Fictitious Characters

by likeamadonna

Summary

Bono and Edge have learned that people are writing Bono/Edge fanfiction. So they decide to write Bono/Edge fanfiction, too. Multi-era, set mostly in the 80s.

Notes

Like everyone else in the U2 fanfic community, I felt called out by the line in Book of Your Heart that said, “We are not fictitious characters.” I felt called out by the whole song, really, although I am positive these guys know nothing about us.

I came up with the idea for this story while I wrote the final chapters of The White Room, and I hope nobody else has done it before me. If so, sorry about that. I had no idea! At the same time, I feel like this is a uniquely-me kind of thing, and PJ assured me that even if the concept has already been explored, my take will be like no one else’s (thanks for saying that ❤️).

The first chapter is a string of 2006 emails between our heroes and is an introduction to the rest.

I really hope you will enjoy this oddball meta story, which I’m pretty sure will be as long as my other big ones.
“We’re not giving them much to work with here, Edge,” Neil told me last night at the book signing. He caught me during a free moment—you were mobbed by fans and seemed determined to give every last one of them a concentrated dose of your lethal charm as Eathan’s Bookstore was doing what it could to wrap things up. Larry and Adam were, of course, long gone.

“Who’s them?” I asked.

He grinned. “The ones who write about you.”

“The press? I think 345 pages is way more than enough information about us.”

“Not the press.” His face was the picture of mock seriousness and confidentiality, and he motioned for me to come closer. “Did you know people write actual fanfiction about U2?”

“So it’s not just you?”

“Very funny.”

“There are certain places on the internet I try to avoid.” I watched you continue to work the small crowd as I thought about this for about ten seconds. “I’m guessing it’s groupie wish-fulfillment and things like that?”

“Well, some of it is. But a lot of it is about you and Bono. Kirk and Spock kinda stuff, if you know what I mean.”

I blinked. “No kidding?”

“They’re on to you,” he said, winking. “Just a heads up.”

“Thanks.” I took in my surroundings. A couple of staff members were picking up pens and cups from the long tables they had pushed together for us, and another detached and stacked the posters of our young faces that decorated the fronts of the tables. The delicious scent of new books, coffee, and permanent markers filled the air. I turned to face Neil. “Okay. How many people are writing about us?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know exactly. Less than twenty? Probably way less.”

“That many? And I thought we were still a pretty big rock band.”

“Yeah, well, you’re not exactly Nsync. Or whoever’s the boy band du jour.”

“I guess that’s fair.”

“I’m just saying maybe a dozen people will pore over this thing,” he said, patting a foot-high stack of *U2 by U2.* “And they won’t find what they’re looking for.”

“Romantic tidbits about Bono and myself.”

“We could have tossed some in, you know. Might have sold a few more books.”

“Maybe we’ll add a chapter to the updated edition in fifteen or twenty years.”
“I’m game if you are.”

You laughed loudly at a middle-aged woman and flashed a winning smile at me over your shoulder.

“So somewhere on the internet there are stories about Bono and me falling in love and having sex and so on?” I asked.

“Don’t go looking for them.”

“Oh, I won’t.”

“Seriously. Once you read that stuff, there’ll be no getting it out of here,” he said, patting my head.

“Believe me.”

“So you’ve read some of it?”

“Enough to know I needed to stop reading it immediately.”

“Well, based on what you saw, is it any good from a, uh, literary standpoint?”

“What I saw was very good. Excellent, even. The stories are usually based on something you and Bono said or did, and then they just imagine the rest. The shirt you’re wearing tonight could set them off, for heaven’s sake.”

“This?” I looked at the weathered reproduction of the two of us staring each other down circa 1987.

“Can’t say I blame them.”

“These fans love you, and if I’m honest, the things they write make you guys seem cooler than you really are. But do not read it. Trust me.”

“Alright.”

Neil gathered up his things and waved at you. I gave him a hug, and he said, “Hey, you’d better be careful. We don’t want them to wonder if there’s trouble in paradise.” So I gave him a sloppy kiss on the cheek and sent him on his way.

You looked fucking devastating last night, my love, and I would have done anything you’d asked if given the chance.

E.

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Dear E.,

Well, all of this is a revelation. A handful of our fans are writing erotica about us and, one assumes, they are posting it in a little online community somewhere...? Imagine that. I’m not going to look at it either, of course. I’m not.

But.

Wouldn’t it be fun to post the things we’ve written for each other--under some regrettable pen name, of course--and see what these fans of ours have to say?

“Characterization seems way off. You clearly have no understanding of the south of France. Self-indulgent rubbish at best. Bono would never say any of that. Edge as the dominant partner? I’m sorry
but I just don’t see it.” Et cetera.

B.

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No. Absolutely not. One hundred percent NO. Do not.

