passion Band had to include Jane and Jacquie. Most of the band was spared the shame of having to appear at the *Purple Robe*, but, unfortunately, I was also not one of those.

Crystal and Judy Dildo led the band from the front. In fact, Judy was the only one who didn't seem especially upset by the turn of events. As a Rock Guitarist she'd appeared at some pretty crappy places with correspondingly rowdy audiences. She

often regaled us with stories about the audience at these Rock gigs: the urination and vomit on stage, the blood and bruises in the mosh pit, and the fist-fights in the venue's shadows.

When Crystal and Judy appeared on stage at the *Purple Robe* on either side of the dance pole they were both totally naked with the exception of their shoes (flat-heeled in Crystal's case and rubber-soled in Judy's). It was unusual to see Judy perform without her strapped-on dildo and the black plasters over her nipples, but I think she felt a need to compensate for the rest of us who were disgusted, ashamed and humiliated at having to do the gig. Those watching the gig must have thought Judy was the band leader and that she was the Chrystal advertised on the posters rather than just one of the Passions. She completely took the initiative and compensated for Crystal's unnatural reticence and our shamefaced reserve by giving the audience something of what they wanted (although they may have been puzzled that it wasn't she who was singing; in fact, Judy's voice would only ever be good for the raucous amateurish punk rock that not even she enjoyed much).

The rest of the band was composed of the rhythm section of Jane, Jacquie and me, who stayed as much in the shadows as we could; enough so that we could avoid baring our private parts which were hidden under our not especially sexy or erotic underwear. Even so, we all still had our tits out for the boys: the sisters' large and fleshy breasts flopping about awkwardly as they played and my own much more modest bosom affording little pleasure to the voyeur (of which pretty much everyone in the audience was). I borrowed a purple wig from one of the pole dancers who performed between our three twenty-minute sets. I was scared that my shaved head would attract the wrong kind of fetishistic attention otherwise.

The only other members of the Crystal Passion band to venture into the *Purple Robe* were Jenny Alpha to roadie and Tomiko to manage the sound desk. She was dressed even more than usual like a weird Japanese schoolgirl wet dream; if one that swore with frightening ferocity, drunk her beer straight from the bottle and snorted a shocking number of lines.

The time we spent on stage was relatively easy to endure. I barely glanced out through the flashing red and yellow lights at the exclusively male audience that was mostly somewhat older than we were used to playing. They were just shadows I could glimpse in the dark of men who'd presumably been lured into a strip club with the promise that they'd witness a currently notorious rock band. It was actually the time when we walked onto and came off the stage that was most humiliating. I'd never before been treated to so many wolf-whistles and so much yelled innuendo in my performing life. Only Judy acknowledged the attention and she played the role of the Angry Rock Star to perfection (although that may have been because she *was* an Angry Rock Star). Jane, Jacquie and I kept our heads down or looked away until we could withdraw behind the thick purple velvet curtains and retire to the small changing room where the strippers were waiting their turn.

I don't know what I'd expected of the *Purple Robe* strippers. In all the American movies I'd seen which featured a stripper, she was almost always portrayed as the waif-like girlfriend of a dishevelled and misunderstood male hero who was struggling to get by until she could do something more worthwhile with her life. I could see no evidence of that in the *Purple Robe* strippers who smoked constantly, whose skin was a mix of several tones of black and brown, and for which English was not always their first language.

Moxie Fox was the stage name of the girl who lent me her wig but she preferred to be called Charlene. She had very light black skin and was so thin that I half-expected her to start shooting up, but she could just as easily have been a recovering anorexic. She was more interested in hearing about my glamorous life as a Rock Star than she was to talk about her life or trials however much I tried to steer the conversation elsewhere, but I preferred Charlene's company to that of Jane and Jacquie whose broken-record conversation returned again and again and yet again to how shit it was to perform in a fucking strip club and that they'd be fucked if they'd go on stage for the next set (even though they always did). I had no opportunity to talk to Crystal who was in a tightly huddled conversation with Judy Dildo whose arms were wrapped around Crystal's shoulders in sisterly affection.

Jenny Alpha and Tomiko were the only ones who didn't come backstage but they had to supervise our equipment to ensure it didn't get stolen. In any case, neither of them had been obliged to take off their clothes. My guess is that the two of them were sharing their dope and coke and should any of the male audience venture too close they were both more than capable of handling the situation. Tomiko's blatant sexual aggressiveness and Jenny's well-toned muscular figure were more than enough to intimidate even the most crass wolf-whistler and unfunny heckler.

Polly Tarantella is characteristically coy about our gigs at the *Purple Robe*, as she is with any aspect of Crystal's life that doesn't fit into a remarkably prim vision of her as a misunderstood and wholly spotless genius. What she does say corresponds more to her account of a Crystal Passion who was persecuted and humiliated on her American Tour where the villains are not so much flexibility in the face of necessity but the persons of Kai Pharrel and Judy Dildo (Marianne being wholly innocent of any

wrongdoing). I think Polly is unfair to both of them. Kai was just the bearer of bad news and Judy Dildo, if anything, was the person who did more than anyone to rescue the band from even more humiliation. But Polly is unlikely to forgive Judy for making a success of a couple of gigs at a strip club. I think she'd rather we'd had our clothes ripped off our backs by rapacious male chauvinists and then stoned to death.

Judy was the one who interceded between Crystal and the manager of the *Purple Robe*, a greasy man with skinny arms and a supersized paunch. She got us in and out of the venue with as little harassment as possible. She held off the attention of the ravening crowd by both teasing the audience and treating them like miserable shits. And more than that, she was spending more and more time together with Crystal as she tried to console our clearly despondent band-leader who was taking sole blame for what Jane and Jacquie so often reminded everyone had so far been a disastrous and humiliating American tour. It was Judy who most tried to convince Crystal that she ignore the bad press, the shame of performing at a pornographic venue and the deepening black hole of debt and unpaid wages that was opening up the longer the tour continued. But this might be what most antagonises Polly about Judy. How can Crystal have let herself be led astray by a woman like Judy Dildo when there were others in the band (most significantly me) who Polly claims were much more suitable companions: women who fit better into the myth that Polly and other Rock Music Critics are creating about Crystal Passion and the newest *nouveau vague* of contemporary Rock Music.

We all wanted our memories of Detroit and the *Purple Robe* to recede into the back of our mind. We'd done our gigs and we'd got paid for them. Jane, Jacquie and I skulking in the shadows; Crystal strumming her guitar and singing sweetly over the catcalls; and Judy Dildo strutting, preening and thundering out the power chords. And

all this to an audience perhaps too mesmerised by Judy's Rock Star presence and Tomiko's deafening reconstruction of the Crystal Passion sound to pay much attention to the music they were listening to.

So, it wasn't with anything like joy or anticipation that we read the review of the gigs in a Detroit tabloid newspaper. It wasn't at all reassuring even though it was a relatively positive review but for all the wrong reasons. It was headlined **English Chicks Rock the Purple Robe** and the body of the article didn't get any more faithful to our memories of the event:

English Grunge Rock Chicks Chrystal & the Passions  
rocked out the Purple Robe as part of manager Bob  
Crux's new policy to diversify the range of shows he  
stages at the venue.

Bob explained to our reporter that the Purple Robe has long been a success at catering for the demand for adult entertainment in lively downtown Detroit and when he heard that English Rock Stars Chrystal & the Passions were in town he decided then and there to put them on stage.

The sell-out show featured an English all-girl Rock Group who dressed (or didn't dress) just as the crowd

demanded. This was a night out for men who appreciate an adult show with Rock songs. Just the tonic if you like the very best English Rock Bands like U2 and Duran Duran.

The lead guitarist was Julie Bilbo (29) who rocked the joint like a female Richie Blackmore if the Deep Purple ax man ever got dressed (or undressed) like her. Chrystal (26) was the Passions' singer and talented songwriter. She reminded this writer of Grace Slick in the days of Jefferson Airplane.

Rock fans at the Purple Robe were treated to the very best of English Chick Rock and we look forward to seeing more English talent like this.

Come on, England. Don't be shy. Show us more of what you have to offer. And we want to hear more of your Rock Music too!

“What kind of shit is this!” exclaimed Jane. “Did this cunt even actually go to the fucking concert?”

“Who is Richie Blackmore?” wondered a totally bemused Tomiko. “And what

is this Deep Purple?"

"The reporter must be a mate of the manager," Thelma remarked. "Bob Crux is the only whose age isn't reported."

"Where did they get those ages from?" Thelma wondered. "Did they pluck them out of thin air? Are you *really* 29 years old, Judy?"

"Erm..." said Judy Dildo, uncharacteristically sheepishly. "Maybe."

"Let's just hope no one outside of Detroit ever reads this review," said Crystal with firm resolve. "And let's hope we can put the *Purple Robe* behind us and look forward to the next gig."

"Yay!" said Philippa in almost gung-ho enthusiasm (but then she no more than most of the Crystal Passion band had actually ventured into the *Purple Robe* and she didn't have much shame and humiliation to put behind her). "Kansas City here we come!"

## Chapter Eight

“Wherever it is we’ll be tomorrow, it won’t be Kansas,” Crystal announced when she’d returned from the hotel foyer after what was originally intended to be a routine phone call to Kai about the tour itinerary. “And it most certainly won’t be Kansas City.”

“No need for ruby slippers then,” said Thelma.

“So, if we’re not going to Kansas, where *are* we going?” Andrea asked. “Weren’t we supposed to be travelling from there to Chicago, Washington and New Orleans?”

“It isn’t only Kansas we won’t be going to,” said an emotionally drained Crystal. “It’s worse than that. We’re not going to any of those other destinations either. According to Kai, almost every venue in the country has cancelled our gigs.”

“What the fuck!” Olivia wailed. “Why?”

“It’s the result of all the negative publicity we’ve been getting,” said Crystal. “The concert organisers don’t like what they’ve read and they don’t want to take the risk of allowing us to get on stage.”

“I thought there was no such thing as bad publicity,” remarked Judy.

“That might have been true if we *were* a punk rock group or some kind of edgy theatre troupe,” said Crystal. “But we’re not. We flirted with fame and instead we found scandal.”

“It’s all the fault of the fucking American media!” Judy sniffed. “They’ve fucking had it in for us ever since we arrived in this shit-arse country.”

Of all of us, Judy Dildo was the one most likely to agree with Polly Tarantella’s thesis that Crystal Passion was the victim of a grand conspiracy. Most of us blamed our

misfortune more on the outcome of a series of unfortunate events. And this is ironic given that Polly portrays Judy as the pantomime villain of the tour. She seems to assume that every slight, every setback, every cancelled gig, police harassment and negative press article was all part of a grand scheme whose sole purpose was to bring about Crystal Passion's demise. And the fact that Judy was no more unscathed than Crystal does nothing to deflect Polly's condemnation.

“Is there anything we can do?” Jenny Alpha wondered.

“Yeah there is,” said Jacquie who, along with her sister, was still incensed at our humiliation at the *Purple Robe*. “We can get on board a fucking plane and fly home. This tour’s been a fucking disaster from the very beginning. Let’s just cut our losses.”

“We’ve still got a few gigs to honour,” said Crystal. “We don’t want to cause any disappointment.”

“From what we’ve seen so far, nobody’ll be disappointed at all,” chimed in Jane. “They won’t even know we were ever supposed to be there. Let’s just head to the nearest international airport and fly home.”

“When and where are these gigs?” I asked.

“The first one’s a couple of weeks from now,” said Crystal. “It’s in a city in South Carolina. Rock Hill, I think it’s called.”

“South Carolina,” sniffed Jacquie. “Hicks and hillbillies. It doesn’t sound like the fucking Promised Land.”

“I vote we cancel the gig there before they cancel us,” said Jane. “Those good ol’ boys can lynch someone else. We can fly home to London and civilisation.”

Nobody took Jane up on her suggestion. Crystal was too upset for any of us to want to make things worse for her and I guess we still hoped that there might be some

value in carrying on. And it wasn't much later that day that our fortune unexpectedly seemed to change for the better. This time a much more cheerful Crystal summoned the whole band to congregate in the hotel bar where the only people there other than us was a bored woman bartender and an elderly hotel guest nursing a glass of bourbon.

"Good news," announced Crystal with a broad grin and a glass of mineral water in her hand. "We've got a gig arranged next week in New York State."

"New York again!" Bertha exclaimed.

"Not New York City," Crystal elaborated. "New York State. Somewhere near a city called Syracuse. It's a festival they hold in a field not many miles from there. It'll be just like Woodstock or Glastonbury. It's called the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival."

This announcement prompted a varied response. Although we were all women and many of us enjoyed the company of women more than we did men, some of us, like Andrea and Judy Dildo, didn't much subscribe to the more radical tendencies of the feminist movement. For others like Olivia, Bertha and Jenny Alpha, there was no feminist proposition short of compulsory male castration they wouldn't subscribe to. Although neither Crystal nor I were female separatists, we were generally comfortable in the company of our radical sisters as long as the business of raging at the unfairness of life didn't get in the way of enjoying it.

"Where did you find out about this festival?" wondered Judy who was the least enthusiastic of any of us. Perhaps she was apprehensive of the generally negative opinion most feminists had towards Heavy Metal and mainstream Rock music. "I wasn't aware that Kai had much to do with the American feminist scene..."

"He *is* gay," said Tomiko as if that provided an explanation.

“Since when has being gay made a Man better informed about Women?” Jenny Alpha sneered. “What the fuck can *he* do in a dickless zone?”

“It was Simon who’s organised it for us,” said Crystal. “Kai called him up on a hunch and Simon just happens to be a friend of Ariel Golgotha, the woman organising the festival. Simon told her that we’d played at the John Knowles Paine Concert Hall and what a great band he thinks we are.”

“How *is* the professor?” I asked, as the only other person who’d met him.

“Professor Simon Kurrein?” said Crystal, surprised to hear him addressed in that way. “OK, I suppose, though we mostly only chatted about the festival: you know, the time and place and how to get there. We’ll be the first and only foreign women’s band to have ever played there, which, in a sense, gives us a lot more license than they allow the American bands.”

So, the professor had come to our rescue for a second time: something Polly makes much of in her Crystal Passion biography. However, I can categorically deny that Simon flew from Logan Airport to meet us at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County. His contribution, though significant, was to endorse Crystal Passion to Ariel Golgotha and thereby throw us a lifeline at a difficult time on the tour. He knew very little about the Sisterhood Women’s Music Festival. He probably thought that in a world where women musicians are mostly in the shadow of their male counterparts the mere fact we were women was all the shared identity that was needed. What he probably didn’t know so well was how militant much of the women’s music scene had become in the 1990s. There were still women with guitars singing pretty tunes in the tradition of Joni Mitchell, Tracy Chapman and Joan Armatrading; but there was now a new scene that was sweeping away the cutesy, effete, folky scene of women doing it for themselves.

Inspired by the likes of Courtney Love and her band, Hole (whose song *Teenage Whore* was a favourite of mine), and propelled by the likes of Sleater-Kinney and Bikini Kill, this was a scene that owed far more to the Slits and ESG (another of my favourites) than it ever did to the example of girls strumming on acoustic guitars: however much their sex lives might challenge the preconceptions of their male fans. And it was this, rather than some kind of folksy, hippy-dippy guitar and girl scene we were expecting to find at the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival.

What worried me was that Crystal Passion might not appear either old or new enough to satisfy the festival-goers' tastes. A feminist audience might be just as bemused and puzzled by Crystal's dense, ambiguous and elusive lyrics as any other audience. Crystal might have been as passionate in theory as she was in practice with regards to female empowerment, gender warfare and lesbian love (although she never used terms like 'queer' and 'dyke' to describe herself or her sexuality), but this wasn't obvious from listening to her lyrics. Even when they're written down (as Polly Tarantella has done) there's nothing specific or concrete in her words at all. Certainly not anything as tangible as a proclamation of the triumph of women against the self-evident evils of patriarchy and male oppression.

Although we didn't get to meet Simon, I exchanged a few words with him over the phone before we drove off to New York State. He was plainly sympathetic to our plight, but careful not to actually invite us to play in Boston again. I guess the adverse publicity we'd attracted no longer made that possible. And so it was that a couple of days sooner than we needed to, we travelled back across the narrow strip of Canadian territory to our next gig. Surely things could only get better from now on.

"Wow!" and "Gee!" and "Golly!" were the words Ariel Golgotha most often

used when she addressed us, although she also employed such words as “Fuck” and “Shit” to demonstrate that she wasn’t just the preacher’s daughter she actually was. We learnt that her passion for women’s issues, as much as her lesbianism, was the destination of a difficult personal journey that led from anti-abortion rallies in the company of her father’s congregation towards a lesbian woman-centric life style that her parents actively disapproved of. And given my experience with my own less than sympathetic parents, this was enough reason for me to take a shine to her.

But my attitude was the exact opposite of Judy’s.

“Fucking vicar’s daughter!” she exclaimed, when we were out of earshot.

“Seeing that we’ve arrived early, Ariel has offered us two gigs at the festival,” said Crystal, who chose to ignore Judy’s comments. “We’re gonna be playing on the first night and on the last night as well. That’s one gig on Thursday and a second on Monday.”

“For double the fee?” Andrea wondered.

“Not quite,” admitted Crystal, “But it’s a better deal than we were expecting.”

The Sisterhood Women’s Music Festival was no Glastonbury, no Woodstock, no Reading, no Womad, nor even the kind of free festival that used to be put on by local authorities in Central London to show how hip the borough councillors still were. It was held in a big field where it hadn’t rained for several weeks in which small tents were being erected in steadily closer proximity to one another over the first day. Not surprisingly for a festival organised by and for women, the toilet and washroom facilities weren’t bad at all, though the makeshift bar was something of a disappointment to those of us who preferred alcohol to soya milk and fresh juice. But what was really weird, and surprisingly elating, was that there were no men at the

festival whatsoever.

“Isn’t that a bit weird?” said Andrea when I mentioned this to her. “I mean, men are at least half the population.”

“About fucking time, I’d say,” Jenny Alpha remarked. “No one says fuck all when it’s only men who’re in a pub, at a football match or on a golf course. The fewer dicks, pricks and bollocks the better.”

Judy wasn’t convinced. “You put a lot of women together and there’ll be bitching from sunrise to sundown,” she said sourly.

“And you think it’s any different when there are only men around,” countered Jacquie. “There are always gonna be people who bitch. It’s only human nature.”

“What have you got against women all of a sudden, Judy?” said Thelma. “Do you *really* think men are any better? I’d rather be bitched at than raped or sexually assaulted. Men might not always be the enemy but, fuck it, they deserve to be.”

“Yeah. Yeah,” said Judy, evidently uncomfortable with this line of argument.

Not that any of us were especially comfortable when we tried to settle down to sleep in the cramped space of the rather small tents Ariel had available and which she generously let us use. We hadn’t expected to have to camp out during our American tour and I wasn’t the only one who’d never slept in the open air before. Jane and Jacquie were vocal in their disgust at having to sleep in borrowed sleeping bags on groundsheets laid over dew-damp grass. And Tomiko was moaning that she’d much rather sleep on a futon.

Nevertheless, our discomfort was partly compensated by the attention lavished on us the following day by the other women at the festival. Never before—and probably never since—had I ever felt so privileged to be British. Not that I’d ever had a choice

in the matter. This stemmed from the mysterious and persistent legacy of the Beatles' Invasion of the American music scene almost thirty years earlier. Whatever magic sparkle the lovable mop-tops possessed, Americans were convinced that it had brushed off on all and every one of their compatriots even if, by the 1990s, only Oasis played music that remotely resembled Mersey Beat. While my musical reference points were West Coast America and Detroit, Americans assumed that all we knew and cared about were the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Elton John and, at this festival, Dusty Springfield.

Not only was I celebrated simply by virtue of having been born in Britain and of being a member of a British popular music ensemble, it was also because I was a woman. Here were women amongst whom my shaved head and relaxed clubbing clothes made me feel that I was at last where I truly belonged. We were in the company of women whose dress and appearance was as miscellaneous and unconventional as the Crystal Passion band.

It is fair to say that Crystal was adored with a degree of unquestioning love I'd never seen before, even when we'd played at lesbian and feminist events in the UK. The very Englishness of her appearance—whether clothed or totally nude—only charmed the women who gathered around her. In truth, I can't remember whether there was an occasion when Crystal actually did wear anything: I was so used to seeing her nude. She was naked for at least some of the time and, just as in the UK, there was nobody who'd be so uncool as to remark on this. It might even have been her natural nudity that stimulated such adoration. Wherever Crystal wandered—from book stall to food stall to poster stall; from the stage to the caravans that provided both toilet facilities and hot water (and not a urinal in sight); from the Volkswagen camper van to the tent—she was followed by female fans who adored her despite not yet having heard her music.

There was one note of discord, however, when one of the women, older than most and wearing the peasant rags of the unreconstructed hippie, mentioned that she'd heard that there was negative criticism about Crystal Passion in some of the American media.

"Don't concern yourself about me," said Crystal. "I'm only a visitor to your country. You should be concerned about American women such as Ariel Golgotha who are more often the victim of media assassination. If someone like me who does comparatively little to further women's rights attracts so much undeserved censure, imagine how much worse it would be for Ariel if she was the centre of attention for reactionary sensation-seekers in the media. I feel enormous pride in all of you who work together in the struggle to make the world a better place for all women whether they live in the mountains, the hills or the forests..."

"...Or the towns and cities," echoed one of the American women who'd been trailing Crystal wherever she went.

"Of course," agreed Crystal. "For all women everywhere."

I left Crystal in the midst of her adoring fans and strolled off with Andrea to see what else was happening at the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival. Unfortunately, there was little there that I hadn't seen at other festivals. There were stalls selling organic vegan wholefood. Stalls selling CDs and amateurish pre-recorded cassettes. Stalls piled high with feminist and lesbian literature, where even the badly-drawn comic books were deadly earnest. Stalls selling ethnic clothes, which was different from what I was used to seeing in Europe only in that there were more ponchos and sombreros rather than batik and cheap Indian fabrics and tie-dyed tee-shirts. Although I soon got bored with rummaging through the ethnic chic, Andrea was soon laden down with

wooden beads, rattan mats and braided hair-bands.

I didn't surprise me at all when we returned to where we'd pitched up for the night to discover that the tent Crystal was sharing with Judy and Philippa was full of naked women. And neither Judy nor Philippa were anywhere to be seen. I could just about identify Crystal in the midst of the entangled female flesh where she was wholeheartedly enjoying the intimate affection of American sisterhood. I'm not sure what my feelings were to see Crystal with all these unfamiliar women, although I decided against stripping off to join the fray. I might even have been reassured that Crystal wasn't making love with Judy. For the last few days I was beginning to resent the greater attention Crystal was paying Judy who I couldn't help wondering, with a pang of jealousy, might have somehow superseded me as Crystal's favourite lover (if any woman was ever more favoured than another).

