

I Feel Love.

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Where the pop stars roam the streets and the famous and infamous collide in an exhilarating crash of fashion, youth and, most of all, energy. Or at least that's how it appeared to an eighteen year old aspiring dancer living in the less than fashionable suburbs of San Francisco. I can remember college lunch hours feverishly flicking through the latest *trax* magazine, eyes enviously gazing down at the huge lists of bands listed under the banner of disco. I'd look longingly at the exotic sounding clubs, the Mindshaft, where the infamous Drag Lolly's played, the famous Rendezvous where all the stars hung out, and, of course, the legendary Toad Hall where the first sounds of disco had been played in the early part of the decade. Somehow, my home town's offering of Man at the Rank Club and Lone Star Cabaret at the Phoenix Club just didn't seem as enticing. I needed more, I needed energy. High energy.

One Monday morning and I was heading down to the big city lights with a friend who'd saved up to buy a kaftan. Not any old kaftan either, he'd come to the city not only to be gay but mainly to buy a red glitter sequin encrusted kaftan he had seen some hippies wear in some out of date film. He was English. Enough said.

We arrived early at the thrift store, my friend buttoned up against the winter's chill in his fashionable retro army jacket while I was resplendent in my matching patched denim outfit, complete with defiant cannabis badge. Twenty minutes later we were sipping beer and whisky chasers in some dark Castro bar trying to act all butch.

Our platform boots formed an uneasy alliance with the icy pavement as we tottered off towards the famous Tin Pan Alley, the street where the stars wore wigs and paste jewels when popping across to buy milk. We didn't see any stars that day. Of course he didn't buy the kaftan. He didn't have enough money in the end and reluctantly decided to come back in a few weeks that turned into years. He did though come to the big city to become gay. And he was English.

And we walked past the Roxy swearing blind that we'd be headlining there one day. Disco was happening, disco was in full swing. I can remember hearing *I Feel Love* for the first time and proceeded to cry believing this music was the future. I wondered why I had never bought a disco album. Here was something real. This meant something. The sound was

fabulous, I was fabulous too, and what's more my friends were fabulous.

As soon as I'd seen some gay young queen singing her hit in many a club, I knew that I could no longer get my kicks out of just throwing my hands up in the air as the chorus played into the refrain and the chorus repeated to fade. I needed to sing my own hit. I needed to be part of this party and most of all; I wanted people to throw their hands up in the air to my record. I half-hardheartedly coloured my long curly hair and had ended up with a hideous compromise that looked like a cross between a failed 1960's footballer and a children's television presenter. I still looked like a hippie but figured with my glowing golden locks I could open doors.

I'd been one of the first to walk through the City Disco Club with shiny PVC trousers and ripped clothes, regularly running the gauntlet of taunts and gay screams from the nine button disco smoothies and wannabe star fuckers, and it felt good. Suddenly people were taking notice. The music magazines of the day became my bible. My world started to revolve around the Castro, where it seemed the eyes of the world were looking on as disco started to rip up the nation's youth. Even better, it seemed that just so long as you could put together a few songs and look the part, you could join in too. And I wanted to be *there*. Up till then, I'd been dancing and backing vocals in vaguely likeable 'disco' cover bands, mainly playing suburban pubs and clubs. I trained hard on my moves; I wanted to be the odd one out and used to spend hours perfecting the right hand gestures to the electronic beat of the record. Other long hours would be addressing the outfit, gold shorts, fuck me pumps and a tight ripped top, there was always a glue gun at hand if something needed glamming up. Here was a different world where you soon learnt the value of playing whatever songs were asked of you, no matter how awful, or face a sea of flying bottles or the soul-destroying pay-off (this is where the promoter will come on mid-set to the cheers of the crowd and pay you a percentage of your fee to get you off the stage. Although I never suffered this fate, I'm sure it must have psychologically damaged many a dancer and singer for years).