Love,
E.

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I can’t find it, in any event. Do you still have it?

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Fuck.

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I’m sure it’ll turn up eventually. But anyway, Edge, this news has piqued my imagination. We’ve written about ourselves for each other’s amusement, but all of that was true. What if we wrote fanfiction about ourselves? Couldn’t we create a fantasy version of our love story the way those people do? Maybe we could start at the very beginning, back when we were teenagers, and write about us falling in love at that age. Except in our stories we’ll actually do something about it and not secretly pine for each other until we’re in our thirties. You’ve certainly been into this kind of thing in the bedroom lately, and we won’t be together much once the tour is over, so...

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Only you would think to do this, B.

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You go first.
In this chapter, Edge picks up the gauntlet that Bono threw down.

Edge describes fledgling U2’s first gig at Mt. Temple in front of a crowd, back when they called themselves Feedback.

Since I couldn’t find a photo of that, I looked at pictures of a similar, later performance, and in this chapter I’m having them wear the clothes from that picture because I adore it.

Shane is real and you can read about him and see a photo of him with a self-described ugly duckling tiny Edge in U2 by U2.

That book is and will be my main reference for this fic, along with various online sources.

Thanks so much for reading! xoxo

_Bono, this story--or is it a chapter?--is about the first time we performed in front of an audience at school, playing covers of Peter Frampton, the Bay City Rollers, and the Beach Boys for ten life-changing minutes. We were all so euphoric when it was over, and in an attempt to draw the day out a bit longer, I wanted to ask you to come over for supper and maybe listen to records. But you had a date with Ali, so I went home, ate supper, and listened to records. The following is what would have happened if you had come to my house._

_Look at me. I’m 45 years old, I’m writing fanfiction about us, and I wish it were real._

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“He says it’s alright if I stay over,” you said, hanging up the phone and checking the coin return for change. “Glad to have me out of the house is more like it.”

“Are you okay for clothes or whatever?”

You patted your well-worn black duffel bag--a permanent marker-scrawled HEWSON graced one of its blue straps. You said, “I can change back into my school clothes tomorrow, I guess.”

“You can borrow some of my brother’s old stuff if you want to.” I knew my shirts would be no match for your shoulders. “I think I see the bus.”

You smiled. “Ooh, let’s sit in the top part.”

I paid your fare and lugged my guitar up to the empty top part, where we sat together on plastic seats. We were still in our “stage costumes,” which for me meant a black jacket and red hand-me-down jeans that Dick bought for no discernible reason and hardly ever wore. For you it meant a fitted coat that could not possibly have been made out of real leather and raspberry-colored jeans that barely contained you. I looked down and laughed at our legs as the bus lumbered up the shop-lined road, destination Malahide.
“When you’re in a band, Edge, you must be prepared to stand out,” you said.

“Got it.”

You radiated an intense happiness. The heel of your left boot tapped up and down rapidly, and I felt tremors through my seat. “We’re in a band.”

“We actually did it.”

“We did!” A huge grin. The tremors continued. “I don’t wanna jinx it,” you said, lowering your voice, “but I think this is what I’m supposed to do.”

I nodded.

“I mean, I know it now. It was like...a sign.”

I nodded again.

More tremors. “You felt it too, right? When you hit that D chord, and they all started screaming?”

Your coat made squeaky sounds as you gestured.

I looked into your bright eyes. “It was the best.”

“Then they called us back to play some more! I want to get back up there and do it all again tomorrow.”

“Yeah. Two songs and a medley are not enough, though,” I said, thinking about how impossible it was for us to even learn those.

“I wonder if I’m dreaming / I feel so unashamed / I can’t believe this is happening to me,” you sang/shouted to an audience of me. I accompanied you on air guitar, and for a moment we were back on that makeshift stage. Neither of us could really describe it, but something magical had happened earlier in the hour, and we both felt it. When you sang that song, it wasn’t like you were singing to some girl. It was like you were singing to something bigger. Like you were singing to God.

“Bono comes alive,” I murmured.

“Ha, I guess so. You were so good, Edge.”

“Thanks.”

“You can really play. I’m proud of you.”

“I’m proud of you, too.”

We spent the remainder of the trip comparing notes on every single thing we remembered, from how our amps were arranged on the stage to the way our biology teacher clapped for us. He didn’t just clap; he raised his hands above his head and clapped. We were giddy. And on top of everything else, Christmas break had just begun.

You had already been to my house a number of times that fall, back when we were using Dad’s garden shed as a practice space. But since we had been given permission to play in the band room at school, the amount of quality time you were able to spend with Mum had diminished. She was just as fond of you as you were fond of her. She was expecting us and cooking supper. When I opened the front door, the scent emanating from the kitchen inspired you to make a beeline to its source.
“Mother Edge!”