It was apparent that this representation of the American Sisterhood appreciated Crystal for more than just her music. For a start, it was unlikely that many had actually heard much of it, even though our CDs were on sale in record racks otherwise mostly crammed full of k. d. lang, Joan Baez, Tori Amos and 7 Year Bitch. I loitered around Crystal's tent as the lovemaking continued long after Andrea had discreetly wandered off. It wasn't only because I loved Crystal so much that I thought she was far more attractive than the other women. One of them was plump, another painfully thin (almost anorexic) and another dreadfully old. Of course, that was what I thought at the time. These days, I'd be delighted to enjoy intimacy with any of those women. Crystal's affection towards other people was so universal that I often wondered whether she discriminated on physical attractiveness at all. And then she'd astonish me with a frank and honest appraisal of someone's appearance: both good and bad. But when it came

to sex, Crystal never seemed troubled by such matters.

The sounds of passionate sex, let alone the smell and sight, soon became too much for me, however many times before I'd heard, seen and smelt Crystal's naked body. I left the temptation of flesh behind and wandered over to the tent I was sharing with Andrea and in which she was stretched out and admiring the wares she'd bought.

"I don't know why you're so disgruntled," said Andrea. "It's not because of Crystal, is it? Or do you just not like Women's festivals?"

"I like them well enough," I said. "And it's refreshing not having men around. I just think that celebrating our womanhood should be more fun somehow. And not in this happy-clappy everything-is-groovy kind of a way."

"From what I've heard about some of the younger bands here," said Andrea, who actually preferred exactly the kind of music that I didn't much like, "there's gonna be a lot more sound and fury than sweet melodies when *they* take the stage."

Andrea was right, of course, but not so much on the first day. In fact, the order in which the bands and musicians were scheduled to take the stage was in inverse order to the time of day when they'd be at their best. The first bands to appear on a stage brilliantly lit by the afternoon sun had names like the Jerusalem Whores and the Furry Fishcakes. The bemused women who'd turned up to hear them wore threadbare hippy clothes and their long hair was visibly greying. A handful of younger women—almost certainly the bands' friends and family—were dancing self-consciously at the front of the stage. And just when the younger music fans who'd have most enjoyed the spat-out lyrics of songs such as *My Flappy Vulva Lover* or *Peter Won't, But Paula Does* emerged from their tents the music had become more folky and better suited for an afternoon in a sunny park than a night of drinking and dancing in the open air. Now was the time for

singers with names like Margot Klein, Leanna Morris and Amy Jones to perch on stools with their acoustic guitars accompanied by an all-too-earnest all-female backing band. They performed well-meaning and allusive songs that celebrated womanhood in a thoroughly wholesome way. It was all women doing it for themselves and women surviving the horrors of heterosexual entanglement. It wasn't that I didn't appreciate or even agree with such lyrics. After all, I'd not been tempted into a relationship with a man for years. I just didn't much like the hectoring and sermonising.

It was when Margot Klein had sung her last song—an encore, in fact—with its catchy chorus of “Make Your Man Share the Burden! Watch him Stumble and Fall!” that the Crystal Passion band was due to take the stage. The honour of being the final act on the first night was simply a tribute to our status of being international. We may well have been the only band that didn't come from New York State. And this time, all of us were on stage. Not a slimmed-down ensemble as dictated by circumstances.

In the interval between the Crystal Passion band taking the stage and Margot Klein reluctantly walking off, acoustic guitar in hand while she waved appreciatively at her adoring middle-aged fans, there was a DJ set laid on by a woman in hippy gear who wouldn't have survived a single second in a British Night Club. She even allowed gaps between records which she thankfully didn't compensate for with inane radio DJ banter. Her idea of getting the audience ready for our set was to play songs by any and all of the British girl singers she could think of: so we were treated to an uneven mix of Joan Armatrading, Lulu and Sandie Shaw. She even played the Eurythmics' *Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves*: a tune I'd hoped never to have to hear again. I didn't appreciate being lectured about the virtues of “the conscious liberation of the female state” and being reminded that “the inferior sex has got a new exterior”. While a few very bored

hippies were swinging their motherly hips to this preachy housewife-friendly song, Bertha and Jenny Alpha were humping equipment onto the stage and Tomiko was setting up her mixing decks under a canvas shelter a hundred yards away.

I was nervous as I always am before a gig, but the signs were all good. I was sure we could only shine after what I considered to be an extremely tedious DJ set. And the audience which had thinned out as singer-songwriter followed singer-songwriter was at last beginning to be filled out with younger women who'd be up for something more upbeat and perhaps somewhat less self-satisfied. And many of these women were in thrall of Crystal Passion as a result of her daytime charm offensive.

Ariel Golgotha dashed onto stage with disarming enthusiasm dressed in an odd mix of ethnic chic and biker leather. She tried to address the crowd through the microphone, but all we could hear was a muffled voice swamped by the inspirational lyrics of Joan Armatrading's *Me Myself I*. And then with a half-audible sentence punctuated by the words "Fuck", "Shit" and "Golly", Ariel could at last be heard. She kept her announcement brief—possibly because she didn't really know any better than anyone else what our music sounded like—but I don't think Judy Dildo enjoyed being heralded along with the rest of us as an icon of Women's Liberation who was furthering the cause of feminism through the vehicle of Progressive Hard Rock.

And this may be why as soon as we took to the stage, Judy unleashed the unmoderated fury of full-throttle guitar licks which instantly energised the audience's younger element and dismayed the older hippy chicks.

This was the only set on our tour where we played the music we'd recorded in London just before we departed for our American tour. At the time, we'd thought that the six songs we'd recorded were unfinished work which would soon be accompanied

by half a dozen more when we returned to England. But we valued the opportunity to try out our new material on an absurdly enthusiastic audience before we returned to our more usual tried-and-tested repertoire. What we didn't know of course was that these six songs—on average no more than five minutes long—was to be our final recording as the Crystal Passion band and that they would later feature on an album with the portentous title of *The Last Word*.

In many ways this album is the most unsatisfactory and patchy release credited to Crystal Passion, however much Polly Tarantella champions it as our masterwork. In those days, it was expected that an album should last at least seventy minutes. And this was to justify what was then the more expensive price of a Compact Disc compared to a vinyl record. The six tracks we'd recorded for the as yet untitled fourth album amounted to barely thirty minutes. So, what would have been a very good short album—perhaps bolstered by the songs *So-So Sower* and *Muscle Mary* that we'd recorded on an earlier session as a potential single release—was bloated to a full seventy minutes by an additional half an hour of out-takes, half-finished songs found on Crystal's personal cassette player and a few songs that hadn't been good enough for *Seventy Doctors*, the previous record.

Nevertheless, the six tracks we'd recorded fit together very well and when it came for us to assemble the album, it was because Philippa and Andrea insisted on it that the songs were released on the album in their original sequence: even if they appeared after a somewhat miscellaneous selection of those tracks, like *Muscle Mary*, that Gospel Records considered might yet have commercial potential. And these six tracks featured the whole of the Crystal Passion ensemble in all its miscellaneous glory in arrangements that Crystal had agonised over and had somehow got absolutely right.

There was electric guitar and fiddle, saxophone and percussion, clarinet and trumpet, backing vocals, lead vocals, acoustic guitar, and, keeping up the rhythm, my keyboards, Jane's drums and Jacquie's bass. And it wasn't the mess that some of us had dreaded. With the help of Tomiko's expert engineering skills, it all held together as a coherent whole.

It is this set of six songs that Polly so often proclaims as the definitive sound of Crystal Passion and which she already has plans to have re-recorded by a set of *Band Aid* musicians. Perhaps there'll be someone like Squarepusher or Jon Hopkins playing my synth chords (though I wouldn't be at all surprised if they featured Elton John instead). Perhaps they'll have a decrepit Heavy Metal guitarist play Judy Dildo's licks (but knowing Polly's hatred of Judy, it probably won't be anyone who's any good). And I have no idea who'd play the role of Crystal Passion. Would it be Taylor Swift or Miley Cyrus? Whoever it might be, I can't imagine she'd appear naked on stage as Crystal did at the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival. And if Taylor Swift did appear undressed in the cause of authenticity, I doubt whether she could carry it off with as little sense of embarrassment as did Crystal.

The six songs have perplexing titles like *Curry Carousel Chorus*, *Gloria in an Escalator* and *Tell Me You Love What I Want You To Love* and although I now know every word by heart I still have no idea what Crystal was getting at when she wrote the lyrics. I sometimes wonder if she means me when she sings "Thank you, Kirsty" over and over again in *Lamb Ram Community*. Inevitably, there's no explicit reference to either 'Pebbles' or 'Simone' in her lyrics, any more than there is to a 'Judy' or a 'Mark' or anyone else she regularly made love with. Crystal's lyrics remain enigmatic well beyond the grave, however well they rhyme, scan and give the impression of having

meaning. What I do know is that I always burst into tears whenever I listen to the songs in sequence. They touch me deep inside even though I don't know what Crystal was singing about and, as I've told Polly many times, she never gave much away.

"Fuck, Crystal," said the Harlot who had to solemnly intone "Sanitary. Sanctuary. Salutary. Sanity." in *You Carry an Affirmation*. "What the fuck is all this about?"

"It just sounds good," said Crystal.

"Not *that* good," said Thelma who shared the backing vocal duties with the Harlot. "And what's it got to do with 'Offer me an Amphora'? Where do you get all this pseudo-mystical shit?"

"Do you think I should change the lyrics?" Crystal asked gently.

"I didn't say that," said Thelma. "It's not that it doesn't sound good. It's just that the lyrics don't make much sense."

And I don't think even Polly Tarantella would disagree with Thelma's assessment.

The first and only time I ever felt like a pop star, as opposed to the keyboard player in an obscure uncategorisable music group was that night when we appeared on stage. So, this is what it's like, I thought as the women in the audience danced, swung and moshed to music with complex time signatures, enigmatic lyrics and an eccentric set of instruments. I didn't know at the time that many years later, when nobody could mistake me for a 'babe' and when I could no longer shave my hair in case people thought I was on chemotherapy, that I would then be far more famous for my role in the Crystal Passion band than I was at the time.

And what were we like as a band when we were in full flow?

I'd like to think we weren't at all bad really.

There were some truly talented musicians in the group. Not just Crystal but also Andrea, Philippa, Olivia and Judy Dildo. And it was Judy who on this night, as she increasingly did as the American tour proceeded, who made the greatest impression other than Crystal herself. I'd be fooling myself if I were to claim that Jane, Jacque and I were much better than just about adequate. I've heard far better rhythm sections on old Tamla Motown records and on almost any modern Jazz record. And although Polly might be loath to agree, none of us, including Crystal, offered what Judy Dildo could in terms of stage presence. And on this stage, the two women were almost as one. Both were either totally or almost totally nude. Both had guitars strung over their shoulders. And both dominated the stage: Crystal with her inexplicable unassuming charisma. Judy with her Rock Guitar theatrics and her teasing of the audience's expectations. And whatever Polly says, Judy knew how to play guitar. You can hear it on the CDs, but nothing compares with the imagination and daring of the live show. If she was still active, she'd probably have become famous in her own right. Rather than as the object of Polly's unquenchable rage.

And, just like for a rock band, our audience clamoured for not one, not two, but three encores. And we'd have gladly given more if Ariel Golgotha hadn't brought the proceedings to a close. Fortunately, we had enough material for as many encores as might be required, but Crystal decided to give our American audience exactly what they'd really wanted all along. And this meant that the third encore featured the Beatles' *We Can Work It Out* which somehow melded into *Walk On By* and climaxed with Nirvana's *Come As You Are*. No one could pretend that Crystal's vocals sounded much like either John Lennon's or Kurt Cobain's, but on this occasion Judy Dildo showed an

unexpected skill at singing with a rasped voice which just happened to harmonise well with Crystal's more folky voice.

“Fuck!” said Jane as we left the stage. “That gig almost makes the American tour not seem so bad...”

“That was fucking awesome!” said Olivia.

“You did real good there!” I said to Judy Dildo, swallowing for the moment my resentment that she was sharing her bed with Crystal rather more often than I was.

Judy was dripping with sweat, but she knew that she'd done a good job. But she wasn't going to let that detain her.

“Yeah. Yeah,” she said distractedly before pushing her way through the crowd. “If you could just excuse me please...” she said as she disappeared.

“Where do you think she's going in such a hurry?” Andrea asked as we watched her go.

I didn't know, but I knew well enough where Judy was later that night from the passionate cries of lovemaking that came from the tent she shared with Crystal. And no amount of intimacy with the now reconciled Jane and Jacquie could make up for my hurt feelings.

## Chapter Nine

If you were touring America these days and you wanted to contact your manager or, indeed, anyone back in the UK, all you need to do is switch on a laptop or tablet or smart phone and use Skype. And if not Skype exactly, you'd use Viber or exchange e-mails or instant messages. But in the early 1990s, the internet was very slow and ridiculously expensive and most people weren't online anyway. So, when Crystal wanted to contact Madeleine, our agent, to find out how things were doing she had to seek out a payphone and drop a lot of coins into the slot for a not very long and usually unsatisfactory conversation.

I don't know how or when Crystal originally got Madeleine to represent her. She was Crystal's agent long before I first heard her live and she'd also represented John River before the River Bank became famous and ascended well out of her league. I sometimes got the impression that Madeleine was working for Crystal as a favour, although she did also manage some other rather more successful bands that regularly toured Europe and the UK. None were fabulously rich or famous, but they made enough for it to be worth Madeleine's while. This roster included folk groups, a jazz band and several minor league Rock and Pop groups. The most commercially successful band was called the Seven Imps. They were a Death Metal group who'd originally come from Norway but had now settled in East London and bore a remarkable resemblance to Snow White's Seven Dwarfs as illustrated by Arthur Rackham. To be honest, she and I were never really the best of friends. I think there might have been some sexual tension between us. I considered myself to be Crystal's primary lover after Mark and I think Madeleine might once have believed that she occupied that role. Whatever the

reason, she was never especially friendly towards me. Madeleine was a rather offhand manager when we returned to England and, in the absence of anyone else, it was me who became the *de facto* acting band leader.

John River and Mark both told me that Madeleine was critical in the early days of Crystal's career and it was she who persuaded Christine Giordano to adopt a stage name that was less of a mouthful and thereby become the eponymous Crystal Passion. The acoustic sound of her first album, *Triad*, was a much better fit with the singer-songwriters Madeleine managed—such as Mary Jane Clover, Lenny Shroud and Joanna—than it was with the direction the music took after she teamed up with me, my sister, Jane and Jacquie. And it was through Madeleine that Crystal Passion got signed to Gospel Records.

All the same, she still doesn't get much of a mention in Polly Tarantella's biography.

"So what's Madeleine got to say?" asked Olivia.

"We've had more news coverage in the UK over the last few days than we've ever had," said Crystal.

"Good or bad?" wondered the Harlot.

"Mixed," admitted Crystal. "And none of it's about the music. There was a short article about us in the *NME* that was on our side. It was about our American tour and how we've been maligned by the right-wing press and misrepresented on television and radio. It was more about the failures of the American media than an account of the gigs we've played."

"That's something at least," said Tomiko.

"Well, it's better than the articles about us in *the Sun*, *the Daily Mail* and *the*

*London Evening News* where we've again been called Crystal and the Passions. In fact, *the Daily Mail* even managed to spell my name with a 'K', so that I'm now Kristal as in Kristallnacht. At least they don't also accuse me of being anti-Semitic."

"What do they say?" Philippa wondered.

"That we've been scandalising all of America with our shocking stage act. That we've been appearing on stage in the nude and having live lesbian sex in front of our fans. That we're in the same tradition of scandalous and outrageous rock groups as the Sex Pistols, the Slits and Throbbing Gristle. And, what's worse, the only gig any of them report is the one at the *Purple Robe* in Detroit. There's a small photo of us in *the Sun* but it's difficult to tell what's going on because it's obscured by so many black rectangles. There's nothing about our gig at Boston. Nothing about our gig with Veronica in Newport. And there's something in *the Daily News* about me once being John River's girlfriend..."

"And is that so?" Bertha asked.

"Hardly. John is my cousin. Even I draw the line at that."

"Don't worry about all that shit," said Judy Dildo. "No one pays attention to what's printed in those rags."

Unfortunately, Judy wasn't quite right. Even in the 1990s and without the prevalence of the internet, news could still carry a long distance. Maybe it wasn't as instant as it is these days, but it was fast enough.

Later that day I was hanging around our camp site with Andrea, Tomiko and Crystal while we discussed how to capitalise on the success of our first gig and what numbers we should play at our gig on the closing night. We weren't going to be the final act. That honour was given to a local Syracuse all-woman Hard Rock band called

Third Rock. We weren't even the second-to-last. That slot was taken by the Women of Babylon, a Riot Grrrl band from Brooklyn defiantly proud to be both mixed race and lesbian. That was the perfect combination at this festival which the Crystal Passion band surpassed only by virtue of us having almost three times as many women as they had. But we were looking forward to being third from last and wondering whether we should perform some other cover songs. Andrea was keen on playing Carole King's *It's Too Late* while I was arguing the merits of Alison Limerick's *Where Love Lies*.

But our discussion was interrupted by Ariel Golgotha who appeared by our tent dressed in denim shorts, hand-weave sandals and the official festival tee-shirt.

"Gee! What the fuck! Have you heard this horse-shit rumour, you guys?" she said.

"Sorry, Ariel," asked Crystal innocently. "What horse-shit?"

Ariel looked Crystal up and down from her face to her toes, clearly uncomfortable at standing at such close proximity to a naked woman. Her freckled face visibly reddened, but she continued regardless.

"The horse-shit about you guys performing at a strip club in Detroit. I mean it's fucking groovy that you're like naturists and into Mother Earth and all those good things, but Gee! Strip Clubs! I mean, guys... What the fuck! Is it true?"

Crystal lowered herself onto a deck chair, partly to obscure her nudity but also to take the more submissive role appropriate for further negotiation.

"We've not been lucky with some of our bookings, Ariel," she said.

"But a fucking strip club. In front of fucking... fucking... in front of men. Gee! I mean, like what the fuck! This is a woman's festival. We're here to celebrate our sisterhood. We're not here to pander to male chauvinist fantasies and fucking..."

fucking... stuff like pornography and the oppression of women. Just tell me it's all horse-shit, guys. Come on."

"It's not what we wanted to do," said Crystal. "We had a gig arranged at the Detroit Fall, which is normally a folk-rock club. But when we got to Detroit, we discovered that we'd been booked to play at a club called the Purple Robe instead. We didn't know what kind of place it was and we felt duty-bound to fulfil our obligations."

"But fuck! Gee! You didn't have to play at a fucking strip club. What will the sisters think? It's like the opposite of everything we stand for."

"Do you want us to cancel our gig, Ariel?"

"What? No. I don't think so. It's too late for that. But Gee! I don't know. If word got round... You're not going to start having sex on stage are you? I'm open-minded, fuck knows. But there are limits, you know. There's only so far you can go with free expression before it becomes pornography. I mean, naturism is one thing. That's communion with nature and being Green and aware and as one with the spirits. But sex on stage, even in front of the sisters, that's fucking... fucking... It's not right. Is it, Crystal?"

"Not at all, Ariel," said Crystal. "And you can be assured that we shan't be doing anything like that at all. We'll just go on stage and perform our songs. That's all we want to do and that's all we shall do."

"Well, that's cool then," said Ariel who seemed relieved but evidently not completely reassured.

This conversation visibly upset Crystal. Once Ariel was out of sight and earshot, she sank her head into her hands: her face obscured by her long hair.

"What have I done?" she wailed. "How has it all come to this?"

“None of it’s your fault, Crystal,” said Andrea, kneeling down beside her and wrapping an arm around her shoulder.

“It’s all shit anyway,” said Tomiko. “Who cares about that gig in Detroit? At least it helped pay the bills.”

“We’re still going to make a phenomenal loss on this tour,” Crystal continued. “We should have just said no about appearing at a strip club. We should have stuck to our principles.”

I wasn’t sure what to say. After all, unlike my sister, I was one of those who’d actually performed on stage at the Purple Robe and, what’s more, had done so almost totally nude. I’d hated doing it but I was also complicit.

“Shall we just continue working on the set list?” I suggested.

“That’s mostly been done,” said Andrea. “And judging from what Ariel’s just been saying I don’t think we’ll have the opportunity to play bonus cover tunes, whether by Carole King or by some House diva.”

“If we get the chance we should try *Eight Days a Week* or *Norwegian Wood*,” Crystal proposed with a shy smile. “Anything by Lennon-McCartney goes down well.”

“How about we play something decent like *Lithium* or *Smoke on the Water*?” suggested Judy Dildo who strode towards us from the direction of the food tents. She was wearing a skimpy bikini top and barely decent denim shorts and her arm was around the waist of a teenage girl with short black-dyed hair wearing a festival tee-shirt and tight black briefs. Judging from her piercings and tattoos, this was a girl who’d enjoy the music of Hole and Bikini Kill as much as Judy did. And the evidence from her simpering affection towards Judy was that there was a whole lot more about Judy that she’d been enjoying.

“Ariel’s just come over here and told us that she’d heard about our gig in Detroit,” I announced in the malicious hope of deflating Judy’s ego. I wasn’t feeling charitable towards her. I mean, how dare she? Not only was she making love with Crystal more often than I was, she’d also found the time and opportunity to pick up and fuck the local talent.

“Shit! You mean the Purple Robe.”

“Exactly,” I said.

“That Ariel’s one prudish bitch,” said Judy uncharitably. “She thinks that all it takes is to have sex with a woman for her to be the fucking spokeswoman for a whole half of humanity. She should go back to fucking church and sing hymns and shit.”

The girl accompanying Judy giggled appreciatively. Disrespect towards the Christian faith patently went down well with her. Nonetheless, Judy slipped out of the girl’s grip and slid towards Crystal so that now both she and Andrea had their arms around her. And I was just stood at one side and looked on ineffectually in the company of Tomiko and a still giggling teenage girl who was rolling up one of those single-skin joints that Americans prefer.

“We’ll show those bastards we mean business,” said Judy boldly.

“That’s not why I make music,” Crystal pleaded. “I’m not about confrontation, Judy. I’m about building bridges.”

“Like fucking Simon and Garfunkel,” Judy sniffed scornfully.

Judy’s teenage girlfriend passed me her spliff which I received gratefully, despite the dampness of the roach. “It’s the bomb,” she said. I nodded, but I’d already enjoyed somewhat stronger dope earlier that day and was now up for a whole lot more.

“Fucking traitors!” shouted a woman from behind me. “Scumbag Assholes!”

“What?” I said twisting round my neck, while Andrea, Crystal and Judy jerked up their chins. Neither Tomiko, who was now in possession of the joint, nor Judy’s girlfriend, who was waiting for it to return, paid much heed to the commotion.

“You ain’t feminists!” jeered one of three women who were emboldened by a concoction of the kind of stimulant officially banned at the festival (and whose prohibition Ariel whole-heartedly supported).

“You’re more fluffers than feminists!” agreed her companion who like here friends wore jeans, tee-shirt and a severe haircut (although not quite as radical as mine).

“Strip Clubs and Pornos!” echoed the third. “If that’s what you think feminism’s about, fuck off back to England!”

“You certainly ain’t wanted here, you Asshole Limeys!” said the first.

With that and a cackle of unsisterly laughter, the three women trailed off.

“What the fuck was that about?” Judy’s girlfriend wondered.

