

FRIENDS OF MINE

*THIRTY YEARS IN THE LIFE
OF A DURAN DURAN FAN*

a memoir

Elisa LORELLO

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For the thirteen-year-old Me

FOREWORD

I wasn't surprised when Elisa told me she was writing a book about Duran Duran. The first time we met was as guests of the Internet talk show, *Book Chatter*, and we spent a good portion of the episode talking to each other about our mutual love for the Fab Five, rather than to our host about the books we were supposedly there to plug. Afterward, we exchanged messages analyzing their videos and song lyrics. We argued good-naturedly about which of us was the bigger fan. In my defense, I told her about the teenage fantasies I used to have about thanking "my husband, John Taylor from Duran Duran," as I accepted my Academy Award in an always-unspecified category. She admitted that she'd had similar fantasies, and then one-upped me with a casual mention that her second novel was named after the band's 1993 hit song, "Ordinary World."

And, really, why not write about Duran Duran? In the early to mid-eighties, they were everywhere: radio, MTV, record stores, magazines. Their pictures were plastered all over girls' bedroom walls and taped inside their school locker doors. They were pioneers in the early days of music video, filming in exotic

locations and taking full advantage of their keen fashion sense and good looks. But they were more than just pretty faces; they were seriously talented musicians and songwriters, meshing New Wave, pop, and synth with punk and rock. And Duran Duran has stood the test of time, still recording and touring together thirty years after their American debut. Generation X fans—like Elisa and me—are as loyal as ever, and the band stays relevant by attracting new fans via YouTube and Twitter, just like they did back in the eighties through MTV.

But *Friends of Mine* is about so much more than Duran Duran. It's really the story of a girl coming of age after the devastating divorce of her parents, and her struggle to cope with the changes this brought to herself, to her evolving family, and to the world as she knew it. It's about that family's genuine love of music and for each other. It's about a woman finding and losing love, then finding herself.

Through it all, Duran Duran provided more than background music for her life. They provided more, even, than the soundtrack. They provided escape and support, love and strength. The way friends do.

R.J. Keller

Author of *Waiting for Spring*

“I do believe there is another gain to be gotten from the writing of a memoir. . . . It’s a mirage, coming into focus, slightly, slowly, as the process continues. It’s not unlike starting a band, or engaging in any kind of creative activity—one has to believe one has something worth saying or sharing even if that something is ‘I have nothing to say.’”

~John Taylor

**PART ONE:
THE SEVENTIES**

BEFORE THE RAIN



Chapter 1 **Twin A and Twin B**

No one knew my mother was carrying twins. No one except my mother, that is. Sonograms didn't exist back in 1969, and when the doctor listened to the heartbeat, he mistook my brother's on one side of my mother and mine on the other for one and the same. Even then, Paul was my protector. He covered me like a blanket in the womb.

The pregnancy had been in jeopardy from day one—so much so that the doctor looked my mother in the eye and, in a resolute, unwavering tone, declared, “I will do everything I can to keep you and this baby alive.”

I'm so glad he did.

Mom spent the majority of her pregnancy bedridden, leaving my five other siblings—four brothers and a sister—to take care of each other while my dad worked. This happened during the dawn of the women's liberation movement. Dads, even those whose wives were bedridden during pregnancy, didn't do housewife-y things. That's not to say that my father was indifferent to my mother's condition or neglectful of his family. Rather, he eventually wound up needing to sleep on the floor next to her, prayed over her at night, and did the best he could to manage the household and children by himself.

My sister, Mary, was the youngest, and at four years of age was doing some praying of her own—for a baby girl. She desperately wanted a sister, an ally against all those *boys* who teased her and blew up her Barbie dolls with firecrackers.

My brothers, of course, thought a fifth boy would round out the group rather nicely. A quintet. Mike, fourteen years old and already playing music professionally, foreshadowed his lifelong career when he listened to *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in its entirety and repeatedly, first turning down the sound of the right speaker and listening to the left side only, and then vice versa. He was enthralled with the musicianship, the parts and arrangements, the mixing—everything about making a record. Sometimes he did this in lieu of going to school, and he went from *Sgt. Pepper* to every stereo album he could get his hands on. A certain Ed Sullivan show in 1964 had lit a spark in him, and he'd been eating, sleeping, and breathing the Beatles ever since. Twelve-year-old Bobby, more interested in cars than guitars (although he played drums and bass), also had engineering potential, especially with

regard to all things mechanical. Rich (who later inserted a *t* in the middle of his name “for an edge”), at age nine, was rambunctious and mischievous one minute, sensitive and subdued the next. He earned the title of “guitar hero” before it became a brand name, devoting his life to mastering his craft and sacrificing many parties, sporting events, and social occasions along the way. And Steve was the born manager, displaying a take-charge attitude and an impressive work ethic even at seven years old.

My father, Michael Sr., was a forty-one-year-old engineer who worked for a company called Reeves. He was the youngest of three, with two sisters; a German mother, Johanna (we called her Nana), who was hard of hearing; and a Sicilian father, Mariano, who had been scouted by the New York Yankees and forbidden by his father to join the farm team because “baseball was for bums.” Mariano left the his family before I was born. My mother, Eda (pronounced EE-da), thirty-seven at the time of her pregnancy, was born to parents Biagio and Mary, who emigrated from Naples, Italy. We called them Grandpa and Nonni, the latter being an endearing form of “nonna,” the Italian word for grandmother. In LawnGuylandese, we pronounce it “Nawny,” and most of us spell it with a *y* rather than an *i*. Interestingly, we didn’t call my grandfather “Nonno.” Whereas my grandmother had specifically requested the moniker, my grandfather seemed content with the American form. Unlike my dad, my mother was the oldest child, with three younger brothers. She was in college preparing to be a teacher when she married my father—she was twenty, he was twenty-four—and started a family. Not long after my twin brother and I were born, she got a master’s degree in theology and began a thirty-year career in parish ministry. She would get a second

master's degree in pastoral counseling ten years after her first degree.

By Christmastime, 1969, my mother told the doctor, "I think there are two babies in there. Please take them out." She had been in a lot of pain. The doctor, of course, refused. But one month later, in late January, 1970, Mom was dilated, and although her due date was in February, the doctor prepared her for delivery. Shortly after five P.M. on a Tuesday, Dad called the house and spoke to Nonni, who was taking care of my siblings. He asked her to put one of the boys on the phone.

"What do you want, a boy or a girl?" Dad asked.

"A boy!"

"You got it!"

When Mary saw him cheer, followed by the rest of her brothers, she drooped her head in disappointment. Then my brother handed the phone to her.

"What do you want, a boy or a girl?" Dad asked again.

"A girl," Mary whimpered.

"You got it!"

Mary squealed with joy and skipped about the house.

My mother survived the pregnancy, labor, and birth. And we were the first set of twins born in Terrace Heights Hospital in over a year. To celebrate, the nurses paraded us up and down the corridors, and gave us a front-and-center placement at the viewing window.

Our first time in front of an audience. No wonder we were so shy after that.

We were called Twin A and Twin B until my parents decided on our names, Paul and Elisa (pronounced el-EE-sa). Born three

minutes after Paul, I was Twin B.

That same week a rabbi, whose daughter had also given birth, saw us through the viewing window and asked to meet our mother. Mom happened to be standing in front of the window as well, and the nurse pointed her out. The rabbi confessed to Mom that he had always wanted a lot of children.

“You now have a son *and* a daughter,” he exclaimed. “Your family is made!”

“Yes indeed,” replied my mother, “and I have five others!”

His eyes grew wide. “How wonderful!” He blessed my devout Roman Catholic mother. Then he blessed Twin A and Twin B.

I think that blessing has left a mark on us ever since.





Chapter 2 We Live in Harmony

It really is something remarkable to be born with another human being. You have an instant friend. No genetic predisposition toward twins existed on either side of the family prior to our birth, but we turned out to be trend-setters. Two more sets of twins—one male, one female, both identical and on Mom’s side of the family—were born approximately ten and twenty years after us, respectively.

Paul and I were almost inseparable. Lay us down side by side, and Paul would squirm toward me until the tops of our heads

were touching. Only then would we be able to sleep. Our brother Ritch found this to be rather amusing; thus, the moment our heads touched, he'd move one of us over so Paul would start squirming again. I doubt we got much sleep back then. Eventually we had individual cribs, separated by a chest of drawers. When Paul learned to crawl, he'd climb out of his crib, traverse across the top of the chest, and deposit himself into mine. There we gurgled and played happily until our mother discovered us.

That all ended the day Paul finally decided to look down.

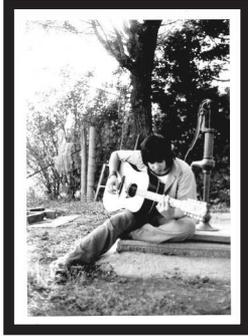
Nonni made clothes for us in matching prints and patterns—dresses for me, jumpsuits for Paul. Humiliating now. Cute then. Special because she made them.

Our names were always spoken as one, without a pause in between: “PaulandElisa.”

The nine of us—five boys, two girls, and my parents—lived in a four-bedroom colonial on a hilly street in suburban Suffolk County on Long Island. Ours was known by the neighbors as “the house with all the cars and guitars.” The guitars covered every couch and chair and bed. Electric, acoustic, big, small. Some with strings missing (which stopped no one from playing them), and some custom-made. Each guitar waited patiently for someone to pick it up to play it again, and the wait was never long. Mary had a little acoustic with her name and flowers painted on it. Ritch owned an electric guitar painted in psychedelic orange and green and yellow Day-Glo colors. Dad's, however, was the grandest of them all: a blonde colored, 1945 Epiphone acoustic with “f” holes, a curved fingerboard, and steel strings. We had to request permission just to look at it, much less play it. Ask any of us to describe our father by a single object or image, and we would all

choose that guitar. So would he. It's still his pride and joy to this day, along with his children.

For the first years of our lives, Paul and I shared the second largest bedroom in the house with Mary. Later, the roster would shuffle; Paul would move in with Steve, and Mary and I would continue to share until I was about eleven, when I would finally get my own room. The finished basement soon became the transition to moving out, à la Greg Brady and the attic on *The Brady Bunch*, starting with Mike. It also became an office, a work-



Mike doing what he loves

shop, and a home recording studio in the eighties. Its final incarnation was as my mother's counseling office. The playroom was more than just a room in which we kids occupied ourselves with our toys—my brothers set up their Marshall amplifiers, Vox organ, microphone stands, and Ludwig drum kit, plugged in, and rehearsed the Beatles catalogue, along with other contemporary popular songs and music they had written themselves.

The cars, ranging from family-friendly Chevy station wagons to fuel-friendly Toyotas to drag-racing GTOs, covered every inch of driveway and garage and even grass. Bobby, Ritch, and Steve especially loved to buy old junkers, overhaul the engines and transmissions, give them flashy paint jobs, and zoom off, leaving a trail of smoke and tire treads behind.

We were a noisy lot, that's for sure.



My brothers were playing music professionally before the age of fifteen. Some of my earliest, albeit faint, memories involve going to the Sunrise Village in Massapequa—a Bavarian restaurant with a bar in the back and private dining areas for special parties. Steve, on a Hofner bass identical in model to Paul McCartney’s but right-handed, and Ritch, on his Day-Glo guitar, together with their friend and drummer, Wayne, played there every Sunday afternoon to a full room and a receptive audience. They dressed in matching satiny shirts and slacks, sans Partridge Family frills and velvet. To introduce them, “Johnny the Clown”—a man dressed in what looked like a baggy blue onesie with pom-pom buttons down the front, a pom-pom-topped pointy hat, Keds, and clown makeup—rode in on a tricycle, propelling it like a kick-and-go scooter. Lorello lore has since depicted Johnny the Clown as an old crank, but I really have no idea.

It never occurred to me that it was unusual, impressive, even, to a) be born into such a large family, with a twin to boot; b) be surrounded by live music at all hours of the day in the form of recording, rehearsal, lessons, or just plain ol’ messin’ around; or c) grow up in the midst of such musical talent. We sang on car trips; Mary would assign harmony parts to Paul and me. At church, Dad formed the folk group—something new for its time—and Ritch and Steve played there every Sunday. Years later, when my sister joined, I tagged along to rehearsals and sang with them. And Mike was the first student conductor of the band at his high school.

Our family motto was “We live in harmony.” No doubt our religious upbringing had something to do with such an upbeat creed. But it was an idealized one, at best. Teasing, bickering, and quarrels took place on a regular basis.

That's not to say we didn't love one another. Quite the contrary. I worshiped my siblings, my brothers especially. Although Mary and I were rivals when we were growing up, she often took care of Paul and me, and even taught us to read and write.

Paul, we quickly discovered, had perfect pitch. One night the entire family sat around the enormous dinner table that dominated our kitchen (along with the perpetual smell of tomato sauce), and my brothers called out Beatles songs to him.

"What's the first note in 'All Together Now?'" asked Mike, and four-year-old Paul hummed the pitch. Mike played the first couple of bars on the guitar and smiled proudly. "He's right!"

Bobby called out the next song: "Love Me Do."

Paul hummed another note. Mike confirmed on guitar. Two for two.

The ante went up. "I Am the Walrus." Again he nailed it. Everyone cheered.

I joined my siblings in this admiration, but deep down I was also envious. I knew these songs just as well, and my intonation was pretty good. But I didn't have Paul's talent and I wanted it.

Even thirty-something years later, at a family gathering, Ritch accidentally dinged his plate, and Paul said under his breath, "D."

Ritch overheard and dinged his plate again. "Dammit, he's right. Freak."

Perhaps I wanted the attention too. I didn't like to be in the spotlight in the presence of strangers, but I was fine with my family. Paul, however, was so shy he couldn't even stand to have the family laugh out loud when he told a joke.

When we were about ten, Paul and I asked Mike to teach us to play the guitar. I used Mary's smaller acoustic, but I had trouble

getting my tiny fingers, my pinkies especially, to adhere to the frets. Additionally, because I was left-handed, holding the guitar right-handed felt awkward. But Bobby and Mary, the other two lefty Lorellos, had no problem holding it the “right” way, so I figured there must be something wrong with *me*.

I got as far as the chords G, D, A, and E, and learned to play the simpler Beatles songs, most notably “Yellow Submarine.” However, while I was still trying to nail a C, Paul not only learned the C with aptitude, but also moved on to C major 7th, followed by the more diverse yet not-made-for-small-fingers bar^d chords. He even reached the point where he didn’t need Mike to chart the chords for him; started figuring songs out himself by ear. Ditto for strumming and finger-picking techniques. And he moved from the Beatles to the Who to the Rolling Stones to the Police. Discouraged by his rapid advancement and my ineptitude, I put the guitar down and tried piano instead. I even took private lessons from someone outside the family. But I was too impatient to learn the scales and finger placement. I wanted to play *songs*—not lesson-book songs with one-line melodies, but complex chord progressions and harmonies and rhythms.

I wanted to be like the rest of my siblings.

Around this same time, I was assigned to play an instrument in school. Guitars and pianos weren’t an option; instead the girls were presented with an array of string instruments, the boys with brass. The bass and cello were too formidable—I couldn’t see myself carrying around anything that was taller than I was, much less playing it—so I opted for the violin. Besides, Mary had taken violin lessons, and if she was playing it, then by God I was going to play it too.

Unlike guitar and piano, I made progress on the violin, taking private lessons and quickly advancing in the school orchestra to First Chair, Second Violin. I even participated in the New York State School Musical Association competition, where I received a second-place medal. I would play the violin for five years before losing interest at age fifteen. You couldn't play Duran Duran songs on a violin.

But I have good intonation, and I also can sing two-part harmony. I developed this ability as a result of Mary assigning Paul and me our vocal parts during extended car trip sing-alongs; and as I got older, it became something instinctive. In most cases I could hear the harmony, didn't need to have it sung to me first. When it came to three-part harmony, however, Mary and Paul were both naturals, whereas I struggled with that third part.

One day I impressed my sixth-grade chorus teacher during tryouts. "Tryouts" weren't auditions as much as an opportunity for the teacher to figure out which kids had talent, whether they were sopranos, altos, et cetera, and which were tone deaf and would need to be hidden. No one got kicked out of the chorus for being a bad singer. Mrs. B. would play various notes on the piano, and we had to vocally match them. When my turn came, one by one she played the notes, and one by one I responded with a corresponding, properly tuned *abbbbbb*, until she came to a bass note that I knew I wouldn't be able to sing because it was outside my vocal range and would force me horribly off key.

No way was I going to allow myself to sing a bad note. No way was I going to be the only Lorello who sucked at music.

So I harmonized the note. Took only a second to think of it.

Mrs. B. laughed—out of pleasant surprise rather than ridicule.

“You sang the harmony,” she said, as if I didn’t know what I’d done. And perhaps I really didn’t know what I’d done. To me, singing two-part harmony came as naturally as reading and writing. I could hear harmony as distinctly as I could hear melody. It never dawned on me that some kids couldn’t hear, much less sing, even the melody, never mind the harmony. And if it had, I probably would have seen it as a disability, like being blind or deaf. How could anyone not be able to hear and reproduce music? How could anyone live in a household without guitars, without amps that were taller than you were—amps you could climb on and go for a ride because they had wheels, and your big brothers would push you from one end of the room to the other while they were moving their equipment to their next gig? How could anyone not know the pleasure of sitting around a dinner table singing the endless final chorus of “Hey Jude”? How could anyone not know what it’s like to sit in your playroom, under the weight of earphones that stick out like Mickey Mouse ears, and sing along to the Beach Boys and the Monkees and *Godspell* and Peter Frampton and *Sgt. Pepper* albums while pretending to play the piano on the wood shelf for hours on end?

Thing is, my brothers never asked me to sing harmony-on-demand the way they did Paul with Beatles-Name-That-Key. I would have to settle for impressing Mrs. B during chorus tryouts.

I was shy, so I just nodded in response to Mrs. B’s statement. She then deemed me a soprano, which meant I was back to singing melody.



Dad's Epiphone: a classic



Chapter 3 Pretty Boys

I've always gone for the pretty boys. Wide eyes, preferably blue. Highly defined cheekbones. Clean-shaven. Puckered lips and toothy grins. Crow's feet framing smiling eyes. Silky hair in textured layers. Black T-shirts and blue jeans, baggy pants and Beatle boots. Stylish, yet casual. Men in uniforms did nothing for me. Neither did the Marlboro Man, Magnum PI, nor Rocky Balboa. Still don't.

Before Duran Duran, Shaun Cassidy was the love of my life. I don't remember when or how I discovered him—he just sort of magically appeared one day—but at eight years old I knew

what it felt like to look at those puppy dog eyes (the first time I'd ever heard of the color "hazel"), round and bright and looking back at me from the poster on the back of Mary's and my bedroom door, watching me, *seeing* me. Sandy, feathered hair that almost fell to his shoulders, a style that only looked good on him. And a smile that made my heart skip a beat, that made me swoon and fervently wish I were ten years older, old enough to be in the running for potential girlfriend. In addition to being a pop singer, Shaun played youthful private detective Joe Hardy on *The Hardy Boys*.

I wore my Shaun Cassidy T-shirt until the iron-on was so faded you could barely see his face. And somewhere there exists a photo of me at the end of Christmas Day, asleep in my bed with his brand new album, *Born Late*, tucked under my arm like a teddy bear—the closest I'd get to sleeping with him. I was a member of the fan club. I knew that his mother was Shirley Jones, that his half-brother was David Cassidy (who wasn't too hard on the eyes either), and that his father was "the late Jack Cassidy." Years later I would understand what that meant, and would know him only through the guest roles he had on *Columbo*—he played some of the best villains.

Thanks to watching *The Hardy Boys*, I learned kissing. It seemed that Joe and Frank Hardy were always kissing some girl by the end of the episode. Solve a mystery, kiss a girl; catch a bad guy, kiss a girl; sing a song, kiss a girl. Rescue a girl, then kiss her. My eight-year-old self had the same visceral reaction to onscreen kissing that I would have ten, twenty, thirty years later—a stirring inside me, equal parts heat and chill, zaps of electric current running through my body. And I knew for sure that I wanted to be on the

receiving end of that Shaun Cassidy kiss. So I would sneak to my room and kiss my pillow, my poster, my window, my canopy bedpost, and imagine Shaun's lips. Or Joe Hardy's. I would make up "scenes" in which I would save Joe Hardy from the evil kidnapper and, after we escaped, we'd somehow wind up on a beach, where he'd tell his brother Frank, played by Parker Stevenson, about how brave I was when I saved him. Then we'd literally walk into the sunset, hand in hand, and he'd kiss me in gratitude. Fade to black.

In hindsight, I think my precociousness worried my parents and older brothers. This was the late 1970s, when every teenage male had a poster of Farrah Fawcett on his bedroom wall, and the outfit of choice for every teenage female was what came to be known as Daisy Dukes (named after Catherine Bach's high-cut denim shorts on *The Dukes of Hazzard*), bikini or halter top, and Candie's shoes—or, if you were like me, the more-reasonable-but-still-popular Dr. Scholl's sandals. For me, "sexy" was something pleasant. Healthy. Vibrant. True sexiness was something natural you possessed rather than something you had to construct. I was never more at home in my own skin than when I was wearing denim jeans or cut-off shorts—the more faded and well worn, the better—paired with various combinations of shoes and tops. I thought one-piece swimsuits, the kind Marilyn Monroe and others of her generation wore, were even more attractive than bikinis. Still do.

But at age eight, I understood nothing of *why* men found Daisy Duke and Farrah Fawcett so sexy. I didn't know what they were doing in their bedrooms, or how their reaction upon viewing these women differed from mine. I saw vitality, an essence of femininity that I couldn't comprehend or articulate concretely, but wanted

to express. I didn't want to wear cut-off shorts and halter tops and high heels so that men would ogle me; I wanted to wear them because they made me feel like a woman.

I eventually discovered that men did look at you *in a certain way* when you wore such clothing, and I didn't want men looking at me like that—more specifically, I didn't want *all* men looking at me like that. Just the one I wanted to marry. Shaun Cassidy could look at me like that.

My father and brothers didn't want men looking at me like that either, and they made it clear to me that a man who looked at me like that wanted something from me, and I sure as hell had better not give it to him. As a result, I spent many years of my life caught in a tug-of-war between trying to cover myself up and trying to be seen for who I really was. Both sides exhausted themselves from all that pulling, and neither won. The rope frayed and unraveled quite a bit too.



Chapter 4 Friends of Mine

I didn't make friends easily when I was growing up. In a way, there was no need. I had Paul, my constant playmate and partner-in-crime. I also had my sister, Mary, who was often left with the unfortunate task of babysitting Paul and me. She used the time wisely and taught us to read and write—*Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* did the rest. We were two of the few kids who entered kindergarten already literate, a rarity in those days. Mary also used to cast and direct Paul and me in plays and talent shows, draw the best treasure maps for Easter egg hunts, and do

the funniest spoof of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. When Mary was off playing with her friends, my older brothers willingly took us with them and their girlfriends to the beach and the park.

I had one best friend outside the family. Kelly and I have often said of each other, “I can’t remember not knowing you.” I swear it’s going to be the opening line of one of my novels sooner or later. But it’s true—I can’t remember a time when I didn’t know Kelly. Her family lived down the street from us; she was the third of four children, a bullet of a runner, and frequently adorned in pigtails and dresses. (I, on the other hand, always detested wearing skirts and dresses, and wore them under protest. Still do.) Kelly had the best backyard, way smaller than ours but complete with a swingset and playhouse built by her dad. Even Paul, shy and withdrawn and refusing to talk to anyone who wasn’t directly related to us, had let her into his world. She, Paul, and I were always a trio. I can’t even remember any two-against-one scenarios.

She never lets me forget about the time she slipped on the ice in our backyard and broke her arm; I never let her forget how creepy her basement was.

She’s still my best friend. My first friend. My oldest friend.

In addition to Kelly and my family, I had scores of imaginary friends with whom I initiated lengthy, animated conversations. Ditto with Muppets, Barbie dolls, and Mr. Rogers. Looking back, I can see how insulated I was, mostly by my own design. But living in that kind of bubble resulted in some problems. Within my home and inner circle, I was vivacious and verbose; outside, however, I was shy, timid, terrified of strangers and even acquaintances, including some of my extended family. In my mind, danger lurked beyond the edge of my backyard. Dogs were loud beasts

that attacked without provocation. Traffic on main roads was menacing. Bullies lurked on the playgrounds. My brothers were my protectors, my suit of armor. It would take me a long time to learn to live without them.

My mother tried to integrate Paul and me with other kids. For months in nursery school, I would talk to no one but Paul and the teacher, speaking to her only in whispers. Paul wouldn't even whisper to the teacher. I didn't realize how much it meant to others when we let them in, although I have a clear memory of a girl who one day proudly announced to our teacher, "Elisa *smiled* at me!"

In kindergarten, Kelly was a liaison who helped us reach out to others, and them to us. For our birthday party, we were allowed to invite three friends apiece, and were at least able to come up with that many. Paul and I had different teachers in first grade, but their classrooms happened to be adjoined, separated by a wall with an opening in it. Whenever I felt anxious or lonely, I peeked my head into the other room just to see him, to know he was there, and was instantly comforted.

One day in the late summer of 1977, I skipped down the street to Kelly's house and found it seemingly deserted. Moreover, she didn't show up at the bus stop when school began. I found out that her mother took Kelly, her siblings (including a ten-month-old), and everything she could fit into an old station wagon back to her hometown in another state to get away from her alcoholic husband.

I missed Kelly terribly, but the physical distance didn't break us up. We kept our friendship alive for the next fifteen years by writing letters. During our teenage years, we exchanged pin-ups

by mail—I sent her all the Rick Springfield pictures I could find, and she sent me all the Duran Duran pictures she could find.

About a year after Kelly moved away, a new family moved into the house behind ours, with two kids slightly younger than Paul and me. They became our new playmates, but only outside of school. We rarely interacted with them on the playground or in the lunchroom, and lost touch altogether when they went to a different junior high school.

When we were slightly older, Mom enrolled us in a summer day camp at the church center. We only lasted a week, but during that time I befriended the counselors. It would be that way wherever my mother sent me—in any youth program, retreat, or group where adults or older kids were present, I gravitated toward them. They didn't seem to mind my hanging out or tagging along, and I couldn't help it. I felt more comfortable around older people. Aside from Kelly, I rarely connected with kids my own age. I didn't listen to their music. Didn't wear their clothes. Didn't understand why their mothers stayed home and mine worked. And I suppose they grew tired of my incessant ramblings about my brothers this, my brothers that, Beatles Beatles Beatles, Shaun Shaun Shaun, yeah yeah yeah . . .

My inner world was active and alive and full, and I was loved and taken care of at home—so why would I need or want the rejection, judgment, and danger of the outer world? Of course, no one wants those things, but that's life, right? I didn't understand that then. I didn't understand what balance was all about. And I wouldn't get it until my thirties.



Nonni and Grandpa in Italy

Chapter 5 I Read the News Today, Oh Boy . . .

I'll start with the chair.

Originally owned by my great-grandmother, it was a fixture in our living room—wing-tipped and re-upholstered in olive green tweed, and a one-time scratching post and lounging area for the cats, much to Mom's dismay. Not a good chair to sit in on hot summer days, when the fabric felt like raw burlap against your skin.

Paul and I were getting ready for school when Dad called us into the living room and instructed us to sit in that chair. The last

time he'd sat us there had been the year before, when he informed us that our grandfather had finally succumbed to cancer.

“John Lennon was shot—and killed—last night.”

Paul and I remember this inflection identically, right down to the precise beats between the words “shot,” “and killed,” and “last night.” We gasped simultaneously, and my thoughts zoomed to my eldest brother, Mike—the one who idolized Lennon and was so inspired by him.

The Beatles were as finely woven into the tapestry of Mike's life—and the life of my family—as Duran Duran would eventually be woven into mine. I've joked with friends that my first words were “yeah, yeah, yeah,” and in reality that probably isn't too far off. Ours was the cool house to come to because my parents let my brothers, and their scores of bandmates, rehearse there. To Mom and Dad, it wasn't noise, nor was it an intrusion or an abomination of musical notes. The Beatles had style and substance. Rhythm and simplicity in their earlier albums, inventiveness and intricacy in their later works. They were rock and roll, but they were also art and poetry. Their drug use never factored into their appeal in my household (or, at least, not in my naïve world). And my mother appreciated Lennon's message of peace as much she did the music.

The Beatles were practically extended family members, but Lennon was special. He was the funniest one in *A Hard Day's Night* and *Help*, the edgier half of the Lennon-McCartney collaboration, the Give-Peace-a-Chance guy.

In 1980, there was no such thing as instant access to all information—no Internet or twenty-four-hour cable news channels. Most of the world didn't learn of Lennon's assassination until the

day after it happened. Many heard the news from the late, great sportscaster Howard Cosell, who announced it during the Monday Night Football game. “Where were you when you heard about John Lennon’s death?” was a question I asked people, the way the generation before me asked, “Where were you when you heard about JFK’s death?” and the generation after me would ask about the deaths of Kurt Cobain or Princess Diana.

The world mourned. So did Mike. So did I, I suppose. I certainly felt the tragedy of it. The deaths of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Princess Diana, John Lennon—they’re etched into our psyches as cultural turning points, iconic landmarks along an historical path. They shake us, individually and collectively. They bring strangers on street corners out into courtyards to embrace and recognize one another in sameness. The world gets very small and cozy in the midst of such grief.

Losing John Lennon was different from losing my grandfather; it packed a bigger punch. To my nine-year-old perspective, Grandpa was old (seventy-six was “old” back then), and cancer wasn’t senseless—that is to say, cancer was a disease, and diseases killed people. That made sense. I didn’t understand cancer beyond that.

Grandpa had always been quiet around me. Pensive. When Paul and I would stay overnight at our grandparents’ house in Floral Park (some of the happiest moments of my childhood), Nonni was the active one—cooking dinner, making up the beds, preparing the table for the following morning’s breakfast before scooting us off to bed. She was the one who took us for walks around the block, with whom we chattered incessantly, and from

whom we asked permission to play in the basement. We slept in raised twin beds in the room that had once belonged to my uncles; and no matter how early we awoke, when we shuffled into the kitchen we found Grandpa sitting at the table, playing a form of solitaire I'd never seen anyone else play, with a deck of Italian picture cards. He'd stop to seat us at the table; offer us orange juice in his broken, Italian-accented English (I had a harder time understanding him than Nonni, mostly because he spoke so softly); make us toast or pour a bowl of the cereal of our choice; and then go back to his game. We watched him in meditative fascination, not feeling the need to talk to him. The only story I remember him telling us was about how he worked in the factory of the Sunshine Biscuit Companyⁱⁱ when he was young—we laughed when he confessed to sneaking an occasional cookie when he wasn't supposed to. In my mind's eye, my grandfather is both that industrious boy and the pensive gentleman. Only in adulthood was I able to see how much power was in his presence.

Grandpa died. John Lennon was murdered. The latter was so cruel, so shocking. I was too young to feel the effects of the Vietnam war, to know how close my brother Mike had come to being drafted, or that my uncle Bob was drafted and had served. Too young to know what Watergate was, to understand corruption and betrayal and violence. Too young to understand the conversations taking place on *All in the Family*, to understand the meaning of *those words* you weren't supposed to say or why you weren't supposed to say them.

So many times I have invited my college freshman students to freewrite about a defining moment in their lives, and so many times I have completed the exercise with them, almost always

choosing “the day John Lennon was shot” and always beginning with my father’s words and the olive green chair. When I turned forty, the moment became even more defining: *My God, this is how old he was when he died*. It’s too young. Too soon. I’ve got too much life left to live. Too many things to do. Too much music left in me. I’ve still got to meet Duran Duran.

John Lennon’s death wasn’t just the end of the sixties and seventies. It was the end of innocence for me. No more Marshall amps in the playroom—and no more calling it the playroom, either; it had officially been promoted to the more mature, less active “den.” No more Johnny the Clown. No more family vacations and singing at the dinner table. No more “We live in harmony.” I was about to enter adolescence, and I was headed straight into the path of the storm.