I joined a disco band called The Discotheques who seemed to possess all the right ingredients of a good soul fuck tribe, limited musical prowess, a pile of attitude, thousands of sequins and a suitably aggressive 100mph approach to every song. I think our twelve song set used to come in at around thirty minutes, each one belted out at maximum speed apart from of course the obligatory cool tempo attempt at chill out at the end. After a few months I was invited to sing on one of the songs, *Somebody Like You*. One night I did a hand

gesture to the hush of the crowd and the beat of the song and that felt like heaven.

We started out with a couple small pub gigs around the city and the crowds did their best to reproduce an authentic disc' environment. Young queens and aging clones in tight shorts and puma trainers' pogoed to our basic, but insistent repertoire, while we did our best to avoid the snowstorm of stage-bound phlegm. As a dancer, I soon found out that the less clothing I wore all eyes would be diverted to me. As a singer I soon found out that the crowd wanted more than just a hand gesture and swinging of the hips. They wanted back stage action, who was I to say no? Night after night there would be swarms of wannabe star fuckers crawling their way to me, hands touching my face, ripping at my t shirt. This felt like heaven. I was in heaven. There were no rules, no inhibitions, no terms and conditions. And then we finally managed to blag a gig at the famous Roxy Club in the heart of the city. The Roxy! Where Miss Ross had played! Where Summer, Two Tons, Stanton, Chic and the rest of them had played. And we were going to play on the same stage!

There was a rumour some people from newly formed Joystick Records were in the house, they wanted new acts, they wanted a hit record for their catalogue and wanted to see what we could do. We picked up our equipment from the disused garage in the Valleys that served as a rehearsal studio and set off for the bright lights. Someone had brought along some lighter fluid and we all tried to sniff it during the long journey down. The van smelt awful and we all had thumping headaches by the time we arrived at the club. Still we were here and this was it! The Roxy! Bright Lights! We bundled out of the van, leering and trying to look tough at baffled passers-by, before walking up to the club, trying hard to conceal our obvious excitement. Outside was a list of forthcoming bands and our initial enthusiasm was dampened somewhat by the discovery that we'd been booked into *The Next Disco Sound* supporting a band ominously called Handbag. The sound of an extremely camp singer echoing up the dark stairs added to our discomfort, causing two members of the band to start talking loudly in deep voices as we brought the equipment in. I glanced towards the stage and saw an effeminate black queen dressed head to toe in a garish Chinese effect kaftan and a red wig giving it loads as she screeched along to a Miss Ross backing track. The omens were not good. The club looked like it had been squatted for years. There was graffiti everywhere, the toilet doors were hanging off their hinges, and your feet stuck to the floor. But this was disco and it was all about attitude and we had that by the truckload. Playing the Roxy was proof that we really had arrived and were ready to take the scene by

storm. At 9 o'clock, when we walked onstage we realized that the scene had in fact been, happened and moved far, far away. To an audience of seven men and the club owner's dog, our songs fell silently into the substantial chasm between the stage and the crowd. Even the dog fell asleep in front of the stage. During the gig, one dancer ran to the edge of the stage only to find it was merely a piece of drink-hardened carpet jutting outwards. The carpet snapped and sent the dancer stumbling onto the empty dance floor, his amplified 'oof' causing some amusement in the shadows. After twenty minutes of unappreciated social sloganeering we left the stage to the same total silence that had greeted our arrival. 'Perhaps there was an A&R man from Joystick out there,' optimistically offered the bass player, cautiously changing his trousers behind his guitar case. The three members of Handbag looked at us in disgust; they knew we were crap too. The black queen singer just walked past us giving us a bitch look and then shouting, 'Oh my dears, this will NOT do,' before mincing out the back door.

We packed up our gear in silence, loaded up the van and went back to the club for payment. 'Quiet night tonight, ladies,' offered the promoter, handing us a few dollars in loose change. We headed back to the valleys in the early hours, silence in the van. I was determined it was not the end and had my vision of acquiring a similar kaftan. I would get a recording deal. I would be famous, and this was not the end. 'Can't wait for the next gig,' muttered one backing dancer.

I looked out of the window and nodded in agreement.

The moment was not quite right.