“That was totally uncalled for,” said Tomiko, whose cut-glass English accent startled the teenager. “It wasn’t true and it wasn’t fair. We’ve none of us done porn, have we?”

I decided not to remind her of the Harlot’s history. “I hope that’s not the opinion of all the women here,” I said.

“Of course it is,” said Judy bitterly. “These pent-up stuck-up feminazis! If you don’t follow the message word for word, you’re fucking toast.”

“They have a point,” said Crystal who, as always, could see the virtue of even the most contrary opinion. “This *is* a festival celebrating womanhood. And what we did in Detroit didn’t further the feminist cause at all.”

“Fuck it!” said Judy angrily. “Come on, Crystal. Come with me. Let’s get away

from all this prissy feminist shit.”

She arose from her crouched position and Crystal stood up beside her, allowing Andrea to slump into the now vacant deck chair. Judy then walked off with her arm round Crystal’s waist.

“Hey, girl!” called out Judy’s new girlfriend. “Can I come along?”

“Sure thing,” said Judy who walked off with one arm around Crystal’s waist and the other around her teenage friend.

“Where do you think they’re going?” Tomiko wondered.

I almost expressed the petulant opinion that I didn’t know and I didn’t care, but my more sympathetic sister spoke before I could.

“Crystal’s distraught,” she said. “A change of scene will do her the world of good.”

“And just *where* is that change of scene?” I remarked. “What *is* it that Judy and Crystal do together?”

“You feel the need to ask,” countered Andrea accusingly. She’d never fully approved of her sister’s infatuation and this wasn’t the first time she made it apparent.

I wouldn’t be the only one to wonder where Crystal and Judy had gone when late that night neither of them had yet returned to their tent, although I might have been the only one to see a pattern in this unexplained absence and the greater amount of time they were now spending together. It wasn’t until the following day that we saw them again though it was totally uncool for anyone (especially me) to actually ask where they’d been. It was enough to know that Crystal was distressed by the hostile attention and the inward conflict with her conscience. I was the only one who’d take offence that it was with Judy rather than me that Crystal had chosen to unburden herself. Sure, I still

had the intimate attention of Jane and Jacquie—not to mention the opportunity to make love with all or any of the other eight women in our entourage (with the notable exception of my sister)—but these could never be enough. I hadn't dropped out of university and abandoned the promise of a career with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries just to be the keyboard player in a commercially unsuccessful ten-piece band.

Even so, whatever resentment I harboured against Judy is nothing compared to that expressed by Polly Tarantella. I sometimes wonder why Polly's so vehemently hostile. She's never met Judy and never likely to do so. And of all those in the Crystal Passion band, no one was more like the kind of Rock Star axe hero that Polly is more often enamoured with. Rock music's pantheon is full of men and, increasingly, women who play electric guitars, wear tight clothes and strut their stuff across the stage. And this is exactly what Judy Dildo was all about. Even her stage name was in the honourable tradition of Rock Stars like Billy Fury, Sid Vicious and Siouxsie Sioux. And yet Polly has taken against Judy and is whole-heartedly in favour of Pebbles—even though my stage name owes more to Hanna-Barbera than it does to Malcolm McLaren. I'd much rather listen to Orbital or D'Angelo than anything by Black Sabbath or Queens of the Stone Age. My guess is that ever since she became such a fervent convert to Crystal Passion, anything and everything that reminds her of what she most often used to champion is now the very thing she least wants to associate herself with.

But even with Crystal back—and no sign or mention of the teenage girl who'd accompanied her and Judy—we weren't fully able to concentrate on preparing for our final gig as the festival's antepenultimate act.

Word of our Detroit gig increasingly became public knowledge as the day progressed. Whereas on the first day of the festival Crystal could do no wrong, now

there was no crime against feminism she wasn't guilty of. A scrappy signboard was erected near our tents on which was painted a crude arrow pointing in our direction and the phrase *This Way to the Porn Sluts!* However, as many of the Riot Grrrl bands had names at least as provocative as 'Porn Sluts', this probably didn't have quite the negative impact that the women who'd put the effort into painting the signboard had intended.

There were no longer any groupies following Crystal around wherever she went and only Judy, Thelma and Olivia were now sharing her tent. In fact, Crystal hardly showed her face in public at all. This was a wise policy as every time she did, she attracted the attention of an affronted woman or other who'd shout something like "Jezebel!", "Traitor!" or "Judas!" in her direction. Or a tirade of abuse along the lines that no true feminist would be seen dead near a strip club let alone perform inside.

"Crystal Fucking 'Linda Lovelace' Passion!" shouted one woman scornfully.

"Suck my dildo, bitch!" shouted another.

"This abuse is as bad as any of Crystal's supposed sins," Andrea remarked.

"I hate to say it," said Bertha. "I love and admire Crystal, but she kinda deserves this shit. She *did* agree to sing in front of a load of fucking strip club punters. And it wasn't just the one time she agreed to flash her tits for the fuckers."

"It's easy for you to say that," I said. "You weren't even there."

"And I fucking never would, whatever you paid me," Bertha continued. "Fuck knows what Jenny Alpha was thinking when she agreed to roadie for you that night. It'd take a fucking fortune to persuade me to do what she did. And then I'd have to hide my face for shame for the rest of my fucking life!"

"Bertha's right," chimed in Philippa. "Crystal should never have agreed to

appear at the Purple Robe. Whatever possessed her to be so fucking stupid?"

I thought of countering this criticism by repeating the arguments that had seemed so persuasive to me at the time. That it was a way to earn money on a tour that was haemorrhaging cash to the extent that the band's survival had become doubtful. That after all the shit we'd already got on the tour, what difference did a little more make. That the audience might well include men who were genuinely interested in listening to our music (and we managed to sell more CDs at the Purple Robe than almost anywhere else we performed). That if Crystal had asked me I'd walk through the Valley of Death to demonstrate my love for her.

But the truth is that none of us were feeling positive about appearing on stage that evening, sandwiched as we were between the Djuna Barnes Folk Trio and the Women of Babylon. Crystal cancelled the customary dress rehearsal without comment, although we knew it was from fear of organised disruption. We could no longer wander round the festival with the self-confidence we had on the first day (and I made a point of hiding my shaved head under a woollen hat in the hope of not being recognised). The only members of the band still openly supportive of the decision to play at the Purple Robe were Judy Dildo, Jenny Alpha and the Harlot. In fact, the Harlot went so far as to say that if there *had* been onstage sex as so many of the festival women at the festival believed then she'd have made a point of being up there with the rest of us.

"What could be more cool than to have Judy's fucking dildo in my twat and your fist up my arse?" the Harlot said provocatively.

"Um!" I said, feeling decidedly uncool as the image of doing this while being watched by the creepy Purple Robe clientele flashed through my mind.

The only person oblivious to the prevailing mood was Tomiko. She seemed

genuinely surprised that the rehearsal was cancelled. She was put out to be told that the set would be almost exactly the same as the Mary Jane's gig in Philadelphia and that it was unlikely that we'd play songs by the Beatles, the Kinks or the Dave Clark Five. "Fuck!" she exclaimed as if it was the most polite expletive imaginable. "What's happening with you guys?" And then before anyone could reply, she rolled another joint and returned to the state of narcotic bliss that so became her.

As the time for our gig approached, we gathered together back-stage as a procession of all-women acts performed ahead of us. Just before the Djuna Barnes Folk Trio was the nearest to an electronic duo the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival had to offer. Like Soft Cell and Wazoo, Black Triangle consisted of a flashy singer and an uncharismatic keyboard player. To my ears, the singing was oddly stylised and the twiddling was decidedly too high register. And worse, the beats were totally pre-programmed and flat-footed. It was a real relief for me when they at last came off-stage. Was the very land from which Techno and House owed its origins still suffering from such undanceable electronic music?

The Djuna Barnes Folk Trio was a trio of women who played bluegrass and American folk songs and were a blessed relief to me. Andrea and Crystal weren't the only ones in the band enjoying their set, though Judy said they were total shit and Jane and Jacque were more interested in a private joke about the fiddler in the trio whose jeans kept slipping down and revealing her not notably appealing bottom crack. At least the songs weren't hectoring anthems on the virtues of womanhood and lesbianism. They had a yearning thoughtful quality that made me wonder how well the lyrics and tunes could be mixed by a Drum & Bass or Deep House producer.

But all too soon, it was our turn to appear on stage.

And as we all expected (with the exception of Tomiko who was a hundred yards away in the mixing tent), we were immediately greeted by boos and jeering. There were even a few banners waved up and down in the audience emblazoned with phrases like ‘Crystal Passion: No Thanks!’, ‘Go Home to England!’ and ‘Strippers Not Welcome!’.

“Uh-oh!” said Olivia as we came onto the stage.

“This doesn’t look good,” said Andrea who joined Philippa and Thelma in the scuffle to take position as far as possible from the front of the stage.

“Fucking fascists!” Judy Dildo spat out, but not otherwise appearing confrontational and, for her, dressed quite modestly.

“If they want a fight,” said the Harlot unconvincingly, “I say: Bring It On!”

“Oh shit!” I said in fear at what lay ahead.

Crystal, however, behaved no differently to how she would normally. She made no marked concession to the change in attitude expressed about her onstage nudity.

She walked toward the front of the stage with as broad a smile as she’d have had if the audience were greeting her with cheers. She picked up the microphone and ignored the barrage of jeers.

“Put your clothes back on!”

“Stick to Blue Movies!”

“Fuck off Judas!”

The jeering died down as Crystal stood her ground and made no comment. Her smile was as unforced and generous as ever.

“Can I have a word please?” she asked the audience. “You’ve heard some bad things about me and my band and I’d like to set the record straight.”

This plea simply led to even more jeering and heckling, but Crystal let it all

wash over her. She maintained her beatific smile regardless while the volume of vocal dissent steadily dipped.

“Daughters of America,” she announced as if addressing not just the audience at the Sisterhood Women’s Music Festival, but all women. “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for the unborn children of America. For the days are coming, in which people shall say that the women of today are fortunate indeed. Blessed are the barren and those who will never carry children and the nipples which will never give suck. Then shall the people of America say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’ and to the hills ‘Cover us’. For if those as innocent as us are the victim of such scorn, what shall be done to those who have true cause for concern?”

This was typical of Crystal Passion’s oblique mysticism and I didn’t understand a word she was saying then and I don’t understand it any better now. Perhaps she’d learnt this way of speaking when she was travelling across India. Or maybe its origin was the music and mystical musing of George Gurdjieff that she loved so much. Wherever it came from, it mystified and bemused the audience just long enough for us to launch into the first song of our set, *Bread for the Fisherman*, with its equally enigmatic lyrics and its punchy guitar riff.

I can’t say the gig was a success as such, but we played for over half an hour and we deliberately didn’t pause for long between songs so there was little opportunity for the catcalls or boos to be heard. Except for Crystal’s nakedness, which in any case was mostly obscured by hair and the way she held her guitar, there was nothing in our performance that could have persuaded an uninformed observer that there was ever a whiff of scandal associated with the Crystal Passion band. Both Judy Dildo and the Harlot were remarkably restrained. We kept the songs short and let them tumble out

one after the other. The only ones in the band to take solos were Andrea, Thelma and Philippa. Nobody seeing my sister could imagine her as anything other than an earnest advocate of the sisterhood. With her curly hair, checked shirt and jeans she looked more like a member of the Djuna Barnes Folk Trio than the Porn Star or stripper that many in the audience might have thought she was.

We didn't expect an encore and we didn't give the audience the opportunity to ask for one. As soon as Crystal had sung the last few words of a rather folky *Rambling Woman* she waved at the audience with a free arm while her other grabbed her guitar as if in response to an explosion of applause.

"Thank you! Thank you very much for letting us appear at the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival. Hope to see you again!" Crystal shouted out.

And then as quickly as was possible we fled the stage, Jenny Alpha and Bertha rushed on to dismantle our equipment, and the Festival's DJ once more took to her decks with an uninspiring mix of records by 1970s' women Soul singers like Aretha Franklin, Roberta Flack and Gloria Gaynor. And we knew better than to walk back to our tents where we were expecting to be waylaid by those in the audience still angry at our well-documented betrayal of the feminist cause.

"Let's see what the Women of Babylon are like," said Judy Dildo, as if this was the one thing she'd been looking forward to all evening. I agreed to listen to the gig reluctantly, but I actually rather enjoyed it, probably more so from having survived our own set without having been spat on or hit by a thrown beer-can.

The Women of Babylon was a band much more in tune with Judy's musical taste but were admirably fervent in their support for the lesbian and feminist cause. They were angry, very angry, at the injustices of male patriarchy and its thoughtless

chauvinism and casual sexism. They were a great deal more like the kind of rock band the American media thought we ought to be (and a lot more so than any woman's rock group I'd ever seen in London or anywhere in the UK). They even permitted themselves some gratuitous nudity, but much more in the confrontational manner of Courtney Love and Babes in Toyland.

The festival audience seemed divided amongst itself as to the virtues of the Women of Babylon. Some in the audience were insanely enthusiastic about the band (especially when the band were riffing on the theme of tampons and period pains) whereas there were other women who were just sitting out the set so they'd have a good seat for the headline band. To my ears (but not Judy's), the final act, Third Rock, was a rock group that could have performed their set at any time in the previous thirty years. The single distinguishing fact about the band was that they were all women. Dressed in a sexually ambivalent uniform of jeans and leather and long full-bodied hair, the band's gender was quite simply the only thing that distinguished them from dreary 1970s' Rock bands like Iron Maiden, Blue Oyster Cult and Grand Funk Railroad.

At one point in Third Rock's set, I turned my head round to check whether Judy Dildo was enjoying the music as much as I was hating it, but instead of her being beside me, miming to the Rock theatrics and guitar licks, there was no sign of her at all.

Or for that matter of Crystal.

"You're looking for Judy and Crystal?" guessed Jane who along with her sister understood more than most my obsession with our band leader.

I nodded.

"They left about half an hour ago," Jane said.

"Any idea where?"

Jane shrugged her shoulders.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said. “Crystal’s her own woman. And whatever it is that Judy’s got to offer, it’s what Crystal wants most at the moment.”

## Chapter Ten

I guess it should be obvious to just about everyone simply by having a look at an atlas, but it came as something of a surprise to me, to realise how big America actually is, and we were only travelling from North to South down the Eastern United States. Almost every single one of America's states is bigger than England, and some are bigger than France or Germany, but when you travel across Europe you know for sure when you've left one country and entered another. In America the differences are more like those between English counties. To an American one state doesn't much resemble another at all, but it seemed like a whole lot of pretty much the same thing to me. Diners. Motels. Malls. Gas stations. And countless Stars and Stripes.

The drive from New York State to South Carolina was too much for us to do it all in just one day and yet on the map it seemed like we'd hardly travelled any distance at all. The real American South of New Orleans, the Mississippi, the Florida Everglades and Texan cowboys was still way out of reach. And there was a whole lot of America to the West—the Rocky Mountains, the Nevada Desert and the West Coast—that was even more distant. I've travelled many times to California since Crystal Passion's fateful American Tour and visited places like Monterey, the Big Sur, Tijuana and the East Ocean Boulevard that I'd always dreamed of visiting when I was listening to Brian Wilson, Dick Dale and Eden Ahbez as a teenager in my London Suburban family home. But nothing we'd seen on our tour of the United States could seem more remote from the beaches, the sunshine and the surf of the America that I'd imagined.

“So, another shitty motel,” moaned Jacquie at a band conference in a diner somewhere vaguely in the vicinity of the States of Maryland, Virginia and West

Virginia.

“Any better ideas?” asked the Harlot, who was one of today’s designated drivers, fingering the point on the fold-up freeway map where the motel was positioned. “This one’s just about the right distance for today. If we drive into one of these other towns marked on the map, like Roanoke and Barren Springs, it’ll be a long detour and there mightn’t be anywhere better to stay.”

The Crystal Passion band was split between the two vehicles we were hiring—the Chevrolet and the VW Camper van—and for reasons of fairness we equally divided the time each of us spent in one or other vehicle. So, five of us would travel a leg of the journey in the relevant comfort of the Chevrolet and the remaining eight in the Camper Van. I’d earlier been enjoying the Chevy’s front seat on the journey from a diner just outside Winchester, Virginia, (which couldn’t have been more different from the original Winchester in Hampshire, England) during which Jenny Alpha was driving and Philippa was squeezed between Jane and Jacquie on the back seats. And now we all bundled into the Camper Van while another five could at last enjoy the car’s relative luxury: this time driven by Judy Dildo who, along with her other talents, was one of the few of us who could drive and willing to do so on the right hand side of the road. And according to the complex formula that we’d agreed on earlier, Judy would this time be accompanied by Andrea, Jenny, Olivia and Tomiko.

So, for this leg at least, I’d be reunited with Crystal and not need to worry about Judy monopolising her attention.

However, once we set off along Interstate 81 away from the Burgers and Fries of the Myrrh Cross Diner towards the Burgers, Fries and double bedrooms of the King’s Cavalry Motel, Crystal was uncharacteristically reticent and any conversation with her

was terse and to the point. She was obviously distressed by how much attitudes towards her had changed over the few days of the Sisterhood Women's Music Festival. Although Ariel Golgotha paid us in full for the two gigs, she was noticeably less talkative while she counted out the dollar bills than she'd been on the first day of the festival. And we were taunted in a most unsisterly manner by a small group of women as our Camper Van trundled over the grass, out of the field and onto the main road. Indeed, as we weaved along Interstate 81 from New York State through Pennsylvania towards Maryland and beyond, Crystal didn't cheer up at all. I guess this was the first time she'd had to confront the kind of hostility we were now experiencing in America.

It was several hours later that we arrived at the King's Cavalry Motel which was pretty much identical to all the others we'd already passed. But then what were we expecting? A motel is what it is: a budget roadside hotel with a whole load of rooms and lots of parking spaces. And the King's Cavalry Motel was designed the same as every other motel, with each room facing towards its own parking space and each room faithfully providing what was advertised at exactly the stated price.

Normally there was plenty of space whenever we pulled into a motel but when Bertha steered the VW Camper Van into the car park, it was obvious that there weren't many spare rooms available. In fact, almost every motel room had a car parked in front of it. And when we bundled out of the van, eager to stretch our legs and have a smoke, we were met by Judy Dildo and Andrea who'd been sitting on a bench and waiting for us just by a soda vending machine.

"Hey guys!" said Judy. "It's not good news. There's a business convention or something near here, so almost all the rooms are taken already. In fact, there are only four rooms left and they're all double beds."

“So that’s enough for just eight of us,” said Crystal.

“Yeah, you’re right,” said Judy. “You eight. We’ve already booked the rooms for you: we didn’t want to risk losing them. Then me and the rest of us will drive on. There’s another motel about fifty miles ahead. The Silver Noose Motel it’s called...”

“So we’ll have to stay the night in two different motels,” said Crystal betraying more than just polite regret in her voice. “The Crystal Passion band will be split up for the first time on the tour.”

“Well, since we arrived at JFK,” remarked Tomiko.

“Don’t worry about it, Crystal,” said Judy. “It’s only fair. You need the rest more than we do. I’m sure the Silver Noose will be more than good enough for us.”

Crystal could see the sense in this arrangement, so she and I walked with Judy to the motel’s check-in desk where Olivia was waiting for us while she sipped from a can of fizzy soda. The middle-aged and overweight motel receptionist was squeezed behind the desk and busy handling the concerns of an equally obese guest.

“Phew! You guys are really hot and sweaty!” Olivia said pointing at the vending machine in the motel foyer. “You better have a can of something.”

We agreed and slotted in our quarters for ice-cold cans of carbonated drinks with exotic names that none of us had ever come across before. I selected a can of Myrtle’s Malt and Crystal chose Top Gaul.

“God! It tastes foul!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, it’s really vinegary,” said Olivia. “It’s cold though.”

“It might be cold,” said Crystal after a sip of Top Gaul, “but it’s not exactly refreshing. Can we swap drinks, Pebbles? I don’t think I can drink any more of this.”

We swapped drinks and I could identify no discernible difference between

Myrtle's Malt and Top Gaul. They were both sugary and both disgusting.

"Does anyone else want to drink this stuff?" Crystal asked. "I don't think I've ever drunk anything so horrible in my life!"

"Yes ma'am!" said the receptionist as the hotel guest she'd been dealing with waddled off. "I'd be thrilled to drink a can of Myrtle's. It's locally brewed and I for one am proud of our local beverages."

"You're welcome to it," said Crystal with a winning smile as she handed it over to the receptionist who greedily guzzled down three long draughts.

The receptionist regarded all four of us—and especially me—with a hostile expression she didn't bother to disguise. She didn't like the fact that my head was shaven any more than she liked Judy Dildo's rock chick uniform of denim, leather, jangling jewellery and tattoos.

"Ain't you that lezbo punk rock group from England I've heard tell about on the radio?" she asked. "Bristol Fashion or summat?"

"Crystal Passion," I automatically corrected her. "And we're not a punk rock group."

"You ain't?" she said sceptically. "Well, all that din all sounds the same to me. I'm a Country Music gal and you freaky druggies are *all* punks as far as I'm concerned. And I'll tell you this now so's there's no misunderstanding, here at King's Cavalry we have a 100% anti-drugs policy and we don't listen to no excuses."

I was so stunned to hear someone pronounce 'anti' as 'ant eye' that I wasn't sure how to respond, but as always Crystal was diplomatic and non-confrontational.

"I can assure you that not one of us will consume illegal drugs while we're here," she said. "But I'm sure we might be tempted by the beer you sell in the bar."

"I don't think Jake'd take kindly to young gals entering his bar unaccompanied," the receptionist said. "He runs a civilised business as we all do here. And no decent Christian gal would be drinking liquor by herself, would she now?"

"Of course not," said Crystal. "I imagine you'd like to see our passports before you give us our room keys."

She handed over a set of eight British passports in which Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State requested and required all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance.

"So you're this Christine Fashion?" the receptionist said when she looked at Crystal's photographs. "Least it ain't the mouthful of your real name. Eye-talian ain't it? And I'll remind you again. This is a Christian establishment. No drug-taking. No loud parties. And no bugging our paying guests with your Rock & Roll tomfoolery."

After this chastisement, we carried our bags to the rooms we were allocated, after first seeing Judy set off with Jenny Alpha, Olivia, Tomiko and my sister.

"Fuck knows what that cow in reception would've made of Tomiko's passport," Judy snarled as she gripped the steering wheel in anticipation of the drive ahead. "A Japanese girl with an Irish passport and the poshest accent this side of Windsor Castle. She'd *really* be freaked out."

Crystal restrained herself from her usual conciliatory remarks as she knew this would only encourage Judy to be further outspoken. "Drive safely," she said after kissing Judy tenderly on her lips.

This show of affection inevitably attracted the unwelcome attention of some of the denim-clad men hanging around outside the bar, clutching bottles of beer and puffing on cigarettes.

“Dykes!” yelled one of them as we strolled back to the motel room where I’d be sharing a double bed with Thelma that night. “Lezzie Carpet Munchers!”

“Suck my dick, girls!” chimed in his friend. “You don’t know... You might actually like it!”