Chapter 6 The Bomb Drops

Paul, Mary, and I sat at the top of the stairs, late at night, hidden from view, and listened to our parents arguing downstairs. It was the spot where we always sat on Christmas morning, impatiently and excitedly waiting for Mom and Dad's permission to go downstairs, take in the beauty of the scene, and check out the loot.

But this was a different kind of waiting. Anxiety replaced

anticipation. When we couldn't take it any more, we padded down the stairs and pleaded with our parents to stop arguing. Of course, we said it was because they were keeping us awake on a school night. Not that that was a lie, but we were pleading for reasons well beyond a good night's sleep. Any child would.

Perhaps it had started when Dad was out of work for two years in the mid-seventies. In adulthood, I learned what unemployment can do to the psyche of an individual, especially a man, and especially a man in his forties. But as a child, I was sheltered from a lot of things: for starters, I had no idea how close we were to losing our house. I had no idea why I was getting free milk and hot lunches from the school, although I remember explaining to the milk monitor *du jour*: "My mother wrote a letter to the principal and now I'm allowed to have free milk." I had no idea that food stamps weren't something you collected like other kinds of stamps.

We had always gone without to some degree. We had a black and white TV when everyone else had color, and by the time we got color, everyone else had remote control. We wore no-name jeans and hand-me-downs, and we got our haircuts either at the barbershop in McCrory's (the last of the five-and-dime stores; our location perished in a fire in 1991 and the chain eventually went out of business) or down the street at a neighbor's house. Never saw a steak on our plates for dinner. I didn't have the Barbie townhouse or the Slip-n-Slide. And I was neither embarrassed nor ashamed about such things until I went on a camping trip with a friend and was mortified to bring a khaki, military-issue sleeping bag that had belonged to my brother Bobby during his brief stint in the Boy Scouts ten years prior. The thing reeked of ugly.

But financial hardship didn't stop my brother Mike from buying Paul and me comic books or taking us to see *Star Wars*. It didn't stop us from getting Colorforms for Christmas or going to Nana's in Queens, where we could always count on a bowl of Lay's potato chips or Halloween-candy-size Milky Ways waiting for us. It didn't stop us from singing through power outages or pulling together to make sure we had a Christmas. We may not have had many things, but we had each other.

Dad's unemployment ended when Grumman Aerospace Corporation hired him as a supervisor in their solar energy laboratory, but he moved on after Ronald Reagan took office and Grumman's increased defense contracts overshadowed their solar energy program.

A lot had happened since my grandfather's death in 1979. The Iranians took American hostages, and our citizens at home tied yellow ribbons around trees; Ronald Reagan became president and the hostages were released shortly thereafter. John Lennon was murdered. Two of my brothers got married, another moved out, and several family traditions followed them out the door because they were no longer logistically possible without everyone under one roof. And my paternal grandmother, who was older and had led a far more tragic life than my maternal grandmother, went into the hospital, and soon fell into a mysterious catatonic state.

Maybe it was all that change.

But I am Monday-morning-quarterbacking here. And Lord knows I've spent enough hours, days, months, and years analyzing the shit out of how a marriage like my parents'—one that had given birth to seven children, served as a model for Marriage Encounter and Pre-Cana retreatsⁱⁱⁱ at our church, and made it to

months shy of thirty years—could possibly come to an end.

Paul and I were the last to find out. My parents' idea had been to establish a hierarchy of emotional support. Somewhere in the back of my mind, however, I'd known it was coming. All the after-dinner visits to relatives and friends and neighbors had tipped me off.

Me: Where are you going?

Mom: To Uncle Bob and Aunt Rosalie's.

Me: Can I come?

Dad: Not this time.

Me: Why not?

Mom: Because we're going to be home late.

Me: Where are you going?

Dad: To Richie and Venesa's.

Me: Can I come?

Mom: No.

Me: Why not?

Mom: Because you've got homework to do.

Me: I'll do it there.

Mom: *No.*

Of course, what I was really asking was: *Will the two of you please tell us what the fuck is going on?* I wanted Mom to explain why she looked like she was going out to shoot every last one of her family and friends in the heart, like she was picking them off one by one, a knife seemingly held to her own heart, or perhaps already impaling it. I wanted Dad to explain why he looked so sad all the time.

I don't remember the exact date we were told (unusual for me, given my freakish memory for dates and places), but by 1983 the olive green, wing-tipped chair was too small for two thirteen-year-olds to fit in. Thus, my parents instructed us to sit on the couch instead. Mom sat on the nearby rocking chair, barrels aimed directly at us; Dad stationed himself at the other end of the couch.

They said it plainly: "We're separating."

And there it was—the shot fired, the punch in the gut, the atom bomb. Sure, I *kenen*; we had all known for a long time. But we had all been hoping, praying, denying, bartering with God and the devil and anyone else who was capable of making a deal. No takers. And because I had refused to believe it could ever happen to *my* parents, I hadn't prepared. Can one ever properly prepare for such a thing? Can a child of that age and at that stage of psychological development know what to anticipate and how to respond?

My father moved out on July 4, 1983. Throughout the seventies, my family celebrated Independence Day with a barbecue; my brothers took out their guitars, plugged in their amps, and put on a show for the neighborhood. On this Fourth of July, Mom, Dad, Mary, Paul, and I still did the barbecue thing. But then at the end of the day (it was still light out), we all stood in front of Dad's rust-colored Toyota, filled to the brim with his belongings—remnants of a life minus a thirty-year-old marriage and seven children—and he kissed each of us goodbye as if he were leaving for a business trip rather than for good. A surreal experience. I've never liked the week of Independence Day because I have a phobia of sudden loud noises, especially fireworks. For years after 1983, the noise factor was compounded

by the dread of my mother spending the day in tears, my father's absence like a crater in the house. I still can't help but feel melancholy around that time.

John Lennon's death was a loss of innocence. My parents' separation was an annihilation. It was the Titanic. It was Hiroshima. It was the nuclear holocaust everyone had been warning us about. It was the end of my world as I knew it. The end of my family. The end of my blissful bubble.

I was going to need to cope. To survive. To stay afloat. I was going to need a lifeboat.

And I was about to find it on a yacht sailing the clear blue waters of Antigua.

**PART TWO:
THE EIGHTIES**

DURAN DURANGED



Chapter 7

Elisa Elisa, Duran Duran

I knew her because she was in my twin brother's second-grade class, and our families went to the same church. We were in different classes in the third grade as well, but our teachers collaborated on a school production of *The Wizard of Oz*. She was the Wicked Witch of the West, winning the part because she cackled better than anyone else. And when she threatened, "*I'll get you, my pretty, and your little dog, too!*" she drew laughter and applause. I, on the other hand, had the dual role of a munchkin and a yellow brick. Yes, you heard right. A yellow brick. I got to say "*Follow the*

yellow brick road!” and parade around the auditorium, arms locked at my sides, while wearing a painted cardboard box over a yellow felt tunic, black bodysuit, and tights. And topping off the costume? A wig made of yarn. Pure humiliation, although I saved that yellow brick well into my twenties.

Finding another person named Elisa in those days was like finding a kid with Intellivision.

After the third grade, the district transferred me to a different elementary school, and we forgot about each other. Until seventh grade, that is, when we attended the same junior high and wound up in all but two classes together. And since her last name started with F and mine with L, we also wound up seated near each other. Our teachers called us Elisa One and Elisa Two. I was Elisa Two, which seemed appropriate; I’d been coming in second my entire life. Elisa’s mom called us “Elisa Squared” when she wanted to speak to both of us at the same time. We gave each other secret nicknames, using only the initials when passing notes, and to this day we’ve never revealed them to anyone. I wonder if she even remembers them. A third friend of ours called me “Fuzz,” in reference to my frizzy hair, and unfortunately it stuck. I never had the voice to admit how much I hated the nickname—how demeaning it was, although I knew it wasn’t intended to be.

Elisa and I became practically joined at the hip. We passed notes between classes. We talked on the phone for hours. We shopped at the mall. We slept over at each other’s houses on the weekends. I had more fun at her house because it was less cluttered and she had MTV. Mind you, this was back when MTV lived up to its name: Music Television. A twenty-four-hour music video channel, complete with “VJs” who clearly had the best gig in

town. Any classmate whose household was lucky enough to have cable, and especially MTV, soared in popularity. The slogan *I want my MTV* was spot-on.

My house, once thriving with music and laughter and familial chaos, had become a hollow shell. My three eldest brothers were grown and married and on their own. My parents' marriage ended two months shy of what would have been their thirtieth wedding anniversary. The remaining siblings at home each had a bedroom to him- and herself, and we shut ourselves inside them, hidden from one another and the world. We passed through our house like ghosts.

Shaun Cassidy lost my affection over the years, especially after his popularity waned. And I had gone through a weird and rather embarrassing-in-hindsight phase during which a school friend and I worshipped Paul McCartney. Other fleeting, short-lived crushes ambled in and out: Fonzie, Christopher Reeve, Mark Hamill, the cast of *The Outsiders*. None of them kept my attention for long.

I didn't know I already liked Duran Duran. I was still listening to AM radio (I didn't own a stereo yet, just a hand-me-down clock radio), and "Hungry Like the Wolf" was unlike anything I'd ever heard, with its catchy hook and that weird moaning girl at the end. I might have mistaken them for the Human League, whose hit song, "Don't You Want Me," came out around the same time. My memory of first hearing "Rio" and "Is There Something I Should Know?" is even fainter, except somehow I know that I liked those songs even more than "Hungry Like the Wolf." Because of the aforementioned MTV, Elisa was more familiar with the band, and new music in general; thus, when I brought my *Teen Beat* magazine to her house sometime in the fall of 1983, she found Duran

Duran in the centerfold and identified each band member:

Simon LeBon, the singer, was the blonde one
Nick Rhodes, on keyboards was the one with the makeup
Roger Taylor, the drummer, was the James Dean knockoff
Andy Taylor, on lead guitar, was the rocker
John Taylor, the bassist, was the one wearing the fedora

Dare I say it? They were pretty boys. Take your pick.

By the end of the week I was able to correctly match each name to its corresponding, deliciously handsome, face. I also learned that the three Taylors weren't related.

When I slept over at Elisa's, we stayed up well past bedtime watching MTV and waiting for a Duran Duran video to air. "Save a Prayer" was my first—the song wasn't my favorite, but the scenery was striking, and it didn't take long for me to be most drawn to the guy in the fedora. Maybe it was his chiseled features—straight, square chin; defined cheekbones; the playful bangs that nearly overshadowed the clichéd-but-aptly-described almond-shaped brown eyes. Tall. Thin. Sexy, especially when he wore said fedora and black leather pants. Luckily Elisa liked Nick; otherwise, I don't think our friendship would have survived.

For Christmas that year, I received my first stereo—a metal chunk of turntable, cassette player, and radio in one boxed console—and my first three albums: Chaka Khan's *I Feel for You*; Hall and Oates's *Rock and Soul, Volume One*; and Duran Duran's newest, *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*. One month later for my birthday, my grandmother gave me their two previous albums: the debut *Duran Duran* and now-classic *Rio*. I dug the first two albums more than the third, although I recall a dreadful attempt to choreograph an

aerobics routine to *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*.

Two of my brothers began a musical collaboration and transformed part of our basement into a home recording studio. As a result, I learned to listen to songs not only as a whole but also in layers—bass track, drum track, keyboards, vocals, overdubs, et cetera. For instance, when I listened to “New Moon on Monday,” I noticed that Simon’s vocal had a bit of a Bowie feel to it, as did the song. Nick preferred sequencers to piano melodies, sometimes using synthesizers like a rhythm instrument. And Andy’s guitar parts were quite versatile—“Girls on Film,” for example, sounded almost like a jazz riff. “Of Crime and Passion,” was more hard rock. No one instrument or genre dominated the Duran Duran sound. Without the synths and bass on “Hungry Like the Wolf,” you might hear a rock and roll song. Take out the guitar track and you’d hear something resembling disco.

Duran Duran transformed the styles and influences from their youth—glam, punk, and disco—into something new. Whereas synthesizers and sequencers dominated the decade, Duran Duran used the technology as a side dish rather than the main course. They rode several waves at once—of sound and production; fashion and image; and video, setting story to music and vice versa.

One thing was for sure—I was totally on board with this new sound and ready to set aside the music of my siblings’ generations: the Beatles and Led Zeppelin and Elton John and the Bee Gees and the Who and Steely Dan and the Doobie Brothers and the Beach Boys and 10cc and ELO and Fleetwood Mac.^{iv} I was ready to listen to the music of *my* generation, to fully embrace the culture of fashion and glamour and color that Duran Duran would have such a hand in creating and carrying throughout the decade.



For my fourteenth birthday, I hosted a slumber party. As part of the night's entertainment, I checked out the Duran Duran VHS video album from the library—a collection of their eleven music videos to date, including the X-rated “Girls on Film” and “The Chauffeur.” Swearing was forbidden in my house. Any mention of sex was even more taboo. Hell, I wasn't even allowed to watch soap operas, so you can imagine what it was like to watch the “Girls on Film” video for the first time, well after my parents had gone to bed. Like a scene straight out of a Judy Blume book. I loved the videos not only because of the guys' good looks, but also because of the stories they told: “Hungry Like the Wolf” seemed to derive inspiration from the blockbuster *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. “Nightboat” told the tale of a haunted ship out to get the band. The “My Own Way” video was a perfect representation for the song itself: glamorous and glittery and sleek and sexy and artsy and energetic. Some don't hold up as well today, but in addition to “Hungry Like the Wolf,” the video for “Rio” has sustained every bit of fantasy, style, and everything the band came to be known for. The intensity of color alone is enough to make anyone wish to be whisked away to someplace exotic.

OK, so maybe Nick Rhodes's and John Taylor's fake saxophone solos are cheesy.

Elisa and I rated the videos according to the look of each Duran. We preferred blonde Simon to brunette Simon, short-haired Andy to long-haired Andy, and orange-haired Nick with subtle makeup to all-out-pink Nick. Roger never changed; he remained classic, James-Dean-cool Roger throughout the years. As

for John, well, I loved all his looks. His New Romantic days appealed to my artistic, budding New Wave side. His blonde bangs and tan fedora appealed to my fantasies of running away with him. And any time he wore those leather pants was a bonus.

So many times I wish I had known about and followed Duran Duran from the very beginning, starting with “Planet Earth” in 1981. I loved the New Romantic look—the blood-red hair and matching lipstick, frilly shirts and military-style gear in any color but khaki, and suede boots. I loved that the guys wore makeup and dyed their hair. It baffles me now to look at those early photos and think about how *young* they were—in their early twenties—and yet how much older they seemed to me. More baffling is that they still looked older at twenty-one than many twenty-one-year-olds look today.

By 1984 Elisa and I were officially “Duran Duranged,” as her older sister used to say. Back then I didn’t like to be called a “Duranie” because it sounded too teenybopper-ish; even though we were smack in the middle of our teens, I was desperate to be taken more seriously. I also thought, for some reason, that the band didn’t like the term either. In addition to poring over the records and videos, being Duran Duranged involved a variety of behaviors and activities. I was pleased to read that John Taylor loved the colors red and black because they were my favorite colors as well; Elisa adopted pink and gray as her colors upon hearing that they were Nick Rhodes’s favorites. And while most girls were copying either Cyndi Lauper’s or Madonna’s looks, I tried to dress like the five Durans, donning fake leather pants and tucking them into suede boots, then accessorizing them with studded belts and white waist-length jackets. I even tried to get my hair styled like

theirs, begging my mother to at least let me bleach my bangs blonde (she refused). But I never even came close—just ended up with a frizzy, dark brown mullet. The other Elisa was less of a tomboy than I was, and more stylish.

Our regular visits to the mall included a stop at Record World to flip through the Duran Duran 45s, 12-inch singles, and LPs, as well as what looked like enormous pages in a book of posters, scouting for new Duran Duran ones or old ones we hadn't yet acquired but were saving our allowances for. From there we went to a store called Just Shirts to look at Duran Duran pins and T-shirts emblazoned with their iron-on images. On to the drugstore, Path Mark, to raid the magazine stand for the latest issues of *Tiger Beat*, *16*, *Bop*, and the best and newest magazine of all, *Star Hits*, for the purpose of collecting pinups, interviews, and articles for our scrapbooks, such as “10 Things Your Didn't Know About Nick Rhodes!” We knew them all. Or rather, we believed everything we read. We learned that Roger was called “Froggy,” and Simon was called “Charlie.” We learned that Andy had been playing guitar since he was five. We knew all their birthdays and sent John and Nick cards. We drank “Long Island iced tea”—iced tea made by two Long Island teenage girls, basically—after one magazine reported it as John's favorite drink. How naïve.

Elisa and I were becoming increasingly competitive, racing to acquire the most Duran Duran pins (with which we lined our denim jackets and pocketbook straps), compiling the best Duran Duran scrapbook, and donning the coolest Duran Duran T-shirt. She took the gold in all three categories; however, I claimed victory in posters and pinups, with which I plastered every inch of my door, walls, and even the ceiling.

To the world, we were another pair of obnoxious teenage girls in love with Duran Duran. To each other, we were “Mrs. John Taylor” and “Mrs. Nick Rhodes,” although we never formally addressed each other as such; it was more of an unspoken understanding.

I always believed I was at an advantage to be taken seriously by the band, even though I was eight to twelve years their junior. My brothers, however, were their chronological peers; better yet, they were also fellow musicians. *Just get me in a room with the band*, I thought, *and I'll be able to talk music*. At age fourteen, I knew what kind of bass John played in the “Planet Earth” video (a Rickenbacker—it was the only time he was seen with it, and I recently found out he had rented it for the video shoot; otherwise, he used an Aria Pro II), the synthesizers Nick used (Jupiter 8 for *Rio*, Roland and Fairlight on stage), and that Roger had a set of Simmons electronic drums. I knew what a Linn drum machine was. Ditto for an Emulator. I knew the difference between a loop and a sample. I knew what reverb was. I knew what multi-track recording was. I knew how long it took to mix^v a single song, and that the best meal following an all-night mixing session was beer and eggs. And I disliked when my friends used the term “mix tapes” because the previous connotation was so imbedded within me. I even read credits on album sleeves, learning who produced and engineered records, and soon recognized the names of studio musicians.

I imagined myself having conversations with the band as we listened to *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*:

Me: Sounds like you used a compressor on the drums for “New Moon on Monday.”

Roger: Why yes, yes we did. How did you know that?

Me: And I like the drum fills in “Tiger Tiger” . . . you a fan of Ringo’s drumming?

Rog (yeah, we’re on a nickname basis by now): Who isn’t?

Me (to John): My brother has a Hofner bass identical to McCartney’s, except it’s right-handed.

John: Cool! Both that your brother owns that bass guitar and that you know Paul McCartney’s is a Hofner!

Me: So what do you think of David Bowie’s “Let’s Dance”? I think it’s exceptionally produced.

Simon: Us too!

And so on. All the while they’d be thinking, *Wow, that Elisa really knows her stuff. She’s not just some screaming teenybopper who only likes us for our looks. She gets our music. She respects us.*

And whenever I took the Long Island Rail Road into Manhattan with my friends, I carried a cassette tape of my brothers’ demo album in my pocket. I fantasized about running into John or Andy—who, at the time, were recording the Power Station album at the studio of the same name—and handing over the demo, to which they’d listen and take to EMI (yes, I even knew their record label, and that it was the same as the Beatles!), who would then immediately sign my brothers. And when my brothers were onstage giving their acceptance speech for their Grammys, they’d thank me as well as John and Andy, and we’d all become friends.

Yes. That’s how my fifteen-year-old mind worked. No wonder I eventually became a fiction writer.



The rest of my life was a shambles. Some mornings I had difficulty going to school; I would develop panic attacks at the mere thought of going. I withdrew from any kind of after-school activity—the school newspaper, the tennis team, the drama club—and opted to go home and watch soap operas against my mother’s explicit orders, or to the mall if I could get a ride (I was still afraid to ride my bike on a main road; plus, I hadn’t upgraded to a ten-speed like all my friends had). Or listen to Duran Duran albums. Or talk on the phone with Elisa until one of our parents or siblings yelled at us.

Boyfriends? Forget it. Despite having been raised in a predominantly male environment, I had no idea how to interact with the opposite sex on a romantic level, however romantic adolescents could be. Oftentimes, when I liked a boy I went completely overboard, showering him with embarrassing attention and gifts, and scaring him the hell away (and who could blame him for running?). No doubt this was a by-product of the overprotectiveness and sexual suppression I’d been subjected to at an earlier age, as well as abandonment issues triggered by my father’s leaving. I was, paradoxically, desperate to be found attractive and terrified to make myself so. I was eager to be pursued but took the counter-productive initiative of doing all the pursuing. I was terrified of rejection, but gravitated toward people and situations where the rejection had already been pre-determined. Thus, I was caught in a dizzying and emotionally exhausting catch-22.

And yet, I was alive. Alive and in love and immersed in the music and the videos and all that color. Duran Duran showered

me with light and sound. I was not completely lost, although I didn't care much about what was going on in the rest of the world.

At the end of the day, it really was about the music. Duran Duran was the band that wanted to bring a little color to a gray life. They wanted to be the band everyone was dancing to when the bomb dropped. My life was more than gray—it was muddied, blurred, shattered. I wasn't dancing when my parents' bomb dropped on me, but thanks to Duran Duran, I danced through the carnage. The videos, the posters and pinups, the clothes—all of it kept me afloat. But the *music* was the oxygen that kept me breathing. It kept me from drowning.

I often wonder: Without Elisa and those endless hours devoted to talking, sleeping, gazing, swooning, listening, dreaming about Duran Duran, where—or to what—would I have turned? Drugs? Alcohol? Cigarettes? “Just Say No” and all those anti-smoking campaigns in elementary school had actually worked on me; I never even tried them. Still haven't to this day. Food was certainly a comfort, and my weight had been yo-yoing since I was eleven. Was Duran Duran a distraction? An obsession? A drug? I didn't want it to be.

A couple of years later, my fandom still in full force, I saw a TV segment about Duran Duran in which a fan referred to the band collectively as a reliable friend. I remember thinking how stupid that was. Perhaps underneath my righteous arrogance was a yearning for that and more. Duran Duran *were* my friends, and they were reliable as hell. But they didn't know I existed. I wanted them to know my name. To *see* me. To get me.



Chapter 8 As the Lights Go Down

You'd think Elisa and I, Duran Duranged as we were, would have gone to our first Duran Duran concert (and my first rock concert not including my brothers' live gigs) together. Her dad was in sales, working with several sporting goods companies, and had access to tickets for events at Madison Square Garden, Shea Stadium, and the Tennis U.S. Open. He had

acquired two tickets to the March 21, 1984 show at Madison Square Garden, but there was no way two fourteen-year-old girls would be allowed to go to the city at night by themselves. So Elisa was going to attend the concert of a lifetime and see the men of our dreams with an adult, while I would sit at home.

In addition to Elisa, I had made another friend in junior high school, named Bea, who was also a John fan. The three of us used to sit on the heaters by the window ten minutes before English class every day and thumb through the latest *Star Hits*, pointing out the best pictures and singing “Planet Earth” (*ba-bop bop, ba-ba-ba bop bop . . .*). Bea was very pretty—she had short, spiky blonde hair and a trim figure; wore the coolest clothes and shoes and makeup; and listened to WLIR, the cutting edge radio station that, along with MTV, introduced Long Island to bands like Duran Duran, U2, the Cure, the Smiths, the B-52s, the Human League, and more. Bea liked U2 and Bono well before the rest of the mainstream had heard of them, and she introduced me to bands like REM, Depeche Mode, and the Alarm. She also became a vegetarian and refused to wear fur or leather, and while she aligned herself with neither Cyndi Lauper nor Madonna, she equally emulated both in hairstyle and fashion. I envied Bea for her beauty and style, and she and I had deeper, more meaningful conversations about love and God and relationships than I had with Elisa.

To my joy and relief, a show at Nassau Coliseum was booked for April 3, 1984, and my brother Steve agreed to take Bea and me. The night before tickets went on sale, Bea slept over at my house. My mother dropped us off at the Walt Whitman Mall at seven o’clock on a Saturday morning—the Ticketron office was behind the A&S department store, easy to miss.

We were expecting a line, but Bea and I seemed to be the first to arrive. A Ticketron employee gave us two plastic bracelets to reserve our place in line and instructed us to return when tickets officially went on sale. The entrance to the mall was unlocked, so we decided to go inside. For two fourteen-year-old girls, this was magical—never before had we seen the mall so desolate, yet so peaceful. We had the place all to ourselves, like a private playground. In later years, when I worked in retail, I would walk through that empty mall and wish that same whimsical innocence would return in exchange for the grown-up managerial responsibility. I can recall the stillness of the displays as we sauntered from store window to store window, taking in the sights of shoulder pads and spandex, leggings and leather, bangles and boots, Ray-Bans and Reeboks—even back then I loved shoes, and to this day I remember falling in love at first sight with the black and white canvas moon boots I would buy at Baker's.

When Ticketron's opening time approached, we headed back and found that a line had formed—all girls our age, albeit none I recognized from school. Our bracelets assured our chances of getting tickets; the ultimate heartbreak would be to go home empty-handed. Lo and behold, Bea excitedly walked away with three tickets (one for herself, and one apiece for her sister and a friend), and I with two (one for me and one for Steve). Our moms had given us their credit cards with notes of permission to use them solely for the ticket purchase.

On March 21, the New York radio station Z-100 live-broadcasted the Madison Square Garden concert, and I was armed and ready with a blank cassette to record it. Back then the standard practice was to have a cassette already poised in its bed so you

could tape your favorite songs from the radio—it was how you made mix tapes (yes, I’ve since embraced the term) and got free music before the days of digital downloads.

A couple of days later, Elisa had caught a bad strain of the flu. The night of the concert, she was in bed sweating out a 104-degree fever. Her sister went to the Garden in her place and took a friend. I can only imagine how Elisa must have felt—not only to know that I’d be going to see Duran Duran without her in just a few weeks, but also to know that her sister was in Madison Square Garden, the venue the band had dreamed of playing ever since they had formed (one of those details all Duranies had memorized). I felt bad for my best friend. And yet, I felt a shameful bit of satisfaction too. Elisa was undoubtedly the more fortunate one—smarter, prettier, and liked more by the boys. Had I finally gotten an upper hand, gained an edge over her? Even if I had, I was too guilty to revel in it.

What’s more, Chic co-founder Nile Rodgers and drummer Tony Thompson appeared on stage with the band that night. Chic was a major influence on Duran Duran, another fact well known by fans, even if they didn’t know Nile Rodgers and Tony Thompson by name. Thus, we both missed a helluva show.

For the next twelve days, Elisa’s dad frantically tried to score two tickets to the sold-out Nassau Coliseum show, calling in every favor he could. On the day of the concert (I could barely sit still in every class), Elisa’s mom, who worked as an administrative assistant at our junior high school, appeared in the window of the door to our English class, emphatically gesturing a thumbs-up.



I wore my lavender T-shirt with the Duran Duran iron-on—the one that would become as faded as the aforementioned and long-abandoned Shaun Cassidy iron-on—with white baggy pants and knock-off Capezios. Bea outfitted herself in a more stylish black jersey with a graphic illustration of the band, khaki pants and studded belt, and a white painter's cap with the band's logo across the brim. During the drive there, I rode in the front seat of my brother Steve's classic, Stratomist-blue, 1971 Buick Skylark, while Bea sat in the back with her sister and friend, the four of us happily chirping and chattering away. Steve, good sport that he was, said little as he drove and observed the speed limit.

Nassau Coliseum, home to the New York Islanders hockey team and located in Uniondale, about forty minutes from where I lived, was massive to my inexperienced eyes. That night it was filled to capacity with wide-eyed teenagers dressed in fedoras and black chauffer caps. The really cool kids stood apart in brightly colored spiked hair and leather jackets. We found our seats—second level, section 204—and assessed how far we were from the stage using my dad's binoculars: about smack in the middle of the arena. Miraculously, I spotted Elisa and her mom sitting almost directly across from us on the other side of the Coliseum. Bea and I waved like two shipwrecked passengers trying to get the attention of a rescue plane. Even more astonishing, Elisa spotted us too and waved back.

'Til Tuesday was the opening act. Above them, the blank video screen—a new technology to concert events—hid the Stanley Cup banners looming in the rafters and waited in anticipation along with the tens of thousands of girls. I liked 'Til Tuesday, although I didn't know any of their songs other than their mega-

hit, “Voices Carry.” Aimee Mann possessed the very look I aspired to but would and could never achieve thanks to my frizzy hair, stunted height, and chubby body. She had bleached blonde, spiky hair with a long, thin, braided tail. Pasty skin. Baggy button-down shirt and jacket, and capris with black leather wrestling shoes. Plus, she played bass guitar. Maybe if I learned to do the same I’d have an in with John Taylor.

Bea, on the other hand, could’ve been Aimee Mann’s younger sister.

’Til Tuesday finished their set, and the energy in the arena was palpable as the crowd collectively grew more excited, more horny, more impatient for our guys to appear.

The lights went down.

Nassau Coliseum erupted in a unanimous, hormone-induced screech.

The opening interlude of “Tiger Tiger” began, accompanied by a still photo of a tiger on the video screen, and the scream intensified. My insides tightened with giddy, nervous energy as I absorbed the newness of a concert, despite my having grown up with live music on a regular basis and having seen my brothers perform at the Sunrise Village and elsewhere. The two-dimensional figures from my walls and scrapbooks and MTV were about to become three-dimensional, confirming their flesh-and-blood existence.

I could barely hear Simon and Andy harmonizing the vocal introduction to “Is There Something I Should Know?” when another scream thundered throughout the Coliseum, traveling like a tsunami. And it never let up. I was on my feet for the duration of the show, like just about everyone else, and Bea even hollered

out an occasional “I love you!” I later found out that Steve had smoked two cigarettes (you could do that back then—he even let me hold up his lighter during “Save a Prayer”) and put the butts in his ears to shield them from the noise. “It was deafening,” he recalled some twenty-five years later. “That night I knew exactly what it must have been like to see the Beatles.”

Each Duran strutted, jumped, posed, seduced, and played for us on stage and for the video screen:

Nick, dressed in tight red leather pants and jacket, ripped T-shirt underneath; the girls went wild when he took off the jacket and flung it behind him after “Save a Prayer.”

Andy, rocking out in black leather pants, red wrestling shoes, long hair pulled back, and red shirt against his metallic black Fender guitar.

Roger, hidden behind his drum kit against a backdrop of Greek-like columns. Pounding. Focused. Driven.

John, also black-leather-clad, with a silk wrap-around shirt and signature blonde bangs. One shake of his hair or flirty stare into the camera for the video screen set off a teenage female explosion.

Simon, at the center of it all, tall and slim and towering, in baggy black pants and white shirt and terrycloth wristbands, sporting spiky blonde hair and the sexiest moves of all.

That’s them, all the way down there on the stage. They’re real.

When you’re at a concert and the band or artist is really connecting to the audience, you almost get the feeling that they know you’re there, can see you sitting all the way in the boondocks or off to the side, and are playing just for you. You think that maybe, just maybe, you have a chance to make yourself seen or

heard if you raise your hands a little higher, cheer a little louder, clap a little harder. But then you realize what you're up against: They *all* want that. Every girl there is thinking the same thing. They're all screaming and hoping to be seen, to be heard, and, most of all, to be *chosen*. And it's easy to be crushed under the weight of that reality—the knowledge of how high the odds are stacked against you, how impossible your chances are.

So you sing through it.

I tried not to look too much at the video screen. Still don't when I attend any live show. I had seen plenty of Duran Duran on two-dimensional TV and in print, and even though they looked like fashionable stick figures from where I was standing and I couldn't touch them, they were *right there*. I wanted, needed to keep reminding myself of that.