“You’re still trying to make that happen, are you, love?”

“Indeed I am. What are we having?”

“I thought you boys might be in the mood for cawl.”

“It’s beef stew,” I informed you, putting my things down. “I’m gonna change--back in a minute.”

“I think you look quite handsome in red,” Mum called after me. But you can’t always trust your mother.

When I returned wearing those jeans I had been drawing and painting on for quite some time, you were busy telling her all about our exciting afternoon. She turned and rolled her eyes at me. “Oh sweetheart, those old things? I just don’t see the appeal.”

“They are something a kid in a band would wear, though, you have to admit,” you said. “These cookies are the best things I have ever eaten.”

“You like my meringues? Just egg whites and sugar. Little bit of cocoa.”

“This one looks like a rose.” You slid it over to me. “You’re a lucky man, Edge.”

“Don’t eat too many of those. You’ll spoil your appetite.”

“Impossible.”

She reached to turn down the little black and white television we had on the top of the refrigerator.

“Is that The Riordans?” you asked. “You don’t have to turn it down.”

“It’s nice to have on as background noise while I’m cooking.”

“Mum liked that show.”

She patted your hand. “Ah, love.”

“Sometimes I turn it on when I miss her,” you said, looking up at the ceiling light before turning your attention to the borderline-attractive couple on the screen. “Wait. Don’t tell me those two are together now...?”

“Oh yes. His parents are absolutely scandalized.” You and Mum continued to bond over the romantic entanglements of several families in some Irish farming community. Meanwhile I stood by the window and studied an impressive moth that was climbing up the screen.

“Ehm, ‘scuse me,” you said abruptly before leaving the kitchen and heading towards the bathroom in a hurry.

A soft musical cue played while one of the show’s patriarchs gazed at a hedgerow. I looked at Mum, and she shrugged, whispering, “I think he’s upset. You should go to him.”

When I reached to bathroom door, I could hear you breathing heavily behind it. Possibly crying. After a few seconds, I tapped lightly on the door and heard a dramatic sniffle. “Bono?”

The door knob turned, and you looked out at me with gleaming eyes. “Sorry. It’s just...that song. On
the show? They play it all the time, and I--” You wiped a tear away and studied yourself in the mirror as the music faded.

I didn’t know what to do or say, so I reached out and patted your shoulder in a way I hoped would comfort you. You exhaled and turned to me, and my hand stayed on your shoulder. Then your arms were around me, and you were hugging me. Your chest felt shockingly substantial, and my other arm engaged with your back. “Music can do that,” I managed, and your reflection nodded.

“Kiss me,” said a voice on the television. You smiled a bit and kissed my cheek in a way that was impossible to interpret: lingering, and certainly more than just a peck, but its placement was platonic. It was enough to make me blush, in any case.

“Thanks,” you whispered against my cheek, your breath warm and sweet.

“I didn’t do much.”

You stepped back and put your hands on my shoulders. Our eyes met, and you said, “You’re a good friend.”

“You are, too,” I said, looking down at the linoleum. “You can put your stuff in Dick’s room, if you want.”

There’s something alluring about any friend’s older siblings, and their rooms are often off-limits and fraught with mystery. Dick and I were so close in age that what was his was also mine, but we both liked having our own spaces. Since he had left for university, his room had a picked-over feeling. Some posters were still on the wall, but not his favorites, and what remained of his record collection were albums I could take or leave. An old ham radio sat on his desk. He and I had spent some time taking it apart, just to see if we could put it back together again, and there it sat, collecting dust.

“Do you miss your brother?” you asked as you dropped your bag and jacket on his bed.

“It’s really different now that he’s gone.” I looked up at the spot on the wall were his Mothers of Invention poster used to be. Remnants of masking tape adhesive had left four yellowing spots on the wall.

“Well, you’ve got three more brothers now.”

“So do you.”

I was trying to act naturally, but my mind was reeling. You had kissed me back in the bathroom. That actually happened. I touched my cheek. Did it mean anything to you?

We wandered back to the kitchen, where we were eventually joined by Dad and Gill, and the five of us sat down to eat. You praised the cawl, which was something we had every couple of weeks and was a hearty but relatively unremarkable meal. Mum was flattered, and I felt bad about not thanking her more often for the things she did for us. You didn’t take her for granted.

Gill was talking about how her history class was covering World War II, and Mum and Dad told her some stories about Wales during that era. You beamed at me from across the table, seemingly overjoyed to be alive. It had been a very good day.

During a lull in the conversation, Gill piped up with, “That’s who he reminds me of! Shane.”

Mum studied you and considered this. “I guess I can kind of see it. Similar eyes, maybe.”
“Who’s Shane?”