“Whyn’tcha screw a real man, ladies?” yelled another. “Or ain’tcha got the balls?”

“They ain’t got no balls,” taunted the first man. “And they ain’t got no tits neither!”

“I don’t think I’ll be going to the bar after all,” Crystal commented as she pushed open the door to the motel room she was sharing with Philippa.

Despite what these men expected, I don’t think any of us were in the mood at that time for lesbian sex. Or for any drug-related activity. I’d exhausted my personal stash supply at the Sisterhood Women’s Music Festival and I hadn’t yet found a reliable source on our time on tour. In fact, the only thing I was in the mood to do was slump on the bed, dog-tired in the unaccustomed heat, holding the television remote while skipping through the dozens of television channels in the hope of finding one that wasn’t showing a commercial. It seemed that as soon as I found a channel that was showing anything halfway decent—perhaps an episode of *Friends* or *Star Trek: The Next Generation*—then without warning the drama would be interrupted by the naffest TV ad imaginable. I even had to sit through a 30 second ad extolling the virtues of Top Gaul, the memory of which was still rumbling uncomfortably inside my guts.

However, when Thelma and I nestled against each other and tried to fall asleep we were kept awake by the constant commotion from the bar where the jukebox was playing unnecessarily loud Country & Western and from the incessant shouting and

loud conversation of other guests obscured by the evening shadows. A handful of men congregated outside our bedroom door for some ten or fifteen minutes during which time they constantly hollered and swore at each other. There was also the echo of yelling in the near distance from an American woman in which I couldn't tell apart a single individual word but I'm sure several were neither decent nor Christian.

"Fuck knows what convention those guys are going to," Thelma commented.  
"But it sure isn't to sell Bibles."

"Or maybe it is," I said ruefully, recalling the ecstatic bawling I'd briefly witnessed on one of the Christian TV channels I'd skimmed through earlier that evening. Americans didn't worship God in the same restrained manner as the Church of England does. Rather, it was conducted at a loud volume with high theatre and buckets of perspiration dripping from the preacher's brow and nose.

After more than an hour of this commotion and some disconcerting screams, thumps and bangs, a general atmosphere of night-time silence finally descended on the motel. And now we could hear more clearly the roar of traffic on Interstate 81. Thelma and I wrapped ourselves in each other's arms under the poly cotton sheet and rested our heads on the hard pillows.

I was hopeful that the blessed relief of a welcome night's sleep would soon be upon me.

But as it happened, this wasn't to be.

All of a sudden my near slumbers were rudely interrupted by a violent and insistent banging on the bedroom door.

"What the fuck?" Thelma exclaimed.

The bangs on the door were repeated and this time I could hear words: "Po-lice!"

Open up, ladies!"

"Fuck!" I exclaimed, as I hastily jumped out of bed and pulled on a baggy shirt and some jeans.

Thelma was up on her feet well before me, dressed in a simple dress she'd squeezed into far more rapidly than I ever could. She opened the door and addressed the two police officers who were standing on the other side with an accent almost as posh as Tomiko's and totally devoid of her habitual glottal stops.

"How can we help you, officer?" she asked.

"We've heard reports of illegal activity, ma'am," said one of the policemen. "Drug-taking and other misdemeanours. We'll have to ask you and the rest of your pop group to accompany us to the Sheriff's Department for questioning."

"Of course, officer," said Thelma. "But I hope you won't mind if you were to let my friend and I get dressed in more decent attire."

"Of course not, ma'am," said the police officer.

For me, the following few hours passed by in a disconnected haze. I remember it more as a series of incidents during which I was constantly fighting against an overpowering need for sleep. Five of us were bundled together into the back of a police van, including Bertha who was by far the least cooperative of us and who Jane and Jacquie made the most effort to calm down. Crystal, Thelma and I sat in the back of the police car which was the most outrageously large car I'd ever sat in. And there was still only space for five people including the police officer who sat beside the driver, who I guessed was the titular Sheriff.

And he wasn't the kind of Sheriff I expected to see after having watched movies like *High Noon* and *Blazing Saddles*. He looked much more like John Candy than he

did Gary Cooper or John Wayne.

“So, you’re this Crystal they been talkin’ about?” the Sheriff asked, turning his head round to look at me. “The lead singer of Crystal and the Passions?”

“No she’s not, sir,” said Crystal. “That would be me.”

“You sure don’t look like no punk rock chick,” the Sheriff said with a hint of disappointment in his voice. “Ain’t you the one that’s gonna burn down all the temples and build them again in three days?”

“That doesn’t sound like me at all, sir,” said Crystal.

“Are you sure you ain’t?” said the policeman driving the car. “That ain’t what I heard about you Godless punk rockers on the radio. I heard you’d come here to America to really shake things up. That you lot think you’re the new Kings of Rock!”

“That’s just not true, sir,” said Crystal.

“So, you ain’t the new Elvis Presley or Dave Matthews?” the driver taunted.

“We aren’t even the new Michael Jackson or Madonna, sir,” said Crystal.

“I darned well hope not!” said the Sheriff. “Just one of them scum is one too many for me!”

The taunting didn’t stop even when we arrived after an indeterminable distance from the motel at the Sheriff’s Office.

“We’ve got the new King of Rock here, Maud,” announced the Sheriff to a stout middle-aged female police officer who was sitting at a desk dominated by a vast electric typewriter. “Or maybe the Queen of Punk Rock. It’s that Crystal from the pop group the Passions that ol’ Rush has been yakking about.”

“Well she can’t be as bad as these two punks,” said Maud, indicating the two young men sitting opposite her. They seemed implausibly sheepish for tough-looking

men adorned in ill-fitting faded denim and countless crude tattoos. Whatever drugs they regularly took, they were no advertisement for its long-term health benefits.

“We ain’t bad,” protested one of them. “We’re just wasted, is all.”

“Talk for yourself, Diz,” said the other. “I ain’t wasted. I ain’t smoked nothin’. I ain’t had nothin’ but Bourbon. I’m clean.”

“Yeah sure, Tyler,” said Diz. He stared at Crystal who appeared very much out of place at the Sheriff’s Office in the floral skirt and blouse she put on when she agreed to accompany the police for questioning. “You seem like a sweet chick. You’ll put in a word for us, won’tcha? You can see we’re the sort who ain’t gonna mess up a guy just for the sake of a wrap.”

“Don’t fuckin’ bother the lady, Diz,” said Tyler. “She ain’t no crackhead.”

“That’s where you couldn’t be more wrong, boys,” said the policeman who’d driven us there. “This here young lady is Crystal from the English Punk Rock group the Passions. We’ve apprehended her on a drug bust just like we have you boys.”

“Motherfuck!” Tyler exclaimed.

“She don’t look like no crackhead to me,” Diz sniffed. “And I wouldn’t want her to be one, neither. Look at the fuckin’ mess my old lady is. And she ain’t even twenty-five yet.”

“Just shows how looks can deceive, boys,” said the Sheriff.

We were escorted to a room at the rear of the Sheriff’s Office which I imagined was most often used for interrogating suspects, though I don’t think many of the criminals arrested here were likely to be guilty of especially serious criminal offences.

“Could you tell me please, Sheriff,” said Crystal in a measured voice while Jane, Jacquie and the others were escorted into the premises, “just why we’ve been

apprehended and of what crime we're supposed to be guilty?"

"Drugs," said the Sheriff. "Pure and simple. The good people at the King's Cavalry Motel have it on good authority that you ladies are in possession of illegal drugs and we don't tolerate no drug abuse in this here county. And so it is my duty to inform you that we're gonna search you ladies for drug possession."

"And an excellent policy that is too, Sheriff," said Crystal diplomatically. "But I can categorically affirm that not one of us is guilty of possessing illegal drugs and I am also certain that the only reason you wish to search us for drugs in the Sheriff's Office is that when you searched our bedrooms at the hotel for incriminating evidence of narcotic use you didn't find any there either."

The Sheriff was visibly put out by this evidence of Crystal's understanding of the situation. "That as may be, ma'am," he said. "But I'm sure you understand that we, as law enforcement officers, are duty-bound to investigate all and every report of illegal drug-taking. You must have been aware that there was a real ruckus at the King's Cavalry Motel earlier this evening."

"And none of that was any of my doing, Sheriff," said Crystal. "Nor was it of any of the members of my ensemble."

"On some?" sniggered one of the police officers who'd driven the police van. "On some what, ladies? Where'd you hide your 'stash', as you call it? Or your 'gear'? Or d'you call it something else back in England?"

Crystal ignored the mocking. "Please just complete your investigation, Sheriff," she said. "I'd be grateful if you could just get it over with so that we can return to the motel, get some sleep and drive on to the concert we're due to perform in Rock Hill, South Carolina."

“Is that where you’re playing next, ladies?” said the Sheriff. “Raising hell in the Carolinas. There’s gonna be a few Tar Heels who won’t be well pleased to see a van-load of hippy punk dykes tear up their town...”

“Even if they *do* call themselves the new Kings and Queens of Rock & Roll,” sniggered one of the other police officers.

“Or just Queens of the ‘Ensemble’”, chortled another police officer.

Needless to say, the interrogation and search that followed discovered no drugs on any of us: however much Maud patted us down and our pockets were turned inside out. Because Crystal was the band leader and therefore the one most likely to secrete drugs on her person, Maud escorted her to the women’s toilet for special treatment. I guess that as a woman police officer working in an all-male office, Maud had to work especially hard to be accepted (especially as her physical appearance would attract unflattering remarks when she was out of earshot). Consequently, her body searches were extremely thorough. Although, unlike Crystal, I didn’t have to remove my clothes, Maud was expert at identifying exactly those places—in between the arse cheeks, in the seams of the jeans or under the collar—where a girl might hide her stash. But it was Crystal who suffered the most thorough search of all.

Polly describes Maud’s interrogation in great detail and with total dismay. How dare Crystal be humiliated in this way? She was stripped of her clothes (though I doubt whether Crystal was much bothered about this) and Maud’s hands sheathed in clear plastic gloves were thrust into both Crystal’s vagina and anus: something which, in very different circumstances, Crystal might even have enjoyed. But there was nothing pleasurable about this kind of intrusive interrogation. As Polly makes clear, the whole episode was deeply humiliating and absurdly so because, of all of us, Crystal was the

one least likely to possess drugs or hide them anywhere on her body.

Crystal never criticised the rest of us for our various drug habits, but when she told the Sheriff that there should be no place for drugs in a person's life, I don't think she was being a hypocrite. As a general rule, she didn't take drugs. She didn't smoke. She very rarely drank alcohol. And she didn't even drink much coffee.

"Thank the fuck it was you lot that got the third degree rather than us!" exclaimed Judy Dildo the following day when we at last arrived at the Silver Noose: many hours later than we'd intended. "If we'd been the ones hauled in last night rather than you then we'd have been busted for sure. And by now we'd either all be in chains or on the first plane home."

"Why's that?" Crystal asked as we stood around in the car park of a truly insalubrious and rundown motel. "Is there something we should know about?"

"I didn't tell you guys 'cos I wasn't sure how to break it," Judy confessed with no hint of remorse in her voice, "but while we were at that Fucking Feminazi Sisterhood Festival, I scored a quarter weight of some real classy Tijuana shit. I wanted to keep it hidden till we got to Rock Hill. It was gonna be a kind of surprise for everyone after the long drive. So, if those pigs had bust us last night, we'd have definitely gone down. We'd be down and we'd be out!"

"Are you saying that you're carrying enough dope for us to be done not for possession but for dealing?" Andrea asked aghast.

"How much did you say you've got, lover girl?" asked a delighted Olivia. "And I thought I was gonna have to survive on nothing but fucking booze."

"Way to go!" echoed the Harlot. "A fucking quarter weight. We're loaded!"

"And soon we'll be wasted," said Jenny Alpha supportively.

“Can we try some of it out now?” Tomiko wondered. “I could really do with a toke right away.”

I could see that Andrea’s appalled reaction, which I almost shared, was pretty much in the minority amongst the Crystal Passion band. Judy Dildo was now the hero of the moment even though it was only by a very slim chance that she’d not been one of those hauled off to the Sheriff’s Office and given a thoroughly invasive shake-down.

And if that had happened, the tour would have ended rather sooner and amongst other things the Crystal Passion band would now have a criminal record and a Rock & Roll reputation like that of the Happy Mondays, Keith Richards and Iggy Pop.

This would have appalled Polly Tarantella, although there was a time in her life when she’d have had a much more sympathetic attitude towards the drug-taking that Judy and most of the band indulged in. From what I’ve heard from those who knew Polly in her early years as a Rock Music Journalist, she was a woman who’d swallow, snort, sniff and even inject whatever there was available when it was available and as much as she could while remaining conscious. But that wasn’t the Polly Tarantella who interviewed me and the one who still keeps in touch. Instead, she’s now very much the reformed ex-Junkie. Mineral water, red wine and fruit juice is all I’ve ever seen her imbibe. And whatever scars she may once have had along her arms or between her toes have all healed now. But she still has sucked-in cheeks, the occasional hundred yard stare and an impossibly straight nose that’s been ravaged and rebuilt.

It is Polly’s born-again sobriety more than a sympathy for the excesses of youth that now governs her attitude towards what she describes as Judy Dildo’s criminal irresponsibility and unrepentant recklessness. The very fact that Judy was weighed down with enough dope to keep the Crystal Passion band high until the very end of our

tour was a sin close to treachery given that Crystal herself was the one member of the band who wouldn't normally take on a joint when it was passed around. And it antagonised Polly even more to learn that Judy was intending to sell the hash in quarter ounce quantities to the other band members, as if this small-scale dealing was the sin for which she should be most damned.

Is there no crime for which Judy Dildo wasn't guilty?

I've even argued with Polly on Judy's behalf, even though at the time I was by far the least sympathetic person in the band towards her. In fact, I'd have probably been secretly pleased if matters had gone the other way round and Judy *had* been busted in our stead. At least I wouldn't have had to suffer the indignity and shame of having Maud pat down my trousers and Crystal wouldn't have had Maud's latex-covered hand thrust into her most private orifices. And, of course, with Judy Dildo out of the way, at long last I'd have had Crystal all to myself.

Polly's account of the interrogation at the Sheriff's Office is one of the most lurid chapters in her biography. The details she's obtained may well be true but they don't figure very highly in my memory of the event. I was almost always just within a heartbeat of falling asleep during the whole ordeal. I was so exhausted that I didn't take in a whole lot of what was happening. Nevertheless, I'm pretty sure that Crystal was the only one who was strip-searched. I think Jane and Jacquie would have told me if they'd also been searched in such an intrusive manner. Although I'm sure the police officers did have unreconstructed opinions about black women (or, for that matter, bald women, homosexual women or just plain ordinary women), they didn't express more than the most general and, to be honest, completely predictable disrespect. I have no memory of the policemen playing cards and placing bets on who'd take custody of

Crystal's elegant summer hat, dress and sandals if she were found to be in possession of illegal drugs. Nor did I see any evidence of the statement that was reputed to have already been typed up and ready for her to sign. And allegedly this was a complete confession of her habitual drug abuse.

But I do remember the joke that was repeated far more often than it was ever funny that Crystal had claimed to be the King of Pop. Indeed, the main dispute was whether she should be referred to as the 'New King of Pop' or simply 'The English Girl Who Claims to be the New King of Pop'. Not surprisingly, the shorter phrase was the one settled on, though of course this designation became totally irrelevant when the Sheriff admitted there was no substantial or even circumstantial evidence of drug possession of any kind whatsoever. And that we would be allowed to go free.

"And we'll see what them boys down in South Carolina make of you gals," he said ruefully. "You better take good care of yourselves is my advice, is all."

## Chapter Eleven

Nobody should approach me if they want a fair, balanced and informed opinion of Rock Hill, South Carolina. Most of what I discovered about the city was well after the Crystal Passion tour and what we saw was probably unrepresentative and, to be honest, not especially attractive. It was a town very much in the shadow of the somewhat larger city of Charlotte, 25 miles away and mostly only glimpsed at as we drove by on the relatively new Interstate 485 which also took us past Charlotte Douglas Airport from which we'd later fly home.

Mostly what we saw of Rock Hill were derelict mills and warehouses. We didn't visit the York County Museum, the White Home or the Botanical Gardens. The best that could be said about the hotel we were staying at was that it had once been much grander in the past, but nobody could mistake the Paradise Hotel for what it had been named. The plumbing was dreadful. Every single tap dripped, especially the ones servicing the chipped enamel baths. And, other than malfunctioning air-conditioners, out-of-order escalators and sticky red carpets, the hotel's prime attraction was a huge lounge bar with a juke box so loud that it could be heard from every bedroom and which only played records by the Marshall Tucker Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Johnny Cash and the Eagles. But even those in our band who enjoyed this kind of Rock and Country music (which definitely didn't include me) wouldn't feel welcome in a bar where the women clientele were mostly there for business.

"Let's hope our gig doesn't get pulled after that drive," Andrea remarked when we collected the keys to our bedrooms.

"There are two gigs," said Crystal. "There's one tomorrow night and another on

Friday. A cancellation would be *very* expensive. I'll check out the situation as soon as we've eaten." It was early evening and we'd not rested once on our long drive from the Virginia side of the North Carolina State Border where we'd stayed the night at a shabby motel on the Old Pipers Gap Road.

"Do we have any gigs after Rock Hill?" Olivia wondered.

"Not for over a week," Crystal answered. "There's one in Baltimore, Maryland, and then another in New York again. Brooklyn this time. And that'll be our last concert!"

"About fucking time!" snorted Jane. "This tour's been a nightmare from beginning to end."

"It's certainly not been the success I'd hoped for," Crystal conceded.

Judy, Tomiko and I all volunteered to bundle into the Chevy with Crystal and make a preliminary visit to the Penitence Club where we'd been booked to play. With a name like that the club could have been anything. Judy speculated that it was a BDSM fetish club with dungeons and chains, while I couldn't help wondering whether it wasn't somehow associated with a denomination of Evangelical Christians.

"It used to be called the Repentance," Crystal said, which didn't resolve our speculation at all.

But as it was, Judy's conjecture was the most accurate, although thankfully if it was being used as a fetish club it wasn't on the nights we were due to play.

"Am I thrilled to see you guys!" said the club's proprietor who was waiting for us in the Penitence Club's bar. He introduced himself as Skull, which was an appropriate name for such a painfully gaunt man whose cheeks were sunk to the bone and whose crooked teeth were too big for his mouth. He was clad in leather and denim

with long lank hair and spiky stubble on his chin and cheeks. I couldn't tell how old Skull was, but despite his many tattoos and piercings he was probably in his forties or even older. "I was dreading you wouldn't make it."

"Why would you think that?" said Crystal in her sweetest voice. "We wouldn't dream of letting you down."

"Well, you can't have missed all the shit going round about you and your band, girls," Skull said. "It's fucking everywhere. It was even in *The Herald*, not to mention the fucking Rush Limbaugh Show and all the other asshole fascist radio talk shows. From all what they say, I can't wait to see you guys perform. Is it true you chicks have sex on stage together?"

"Not on stage so much," said Tomiko in the spirit of clarification.

"But you take your kit off, don't you? That's what *The Herald* says. We should be pulling in punters from Charlotte now your record got played on WRDX FM. And there was some shit about you chicks in *The News & Observer*. You guys have triggered a fucking storm. It's gonna be fucking amazing tomorrow. There'll be a line round the block to see you: sex or no sex."

"Definitely no sex," said Crystal.

"Don't let me stop you if you change your mind, girls," Skull continued. "You wanna see the posters I got made for you? They're fucking awesome!"

"Yes, why not?" said Judy, speaking up for a visibly apprehensive Crystal.

Skull unfolded a poster on a beer-stained table. I could see that even Crystal struggled to maintain her conciliatory smile while I was just too horrified to comment. The best that could be said for the poster is that it might have once been fashionable in the early days of punk rock.

“It’s definitely something,” said Judy Dildo, who was the only one who might have a partiality for the mock Gothic font in which most words were printed. The only other font used was ugly and angular as if someone had scratched the words on a concrete wall with a chisel and this was used to display the band’s name as *Cristal & the Passion*. Under all this was a smudgy sepia image of a few nearly naked women wielding electric guitars and posturing with their mouths open and their tongues hanging out.

“Good, ain’t it!” said Skull. “I got my mate Piles from the tattoo studio to put it together. We’ve plastered these posters all round Rock Hill. That and all the free publicity you chicks have got will really draw ’em in tomorrow.”

“I dare say it will,” said Crystal half-heartedly.

Not that Skull would have noticed a lack of enthusiasm. He was far too intent on admiring the poster laid out in front of us. “Fuck knows who these chicks are,” he said, indicating the grainy images with the discreetly obscured nipples and crotch. “Fucking lookers, ain’t they? I can’t fucking wait to see you chicks strut your stuff.”

“Not all of us take our clothes off,” I remarked.

“Well, there’s always one spoilsport, ain’t there,” Skull smirked. “But as long as there’s something for the guys to look at, we’ll be OK. You dig?”

“Yes, we understand,” said Crystal. “We know exactly what you want.”

“Damned right you do, girls,” said Skull, proudly reviewing his poster which heralded in hard-to-read Gothic font that ‘*Teusday Nite was Girls Nite!!!*’ and that we would be responsible for ‘*the Very Best Butt Naked Rock & Roll in Both the Carolinas*’.

“Shall we just call off the gig?” I asked Crystal as soon as we’d left Skull behind and in the street outside the Penitence Club

“Call it off?” Crystal wondered, clearly taken aback. “Do you really think we should?”

“You saw the poster,” I said. “We’ve met Skull. What the fuck does he think we are? The Sex Pistols?”

“Maybe...” Crystal said warily.

“For fuck sake, Crystal,” I said, pressing home the argument. “The poster makes us look like a third-rate Punk Revival band. They couldn’t even get the band’s name right. And if you think I’m gonna get ‘butt naked’ for a crowd of grungy pervs... It’s fucking insane! Let’s just cut our losses and call it a day here and now.”

“I dunno, Pebbles,” cautioned Judy. “Come on, Crystal. What’s the gig worth? How fucked are we if we don’t do it?”

“Our funds aren’t in the best state,” Crystal admitted.

“Fuck, Crystal,” I exclaimed. “Are you serious? We made a mess of things in Detroit and look at the shit that got thrown at us at the Sisterhood Festival. Are we going to erase the very last trace of our credibility in Hicksville, South Carolina?”

“What’s the bottom line, Crystal?” chipped in Judy. “Do we have a choice?”

“We always have a choice,” Crystal said cryptically.

“Fuck it!” Judy exclaimed. “I need a drink. Let’s go to that bar over there and chat about it over a Budweiser or whatever other piss-poor beer they sell.”

“I could do with a drink, too,” chimed in Tomiko who was still stoned after having sampled Judy’s Tijuana Hash.

Fortunately, there was an empty bench on the Mockingbird Bar terrace by the roadside so we didn’t have to venture inside what was the kind of low-down disreputable bar that often gets featured in American films where the hero gets drunk

and beaten up in a brawl. Judy Dildo wasn't fazed at all and happily strode inside, ignored the unsubtle stares and bought three beers and a mineral water. Maybe the men leaning on the counter thought Judy was a biker chick and that they'd better keep their distance in case there were also some male bikers around.