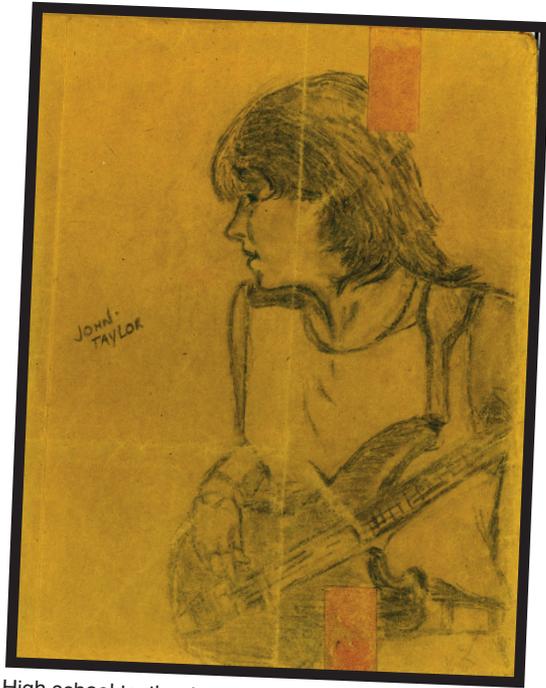
Besides, Duran Duran wasn't a band that lip-synched to their music. They were neither a mere "video band," as the critics had accused them of being, nor were they fabricated and contrived and controlled like Menudo (or, years later, the string of boy bands that would take over American pop music). These guys wrote their own songs and played their own instruments. Andy was a visibly restrained lead guitarist, and I surmised that he had more musical ability than the others combined, save for Roger who harnessed the beat and pumped life into it. John was what my brother Steve politely described as "a solid bass player." Nick was enclosed in a fortress of synthesizers, and although he never broke out into solos à la Keith Emerson of Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, his contributions were vital. Simon was a sexy showman, his vocals sometimes out of tune, although no one seemed to notice or mind.

My favorite performances were “New Religion” and “My Own Way”—frenetic upgrades in tempo compared to the album versions. They’re still my favorites live, along with “Girls on Film,” the millennial hit “(Reach Up for the) Sunrise,” and “Rio.” “Girls on Film”—in particular, the introduction of the band by Simon at the breakdown—was a performance all by itself. The girls went completely manic when Simon introduced John.

When the concert ended (and believe me, you never want it to end), I had just enough money to buy a *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* jersey with cherry red sleeves. The thing to do was wear the jersey to school the next day as a way for kids to show off where they’d been the night before. If you saw someone wearing an identical jersey, you stopped and chatted (“Weren’t they mint? Where were your seats?”), sometimes crossing cliques to do so, and praying your seats were better. Better yet, if you showed up wearing a jersey to a show that was sold out, like Prince and the Revolution, or Rush, you earned valuable jealousy points. I wore my jersey proudly but rarely, wanting to preserve it for as long as possible. I still own it.

Steve drove the four teenagers home, quiet again as he listened to us chattering and singing and oh-my-godding all the way. I still owe him for it.

Not once during the night had I given thought to my frizzy hair, my flabby body, my lack of popularity or a boyfriend, my broken family, the threat of nuclear war, or Big Brother. I wanted to live in those two hours, put them in a bottle and preserve it in a hope chest, for the rest of my life. It was a moment of Now, the kind Duran Duran would sing about twenty-six years later.



High school textbook, paper bag cover art by yours truly

Chapter 9 Fan Fiction

Duran Duran—and John Taylor in particular—had become my creative muse. I don't know if I started drawing as a way to follow in my sister's footsteps or to surpass them, but by age twelve I was copying pinups from my *Teen Beat* magazines—their glossy features made for good line and shade adaptation. For some reason, copying a photograph or a

magazine print (or in some cases, a still life) always came easier to me than drawing something “freehand” or from memory. Sort of like the musical equivalent of learning to play other people’s songs but being unable to write your own. Besides, I enjoyed doing it, and early on I showed signs of aptitude.

Thus, I copied pinup after pinup of John, followed by portraits of Nick, Simon, and Roger as Christmas and birthday presents for my friends (poor Andy, he wasn’t any of our favorites). Some of my best work appeared on my paper-bag-covered textbooks. I knew one photo of John so well from having copied it so many times that eventually I could draw it from memory. A three-quarter view. Eyes looking wistfully out into the distance, as if his mind is lost somewhere. Nose delicately round and perfectly shaped, an exposed nostril the shape of a bean. Cheekbone high. Chin squared. Lips not too thin, not too puckered. Shading for blush on the cheeks and extra dark pencil for eyeliner. Hair: Short. Brown. A shock of bangs covering his forehead and framing his eyes. The sides pushed behind his round ear. Hand resting on his shoulder, yet fingers thankfully hidden (I had the hardest time drawing hands). Red-and-black knit shirt.

My ninth-grade Studio in Art class final project was a five-drawing series of John Taylor; I used that portrait and drew a window through which he saw reflections of various images of himself. I had plenty to choose from, after all. I got high marks for all five.

Studio in Art gave me the foundations for drawing and painting that I still use to this day. My teacher, Mr. Glorioso, was tough on me yet assured me the reason was because I had talent and he didn’t want it to go to waste. And I liked the New Wave clique

composed mostly of art students who dressed in black and wore tweed trenchcoats and had Morrissey haircuts (even the girls) and dyed hair and listened to WLIR and watched *Square Pegs*. I wanted in with them.

Then came the stories.

Writing wasn't a new pastime for me, or a fleeting hobby like drawing or playing an instrument. Rather, it was as much a constant in my life as being a twin. And unlike with music or drawing, I didn't have to try so hard to make it work. From the very first day I learned to manipulate letters to form words, I loved the look and sound of them, loved the endless possibilities of combinations. I loved telling stories and seemed to have a penchant for adapting real experiences into fiction. The very first story I wrote was the result of my first grade teacher giving me a picture and telling me to make up a story about it. The picture was of a boy reaching for a cookie jar. I wrote about this boy who had come home from school and wanted a snack, but the cookie jar was out of his reach and no one was available to help him—his brothers and sisters were still at school, his mother was at work, and his father was “busy giving a guitar lesson.” I spelled “guitar” G-I-T-A-R, instinctively knowing it was incorrect but being unable to determine the missing letter.

Had that really happened to me? No. But I had been witness to and experienced the occasional getting lost in the cracks that can't be helped when you're one of seven children. I had been witness to working mothers, and to unemployed fathers giving guitar lessons to make ends meet.

The Duran Duran stories began as “dreams” that Elisa and I shared with each other: a series of adventure/romance tales in

which our teenage selves magically aged six years (in reality, the age gap seemed so wide and impossible to close) and owned mint apartments in the city. I'd even started referring to the apartments as "flats," like the band members used to say. We had money, we had style, we had careers, and, most importantly, we had beauty.



John Taylor

Enough beauty and wealth and connections to meet the band backstage or in the studio or on a Manhattan street, where they'd fall in love with us in a New York minute, dump their girlfriends, take us on the road with them,

and live happily ever after. The happily ever after was especially crucial to me in those days.

The Elisa who got more attention in the story depended on which one was telling it. When Elisa One narrated, Simon and Nick would mostly fight for her attention; when I narrated, all five Durans would fight for mine. Of course, we always got the Duran of our choice. And there would be kissing—lots and lots of kissing—and lovemaking that was, at best, implied but never specifically stated. I had been programmed not to talk about sex, not to think about sex as *sex*, not to relate to it as anything other than this thing married people did to make babies. Girls my age weren't supposed to have sex. Girls weren't supposed to be overtly

sexual; if they were, they would surely fall prey to something bad. *Lovemaking*, on the other hand, was different. It was romantic, intimate, and much safer—at least, that was the way it had been presented to me in the soap operas I watched when no one was around to catch me. I'm not sure I fully grasped that sex and love-making were the same physical act. The latter seemed gentler, more meaningful, and less invasive than the former. Yeah. I was all about the lovemaking.

In secret, of course. Always in secret.

I began to record these stories in my notebooks whose covers were graffitied with blue-ball-point-penned Duran Duran logos and declarations of love. And pretty soon the other Elisa was written out of the narrative completely; the stories became portals of escape in which John and I would rescue each other from the pains and pressures of the world. I was desperate to be rescued back then. I was equally desperate to be the rescuer of someone else, because it would mean that I was needed. That I was valuable. In the fallout of my parents' separation, I felt all but forgotten. My siblings and I were each coping by ourselves rather than helping one another through it. I'm not sure why we didn't pull together more as a family, other than that the separation had ripped us apart so badly we no longer felt like one. It was even more painful to be a broken family posing as whole. Those first few Christmases when my dad joined us and then left after dinner were especially torturous—would've been easier had he not been there at all.



I put all the stories in a box and hid them in that godforsaken cardboard yellow brick from my third grade costume in the back of my closet. In 2012, while packing to move back to the northeast from North Carolina, I opened the box of stories (sans yellow brick) for the first time in twenty-five years.

I found about a dozen stories total, all written on looseleaf or spiral notebook paper, some still with jagged, frayed bits from being ripped from their bindings. My penmanship was much neater then than it is now, as if I wasn't in as much of a hurry to get the words on the page. I even archived each story, giving them titles such as "James Bond John" and "The Party." Each one was date-stamped in pen, the time period spanning from February 1985 to March 1986. Some were just a few pages long ("one page" includes front and back), while others were ten or more pages. The longest was twenty. I'd composed an even longer one: a time-travel epic that transported me back to the Rum Runner club in Birmingham, England, circa 1980; because it was too thick to fold in half, it required its own binder. I don't know what became of it.

At the top of the pile sat the last and longest; halfway through reading it, I had to put it down due to a combination of embarrassment and sadness. And yet, I was struck by how well crafted the story is—part action/adventure, part romance, all the elements of fiction present. Our romantic heroes met in unusual circumstances: John Taylor jumped into the backseat of our heroine's car to run away from screaming fans—we soon learned that he was running from more than them. Characters with vulnerabilities. An antagonist in pursuit of our heroes. Rising

action, well paced—we don’t know right away from what (or whom) John was running or what the villain was after, building some suspense for the reader. Drama: our heroes exchanged “pleading looks,” “frozen tears,” and “soft touches.” Climax and resolution and, of course, the happy ending.

I didn’t know how to identify the heroine in these stories. Each story was written and narrated in first person; a character named Elisa Lorello is the protagonist, and she was a complex hybrid of adolescent and adult. Reading them in 2012, she sounded and felt and looked like no one resembling *me*; thus, as I describe her here, I can’t help but use third person. The story opened with our heroine coming out of a mall (showing her adolescent side), but she’s got a car and an apartment and lived independently (as if she were a full-fledged adult). She made her living as a freelance artist in a way that might be described today as “Carrie Bradshaw capitalism.”

The dialogue was surprisingly fluent—clearly I had a flair for that early on without realizing it. Had this story come from one of my teen students, I would’ve encouraged her to keep writing.

But in addition to craft, I noticed the gripping honesty of a girl in pain. I only needed to read one page, one paragraph, or even one sentence from each story to identify the patterns: The fictional Elisa possessed an independence and maturity that the teenage me once idolized. She had boyfriends (plural, of course). However, in some stories she also had a dull life; thus, she was whisked away on some glamorous, Hungry-Like-the-Wolf adventure.

The hyperbolic drama I wrote was reflective of the soap operas and music videos I watched. John Taylor was the hero, but in several stories he was also the victim, and my forty-two-year-old self lamented that, for it was really a projection of *me*. The fictional

John Taylor is depicted as a man in pain, success having taken its toll on him physically and emotionally. He is inevitably attracted to Elisa because she sees past the famous pop star—a guy who just needs to be loved, to be heard, to be validated not by models or thousands of screaming girls, but by *one* person.

One ordinary person. The *only* person who could understand him.

Which, of course, makes her extraordinary.

I portrayed myself as the rescuer, but the prose reveals the truth of my desperate need to be rescued. How I needed to be seen! How I needed to be validated! I depicted a guy who needed to be seen as plain underneath his dazzling good looks, but I craved to be a dazzling woman underneath my plainness. I hungered for maturity, for recognition as more than just another screaming Duranie. In the stories, John and Simon and the rest of the band see within minutes that “She’s not like the other fans. She takes us seriously.” I needed the truth of those stories to be taken seriously. I wanted to be more than the band’s fan. I wanted to be their friend. I wanted their love.

Those stories were about belonging somewhere and being someone. I suppose that’s the theme of every adolescent’s story. As I read them I could even see the rift that was coming between Elisa One and me—the competition was too intense. She was smarter, the better tennis player, got better grades, wore the more fashionable and expensive clothes, had the prettier bedroom, owned more records, and had a bigger allowance to spend. Worst of all, the guys I had crushes on liked her rather than me. I couldn’t measure up, no matter how hard I tried. She had parents who were married and wanted to stay that way. The one ace I re-

tained was my siblings—talented, professional musicians who loved me—and perhaps that was one more reason why I'd placed them on such a high pedestal. They were the only card I had to play, the only thing I had going for me. At best, I could shine their shoes. But I could never walk in them; they were too big for me to fill. And yet, I equally yearned to dance to the beat of my own drum. Maybe that too is the desire of every teenager: to simultaneously be authentic and like everyone else, to stand out and blend in.

Why have I saved those stories? I never even dared to peek at them in more than twenty-five years. Years ago, I disposed of every journal and diary because I didn't want to be weighed down by my past. Yet I've never been able to bring myself to destroy the stories. Surely it wasn't about the writing. Most of it is cringe-worthy now. But back then I frequently took out those stories and devoured them the way avid readers of Judy Blume or J.R.R. Tolkien do. I don't think Elisa ever knew that I'd put any of them on paper. I've never shown them to anyone; doing so would allow people to see whom I was desperate to be. There's too much painful reality in that fiction. What I've described here is the most anyone knows. I wrote and read those stories in secret, and I saved and savored them in secret. I've stored and preserved them all these years in secret.

I saved them because they saved me.



"Leave it unfinished," said Mr. Glorioso. (Painting of John Taylor)



Chapter 10 Feed the World

I was no stranger to activism. My mother had been vocal about things like the need for nuclear disarmament, an end to Soviet occupation in Afghanistan and violence in El Salvador, and the negative effects of “Reaganomics” on the poor. Her activism rubbed off on me when I joined her at a march against the opening of a nuclear power plant on Long Island. I might have been the only kid under fifteen there. My mother had taken to heart the Gospel passage: “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me,” and did her best

to be a living example of that teaching. The parable of the Good Samaritan has always been one of my favorites.

So when Bob Geldof organized Band Aid in late 1984 and co-wrote “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” with Ultravox’s Midge Ure, I was all over it. This was a teenage activist’s dream, and my beloved Duran Duran had been the first to get on board with the project that featured the A-list British pop groups of the eighties.

That Christmas I bought the single (and one year later the 12-inch extended version, which included recorded messages of “Happy Christmas” from all the participating artists), videotape-recorded the music video when it aired on network television and replayed it incessantly, and graffitied FEED THE WORLD on notebooks and desks at school. I wanted a FEED THE WORLD T-shirt styled à la FRANKIE SAY RELAX in the worst way. Never did get it (or the actual FRANKIE shirt). On Christmas Eve, one of our family traditions included a private “agape” (pronounced AH-gah-PAY) service in which we read the Gospel passage depicting the night of Jesus’s birth, broke bread, and placed the infant figurine in the manger. The service always ended with an acoustic rendition of “Silent Night.” This marked the second Christmas since my parents had split up, and we were down to just Mary, Paul, and me for the agape, but Mom insisted on adhering to the tradition. I lobbied for “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” in lieu of “Silent Night.” My sister learned the chords on the guitar, and she and I sang it together. I prayed for an end to world hunger.



On July 13, 1985, I felt connected to something even bigger: Live Aid. Maybe because this was the first event in my lifetime that almost the entire planet simultaneously watched on television (with the possible exception of Charles and Diana’s wedding). Maybe it was because youth and idealism go so well together. Or maybe it was because pop music was at the center of it all. The concept wasn’t new—George Harrison had organized the Concert for Bangladesh in 1971 to raise money and awareness for the war-torn, weather-ravaged third world nation, enlisting a supergroup that included Bob Dylan, Ringo Starr, Billy Preston, Ravi Shankar, and Badfinger, to name a few. But the scale and magnitude of Live Aid made the Concert for Bangladesh look like a gig at Sunrise Village. It was a twenty-four-hour, bi-continental event. Aerial views of jam-packed Wembley Stadium in London and JFK Stadium in Philadelphia were staggering to look at. Performances and videos from other places, including Russia, Japan, and Australia, were streamed in via satellite. And when Joan Baez—no stranger to activism herself—declared on that sweltering day, “This is your Woodstock,” I did more than believe her—I *owned* it.

One by one the bands of my generation—including U2 and Spandau Ballet and Sade and Allison Moyet and Adam Ant—performed with the bands of my brothers’ and sister’s generation—the Who and Queen and Paul McCartney and David Bowie and Elton John, among scores of others. Network television had agreed to run about eight hours of the event live, and I was present for most of those eight hours, vigilant with the VCR, cutting out commercials and technical delays. Of course,

that was the cheapskate viewer's choice—once again, MTV was the place to be, with the VJs' ongoing live coverage. By then the MTV VJs were celebrities themselves, a kind of royalty with all-access passes to all things pop. They were *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* paving the way for *The Breakfast Club* and the Brat Pack.

I didn't have MTV, however. My brother Mike did, and I pestered him to make sure he taped whatever Channel Five didn't cover, which included Duran Duran's performance.

One of the highlights of the day involved a call from my grandmother, Nonni.

"Are you watching the concert?" she asked.

"Of course! Are you?"

"Some of it," she replied. I was so proud.

"Did you see the Power Station? The bassist and guitarist I love are in that band." I'd seen them perform at Jones Beach ten days earlier.

She did and, in her thick Italian accent, opined that theirs was one of the better performances because "they didn't sweat." That she was even watching Live Aid was just one more reason why I loved her so much.

Some of the most notable performances happened after Channel Five stopped airing the concert: Mick Jagger and Tina Turner practically set the stage on fire, their chemistry was so hot. Bob Dylan offered a ragged and unintentionally comical acoustic set backed by a rather baked Ron Wood and Keith Richards. The Led Zeppelin reunion recharged a crowd that had been melting in 100-plus-degree temperatures all day. And Eric Clapton put on what had to be, musically speaking, the tightest, sharpest performance of the entire concert on both sides of the globe.

Duran Duran hadn't performed live together since the previous year, but they were still very much in the spotlight with their recent smash, the theme song from the latest James Bond movie, *A View to a Kill*. In terms of appearance, the band members had changed from pretty pinups to rougher, tougher rock-and-rollers. John had put on weight, and he and Andy, both with long, cascading hair, looked as if they had been doing some hard partying (which, I learned years later, was true). Simon was back to brunette and sported a bit of an Elvis Presley look. Nick had also gone jet-black, and wore more makeup than ever. Roger . . . well, Roger looked like Roger. Cool and composed and laid back.

Duran Duran's Live Aid set consisted of "A View to a Kill" (during which Simon's voice cracked horribly on the final chorus), "Union of the Snake," "Save a Prayer," and "The Reflex." Despite Simon's bad note and the fact that they hadn't played together in months, the band sounded tight, and their set was one of my favorite performances of the day. Simon kept the energy up and even invited the crowd to dance.

What no one knew about that performance was that it would be the last one given by the original five band members. They wouldn't reunite for another twenty years. I wonder: Had I known, would I have watched it differently? Had some part of me already known?

Numerous times I imagined seeing my brothers perform alongside the scores of other bands and artists, to the cheers of fans worldwide. I could see Mike sitting at a keyboard, singing into the mic with the same mannerisms as Michael McDonald, Ritch wowing the crowd with his guitar solos and good looks, Steve keeping the beat and making his "bass face." They deserved

to be there. But they were nowhere near Philadelphia or London that day. They weren't even near the TV. Instead they were working—either laboring in the studio to finish their demo for prospective record companies, or at grinding day jobs in order to pay rent and feed their families.

My twin brother's memory of Live Aid is that I used it as an excuse to get out of doing all my chores. Maybe I did. But I remember feeling as if my donation, my participation consisting solely of watching the event, had made a difference in someone's life. I believed music made a difference. Music fed the world, that day and every day. It had fed me all my life. And Duran Duran continued to feed me. Lord knows I was still hungry.



More paper bag cover art, this time of the Power Station logo

Chapter 11 Breakups

Roger Taylor and Andy Taylor leaving Duran Duran in 1985 was like my father leaving all over again. OK, maybe it wasn't *that* bad, but I took it hard. I blamed myself for not liking Andy more—for not finding him as attractive as the others or speaking up on behalf of his and Roger's musical abilities and contributions to the band. In an adolescent's life, such

things equate with the end of the world. And perhaps, for me, it was yet again. Who would save me now?

Prior to Roger's and Andy's departures, and following their mega world tour in 1984, Duran Duran split in half and formed two spinoff groups: John and Andy formed the Power Station with Robert Palmer and Tony Thompson, produced by Chic bassist Bernard Edwards; and Simon, Nick, and Roger formed Arcadia, keeping *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* producer Alex Sadkin.

I loved Power Station, loved its edge and Robert Palmer's smoky vocals that oozed old-school rock and soul and blues and jazz. He seemed more big band than bubblegum pop, and yet he went on to make one of the most iconic pop music videos ever, and blended rather well with eighties style and fashion and extravagance. I equally loved Andy's guitar playing—could instantly recognize his distinctive sound when I heard it on Palmer's "Addicted to Love" and Belinda Carlisle's "Mad About You." I loved that John was progressing musically, although, in retrospect, I could see the physical effects of the drugs he was taking. At the time, I'd been rather naïve regarding the extent of his drug and alcohol use, and in hindsight I'm glad I was. And I *loved* Tony Thompson's hard-hitting percussion. That drum sound was unlike any other. "How did he get it to sound like that?" I had asked my brother Mike in reference to the engineer, Jason Corsaro. I don't remember what Mike told me then, but years later I found out it had a lot to do with Tony hitting the hell out of his kit, and the acoustics of the studio for which the band is named. Mike knew one of the session keyboardists credited on the album—Dave LeBolt—and I was dying for an introduction to him so that my millions of degrees of separation from John Taylor would decrease by one, and

perhaps he could tell John and Andy about me. I never did meet Mr. LeBolt.

Hell, even Simon LeBon once said he wished he'd been the front man for that band.

“Some Like It Hot” is still one of my all-time favorite records. It's a well-produced, blood-pumping, sexy song, equal parts rock and funk.

In contrast, although Arcadia's *So Red the Rose* album featured some impressive guest musicians including Grace Jones, David Gilmour, and Sting, I didn't have the same appreciation for Arcadia as I did for Power Station. Perhaps it sounded too much like a Duran Duran record, minus John's syncopated bass lines and Andy's razored riffs. Or maybe I loved Power Station more than Arcadia because the former were closer to my musical roots. My brother Ritch could've been in Power Station. So could Steve.

Nevertheless, I was eager for Duran Duran to get back together, and I was devastated when they pared down to three. But at least they weren't completely gone from the scene.



I didn't dislike the *Notorious* album when it came out. The title track was fantastic and funky. The more stuff I heard with Nile Rodgers at the helm, the more I appreciated him as a producer and a musician. In addition to producing Madonna's *Like a Virgin* and David Bowie's *Let's Dance* albums, he also produced Duran Duran's single, “The Wild Boys,” and before that he re-mixed “The Reflex,” which became their biggest hit. *Notorious* was a little funkier, a little brassier, a little crisper and more clean-cut than

anything else the band had done. But it didn't have the color and energy of *Rio*, or the unique sound of the debut album. It didn't have the heart of Roger's drumming or the soul of Andy's guitar playing.

But I stuck with them because they were still Duran Duran. And when I had the opportunity to see them at Madison Square Garden in 1987—seventh row seats—I jumped on it. Bea and I went together again.

You'd think having seats that close would be something to gloat about, but in reality it turned out to be quite a letdown. I couldn't see a thing; all the girls were standing on their chairs (safety and common sense be damned), and I came close to falling and injuring myself twice before finally giving up and remaining on the floor. Additionally, we somehow were pushed to the outside of the row, away from John and Simon and closer to "the new guy," guitarist Warren Cuccurullo, whom I had not yet embraced and sadly wouldn't until after his departure, despite his musical contributions to "Ordinary World" and other stellar Duran songs. I saw him too much as the meddling stepparent at the time.

Meanwhile, the other Elisa and I had been going through our own relationship friction. For one thing, our unspoken competition had hit an all-time high, and I could no longer stand falling short. She had everything first—a Swatch, a Sony Walkman, a pair of Guess jeans, even a Power Station album ("*She doesn't even like John!*" I cried). Such things sound superficial now, but when your self-esteem is already hanging by a thread and you're immersed in the Breakfast Club world of cliques and status, it seems like someone is always keeping score between the haves and the have-nots.

We were moving in different social circles too. Elisa was preppier and friendlier with the honor students, while I was more artsy, trying to fit in with the New Wave kids. And although John, Nick, and Simon—collectively our favorites—kept Duran Duran intact as best they could, Elisa's and my Duran Duranged days were fading quickly. So were the sleepovers and the stories and the shopping. Maybe she was outgrowing it all. Maybe we both were. But I wasn't ready to let go, and I was scared to be cut loose.

I still needed them.

Some thirty years later, John wrote about that time in *his* life—about how he, too, was desperate to keep Duran Duran together, to maintain the momentum that had brought them to the top of Pop Stardom Mountain. I experienced something similar with my writing career. When you go to number one, you want to stay there. And you want to relive the excitement of getting there, because in retrospect that was the fun part, even though it was so arduous at the time. But since you can't repeat it, you're constantly disappointed. Only when you accept your present reality and stop trying to measure everything else you accomplish against that past achievement do you find a new kind of satisfaction, both with your life and the art you make.

In my late teens, however, I felt that increasingly hollow feeling of letdown, the kind of craving that keeps you standing in front of a fully stocked fridge and finding nothing to eat. If only I had known that John and I were going through the same thing at the same time. If only we could've fully understood it then and comforted each other. If only we could've been friends.



The late Robert Palmer. Unfortunately this sketchbook, including this drawing, was lost when my portfolio was stolen a couple of years later.



Chapter 12 Happy Birthday, Elisa

My sister Mary's Sweet Sixteen birthday party took place in 1981. My parents rented a Knights of Columbus hall, and about thirty people attended. Mike, Ritch, and Steve on keyboard, guitar, and bass, respectively, along with Ritch's then-wife-to-be Venesa on vocals and a friend named Sandy on drums, had formed a band called Lexy Star, and they were the headlining act at the party. Such a thing wasn't unusual back then; young garage bands were a commonplace, and they cut their teeth playing school dances and graduation parties until DJs started moving in on their territory. My brothers had been recording and playing too long and too professionally to be considered



a garage band, but an audience was an audience, and the guest of honor was their little sister.

I reveled in being surrounded by all those high-schoolers with their long hair and rugby shirts and Lee jeans. I was dressed in the remaining traces of the seventies: wrap-around denim skirt, baby pink blouse, knockoff cowboy boots. Watching Lexy Star's set was an even bigger thrill. Venesa warmed up the crowd and belted out the Beatles' "Birthday" like any other rocker, fiery and full of sex appeal. When Melissa Etheridge finally hit the scene, I was slightly less impressed than my friends were because I had seen Venesa's performances years before.

The moment Lexy Star struck their first chord, I knew they were going to play my Sweet Sixteen party. Regardless of where they would be—famous and touring the globe, or obscure and making ends meet—come January 1986, they had a gig booked.

It didn't matter to me that by 1986 guitars were out and synthesizers were in. Didn't matter that all the cool kids were renting bigger and better spaces than the Knights of Columbus halls. Didn't matter that DJs had become the primary form of party entertainment.

I invited about twenty people to my brother Bobby's house; he had a split-level, and we decorated the basement with red and black streamers. Of the twenty, about five never RSVPed. To make matters worse, it snowed that day, and most parents weren't willing to schlep their kid a half-hour across the Island on a good night. All in all, I think I was lucky to host ten guests. I was far from popular anyway. And I didn't care.

Actually, that's not entirely true. I felt their rejection more than I did their absence. I'd wanted them to care too. I'd wanted them to see this band, to feel what I felt in the presence of their musical talent and energy, because when an older, longer-haired, and fedora-clad incarnation of Lexy Star jammed that first riff of "Birthday," I was happy as could be. It was like having a famous band do a private gig for someone of privilege. When they followed up with covers of Power Station's "Some Like It Hot" and "Get It On" (Andy would've been impressed with Ritch's guitar solos), I was even more thrilled. It fueled fantasies of my wedding to John, in which we'd forego hiring an actual band and instead Duran Duran would jam with my brothers. And of course, Robert Palmer and Bernard Edwards and Nile Rodgers would all be there too, so they'd join us. Helluva party.

Some seven years later, Duran Duran would record a cover of Sly and the Family Stone's "I Want to Take You Higher," and it would match the energy of that party performance in which Venesa wooed the dozen adolescents by extending the mic and doing a call-and-response of "Hiii-ye!" I was mortified, actually. Although I could belt out a tune in the shower with the best of them, singing in front of people was a nightmare. My throat closed up, my intonation flew south, and I wound up singing the

word horridly off key in front of not only my friends but also my *family*. Ugh. I would've been less embarrassed by a wardrobe malfunction.

I have photos from the party: me, dressed in an oversized gray sweater covering acid-washed jeans tucked into maroon suede boots; rubber bracelets, bangles, and a single Swatch watch climbing up my right arm; my hair short, less frizzy in the winter, showing off my new, unbraided rat's tail that would eventually grow down to the middle of my back. My friends are outfitted a little less casually in low-heeled leather pumps or flats, blue or yellow plaid shirts, spandex leggings or baggy pants. The two guys (Paul, and Marc, my friend since fifth grade) in Capezio's, black pants, and pullovers shirts, their sleeves pushed up past their elbows. In one photo, everyone is dancing; in another, we're all sitting on the floor and lined up against the wall, watching the band more passively. I can't read the expressions on my friends' faces—can't tell whether they're bored or doing something they've never done before or are just content, hanging out as teenagers do. But the look at my face reveals all. I'm glowing, oblivious to whether anyone else is having a good time. I'm actualizing the goal I'd set years before in that Knights of Columbus hall.

Only one pre-recorded song was played that night. In addition to the party and the live gig, I'd made one other special request for a birthday gift: I asked Mike to write me a song.

I'm not sure if growing up as a twin made me crave a certain kind of individualism every now and then, or if it was being the youngest of seven. Either way, you don't get a lot of your "own." You share a lot. Not that that was so awful, but I coveted things I didn't have to share—anything with my name on it, for instance,

especially since finding anything with the name “Elisa” on it was about as rare as finding a pearl in an oyster. And it wasn’t just things. I remember asking my dad to spend a day with me, just the two of us, years before my parents separated. Mom wound up spending the day with Paul, and I don’t know if my parents had pre-planned this, but the four of us just so happened to end up at IHOP (we used to call it “the pancake house”) at the same time afterward. One of those days you file away in your memory bank for the rest of your life under “Happy.” Paul and I weren’t treated like identical twins, but we did share a lot. We had matching toys, cups, and Fonzie T-shirts, and only he and I would be able to distinguish which belonged to whom based on the most minute detail: a patch of faded paint, a scratch in the wheel, and so on.

A song from Mike would be my own, something from him to me. Something special.

Thus, when the band finished their set, Mike popped a cassette into the tape deck and pressed play.

The first thing I heard was a sample, not unlike the “Fle-fle-fle-fle-flex” that opens “The Reflex,” only it’s “La-la-la-EL-EE-SA,” followed by a drum fill—more specifically, Tony Thompson’s Power Station drums. Mike sampled them. What came after that I can only describe now as pure eighties pop—a waterfall of sampled strings, slap bass, and Yamaha DX-7 sounds to make up a melody to accompany Mike’s vocals and lyrics:

*My love to you this special year
 And hoping all your dreams come true
 Those may be good things to say
 But I just want to sing to you*

Happy birthday, Elisa!

