

Rock Stars Stole My Life!

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A Big Bad Love Affair With Music



CORONET

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I

Bloody Marys At The Gates Of Dawn

It's five in the morning somewhere over Greenland and the noise is beginning to fade.

I lift my little window-shade and watch the dawn glow on a curved horizon, then melt back into the deep blue darkness. Is it day or night? Not even the Earth seems to know. It's the weekend and I've had four hours' sleep since Tuesday.

The plane is heaving with bloggers, gossip hacks, journalists, DJs and TV presenters, and we've been hoofing down champagne on the people who manage and make records by Rihanna. It's November 2012, and their twenty-four-year-old pop siren is the hottest ticket on the globe below us. She's playing seven shows in seven countries in seven days, her band, their entourage, the press corps and a handful of fans all transported in a Boeing 777. When some marketing wonk cooked up this caper there might well have been whooping and punching of the air, but it's starting to unravel and it's costing three-quarters of a million dollars a day.

A hush descends and the cabin shuts down with a soft clicking of switches. There's only two of us still awake in the pale lamplight, filing pieces for our magazines' websites, mine tapped out with one quivering finger on an iPhone. It's thirsty work, this reporting, so I wander down the aisle to see if I can scare up some more booze, and there, in the gloom, I see a third face lit by the luminous glow of a laptop, a teenage blogger from Berkeley, California – pointy

shoes, skinny jeans, big hair, a self-styled ‘Rihanna nut’. I’d talked to him earlier.

‘What did you think of the show?’ I whisper.

‘Didn’t see it, man.’ He doesn’t look up. ‘The whole thing was, like, fucked.’

‘The whole thing? You *sure*?’

‘I get to the venue, OK, and I’m supposed to have a seat but I, like, *don’t*? Every time I sit down someone comes along and says it’s reserved,’ he shrugs, ‘so obvy I go to the bar across the road and have a drink.’

‘How many times did this happen?’

‘Twice,’ he says, stabbing at a computer game. ‘Maybe three times. A whole bowl of wrong.’

He left and went to a bar?

‘You left and went to a bar?’

‘To a bar, *totes*.’ Stabbing away. ‘I’m, like, *outta* here!’

Now I’m thinking: Hang *on* a minute. This is the same guy, right, who boarded this tub in Los Angeles and was then flown to Mexico City and Toronto. And he’s now en route to Stockholm, Paris, Berlin, London and New York with some \$800-a-night hotel suites along the way. Total cost to him: nothing at all. On the same plane as the pop star he’s ‘totally mental’ about, who’s asleep in her pod up the sharp end, just the other side of that curtain. And when he first sank into his capacious seat he was given – we all were – a bulging gift bag containing clothes, books, perfume, a digital watch, an expensive set of headphones and a little bracelet with a rock in it. Not a *big* one, I grant you, but a genuine diamond nonetheless. Rihanna’s show normally fills packed football stadia in a vast, cranked-up spectacle of sound and light but on the 777 Tour she’s playing clubs, last night’s a tiny Canadian music-hall with chandeliers and a moulded plaster ceiling. Hardcore supporters travelled thousands of miles in the hope of a ticket.

And he's walked out of her concert – *why?* Because he didn't fancy standing up to watch it.

At this point something snaps in the back of my head. Some rogue neurone kicks in and I find myself thinking, This kid's taken leave of his senses. For crying out loud, *what is the problem?* Was his champagne not quite chilled enough? Champagne, I might add, that was personally served him on the flight to Mexico by the smiling and powerfully attractive figure of Rihanna herself; champagne, I might *also* add, that's fifty dollars a glass and tipped from bottles that appear to be fashioned from pure gold. Did the cognac run out? Are we out of hot towels and sushi? Was there no square of speciality nougat on the counterpane in his hotel room, no linen napkin folded into the shape of a swan with a flower in its beak? I mean, *what?*

Look here, mate, I huff to myself. *We* fought this war for you, the wind-lashed foot-soldiers of the seventies! We bought the records, we queued for the tickets, we served in the dug-outs, we kept the ball rolling so that years later, in the twenty-first century, a highly refined, multi-billion-dollar industry could ferry massively over-served seventeen-year-olds like this guy, eighteen thousand miles round the planet to see his favourite act seven nights in succession for free!

Except he goes across the road for a drink.

I didn't say it out loud, of course. Had I actually delivered this monologue, it would have sparked hoots of derisive mirth. He'd probably have filmed me, too, and stuck the footage on the internet in pursuit of mass public humiliation. So, I give a crumpled smile and slink back to my seat, handing a chinking glass to my fellow reporter.

'How are you feeling?' she says.

'Great,' I say, poking a straw into a Bloody Mary and tapping my phone. And I *am*, I'm enthralled by everything. But when I switch off my light and try to close my eyes, I

can't sleep. I keep thinking back to when *I* was seventeen and the music *I* was 'totally mental' about, and what a quaint, clunky, magical old world it seemed to be.

The creaking portals of my mind had opened and issued their mud-stained memories . . .