"I don't think doing the two gigs at the Penitence will harm our reputation any worse than it already is," said Judy as she handed out the drinks. "We need the cash just to afford to fly home. Let's face it, this tour's been a fucking disaster and we need every last dime we can get."

"Is that true?" I asked Crystal.

She nodded. "We're not in a good place, Pebbles."

"We'll give the fuckers what they want," said Judy. "Rock & Roll and naked women. No pussyfooting this time! The real deal."

"I'm not taking my clothes off again like we did in Detroit," I said.

"I'm not saying you had to," said Judy.

"I never joined Crystal's band to play fucking Rock Music," I continued. "I hate Rock. I hate Heavy Metal. I hate *all* that shit."

"I know you do, Pebbles," said Judy. "But it's just the one gig and you can program your synths to make whatever kind of sound you want. Think of it as us being like the Prodigy or the Chemical Brothers..."

"Anyone who doesn't want to perform at the Penitence doesn't have to, Pebbles," said Crystal diplomatically. "We can arrange the songs so we don't need keyboards. You don't have to come on stage with us."

"Fuck!" I exclaimed, knowing that I'd already lost the argument. I turned my head towards Tomiko. "Have you got any of that Tijuana shit on you?"

"Not out in the open, Pebbles," said Judy prudently. "Look me and Tomiko, we'll go to the loo—what they call the bathroom over here—and skin up a big one. But then we'll have to be fucking discreet when we smoke it."

"Yeah," I agreed, looking forward to the opportunity to be left alone with just Crystal. "Sounds like a plan."

However, I barely passed even two words with Crystal before we were interrupted, this time by two long-haired young men puffing on Marlboros and dressed in jeans and tee-shirts.

"Hey, gals, mind if we join you for a beer?" asked the one with blond hair.

"Well, as a matter of fact..." I began, fully intending to tell them to fuck off.

"Of course we don't mind," said Crystal sweetly. "We haven't had the chance to chat with the locals."

"Heck no, girls," said the other man. "You ain't from these parts, are you? I reckon I know your accents. You English or summat?"

"Yes, of course. My name's Crystal and this is my friend Pebbles."

"Like the fucking Flintstones," the blond-haired man exclaimed. "I'm Des and this here's Gus. We sound like some fucking TV Show too. Des and Gus!"

Crystal laughed good-humouredly and in the chat that followed, she mostly asked questions of the two men while I sullenly and silently puffed away on the Marlboro cigarette that Des offered me.

"We've just come out the pen," admitted Des in answer to Crystal's question. "Thievery and Burglary that's what we've done time for. Not for the first time neither."

"Those bastards have got it in for us," said Gus. "I'm out just ten days and I get sent back to York County before I can earn a single day's honest pay."

“Shit, Gus,” said Des. “You ain’t done an honest day’s work in your entire life. If it ain’t thieving, it’s dealing meth, cracking joints or aggravated assault...”

“You ain’t no saint, Des. You got caught fair and square. You lifted a whole bunch of shit from that house on West White Street...”

“I was desperate. I was gonna be evicted and all. I had to do somethin’ to pay the rent. My missis was relying on me...”

“And now she’s done gone left you, Des. Fine load of fucking good it did you. You’re in as much shit as me now.”

“What are you going to do now, Gus?” Crystal asked.

“Fuck knows. Rob a bank, I s’pose,” said Gus. “You girls don’t know what it’s like being on the wrong side of society...”

“I don’t know about that,” said Crystal ruefully.

“Even if you did get in the shit,” Gus continued, “you’d climb out of it OK. You got an education, I can tell from the highfalutin’ way you speak; those long educated words I don’t rightly know.”

“That ain’t the point, Gus,” said Des. “This here girl’s no criminal. She’s like a fucking angel, ’scuse my French, ma’am. But you *are* a crook, Gus. You’re one mean motherfucker. Me, I’ve done my time. I’m gonna go straight. I’m gonna get a job and get my missis and my boy back. I done wrong. I know that. And I’m truly sorry for what I did and the distress I caused those good folks on West White Street.”

“I’m sure things will work out for you if you’re sincere,” said Crystal, who was spared the need to elaborate by the return of Judy and Tomiko who’d already smoked rather more than their fair share while in the lavatory. But Tomiko once again demonstrated her fantastical ability to roll the perfect joint, however stoned she was.

“Hey guys,” said Tomiko in a voice whose poshness was well above and beyond any scale that Des and Gus had encountered before as she proffered them a lit spliff. “We’ve got plenty to go round.”

“Not now,” said Judy guardedly, knowing only too well how undiscriminating Tomiko could be with regards to sexual liaisons. “There are other things we’ve got to do this evening.”

“Like what, sweetheart?” challenged Gus.

“Wouldn’t you like to know, lover boy?” said Judy in an assertive voice that effectively killed the likelihood of anything between them resembling romance. “Just enjoy a World Class Tijuana toke while it’s going free and don’t fucking Bogart the joint, boys.”

It was as apparent to me then as it has been subsequently to Polly Tarantella that the preparation for the Penitence Club gig was much more in Judy’s control than it was Crystal’s. On this occasion, Judy Dildo was effectively band leader while Crystal was relegated to chief song-writer and lead vocalist. She didn’t have the spirit to resist Judy’s coup d’état. In any case, Crystal had no alternative to offer. And this seizure of authority, more than any other, is what most riles Polly about Judy. She even speculates that had matters turned out differently, Crystal Passion would have been side-lined from her own band and that it would in effect become the Judy Dildo band. But bizarrely enough, Polly is about the only person who might have liked the Rock & Roll direction Judy might have taken the band. Nobody else in the band would have agreed to such a change, especially not me who, along with Jane and Jacquie, still dreamed of a future cutting white label twelves and DJing at Pacha and the Café del Mar. My sister, Andrea, had already said she was unhappy with the non-acoustic element of the Crystal Passion

band and that she preferred it when Crystal had been a solo performer.

Crystal's biggest achievement was that she'd managed to hold together a band of so many disparate elements, a band that could include Andrea and me, Judy Dildo and the Harlot, and Olivia and Thelma. Such bands are very rare and don't normally last for long.

It was Judy who took the wheel of the Chevrolet on the drive back to the hotel (again displaying her legendary ability to never get wrecked however much dope she'd smoked), while in the back seat, next to Tomiko, Crystal sat silently with her face pressed against the window.

"Hey guys, look at that shit!" said Tomiko leaning a pointed finger over my shoulder and towards the wall of a dilapidated factory where one of Skull's posters was pasted. What made even Tomiko agitated wasn't so much the defaced poster, which looked no better in situ than it did in the Penitence Club's bar, but the nature of its defacement.

In England, when a poster is pasted up which shows something a little bit risqué any later defacement makes it rather more obscene than it was before. A picture of naked or semi-clad woman are embellished with crude sketches of erect penises and scrawled over with juvenile obscenities. But this defacement was of quite a different order. Across the poster and obscuring all trace of nudity was a strip of white paper of the type that normally announces a change to the planned event on which was printed in sans serif (rather than Gothic): 'Ban Indecency in Rock Hill'.

Another poster a few yards further along was pasted over with a similar strip of white paper with the same message but also with a spray-painted message probably not written by the original defacers. And this read quite simply: 'Kill All Dike Punks'. And

another poster was similarly obscured by a white strip with the printed message: 'God Hates Lesbians'.

"Fuck!" exclaimed Judy Dildo, clearly impressed. "There's obviously someone here who doesn't like us."

"Or even women in general," Crystal commented.

Our growing fears about how we'd be received were further heightened when we later drove from the hotel to the Penitence Club. As was our usual routine, we arrived a few hours early to set up the equipment, do a sound check and familiarise ourselves with the venue. With so many of us and so much equipment, we had to travel in both the Chevrolet and the Volkswagen Camper, expecting just to park outside the Penitence, unload the equipment and park the car nearby. However, as the club had no car park, we had to park our vehicles a block or so away in the nearest available lot. There was no way the Camper Van could be described as discreet or unobtrusive adorned as it was in psychedelic colours and celebrating long-gone rock bands such as the Grateful Dead and the Doors. Although it would be eye-catching wherever it was parked, on this occasion the fading grandeur of Volkswagen's hippy icon was an unwelcome beacon to our presence in Rock Hill's streets that, however well lit by the bright sun, were manifestly squalid and grimy.

"Is it safe to leave the van here?" Andrea wondered, as she lifted out her violin case.

"It's no less safe than parking it at the Paradise Hotel," said Judy with a dismissive sniff.

"It's best the van is parked nearby if we need to make a swift getaway," remarked the more practically minded Bertha. "Not that it wouldn't be better if we were

parked a lot nearer.”

So, we all had to share the burden of Jane’s drums, Tomiko’s sound desk, my keyboards and Olivia’s assortment of bongos, cymbals, tambourines and tympani along with whatever we would normally carry. As we walked across the near empty lot from the psychedelic Camper Van along Rock Hill’s least celebrated streets, these instruments (especially my own) had never before seemed more heavy. And although we arrived earlier than we normally would, there were early signs of what would later be a somewhat larger crowd. There was already a straggle of young Americans hanging around the front entrance to the Penitence Club attired in the Grunge scruffiness now fashionable in the States nearly twenty years after it had been so in the UK. There was no surprise here, as our audiences were mostly much the same wherever we’d played, though in this case there was a marked lack of women. Clearly ‘Girl’s Nite’ at the Penitence didn’t mean that there’d be a greater presence of female fans.

What we weren’t used to seeing—had never seen before—was a small group of exactly the sort of person you’d never associate with a Crystal Passion gig gathered together on the other side of the road from the venue behind placards that read ‘God Hates Lesbians’ and ‘Rock Hill Says: Cristal & the Passions Go Home!’ At this stage there were twice as many people camped opposite the venue as there were young men waiting to go inside. I wasn’t in much of a position to get a close look at the protestors, but they looked no different to the great majority of people we’d seen so far in South Caroline or, indeed, anywhere else in America. Blue jeans, check shirts and mostly overweight. If they differed at all, it was that the men were more whiskered and that some of the women sported plaits and head-scarves. You certainly wouldn’t guess they were radical Christian fundamentalists unless you happened to see them with a group

of like-minded people.

As soon as the demonstrators spotted us they began yelling and shouting in our direction. There could be no doubt that we were the infamous coven of Godless English Lesbian Punk Rockers that they imagined us to be. In any setting, there was no way a group of more than a dozen young women could blend into the background especially given our relatively eccentric dress. And in South Carolina, there was the added cause for prejudice in that two of us were black and one Japanese. And that we were all either exclusively lesbian or openly bisexual. But nowhere before had I heard the kind of bizarre and oddly archaic taunts thrown at us. Words like “Dykes”, “Atheists” and “Jezebels” would have been considered terms of praise at the Sisterhood Festival. Expressions like “Whores”, “Blasphemers” and “Satanists” were equally irrelevant insults. And there was little potency in less monosyllabic taunts such as “May God Forgive Your Sins!”, “God Hates Lesbians!” and “Thou Hast Committed an Abomination and Art Cursed in the Eyes of the Lord!”

The actual words yelled at us was irrelevant. It was obvious that by accident rather than design we were now the object of intense hatred for this small gathering of protestors. And nobody was more upset about this than Crystal. Throughout her whole life she'd endeavoured only to understand and love other people.

Actually getting into the Penitence wasn't as simple as we'd hoped. First of all we had to locate the artists' entrance at the side of the venue. It was out of sight of those waiting to see us perform but well within sight and earshot of the demonstrators. After many repeated attempts to attract attention by ringing the doorbell and increasingly panicked by the emboldened yells from across the road, we hammered on the stage door and yelled as loud as we could to try and get attention.

“Yeah. Yeah,” said Skull as he opened the side door with bleary red eyes and the hair on one side of his head visibly flattened. “I heard you guys the first time.”

“Just fucking let us in,” said Judy Dildo, who was in no mood for chitchat. “Just get us away from the fucking Bible Bashers before they lynch us.”

“OK! OK” said Skull who stood on one side of the door while we filed past him into the club’s relative safety. He glanced across the road at the small gathering who on noticing him launched into cries of “Shame on You!” and “Shut Down the Penitence!” As he closed the doors behind him and padlocked the security bar into place, he was chuckling to himself. “Well done, guys!” he said. “You chicks have got yourself the best fucking welcome committee you could hope for.”

“Some fucking welcome!” exclaimed Jacquie.

“Even better,” said Skull with a huge grin as he regarded Jane and Jacquie for the first time. “Hey. Wow! Not just fucking nudist dykes, you’ve got nig...African American chicks in the group too. The more ruckus caused by them Fundies, the more tickets we sell for the gig. I reckon we’ll do good business tonight. I even asked Golly to do an extra shift at the bar.”

At this stage, it was usually Crystal who’d pay attention to practical matters such as locating the dressing room and stage, but she just wasn’t in a fit state to do that. Her face was etched in tears and her mouth was gasping like a freshly hooked fish. She was more upset by the hostile reception outside than anyone else. Clearly, things had got too much for her.

While Andrea and Philippa tried comforting Crystal, it was up to Judy to get things organised.

“Whatever, Skull,” she said. “Just show us where we do the sound check.”

“Sound check?” said Skull. “Oh yeah, of course. You’re real pros, ain’tcha? And I don’t mean that in the vulgar sense either, girls. What I mean is that you’ve got a professional attitude...”

“And we need to see the dressing room, too,” said Olivia.

“Dressing room?” said Skull. “You serious? I s’pose you must be if you’re gonna change out of your dresses. I got a room at the back you could use but it ain’t got no make-up mirrors or any of that shit. In fact, I dunno if there’s even space to get all of you in there at one time...”

“Shall we just see what’s on offer, Skull?” said Judy who like me was already seeing her already low expectations of the facilities offered by the Penitence drop yet further. “We’ll just make do with whatever you’ve got.”

I can’t claim that our gig at the Penitence was one of the Crystal Passion band’s finest. From my point of view, at least, it was one that in different circumstances I’d much prefer to be able to forget. Crystal was still very unhappy during the rehearsals and into the concert itself. She was hardly able to restrain her tears and it was a great effort for her to stand on stage and sing and play the guitar. It was almost as if she’d decided to simply go through the motions: something I could never accuse her of before. If anything characterised Crystal Passion as a musician it was that she put her heart and soul into every performance. When you saw her on stage, you were witnessing someone who’d somehow bypassed the limitations of communication and was literally speaking from deep inside her very being.

Not tonight, however. This was Judy Dildo’s gig and, given the circumstances, nobody was going to object to this at all.

Was this the way it would be from now on? I wasn’t at ease even during the

sound check where only Crystal took off her clothes (to Skull's obvious delight). Until that night, we'd never played our music so fast, so furious and so ferociously. The songs, the lyrics and the melodies were all Crystal's. She'd composed them and she retained authorial copyright. But on this gig the electric guitar was pushed right to the front and played louder and faster and more forcefully than it had ever been before. Tomiko mixed the percussion, the drums, the bass and even my keyboards to emphasise the hardness of the beats and to pump up the lower register as a counterweight to the energy and propulsion of Judy's electric guitar. The mid-range represented by Andrea, Philippa, Thelma and the Harlot could barely be heard at all except as an accompaniment to the lower and higher registers. And Crystal was almost inaudible. Her acoustic guitar was overshadowed by Judy's electric guitar and her vocals were mostly heard only in harmony with Judy Dildo, Thelma and the Harlot. On this occasion, it was Judy's abrasive singing voice which was most prominent.

So, on this gig at least, I was now the keyboard player in a Rock & Roll Band. This was something that my sister and I, not to mention Jane and Jacquie, had sworn never to do when we first met Crystal. This wasn't the music I wanted to play. But Judy Dildo was well in her element. She was effectively the band's leader, overshadowing everyone including Crystal.

And bad though it had been for me in the rehearsal where, with Crystal's tacit approval, Judy encouraged us to rock like an all-girl Metallica or Napalm Death, it was much worse at the actual gig. I'd never been more grateful for the lines of coke and sulphate that Judy laid on for us all before we hit the stage. That, with the Tijuana shit and the Carolina Bourbon shots that Skull so thoughtfully supplied, got us into something that approximated to the right mood for the evening ahead. But this was a

gig where Andrea and Philippa fought to get as far into the already crowded rear of the stage where Olivia, Jane, Jacquie and I were playing.

It was at the front of the stage where the action was taking place. Thelma and the Harlot had joined in the spirit urged on by Skull's expectations (and those of Conservative America and its Syndicated Media) to follow the example usually set only by Crystal and, less regularly, Judy Dildo. And that, of course, was to bare their flesh. Only the Harlot bared as much as Crystal. For the first time she appeared on stage totally nude and somehow seemed much more naked, in a raw and physical sense, than Crystal had ever done. Her shaved crotch, nipple rings and tattoos promised with great frankness exactly what the Harlot had to offer any of her lovers, which was many times more than what anyone in the audience was ever likely to have experienced before. The Harlot wasn't the only one onstage nudist. Thelma flaunted all but her neatly trimmed crotch, which was obscured by a flimsy bikini bottom. Judy Dildo had forsaken even the black nipple plasters that was normally her only pretence of modesty given that her vagina was obscured by the much more obscene and fully erect representation of male genitalia after which she was named and which was strapped on to her crotch.

I can only imagine what the almost exclusively male audience made of the huge black plastic dildo Judy flaunted and which she thrust towards the rowdy young men to the percussive rhythm supplied by Jane and Jacquie and massively pumped up by a shadowy Tomiko in the sound booth (who didn't need to take any of her clothes off to arouse the libidos of at least a subsection of the male audience).

In the sense that we earned an encore and that the audience were obviously excited and enthralled by the Crystal Passion band, this gig might be pronounced a success. But it was obvious to most of us that this hadn't been Crystal's show at all.

And this was proven by how she burst into tears as soon as we'd finished and were out of sight of our fans. Only Judy Dildo, Thelma and the Harlot seemed to have enjoyed the gig, perhaps because this was the concert where they were most in charge.

"That was fucking great, girls!" said Skull who came to see us backstage and was clearly disappointed that the lead singers had managed to get dressed before he made his presence known. "I can't fucking wait till Friday's gig. We should have double the crowd. We'll either have to cram them in like sardines or turn 'em away."

Only Judy Dildo chatted to Skull while the rest of us gathered our gear together, with Bertha and Jenny Alpha as fast and efficient as ever. Olivia and Philippa shared the duty of selling copies of our CDs to the audience as they filed out. Not surprisingly, the record that sold the most copies was *Passing Passion*: the only record sleeve to feature Crystal in the nude. I couldn't help wondering how disappointed our audience would be when they came to play the album (or even the wholly acoustic *Triad*) to find that it was about as unlike a Punk Rock album as you could imagine. They weren't to know that a couple of decades later, their purchases would now dramatically soar in value thanks to Polly Tarantella's efforts (and even more so, if they bought the then significantly less expensive vinyl edition).

"I just want to go to the airport now and fly home!" Andrea declared as we walked back to the Camper Van. "I've just about had enough of this tour."

"It's been one fucking humiliation after another," said Jacquie. "At least that perv Skull didn't try to get us *all* to strip off."

"It wasn't *that* bad," said Thelma. "You heard how they called for an encore. That was better than anything we got in Boston."

Crystal said nothing. She was weeping softly and walked along with her head

facing the ground and her shoulders hunched. Judy also said nothing, but although she had a comforting arm around Crystal's shoulders it was clear that *she* wasn't upset. And this, as far as Polly Tarantella is concerned, is just one more piece of evidence of Judy's treachery and scheming. How dare Judy Dildo allow Crystal Passion to be so humiliated!

Crystal's misery for the evening didn't end just with the shame of being overshadowed by her lead guitarist (though only Polly is as upset by that as much as I was). When we were in sight of the Camper Van, we could now see our folly in having parked such a conspicuously psychedelic vehicle in Rock Hill's streets.

"Fuck!" exclaimed Penny Alpha. "It's a fucking write-off."

"I hope the insurance will cover this," said the more practical Olivia.

"More's the point," said Bertha who was weighed down by the heaviest equipment (mostly mine and Tomiko's). "How the fuck do we get back to the hotel?"

Thankfully, the Chevy had been totally untouched by whoever it had been who'd vandalised the Camper Van, but it had never been intended for use as a shuttle service to the hotel for the band and our equipment while Judy and Crystal hunted for a nearby phone booth to make the necessary calls to local garages to take care of the Volkswagen Camper Van, to Kai Pharrel to determine our liability and to car hire firms to get a replacement vehicle for our subsequent gigs. And at the time, of course, we had no idea how pointless this last concern would be.

Although I have my own ideas as to who smashed up the Volkswagen Camper Van and Polly Tarantella has no shortage of hypotheses, the culprits were never found and, to be honest, nobody expected they ever would be. But it was clear that those who'd attacked the van weren't just opportunist car wreckers. The tyres had been

slashed, the windows smashed and the doors prised open. That was sort of what you'd expect. What self-respecting vandal would leave such obvious targets untouched? There was little inside the van of any value, but what there was had been knifed open, pulled apart and strewn across the parking lot.

But the way the vandals distinguished themselves (although it could never be used as evidence in a court of law) was by the nature of the graffiti sprayed over the psychedelic celebrations of the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix and Spirit.

‘Rock Hill Hates Dykes’.

‘Cristal Sucks Dick’.

‘Jesus Dont Forgive Your Sins’.

‘Cristal, Whore of Punk’.

‘Go Home Punk Dikes’.

Crystal sniffed as she brushed aside a tear from the corner of her eye. “They really don’t like me, do they?” she said.

“It’s not you they don’t like,” I said. “It’s what you represent.”

“It comes to exactly the same thing, believe you me.”

## Chapter Twelve

Polly Tarantella hadn't always been the great custodian of Crystal Passion's legacy nor always the music's greatest champion. In fact, I first heard of her when Olivia—one of the few original band-members I still keep in touch with—e-mailed me a link to a Rock Music website I'd never have discovered otherwise in which Polly Tarantella lambasted Crystal Passion with a vehemence that was bizarre given the many years since the band had broken up. In those days she was known as Sally Tyrant and was a famous or, perhaps, notorious Rock Music critic, celebrated for her acerbic and scathing prose and for her withering assaults on everything and anything that triggered her dissatisfaction.

What amazed me most of all was that a Rock Music Critic had even heard of Crystal Passion. By then the band was almost entirely forgotten. If our music was likely to be heard anywhere it would be on obscure late-night music shows on BBC Radio 6 or X-FM. It wasn't old enough to profit from the Prog revival and not contemporary enough to be considered alt-folk or electro-acoustic art music. But here was Sally Tyrant laying into those musicians and bands she deemed traitors to the cause of Rock Culture as she judged it. In her eyes, Crystal Passion represented the very worst deviation from Rock Music's sacred mission. The eponymous lead singer and her band were being too clever by half. The music was trying to be both pop and art and had failed as both. Crystal Passion belonged to the same tradition as Sufjan Stevens, the Unthanks and Badly Drawn Boy. The band was striving towards something ambitious, something epic and something deep, but succeeded only in being trite, hackneyed and unconvincing. Rock Music was best represented by bands like the Foo Fighters, Muse and Stiff Little Fingers who fashioned a no-nonsense style that said all that was needed

to be said without complicating the message with mystical nonsense and fanciful analogies. The best song was less than three minutes long and expressed in a few glorious chords, plenty of energy and unfussy lyrics everything it had to say. The cause of Rock Music was best achieved by dumping the pretentious crap, cranking up the amp and just getting on with it. And in Sally's opinion nobody had ever done this better than the Clash, the Strokes and Metallica.