Happy birthday to you!

Happy birthday, Elisa!

Happy birthday to you!

I still play the song every year on my birthday (having since transferred it from cassette tape to both CD and MP3), and it makes my love cup runneth over, especially on those milestone birthdays. Better yet, it's still a catchy pop song. My big brother knew me so well.

No doubt my friends had way more spectacular Sweet Sixteen parties than I did, with twice, even three times as many guests and balloons and catered food and tablecloths and party favors and dance floors and DJs. But today I can't remember a single one of them.





Chapter 13 Pre-Existing Conditions

Donovan was in my Fashion Illustration class and he was, in a word, beautiful. He was two years older than I. Tall and lanky, just like John Taylor. Dark, silky hair that came down to his shoulders. Sharply defined cheekbones like Nick Rhodes, and pouty lips like Simon LeBon. A smile that made me goofy. Another pretty boy.

He was as much of a Duran Duran fan as my friends and I were. Dressed like them and looked like he'd blend right in with the band during a photo session—and he could pull off the look, which was hard to do. When someone like Huey Lewis wore a red suit and Ray-Bans on stage or in a video or during an interview, he looked ultra-cool. When a guy walked through the mall in the same outfit, he looked like an asshole. But not Donovan. He was runway-ready wherever he went.

He was also gay.

I knew what *gay* was in the mid-eighties. It was a derogatory term for something that was grossly uncool. It was also a guy who was effeminate and liked other guys “that way.” Looking back, no one seemed to talk much about it. It was taboo to say it, much less suspect it. Taboo to *be* “that way.” And yet, androgyny—“gender-bending,” the media called it—was in style. Men wore makeup and pierced both ears; women wore men’s shirts and glasses. Capezios and Cavariccis were designed the same for men and women. Women buzzed their hair short and men grew their hair long. When my brother Ritch had a gig or I had concert tickets to Robert Palmer or Howard Jones or Hall & Oates, we raided each other’s closets. Hell, even John Taylor wore a dress—an actual woman’s *dress*—over leather pants when he performed with the Power Station on *Saturday Night Live*.

It was all copacetic—as long as you liked the opposite sex at the end of the day.

Gay guys were great friends for girls because they shared so many qualities—they liked to talk about fashion and MTV and boys—and even though they might like the same boys you did, the chances of them winding up with said boys were about 99.9

to .01. They were safe in other ways too. A gay guy wasn't going to try to cop a feel when no one was looking, wasn't going to pressure you to go all the way, and wasn't going to tell his friends the next day that he scored with you (unless he was trying to keep up appearances). I was afraid of those things back then.

So I increasingly found myself attracted to gay guys. They could love you—not romantically, but at least they wouldn't reject you because of anything you said or did, or the way you looked. It's not you, it's them. The rejection was a pre-existing condition, hard-wired. No surprises, no bombshells. Of course, that didn't quell the toxic, paradoxical fantasy that the boy would “change” for you. Trying to find love and acceptance in a pre-rejected relationship is like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, inundo notwithstanding. But that's the thing with insanity. You keep doing the same thing while expecting different results, and you don't even realize you're doing it until you've had some therapy. And sometimes even that doesn't stop you.

Come to think of it, I don't think Donovan was really in my fashion class but rather was hiding from someplace else he was supposed to be. I sat at the next worktable and stole long glances at him, mentally pleading with him to read my mind and to be my friend. One time he cut up a well-used Sticky Hand^{vi} and tossed the pieces up like little spitballs on the ceiling (where they stuck for months unnoticed), utterly amused, and no one saw him doing it but me. When he spotted me gazing at him, catching him in his mischief, he laughed and *winked*. As if to say, “It's our little secret, just you and me.”

I just about melted.

I already knew I wasn't cool enough for him. Despite my want-

ing and trying to be, I wasn't one of the New Wave kids. My mother wouldn't let me dye my hair, but I had it cut so that I'd have a rat's tail. Tried to lighten my already-pale skin tone by applying baby powder to my face instead of foundation. Wore bright red lipstick that stuck to my teeth, and clumpy mascara that I believed was responsible for giving me chalazion cysts. Paired spandex leggings with T-shirts I'd painted—Campbell's soup cans à la Warhol, the Power Station album cover, and the *Godspell* portrait—and red Chuck Taylor high tops. I listened to WLIR, but I was more into ABC than U2, Howard Jones than Jane's Addiction. I was synth pop, not hard core. And I knew I wasn't even close to measuring up, not only because my look was a derivative imitation, but also because I didn't have the mentality of an artist. Didn't have the confidence. I could draw, but not like them. The crowd Donovan hung out with went into Manhattan by themselves on the weekends. They went dancing at Spize and Spit and Paris, New York. They bought tons of vinyl bootlegs and imports from this cool store called Tower Records in the city that was four times the size of Record World. They traveled to the Soviet Union on student exchange trips. They were fearless. At least, that's the way they seemed to be. They drew lifesize cutouts of the people I wrote about in my secret stories, and not copied from a photograph—they created them as easily as I now create my novel characters. Drawing and painting came as naturally to them as writing does to me. But at the time I desperately wanted to be like them, to be one of them. I wanted to be urban. I wanted to be bohemian. I wanted to be fearless. But I was hopelessly suburban. I was afraid of everything. I was hollow. I was the epitome of uncool. And I was broken. I'd been betrayed. Abandoned. Forgotten.

I'd been rendered invisible.

The first time I talked to Donovan was in seventh-period study hall. I'd managed to snag the golden seat in front of him, where I sat side-saddle (making it easier to turn around and face him should the opportunity to do so present itself) and copied a pinup of Nick Rhodes on my sketchpad, hoping he'd notice—I'd heard that he was a Nick fan.

And sure enough, it happened. We made eye contact, and then he rolled his eyes around.

"I am so bored," he muttered.

"I know," I said, willing my face not to shine. "Me too."

And we began to talk. We talked about Arcadia, and how they compared to Power Station and Duran Duran. We talked about his other two favorite groups—Kajagoogoo and Japan (I went out and bought their albums within the next week, although I already had the 45 for "Too Shy")—and I told him about seeing Power Station twice in '85 and Howard Jones at the Coliseum in '86 and Duran Duran at Madison Square Garden in '87, and how the live version of "Wild Boys" was *way* better than the studio version. The rest of study hall passed in a blur.

Lo and behold, I became friends with Donovan. Sort of. He now knew my name, recognized my face, and would say hi in the hallways and at Record World (he worked there) or whenever he didn't cut study hall. But he never went out of his way to talk to me, never invited me anywhere, never exchanged phone numbers with me.

Alas, I was so desperate to remain his friend that I became the puppy dog that doesn't go away after you feed it once. When the quarter ended, we weren't in study hall together anymore. And

because he was a senior, I soon stopped seeing him in school at all. Thus, I would visit him at the Chanel counter in Macy's, where he worked as a makeup artist after quitting Record World. And when I was old enough to go dancing at Paris, New York, I would try to get a glance of him there. Eventually he stopped acknowledging me, stopped saying hello, stopped talking to me about David Sylvian.

I had scared off another one.

I don't know what became of Donovan. Someone said he went to live in the city. Someone else said he became a drag queen. Yet another person speculated that he became a woman. Regardless of where he wound up or who he became, he remained one more reminder of how desperate I was for everything I couldn't have.



Chapter 14 Paris, New York

Paris, New York was located on Jericho Turnpike in South Huntington, the most unlikely location for one of the coolest dance clubs on Long Island. In my seventeen-year-old opinion, that is. Like I was an expert in such things.

The club wasn't even in the heart of Huntington Village. But if you listened to WLIR, if you dressed in black, and if you were an art student in high school, you went to Paris, New York. The venue didn't typically showcase English pop like Howard Jones or Duran Duran. For that, you went to Spize or Spit.

Recently learned fact: Duran Duran's first US gig was at Spit in 1982. Even if I'd been a fan at that time and had known about the show, I probably would've been too young to go.

The closest to pop that Paris, New York came was Depeche Mode, or Duran Duran's "All She Wants Is." Otherwise, Paris, New York played the Cure, the Clash, the Smiths, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Jesus and Mary Chain, Love and Rockets, Japan, and the Alarm. It played "These Boots Were Made for Walking" followed by "Warm Leatherette." It played Kraftwerk. Occasionally someone would start slam-dancing on the dance floor, but more often than not a pack of black-clad, studded-belt-and-bracelet-bound, Mohawk-cropped, punk-lite kids bobbed up and down in their combat boots, Doc Martens, or paint-splattered Chucks and minded their own business.

I started going to Paris, New York when I was seventeen. Eighteen was the age limit, but the bouncers never proofed us. By the time I moved out of my teens and into my early twenties, I preferred the music and atmosphere of Spize and Spit, albeit I can't remember the size or lighting or décor of any of them. Dark, I guess. Nightclubs were always dark and moody and smelled like wood and cigarettes and weed and sweat. I went to Paris, New York to be seen, although I was more invisible there than anywhere else, despite the fact that I stuck out as such a wannabe. The irony of the New Wave clique is that while they aim to achieve a sense of individualism, eventually they all look the same.

I went to Paris, New York so I could tell people I hung out at Paris, New York. I went to be cool. To fit in. To try to be an artist. To try not to be afraid.

It's not there anymore. Hasn't been in a long time. And yet, I

have dreamed of going back, although I wonder what, specifically, I would expect or hope to find. What would I be looking for? I'm interested neither in blending in nor standing out anymore. I'm OK with admitting to liking the British pop rather than the hardcore stuff. I still own my Chucks, and I finally dyed my hair jet black. I'm comfortable living in my skin now. I don't desire escape. I don't desire validation. Maybe I will look for that teenage me and tell her she doesn't need to be there.



Chapter 15 Prom Night

The year: 1988. Hair was big, drum sounds were bigger, and greed was good. Glasnost was paving the way for the fall of the Iron Curtain, and the late night talk shows were revving up for four years of Dan Quayle jokes.

I would surmise that most Long Islanders from my generation have the same memory about their senior prom, if they have any

memory at all: a lot of taffeta, ugly tuxes that smelled like industrial dry cleaning fluid (who needed drugs and alcohol to get wasted when all you had to do was take a whiff of your cummerbund?), expensive limos, wilting corsages, and awkward slow dancing to Spandau Ballet's "True." The rest is likely a blur because you and your friends chipped in for a limo to take you into Manhattan where you paid a hobo five bucks to buy you alcohol and you got completely blotto and wound up waking up on Jones Beach wondering how you got there as the tide brushed up against your ankles, costing you an extra fifty bucks in dry-cleaning fees.

I didn't have a date to the prom. Didn't have a boyfriend. Didn't even have friends at the time. Elisa and I were no longer speaking to one another. Bea and I were also drifting apart.

Paul had a date and went with a group of friends he made at his part-time job at the public library. I was never into the whole frilly-dress thing, so a part of me thought that missing prom was no big deal. But another part of me was lonely. That loneliness had nothing to do with prom and everything to do with a world I so desperately wanted to escape. And yet, at the time I was afraid of living large, of living out loud.

So I stayed home.

My brother Ritch had temporarily moved home after his seven-year marriage to Venesa ended, and Mom had a new job with a parish that required her to work a lot of nights, including that one. Maybe Ritch felt sorry for me. Or maybe he was feeling lonely himself. Whatever the reason, he invited me out to an arcade after dinner. While he played all the car-racing simulation games, I wandered around looking for something to interest me, the addictive Pac Man

and Space Invaders days long behind. Eventually he caught on.

“Wanna go get a hot pretzel?” he asked.

“Sure,” I said, shrugging my shoulders.

We left the arcade (which I found puzzling, considering there was a concession stand there). After driving for about twenty minutes, I asked why it was taking so long to get a hot pretzel.

“I know a good place,” he said. Had I been paying more attention, I probably would’ve noticed the devilish look in his eyes—an expression he wore when he was up to no good and knew it. When he wore that look on stage, watch out.

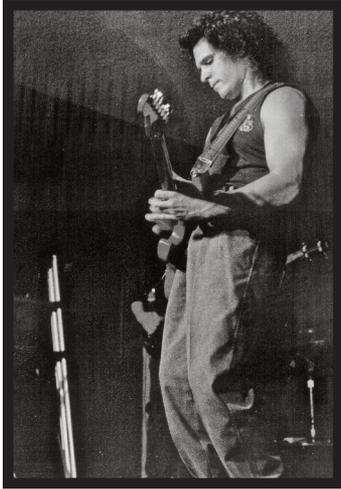
Another twenty-five minutes, and we were in Manhattan.

We parked and walked to Rockefeller Plaza to visit the statue of Prometheus, and no doubt we were both thinking about our grandfather, the one who’d been dead for almost ten years. The one who played Italian solitaire at the crack of dawn and dominated a room with his silent presence. Grandpa had worked in a foundry called General Bronze, and in addition to Atlas and some of the ornate bronze work in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, General Bronze and my grandfather also cast Prometheus.^{vii} Well, not all by himself, but my siblings and cousins and I have always referred to Prometheus as “Grandpa’s statue.”

Ritch and I next set our sights on the NBC building located at 30 Rockefeller Plaza, known then by insiders as “30 Rock”; the rest of the world would also call it that twenty years later, thanks to Tina Fey. We wanted to try to get past the lobby, and I joked that we could tell the security guard I won a “Hang-Out-with-Tico-Torres-in-New-York-City” contest on MTV. My brother bore a striking resemblance to the Bon Jovi drummer, and I . . . well, I looked like someone who watched a lot of MTV, even

though it had stopped being cool sometime after Live Aid.

It wasn't such a crazy story. Ritchie Lorello has looked and acted like a rock star all his life. I used to describe him to my friends as "a brunette David Lee Roth who plays guitar like Eddie



Guitar Hero

Van Halen." The year before, after he and Venesa dropped Bea and me off at Madison Square Garden for the Duran Duran concert, they went to the then-happening Hard Rock Café, where they were pulled out of line and escorted inside. They looked like a rock and roll power couple. Perhaps I didn't know the word then, but what I was trying to describe was *charisma*—of all the Lorellos, Ritch wears it best.

He walks into a room, and heads turn. Eyes light up. Women take notice. He smiles, and his charisma only amplifies. Put a guitar in his hands, and fireworks happen.

Ritch was the most protective of my brothers. He used to say that he planted "spies" that followed me wherever I went, making sure guys weren't having their way with me. Would some people find this creepy, intrusive, overbearing? Maybe, but I relished the attention, and loved the idea that someone was looking out for me. Besides, I knew he was joking.

And wherever we went together, I was proud to be seen with him. Still am. One Memorial Day, he and I went to the supermarket to pick up some last-minute food essentials for the Lorello

barbecue. Rather than push a cart or carry a basket, Ritch mischievously tossed every item at me, one by one, over his shoulder, determined to make me drop the whole load. The more I caught, the more he giggled and doubled his efforts. When I caught every last damn jar, box, and bottle, he conceded to me with admiration. Even an impressed stockboy remarked, “Wow. She’s good.”

When Ritch eyed an enormous bag of charcoal, I threatened, *“Don’t even think about it.”*

And one day in 1993, when I worked at the Warner Brothers Studio Store as a stock manager, my friend and coworker, Mark (not to be confused with my childhood friend Marc), appeared in the stockroom.

“Hey Elisa, do you owe anyone money?” he asked.

“No. Why?”

“There’s a scary-lookin’ dude with long hair and a biker jacket here to see you.”

I grinned. “That’s my brother.”

A rock star hanging out with a homely eighteen-year-old? Hey, it could happen. And on prom night in 1988, it did.

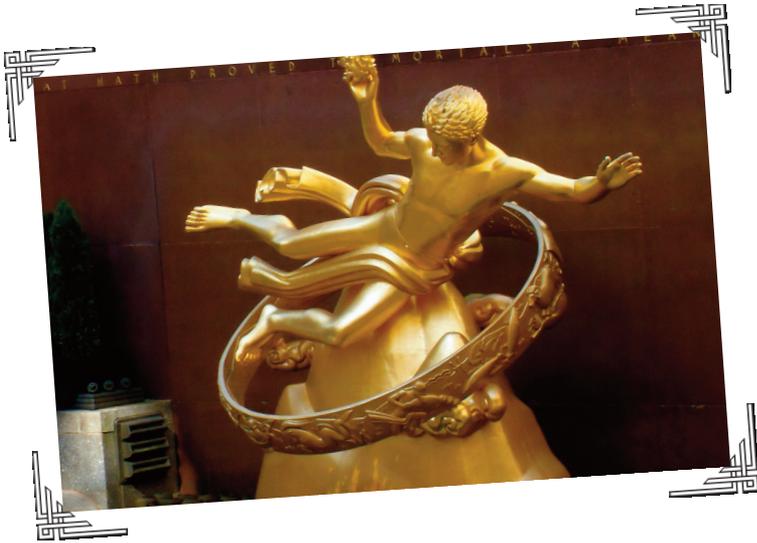
For a couple of hours, Ritch took me out of my bleak world and amped up my life. And it doesn’t matter that I have no pictures to mark the occasion and no memory of the things we talked about. I don’t need them.

Does it matter that he never received recognition of his talent by Eddie Van Halen or Eric Clapton, or that he never achieved the fame of Duran Duran? On one hand, I am heartbroken that he didn’t. He could’ve shared the stage with any of them. He could’ve been a pinup on a teenage girl’s wall. On the other hand, I see the life he has today—it’s far from a rock-star world of pa-

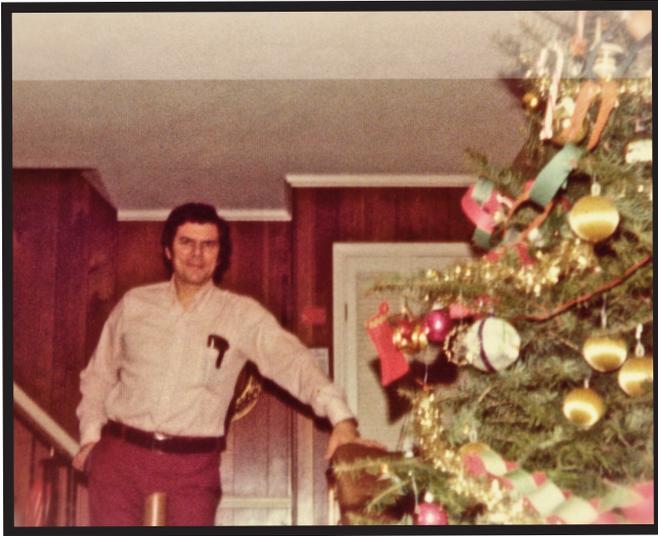
parazzi and strings of gigs and flights and hotels, but he lives his life on his own terms. He plays in a band, he raised his children, and he's in a committed relationship with a woman who gets him. He still lives out loud. And of all my siblings, he's the one who most encourages me to live out loud. He prompts me to reach for stars, and to maximize and capitalize on my talents.

He still looks out for me.

And by the way, that was the best damn hot pretzel I ever ate.



SPECIAL SECTION:
PHOTOS



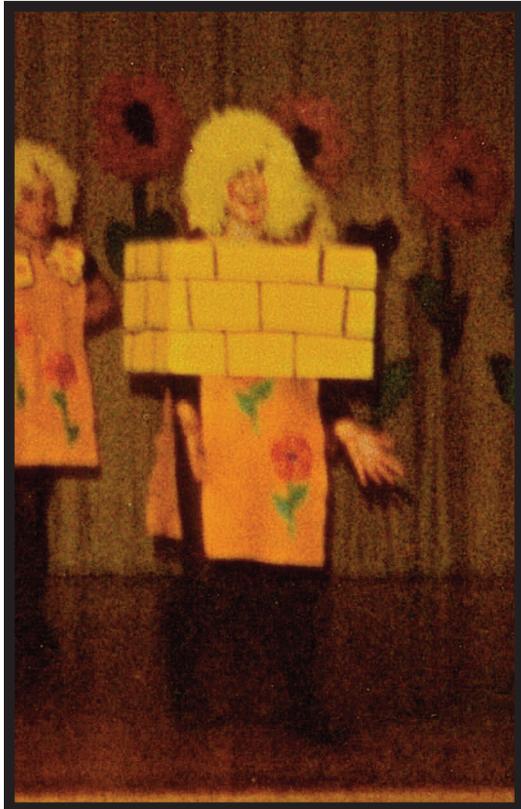
Dad, 1975



Mom, 1976



The Wizard of Oz, third grade. I tried to hog all the glory from the leads!



"Follow the Yellow Brick Road!"



"I can't remember not knowing you."
Kelly and I *then*. . .
are reunited.



. . .and *now*.
In New York, following a
very special book signing.



The Lorello women at my Sweet Sixteen party.



The Lorello brothers perform.

Left to right: Mike (with Rickenbacker guitar), Steve (playing an Aria Pro II bass, same as John Taylor!), Venesa (to whom I now lovingly refer as “my sister-out-law”), and Ritch (rockin’ on a custom-built Fender).

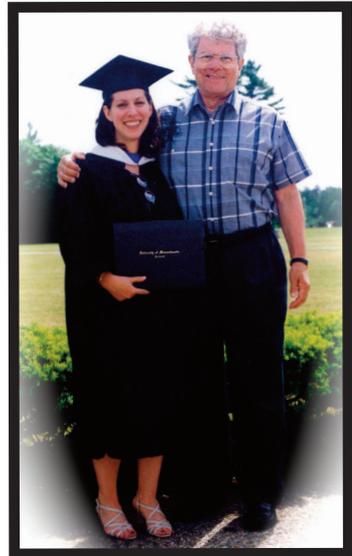


Elisa Elisa

UMass Dartmouth Graduation, Class of 1999



Showing off my diploma with Nonni



Dad



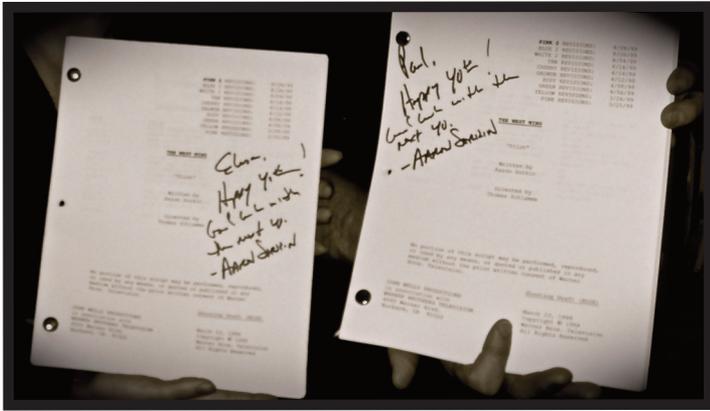
Mom and Dad



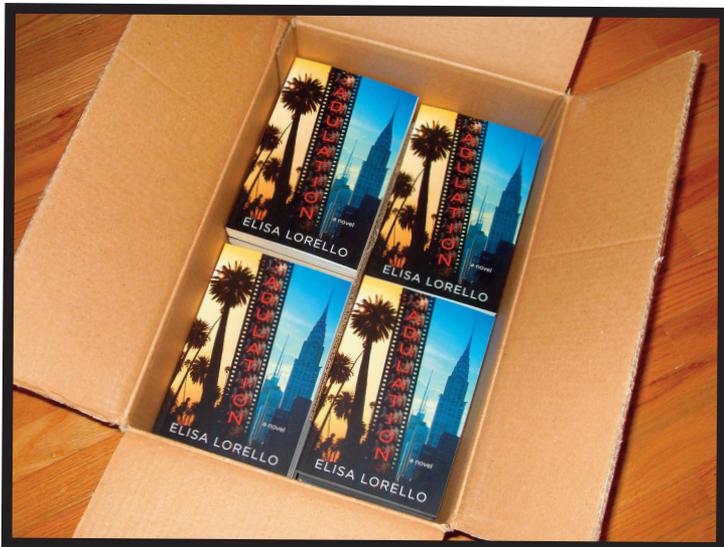
My brother Bobby and I, 2007.



Sorkinites, Unite!
Heather, Larry, and I
the morning after
The Social Network
premiere in NYC.
Sadly, Larry passed
away in January,
2013.



Best. Birthday present. Ever: Matching signed *West Wing* pilot scripts for Paul and me, from Aaron Sorkin: "Happy 40th! Good luck with the next 40."



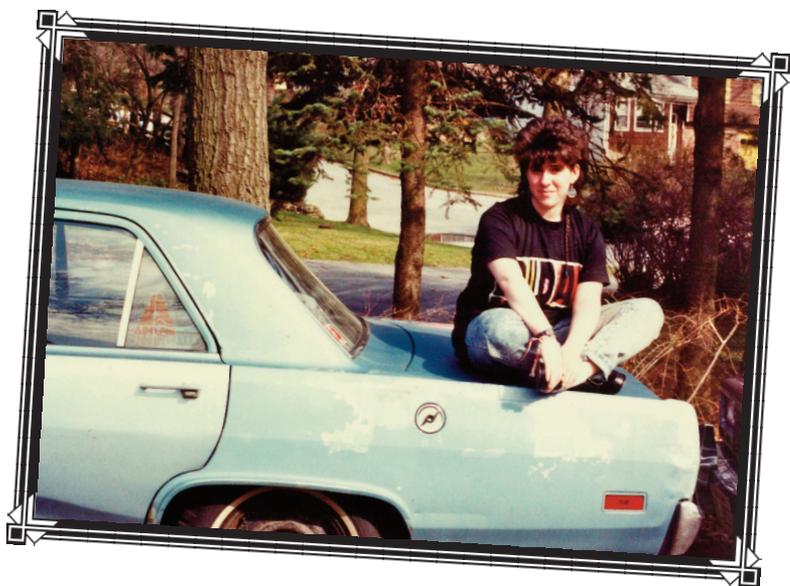
One of the best parts about being an author.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to the band Duran Duran, especially its original five members: John Taylor, Simon LeBon, Nick Rhodes, Roger Taylor, and Andy Taylor. For the last twenty-seven years and counting, Duran Duran's music has been my primary source of comfort during times of sorrow, joy, and celebration, and companionship for everything in between. Their song "Ordinary World" was the inspiration for this novel, and I don't know how I would've survived the most turbulent times of my life without them. I love them as much as I love my own brothers.

Acknowledgement from *Ordinary World*.



Me and JT at B&N, October 16, 2012



Chapter 16 Beginnings and Endings

I have always preferred beginnings to endings, and have always been better at the former than the latter. Even in writing, for the most part. Beginnings are exciting and full of hope; the unknown is something to dive into headfirst rather than some scary abyss waiting to suck you in. Endings connote loss and finality, an inability to go back and do it over, do it better, hold the moment just a little bit longer.

Thus, when I approach the end of a decade—the eighties, nineties, and aughts, so far—I go through a little bit of a funk. I feel a dread of time running out, coupled with a regret of time wasted. I fear getting older, moving on, passing away. I fear leaving intentions unmanifested. Inertia takes over. But once the clock strikes and the calendar turns, I am refreshed, renewed, and looking ahead at the magnificent vista with eager eyes. I hated being twenty-nine, but loved being thirty. Hated my late thirties, love my early forties.

It's no surprise, then, that despite the personal turmoil that filled so much of the eighties, I was sad to see the decade behind me. When Paul and I graduated from Walt Whitman High School in 1988, and the assistant principal announced my name, he called me "Elena Lorello." And this was after I spelled my first name phonetically on the index card to avoid a mispronunciation! No one clapped in that momentary confusion, and when I spotted my mother in the bleachers, we exchanged tearful glances. Once again I was negated, rendered invisible, forgotten. And Mom, having endured countless mispronunciations of her own name, was the only one who knew how I felt. Worse still, a different administrator had pronounced the other Elisa's name perfectly.

After the ceremony, I approached the butcher.

"So tell me, how do you mess up a name that is phonetically spelled out for you?" I asked.

"We do the best we can," he replied, avoiding eye contact.

"Your 'best' is exemplary of the education I received here," I retorted, and departed with, "You ruined my graduation." I then removed my cap and gown and threw them in a heap on the bleacher as we left.

High school, in a word, sucked. I was glad to be out. But that didn't make the ending any easier. In the nine months leading up to graduation, I lost all my friends. Elisa and I weren't on speaking terms. Bea and two other girls we befriended steadily pulled away from me. Rather, in hindsight, I had alienated them. I was jealous, believing that Bea preferred them to me, evidenced by such instances like the time she scored tickets to Depeche Mode and U2 and didn't invite me to go with them. And when I tagged along with them to see the Alarm, they could tell I wasn't as into the band as they were.

The reality was that I just wasn't a very good friend in those days. I took much and gave too little. I was starved for love, not realizing that an ocean of it surrounded me. But when you are devoid of self-love, all you see around you is a reflection of that.

I didn't realize until my mid-thirties that some part of me had blamed myself for my dad's leaving—specifically, I had somehow concluded that I hadn't loved him enough, and that's why, in turn, he hadn't loved me enough to stay. I also went through a period where I blamed my mother—after all, didn't psychology class teach us about modeling our parents' behaviors? This couldn't possibly be all my dad's fault.

I went in and out of therapy, and although my therapists constantly credited me for my intuition and ability to be introspective and so “in touch” with my feelings, none of those qualities seemed to be doing me any good in terms of coping. In short, I hated being Elisa Lorello. I hated everything she was and wasn't. I hated her naïveté and inexperience. I hated her utter lack of courage and confidence and direction. I hated her wardrobe, her size and weight and height, her hair and facial features, especially

her teeth. I hated her scarcity. Hell, some days I even hated her name. That carefree, precocious child who loved Shaun Cassidy and kissing and playing Superfriends and spending hours combing Barbie's hair and coloring had been MIA for so long it hurt to even think about her. What's more, the pedestals she'd placed her big brothers on crumbled one by one. Of course, this was a good thing, but she'd gotten buried under the rubble.

College had to be a beginning, right? Something to look forward to, right?

Wrong.

College was something for which I was completely unprepared. As Mr. Glorioso helped me compile my portfolio for applications to art schools, he told me in no uncertain terms that I had fallen short of my aptitude and promise. "You may have been voted Best Artist of Walt Whitman High School," he said to me (the only popularity contest I ever won), "but you've got a Class-B portfolio. If you're lucky enough to get in, you're going to have to work twice as hard to stay there."

These days, if art school were something I aspired to, I would use Mr. G's blunt assessment as motivation to get my ass in gear and do the work with an *I'll show you* mentality. I'll surpass your expectations! But back then, all I heard was, *You're not good enough*, and I believed it. Knew it in every fiber of my being. I didn't want to have to work that hard, was afraid to work that hard. What's more, I was afraid of New York City, and that's where all the reputable art schools were. I couldn't live there. I wasn't a city girl. I needed to stay home.

So I settled for SUNY Farmingdale's commercial art program, was accepted, and spent a semester not showing up to any classes

other than English 101. I used to call SUNY Farmingdale “Grade 13” because I spotted so many of my former Whitman classmates on campus wandering as aimlessly as I did.

After dropping almost all of my classes, I left Farmingdale and transferred to SUNY Stony Brook under the advisement of my English 101 teacher, who told me I had writing talent and would thrive as an English major there. Stony Brook turned out to be ten times as overwhelming; I didn’t even make it through one class, much less one semester.

Now what?

I was working part-time at a men’s store called Just Shirts, the place at the mall where I used to shop for Duran Duran pins and iron-on T-shirts. The store had since dismantled the iron-on T-shirt station and condensed to a space about half its original size, which suited me well—I have never liked being in “big” environments. I got along well with my coworkers. Moreover, I had outgrown my childhood shyness enough to be personable and outgoing with customers, and exceptional at training new employees. Throughout grade school, my teachers had put me in positions of leadership—team leader, class monitor, student captain—so I guess it shouldn’t have been any surprise that I was quickly promoted to “Third Key,” which was not quite assistant manager level, but enough to say, “We trust you; you’re on your way.”