This article really hurt and upset me. What had Crystal Passion ever done to deserve such scorn? What was so offensive about her music? And any criticism of the Crystal Passion band—on all but the first album—was also criticism of me of course.

And it wasn't as if I'd made such a great success of my career since Crystal Passion disbanded that I could easily rise above it all.

Bizarrely enough, Sally Tyrant's tirade led to a short-lived spike in iTunes downloads and Amazon record sales as her readers tried to find out what was so very bad about Crystal Passion's music.

On the other hand, much as I felt crushed by this attack on the woman who even today remains the only true love of my life, I partly sympathised with Sally Tyrant's sentiments. And in a sense, I almost prefer Sally Tyrant's earlier ascetic attitude to Polly Tarantella's current attitude whereby anyone who criticises Crystal Passion, however mildly, is immediately beneath contempt. Nothing can now be said about Crystal Passion that isn't uncritically positive. And as someone who likes her House, Techno or Bass unadorned and on point, I understand the thesis that Crystal Passion had diluted the impact of her music by trying to be so many different things at the same time.

But Sally Tyrant's earlier appraisal also doesn't make much sense. Even those musicians she disparaged have released music that's basic and raw while many of those

she celebrates so highly (in particular the Clash) have recorded songs that were experimental and even gratuitously complex. And, speaking for what I most believe, the quality of Crystal Passion's music is such that someone like me, who wouldn't normally listen to Folk Music or Prog Rock or even the Rock Music that both Sally and Polly claim to be the Zenith of the Evolution of Music, can be so won over that I could give up everything (literally) just to be with her.

And it wasn't just the music, of course.

The next I heard of Polly Tarantella (as Sally Tyrant not much later rechristened herself) was when she started writing articles about Crystal Passion (and, incidentally, Sufjan Stevens and the Unthanks) in which she was as admiring and eulogising as she'd once been cruel and contemptuous.

So, why the sudden change of attitude?

It's not something that Polly's ever explained to me nor, as far as I know, to anyone else. Polly is so convinced in the absolute correctness of her opinions at the time of expressing them that she'll deny she's ever changed them. She'd probably say her earlier remarks were meant ironically or were misunderstood. (Not that there seems much scope for ambiguity or misunderstanding in a Sally Tyrant tirade).

Polly's change of heart coincides with the period of hospitalisation she doesn't talk about much but which apparently took her within a heartbeat of death. I think it might have been a massive drug overdose that triggered Polly's health crisis and the accompanying change of outlook, given that her drug habit also came to a very sudden and abrupt halt. Polly's someone who likes to punish herself. She's sometimes talked about her S&M sex sessions as some kind of a badge of honour and I've witnessed the perverse pleasure she gets from putting herself in harm's way. Perhaps she's decided

that instead of being metaphorically beaten up by those who don't like her championship of Rock Music orthodoxy, she'd rather be attacked for taking the radically opposed view that, after all's said and done, the truest and purest manifestation of the Great Rock & Roll Dream is to be found in the much maligned and heroically unsuccessful Crystal Passion band. After all, what could be more perverse in the History of Rock than a band made up of a dozen British women whose music straddles so many genres of which Rock was but one (and only just), who sold hardly any records at all, and who spectacularly failed to crack the elusive American Rock Music market?

And then, of course, for a woman like Polly who's drawn to pain and suffering, she must also have been attracted to the circumstances related to the Crystal Passion band's demise.

And also of Crystal Passion herself.

But a worse situation than the one we'd already found ourselves in seemed highly unlikely while we were being chauffeured back in small groups by Chevrolet to the Paradise Hotel with as much equipment as possible resting on our knees or squeezed into the trunk. It was Judy and Crystal who took the responsibility of contacting Kai Pharrel and the various insurance companies regarding the vandalised Camper Van and of arranging alternative forms of travel for the rest of our tour. In fact, it was much more Judy than Crystal who was active. Crystal was more depressed and withdrawn than I'd ever seen her before. She clung to Judy with a limpet-like closeness that I'd never imagined possible before.

I was so sick of the disaster that was the American Tour that I just couldn't be bothered any more. I no longer cared whether we played another gig in America and I openly speculated with Andrea, Jane and Jacquie whether I could be bothered to stick

with the Crystal Passion band when we returned to England.

“Why not just call it the Crystal and Judy Band and be done with it,” I said bitterly.

“Don’t be so hard on Crystal,” said Andrea. “It’s not been an easy ride for her and Judy just happens to offer her the comfort she needs at the moment.”

“And just what is that?” I countered. “Unless Crystal’s become a late convert to Tijuana’s finest or a fan of Heavy Metal, all Judy can offer is love and sex...”

“And what’s so wrong with that?” countered Jacquie.

It was plain that the Crystal Passion band’s close proximity with one another during the series of disasters that was our American tour wasn’t healthy for our intertwined complex and libertine lesbian love life. I was spending more time with only Jane and Jacquie. Andrea had more or less renounced lesbian sex altogether. And amongst the others, now the once reliably indiscriminate Crystal was spending most of her time with Judy, only Tomiko and the Harlot could be trusted to maintain the sexual licence that had so recently acted as the band’s cohesive glue.

So, it was pretty well inevitable that the appearance of a couple of young men in our number during our stay at the Paradise Hotel would exacerbate the growing fractures in the band.

“There’s a fucking *man* in my room!” exclaimed Bertha as she burst in on Andrea and I while we were resting in our shared bedroom, slightly stoned from our cut of Judy’s Tijuana stash.

“Not just one man,” said Philippa who followed behind and was just as disgusted. “There’s two of them! Where do they come from?”

“Hey!” said Olivia who was chasing after them with Jenny Alpha. “Don’t be so

uptight.”

Just behind Olivia and Jenny were two sheepish young men with unkempt long hair and well-worn baggy check shirts and jeans. One had the light-brown skin that in America was enough to qualify him as Black, while the other had a trace of Catawba Indian which, as with Elvis Presley, was somehow not enough for him to lose his White ethnic status.

“Hey guys,” said the young man with the paler skin.

“This is Matt,” said Olivia. “He and Joe belong to a local Rock Group. Both come from here in Rock Hill. Matt plays guitar and Joe plays drums.”

“Yeah,” said Joe. “We saw you guys at the Penitence. You were cool. You really rocked it...”

“And then we bought your records after the gig,” said Matt. “We could only afford the vinyl. But it was fucking amazing! Even better than the gig. That Crystal Passion is one fuck of a singer. *And she wrote the songs and all.*”

“We were fucking blown away so we asked Skull where you guys were staying and he told us it was at the Paradise,” continued Joe.

“So we came here to pay our respects...” said Matt.

“...And Jenny and I have been looking after them ever since,” continued Olivia.

“Fuck! They’re cute,” said Tomiko who poked her head in through the door.

“Gimme that ass!” echoed the Harlot whose head poked in from the other side.

“They’re both fucking *men!*” said Bertha in disgust and despair.

It was inevitable of course that those in the Crystal Passion band whose sexual identity wasn’t solely lesbian should be tempted by male flesh. There was no denying that Matt and Joe were the kind of young men who’d be attractive to those in the band

with no absolute preference. They were slim. They were young. They were refreshingly open-minded in a nation we now understood wasn't naturally either liberal or tolerant. And they were a relatively rare phenomenon in a world where the greater proportion of the Crystal Passion fan base, at least in the UK, was feminist and female. Neither Matt nor Joes were female but neither did they seem bothered about the gender of the musicians in the band. They didn't only listen to Grunge groups like Pearl Jam, Nirvana and the Pixies, but also to female musicians as varied as Joni Mitchell, Bikini Kill and P J Harvey. In fact, if it wasn't for the complicating presence of Jane and Jacquie and (at a distance) Crystal, I might have been tempted myself.

Neither Crystal nor Judy were likely to agree with Bertha and Philippa that the presence of men in our company was to be avoided at all costs. Judy because her sexual preferences leaned more towards men than women and Crystal because she would never deign to take account of such trivial distinctions. So, while at the Paradise Hotel, our already substantial numbers were further swollen. And, by virtue of their gender alone, Matt and Joe could only be divisive in a band increasingly held together more by circumstance than choice.

And this, among other things, clearly upset Crystal.

“It’s the end, isn’t it Pebbles?” Crystal confided to me as we sat together in the Paradise Hotel’s scruffy garden near a scrawny chicken who was pecking at the bare sun-baked soil. “The band won’t survive the tour. The album we’ve already recorded will be our last.”

“Don’t be silly,” I said reassuringly, but in truth somewhat startled that Crystal should so echo my thoughts.

“Oh America!” Crystal pleaded. “What have I done to deserve this?”

“Don’t despair,” I said. “We’ll be OK. The Camper Van being vandalised is something we’ll survive. We’ll get over it. It’ll all work out. After the gig on Friday, everything will be absolutely fine. Three days after that we’ll forget all about it.”

“I hope so, Pebbles,” said Crystal. “I hope so.”

“It’s *bloody* hot here,” I said, glancing up at the sun beating down on us. “Do you want me to get you something to drink from the bar?”

“Don’t worry about that, Pebbles,” said Crystal picking up a can of soda from between her feet that she must have already purchased from the hotel vending machine. “This might taste vinegary and it’s probably got every chemical additive you can imagine, not to mention carbon monoxide and sugar, but it’s enough for me now.” She rubbed the can over her forehead and let the moisture drip down her nose. “What I’ve got to do and have to do right away is call my mother...”

“Marianne. You think she’ll be contactable?”

Crystal regarded the clock looming above the hotel reception desk. “My mother and I agreed to be near the phone about this time every day if we ever needed to get in touch. And I definitely want to talk with my mother now.”

“Let’s get into the foyer then and out of the sun.”

“You’re right, Pebbles,” said Crystal. “That’s exactly what I must do. I *really* need to talk to Mum.”

The way Polly Tarantella describes the conversation that followed between Crystal and Marianne it’s as if we were all in the same room. But of course we weren’t. Crystal was standing in the hotel phone booth with a cardboard phone credit card while I was hovering around within earshot but not part of the conversation. And at the other end of the telephone in San Francisco—almost as far away across the American

continent as we were across the Atlantic Ocean from England—was Marianne and, somewhere in the background, was her new boyfriend, John Dimple, whose relationship with her mother Crystal was evidently eager to encourage.

“John’s good for you, Mum,” said Crystal. “From what you’ve told me about him, he’s exactly the kind of man you need in your life right now.”

Obviously I couldn’t hear Marianne’s reply but I could see Crystal nod her head and interject with the occasional “Yes” and “No”.

“Of course you must live together if that’s what you want, Mum,” said Crystal. “He’s a lot better than your last boyfriend. Not that he was bad exactly, but John is a better proposition altogether. That’s what you need at the moment.”

There was a muffled response from the other end of the line, presumably still about John.

I never met John Dimple, whatever impression you get from Polly Tarantella’s account, not then and not since. Perhaps he arrived too soon in Marianne’s life to feature in the following weeks and months. But Polly’s interviewed him and in her biography of Crystal Passion he poses as a real authority on Crystal Passion even though they’d never actually met. Nevertheless, given that he and Marianne maintained a relationship for more than a decade and a friendship that’s lasted to the present day I have to credit John with a lot more knowledge and understanding of Crystal’s mother than I ever had.

But it’s still not the same as knowing Crystal.

Perhaps it’s because of John, who sounds like a nice kind of guy, that Polly has given Marianne a prominent role in Crystal’s life that seems much greater now than it did when I knew Crystal and played in her band. It’s true that Crystal had a close healthy relationship with her mother. It was rather better than my relationship with my mother

who still resents me for not being heterosexual and for not settling down as a suburban wife with two children and a husband with a job in the City. And better also than Polly's relationship with her mother which must have been strained beyond breaking point every time Polly was admitted into rehab or when she appeared on her parents' door smashed, wasted or wrecked.

But there are many women who have good relationships with their mothers. My sister Andrea has a much better relationship with our mother than I do, that's for sure. And I don't think Jane and Jacque ever had a falling out with their parents despite the strain of their relationship with me. So, I don't think significant conclusions can be drawn about Crystal's genius and musical direction from the mere fact that Marianne's hippy mother and she were close. It wasn't that which determined her future life, however much Polly Tarantella emphasises the parallels between events in Marianne's life before Crystal was born and events in Crystal's life when she became a professional musician.

These few precious moments with Crystal that Polly makes such a big deal of are even more precious now than they seemed at the time. For most of the time between our two gigs at the Penitence Club, Crystal was nowhere to be found.

And neither was Judy.

I admit that I greatly resented Judy's pernicious influence on Crystal and her subsequent absence from my side. However, even at my most jealous at the time I wouldn't have drawn the kind of conclusions that Polly suggests, such as, for instance, that Judy orchestrated the bust at the King's Cavalry Motel. The fact that matters would have been much worse had Judy been taken to the Sheriff's Office along with the rest of us and they'd found a quarter weight of dope in her possession doesn't imply that

Judy's good fortune in not being busted is part of some grand scheme. My guess is that the bust came more from the motel staff's malevolent suspicious nature. Crystal Passion was the object of hostile media attention and they didn't much sympathise with our lifestyles. Although I don't agree with Polly, I can see that a villain gives her story a sense of intrigue. And what better villain could there be than someone as close to Crystal's bosom as Judy Dildo?

It wasn't only me who noticed that Crystal and Judy were absent from the Paradise Hotel and their shared bedroom. And everyone assumed that wherever they were, they were together. But doing what, I don't know.

I don't believe Crystal was taking drugs, unless she was a lot better at hiding the evidence than anyone else I've ever known. In any case, drug-taking wasn't in her character. It wasn't that she disapproved of drugs. It was more that she couldn't see the point. The real world was already weird enough. So what were Crystal and Judy doing together that they didn't share with the rest of the band?

Sex is one thing, of course. Crystal's sexual passion is something difficult to describe to someone who's never experienced it. And Judy Dildo—who was probably more heterosexual than almost anyone else in the band except my sister Andrea—was overcome by Crystal's sexual charisma. That must have made emotional matters between them even more significant. And I don't think it's just idle speculation that Judy and Crystal shared their moments of intimacy apart from the band in the company of men. Judy enjoyed being fucked by men. And Crystal did too. And I suspect they enjoyed sharing their bodies with men equally as much as each other.

I also think that Judy was eager to expose Crystal to the kind of music she enjoyed so much. The fact that Rock Music, more than almost any other kind of genre,

chiefly appeals to men (and most especially adolescent men in awe of the most common and basest male fantasies) meant that Judy Dildo would have to drag Crystal away from other women: especially those of a feminist disposition that Judy so often professed to despise.

So in those hours Judy and Crystal spent together I visualise the two women writhing together in the midst of a tangle of naked men whose huge erect penises were either inserted into all or some of their orifices and spurting semen all over them. And into this stew of masculine fucking, sucking and spunking, I envisage a soundtrack of heavy metal guitar, energetic but unimaginative drum beats, and singing that sounds like either a cat being strangled or a man barking through a mouthful of gravel.

The sooner Crystal got bored with all that shit the better!

But even though by Friday we'd all got used to the idea of hardly not seeing much of either of them, it was a surprise for us all to be packing up our equipment for our gig at the Penitence and there *still* to be no sign of Crystal or Judy.

“Where the fuck is she?” wondered Jenny Alpha as she loaded Crystal’s acoustic guitar into the back of the non-descript removal van we’d hired for the day. “Still fucking Judy at a fucking opium den?”

“She *will* be here when the gig begins, won’t she?” pleaded Thelma. “It’s not gonna be much of a Crystal Passion band without Crystal.”

“And what about Judy?” remarked the Harlot. “Who’ll do all that rock strutting stuff if she’s not here?”

“Matt can help out,” said Olivia, whose arm was around his waist. “He plays a mean guitar.”

“I fucking hope we won’t have to resort to *that*!” Philippa sniffed.

“Crystal’s *never* let us down before,” I said with the confidence and authority that came from being one of the band’s original members. In fact, after Crystal herself, probably *the* original member.

But my optimism was misplaced. Even after the equipment was set up on stage, Crystal still hadn’t arrived. We had to rehearse with Tomiko on the sound desk with Skull lurking in the shadows clutching a can of Bud and snorting a line of Coke. Philippa, Thelma and the Harlot stood in for Crystal’s role either by playing acoustic guitar, as only Philippa was able, or by singing her lyrics, as Thelma and the Harlot could both do (though their voices had none of Crystal’s porcelain beauty). And as Olivia proposed, Matt stood in for Judy: easily able to mimic her Rock Star strut and Axe-Man flourish, and surprisingly good (given the rushed circumstances) at learning and playing her riffs.

But when the real Judy Dildo turned up with barely half an hour left before we were due on stage and to witness Matt subbing for her, she was instantly dismissive.

“What the fuck is this shit?” she said. “Gimme my guitar and I’ll show you how it should be done.”

“And Crystal can take responsibility for the acoustic guitar and vocals too?” Philippa pleaded.

Judy seemed genuinely alarmed. “Isn’t Crystal here?”

“Fuck no,” said Thelma. “We thought she was with you.”

“She was but...” began Judy. “Well, fuck it, she’s not with me now.”

“So where is she, Judy?” I challenged.

“She ain’t here is all, is she?” said Judy defiantly. And then rather more conciliatorily and with evident distress in her voice, she asked: “You’re absolutely sure

Crystal's not here? You're not shitting me?"

"We wouldn't fuck about when it comes to something like that," said Jane.

"Where the fuck is Crystal?"

"Erm..." said Judy hesitantly. "Fuck! She's not here? Fuck! Shit!"

And with these oaths Judy Dildo strode off towards the Penitence Club's exit.

And then with a theatrical gesture that was probably unintentional she slammed the door behind her and was gone.

"Fuck me!" said Jacquie, who'd never much liked Judy. "What's got into her?"

"I think there's a good chance we won't see Judy playing her guitar tonight after all," Olivia remarked. "It looks like you've got the gig," she said to Matt who was at least as startled and bemused as the rest of us at Judy's outburst. "You've just passed the audition. You've got all the votes."

"Well, at least we don't also need a fucking drummer," declared Jane.

"But there's still no sign of Crystal," moaned Philippa.

"Fuck!" Thelma exclaimed. "Am I gonna have to be Crystal for the night?"

"You and me both, sweetheart!" said the Harlot with a slightly deranged laugh.

"I'm sure Crystal and Judy will turn up in time for the gig," I said.

"Well, we've just got to assume they won't," said Olivia. "We'll have to expect the worst and prepare for it."

"So tonight it's gonna be Matt Dildo and Thelma & Philippa Crystal," remarked the Harlot.

And so it was to be.

I'd never before performed on stage in front of an audience without Crystal Passion and it goes without saying that the Crystal Passion band without its titular

leader wasn't the same at all. Of course, as far as the audience of check- and tee-shirted young men with a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other, the only differences to what they expected was that the guitarist was a man and that there was absolutely no nudity. None of us had the heart or inclination to strip off, not even the Harlot. And certainly neither Thelma nor Philippa who were more anxious about having to sing the lead vocals on songs they knew well but whose lyrics they didn't understand any more than did the rest of us. It just wasn't the same to hear Thelma intone: "The son comes home with nothing to show. The father gives him a fortune of snow. The worst is loved the most. And the best is left to last." What seemed so profound voiced by Crystal sounded banal and faintly bizarre coming from Thelma and Philippa.

At least we were spared a refrain from the audience of "Take 'em off!" or "Show us your tits!" And this was mostly because of Matt being on stage and his obvious love for the rock riff. It just didn't make sense for an audience of men who valued their heterosexuality to demand that Matt should rip off his clothes and display what was actually quite a handsome asset (not that I ever did more than glance at it while he was fucking Olivia on her bed). And given that this was primarily a Rock audience who'd come to see a Rock Band, Matt's frequent quotations from the great rock riffs of history (such as 'Purple Haze', 'Come As You Are' and 'Sunshine of Your Love') managed to satisfy those who might otherwise have been clamouring for the sight of a lot more female flesh.

During every moment and every second of the gig I was expecting, hoping, almost praying for Crystal Passion or even Judy Dildo to appear at the side of the stage with a smile and the reassurance that everything was alright and that their earlier non-appearance had been nothing more than a hiccup. But no such luck. We powered

through our gig, playing a set that was pretty much identical to our previous one at the club except that we were more content to let Matt indulge himself in his Rock Guitar dreams of glory than we'd ever have allowed Judy. And that was because it was a relief for us all, including Philippa and Thelma, to just fade into the background gloom and stay out of sight.

We gave no encore although there were many in the audience calling for more and Matt was ready and eager to jump back onto the stage.

"I'm just not in the fucking mood!" said Jacquie.

"Keep your sonic dildo strapped away, sweetie," Jane dismissively advised Matt. "None of us are going back there however much the fuckers shout out for us."

"Forget about it, lover boy," said Olivia, forcefully grabbing Matt's crotch. "We can make sweet music elsewhere."

"Still no sign of Crystal or Judy," remarked Andrea.

"They're probably in a fucking twelve man orgy somewhere," remarked Jacquie snidely. "Judy's always liked cock and rock and now she's tempted Crystal over to the fucking dark side."

"It's not like Crystal," I pleaded in her defence.

"But it's fucking just like Judy," snarled Jane. "I fucking hate that bitch."

"Yeah," said Jacquie, expressing for the first time what has since become the orthodox account of events according to Polly Tarantella. "Ever since Judy joined the band, it's been headed towards disaster. And ever since we arrived in America—the land of fucking racist metal heads—Judy's led us all down the slope towards destruction. Fuck it! She's the bitch who got us to play naked in Detroit. And she's the bitch who's turned Crystal Passion into some kind of all-girl Rock Band."

These weren't the last words said about Judy as it became increasingly apparent that Crystal hadn't been hiding in the toilets or sitting despondently in the dressing room or waiting outside the Penitence with some perfectly understandable excuse as to why she hadn't made it to the gig. There was still no sign of her anywhere.

We were in a very sombre mood as we hoisted our equipment along to our van, which hadn't been vandalised this time even though the same group of Christian protestors had been protesting at exactly the same spot on the street as before. My guess is that nobody thought it worth the effort of vandalising a battered old van with the smudged-out name of Wayne Sentry & Sons barely legible under all the grime and rust.

"Was *that* the worst gig we've ever done?" Jane wondered.

Matt was visibly hurt by Jane's dismissal so Olivia stood up for him. "We just weren't able to play as well as we would've back in the UK. Events haven't been kind to us. But we did a fuck of a lot better tonight than anyone would've predicted given that we've lost our lead singer, our song-writer and both our guitarists."

"I thought you guys were awesome," said Joe loyal as ever to his best friend and probably envious that it hadn't been Jane who'd failed to turn up for the gig.