Retail sales wasn’t an ideal career, but it would have to suffice until I figured out what I wanted to do for the long term, what inspired me other than writing, because I didn’t believe that I could make a living from writing. At least Just Shirts was giving me positive reinforcement and professional experience, and I was

in desperate need of both. But I would meet someone there who would completely take over the next few years of my life, stamping out any ember of self-worth that may have been flickering under all that emotional crap.

It was the beginning of the end.

**PART THREE:
THE NINETIES**

I WILL LEARN TO SURVIVE



Chapter 17 Ordinary World

I distinctly remember telling my mother one day during the mid-eighties, in proud, adolescent arrogance, “I am *never* going to fall into a generation gap when it comes to music. I am always going to like what’s *in*.”

Not only did I fall into the Grand Canyon of generation gaps, but also the fault lines appeared as early as 1990. For starters, I

stopped listening to WLIR when they changed their format and turned into WDRE, showcasing progressive rock. I had no interest in learning these new breakout groups. Didn't like the new sound or style that was taking over the rest of the airwaves either. "Grunge," they were calling it. Faded flannel shirts and construction boots replaced colorful suits and Capezios. Hair was still big, especially for girls, but for guys it was long and unkempt.

The music seemed to mimic the look. Guitars were not only back, but also invasive. The clean-cut production of the eighties, with its orchestral samples, electronic drums, and pervasive synthesizers, was replaced with dirtier, grittier mixed of organic instruments. The garage band was back. But none of it sounded like the rock and roll I had grown up with, and it certainly wasn't the English synth pop I so loved. Rock was still afflicted by a shortage of women, with the exception of Melissa Etheridge. But girl groups like TLC and Salt-N-Pepa were quickly crossing over from hip-hop to pop, while Janet Jackson and Madonna battled for the top spot.

I don't even wanna talk about the genie pants.

Thus, I started to fall back into the music of my brothers and sister, and tuned in to the classic rock radio station WBAB. We listened to it at work too.

When I met Derrick, the new assistant manager at Just Shirts, I thought my life was changing for the better. For starters, I lost thirty pounds. That meant a new wardrobe, and Derrick had good style and fashion sense, so he took me shopping. He was also trying to get me to dress a little more provocatively, especially since I now had a body to flaunt.

Derrick loved dance music. Freestyle, it was called—and it just

so happened that my brother Mike, now employed as an audio engineer at a recording studio, was working on a lot of dance records. Mike worked in collaboration with producers like Mark Liggett and Chris Barbosa, who produced Shannon's mega-eighties hit "Let the Music Play"; Tony Moran, best known at the time as one of the Latin Rascals; and Joey Gardner, who produced hits like rapper K7's "Come Baby Come." Mike even worked on a record with Flo and Eddie, the two guys from the Turtles, who would eventually sing background vocals on Duran Duran's cover of Iggy Pop's "Success" from their *Thank You* album. Better yet, these songs were getting airplay. It was not uncommon for me, during a night of dancing at a club or a shift at the store (Derrick hated WBAB and always played Hot97 during his managerial shifts), to hear at least three songs Mike had worked on, to my delight. And Mike's role was not only as an engineer but also as the keyboardist, sometimes the songwriter, and occasionally even producer.

Derrick and I started hanging out after work, going to dance clubs all over Long Island. Who or what Derrick wanted to be on any given night—he suffered from a pathology not unlike Woody Allen's fictional chameleon character in *Zelig*—determined which club we'd attend: Spit for New Wave, Levels for preppy, Images for what would be described now as the *Jersey Shore* type, and so on.

Had I stopped listening to Duran Duran? No chance. But most of the pinups and posters had come off the walls and ceilings, save for my favorites. And MTV was growing up with the rest of us, now showcasing Bill Clinton rather than Billy Idol. I had no one to be Duran Duranged with anymore, and I'd stopped reading

and writing my secret stories. After my sister got married and moved out, I took over her bedroom, painted the walls white, installed a gray carpet, and decked out the rest of the furniture in white, black, and red. The remaining Duran Duran posters came down and framed Patrick Nagel poster prints went up—the last bastion of the eighties. The result was a pseudo studio apartment—if I could've, I would've included a mini-fridge.

What had begun as a mild infatuation with Derrick morphed into a toxic co-dependency. Soon he wasn't merely taking me shopping; he was picking out all my clothes and instructing me on what to wear to work, to dinner, and to the dance club. He showered me with new outfits, and I later found out he'd stolen the majority of them. His idea of sexy was long artificial nails, big teased hair, stiletto pumps, fuchsia makeup, high-cut skirts, and low-cut shirts. In short, I pretty much looked like a prostitute whenever I went out with Derrick. If I dared express my own style—my beloved T-shirt and jeans, for example—he'd tell me I looked “butch,” “nasty,” and “unfuckable.”

Derrick was the poster boy of self-loathing, and he took me down that sewer with him. I was so far gone that when he asked me to marry him, he put the engagement ring on my finger without waiting for me to give him an answer. I knew it was a bad idea, but couldn't bring myself to say no. And I spent the next week begging my family to “trust me” when I showed them the ring and they voiced their objections. I was trying to say, *I know I have to get out of this. I will as soon as I can.*

Hitting rock bottom happened around two o'clock one morning when, after coming home from a dance club smelling of smoke and alcohol (even though I'd touched neither), I looked in

the mirror and didn't recognize the face looking back at me. No exaggeration.

Scared the shit out of me.

I weep for that moment, and all the moments that led up to it. I weep as I write the words, as I go down that dark alley in my memory. Even the recollection of my parents' separation is not as painful. My parents never emotionally or verbally abused or controlled or manipulated me. My father's hang-ups about sex and foul language may have suppressed and inhibited me and left a dent on my psyche, but he never, ever called me a whore as a term of endearment. He never called me a dyke for liking sports. Derrick did it all, and he did it under the guise of love. I weep for the woman I was because I can't understand how I let her fall so far—how I didn't protect her, and didn't let others protect her either. I can't even use first-person, she's so completely different from who I am today.



I was alone in my car when I first heard "Ordinary World" on the radio. It came on as I pulled away from the Dairy Barn, a drive-thru-only convenience store renowned by Long Islanders. A mundane errand. Dare I say, an ordinary one. The clear, starry night sky only added to the ambiance of the moment.

It had been a few years since the band released a new song or album; or, at least, one to get really excited about. Big Thing had yielded only one Billboard top ten hit, and Liberty was a commercial flop. And although both spent ample time on my turntable and in my CD player, respectively, I just couldn't muster

the enthusiasm for them that I had for the earlier albums, rationalizing that it just wasn't the same without Roger and Andy. Musically speaking, I was longing for the band to go back to something more innocent and exciting. Their *Rio* days, perhaps. In hindsight, it was *me* longing to go back, and projecting that desire onto them. I just wanted to be happy. More specifically, I wanted them to make me happy.

The introduction was more acoustic and orchestral than their other pop ballads. My ears perked up and I turned onto a different street to extend the trip home. In fact, I was so taken that I nearly pulled over.

This was a Duran Duran song?

It was a more acoustic and orchestral introduction than those of their other pop ballads. My ears perked up and I turned onto a different street to extend the trip home. In fact, I was so taken that I nearly pulled over.

I'd never paid much attention to Simon's lyrics before—they had always been rather cryptic to me. But these were clear and fluent, and I hung on every word. For the first time during my fandom, I felt as if Simon had written these words, and the band had written this song, *just for me*. As if they *knew* me, knew exactly what I was going through—not just with Derrick, but everything since the day my parents sat Paul and me on the couch in the living room. *Where is the light that I recognize* was my lost spirit; *Where is my friend when I need you most* was my lost self.

Loss had consumed me—loss of the idealized family of my childhood, the one that had sheltered and protected me; loss of my parents' marriage; loss of my friends; loss of Duran Duran as a quintet, and how they, too, had sheltered and protected me.

Worst of all, loss of *me*.

“Ordinary World” was a beacon that led me away from a path of loneliness, worthlessness, and victimhood. It assured me that I could take a new road to a different place, where something better awaited me. It gave me hope. It restored my faith. It made me a promise: *I will learn to survive*.

It was a damn good song, too—melodic; harmonic; well composed, arranged, produced, and engineered. The melancholic minor chords of the verses gave way to major chords in the chorus. The effect, especially at the end, was one of hope and promise and redemption.

In short, one of my all-time favorite Duran Duran songs. My brothers’ and sister’s favorite too. The kind they wish they’d written.

When I finally pulled into the driveway, I needed a moment to collect myself. I repeated the words *thank you* to Simon, John, Nick, and Warren. Duran Duran had saved me yet again, perhaps even more so than the last time. But not via a glossy photo or a video on a screen. No, this time they did it with words and music.

They spoke in my language.

My life didn’t change overnight, but I was finally on my way. The crowning moment came when I was out with Derrick. He had been giving me a hard time all night about my new haircut and outfit consisting of a graphic T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans, and I was refuting his insults, culminating in this exchange:

“Stop it,” I said. “Stop putting me down. Stop trying to make me feel ‘less than’ for wearing something I like and feel comfortable in.”

“You’re not beautiful anymore,” he said. “I can’t stand the way you look now. I just don’t think you’re beautiful anymore.”

“On the contrary,” I countered, “I’ve never looked better.”

I turned and caught my reflection in the side view mirror, and I smiled widely. Not only did I recognize the face, but also I was happy to see her. My eyes welled up.

The engagement was over.

Within two years after hearing “Ordinary World” for the first time, I met and made a new set of friends, moved away from home and went back to college, cut all ties with Derrick, and fell in love for real.

Slowly but surely, I found myself.

I had learned to survive.

And I thrived.



Chapter 18

The Dartmouth Waltz

A friend who didn't know me prior to college once looked through my photo album and speculated in jest that I must have been in a witness relocation program because my hairstyle and appearance changed so frequently. I've always been a fan of reinvention and seem to make myself over every two or three years, guided more by instinct than intent.

My years at the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth, especially as an undergraduate, were a time of massive reinvention. Now completely free from Derrick's control, I viewed life through a new lens and with a renewed passion for reading

and learning. In 1995 I was finally ready—hungry, even—for a college education, and I matriculated as a human resources major because I was interested in employee training, leadership, and relationship-building. However, after working as a go-fer in the human resources office on campus, I learned that the term was a misnomer—human resources was rarely human or resourceful. The experience, however, was one of the highlights of my college career because it allowed me to network with just about every part of the university.

I changed my major to psychology, specifically focusing on organizational behavior (a.k.a. industrial psychology, or psychology of the workplace), and supplemented it with classes in marketing and promotion and the liberal arts. Years later, I would tell my college freshman students that I successfully applied my psychology degree not only to my graduate studies and teaching career, but also to my novel writing on a daily basis. Way better than a degree in English. Student loans well spent.

Other than attending a four-week summer art program in upstate New York when I was sixteen, I had never lived away from home. And although I knew my limitations—mainly homesickness and fear of flying—I also knew that it was time to leave the nest, and I was more than willing to go. Saying goodbye to Paul was the hardest part. We never expressed much physical affection for each other, but he succumbed to an awkward hug and gave a brusque wave before re-entering the house as my run-down Chevy Lumina, packed to the brim, rolled up the street toward southeastern Massachusetts, my mother following in her Ford Tempo to help me with the transition.

About a month into my first semester, I contracted pneumonia.

My body's way of getting rid of all the crap from the last five years with Derrick, I speculated. Shortly after my recovery, Paul and two of his buddies visited me on campus. Naturally I was overjoyed to see him, but I didn't expect the bear hug he enveloped me with—in front of his buddies, no less! Needless to say, I was touched. We all had a blast as I showed them the campus—acres of lawns muddied by nonstop downpours, low-rise concrete steps, concrete sidewalks and buildings (including the floors) and classrooms. We each stood on a different side of the polygon-shaped amphitheater and played with its acoustics by shouting to one another. The following day we traveled to Boston and embarked on a series of navigational mishaps, including getting off at the wrong T stop and running out of tokens, as well as getting lost trying to find the *Cheers* pub and, more importantly for the guys, the Sam Adams pub. We also quickly learned how subway etiquette in Boston differs from subway etiquette in New York: Subway etiquette exists in Boston.

On the last day of their visit, Paul handed me a cassette tape. "I wrote this song for you ten minutes after you drove away," he said before adding apologetically, "It isn't finished." On the cassette, scrawled in his penmanship, was "The Dartmouth Waltz." I popped the tape into the portable stereo my brother Mike had given me as a going-away present, pressed play, and was greeted by a Yamaha piano in third notes in the key of E major, followed by a looped jazz snare drum. And then the melody: a playful electric piano, light and fresh, like stones skipping across a pond, somewhat reminiscent of Johnny Costa's playing on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Unlike Mike's song for my Sweet Sixteen, this wasn't pop inspired—no Power Station drums or John Taylor bass line. No, this was unequivocally a Paul Lorello composition. And

yet, what struck me so deeply was how perfectly the melody captured *me*; it was a metaphor of the carefree, God-and-butterflies child I had been. A bird that finally left the nest and was free to fly wherever she wanted.

I was hearing exactly how my twin brother felt about me. Seeing myself through his eyes.

Years later, when we were in our thirties, Paul confessed that the day I left for UMass-Dartmouth was, in his words, “the day I stopped worrying about you. I knew you were going to be OK.” And it was only then that my blinders came off. Paul hadn’t only protected me in the womb. He agonized when I was in pain, carrying the weight of powerlessness on his shoulders. He had tried so hard to keep me happy for so long, and I had been too self-absorbed to see it. “The Dartmouth Waltz” wasn’t only a celebration of my release from chains, but also his own.

Ironically, what made the moment even more special was that it wasn’t a private one. He allowed me to listen to the song in the presence of his buddies. Knowing Paul—shy and withdrawn his entire life, the one who communicated with others through me—I thought he’d be embarrassed by this display of emotion and affection. I mean, first the hugging, and now this? No way could I contain my tears of joy and love and gratitude. No way could I just sit there and say, “Thanks, man.” I pummeled him with a hug. Hugged his buddies too.

“The Dartmouth Waltz” was always meant to be an instrumental, but between the first and last stanzas, the song is reduced to just rhythm, awaiting a solo—perhaps a bit of flute or a piano solo à la Keith Emerson. Every few years I bug Paul to finish it. Even put it on my Christmas list once. And yet, in some ways it’s perfect as it is.



Chapter 19 The UMass-Dartmouth Years

As a twenty-five-year-old entering sophomore, I was, for the first time in my life, the oldest kid in the room. And although I was friendly with the professors, who saw my life experience and work ethic as assets to the class, I also, for the first time in my life, found myself making friends with people who were younger than I.

I loved being the New Yorker and was proud to tell people I was from Long Island. I had as much difficulty understanding that when my anatomy professor was saying *hot*, he really meant “heart,” as waitstaff did comprehending that I was asking for

“water” when I said *wortub*. I learned that Red Sox fans despise Yankee fans (we Yankee fans were always too busy picking on Mets fans to care about Red Sox fans), and that I was known around campus as “the Knicks girl” thanks to my cap, water bottle, and car bumper sticker flaunting the basketball team logo. Southeastern Massachusetts possessed a climate and geographical characteristics similar to those of Long Island—close to the beach; close to the city; close to the mall—and allowed me to live far enough away from home to learn how to live on my own, but close enough to go home whenever I wanted.

The pizza and bagels were dreadful, however. Still are.

UMass-Dartmouth was home in every sense of the word; I lived on campus, worked on campus, studied on campus, and even attended Catholic mass on campus. I found community in various groups and activities. I even managed to make a little mischief from time to time without consuming a drop of alcohol.

One day during the spring semester in 1996, my friend and housemate, Autumn, came into my room and announced, “I’ve got the perfect guy for you.”

She described Brett: Tall. Nice guy. Liked Sports. Worked on campus. “Cool,” I said. “Give him my number the next time you see him.”

About two weeks later, on a whim, I went to visit Autumn at her work-study job, and I spotted a guy leaning over a counter, dressed in jeans and a baseball cap.

Somehow, I knew it was *him*. And five minutes after Autumn introduced us, I knew I was going to go out with him.

Brett had stunning blue eyes, a mop of hair in need of a good New York stylist, and at least fourteen inches on me in height.

When he towered over me after releasing me from an embrace, I'd exclaim, "Stop being taller than me!" a line from the Beatles movie *A Hard Day's Night*. I'd met several great guys after Derrick, and even dated one of them. To be with someone I didn't have to chase—someone who expressed explicitly that he found me attractive and beautiful and lovable—was both exciting and frightening. The day Brett and I met, I was wearing a hideous teal parka, a faded baseball cap, and no makeup save lipstick, and he asked Autumn for my number anyway. He didn't know that she wanted to set us up because she'd never gotten the chance to tell him about me.

Our dates were simple: gazing at the stars from the campus observatory, walks around Ring Road after classes and work, dinner and a movie and back to his New Bedford apartment, and dancing barefoot in the dark to Joe Satriani, to name a few. We also ventured out to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and to Long Island for Easter break. He made sure I stayed on top of my homework, and dropped me off early enough in the mornings to make my eight A.M. class. He even read a chapter to me from *Light in August*, the novel assigned for my Literature and Society class, when I was bored silly with it. That alone was enough to make me smitten.

Two years my senior, he was a left-brained science guy, whereas I was a right-brained humanities girl. We seemed to complement each other nicely. Or, as he put it, "We fit together well."

I fell in love with Brett, and he with me. Finally. It happened. For real. We even talked marriage at one point.

As the end of the semester approached, Brett asked me to move in with him for the summer. Despite how we felt about each

other, and that I spent four days a week at his apartment, I didn't think we were ready to take that step. Maybe he saw that as a rejection of him. Maybe I was afraid of being rejected first. He began to withdraw emotionally. I went back to Long Island, took a fifty-hour-per-week job at a wholesale beauty supply store, and drove up to Massachusetts only once to visit Brett. By that time, he had completely shut down, and we spent the weekend together as if we were strangers.

Shortly after I returned to campus for the new semester, our relationship ended abruptly. I wanted to save it, but I didn't know how. Love relationships, especially one of such intimacy (dare I say, *lovmaking*) as Brett and I shared, were still new and scary to me. Whatever had gone wrong between us was *my* fault, I decided.

I dealt with our breakup horribly, was devastated by it. In the same way that I had overanalyzed my parents' separation, I obsessively pored over the entire span of Brett's and my relationship, trying to pinpoint the exact moment when things went sour, the One Wrong Move. If I could identify it, then perhaps I could fix it. It took me a long time to get over Brett—way longer than it should have. For years I believed that I had blown my one and only chance at love, scared off my soul mate, given up too easily. I believed I was doomed to a life spent alone, as a broken half.

At first I retreated. I moved off campus and spent days in bed and all but flunked out that semester.

This time I had to pick up the pieces on my own.

I will learn to survive.

So I did. I threw myself into my schoolwork and the university community, loving my coursework but stymied when confronted with the question of how to apply it to a career. I showed potential

for counseling, but didn't want to go through the required schooling and clinical work. Was still interested in employee training and leadership, but didn't know how to break into such a career, or how to circumvent working in an office or corporate environment, for which I was ill suited.

"I can see you in advertising," suggested Dr. John Caruso, my academic advisor who would become my colleague and friend years later.

I couldn't.

By my senior year, half of my courses involved writing in some form, and I excelled at all of them. One of my professors recommended that I apply to the graduate program in professional writing. Maybe I could get into editing and publishing. The program also offered teaching assistantships, and I considered it to be a good way to get some experience in case I needed something to fall back on.



In the mid to late 1990s, as John Taylor took a break from Duran Duran, so did I. And for the same reason, it seemed: to get our acts together and discover who we really were and what we were capable of on our own. Eliminating all traces of Derrick had included an end to all the dance music, with the exception of anything my brother Mike worked on. Once again I went back to the music of my childhood and siblings' roots, mostly classic rock: the Beatles, Steely Dan, ELO, the Beach Boys (featuring Brian Wilson), Van Halen, and Stevie Ray Vaughan, whose music was introduced to me by a guy with whom I briefly hooked up. My

father, a longtime Ella Fitzgerald fan, sent me a few CDs and I fell in love with her too. Nat King Cole was my other favorite, and later Diana Krall and all things George Gershwin. I took Jazz Appreciation as an elective and developed just that, which resulted in many lengthy and pleasant conversations with Paul, who had studied and taught himself to play all the jazz greats. My turntable had broken by 1995, and because I was living on campus, my records, Duran memorabilia, and most of the eighties had gone into storage. I didn't even own the band's latest album, *Medazzaland*, much less listen to it, until many years later.

In terms of being in the loop with what the band was up to, I went through a blackout period. The World Wide Web was up and running, but I wasn't on it much unless I was doing a project for school or emailing a professor or classmate. Duran Duran was no longer ubiquitous; they hadn't been for a long time, even with the success of "Ordinary World" and "Come Undone," their two comeback hits from *The Wedding Album*. In short, they'd gone off my radar.

When I found out that John had left the band, I decided that Duran Duran was done. I had finally come to terms with Andy and Roger leaving, but John? No way. He was the band's co-founder. My favorite. That was a deal breaker.

John's departure was a loss, but not like previous ones—by that time I was resigned to the fact that the band's career had run its course. They'd been in my life for over ten years. That's how long the Beatles had lasted as a band. It was OK—they'd given me plenty, and it was time to move on. Time to stand in my own shoes. Let's just be friends now. Life had more in store for me. I was in my late twenties and a committed college student, living

on my own. I got my life together, and recovered my self-esteem. I slowly but eventually got over losing Brett. After being separated for almost fifteen years, my parents finally and officially divorced. By then we had all come to terms with the end of their marriage; thus, the divorce seemed more like a technicality than an ordeal. My mother sold our house, and most of my siblings had spouses and families and careers and their own homes. Perhaps I had finally outgrown Duran Duran, not to mention the eighties. My rat's tail was gone, big hair tamed, Chucks in the closet. I was drawing new portraits and finding new love interests: Chris Noth and *Northern Exposure* and existentialism.

My graduation day on June 6, 1999—two days before Nick Rhodes's thirty-seventh birthday—remains one of the best days of my life. I would soon continue my education at UMass-Dartmouth in the graduate program in professional writing, and begin a new career teaching freshman composition.

And I got an idea for a novel, one that I wouldn't write for another five years.

**PART FOUR:
THE NEW
MILLENNIUM**

REACH UP FOR THE SUNRISE



Chapter 20

The Warmth of the Sun

I can still see the color of the sky: a blue so clear and vibrant, almost the color of sapphire, with an occasional fluffy cloud that added serenity to the sunshine. I sat nestled in the reading chair next to the window in my second-floor New England apartment, in a house that was over 100 years old and just five miles from the beach. Awake uncharacteristically early, I read a set of papers—literacy narratives, to be precise—from my English 101 class, and I teemed with enthusiasm. Teaching was still new to me, and I brimmed with idealism and energy and promise. With *hope*.

The first time I stood in front of a classroom, after my nerves subsided I felt a rush of adrenaline that I knew was comparable to what my brothers felt when they performed in front of an audience. Any trace of shyness I'd had as a child was long gone.

In short, I was in love. I loved my work, loved my students, loved my graduate studies, loved my little New England apartment and the nearby sand and sea.

Life was good.

And then I turned on the television. It was about ten A.M.

First, confusion: *Why is the news showing a picture of one of the Twin Towers but reporting about a plane hitting the Pentagon? And come to think of it, where's the other tower?*

Next, shock: *Holy shit, the tower just crumbled to the ground! The Manhattan skyline is different now.*

Followed by horror: *Oh my God, the people—all those people trapped inside! Holy shit, my best friend!*

Morbid fear: *What the hell is happening? Is my family safe? Are my friends safe? Holy God, am I safe?*

Culminating in profound grief: *My home. My beloved home.*

I spent hours desperately trying to get through to my family on Long Island, making sure Mike wasn't working in the city (as he sometimes did), and seeking confirmation that my cousins, many of whom were volunteer firefighters and rescue workers, were safe. I wasn't able to reach my mother until ten thirty at night.

The sound of that incessant busy signal was enough to drive me insane.

I also spent the day preparing myself for the news that my best friend, Elisa—the one with whom I used to stay up until two A.M. watching videos, and with whom I made chocolate chip pancakes

for breakfast, the sidekick in my stories about escaping my unpopular life to a blissful romance with John Taylor—was dead. She and her husband worked in the Merrill Lynch building next door to the towers at the World Trade Center, but I thought she worked *in* one of the towers.^{viii}



Elisa and I had spent the remainder of high school not speaking to each other, caught up in what I could so clearly see in adult hindsight as nothing more than catty, adolescent rivalry, magnified by my self-imposed isolation and low self-esteem. However, following our high school graduation, we both ended up at the same party. And the two Elisas, who had never been at a loss for conversation, sat and talked for hours, oblivious to the socializing around us. At some point, we looked at each other and asked, “What the hell happened between us?” Neither of us had a clue, and we buried the hatchet on the spot.

While I floated from college to college and job to job, sinking deeper into Derrick’s abyss, Elisa was busy at the Fashion Institute of Technology, quickly rising to the top of her class in Interior Design. She landed a job with Liz Claiborne by the time she was twenty. She earned enough money to afford a Lexus by the time she was twenty-five. At fifteen, this would’ve turned me a shade of green that clashed with my high tops; however, as a young adult I was nothing but happy for her. I bragged about her to my other friends. If I envied anything, it was her clear ambition and intent—she knew exactly what she wanted, made a plan to attain it, and didn’t let anything deter her. I had wanted that kind of clarity for myself.

Elisa was immensely supportive of me while I attended UMass-Dartmouth: She sent me care packages with checks enclosed, gifted me an extra warm winter coat for frigid New England days, and even loaned me her mini-fridge from her own college days. We exchanged long letters and even longer phone calls, just like our teenage years, and we discussed relationships and dating and what we wanted to do with our lives; occasionally we'd happily reminisce about our Duran Duranged days. She visited me one weekend, and we did all the touristy things in Boston and visited the mansions in Newport, Rhode Island. After spending so many years living in Manhattan and traveling abroad, Elisa was an expert explorer; put a map in her hands and she'd chart a course in seconds.



That day I was consumed with memories, replaying every part of Elisa's and my friendship. Only three years before, we'd sat on the couch at her house on New Year's Eve, splitting a pint of Häagen-Dazs, watching *When Harry Met Sally* and practically writing a new scene of our own. Elisa had gone out on a date with a guy she knew from work.

"So do you think I should go out with him again?" she'd asked.

"Why not?" I'd replied. "It's not like you have to marry the guy."

But somehow I'd known that she would. And several months after their wedding, I visited them during winter break at their apartment in Manhattan, literally around the corner from the Twin Towers. The view was spectacular at night. We even cut through the lobby of one of the towers on our way to dinner, and again to drop me off at the subway.

It was possible that her husband was dead too. Surely the apartment building was gone, although by then they'd bought a house on Long Island.

Aside from Kelly, Elisa was the friend I'd known the longest. We passed for sisters.

And yet, we never attended a Duran Duran concert together. How could we have let that happen?

Her email came around six thirty that evening. The subject heading read: "We're OK."

I burst into a wail, exhaling for the first time all day and grieving for those who wouldn't get such an email.

Just about everyone in the US sat or stood still *that day*, their mouths open, eyes wet. They have a vivid memory of where they were, what happened, how they felt—and they know someone who knows someone who knows someone who didn't make it. One of my dear friends in Massachusetts lost her best friend on one of the planes that flew out of Logan Airport in Boston. Another friend was from Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and lived very near the crash site of Flight 93.

All in that bright blue sky, dazzling in the tranquility of the morning, interrupted by a thundering fireball.

In the weeks that followed, I played "Ordinary World" almost every day. It cradled me to comfort, and once again my friends Duran Duran were getting me through the dark days. I also played *Rio* and *Seven and the Ragged Tiger* and *Duran Duran*—albums I hadn't listened to in a long time—especially the danceable tunes. I saw what the power of music did for the families of those who lost their lives *that day*. In the aftermath, people walked around in a stupor, shaking their heads at the senselessness and trying to

relocate that spot of normalcy. Strangers clung to one another. But during the Concert for New York, instead of shaking their heads in sadness, they bobbed them to the beat, as if to say, *I know this*. This feeling where things make sense, where words and music go together. I know this tune and this rhythm—it's in sync with my heartbeat. My chest no longer feels quite so tight. It's OK to enjoy it. This is life: joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, love and loss. It's OK to give in to it.

Music heals.

During the same night they heard the news about John F. Kennedy's assassination, Brian Wilson and Mike Love wrote "The Warmth of the Sun." Music has the power to bring not only friends together, but also strangers. It bonds us in peace and love and faith and hope and joy. And it does so without asking for our ID, religion, political persuasion, or diplomas. Music was the grace in the midst of the suffering, be it James Taylor's "Fire and Rain" or Melissa Etheridge's "Come to My Window." That concert, and the music that pumped out from it, plugged us back in.

Elisa doesn't talk about *that day*. I know very little of what she and her husband went through, except that it was traumatic. How could it not be? They were fortunate to escape safely. They both know that. Today they have two beautiful daughters and a typical suburban life—everything but the minivan. We sometimes wonder what our teenage selves would have thought about our lives, had they been able to see into the future. Our slumber party days and all-night gab sessions were long over. But one thing was for sure: There would be chocolate chip pancakes, and there would be hugs. And one day, we vowed, we'll go see Duran Duran in concert together. Heck, maybe we'll even meet them someday.



Chapter 21

Welcome Home

In 2003, when I graduated from UMass-Dartmouth for the second time, now with a master's degree under my belt, my mother asked me if I wanted anything special as a graduation gift.

“Yes,” I answered. “A guitar.”

I'd been thinking about it for a while. Had always regretted giving up on it so soon, letting my fear of sucking prevent me from actually trying. Moreover, I was thinking that maybe the problem hadn't been suckage as much as it had been a simple matter of coordination—I needed to play left-handed.

So I found a music store and browsed around. I love the smell of a music store; like a recording studio, it's metallic and musty. I wanted one of everything, as if I could plug in an instantly play them all. I found an acoustic guitar that was in my price range and

of acceptable quality—at least, to my ears. Unfortunately I didn't have one of my brothers with me. And maybe I didn't want to. Maybe this time I wanted to rely on my own instinct and knowledge. Or maybe I was just too impatient to wait to buy one the next time I visited Long Island.

The store didn't stock or display any left-handed acoustics, so I held a right-handed one upside down. And man, did it feel good. Normal. Comfortable. I looked at the sales associate, your typical music guy—older dude with salt-and-pepper hair falling down to his shoulders, beer gut under his black Beatles T-shirt—and smiled.

“This feels really good,” I said, and explained why it had been so long since I last picked up a guitar.

He smiled back and said, “Welcome home.”

Indeed.

I ordered a Samick left-handed acoustic guitar, and in less than two weeks I brought the instrument home and placed it upright on one of the living room chairs, just like the good ol' days. She was beautiful: mahogany front, sides, and back; dreadnought body shape; narrow neck to accommodate my little fingers. I also purchased a metronome, a battery-operated tuner, a bunch of picks, and flash cards of guitar chords. A friend had an old, beat-up case and offered it to me. I gladly accepted it, joking that it would make me look like a seasoned musician. And sure enough, when my brother Ritch came to town, first thing he asked was, “Where did you get that case? It looks like a working musician's case.”

“From a working musician,” I replied. He loved it.

As a starting point, I thumbed through the flash cards and pulled out the easy chords first: G, D, E, A, G-minor, D-minor,

E-minor, A-minor. Cut and filed the fingernails on my right hand down to stubs. Trying to learn the C chord alone pained my fingertips as I pressed them firmly against the frets, so much so that it brought tears to my eyes. But when I was able to produce a clear, unified strum of the strings, I felt a childlike satisfaction—as if I'd just learned to tie my shoes or recite the alphabet from memory. And, just like when I was ten years old, I learned “Yellow Submarine” first, followed by just about every other Beatles song with G, D, E, A, and C in it.

The F chord was even more difficult than the C. I'd forgotten one of my childhood setbacks: abnormally small pinkies. My pinkies are about half the size of my ring fingers. I have another deformity as well, one I was unaware of until I was nineteen and dislocated my left thumb in a freak accident. The ER doctor pointed out that I was missing the knuckles at the base of each thumb; they had never developed. He speculated that this oddity was the result of my being born prematurely as well as being a twin. It also may have affected my guitar playing, not to mention my inability to pack a punch. Regardless, showing off my lack of thumb knuckles makes for a great ice-breaker at parties. Ditto for blind dates.

Paul's thumb knuckles, on the other hand, are well developed.

Ritch gave me a tip for the F-chord: “Pretend you're trying to snap the neck of the guitar off.” It worked.

My siblings, and especially my dad, were thrilled. They constantly gave me tips, either in person or over the phone. The great thing about playing lefty was that I could sit across from them and watch their fretwork like a mirror image, then imitate it. Nothing made me happier than the chance to finally play with them,

despite how self-conscious I was regarding my beginner skills. But like any good big brother or sister or parent, they complimented and encouraged me, validated and reinforced my efforts. Dad sent me thirty-year-old lesson books. My sister Mary sent me books with church songs and hymns from when she used to play in the folk group at her Unitarian church. My brother Mike wrote out chord charts, including one for John Mayer's "Daughters" (I was ambitious). And for Christmas that year, I received a guitar stand, a capo, a brightly-colored shoulder strap, and a beginner's book of Christmas songs.

"I'm twenty years late," I repeatedly apologized, especially when I made mistakes, but that made no difference to them. Ritch even reminded me, "I used to spend entire days doing nothing but practicing. I missed parties, sporting events, school events, you name it. I willingly sacrificed a social life because I wanted to be as good as Eddie Van Halen and Eric Clapton. You don't need to do that, unless you *want* to. If you want it, then go for it, but know that that's what it took me. Just enjoy yourself. Pace yourself. Practice every day. Devote the time you spend reading and writing to playing the guitar, if you really want it that badly."

I didn't want it *that* badly, but I did practice at least an hour almost every day.

My dad gave me lessons over the phone, holding his own guitar in hand and "showing" me chords and strumming patterns. Some of it was beyond my skill level, but I loved it anyway. Even over the phone, his classic Epiphone sounded smooth as silk.

I also enjoyed playing with my sister, whose musical abilities I had taken for granted throughout my life. Mary had terrific intonation, knew three-part harmony, and could strum and

finger-pick songs ranging from the Beach Boys to the Indigo Girls.

When I turned twenty, I left behind not only adolescence, but also years of rivalry with my sister. Our differences in talent and interests and body type had become complements (and compliments) rather than points of contention or envy. She admired my tenacity; I admired her thoroughness. What's more, Mary became my primary confidante in matters of my love life and career. I'd come to appreciate her in ways I never did in youth. *Gratitude* comes to mind when I think of her—for our two-hour phone conversations, our mutual respect and ability to embrace each other's strengths, and our fits of uncontrollable laughter, especially when we talk about our childhood. We seldom remember the rivalry. Most of all, I love her beauty, inside and out.

Mary showed me how to finger-pick the chorus to the Beatles' "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away." Her favorite Duran Duran song is "Ordinary World."

As I improved and learned new chords, I discovered something even more delightful: I had "the gift." Well, maybe *gift* was too strong a word in my case, but I had the ability to figure out songs by ear. As I listened to a song, I scanned the fretboard with my fingers, trying out different chords until the one I wanted appeared, as if I were fitting pieces into a jigsaw puzzle. Once again, I started with Beatles songs. One day I called Paul, Mary, and Mike, one after the other, and with childlike pride I announced: "Today I heard Ringo Starr's 'It Don't Come Easy' on the car radio, and when I got home I figured it out all by myself!"

I also found a website that provided chord charts for songs ranging from Simon and Garfunkel to Guns N' Roses. It was hard to find songs I loved that matched my skill level. Bar chords were

my nemesis. They required pressing at least one finger (usually the pointer) across the entire fretboard on all the strings. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't press down hard enough, couldn't keep my fingers in place long enough. Were they too small? Were my digital muscles not stretched out and strengthened yet? I knew I needed extra help—one-on-one lessons on a regular basis. But I wasn't ready for that yet.

And then came the ultimate goal: Duran Duran songs.

If you have ever doubted Duran Duran's ability to write songs containing texture and complexity, then try to find a Duran song with first-position chords only. Not easy. I listened to all their albums with my guitar strapped on, trying to find familiar, simple chords, and struggling to net anything beyond a couple of chords on a couple of songs. But then I got lucky with the *Rio* album, and discovered I could play most of "Hold Back the Rain" and "Last Chance on the Stairway" (figuring out the bridge of a song is my other nemesis!). Ditto with "(Reach Up for the) Sunrise" from the *Astronaut* album. At best, I could put together a rather short "Unplugged" set. At worst, I would have to wait until I took actual lessons.

In a bit of teenage regression, I found myself fantasizing about meeting the band and sitting in a room jamming with them, John encouraging me the same way my brothers did—sharing stories of when he first started playing, and perhaps even helping out with those bloody bar chords. And I'd sing too, and Simon would say, "Good harmonies, Leese!" From one musician to another.

Do I really call myself a musician now? Can I? Have I earned that title?

No. I don't and I can't. Not yet, anyway. I have musical ability,

and I'm proud of that. If I put in the time and effort the way my siblings did, I could eventually work my way up to musician status. I still want to. Just not badly enough. I even occasionally fantasize about having the financial freedom to work with Mike on an album of cover songs—me having a vision, and Mike executing and actualizing that vision the way he does so incredibly well. Adaptation was always my strong suit. Would I cover Duran Duran songs? No doubt.



Chapter 22 **A View to a Kill**

I've been keeping diaries and journals since I was thirteen. The terms are often used interchangeably, but for me they represent different things. I keep a diary to record daily activities and happenings, as well as reflections on said activities and happenings. I use journals for freewriting, recording ideas for novels, jotting down snippets of dialogue or prose or descriptions, drafting scenes or essays or letters, and analyzing dreams.

Sometimes I returned to a certain date or time period in my life by re-reading the diary entry(ies), either to relive the joy (of, for instance, my first Duran Duran concert or Live Aid) or to retrace my steps (as through the span of my relationship with Brett).

The selection of a diary or journal is practically a ritual. The books have to be of a certain size and shape and color. I prefer hard-bound books to spiral-bound books, fabric-wrapped covers to plastic covers, lined pages to unlined pages, and college-ruled lines to wide-ruled lines. Notebooks are acceptable for journals, but never for diaries. Even my choice of pen is deliberate. Certain colors for certain books, mostly ballpoint (although sometimes felt-tip does the trick), and no pencils.

For twenty years I saved every diary and journal, never knowing whether something among all those pages would be useful someday: A creative nonfiction piece about the day I helped Nonni decorate her Christmas tree while listening to Nat King Cole records. A collection of essays called *Sex, Makeup, and Chocolate: Confections of a Woman* that I had started in my early twenties. I believed in Nora Ephron's adage: "Everything is copy." By my mid-thirties, I was lugging around three massive shipping cartons full of journals, notebooks, and diaries bursting with the good, bad, and ugly of my life.

My past was literally weighing me down.

Despite the enrichment from my graduate studies and the advancement I'd made thanks to my ambition and aptitude, my life felt inert. More than that. A blockage clogged my psyche.

After some introspection, I realized that said blockage was the result of the baggage I was carrying around in the form of those cartons of diaries and journals. And I decided they needed to go. Thus, when I packed for a visit to my mother's new house on

Long Island, in addition to my clothes and shoes and makeup and books, I loaded all three cartons into my car. Together Mom and I took the cartons to the recycling center—I would have preferred something more ritualistic, like a burning ceremony, but this would've required a bonfire. One by one, I dragged them to the enormous dumpster, stood over it, and overturned their contents, watching the pages of my life flutter as they fell to the depths below. The view was surreal.

Goodbye, grief.

Goodbye, Donovan and all the other boys I had crushes on.

Goodbye, Derrick, you *dybbuk*.

Goodbye, Brett.

Goodbye, heartbreak.

Goodbye, good times: siblings' weddings and births of nieces and nephews and prom night with Ritch and dancing at Spize and after-shift drinks at TGI Fridays with my friends from Warner Brothers Studio Store and UMass-Dartmouth graduation and every new Duran Duran album and concert.

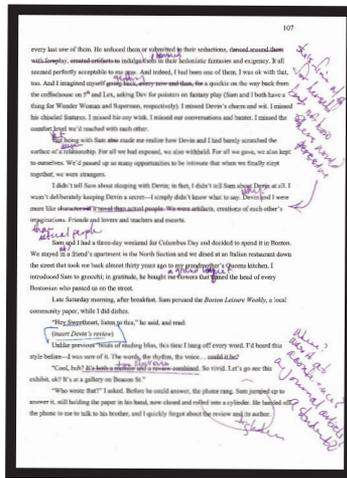
Hello, possibilities.

When I returned to the car and Mom drove us away from the recycling center, a tidal wave of emotion barreled from my chest and crashed in a wail of tears. *My God, what have I done? I just threw my entire life in the trash.*

But no, I hadn't. This was a recycling center, after all. Recycling transforms a discarded object into something new and different and useful.

At that moment, I could physically feel the energy and the weight of the last twenty years leave me. Could almost see it float away.

I was free.



A page of editing from the *Faking It* manuscript.

Chapter 23 Everything Is Copy

In 2004, I wrote the first draft of *Faking It*. For years I had told myself that I wasn't a fiction writer, that I was no good at making up stories. I'm not sure how this notion had ingrained itself in me, other than perhaps the result of my reading things I'd written ten years prior, thinking they were good, and discovering they were awful. Or maybe it was because I didn't seem to have any good ideas for a novel. Maybe Duran Duran fan fiction was the only kind of fiction I knew how to write; maybe Duran Duran was the only subject on which I was an authority. But I had long outgrown those stories. Besides, they weren't written for public consumption.

The seed had been planted in 1999, shortly after I started watching a new TV show called *Sex and the City*. I was equal parts fascinated with and bothered by the boldness of the content. Women openly discussing sex as effortlessly as one would discuss shoes. Not to mention all the sex they were having . . . I found a part of myself envying them as well, for all of it. I was taking a class called Writing about Popular Culture, and I explored these thoughts and feelings and reflections as the subject of an essay. I wondered how someone who was brought up to believe that sex wasn't suitable as an open topic of discussion would react in the presence of someone who was completely uninhibited. *Sex and the City* played out this dynamic with Charlotte and Samantha, but for me it wasn't pushing the envelope enough.

Thus, a *what-if* was born: What if an extremely inhibited woman meets an extremely uninhibited man?

The follow-up to that—and what if they become friends?—was inspired by my favorite film, *When Harry Met Sally*.

That's cute. But I'm not a fiction writer.

Over the next five years, I went to graduate school; immersed myself in scholarly texts about rhetoric and composition theory; read countless student papers; attended conferences, workshops, meetings, and anything else I could to better myself as a teacher. A beloved elderly colleague used to introduce me to university administrators by saying: "This is one of our graduate students, Elisa Lorello. She's on a faster tenure track than most of our already-tenured faculty." In the midst of all that academic absorption, however, I'd occasionally hear little whispers and conversations in my head. Eventually the voices came with names: Andi. Devin. Maggie. Christian.

Six months after I graduated, these characters demanded my full attention, and their message was clear: Get the damn thing down on the page.

After using Peter Elbow's scholarly article, "Closing My Eyes As I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience," as one of the tenets of my teaching philosophy, I decided to practice what I preached and write a novel with only one reader in mind: *me*. On the first page I typed: "I wrote the book I wanted to read" and attributed the quotation to Toni Morrison because I'd heard her say it first. I also thought about the advice "Write what you know" (I interpret that less literally today), and Nora Ephron's "Everything is copy."

I wanted to read a novel about a woman who was my age, who grew up listening to the same music and watching the same movies I had.

I wanted to read a novel about a woman who was from Long Island.

I wanted to read a novel about a woman who had something to teach as well as something to learn.

I wanted to read a novel about this thirty-something Long Islander who finally gets the guy she always wanted.

So I wrote it. And I relied heavily on the familiar: Italian-American heritage; overprotective brothers who were also musicians; familiar locations and songs and books. I could relate to *her*. I could relate to her experience of growing up in a world where sex was taboo. But I had no idea where she'd take me. Andi Cutrone might have started out looking and sounding a lot like me, but the more she spoke, the more unique her story became. I was surprised by where she led me and what she revealed. Ditto for

Devin.

I hadn't intended for Andi to be a professor of rhetoric and composition. But when I asked myself, *What is she gonna teach this guy?* a voice responded, *You just got a master's degree. Why don't you use it there too?* The decision to do so turned out to be the glue that bound the novel together; the dynamic between Andi and Devin, and the story itself, is wonderfully rhetorical.

Turns out I'm a fiction writer.



Chapter 24 The Reunion

Although I don't recall where or when or how I heard that the original five members of Duran Duran were reuniting to record an album and go on tour, I do recall my reaction. Elated, Ecstatic, Overjoyed. Like hearing that your parents are getting back together.

When I listened to the *Astronaut* album for the first time, the heart and edge that Roger and Andy (especially Andy) had brought to the sound and style of earlier albums was back. From a musical standpoint, the songs were new and different and fresh, well composed and arranged and produced. The single, "(Reach Up for the) Sunrise," instantly joined the list of my favorites (a difficult list to compile, I assure you); it echoed that classic Duran Duran message of having a good time, joining the party, and

bringing a little light and color to one's otherwise gray life. *Astronaut* surpassed *The Wedding Album* in terms of being my favorite Duran album since *Rio*.

The 2005 show at Jones Beach Theatre on Long Island was the first time I ever attended a concert by myself. I'd tried to recruit others to join me—my sister, friends, even one of my nieces who liked them—but everyone was either busy or uninterested. Elisa had recently given birth to her second child, so I unfortunately made the false assumption that she'd be unable to go. Being there alone was a bittersweet experience. On one hand, I was so happily absorbed in the moment that my going solo didn't matter. On the other hand, every time the band broke into another song, I felt like a kid unwrapping a present in shiny paper—each one left me surprised and delighted, and I wanted to share my delight with someone, especially with my longtime fellow Duranie.

This was my sixth or seventh (I lost count) Duran Duran concert, not including the two Power Station concerts I saw in the summer of 1985, and each was better than the previous one. Seeing the original five Durans together on stage was like coming home and seeing my entire family together, including my parents. The two-hour set was like a love letter or a thank-you card to the fans who had stood by them since the beginning. Made me feel a little guilty for checking out in the late nineties. They played songs I had either never heard live or hadn't heard since 1984: "Sound of Thunder," "Friends of Mine," my beloved "My Own Way" and "New Religion," and the rare "Make Me Smile (Come Up and See Me)." And the standards: "The Reflex," "Notorious," "Planet Earth," "Rio," and "Ordinary World" (and if you've never heard Andy Taylor play "Ordinary World," then you've missed Shake-

spare the way it's meant to be done). From *Astronaut*, they played "What Happens Tomorrow," "Nice," "Taste the Summer," and, of course, a rockin' "(Reach Up for the) Sunrise."

In a way, Duran Duran and I had come full circle. We had all grown up, and the age gap between us finally closed. The band and I had both earned the respect we wanted and deserved. I hadn't seen a video since 1988 and couldn't care less if I did. They weren't pop stars anymore, but *musicians*. My life was full: I had built a joyful teaching career, was surrounded by a community of loving friends, and had made peace with the tumultuous times of my past. Duran Duran no longer needed to be solely my anchor or lifeboat. Now they were the cake and the icing, the portrait and the frame, the journey and the destination. Pick your metaphor. They were the appetizer, the main course, and the dessert. They were comfort food, a cup of hot chocolate warming you on the inside.

About six years later, I wrote a letter to Andy expressing my gratitude for what he and Duran Duran have meant to me, as well as lamenting that he couldn't stay with the band following the *Astronaut* tour. He responded with a rather sober and practical message:

I guess growing up with musicians gives you a unique perspective into the reality of the science . . . Reunions by definition are never destined to last. Bands are like second marriages; we're all bigamists or schizoids and in all honesty my teenage family needed their father at home. If only we'd taken a six-month break, how different things may have been. But you can't turn it back, only reflect on what's done and I have no complaints about my experiences. Many tales to tell, but no regrets.

I've made peace with that divorce too. Perhaps it's one of the reasons why I like guitarist Dom Brown so much now, and appreciate Warren Cuccurullo's contributions in ways I never did before.



Clock made from "Ordinary World" 45 –
a handcrafted Christmas gift from my friend Jill.

Chapter 25 **Ordinary World (Reprise)**

In August 2006, after living in Massachusetts for eleven years (six of them year-round), I moved to North Carolina in search of friendlier winters and a lower cost of living. At the time, university teaching positions in freshman composition and academic writing were abundant there; moreover, they came with benefits, faculty support, and full-year contracts—basic needs that were hard to find in New England. I originally considered moving to Greensboro, but ended up in the Triangle region (Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill), the perfect place for me.

On paper, North Carolina State University was the worst fit in terms of a teaching position. For one thing, the population of the incoming freshman class equaled the entire student body population of UMass-Dartmouth, and I typically don't function well in high-volume situations. Additionally, the first-year writing program's learning objectives seemed to clash with my pedagogical approach.^{ix} However, my intuition assured me that I accepted the right position at the right university, and I fared well, especially during my first few years there.

The first two people I met were a professor named Susan and her husband, Stacey. I quickly learned that in addition to being an instructor, Stacey was a novelist. Along with my other belongings, I had come to North Carolina with a manuscript for *Faking It*, a novel about a female writing professor who befriends a male escort. But I'd spent so much time in academia that I had no idea how to go about getting a novel published. Stacey kindly and willingly took me under his wing. He showed me the ropes of finding and querying literary agents, and together we formed a critique group to help each other hone our manuscripts. Additionally, Stacey was dabbling in self-publishing with an up-and-coming digital print-on-demand company (also known as publish-on-demand, both terms commonly referred to as POD) based in the Triangle called Lulu. He began hosting workshops to educate aspiring authors on how Lulu worked, the pros and cons of self-publishing, and book marketing and promotion strategies.

Could that be a viable option for me if the agent thing didn't work out? I kept it in mind.

My transition to North Carolina was easy—almost *too* easy. I attributed the swift adaptation to all the relocated Long Islanders

and New Englanders I met (the town of Cary is known as the Containment Area for Relocated Yankees). But then one day in the fall, three months after the move, homesickness finally tapped me on the shoulder. I'd stumbled upon a TV travel show that showcased Boston, Massachusetts, in all its autumn splendor, and I wept.

My relationship status was in flux. I was in love with someone, but he didn't feel the same way about me. My life had turned out to be so different from the one I'd envisioned when I was a kid. I had plenty to be grateful for, but where was someone with whom to share it all? Where was the man who was going to love me just the way I was—the one who “got” me, valued me, respected me, and desired me? Why had he never shown up? *Where is my friend when I need you most?*

What happens when the dream of the life you wanted dies?

In November 2006, I decided to participate in NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) in which the goal is to write fifty thousand words of a novel. When *Faking It* ended, I knew the protagonist Andi's story wasn't finished. As the premise of the sequel took shape, I resisted. Didn't want to go there. Fought it with all my might. The sequel was a radical contrast to the flip, fun *Faking It*, but resistance is futile; when a story needs to be told, it takes hold and doesn't let go. Any story I would've written in its place wouldn't have been the right one. It wouldn't have been honest.

I knew the feeling of a world shattering in a moment. Had felt it the day my parents announced they were separating, and again when I watched the Twin Towers crumble away and the skyline change forever. That had been on my mind lately, especially since

the five-year anniversary had just passed. The Twin Towers had always been my favorite Manhattan landmark because of the obvious connection regarding their twin status. There was even a point on the Northern State Parkway, going westbound, where, if the day was clear enough, you could see the top of the towers and the antenna. They provided the perfect balance to the skyline. And just like when I used to peek into Paul's classroom in first grade, the mere knowledge of their presence and proximity was comforting.

So I posed the *what-if* question: What if Andi loses her world as she knows it? Specifically, what if she loses a *person*, the one she wanted and waited for her entire life?

It seemed such a cruel thing to do to someone I loved dearly, even though she was fictional. The more I wrote, the more I grieved with her.

How would she get through it? I needed an answer to that as well as the *what-if* question. Since I'd been feeling down due to the homesickness, I played a Duran Duran CD to cheer myself up. And when the introduction of "Ordinary World" emanated from my speakers, and Simon's words soothed me once more, the answer came clear as day. The story unfolded before me, and I saw Andi's way through.

"Ordinary World" was the lighthouse yet again, albeit in a different way and for different reasons.

Early into the draft, I realized that "Ordinary World" needed to be the novel's title as well. I even listened to the song on days when I struggled with the writing. I didn't mention the song by name in the novel, but I wrote a special note to the band in the acknowledgements:

Finally, my deepest gratitude to the band Duran Duran, especially its original five members: John Taylor, Simon LeBon, Nick Rhodes, Roger Taylor, and Andy Taylor. For the last twenty-seven years and counting, Duran Duran's music has been my primary source of comfort during times of sorrow, joy, and celebration, and companionship for everything in between. Their song "Ordinary World" was the inspiration for this novel, and I don't know how I would've survived the most turbulent times of my life without them. I love them as much as I love my own brothers.

That last line feels disingenuous to me now. It did even when I wrote it. But I confess I was audience-conscious at the time. Call it a little leftover fantasy: *What if my book somehow got into the hands of the band and they read it, including the acknowledgments?* I was the teenage fan still desperate to be treated like a grownup. Maybe I hadn't gotten that squared away after all. Perhaps I was trying to sort out my adult feelings for the band. John was married and had a daughter and a stable home life. Ditto for Simon and Roger and the rest. That was good. I was happy for them. And I turned out OK too, despite my train wreck of a love life. I came out of that wreckage intact, to the point that I could write about it humorously and even channel some of it into my next novel, *Why I Love Singlehood*.

No doubt I loved them. But love them like *my brothers*? Hardly. I think I was really trying to say this: *If you want to be my friend,*

and only my friend, I'm cool with that. I can love you that way. And because you're the same age as my brothers, we'll get along just fine.

I can't explain what "Ordinary World" means to me now. At the 2012 concert I attended in Durham, North Carolina, Simon said the song has become bigger than them and us; it belongs to the world now. I think I get what he means. But it's also still incredibly personal to me—it's still the beacon of my life, not just in times of loss but also in times of strength. Musically speaking, it's become a classic. Timeless.

A handful of songs move me to tears and take me someplace beyond the music, a place where sound and spirit meet, where I find my Self. "Ordinary World" is one of them. It's *Home*.



Chapter 26 Studio Time

My father turned eighty in 2008. In addition to throwing him a surprise party, my siblings and I decided to write and record a song on which all seven of us would perform—a Lorello first. Various siblings have collaborated over the years, but never all seven of us together.

I was totally stoked.

The last time I was in a recording studio as more than an eager observer was when I was about ten—I had asked Mike to record a duet of us. We chose “Eleanor Rigby,” and I sang with Mike’s accompaniment on acoustic guitar. I never told him how dissatisfied I’d been with the outcome. It had nothing to do with him; in fact, I’d cherished the quality time and attention. No, the problem was *me*—mainly, I hated the way my voice sounded. I didn’t sound like a rocker with an edge. I sounded too “cute,” too girlish. I was

disappointed with our choice of song too, although I must have agreed to it at some point, if not suggested it. In hindsight, I would've preferred something like "Two of Us." Or maybe I just would've preferred to be twenty. I had been in a hurry to grow up since I was two.

I love being in a recording studio the same way I love being in a bookstore or a coffee shop or a classroom. Have been that way all my life. Don't necessarily know how everything works, but it feels like a good place to be. I love watching musicians in action—warming up, mic-ing their instruments, laying down the track, adjusting the sound. I remember the days before digital recording and helping to thread the tape into the Tascam recording machine, or seeing what the new DX-7 synthesizer could do. I remember Mike giving Paul and me a demonstration of the Emulator at Mirror Image Studios in Dix Hills, where he began his career as an audio engineer.

I love the conversations too. The "studio-speak." At a recent family gathering, I sidled up to Mike and Ritch as they discussed a new iPhone app from Pro Tools, a brand of digital recording software—that was as much as I could glean. Mike thought I was patiently waiting for a break in the conversation so I could say something, but rather I was happily observing their interest and enthusiasm about the subject, basking in their keen knowledge and expertise. And I didn't bother asking them to explain it to me. Maybe it's similar to Aaron Sorkin liking what he calls "the sound of intelligence" and trying to capture it in his screenwriting. And when I watch *VH-1 Classic Albums: Rio*, I yearn for more desk-time and less live performance. I yearn to be sitting at the vast console with each band member, breaking down the songs track

by track, deconstructing the sounds, isolating a bass line, a guitar solo, a harmony. Felt the same yearning when I read about the band's studio time in Andy's autobiography, *Wild Boy*. It's a good way to share Duran Duran with Mike, one that he relates to and appreciates. We enjoy those studio clips from *Classic Albums*. Likewise, I love when he plays songs for me in this same manner at his studio, be it clips from the Beatles' *Anthology* or whatever song or album he's working on. Each time I revel in the process.

Mike wrote the music and lyrics for "Little Things," a song about taking time to appreciate the seemingly ordinary, simplistic tokens of beauty around us. From there we divvied up singing parts, instruments, and arrangement. Mike laid down the foundational drum and acoustic guitar parts, and sang the first verse and chorus. Bobby sang on the final chorus. Ritch was the lead guitarist and sang the third verse and chorus. Steve played bass and rhythm guitar, and sang the second verse and chorus. Mary sang harmony on the chorus and melody on the bridge. Paul alternated Ritch's guitar parts with organ solos, as well as alternating harmonies with me during Ritch's lead vocal part. Even some of my nieces and nephews contributed, providing a harmony or a percussive part. Everyone sang the final chorus.

Thanks to modern technology, two of my brothers were able to record their tracks in their residential states and send them digitally to Mike. At one point, Mike had so many tracks that he had to pull some Geoff Emerick^x-style engineering tricks by combining and deleting tracks as he went along.

And me? Because my guitar playing was still amateur, I opted to sing harmonies, alternating with Paul on Ritch's vocal, and join Mary in singing the bridge. Harmony was my strong suit, after all.

I recorded the vocals at Mike's home studio on Long Island during one of my holiday visits. The experience was a dream come true, and an emotional one too. All my life I had wanted to sing with the band, so to speak. To be one of the musical Lorellos. My time had finally come.

I have spent countless hours watching Mike work, listening to his projects in progress as well as in finished form. Not a day has passed that I haven't praised or been in awe of his talent. Working with him in this capacity brought my admiration to a whole new level, both emotionally and professionally. Audio engineering and producing sometimes reminds me of the revision process in writing. There's a constant listening to ("reading") the song and shaping the sound and the flavor, making choices about what to add and what to take away, and being precise with every note and pitch and shade just as a writer consciously considers every punctuation mark and verb and modifier. Mike's ear is so honed, so impeccable and exact, that I am rendered speechless. He can hear things the rest of us can't.

And as if it wasn't cool enough just to watch him at work—hell, to be a part of that work—Mike made me feel like a professional singer while still treating me like his sister, encouraging me and getting me to deliver the best performance in the limited time we had. Before we began recording, we sat together at the desk, listening to the draft of the song. He had sent me a demo prior to my session, so I already had a feel for the melody and harmonies. I rehearsed with him, and he was impressed with my ability, considering I never had professional training as a singer. That said, we both knew I needed a lot of work.

I took my place behind the microphone, recalling a documen-

tary about the making of the Power Station album I saw when I was fifteen and watching Robert Palmer at the mic. I felt very Robert Palmer at that moment, holding the headphones against my right ear, listening to my voice with my left, and closing my eyes to shut out the world. But the delusions of grandeur stopped there. Singing in front of my brother was like singing in public; I didn't want my throat to close up. He covered a music stand with a towel to dampen the sound of my voice reflecting off the stand (in layperson's terms, to prevent my voice from sounding twangy), but it also served as something for me to hide behind. We proceeded to do take after take, and Mike offered a bit of feedback after each one.

"That's good, Leese. This time, don't try so hard to match up with Ritchie's voice. Make it your own. Accentuate the *ow* in 'believe me now.'" He showed me how to do it.

We did another take and I rolled my eyes in disapproval. "Ugh. I overcompensated on that one. Can we try it again?"

"Sure thing," he said. And so it went. We recorded for several hours.

And then came the magic: auto-tune.

Auto-tune has gotten a bad rap for how much it distorts the vocal sound and style of today's pop stars. But like cosmetics, when used to enhance the features already present, it's a fantastic tool. As an engineer, producer, and musician, Mike is an absolute master, a craftsman, an artist. I watched him digitally sculpt my vocal; with the computer mouse as his chisel, the audio wave on the monitor as the canvas, and my vocal as the medium, he bent, shaped, curved, shaved, tuned, honed, and refined that wave until my voice sounded smooth and flawless, like someone who had all

her chops and knew what to do with them. By the time he played the finished vocal track, he fooled me into believing I was an accomplished singer. He matched Mary's and my bridge vocals so well it's hard to tell which is which.

I've wanted to get back into the studio ever since, a constantly changing list of potential cover songs always looming in the back of my mind.

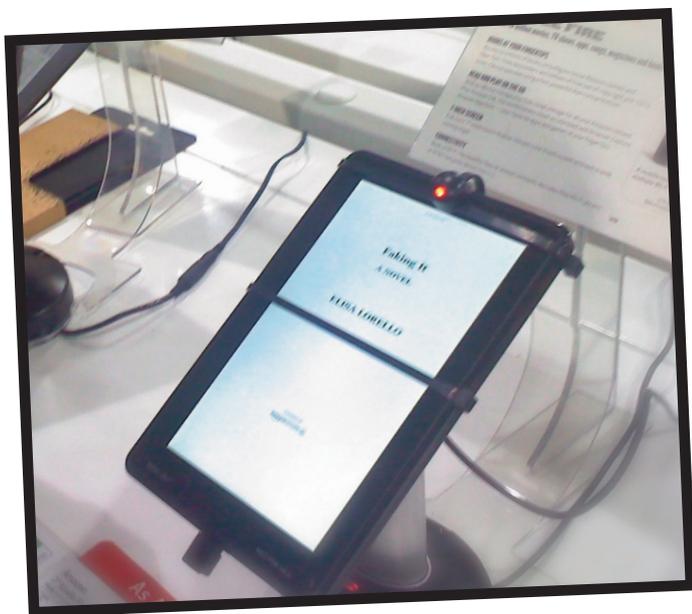
When I heard the final mix of "Little Things," emotion swept over me, especially when the seven of us sang the final chorus (*Give me the little things. . .*) in unison, as if we were all in the room when we sang it. Mike was impressed by how good our voices sounded together. For instance, he thought Paul's and my voices complemented Ritch's as well as Mary's did his own. He loved Paul's musical instinct, including a suggestion to add a little Brian Wilson-"God Only Knows" flavor at the bridge (it's so subtle you might miss it), and commended Bobby for nailing his vocal so quickly.

The product may have been a gift for our father, but the process was a gift for us. We all loved doing it as a family.

Musically speaking, "Little Things" is a well-written, well-produced, well-recorded song. I uploaded it to my iPod Shuffle, and it always seems to come around when I most need to hear it. Gets me softly in the gut every time. But my emotion was nothing compared to my father's when we presented him with the MP3 and a companion video featuring photos of each of us during the recording process. Over the years, my father has struggled to come to terms with leaving his wife and children, and has been trapped under the weight of his own guilt and remorse. Each of us, my mother included, have assured him of our forgiveness and

that we're OK. One day I even called him and said, "If someone told me I could go back in time and fix things so you and Mom would stay together, but the consequence would be a completely different life today, I wouldn't do it. I can't imagine a different life, even if it meant more money or a husband or something like that. I couldn't have *this* life without all the things that happened in the past. Even the crappy things. I couldn't have written the novels I wrote, couldn't teach the way I teach, couldn't be the person I am. I don't want it any other way."