"Well, whatever," said Tomiko who was visibly bored with the discussion and held a spliff between her thumb and forefinger. "Anyone wanna share some blow?"

When we got back to the hotel, I helped Bertha and Jenny unload the band's equipment from the van not so much because I needed the exercise but because I wanted to put some distance between me and Jane and Jacquie. Much as I loved them, I wasn't able then (and I've been no better since) to handle the sisters when they got angry. And, besides, I was angry too. And like Jane and Jacquie I also blamed Judy Dildo for the fact that Crystal hadn't turned up for her own concert.

What the fuck could be more important than that?

When I entered the foyer of the Paradise Hotel, with Jenny Alpha loaded down with Tomiko's sound deck and Bertha sharing the burden of my keyboards and tangled cables, there was a palpably weird subdued atmosphere. Although everyone was gathered around the reception desk and sitting on the polyvinyl chairs, nobody was talking. Not even Matt and Joe.

Shit! Had our rooms been burgled? Had there been another bust? Had some bad news come back from the UK?

“What’s going on?” I asked not sure who I was actually addressing.

And then I noticed for the first time that there was a strange man in the centre of the foyer and that he was dressed in the almost casual official uniform of the South Carolina police with the archetypal broad-brimmed hat.

“I’m afraid I’ve got bad news for you, ma’am,” he said.

“It’s about Crystal, isn’t it?” I said, suddenly letting forth the flood of tears that I’d been holding back all evening. “Something’s happened to Crystal. There’s been an accident. She’s in the hospital.”

“I’m sorry to be the one to have to tell you this, ma’am,” said the police officer. “But it’s worse than that.”

And indeed it was.

Crystal Passion was dead.

And not just dead. Violated. Savagely abused. And then discarded.

And discovered—not many hours after her last breath—alongside the banks of the Catawba River: a broken doll bruised and bloody and pierced by knife-wounds, her nose crushed and her clothes nowhere to be found.

But most of all: dead.

It was hard for me to take in a single detail, but what was becoming increasingly apparent to me as I wailed and wept was that I would never speak to, laugh with or play with Crystal Passion again.

In fact, I would never see Crystal Passion alive ever again.

## Chapter Thirteen

There's a lot I simply can't remember that happened in the following few days we were stranded in Rock Hill. My attention was almost entirely focused on my overwhelming sense of grief. I was completely disconnected from the many events swirling around me. I guess I was hoping that Crystal might still be alive and would magically appear from somewhere. And when it was established that Crystal had been murdered at almost exactly the time that Judy Dildo made her brief appearance at the Penitence Club, the only relief I had from my overwhelming anguish was the intense hatred I could direct towards her. As it was with other members of the band.

"We don't know for sure, do we?" said Andrea, one of the few brave enough to defend Judy in her absence. "Just because we haven't seen her since... since... Just because of that doesn't prove anything, does it?"

"So, why isn't she here then?" said Jane. "What's that bitch hiding from us? I'm not saying she actually killed Crystal..."

"She couldn't have done," said Jenny Alpha. "We saw her at the club *when* it happened. Even Judy couldn't have been in two places at the same time."

"It can't be a fucking coincidence that we've seen fuck all of the bitch since she burst in like that," said Jacquie. "What did she know? Where did she fucking run off to? She knew something, didn't she?"

"I don't know what Judy did or didn't know," said Philippa, also striving to be diplomatic. "But you're right, Jacquie. Judy took Crystal to a dark place she wouldn't have gone to otherwise..."

"Fucking Thrash Metal male orgies," I moaned. "Fucking men, smack, dicks,

sadomasochism and knives.”

“We don’t know about any of that stuff,” said Philippa. “Except the knives, of course. And the fact that Crystal was raped and pissed on just before she was killed ...”

I burst into a fresh torrent of tears that prompted my sister to wrap her arms around my shoulders. “Well that’s what happened, isn’t it? It could be that Judy had nothing to do with it at all. Maybe Crystal just happened to be walking along the Catawba River and was the victim of a random act of violence. We just don’t know.”

But what we did know and got to know for sure when we filed into the crematorium to identify Crystal’s abused and battered body was that she was undeniably dead. The woman on the cold marble slab whose eyes were discreetly closed and whose skin had already taken on the pale complexion of the recently deceased could be none other than Crystal Passion: the love of my life and the woman to whom I had literally sacrificed everything. Except my life, of course. And I don’t know how many times I thought to myself (and maybe even wailed aloud to my sister and my two black lovers) that I would gladly sacrifice that as well if Crystal Passion were still alive.

That Crystal was unclothed in the crematorium, despite the cold, seemed appropriate. That was how she’d been most of her life and how she was when discovered at the scene of the crime by three young black men who were originally detained as suspects despite their exemplary academic record and good behaviour. This time, she was naked simply because that was what all corpses are before an autopsy and for a case like this where murder was pretty much obviously the cause an autopsy was a necessary part of the police investigation. The fact that Crystal’s beautiful body, already scarred and disfigured by the violence that had killed her, would soon be scalped apart only made me sob the louder while the police officers looked on and

Andrea, Jane and Jacquie tried to comfort me.

But my grief overcame me. My feet suddenly gave way beneath me and, still wailing, I collapsed to the floor. I gripped Jane's tee-shirt so tightly when I fell that I tore it across the seams, but fortunately not so that her bosom fell loose. I crouched on the floor in despair and shouted out to the world, just like you see people do in the kind of movies that I never usually watch: "Why? Why? Why did this have to happen?"

"Gee! She's taking it bad, ain't she?" remarked one of the brawnier police officers.

"She was Crystal's closest friend," said Philippa.

"She was Crystal's lover," the Harlot clarified.

"Well, whatever they felt for one another," said the police officer sympathetically. "This gal certainly feels it strong. I don't often see grief that bad. And I've seen some pretty crazed shit I can tell you. That Crystal Passion chick must have been one heck of a gal!"

The responsibility of positively identifying Crystal Passion's body was only the first of a series of duties we all had to do, including Matt and Joe, and even Skull. And on this occasion the police were on our side. Whatever they might have privately thought about a dozen oddly dressed British women and their unorthodox lifestyles was expressed only inadvertently. This was a murder case and, for the moment, the chief suspect was Judy Dildo.

Her alibi was in no way helped by the fact that she hadn't returned to the Paradise Hotel at all on the night following the gig nor on the following days. As a result, much of the police interrogation was focused on Judy and what we knew of her whereabouts in the few days we'd been in Rock Hill (and from before the time we'd

crossed the South Carolina State Line). It didn't occur to me that we should hide the fact of Judy's acquisition of a quarter weight of dope and to the credit of the police, although they confiscated what was left for forensic testing, there was no mention that we were complicit in a criminal offense. Jane observed with a bitter laugh that when Judy Dildo did return she'd be busted whether she had anything to do with Crystal's murder or not.

"That'll fucking teach the bitch!" she said.

"That doesn't seem fair," said Tomiko. "If Judy had nothing to do with it, why should she be punished?"

I was so wrapped up in my own sorrow that I didn't pay much attention to how the others were reacting to Crystal's death. I suppose I assumed that I had the most cause for sorrow having always been Crystal's primary lover in the band, but in fact everyone was grieving. Jane and Jacquie could sublimate their grief with their anger. My sister was distracted by my near nervous breakdown. But we were all in a state of shock and distress: Philippa, Thelma, Bertha, Olivia, the Harlot, Jenny Alpha and, most of all, Tomiko.

I suppose it was because I'd always thought of Tomiko as being somehow different from the rest of us that I never imagined she'd get so distraught. Tomiko was an ethnic Japanese woman with a Public School education and an Irish passport who managed the sound deck and was more often stoned than straight. But while we were in the crematorium she wept silently as she hovered over Crystal Passion's body. She ran her fingers over the body, even over the knife wounds that had slit open the stomach, and then she unexpectedly exploded into a torrent of tears.

"It's real!" she sobbed, as Olivia and the Harlot comforted her. "It's really

happened! I didn't imagine it possible. Crystal's dead. She's dead. Dead! Dead!"

Polly Tarantella has somehow managed to obtain a transcript of the police investigation into Crystal's murder and almost all of it is transcribed in her biography. There are exact details in the coroner's report (which I couldn't bear to read at the time) which describe the nature of the knife wounds, present an analysis of the semen found in her vagina and anus, itemises where she was hit and the likely cause of each bruise, and confirms that the urine traces over her body were fresh at the time of her murder. The fact there'd been no attempt to hide her body was evidence that the murderers weren't professional criminals. And the evidence from the semen and the nature of the violence was that there'd been at least two and possibly as many as half a dozen men involved in the crime. But in the early 1990s when there was no such thing as DNA profiling and when America was drowning in a national crime wave, there was little likelihood the criminals would ever be found. Unless the forensic evidence exactly matched the other evidence the police had in their files (which were mostly written on paper rather than stored in a computer) or one of the perpetrators had left behind some tell-tale evidence (as so often happens in American cop shows) there was almost no chance that Crystal's killers could be identified unless Judy was able to help the police with their inquiries.

Given that so much of the police investigation related to Judy Dildo, Polly has a lot of ammunition for her claim that Judy was Crystal's evil nemesis. There's a lot of redaction in the police files which as far as I could see was more to protect the witnesses (such as me) than to hide the truth. I can tell from the transcripts that it was Jane and Jacque who had the most vicious things to say about Judy, though I was surprised to discover the extent to which some in the band continued to defend her. Though I don't

know for sure, I think Judy's chief champions were Tomiko, Jenny and the Harlot. She was described in a much more positive way than I'd have predicted. I didn't know before reading these accounts just how great Judy's love for Crystal had been. Nor how much she'd admired me. And this makes me feel especially ashamed given how much I hated and despised Judy at the time.

Polly's thesis of Judy's great treachery needs more than a few unkind comments from Jane and Jacquie (and probably also from Philippa and Bertha), but the necessary proof, at least as far as Polly's concerned, came to light on the third day of the police investigation

At this stage we'd got used to reading reports in the *Rock Hill Herald* and the other local newspapers from the Charlotte metropolitan area about the 'English Rock Star Murder' which on the local television news channels was also known as the 'Crystal Passion Riverside Knifing'. There was nothing much more said about Crystal or the band in the reports beyond the facts that we came from London, England, and that we were all women (except for 'local boy, Matt McGinnis'). There was no mention now of the controversy that had agitated the Christian faithful nor of the chequered history of our American tour. But the cliché of finding out about a story from a news bulletin rather than directly from the police (again so familiar from American cop shows) was true in our case.

"Breaking," said the news reader on whatever local affiliate was associated with NBC. "We have new information about prime suspect Judith O'Hara in the Catawba River Killing. After the break."

And so Andrea and I, holed together in our hotel room, had to endure an endless series of advertisements for local realtors, automobile sales and legal services until the

news reader appeared on the screen again.

“The body of Judith O’Hara, the English rock guitarist the police have been looking for, has been found in Rock Hill less than a quarter mile from the scene of the horrific murder of English Rock Star, Crystal Passion. At this stage, we don’t yet know whether the cause is suicide or foul play, but we do know that Miss O’Hara’s dead body was found hanging from a tree by local walkers in River Park. We’re expecting a statement from the Rock Hill PD in the next half hour. Stay tuned.”

And following this there was a totally unrelated story about the preparation for the following year’s Come-See-Me Festival at the historic, award-winning Glencairn Garden, more on which I was in absolutely no mood to find out about.

“I don’t fancy waiting for this talking head to get round to what’s happened to Judy,” said Andrea. “We’ll get someone to drive us to the police station and get the story from source, shall we?”

My sister had clearly decided that whatever small benefit we might get from getting the news from the detectives investigating Crystal’s murder before the formal announcement would be worth our while because we’d be busy doing something instead of having to wait anxiously in a hotel room by the television screen for a spokesperson to loom into camera view.

“As long as we can keep the radio tuned to a news station while we drive there,” I said as I jumped up with a fresh sense of purpose. We then bundled into the Chevy with Jenny at the wheel and both Tomiko and Thelma for company.

“Hey, ladies,” said Nate, the receptionist at the Police Station who we’d got to know quite well during the last couple of days. “I was expecting to see some of you here after what what’s been found. I guess you wanna talk to the DI?”

“Is Luke here?” I asked.

“No,” Nate admitted. “He’s gotta make an official announcement for the TV cameras. It’s big news round here as I guess you ladies already know. But some of the other guys will fill you in. Wait here. I’ll see who I can find.”

It was Inspector Matthew Papadopoulos who escorted us into a quiet office that was reserved for just this kind of discussion to describe what had been found and what had been determined from the evidence. It was evident that he’d had to do something like this many times before. Even though it was Inspector Mark Evans who’d actually attended the scene of the crime and examined the evidence, Inspector Papadopoulos gave such a vivid depiction that it was difficult to believe that his was a second-hand account.

Judy had indeed been found hanging from a tree in River Park. The walkers who came across her body weren’t the first to walk past it, but they were the ones who’d noticed it first. The body was hanging just above head height and was obscured by dense foliage. In those days, there were very few cell phones, even in America, and none of these walkers owned one, so a couple of them remained by the scene of the crime (which must have been gruesome), while the other two raced off to a nearby drug store which was the nearest place where they could find a telephone. What they’d witnessed was exactly like those photographs that illustrate the Billy Holiday song *Strange Fruit*, only unlike those lynched bodies so indelibly associated with the Ku Klux Klan and the Gallant South, this corpse was of a woman of white ethnicity. At least she hadn’t also been found naked.

It wasn’t an easy job for the police to get Judy’s body down from the branch from which she’d been hung. Evidently, her murderers were quite expert at hanging

people they didn't like.

"They probably had to loop the rope from an elevated position," Inspector Papadopoulos explained, "so we're looking for evidence of snagged clothing. Our main task is to establish for sure that this wasn't a suicide, although I can't see how it could have been. In any case, we ain't heard anything from you ladies to suggest that Miss O'Hara was the suicidal type. Suicides don't normally involve as much cooperation and planning as went into Miss O'Hara's killing."

The evidence was that the hanging was what actually killed Judy but that this was only the final act of violence in a series of horrific abuses that she'd suffered. Inspector Papadopoulos didn't give an account of the actual lynching, but I have a vivid image in my mind (derived from some of the more gory horror movies I've seen) of Judy's body pulled taut at the neck with her tongue and eyes bulging out from asphyxiation while her last energetic kicks were only helping to hasten her death. And before that ordeal, she'd already been beaten, punched and raped. The inspector didn't describe in detail how she'd been violated, but those interested in learning more can find all the repulsive details of the violence against Judy's body described in Polly's biography of Crystal Passion. There's almost as much detail about Judy's final suffering as there is regarding Crystal herself. The only compensation for Judy is that she hadn't been stabbed to death, but I can only hazard a guess at how much terror Judy must have felt as her murderers slipped the noose around her neck and tugged the rope upwards.

The inspector went to great pains to explain to us (rather more than I've ever seen in a Crime Thriller) how cautious they had to be in arriving at conclusions about Judy's murder. What was almost certain was that, as with Crystal Passion (who was

consistently referred to as Miss Giordano), the death of Miss O'Hara was the result of homicide. What could not be determined were the motives for the murders, the identity of the perpetrators, the exact number of perpetrators, and certainly not their age, ethnicity or nationality: though the presence of semen in both cases strongly suggested that the murderers were all men and that there was more than one in both murders.

“One thing we cannot be absolutely certain about at this point of time,” stressed the inspector, “is that the two crimes are directly linked, although, like you and the crime reporters in the *Rock Hill Herald*, we’re darned sure they are.”

It would be satisfying to be able to say that the murderers (and rapists and woman-beaters and perverts) who’d killed Crystal and Judy have since been arrested and got their due deserts. And however much in principle I oppose such brutal means of capital punishment as lethal injection or the electric chair, I’m not sure my conscience is so resilient that I’d be upset if the murders were all lined up and electrocuted or, more likely, spent their last dying moments pumped up with pentobarbital, Pancuronium bromide and Potassium chloride. But the truth remains that whatever theories Polly and others have come up with, nobody knows to this day who killed Judy and Crystal, why they were murdered or even whether the two homicides are connected.

I suppose this is the point in my story I should come up with my own hypothesis: perhaps adding yet more to the frenzy of speculation about the murders and just what Judy knew. All I can say is that I’m pretty sure Judy had a good idea who Crystal’s killers were. She mightn’t have known them personally as such but well enough for her to be considered such a threat that relatively soon after (less than 48 hours according to forensic evidence) she was also murdered. There seems to have been a kind of crude

ritual the murderers enacted when they murdered Judy, though I can't say whether there was anything other than a frenzy of crazed and undoubtedly libidinous passion involved in Crystal's murder. Nevertheless, Polly has no qualms in devoting nearly a quarter of the biography's length to an account of all the hypotheses and rumours she can find, including those which are at best ludicrous and, at worst, dangerously unhinged.

Whatever else Judy had been doing in the couple of days since we last saw her at the Penitence Club I don't believe she was trying to hide evidence of her guilt and thereby fell foul of a Rock Hill Mafia Boss. More likely is that Crystal's murderers were on the periphery of whatever social scene she and Judy had got to know in the few days since we'd arrived in Rock Hill and that when she made enquiries (which must have taken on a grim urgency after she'd learned out about Crystal's death) she was deemed to be a sufficient threat to the murderers that they decided to kill her as well.

And not simply kill her, of course.

And although we don't know who Judy's murderers are—just as we don't know who killed Crystal Passion—I can say with no fear of ever being proven wrong that the men who killed them were the very worst kind of sick fucks.

There are those who almost seem to excuse rape, sexual violence and murder with the theory that the violators or killers were on drugs and didn't know what they were doing. I know a bit about drugs: well, a lot more than those who make such claims. And even though I'm more an expert on E, acid and dope than I am on crystal meth, smack or crack cocaine, I just don't think it makes sense to say that it's only because they're users that such people commit violent crime. The one drug I know that's likely to turn people into crazed lunatics like that is alcohol. Smack and coke simply make it easier to do evil things if you're already so inclined. And the drugs that *do* totally space

you out also make you incapable of walking in a straight line or stringing a sentence together, let alone doing something as difficult as killing someone and getting away with it. If drugs were involved in the murder of my two friends, it was more because it added to the fun the fuckers got out of it rather than being the cause. Perhaps if there'd been no drugs (and we don't even know there were) the killers might have been less brutal, but I guess they'd have compensated for that with greater clinical precision.

“I know that it's all a bit much to take in, ladies,” said Inspector Papadopoulos. “Your friend Judy is dead, just as your friend Christine is. I'll give you a half hour or so to gather your thoughts and perhaps pray for the departed if you should feel so disposed, but then we'll have to ask you, as we will the others in your pop group, to positively identify the deceased and then to further assist us with our enquiries by answering a few more questions related to Miss O'Hara.”

“And what would be the point of that?” asked Andrea.

“Of praying, ma'am?”

“Praying's fine, inspector,” said Andrea. “I respect you for offering us the opportunity to pay our respects to the dead. No, I mean what's the point of trying to resolve the case? What difference would it make?”

“So that we can arrest and punish the murderers of your friends,” said the inspector. “Surely that's obvious.”

“It sure is,” said Tomiko, with almost malicious glee in her voice. “Whoever the bastards are, I want to see them in court and I want to see them locked up...”

“...Otherwise they'll go ahead and rape and murder other women like Judy and Crystal,” said Jenny. “That's what it's all about, isn't it Inspector?”

“Indeed it is,” said Inspector Papadopoulos with evident relief that he didn't

have to reply to Andrea's objections.

Nonetheless, the fresh turn of events that followed the discovery of Judy's body didn't make it any easier for me or anyone else in the band. There was so much we now had to put in order before we could at last leave Rock Hill and return home. Not least of which were the funerals. And before that we had to assist the police in their investigations.

First, there was the grisly task of identifying Judy's body which thankfully wasn't as badly mutilated as Crystal's. There were bruises and scratches clearly visible all over her face, torso and upper thighs. The neck was swollen and raw. The head was twisted at an excruciatingly unnatural angle. But there were none of the knife wounds that had scarred Crystal's body. Although I'd known Judy very well over the past few years the shock of seeing her dead body didn't distress me as much as it had to see Crystal's. I still suspected that even though it wasn't she who'd actually killed her, Judy was still in some sense responsible for Crystal's murder.

There weren't any of the distressing scenes that accompanied the viewing of Crystal's body. No one collapsed onto the crematorium floor and no one burst into hysterical tears. Some of the band wept for Judy, but I wasn't one of them and neither were Jane and Jacquie. But at least nobody said at the time (although like me some must have thought it) that if it hadn't been for Judy then we'd have had no dead bodies to identify. And that instead of having to suffer all this distress we could have fulfilled the final commitments of our disastrous American tour and return by British Airways to London Heathrow and make a fresh start with the Crystal Passion Band still led by my eponymous lover.

It didn't surprise me that the police found evidence of drugs in Judy's blood and

that we would be questioned about it. In addition to the traces of marijuana, MDMA and alcohol that you'd expect, there was also evidence of heroin and crystal meth. Nothing like this, of course, was found in Crystal's blood. This didn't endear me any more to the recently deceased, though like Polly I've speculated about the circumstances in which she took such narcotics.

"But it wasn't drugs that killed her, was it?" Philippa asked for confirmation.

"Technically no," said DI Luke Doctorow. "And unless we find further evidence, her drug taking is at best incidental to our investigations."

"Could you do me a favour, inspector?" Philippa pressed him. "Please don't tell Judy's mother about the drugs. It'd kill her to know."

I wondered what Philippa was implying. Were Judy's parents *that* naïve about her drug use? Though I sometimes wondered what my parents thought about my own rather less excessive drug habits, I knew that I'd soon have the opportunity to find out more given that Mr and Mrs O'Hara were soon due to attend the funeral at the Joseph Armistead & Sons Funeral Home. Also flying across the Atlantic Ocean were Crystal's father and brother, Giuseppe and Justin, and, although they needn't have come, Zack and Liz Aaronson. And representing Crystal Passion's British commercial concerns were our harassed manager, Madeleine Tartt, and Gospel Records owner, Nick Ó Domhnaill. Less welcome for me but inevitably, so too was Crystal's husband, Mark McDonough. And from the other compass direction would be coming Crystal's mother, Marianne.

Of all these mourners it was with Marianne, Zack and Liz that I most wanted to spend my time. At least, we could share our loss over a few joints. It was now my turn to comfort Marianne, which somehow served to make my own loss more tolerable. I

avoided talking to Mark whose relationship with Crystal I was now more jealous about than ever: especially since he arrived with a girlfriend, Maria, who'd also had a relationship with Crystal and who I'd never known about before. The complications of Crystal's promiscuous and undiscriminating love-life wasn't something I really wanted to bother myself with at the time.

It was on the actual day of the funeral that I met Judy's parents. Like the other mourners, they wisely chose not to stay at the Paradise Hotel, and they made no other effort to get to know the rest of us. This was understandable as Mr and Mrs O'Hara shared nothing with the band or any of its members other than their daughter. I'd got to know almost everyone in Crystal's family and had once even had sex with Crystal when Mark was in the same room. (I'd like to take this opportunity to deny the suggestion that I had sex with him, but of this I can't be absolutely sure.)