That's what "Little Things" is all about.



Chapter 27

Kindling

My teaching career was in full force, and I still had the option to get a doctorate in rhetoric and composition, which had been my original plan. But who knew novel writing would be so seductive, not to mention so much fun?

By the end of 2008, after a year-long failed attempt to acquire a literary agent, I made the decision to self-publish *Faking It*. The experience taught me a lot about the protocols of writing query letters and synopses, sending out manuscripts, and communicating with agents. I received some positive feedback, and I also made

several mistakes. But unlike rejections in love relationships, rejections in the publishing industry didn't shake me to the core. Rather, they strengthened me. Witnessing my brothers' experiences with rejection in the music industry taught me resilience. To say that I benefitted from their losses pains me, but it's true. Can one say that this was the good that came out of a disappointing circumstance? Maybe. Despite some painful rejections earlier in their careers, two of my brothers wound up able to make a living from music. Another left the business without regrets.

Another thing I learned from my brothers was how to take charge of my writing career—to own it and act as if I were already a best-selling author bringing in the big bucks. I also noticed that acceptance or rejection wasn't always based on talent, and that sometimes rejection gave way to better opportunities.

Too bad it took me so long to realize that I could apply all those lessons to my love life.

After I exhausted the list of literary agents and made additional revisions to the *Faking It* manuscript based on the feedback they'd given me, I wavered over whether to self-publish. The stigma against self-publishing was quite strong. Many saw it as a last resort by amateurs and talentless hacks who couldn't get a publishing contract. Chain bookstores wouldn't touch self-pubbed books. And the process was costly. But with the rise of POD and a new type of marketing called “viral marketing”—a low-cost endeavor that relied on word-of-mouth and Internet savvy—I considered that perhaps the tide was turning.

My brother Ritch and I joke that I'm one of the only liberal capitalists around—I have always loved the idea of being self-employed, and desired an entrepreneurial spirit. However, I lacked

practicality and good business sense, so although I excelled in good ideas and ambition, I fell short in execution and capital. And yet, I've always been an exceptional networker and salesperson, especially when selling a product I love. I loved *Faking It*. And even though I had no idea who would want to read a novel about an uptight, New York professor giving writing lessons to a sexy, uninhibited escort (other than rhetoric-composition geeks such as myself), I knew that the manuscript couldn't sit in a drawer for the rest of its life. An audience was out there, and somehow they and *Faking It* would find each other. Whereas agents said they didn't know how to sell it to a publisher, I thought, *Hell, I could sell it*. And I could start with three regions: Long Island, Massachusetts, and North Carolina, with contacts in libraries, bookstores, and colleges in each one.

And so, following my friend Stacey's lead, I edited the manuscript to within an inch of its life, learned how to format it to fit the POD specifications (an education all on its own; I wish there had been a diploma for *that*), designed an amateur cover, and ordered my first copies of *Faking It: a novel by Elisa Lorello*. And I did it all on a budget of borrowed money—namely, my credit card. From there I pounded the pavement, sending books to whomever I could, including an acquisitions editor at Algonquin who had nice things to say even though he passed on it. Despite all my efforts, however, I hadn't sold even fifty copies after nine months, and my credit card debt was increasing.

But in 2009, two things changed the course of my career: online social networking and the Kindle.



At *The Social Network* premiere with some new friends.

Chapter 28 The Social Network

Although the website had crossed my path while I was at UMass-Dartmouth, I hadn't given Facebook any consideration. It seemed to be geared to the younger generation as a way to keep in touch with their classmates. Even though my students, as well as some friends and a few colleagues, were buzzing about it, I

believed that joining would be detrimental to my teaching career—I didn’t want students to have access to me in that way.

One summer day at Caribou Coffee in 2008, my good friend Susan persuaded me to join Facebook after she should me how it



Screenwriter
Aaron Sorkin

worked. Turns out students wouldn’t have access to me if I didn’t want them to. Like most of the population, it didn’t take me long to become addicted. The primary payoff was a way to stay more closely connected to the many Massachusetts friends I had left behind when I moved to North Carolina. Better yet, I reconnected with cousins I rarely saw and cultivated new, rewarding relationships with them.

Facebook also brought about a healing experience when I found my high school friends—including Bea, whom I’d neither seen nor spoken to since 1989—and apologized for how messed up I’d been back then and the impact on our friendships. Each of them, Bea especially, responded with kind words and forgiveness.

And then I joined the “Aaron Sorkin and the Facebook Movie” group.

I was a latecomer to Sorkin’s work—despite my mother and grad school colleagues gushing about *The West Wing*, I didn’t catch on until the reruns began on the Bravo channel in 2004. The pilot episode had me at “Good morning, Mr. McGarry.” An IMDB search led to the revelation that the guy who wrote *The West Wing* was the same guy who wrote *A Few Good Men*, a film I loved, as well as *Sports Night*—or, as I remembered it, that good TV show I kept forgetting to watch when I was in college.

Move over, Duran Duran. There’s a new sheriff in town.

I devoured *The West Wing*. It had a substantial effect on my writing, especially when it came to dialogue. Sorkin has an aural style of dialogue—he hears it like music—and no doubt that’s one of the reasons why his work resonates with me; my musical background gives way to the same style. I also loved his characters.

Plus, you know, Rob Lowe. And that Sorkin guy was kinda cute too.

Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip didn’t fare nearly as well as *The West Wing*, nor had I fallen in love with it, but that didn’t stop me from wanting more Sorkin. And so, when a Google search of “Aaron Sorkin” informed me about his screenplay-in-progress called “The Facebook Movie” (that would eventually become *The Social Network*), I stumbled upon the Facebook group page and struck gold, specifically in the form of a discussion forum called *Questions for Me*, created by Aaron Sorkin himself, which invited fans to ask him anything.

Of course, like others before me, I suspiciously questioned whether the real Aaron Sorkin was behind it. But as I scrolled through the posts and read his responses to numerous fans’ questions, I cast my doubts aside. I had arrived late to the party, but not so late that I couldn’t submit my own question and receive that glorious email notification, subject heading in bold type: **Aaron Sorkin replied to your post on a discussion board.**

Yeah, I confess: I went a little fangirl-crazy the first time I saw it. It doesn’t go away.

My question was a stupid attempt to make myself sound intelligent, something about the rhetorical appeal of Sorkin’s writing. He didn’t respond to that, but rather to my mention of having included him in *Faking It’s* acknowledgements. He asked me for a

copy of the book.

He asked me for a copy of the book!

He asked me. For a copy of *my* book.

So I sent him one, and it was the first time I was ashamed to be self-published. I wanted Aaron to see and respect me as a professional novelist, and self-publishing hadn't yet overcome its stigma.

But that was all about to change.

By this time I had tapped into a network of writers in the Raleigh area (a wonderful community that I miss since returning to the northeast). There I heard chatter about the Amazon Kindle. I'd seen Jeff Bezos promoting it on *Oprah* and *The Daily Show*, so I knew what it was, but the buzz was about how authors like me could upload their novels and sell them as ebooks. Like self-publishing, ebooks had gotten a bad rap and didn't seem to be lucrative. My friend Stacey, however, saw opportunity; not only did he re-format and upload his novels to the Kindle Direct Publishing platform (now known as KDP), but he also listed them each for one dollar, a sharp contrast to his paperback prices. A buck! Surely he was devaluing his books, literally selling himself short, right?

His sales took off. By the end of the month, he'd sold enough to make a mortgage payment.

So what did I do? I followed Stacey's lead yet again. If his novels could sell, then why not mine? I uploaded *Faking It*, set the price at \$1.99, and then it hit me: Facebook would be the perfect promotional tool, a way to target more than three states. And not just Facebook. I joined Twitter, learned about blog tours, and jumped on the Kindle discussion forums too. The entire process

was one of trial and error, and I eventually learned that the best way to sell books was by *not* selling them. In other words, get involved in conversations about books or topics of mutual interest, and let the subject of my book come up casually, naturally, on its own, without me beating anyone over the head.

Seventy Kindle copies of *Faking It* sold in the first month. More than I'd sold in paperback in six months. And they weren't purchased by friends and family and locals. Strangers were buying my book. People from different parts of the country.

Twelve copies sold the second month.

By September I decided that Stacey's one-dollar-price-point was a good risk, and thus I lowered my price to ninety-nine cents. That month's unit sales topped fifty. By then I had finished *Faking It's* sequel, *Ordinary World*, and uploaded that as well. Because I was still working on no budget, the cover design was even more dreadful than *Faking It's*. But that didn't stop Kindle owners from giving it a chance.^{xi}

Something was happening: The books were selling. In increasing volume. And favorable reviews were coming in.

Something else was happening: The *Questions for Me* discussion forum on Facebook was becoming increasingly clique-y, and I happened to be part of the clique. I can pinpoint the day we all bonded—a rather curious thread unfolded involving, among other things, a debate about the preference of sex versus coffee, and suddenly we weren't so much talking to Aaron as to one another. For the first time, I sent and accepted friend requests to and from people I didn't know personally, but who were familiar by way of the discussion forum (now known colloquially as “the board”). And, I soon discovered, some of them were among the hundreds

of new readers downloading my books.

For the first time in my life, I had not only seen the zeitgeist, but was a part of it. The Kindle, ebooks, and online social network marketing comprised the new wave, and without realizing it, I was among the first to ride it. The Kindle was the number-one Christmas gift in 2009. And since people wanted to use their Kindles but were broke, they searched for good but cheaply priced books. Mine included.

In the first week of January 2010, my sales increased to one thousand units per week. The week of my fortieth birthday, nearly ten thousand units sold in three days. By February, approximately twenty thousand units of the two books combined had sold overall.

Months later, I attempted to figure out how the pieces synchronistically came together. *Faking It* and *Ordinary World* had appeared on several high-traffic blogs as recommended “good cheap books.” That, plus the increasingly favorable reviews and word of mouth, led to more visibility on Amazon. Which led to higher rankings. Which led to more sales. A fabulous cyber-snowball effect.

To this day, I have trouble wrapping my brain around it. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that such a thing was possible. I suddenly got a taste of what Duran Duran must have felt when MTV came into their lives. My star was on the rise.



A birthday tweet from the band

Chapter 29

All You Need Is Now

The year I turned forty, 2010, was electric. The “40-for-40” list featured in my fourth novel, *Adulation*, was an idea I’d picked up in a blog and adapted for myself. I filled it with goals that had been damned near impossible to attain in previous years. To my delight, I gradually checked off item after item, including but not limited to:

- * Buy my dream car (a Volkswagen Beetle)
- * Get a publishing contract (AmazonEncore, an imprint of Amazon Publishing)
- * Become a full-time novelist (I reduced my courseload at NC State while still maintaining my benefits)
- * Meet Aaron Sorkin (I attended a pre-screening of *The Social Network* at Durham’s Carolina Theatre)

After Aaron Sorkin shut down his Facebook page prior to the release of *The Social Network*, the friends I made through the board formed our own private group and became as close as people who met for coffee on a regular basis. Many of us attended the film's premiere in New York City, meeting one another in person for the first time. And yet, this felt more like a reunion; we already knew each other so well. It was great to finally hug them.

Then came Duran Duran's thirteenth album, *All You Need Is Now*.

John Taylor has spoken publicly about the impact of Facebook and Twitter on reviving the band's relationship with their fans. I, too, will testify that their online presence revitalized my love for them and made it stronger than ever. The blessing (and curse) of Facebook and Twitter is *access*. For the first time ever, I was able to "talk" to John; it first happened during one of his Twitter lightning rounds, in which he randomly responds to his fans' tweets. I went for an attention-getter:

@elisalorello: Wanna co-write a novel with me?

It worked.

@thisistherealJT: About what?

Yes, I confess that behind closed doors, I regressed to a fourteen-year-old Duranie, squealing and happy-dancing all over my apartment and posting on Facebook: John Taylor just replied to one of my tweets!!!!

So much for serious. At least I didn't use all capital letters.

What's more, JT turned down my invitation to collaborate on a novel via direct message: "I'm a little too self-absorbed!" Funny. Ah well. I was kidding when I proposed it.

Well, half-kidding.

But *a direct message!* He replied to *me* and me alone, his words intended for no one else's eyes. It was as close as I'd ever come to meeting the man and having a conversation with him.

I then tweeted about *Ordinary World* to John, and he direct-messaged me again: "Cool!" Following that, I tweeted to @duranduran:

@thisistherealJT thinks my novel #OrdinaryWorld, inspired by the song, is "cool!" What say you?

@duranduran: Us too!

And that was that. The Duran Duran organization knew, for a fleeting moment, that my novel was out there somewhere. The tweet exchanges brought me some followers and perhaps some sales too. Since then, @duranduran has either re-tweeted or replied to me on a handful of occasions, as has John. My friend and fellow Amazon Publishing author, Rob Kroese, got a Twitter endorsement from Simon LeBon when he just so happened to read Rob's novel, *Mercury Falls*, and tweeted about it.

I still hate his guts for it. (Rob's, that is.)

Although, truth be told, I am way more terrified of my novels getting into the hands of any member of the band and their disliking them than I am of their never knowing of the books' existence.

I had an in now. A window. A portal. So did the millions of other fans, of course, but that's the seduction of online social networking—it tends to feel deceptively personal. Nevertheless, I made contact. And ever the go-getter, I aimed even higher: to meet the band in person.

One thing was certain: My affair with Aaron Sorkin was over. Duran Duran and I were about to renew our vows.



Red Carpet Massacre, the album following *Astronaut*, disappointed me when I first listened to it in 2007. For one thing, Andy had left the band again due to irreconcilable differences, and I was sad to see him go. Thus, the guitar work on *Red Carpet Massacre* seemed to take a backseat—at least it did on my first few listens. For another thing, I didn't think the matchups with producers Justin Timberlake and Timbaland were a good fit. Was this a sign of my blatant generation gap in action, of my having been disconnected from contemporary pop music for too long? Possibly. It's not that the songwriting was bad. But when I played some of the tracks for Mike, he shrugged his shoulders and said, "It sounds like Simon LeBon singing a Justin Timberlake song."

My two favorite songs on the album were "Tricked Out" and "Zoom In." "Tricked Out," an instrumental, echoed Jeff Lynne and ELO in its chord progression and sound. The only things missing were the layers of strings and a more prominent snare. "Zoom In" had a tight kick drum and reminded me a lot of the kind of songs WLIR used to play during the eighties, something that would've sent me swarming to the dance floor at Spize or Paris, New York.

The live concerts following the album's release, however, warmed me up to it a little bit more, as had been the case with "Wild Boys" a little over twenty years earlier. I didn't like that record at all when it was first released; after seeing the band perform it live, however, I developed a greater appreciation. The *Red Carpet Massacre* tour contained a new feature—an all-electronic set with the four original Durans standing side by side onstage in front of portable synthesizers and electronic drums. It was

fantastic. Their song choices were perfect: a medley of sleek, anti-acoustic arrangements, including “Last Chance on the Stairway,” “All She Wants Is,” and, to my inner teenage New-Wave-artist’s delight, a fabulously cool cover of The Normal’s robotic “Warm Leatherette.”

I feel bad for criticizing the album. And I can’t help but be audience-conscious as I write this. If any of the Durans read this, what would they think? Would they be hurt? Offended? What gives me the right to be so critical when I’m not a professional musician or engineer or producer? But I imagine what a producer like Mike could have done with *Red Carpet Massacre*—how he could have raised the bar on songs like “Falling Down” and “Tricked Out.” Time and again I have seen (and heard) what my brother has accomplished as a producer in terms of eliciting top-rate performances and then making them sound better than even the performers thought possible. Hell, I’ve experienced it firsthand. Sorry as I am to say it, I don’t think *Red Carpet Massacre*’s production team reached the levels they should (or could) have.

Producer Mark Ronson, however, actualized what I and many of my fellow Duranies, had been yearning for: a follow-up to *Rio*. More specifically, a recapturing of the passion and energy we felt when we first listened to *Rio* and the debut album. A return to the signature sound and style that made Duran Duran so great in the first place, and made us fall in love with them before we caught a single glimpse of Sri Lanka.

That’s a tall order, however, and it puts tremendous pressure on an artist. When you’ve got a masterpiece, everyone wants more of the masterpiece. But they don’t want a carbon copy or something derivative. Too much of the same, and you’re labeled as a

one-trick pony. Stray too far, however, and you lose your followers. And that masterpiece becomes the standard against which everything else is judged. For example, I couldn't help but list the reasons why *Studio 60* fell short of *The West Wing*. Brian Wilson could never top *Pet Sounds*. (Some will argue that he did with *SMiLE*. I could probably make a case too.) Everything the Beatles have done—as a band or solo—will forever be compared to *Sgt. Pepper*. But the Beatles didn't want to do the same ol' thing. I commend them for that.

Even I—and please don't think that I am putting myself or my product in the same category as these guys—have experienced this phenomenon with *Faking It*. It's my cash cow, the novel against which readers and reviewers measure all my other novels. Will I ever write another *Faking It*? I can't. Does that scare me? Sometimes, yes. Especially because I still don't know why that one struck such a chord with readers. In hindsight, I can see how certain factors coincidentally aligned to make it successful. But there's also an X-factor. There always is. The one thing I know for sure is that I must always write the novels *I* want to read. The moment I try to please the masses or the market or the trend, I'm screwed. No way will I ever please everyone. I don't dare even try. And when it comes to music or film or television, I don't think the principle is any different.

Mark Ronson, an accomplished musician, DJ, and producer (and five years my junior) is, admittedly, a Duran Duran fan. As such, he wanted the band to make an album that Duran Duran fans would love. Bless him. The band listened.

I could argue that timing played a role in the end result as well. More specifically, the psychological stage of human development

known as “mid-life.” Members of the band approached or turned fifty, the age at which those things stored away in mental attics during the teens and early twenties demand to be dug out. Mid-life is the time when many people look back on the first half of life and ask, “What was it all about?” They then look ahead to the second half, asking the same question they did in the first: “What do I want to do with the rest of my life?”

“The ‘mid-life crisis’ is really a crisis of feelings,” my mother, an expert in the field of mid-life psychology and spirituality, explains. “An individual may want to go back to a time when he or she was younger, happier. But of course, they can’t.” Thus, the “work” of the individual in mid-life is to take the best from that past and integrate it into the present. Mom continues: “The second half of life is about *individuation* and *integration*. It’s the ego’s time to step aside so you can become the person you were created to be.” *Integrating* may involve capturing the passion of a past time, but turning it into something new and different—dare I say, “re-purposing” it, just like I do with my stories.

Isn’t that what nostalgia is all about? We look back to a time and place with more fondness and light than perhaps it deserves. While some remember the 1950s as a time of sock hops and drive-ins, a great time to be a teen, others remember them as a time when a lot of lynchings took place in the South. The sixties were an age of idealism, but they were also an age of assassination.

And was there anything other than unrest in the seventies? The coolest muscle cars around, I guess.

As for the eighties? We remember the neon colors, but have forgotten the white lines—cocaine. And some who tout the

Reagan legacy gloss over the fact that his administration illegally and secretly sold arms to Iran to fund the Nicaraguan Contras, as if such a breach were nothing more than a parking violation.

So what makes the past so rosy and seemingly carefree? What makes us want to go back to it, even when some of it was rather painful?

Music. And books. And film and television and plays and paintings.

Every generation is defined by its stories. The arts, and the culture they represent, tell those stories. The music becomes the soundtrack for them. Nostalgia turns us all into unreliable narrators. But when we integrate those stories into our present, we save the best of our history. To borrow from Paul McCartney's "Hey Jude," we take a sad song and make it better.

I believe *All You Need Is Now* was an amalgamation. Musically, the band went back to their roots. Did they take out their old Chic and Bowie and Roxy Music records? I don't know. But Ronson reunited them with "the Duran Duran sound." "You've got to own that," he'd said to them. Thus, *All You Need Is Now* contains traces of Jupiter 8 synth sounds and loops, syncopated bass lines and drum fills, and guitar riffs with an edge and a heart. Once again, no one instrument dominates.

The title track says it all: *And we will sway in the moon the way we did when we were younger / When we told everybody all you need is now.* We remember the energy of the moment: The fedoras and leather. The blonde bangs and spiky hair. The eyeliner and lip gloss. The posters on the wall. The records on the turntable. The scratches and skips from endless play. The concert tickets clutched in our hands. The wall of sound. The collective scream. The sexuality.

But it's not about going back there. It's not about reliving that moment. It's about here. It's about now. It's pretty damn good where we stand.

I first listened to the *All You Need Is Now* album during a car trip across Long Island during Christmas break. And it was, indeed, the album I'd been waiting for. Not to say that it was a replica of *Rio*—no, it was clearly a twenty-first-century album with twenty-first-century technology and production. Simon's vocals were auto-tuned. The tracks were digitally recorded and mixed. Long gone were the days of all-night mixing sessions (and beer and eggs for breakfast). But there was a *feel* to it, an energy and passion that had not been present on *Astronaut* or *Red Carpet Massacre* or any of the other last ten albums, for that matter. I could feel it with every track, one seemingly better than the next. Was positively giddy as I listened, as if becoming acquainted with and falling in love with Duran Duran all over again. “Musical chocolate,” I tweeted.

And it's not that I turned fourteen again—I'd rather not go back to those days—but the love and energy and passion I amassed for Duran Duran almost thirty years prior was now integrated into my forty-year-old self: one who was happy and had experienced her own success and knew it was only going to get better. And, in a healthy, mid-life sort of response, I retrieved all my vinyl albums from storage, bought a turntable, and reunited with Hall & Oates and Huey Lewis and Kajagoogoo and Talking Heads and Howard Jones and Thompson Twins and Scritti Politti as well. What's more, thanks to the record store down the street^{xiii} from Tompkins Hall at NC State, I supplemented my collection with albums I'd wanted during my teens but never had enough pocket money to buy: Culture Club and Depeche Mode and Wang

Chung and Simple Minds and Peter Gabriel and Yazoo and Wham. I posted on Facebook: “I’m buying back the best part of my childhood, one album at a time.”



Chapter 30 Someone Else, Not Me

I didn't listen to the *Medazzaland* or *Pop Trash* albums (made without John Taylor, although he's credited on a few of the *Medazzaland* tracks) for the first time until 2011, well after their releases. Of the two, I preferred *Pop Trash*. *Medazzaland* took a long time to grow on me. Both sounded like indie versions of Duran Duran—less seasoned, in a way. Neither album contained the production values of their earlier projects, and while that can

work stylistically in some bands' favor, I'm not convinced it did for Duran Duran. I liked a lot of the songwriting, however, and several tracks were downright Beatle-ish.

“Someone Else, Not Me” stood apart from the rest of *Pop Trash*, although I wasn't crazy about the mix. (With every criticism I ask myself, *Do I really know what I'm talking about? Is it my place to judge?* I can almost hear myself, à la *This is Spinal Tap*, saying: “You don't mix Duran Duran in dubbly.”) The song was about lovers knowing that sometimes the greatest act of love is letting go—at least that's what it meant to me.

Before I left North Carolina, a good friend (a male) said, “I don't mean to pry, and I hope this doesn't come out like an insult, but why are you still single?”

I replied, “Short answer: I chose to be.”

Then I offered him the longer explanation while we split a brownie sundae, with me eating most of it. Since Brett, I'd fallen in and out of love, and dated few men. None of the relationships had worked out, for one reason or another, but not because I hadn't gotten over Brett. I had.

In yet one more effort to find a long-term mate, I had joined an online dating site (I was in my late thirties). After a third date with an attractive guy who was an avid reader and a practicing Buddhist—a date that I thought had gone well and would lead to a fourth and beyond—he gave me the let's-just-be-friends kiss of death. It came on the heels of a longtime disappointment involving a man with whom I was in love, but who didn't feel the same in return. For years we'd tried to maintain a friendship to no avail, and I'd finally ended the relationship permanently.

I was done.

Done with disappointment. Done with letdowns. Done with let's-just-be-friends. Done with dating. In fact, I'd never been good at dating in the first place. Never cared for it. My best moments in love always happened when I wasn't trying.

I was done with all of it, I decided. So I shut down.

It's not that I didn't take any responsibility for the causes of my train wreck of a love life. But I was tired of shouldering *all* the blame.

As time passed, however, what began as a reaction to pain and fear gradually evolved into something healing, even gratifying. I cherished my independence, and acknowledged everything I accomplished because I was single. Occasionally, during moments of reflection, I would ask myself lovingly, peacefully, like a parent asks a child: *Do you want to meet someone? Because you can if you want to. You can have anything you want. You can handle this now. You can let someone in. If you want to.* The answer would resound just as peacefully: *No, not now. Right now I'm happy with the way things are, and the way I am.* The answer was always about *now*.

And maybe my love life hadn't been so much a train wreck as it had been an education.

In the mid-2000s, Brett and I unintentionally ran into each other a number of times, as if the universe had finally deemed it safe for us to do so. Each encounter was amiable and pleasant. About five years later, after I moved south, we reconnected via email. I don't recall how or why the conversations started, but they gave us a chance to say things we'd needed to say for almost fifteen years. No doubt the physical as well as temporal distance was a positive factor; our cyber-interactions came with a built-in boundary that served us both well.

We said we were sorry.

We said we had loved each other then, and cared for each other now.

We were each happy to see what became of the other.

We let go of regrets. We forgave each other. We remembered the good times.

We *healed*.

I've never wanted children, and I now believe that even if Brett and I had worked through our issues and gotten married, we likely would have ended up divorced. Instead, he is what he was meant to be: a father as well as a husband. And after years of hoping-wishing-praying for a love relationship, I transformed myself into a woman who learned to *be* the things she had so desperately craved from a man for so long. Be love. Be affection. Be understanding. Be acceptance. Be intelligent. Be humor. Be intimacy. Be the love of your life. Be here now.

Be *the one*.

I had become that, and more. And I didn't want to change a single thing.

"Someone Else, Not Me" is about my love life. It's about setting all of it free, and doing it lovingly, even if it's painful. Like "Ordinary World," it's about finding grace in the midst of the suffering. The song should've been a hit. An anthem. It should've been mixed better. It's one of the best Duran Duran songs that no one knows.

My second favorite song on *Pop Trash* was "Mars Meets Venus." Although I disliked the title—reminded me too much of that god-awful *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* book that I'd read in my early twenties—the line *Someone is perfect for you / Do you wanna bet your life you're gonna be perfect for them too* was

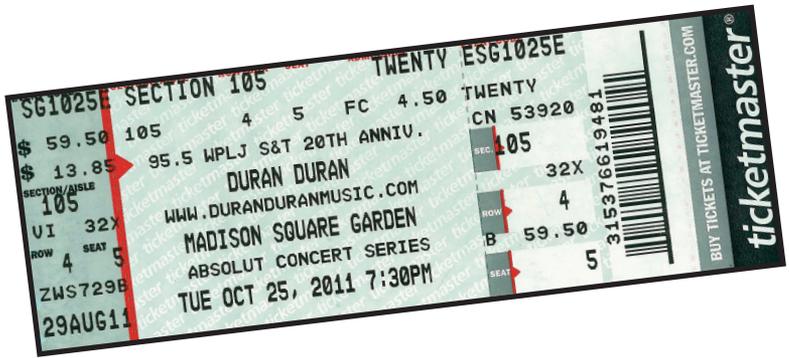
uplifting, and it entertained a possibility, a *what-if*: What if maybe, just maybe, there is such a thing as “the one”?

Because let’s face it: I’m an eternal optimist. Not to mention abstract, idealist, romantic. (I stole that description—verbatim—from the back of a Duran Duran concert T-shirt circa *Big Thing*. Hey, can I help it if it describes me to a tee, no pun intended?)

I cannot deny that I have fleeting moments of longing, of wondering the whereabouts of the man I used to dream about when I practiced kissing on pillows. Not Shaun Cassidy, but someone else. I wonder if I set impossible expectations for myself. I wonder if he’s standing in plain sight and I’m too busy looking past him for something or someone that doesn’t exist. I wonder if I create him in every novel—as David and Sam and Kenny and Norman and Josh and Danny—and thus don’t need to go “looking” for him because he’s already here, has been here all along, inside of me. I wonder if I’m in denial and still closed off. I wonder if the intention has yet to be fully aligned and manifested. I wonder if there even is an intention. I wonder if I still want it, if I ever wanted it in the first place. I wonder what “it” is.

But when I sustain the silence of the now for as long as I can, those cluttered thoughts scatter like seagulls and leave me with this one rhythmic crest of the surf: *To thine own self be true.*

And that is all I need to know: Be myself. The rest is someone else, not me.



Chapter 31 Due North

As if 2010 wasn't fabulous enough, 2011 brought Duran Duran and me one highlight after another. As official AmazonEncore publications, *Faking It* and *Ordinary World* made a comeback (rather, to echo the imprint's namesake, an encore) with new, professionally designed covers and improved copyediting. *Faking It* shot up the Kindle Best Seller list again, this time peaking at number fourteen overall. It retained the top spot in Single Women's Fiction for over a year. Additionally, AmazonEncore released my third novel, *Why I Love Singlehood*, co-authored with my friend and former student, Sarah Girrell, and I was finishing my fourth novel, *Adulation*.

The year 2011 repeatedly brought me back to New York too. First, Amazon Publishing invited all of its authors to the Book Expo of America. For three days I felt like a rock star: limos, hotels, dinners, free run of the Javitz Center, and meeting and rubbing elbows with fellow authors and Amazon Publishing bigwigs (no, Jeff Bezos wasn't there). Second, I checked off another goal: attending the Southampton Writers Conference on Long Island. With past instructors such as Alan Alda and the late Frank McCourt, the SWC had been on my life's to-do list for years. Ironically, the screenwriting workshops made a bigger impression on my novel-writing skills than the short fiction class did. And I kept up with hobnobbing and elbow-rubbing and enjoying my beloved East End. The pulls of the ocean and physical proximity to my family increased with each trip.

Simultaneously, Duran Duran hit peaks that echoed their eighties stardom: *All You Need Is Now* hit number one on iTunes. The "Girl Panic!" video scored one million YouTube hits. The band headlined the iconic Coachella festival, and produced a web-streamed live show directed by avant-garde filmmaker David Lynch. And they embarked on a world tour and greeted boisterous, welcoming audiences in every city. The crowds still contained some teenagers—only this time they were mostly the offspring of longtime fans. And all those guys who were afraid to like Duran Duran in the eighties for fear of being called or outed as gay were dancing in the aisles with the rest of us. Thanks to Twitter and Facebook, we felt closer to our band—and one another—again.

And to think we came so close to losing it.

Simon had suffered a vocal injury, forcing the band to cancel

months of tour dates while he recovered. The band later relayed it as “a frightening time” because they didn’t know if Simon could or would make a full recovery.

And they all agreed that there could be no Duran Duran without Simon LeBon.

I am unexpectedly emotional as I write about this. At the time, I didn’t realize how serious Simon’s condition was. Via Facebook and Twitter, I sent him love and get-well wishes; maybe he read them, maybe not. Maybe some part of him felt the energy.

I can only imagine what it feels like to be at a point in your career when you love it more than ever, and a place in life where you know exactly what you want to do for the rest of your life, and then lose it. I’m emotional right now because I’m asking myself the same question Simon and John and Nick and Roger were asking: *What would I do without Duran Duran, especially since they’ve brought me a whole new level of joy at this stage of my life?*

I’d like to think—and I know this is going to sound corny—that it was love that gave Simon his voice back.

John said in an interview that the band became closer friends than ever during that time. Brothers, even. I think we fans did with them as well; not just during Simon’s recovery, but these past couple of years, thanks to the constant exposure on YouTube and iTunes and Facebook and Twitter, compounded by the intimacy of every live show, and the *words*—tweets, blog posts, articles, and interviews. They’re speaking to us. And they see and hear us speaking to them. Whereas cameras were once confiscated at venues during concerts, fans now capture and preserve the moments on their smartphones. Even Nick now takes snapshots of the audience and posts them on the band’s official website and

Facebook page the following day.

Simon recovered his voice in time for yet another one of my longtime goals to be fulfilled: On October 25, 2011, Elisa and I finally attended a Duran Duran concert together.

At Madison Square Garden.

Perfect.

It was the band's first time performing there in almost twenty-five years. I canceled my classes and drove up from North Carolina—no way in hell was I missing this opportunity.^{xiii} Although, we almost did. Just as the station called the final boarding warning, we hopped on the Long Island Rail Road. I then reached into my jacket pocket and felt nothing: My wallet—and our concert tickets—had fallen out as we raced down the platform. Fortunately, the Duran angels were watching over us. I jumped off the train, retrieved my wallet from the platform steps, and jumped back on seconds before the train doors closed for good.

When we arrived in Manhattan, we dined at Chelsea Market and took in the city at twilight, enjoying the cool, crisp autumn air as we walked the streets. The city that had been such a scary place to me when I was a teenager was now a badge of honor. And Elisa and I were no longer comparing Swatches or planning our double wedding to Nick and John; instead, we talked about our families and daily ins and outs with employment and health insurance and paying bills. Neither of us became the jet-setting artists we once fantasized ourselves to be, but we made it through the last twenty years and found happiness.

We didn't have the best seats at the Garden (100-level, but on the right and far from the stage). Long gone was the sea of

fedoras, painter's caps, Capezios, and band lookalikes. In fact, the crowd looked rather aged. But we were a happy audience—the majority of us were on our feet the entire night, dancing and singing and basking in the moment, all together again. Ageless.

Yeah, this was way better than being fifteen.

Would Elisa and I have been friends without Duran Duran? They take up very little of our conversation these days, but they've made life more fun. And when we do talk about the band, a youthful spirit takes over without any of the adolescent angst. Funny how when I look back at the eighties, so much of that pain has fallen away, especially when I listen to the music. Eighties music is happy. Colorful. Friendly. The music is worth remembering.

I slept over at Elisa's house that night, down the hall from her two daughters. But we didn't have time for chocolate chip pancakes the following morning. No staying home from work either. I needed to get back on I-95 South. However, from that point on, I knew my days in North Carolina were numbered.



Tweet from my friend Stacey: "At Duran Duran with @elisalorello who is having so much fun it's infectious." Durham, NC August 2012

Chapter 32

Duranies Rock On

Have I mentioned how much fun it is to be a Duran Duran fan? Has been fun for the last thirty years, but never so much as it is now.

For instance, we know the things that legends are made of, such as Simon's lyric book and purple leopard-skin pants, the Rum Runner night club, the iconic image of Princess Diana shaking John's hand, and Nick's all-pink wedding to Julianne Friedman.

We know what "Roger uses two hands for his" means, and we crack up every time someone says it.

We mimic that point-and-pivot step every time we hear the line "You're about as easy as a nuclear war" from "Is There Something I Should Know?" We also know exactly when to scream *Switch it off!* during "Planet Earth" and *That means money, honey!* during "Girls on Film."

We love to shout with urgency, “I mean, gimme a wrist-baaaand!” when we are waiting impatiently.

We wonder whom Simon will select from the audience to kick off “The Reflex” with “Da na na na . . .” and which song they will break into at the “Notorious” bridge.

We can’t wait to chant *Play the fuckin’ bass, John!*

We still play air-saxophone during “Rio.”

We memorized Mercutio’s soliloquy from *Romeo and Juliet* thanks to Simon’s recitation at the beginning of the “Nightboat” video:

*She is the fairies’ midwife, and she comes
In a shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomi
Over men’s noses as they lie asleep.*

We kept our scrapbooks filled with yellowed pages of *Bop* and *Tiger Beat*, and our *Star Hits* pinups are packed away and preserved.

We saved every last ticket stub and concert T-shirt and pin and banner and trading card.

We’ve doctored our Facebook profile photos to look like Patrick Nagel portraits.

We retained a Duran-inspired accessory—a well-wrapped scarf, a fedora, a few dangling bangles, a tassel or two—and revived it in retro fashion.

We bond at concerts and book signings and fan forums. We debate best Duran Duran album, best single, best poster, best look, best album cover, best album post-Roger-and-Andy, best guitarist post-Andy, best producer, best live song, best video

album/documentary, best night club remix, best live performance . . . and in the end come to the consensus that it's all good 'cause it's all Duran Duran.

We know the milestones and turning points. We know the trivia and history. We know birthdays and anniversaries.

We confess to one another that we still occasionally fantasize about what it would be like to be their wives, girlfriends, lovers. And when we do, we giggle like teenage girls.

Most of all, wherever we are—at a coffee shop, a store, the gym, or in the car—when a Duran Duran song comes on, our ears perk up, the corners of our mouths widen into a greeting grin, and a twinkle appears in our eyes. We tap our feet, snap our fingers, and either resist or give in to the urge to dance and sing along.

We make friends for life.



Chapter 33 Putting the Fan Away

The moment John Taylor announced that he was writing a memoir, I *knew* I was going to meet him. Of course, I also knew not to be overconfident; nothing was a sure thing. But the likelihood of his doing a book tour with New York City being one of the stops, and the odds of my being there for it, were high.

In 2012, I resigned from NC State and announced to my friends and family that, after six warm, wonderful years in North Carolina, I was going home. More specifically, I was returning to southeastern Massachusetts. Originally I'd wanted to move back to Long Island. My beloved Nonni, once so full of vitality and style and warmth and wit, was slowly deteriorating, becoming a shell of her former self. Ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred years old . . . what was she

holding on to? As I witnessed the emotional peaks and valleys, not to mention the physical and financial toll her care took on my mom and uncles, I increasingly felt the need to be more available—not only to my mother, but also to my father and siblings. I didn’t want to think morbidly about how much (or little?) time was left, but I didn’t want to take time for granted either. And I didn’t want finances or physical distance to get in the way of spending that time with the people I loved most. I could no longer stand living so far away from my twin brother or missing Thanksgiving on Long Island.

The weeks in Southampton for the writers conference reminded me just how much I missed the ocean and needed its nourishment too. For me, a beach is the perfect balance of energy: wind and water, earth and sun. I go not for tanning and socializing, but for substance and solace, rejuvenation and reconciliation. I go to heal a broken heart. To give thanks for my life. To just be. I don’t need to be on or in the water, just near it. I need accessibility. As much as I loved the Triangle with all its comforts and conveniences, and loved the life I’d made, the people I’d met, the connections and friendships and more affordable cost of living, I could no longer accept being landlocked as a trade-off.

Could I have moved to the Carolina coast? Of course. I was attracted to Wilmington and the UNC-W campus. Both had served as inspiration for the setting of *Why I Love Singlehood*. But distance remained an issue; I would be even farther away from my family on Long Island.

However, as I researched the cost of housing and insurance and utilities, I knew I couldn’t afford Long Island, even if I got a full-time teaching position.

“Why not go back to Massachusetts?” my friend Kate sug-

gested one day.

And then, as if they were in cahoots, my twin brother said to me, out of the blue, “You should move back to Massachusetts. I think it suited you well.”

And so, the Bay State it was. And it would serve the same purpose the second time around as it had the first: close enough to Long Island to go home when I needed and wanted to. Plus, I already knew my way around. I had planted roots the last time.

That was Life Decision Number One. Life Decision Number Two involved teaching. In recent years I had called teaching “my spouse” and novel-writing “my mistress.” Both provided intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. However, both also demanded my full attention and, despite my attempts to remain committed to my spouse (not to mention my guilt), I could no longer deny that I was happier with my mistress. Especially when I saw what my divided affection was doing to the kids—students, that is. (Am I taking this metaphor too far?)

I had a good thing going at NC State: an outstanding faculty, a supportive staff, a top-notch curriculum, and the oh-so-important benefits that are hard to come by at the non-tenure-track level. And I still enjoyed being in the classroom. Still created and experienced moments of magic. Still liked the process. But the sporadic joys were no longer sustaining me during those tedious periods of grading, for which my ever-present disdain was increasing. Additionally, the first-year writing curriculum, top-notch and cutting edge as it was, was out of alignment with the idealistic pedagogy that had shaped me in graduate school. I had a hard time reconciling that too. Was I out of touch? Stuck in the past, just like with my musical preferences?

Regardless of the answer, my teaching suffered, which meant

that my students suffered. And that weighed more heavily on me than anything else.

Now in my forties, I wondered if I reached an age at which being whimsical wasn't feasible. For the first time in my adult life, I was afraid to lose my security. I was afraid to live without health insurance again, to return to a credit-card-debt, hand-to-mouth, paycheck-to-paycheck, thrift-store-shopping lifestyle. But teaching had become a job rather than a profession—or, as it had once been, a passion—and *that* sapped more energy from me than the fear of being impoverished while doing what I loved. I have always been the type of person for whom work needed to be joyful, even when it meant sacrificing more lucrative positions. Maybe it's also the Italian in me who lives for pleasure.

The chorus of our father's birthday song echoed softly: *Give me the little things.*

Every day I looked at the vision board beside my bed, at the words in bold orange letters: GO FOR IT!

So I did.

I decided to move in the fall, when the southern heat was less oppressive and just in time to see the New England foliage. Summer would also give me the chance to squeeze in some much-needed writing time, look for a place to live, and pack up my life.

Besides, Duran Duran was coming to the Durham Performing Arts Center (DPAC) in August. No way was I going to miss that. In fact, it was the best damn Duran Duran concert I ever attended.

John's memoir, *In the Pleasure Groove: Love, Death and Duran Duran*, was scheduled for an October 2012 release date. I kept pushing my move date back, from Labor Day weekend to mid-to-late-October. I even considered temporarily moving in with my

mother through the end of the year, but moving in January was as repulsive a thought as moving in July.

Then the announcement showed up on Facebook: In-Store Signing, Barnes & Noble, New York City. Duran Duran's John Taylor. October 16.

My entire move now revolved around this date. I scrambled with the moving company, the owner of the new house I was about to rent, and my mom to ensure that I would be at that bookstore that day. It worked out like this:

- * Movers arrived at the North Carolina apartment on October 5th
- * I drove up to Long Island on the 7th
- * Mom and I drove up to the new house in Massachusetts on the 9th
- * Movers showed up on the 11th (after a one-day delay)
- * Mom and I drove back to Long Island on the 13th
- * I went to Elisa's the night of the 15th
- * Elisa and I took the train into the city the next morning, making it to the B&N by nine A.M.

I'm exhausted just typing it.

When Elisa and I arrived at the bookstore downtown, we saw no lines out the door or even inside. But when we purchased our books and the cashier sent us sent upstairs, we found at least a hundred women, the majority of them forty-somethings, coiled around the aisles between each stack. Some standing, some sitting, some with coffee or baked goods from the Starbucks café below. Not too bad, we decided. At least we wouldn't be turned away.

John was due to arrive at twelve thirty. I held the hardcover in my hands, with JT posed serious and sexy on the front against a fire-engine-red backdrop, the book's title in bold, sans serif typeface. If I may quote my inner teenage Duranie, he looked like "a total fox." (I later tweeted to Patty Palazzo, the designer, "My God, I want to wallpaper my office with that cover.") I opened the book, smelled the pages, and read the first couple of chapters. But I couldn't concentrate.

From the moment I found out about the book tour, and this particular event, I visualized what I would say when I stepped up to the signing table. I practiced this ritual while taking long walks around the pond at Apex Park in North Carolina. For example, when meeting Aaron Sorkin, I imagined myself as cool. Composed. A peer, if you will. Writer to writer. And that's exactly how I felt when I met him. Not to say that there wasn't a fluttering of inner butterflies when the moment happened, but I didn't even bat an eyelash when Aaron, remembering me from the Facebook discussion group, took my hand and said, "It's great to see you. I wish we had time to chat."

What I was really trying to do, as John had said in an interview, was "put the fan away. Otherwise you can't have a real conversation." I had wanted a real conversation with Aaron. Or, at the very least, a genuine moment between two writers. Nowhere in that conversation belonged the words, "I'm your biggest fan," or, "You're the bestest writer in all the world and beyond," or, "So, if you're ever single . . ."

With John, I didn't want to try too hard to impress him, as I had mistakenly done with Aaron that first time on Facebook, nor did I want to be a fangirl. As with Aaron or Emilio Estevez, with

whom I had chatted on the phone thanks to a promotional contest for his film *The Way*, I wanted to interact person to person. Writer to writer. Storyteller to storyteller. Musician to musician's sister. Friend to friend. I had to put the fan away. So with every lap around the pond, I played out the scenario:

(Step up to the table.)

Me: Hi John. It's a pleasure to finally meet you.

John: Hello.

Me: I'm looking forward to reading this. I love your writing on the Duran blog.

John: Thanks.

Me: I'm a writer as well.

John: That's great! What do you write?

Me: Novels. In fact, I just so happened to write one called *Ordinary World* . . .

Still too fangirl?

My other option was to tell him the Matt Sorum story. When John formed the band Neurotic Outsiders (post-Duran Duran) with Guns N' Roses drummer Matt Sorum, bassist Duff McKagen, and Sex Pistols guitarist Steve Jones, they played a gig at the Electric Ballroom in Phoenix. My brother Ritch, in a band of his own, was there to see Matt Sorum, who was a friend of his. Following the set, Ritch went backstage, where Matt introduced him to John.

The part I would leave out is when Ritch called me sometime afterward and said, "I saw John Taylor the other night," to which I replied simply, "That's cool," not learning until years later that

by *saw* he meant *met*. When he finally clarified what really happened, I shouted something along the lines of “You did *WHAT?*” followed by “How come you didn’t tell me?” It took everything I had not to add, *And for chrissakes, why didn’t you give him my phone number?* I knew better.

The Matt Sorum story offered me some clout on various fronts: 1) Having a mutual connection would diminish the degrees of separation between us. 2) It’s a story about guys and bands, and it would give Ritch a little shoutout too. Not that I was expecting John to remember this meeting. 3) Seeing that I come from this musical world, we would potentially have more to talk to about.

If I got a chance to tell him. And if I didn’t blank out and act like an idiot instead. Or worse, start to cry. After all, I’d been waiting for this moment for thirty years. *Thirty years!*

Then there was the *Ordinary World* issue—i.e., the question of whether to present John with my novel. Signed, of course. Would the act be too much of a fan thing? Would he be accepting gifts? I’d brought a copy with me, and with three-and-a-half hours to kill at Barnes & Noble, I had plenty of time to waver on it, which I did. Elisa, and the surrounding fans we chatted with, insisted I give it to him.

OK, I’ll do it. It’s worth a shot.

No, I won’t. It’s stupid. Corny. He’ll be put off by it.

I don’t know.

Yes?

No?

Maybe.

We’ll see.

By eleven o'clock, I started to get antsy. By eleven thirty, downright nervous. I alternated between periods of standing and sitting, opting to stand because I could at least shake off some of the energy by frenetically swaying from side to side. In one of those small-world, what-are-the-odds moments, I saw a woman I had “met” on Twitter, recognizing her from her profile photo. She was standing so close to us in line that I could hear her voice. When I heard her say “North Carolina” (she lived there and came to New York just for the signing—as I would have done had I not just made the move), I approached her. She recognized me as well, and we hugged. Sometimes social networking isn't all that impersonal.

Twelve o'clock. By now the line extended to the back of the store, and it was a big store. Approximately a thousand people showed up, at least ninety-five percent of them women. *This was happening.* And yet, 'til the very end I mentally listed things that could go wrong: John could get sick, stuck in traffic, cancel. The line could go on too long and they would cut it off just as we stepped up. I could take a blurry photo, or not get in a photo at all.

At twelve fifteen, the line started to move. And then, moments before twelve thirty, a cheer erupted. JT in the building.

Oh my God.

He's here.

Because Elisa and I were sandwiched between bookcases, we couldn't see the signing table, or him. The fluttering in my stomach turned into churning blades. *Be cool be cool be cool,* I silently chanted. *He's just a musician. You've met lots of musicians. Hell, you've lived with them. You know this guy. Doesn't matter that he doesn't know you. Put the fan away and have a conversation.*

The line stopped and started again.

I couldn't stop fidgeting. Fans raised their smartphones and iPads over their heads in an attempt to get a snapshot of John at the signing table. I took out my camera in preparation as Elisa and I strategized about how to take photos for each other. Meanwhile, I continued to deliberate over whether to present the copy of *Ordinary World* that I'd signed and inscribed while we waited. Our new friends said unanimously: "Do it!"

We reached a point in the line where we could peek between two racks of calendars and catch a glimpse of John at the signing table. One by one, women tiptoed over and snuck snapshots before returning with excited smiles, saying, "He looks *really* good."

"Oh, hell," I said in surrender, and I crept to the calendar peephole.

And there he was. Clad in black jacket and pants, white shirt, and a red plaid scarf so perfectly, artfully wrapped around his neck (how come I can never get *my* scarves to look like that?). Shiny, sculpted brown hair. He had come straight from the *Today* show (we watched it on someone's iPad), and it was hard to tell if any traces of makeup remained. I could see the crow's feet framing his eyes as he smiled and spoke to each fan while he signed their books. Even sitting down, he was tall.

I had never seen him this close-up before. This three-dimensional.

He was every bit as gorgeous as he had been on my bedroom wall thirty years ago. More so now, perhaps.

At that moment, any reserve of cool I had managed to collect spilled out all over the carpet. I felt my face flush as I walked back to the line.

“Damn,” I blurted, before adding, “He *does* look really good.”

One of the women laughed. “Your face is so red right now!”

Of course, as if on cue, it turned even redder. *Shit! Shit! Shit!*

The fan was demanding to be let out of her cage, and I was fighting her off. I wasn’t like this when I met Aaron. Why not? Had I been more confident? Or was it because I’d only been admiring him for about six years as opposed to thirty? I never hung posters of Aaron Sorkin on my wall or attached photo-pins to my denim jacket. I never woke up and went to sleep with him.

My most recent novel, *Adulation*, was originally conceived as a fan who meets her teen idol twenty-five years later. But I didn’t know what came after that meeting. Do they become friends?

Did that in *Faking It*.

Lovers?

That didn’t feel right either, despite the countless pages of fan fiction I’d written, not to mention the fantasies I’d conjured depicting such scenarios.

What did I want from this guy?

Same thing I’ve always wanted: To be known beyond a single meeting. To be noticed. To stand out. Not to or by the masses, but to and by *one*.

I could tell that story with a screenwriter. That’s where my head was at the time. *The Social Network* came out before *All You Need Is Now*.

The last thing I wanted right now, at this moment, was to be a fan. I was tired of fandom. We’d come too far together for that, John and Duran Duran and me.

Would I ever get to tell the story I’d wanted to tell, or would I have to live it in order to find out what happens?

We made it to the velvet ropes. Elisa stood in front of me. John was about fifteen feet away. One of the handlers explained the protocol: Pass your book to the B&N associate, step up to the signing table when the fan in front of you leaves, hand your camera to the other associate on the left, let John sign your book, and exit to the left, collecting your camera as you go.

Elisa piped up: “Can we give him anything?”

“Excuse me?”

“She has something for him,” Elisa said, pointing to me. “A book.”

“I’m an author,” I explained. “I’ve written a novel and I’d like to present it to him.”

The woman smiled. “Of course! I work for John. You can give it to me and I’ll make sure he gets it, or you can give it to him right now.”

“I’ll give it to him now, thank you,” I said.

Well, that’s it. Decision made.

Elisa approached the table, and I heard John greet her.

“Hello, Elissa.”

I don’t think Elisa or I ever heard anyone mispronounce our name with such a friendly, delicate voice, nor, for once, did we mind the error. Would he call me by name too? Would he remark, “Two Elissas in a row”? Or was he in assembly-line mode and wouldn’t notice?

Be cool be cool be cool . . .

My turn.

I stepped up to the table. The Matt Sorum story instantly went MIA.

“Hi, John,” I tried to say casually, but hearing myself, it almost

sounded like whining. My voice quavered. Good grief.

As he opened *In the Pleasure Groove* to sign it, I plopped *Ordinary World* down on the table and pushed it toward him as I rambled something about having told him about it on Twitter, not expecting him to remember it, but I wrote this and it was inspired by the song and I would very much like to present you with this copy here right now . . .

Oh, God. A train wreck. There was no time to explain the premise or that it was a sequel. The *Ordinary World* cover design was also my least favorite of all my novels, and to say it paled in comparison to the fiery cover of *In the Pleasure Groove* would be a polite understatement.

In addition to the B&N associate taking pictures for everyone, a photographer who worked for Duran Duran was also present. I assumed that she was responsible for all the photos of fans at the previous events appearing on Duran Duran's Facebook page. When I presented John with *Ordinary World*, she curiously leaned in, looking over John's shoulder as he examined it.

"Can I get a picture of that?" she asked. Next thing I knew, I was smiling and showing it to her. But wait!

"I'd like to get a photo of John and me holding each other's books, if you don't mind," I said. John agreed, so I slightly leaned in and over the table, clutching his book and hoping my smile wasn't overly toothy. The photographer snapped a couple of shots.

I had visualized *that* moment during one of my many walks in Apex Park.

And it hit me.

Wow.

And then the one thing I feared would happen did: I got starstruck. Tongue-tied. As I was about to step away from the table, John said something to me.

“Good luck with it.”

It took me an extra second to decipher that he was referring to *Ordinary World*.

“Thank you,” was all I could articulate. Then I stammered, “Oh, and uh, you too. Congrats.” Or something like that. Ugh.

I was shell-shocked for hours afterward: *What the hell just happened? What did he say? What did I say? What did he look like?* I wished I had video-recorded it.

When Elisa and I left the store and were back on the city streets, I decided to let the fan out just for a moment.

“Holy crap, we just met John Taylor!” I said. Elisa squealed as we grabbed each other and hugged, drawing looks from passersby.

The icing on the cake? Kelly, my friend I can’t remember not knowing, just so happened to be in New York on business that week. She met Elisa and me at Johnny Rockets down the street from Barnes & Noble. My two oldest and dearest friends finally got to meet each other, and I got to share the defining moment of my Duran Duranged life with both of them. How appropriate.

I walked away from John, the signing table, and the entire experience, feeling . . . what is the word—unsatisfied? That sounds like an overstatement. Selfish, even. Something a perfectionist would say. I don’t think the magnitude of what happened had set in.

Still hasn’t.

I was downplaying it hours later. Sure, John Taylor went along with the photo-op, politely holding my book, but he’s not *reading*

it, I said. My friends and family were way more confident than I was. He's going to read it, they said. He *is* reading it, and he's going to love it, will contact me through Twitter or my website to tell me how good it was, how much he enjoyed it, let's have lunch, et cetera. Hasn't happened yet.

One meeting wasn't enough.

There wasn't time to tell him how much I love "Runway Runaway," that "Blame the Machines" would make Jeff Lynne proud, or that "New Religion" is still my favorite live song. There wasn't time to tell him about Dad's 1945 Epiphone; about my growing up above a recording studio in the basement; about every single band my brothers had ever formed; about Mike Lorello, producer extraordinaire, and Ritchie Lorello, guitarist extraordinaire. There wasn't time to tell him about Elisa Lorello, self-taught, amateur lefty guitarist who can sing two-part harmony. Who is a teacher and a best-selling novelist and at one time wanted to design album covers for a living. Who has traveled hundreds of miles to see him in concert. Who doesn't drink, doesn't smoke, doesn't do drugs, and never did. Who has loved and lost and loved again. Who is single and happy, hasn't met "the one" (yet?), and is content either way. Who has lived a charmed life, surrounded by fabulous family and friends.

I want him to ask me about these things, to say, "Stay and chat for awhile."

All I ever needed to do was be myself, I now realize.

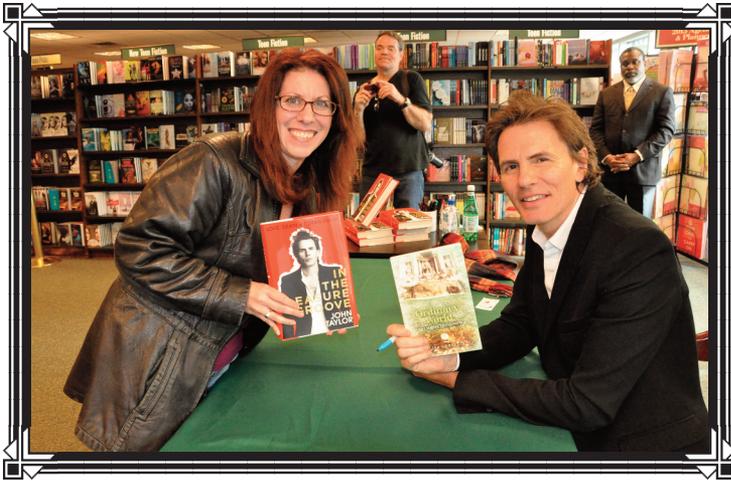
It took two days to track down the photo, and the result exceeded my expectations. The photo is fantastic. I have framed copies of it all over my house and on my Facebook page. I even considered sending them out in lieu of Christmas cards.

The day after the signing, I reported on Facebook that it was time for a new bucket list. First item: Meet the rest of Duran Duran.

After that, something even better.

I no longer want to be a fan—it's time for her to retire. Instead I'll always be an admirer. Not a best buddy or a lover, but an endearing, affectionate friend.

I have yet to tell that story.



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Duranies and Gen-Xers everywhere, as well as my loyal readers.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elisa Lorello is the author of the Kindle best-selling novels *Faking It* and *Ordinary World, Why I Love Singlehood* (co-authored with Sarah Girrell), and *Adulation*. *Faking It*, translated in German as *Vorgetäuscht*, spent three weeks at number one on the German Kindle Bestseller list. Her fifth novel, *She Has Your Eyes*, a continuation of *Faking It* and *Ordinary World*, will be released in February 2014.

When she's not reading and writing, Elisa is an unapologetic Duran Duran fan, a walker, coffee shop patron, Pop Tart enthusiast, and sings two-part harmony. She currently lives in Southeastern Massachusetts.

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END NOTES

ⁱ I've seen this spelled as "barre." When I conferred with my brother Mike, he said he always saw and spelled it as "bar." I defer to him as the authority.

ⁱⁱ Maker of Vienna Fingers, Nutter Butters, and Hydrox cookies, most notably.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to my mother, "Marriage Encounter originated in Spain. It consists of a weekend for couples whose marriages are good but could use a bit of a boost. Three couples and a priest present a series of talks. Each talk is followed by a question for reflection. Attending couples learn how to answer the question in writing and then lovingly share and discuss each other's answers. When the weekend ends, the couples are renewed as a result of recalled feelings of love expressed during dating, engagement, and early marriage days. The couples are encouraged to continue the reflective dialogue thereafter."

In contrast, "Pre-Cana is a diocesan/parish program in weekly sessions (determined by the sponsoring parish) for engaged couples. Married couples with personal, experiential examples in topics of commitment, faith, spirituality, finances, sex, welcoming children, in-laws, and more, present talks to the candidates."

^{iv} I can't help but take notice of the lack of women in that array of bands and artists. Aside from my dad loving Ella Fitzgerald and eventually passing that love on to me, my brother Mike owning a copy of Carole King's *Tapestry*, and my sister owning a Linda Ronstadt album, I can't remember any female influences. I notice the same thing when I list role models from other arts and entertainment fields—literary, television and screen, sports—and wonder if I'm supposed to feel a sense of discrimination. Have I had more male influences because I grew up with so many males? Or did being born on the cusp of the women's liberation movement mean that I was riding the last wave of a male-dominated society? I don't know. I'm not uncomfortable with having so many male influences, but am sometimes self-conscious about not having made the effort—then or now—to seek out more female influences. The exception, of course, is Nora Ephron.

^v I asked Mike to define “mix” in layperson's terms. Here's his reply: “Generally, you're taking a multi-track recording (i.e., guitars, bass, individual drum kit pieces, pianos, synthesizers, etc.), and balancing and sonically tweaking the individual sounds so that they blend. The whole mess will wind up frozen in a stereo (two-track) version, which will most likely be mastered (further tweaked as a whole) and passed on to the consumer. This is a clinical description. It is an art to do it properly and wind up with an aesthetically pleasing result.”

^{vi} For some reason, I remember calling them “wacky whippers.” However, some additional research revealed that these things are called Sticky Hands, and I found this description: “It was a one-piece object with a cylindrical handle several inches long and roughly the diameter of a pencil. One end broadened into a flattened arrowhead shaped like a hand. It was made of some plastic/rubber compound, which was both ductile and almost 100% elastic, and its surface was very sticky. When cracked like a

whip, the handle would elongate several feet, then snap back to its original size. Since its surface was sticky, [it] could pick up and retrieve a piece of paper (or other light object) from a distance of several feet.”

^{vii} This fact may not be entirely accurate. Family debates question how much involvement my grandfather had in casting Prometheus, and whether the foundry was General Bronze or Roman Bronze.

Here’s what I pieced together from consultations with my mother and uncle Bob: My great-grandfather and great-uncle were instrumental in casting the iconic Atlas statue in New York City. Grandpa worked for General Bronze as superintendent of the foundry. They did architectural and commercial castings, including the bronze work inside St. Patrick’s Cathedral (not the doors), and Prometheus in Rockefeller Plaza.

Says my uncle: “Roman Bronze, I believe, was a subsidiary of General Bronze. The two foundries were on the same property and steps away from each other. As a kid I roamed freely throughout both foundries. The major distinction between the two foundries was the casting methods employed. Roman Bronze used the ‘Lost Wax’ method developed by Celini in the middle ages, whereas General Bronze used sand castings.” Grandpa and my great-grandfather (who ran Tiffany Studios) were experts in the latter method.

Two friends from General Bronze then broke off and went into business for themselves, forming General Foundry, and offered Grandpa the superintendent position there. Says my uncle: “General Bronze would only sell the foundry to the the two partners under the condition that Grandpa be made a partner. But it was not for free. He [Grandpa] cashed in life insurance policies to buy his share. . . less than 10% of the company.”

General Foundry, including Grandpa, cast the Jefferson Memorial Statue in Washington, DC.

^{viii} The Merrill Lynch building was destroyed.

^{ix} The first-year writing program at NC State takes a “writing in the disciplines” (WID) approach. This model of pedagogy has a solid theoretical foundation, and NC State’s curriculum is constantly raising the bar, incorporating digital technology and multi-modal approaches. At the time of my graduate thesis, I supported this approach. However, by the time I was teaching at NC State I had difficulty applying that theory in practical terms, and it didn’t jive with my more expressivist tendencies. That said, my “tenure” at NC State was my most career-enriching experience to date. NC State’s first-year writing program in all aspects—leadership, curriculum, faculty, and support—embodies top-notch excellence.

^x Geoff Emerick was the renowned chief engineer for the Beatles. The stories about the groundbreaking work he and George Martin did on *Sgt. Pepper* are well-documented and fascinating for Beatles enthusiasts, aspiring engineers, and wannabes and aficionados like myself.

^{xi} I was nowhere near Stacey’s sales numbers, and I speculated at the time that most Kindle owners were tech-savvy males who tended to be into the action/adventure, mystery/thriller, Stephen King-type genres that Stacey’s novels were aligned with. Romantic comedy, not so much. However, today the romance genre is the largest-selling genre on Kindle. And although I don’t characterize my books as romance, they found their way into the Kindle mainstream.

^{xii} You can imagine the mental ass-kicking I gave myself when I found out that Duran Duran had stopped in at that very store a

week they played the Koko Booth Amphitheatre in Cary (the show I attended) in 2008. It's likely I wasn't on campus when they were there because the semester had ended by then, but still . . . so freakin' close!

^{xiii} I still regret passing on going to New York earlier that month to attend the premiere of Emilio Estevez's film *The Way* and meet both him and his father, Martin Sheen, not to mention spend time with my good friend Fenny, who made the trip over from England exclusively for the purpose of seeing the film. At the time, I couldn't justify the cost or taking even more time away from classes, but I've since come to re-prioritize such things.