The only members of the band who spoke to Judy's parents were Philippa, Olivia and Andrea. Mr and Mrs O'Hara were a world apart from Crystal's bohemian hippy mother and father. Judy's father was a middle-aged man with a prominent paunch, a head shaved to obscure his baldness and not at all comfortable in his Marks & Spencer suit and tie. Judy's mother was tall and lean and smoked as often as she could when not in the funeral parlour. Like her husband, she wasn't used to wearing what they deemed suitable clothes for a funeral (which was probably much the same outfit that they'd wear to a wedding, a christening or a degree ceremony).

"I thought after Judy had agreed to go to rehab, she'd be alright," I overheard Mrs O'Hara say to Andrea. "We all did. She was *so* much better after. We didn't mind the boyfriends and the late nights and all: it was all those hard drugs that were killing her we didn't like."

“We thought it’d be good for Judy to go on tour with you girls,” said Judy’s father. “That Crystal seemed like a nice girl. Really posh and polite, she was. Not like Judy’s scummy boyfriends. Bloody scumbags the lot of ’em, if you don’t mind my French.”

Mark, Marianne and Giuseppe paid for the funerals of both Judy and Crystal and also paid for Judy’s parents’ air-fare and hotel bills. I was dreading that they’d impose some sort of self-indulgent hippy nonsense on the funeral. Would there be a naturist theme to celebrate Crystal’s preferred style of dress? Would there be the scent of incense and patchouli oil everywhere? Would we be treated to a soundtrack of dreary 1960s singer-songwriters? Instead it was a remarkably restrained event or, indeed, pair of events, as both Crystal’s and Judy’s funerals took place on the same day and the combined funeral was a tribute to both women.

Judy’s parents requested hymns that were chosen more for their tunes than their lyrical content, but I wasn’t going to criticise them for choosing *He Who Would Valiant Be* or *Jerusalem*. There were even prayers and a moment of silence. This must have been a source of gratification for Judy’s parents just as much as it would have annoyed the living Judy. Reverend Emery Cleopas of the Rock Hill Episcopal Church must also have been pleased to discover that the band of English lesbian punk rock degenerates he’d been expecting were rather better behaved than the plethora of tattoos, unconventional hair-styles and unorthodox clothes (let alone our media reputation) might suggest.

Music was played at the funeral. That could scarcely be avoided in an event to mark the passing of two musicians. There were two tracks by Crystal Passion—*Rambling Woman* and *Travelling Light*—but there was also a rock song that Judy had

recorded with one of her earlier groups, the Stone Rollers, called *Reach Hither Your Hand*. Tomiko seemed to enjoy the song but I hated it. Otherwise, the music was a peculiar mix of polyphonic liturgical songs played on CD by the likes of the Hilliard Ensemble and the Tallis Scholars in conjunction with some peculiar downbeat jazz.

Was this the kind of send-off that Crystal deserved? Or for that matter, Judy? Polly Tarantella is convinced that it wasn't. That in some way, given her unquestionable eminence, this funeral was yet another humiliation piled onto Crystal Passion's ultimately tragic American tour. She also deemed that it was worse than demeaning for Crystal's funeral to be bundled together with Judy's. That wasn't how it seemed at the time. However much I'd have preferred it otherwise, the respective set of kin believed that a joint funeral for two women who'd worked, lived and died together (more or less) was entirely appropriate. And whatever Polly has to say, it wasn't a cut-price, pauper's funeral. I admit that it wasn't a State Funeral attended by the great and good from the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame or by a line of mournful Grammy winners. Perhaps only this could satisfy Polly.

Given the circumstances, the funerals were well organised and well attended. The attendance was boosted by the presence of Matt, Joe, Skull, Professor Simon Kurrein and Veronica Wilson. And it certainly was no insult to have the service led by Reverend Emery Cleopas. Although nobody in the Giordano family was a regular churchgoer, Marianne had a soft spot for the Anglican community and its Episcopalian cousins. She believed it was better to have the service conducted by someone professionally qualified and, through the grace of the Most Reverend George Carey, he was automatically sympathetic to a group of mostly English people who were having to bury their dead in a foreign land.

Would it have been better to repatriate the bodies?

Well, whatever Polly thinks, this isn't a cheap option. And anyway there's now a corner of South Carolina where Judy and Crystal will forever be neighbours. Furthermore, Crystal's grave is now almost equally as far apart from where her parents now live.

Rock Hill, SC, now benefits from having an extra source of tourist revenue in the form of visitors to the Forest Hills Cemetery which those inspired by the life and music of Crystal Passion can come and pay their respects. The good people of the fourth-largest city of the Charlotte metropolitan area have a claim to fame that would have been denied them if Crystal had been buried instead in a suburban London churchyard.

Would anyone outside of the Carolinas have ever heard of this otherwise unremarkable American city otherwise?

## Chapter Fourteen

Both Crystal's and Judy's parents preferred that their daughters be buried rather than cremated so the final moments of the funeral weren't of two coffins sliding inside a furnace and being incinerated. Instead a procession of hearses snaked out of the funeral home and wound through the roads and avenues of Rock Hill to Crystal's final resting place at the Forest Hills Cemetery. I was a mess of sorrow and tears during the whole drive. The brief respite I'd had from my grief by the need to comfort Marianne abandoned me now that there were others, including Crystal's father, who'd taken on the role. It was Andrea who once again shouldered the burden of comforting her sister as we processed towards the cemetery and the already excavated rectangles of soil into which Crystal and Judy would be separately buried.

I knew very little at the time about the conventions and customs associated with funerals and wasn't at all sure what was the right thing to do. I'd seen in movies that someone or other was supposed to throw something into the open grave, so I tossed in a linen handkerchief that Crystal had once given me. However, nobody else followed my gesture and I still regret having lost this small memorandum of Crystal's life.

The funeral wasn't as private as any of us would have liked. How could it have been? All of North and South Carolina, or at least those in the Charlotte metropolitan area, were interested in witnessing the final chapter of the Catawba River Murder (or the River Park Lynching or the English Rock Star Double Homicide). And there were those, I'm sure, who believed that Crystal deserved to die for the sin of being a godless lesbian atheist who shamed the moral rectitude of York County, SC.

There was a modest coterie of photographers who followed the funeral

procession all the way from the exit door of the Joseph Armistead & Sons Funeral Home to the Forest Hills Cemetery. Although they kept a respectful distance, I could still hear the distant click of camera shutters as I bent my head down in memoriam. However, not even Polly has suggested that it was the relentless hounding of the press that had brought about Crystal's death. It might have worsened the generally sour atmosphere in the weeks and days that culminated in her tragic murder, but Crystal had escaped press attention sufficiently enough for her murderers and Judy's lynchers to remain unknown, undiscovered and free from the penalty of justice right up to the present day.

My enduring hope is that someone somewhere in Rock Hill or the Charlotte metropolitan area, almost certainly middle-aged and possibly balding, is now feeling sufficient remorse for his role in the rape and murder of the woman Polly Tarantella deems the greatest performer of popular music since at least the 1970s that he will come forward to the Rock Hill PD and hand himself in.

And with the funeral over, there was no longer a reason to remain a moment longer in South Carolina or the United States. So at long last (and after far longer than any of us would have chosen) we could set off for Charlotte Douglas International Airport and fly back to the United Kingdom.

I don't believe a single one of us was sorry to leave America behind.

Not that our arrival at Heathrow was especially auspicious. Or particularly anything much. There were no paparazzi or reporters stalking us on our return. In fact, it was pretty much as we'd hoped. The tensest moment was the wait by the carousel for our luggage after which we strolled unhindered through the green channel and then by Piccadilly Line on the long tube ride home.

It wasn't that our tragic American tour hadn't been news. It just wasn't the sort that would justify a press stake-out or more than a few column inches in the middle pages of a family newspaper. Sure there'd been obituaries for Crystal Passion in the Guardian, the NME, the Wire and Smash Hits, but I got the impression that the tribute writers got their information directly from our label, Gospel Records. There was a brief mention of Crystal Passion's murder on *Have I Got News for You* in which more effort was expended in explaining to Ian Hislop what a Riot Grrrl was than on any insight into Crystal Passion or her music. It was obvious that what interested the British media wasn't that a couple of almost unknown musicians had been murdered but that it took place in South Carolina which, by virtue of being one of the original Confederate States, was therefore the home of racism, religious bigotry and mind-blowing ignorance and stupidity. There is nothing that the British—in particular, the English—like more than to feel superior to a nation of straw-chewing, cross-burning, negro-lynching hicks.

A few radio plays of our songs, most particularly by the likes of John Peel and Mark Radcliffe, piqued interest in our music and this led to an early peak in our CD sales, which the hurriedly mixed and marketed posthumous fourth album went some way to satisfy. Although I still think *The Last Word* is the least satisfactory of Crystal Passion's albums, including her first solo acoustic album, it *is* the biggest selling.

“So, who's still active in the Crystal Passion Band?” our manager, Madeleine Tartt, asked when we met her in a small coffee shop near Paddington Station. I was accompanied by Tomiko and Jacquie while Madeleine had her chunky well-thumbed Filofax ever close at hand.

“Andrea says she won't have anything more to do with the band,” I said.  
“Without Crystal, my sister says there's no point in the band continuing.”

“OK,” said Madeleine. “Who else is there?”

“Philippa and Bertha have become an item and they’re travelling the world together,” I said. “I think they might be in India or Armenia or somewhere.”

“I don’t think Olivia’s interested in sticking with the band either,” said Jacquie. “Not if Jane’s still playing...”

“And are you and Jane still in?” asked Madeleine.

“Only if Pebbles keeps it together,” said Jacquie, giving my hand a reassuring squeeze.

“Jenny Alpha’s living with Olivia now,” I said. “So, if Olivia’s left, then I guess Jenny has too. I don’t know where Thelma is, but I don’t think she’d be keen to be involved in a Crystal Passion band without Crystal. And I’m pretty sure the same goes for the Harlot.”

“So, let’s do the sums,” said Madeleine, mostly addressing me. “If we assume that you stay in the band, and Jane and Jacquie too, then all we’re left with is a trio. What about you, Tomiko? Do you want to work with Pebbles and the two sisters?”

“I’d do *anything* to keep the memory of Crystal Passion alive,” said Tomiko with startling conviction. “It’s what she deserves.”

“So what we’re left with is a rhythm section and a sound engineer,” said Madeleine. “Can any of you sing or play guitar?”

I shook my head.

If the three of us were to keep alight the flame of Crystal Passion we’d be more likely to emulate Underworld or Portishead and pursue a career on the dance floor, while I’m sure Madeleine would prefer we followed the examples of Joy Division after Ian Curtis committed suicide or Genesis when Peter Gabriel left (though I don’t think

Jane would relish being the band's Phil Collins).

"So, what do we do now?" Madeleine wondered. "There's an album to be released and I know that Ben from Gospel records would like some remnant of the Crystal Passion band to be out there to promote the record and even go on tour. But I don't think even Ben would be so enthusiastic if all that appeared on stage was a rhythm section with no lead singer and no lead guitar or indeed any lead instrument whatsoever."

"I don't see why not," sniffed Jacquie. "What about Booker T & the MG's? What about the Shadows without Cliff Richard? What about almost every fucking House and Techno crew you can think of?"

"That's not gonna work, Jacquie," said Madeleine. "The album's got a singer and a guitarist on it. In fact, it's got three singers and two guitars. There's gonna be some pretty pissed-off punters if they go to what they think is a Crystal Passion gig and what they get is the Chemical Brothers."

"There's my friend, Steph," I said.

"Steph?" wondered Madeleine. "Who's she?"

"She can sing and play guitar."

"And where is Steph at the moment, Pebbles?"

"She plays with the Palms, a sort of alt-folk group, but I don't think she's doing anything much at the moment. In fact, I don't think the Palms are active at all these days. It's hard for them to find gigs, especially in London."

"She's untried and untested, Pebbles," said Madeleine. "It'd be a heavy burden for her to take on the role of Crystal Passion. Are you sure she's up to it?"

"I could ask her..."

“Well, we don’t have many options left,” said Madeleine. “I’m getting the very real impression that if your friend Steph can’t rescue Crystal Passion then the band has already played its farewell concert.”

I pretty much agree with Madeleine. The last real gig as Crystal Passion—that is with the eponymous band leader—was that first engagement at the Penitence Club where Judy Dildo was the real driving force. What I’d prefer to remember as the final Crystal Passion gig was the first one at the Sisterhood Women’s Music Festival where she was accorded so much respect and adulation.

And no way was Steph a replacement for Crystal. The best that Stephanie Dickens could be was a surrogate Crystal Passion: able to do the job but never able to match the real thing.

But Steph was available and, what’s more, she was thrilled to accept the offer. It was a huge step forward for her. The Palms weren’t really getting anywhere. They hadn’t been signed to a record label and I don’t think any of their original songs were either especially original or even particularly good. But Steph could definitely sing, even if her voice was more a bluesy mezzo-soprano. She was also an accomplished guitar player, at least as good as Crystal in a technical sense. She could also play piano, but as I was already the band’s keyboard player this wasn’t the role we wanted for her. And she knew all Crystal’s music, especially the songs on her singer-songwriter debut album. However, although I’d known Steph since before going to university she was more my sister’s friend than mine. She and Andrea often practiced playing music together in their respective bedrooms: Steph on guitar and vocals and Andrea on the fiddle.

At the time I thought the music they played was flimsy and dreary with

absolutely no beat or rhythm, but I'd probably rather enjoy it if I heard it now.

Steph did as well as she could to fill the lead role in the much diminished Crystal Passion band. In fact, she was probably the most professional and dedicated of any of us. I don't think Jane, Jacquie and me really had our heart in the enterprise. Crystal Passion was dead and every time we played one of her songs (and all the songs were hers), what we all heard in our heads was Crystal Passion's voice and Crystal Passion's guitar whereas what we were actually hearing was Steph's voice and guitar.

And there were several occasions I collapsed into tears during rehearsals when I recalled how Crystal used to enthrall me with her voice and her enigmatic lyrics and her idiosyncratic tunes.

The final tour of an outfit called the Crystal Passion Band wasn't what I'd call a huge success even though it attracted larger audiences than we'd ever had when Crystal was alive. The quartet we now were was not the ten-piece band that performed on *The Last Word*. There was no equivalent to Judy's electric guitar or the backing vocals from Thelma and the Harlot. There was none of Olivia's crazy percussion or Andrea's ethereal fiddle or Philippa's soaring saxophone.

Tomiko did her best to help fill the vacuum. There is a cliché that the sound engineer is a proper member of a band, in our case the fifth member, but Tomiko was truly worth two or three of the rest of the band. She had the imagination and technical skill of a top club DJ and the ability to squeeze out more sound than could be expected from a quartet. I was now able to properly appreciate Tomiko's role when we were a ten-piece band where she managed to balance the weird mix of instruments into a pleasing whole and admired her ability to somehow fill the space of ten instruments with just four.

I loved Steph for her commitment and energy and, as the tour continued, I came to love her in a much more physical way. She and I were soon lovers in a kind of distant echo of the love I'd previously felt for Crystal. Steph was very different, of course, and not just because she'd never dream of taking her clothes off on stage (though she had no such reservation in the bedroom). She was tall, she was slim and her hair was short and enticingly boyish.

Inevitably my relationship with Steph (which outlasted the Crystal Passion band by several years) resulted in the band's final demise. Jane and Jacque became increasingly less tolerant of what they came to view as infidelity even when they shared the same bed as us. And Tomiko didn't want to be caught between the fury of the two sisters and me and Steph however much she enjoyed making love with all or any of us whenever and wherever it might happen.

"I understand, Pebbles," Madeleine said, mid-way through the tour when I announced that the Crystal Passion band would cease to be after the final gig. "Steph's good. Very good. Much better than I dared expect. But she ain't Crystal."

More's the pity, I thought, but I was too loyal to my lover to say anything disrespectful. "Perhaps you could manage Steph in a different capacity," I said. "Perhaps as an artist in her own right."

"I'll see, Pebbles," said Madeleine, but she was obviously reluctant to do so. It was Crystal Passion that Madeleine wanted to manage and with Crystal dead, she no more than anyone else could see the point of the band carrying on any longer.

Steph did find a manager, but one who better understood the alt-folk scene. She went on to play as singer and guitarist with many other bands: including the River Bank on whose records she's sung duets with John River. But Steph wasn't a talented

composer and never made much impact as a solo artist. Although we lived together for nearly a decade, she never understood or appreciated House music or Drum & Bass or Techno or any of my club-oriented musical obsessions. She supported me as best she could when I released my own records, but it was always a mystery to her how I could prefer electronic beats and samples to the beauty of an acoustic instrument and an unmediated human voice.

I sympathise with her taste in music more now than I did when we were lovers. In any case, when we were living together it was a point of pride that we keep our spheres of musical taste apart. But even now when I hear a piece of music by Bob Dylan or Nick Drake or Joni Mitchell or Leonard Cohen I always speculate on how I'd boost the sound and add a drum beat, rather as the Source did with Candi Staton. But it wasn't musical differences that drove Steph and I apart.

It was the love of another woman and in this case it was Steph's love for a girl called Sandra. And it still hurts when I reflect on the fact that Sandra is ten years younger than me, that she's sylph-like slim and has a tin ear. For fuck sake, she even listens to Mumford & Sons! And she watches fucking *X Factor* and *Britain's Got Talent*. How can Steph have got it so totally wrong?

After this short-lived postscript of a Crystal Passion Band, there was little more of note in the band's story for the next few years. The boost in sales of the Crystal Passion record catalogue following Crystal's tragic death soon trickled away. In fact, in the coming years, record sales shrunk to virtually nothing. The corpse of her music was occasionally jogged into life by radio plays in America, Britain and Europe. But while CD and vinyl sales fell off, it was the arrival of the World Wide Web and the eventual legalization and subsequent growth in music downloads that brought Crystal

Passion's music to the attention of those who otherwise would never have heard it and had no prior notion of how it should be classified.

Polly Tarantella's discovery of Crystal Passion and her music didn't happen out of the blue. There were others who'd re-discovered her legacy long before Polly (and hadn't necessarily paid a penny to download it) and some of them loved the music so much they created websites to share their appreciation. Soon there were Twitter accounts to link her new fans who lived in countries as far afield as Russia, Korea, South Africa and Argentina.

When the internet was young and the top search engine was AltaVista, all I'd ever found were bizarrely incoherent references to 'Crystal Passion' on embarrassingly amateurish home-made websites. But Olivia tipped me off that I should have another look and this time when I entered 'Crystal Passion' into the Google search engine I discovered page after page of links to blogs, forums and online articles and reviews all celebrating Crystal Passion. Although most entries were in English, there were other languages that I recognised such as French, German, Spanish and Italian, but also those written in alphabets I couldn't read such as Chinese, Arabic and Cyrillic.

Weirder still for me to read were the countless references to 'Pebbles', a name that had become more a private nickname than a stage-name in the years since I'd played in the Crystal Passion band. And somehow this 'Pebbles' had become celebrated as the band's second most significant member. This might have been a result of my abortive attempt to keep the Crystal Passion band alive, but mostly from the entirely accidental fact that almost all the surviving photographs and film of Crystal Passion featured me in a rather more prominent position than I probably deserved. It might also have been because I had a memorable stage name that was still well-known thanks to

the endless re-runs of *The Flintstones* on television channels across the world.

It was probably no surprise that the growing online interest in Crystal Passion should lead to XL Records deciding to buy the distribution rights to the otherwise deleted back catalogue still officially owned by the now defunct Gospel Records. So, overnight, Crystal Passion became a member of the same staple as Adele, FKA Twigs, Gil Scott Heron and the Prodigy. As someone who'd been a fan of Hardcore and Breakbeat in the 1990s, I was pleased that I'd now become a member of the same label that had released Liquid's *Sweet Harmony*.

Interest in the music grew to the extent that *Pitchfork*, *Quietus*, *NME*, *MixMag* and even *Q* featured articles on what was forever described as the 'unclassifiable' music of the 'tragically deceased' Crystal Passion. It was on this wave of enthusiasm that Polly Tarantella's best-selling biography was published and further increased interest in the band. However, what was most important about Polly's championing was her mission to define Crystal Passion as the most significant music phenomenon since the arrival of Punk and New Wave in the late 1970s. In essence, her thesis is that popular music needed a saviour and that saviour is Crystal Passion. And it's only when you start thinking about it that you realise how bonkers this contention is.

My own view is that Polly's manifesto is compelling to so many people because there's a widely held belief that nothing of significance has happened in the world of Rock and Pop since the 1970s. All you've got to do is skim through the popular music magazines, especially those dedicated to Rock Music, and it seems that everything of importance was happening in the 60s and 70s. Record sales are still dominated by the likes of Elton John, Pink Floyd, David Bowie and the Beatles. Nobody seems to care about the intervening decades. If you browse through magazines like *Classic Rock*,

*Rolling Stone* or *Q*, you'd be convinced that music of any worth simply stopped being recorded after 1975. So, the assertion that this grand tradition has now been resurrected from the grave has great popular appeal to a lot of people. And this is especially so when the contemporary pop you hear on MTV and daytime television is either astonishingly banal or incredibly derivative.

But I don't really agree with Polly at all however much my friends and I have benefitted from her critical re-appraisal. Crystal definitely didn't see herself as Rock Music's Messiah. In fact, she didn't have much interest in the mythology of Rock and Pop at all. No more than me did she believe that popular music is defined only in relation to the hallowed tradition of the four-piece electric guitar band. She didn't see herself as the natural successor of Elvis Presley, John Lennon or even Joni Mitchell. It wasn't that she didn't enjoy Rock and Pop music. It was that she believed in a broader, wider, more varied music tradition. She made no distinction between World, Jazz, Folk or Classical Music. She was more likely to listen to Steve Reich, Henry Purcell, John Coltrane, Mahalia Jackson or Tania Maria than anything by Pete Townshend or Bob Geldof (not that she actively disliked their music).

I don't buy into the myth that the history of music is defined by reference to Pop and Rock. There was a lot of good music around before the Teddy Boys ripped up cinema seats with their flick-knives after having watched a film of Bill Haley and the Comets play sanitised arrangements of classic Rhythm & Blues songs. And anyway, I'd rather go to a club and dance to House, Techno or Bass. And when I'm at home I'm more likely to listen to Boards of Canada, Aphex Twin or Flying Lotus than a tedious Rock album with macho guitar and dreary vocals. But that's my view. And I don't accept the view that there's ever been a major interruption in service during the time

that I've been listening to music.

But I can't complain too much. I may not subscribe to Polly's opinions of Crystal Passion's significance and I certainly don't agree with the more extravagant claims of her greatness as a composer, a musician or a person, but I'm very grateful to the interest and attention paid to the music and the four albums that were released.

It particularly gratifies me to reflect that although Crystal Passion my lover was murdered more than two decades ago, Crystal Passion the recording artist and composer has now risen from the dead and is walking amongst us. I just hope that those who buy her records are actually listening to her music and not just acquiring them to keep up with fashion and to appear knowledgeable about contemporary popular music.

But if Crystal's music is to be remembered forever then I guess the significance of her death is that only her corporeal existence has come to an end and that she has somehow truly attained immortality.