“D—Edge’s friend when they were small,” Mum said. “Cutest little boy you ever saw. Like a miniature Paul Newman.”

“He was a bit older. He went to St. Patrick’s school when I was thirteen.”

“Nice boy,” Dad said. “The two of them were thick as thieves.”

“Edge was quite taken with him, actually,” Gill laughed, and I shot her a look. After school Shane and I liked to make hideouts from scraps of paneling, big pieces of cardboard, and anything else we could get our hands on. She may have been spying on us one afternoon while we were playing house, and she never let me forget about it, even though he and I were only six or seven years old at the time.

“Well, Shane’s loss is my gain,” you told Gill with a smile that caused her to catch her breath, and god knows what else, ovulate for the first time? You are perfectly aware of the effect you have on women of all ages, even (and one assumes especially) twelve year-old girls.

“Would you like some more, love?” Mum asked, sliding the stew pot over to you.

“Thanks. It’s just so good.”

Dad nodded at you. “You’re always welcome here, lad.”

After supper, we tried to watch some TV with them, but eventually we became restless. So you and I took a ten-minute walk to Bisset’s Strand to look at the water. Or rather, to listen to it, as the sun had already set hours ago. The air was slightly chilly, but we didn’t care because we were too busy talking about our little performance again, in disbelief that it had really happened and that technically it was still the same day. Lit by a street lamp in a small, empty parking lot, we sat on a stack of concrete blocks, inhaled the night air, and listened to the black Irish Sea. The sound of the waves was steady and reassuring.

You noticed a nearby sign that said “road liable to flooding” and said, “I’ll bet it is.”

“Can you imagine leaving a little motorcycle or whatever out here and then coming back for it later and it’s just...washed away?”

“Yeah. But I’m pretty sure I wanna live by the sea someday.”

“Some of these houses smell all mildewy because of the dampness, though.”

“Still wanna live by the sea.”

“I’m sure you will, then.”

You smiled at the darkness for a second or two and nudged me. “So, Shane, huh?” We made eye contact; yours looked brown in the amber light.

I shrugged. “Yeah. He was my best friend. But you know how people can drift away. You get separated because of whatever, and if you don’t see them every day, it’s hard to catch up with them later because too much has happened.”

“Right.”

I bit my lip. Having one hundred percent of someone’s attention was a rare occurrence for me, but
you made me feel like I was the only other person on earth as far as you were concerned. “Anyway, we were kind of moving in different directions. He was really popular and into sports, and I was into, you know, weird stuff.”

“Yeah, you’re such a weirdo, Edge.”

“I saw him last summer. He didn’t know you, but I guess he knew of you when you were at St. Patrick’s.”

“Oh yeah?”

“He’s still there, but yeah, he told me about some kid named Paul who was kind of a troublemaker.”

You nodded. “Guilty as charged.”

I grinned. “I guess you could say Shane was your John the Baptist.”

“What?”

“Like, ‘Yeah, I’m alright, but I’m telling you, this Paul kid is coming, so look out.’”

You shook your head and laughed at this idea. “I don’t remember him at all.”

“I’m surprised. He’s one of those people who are so good-looking you kind of don’t believe they’re real, like Elizabeth Taylor or someone. And I was kind of his ugly...sidekick or whatever.”

“Oh. You are no ugly sidekick, Edge. No to both of those things.” You brushed my hair away from my forehead, and lowering your voice, you said, “I love to look at you.” I held my breath. “Parts of your face are like...almost Native American, you know? And how can that be?” Your hand cupped my jaw, and your pinkie moved over my cheekbone. I couldn’t resist leaning into your touch. “But then you have those light green eyes. How are you real?”

“You know what color my eyes are in this light?”

“Of course I do.” You pointed at the dark water. “You know when there’s a nice wave, and the sun’s behind it, and you see that green color in the wave? That’s the color your eyes are.”

Yeah. The kiss that afternoon meant something to you.

I smiled and looked down at my jeans. The knees were worn to the point that the fabric didn’t feel like denim anymore. It was soft, like suede, and paper-thin. I drew a fingernail along the thinnest part, back and forth, until it started to break through. I knew that little tear would continue to open. Touching it had just become even more irresistible.

I took a deep breath. “Sometimes I feel like I summoned you.”

Amused, you asked, “And how did you summon me, Edge?”

“The last couple of summers, Dick and I were messing around trying to blow things up. He knew just enough about chemistry, and we were bored. Dad didn’t know whether to discourage us or cheer us on because we were being scientists, sort of. It was fun and probably way too dangerous.”

“Dangerously fun.”

“But the explosions, when we were able to make them happen? They were so cool. And then Dick left for college, and the next thing I knew, there you were.”
“Boom,” you said with a smile.

You were sitting awfully close to me. But I didn’t move.

The wind blew your hair back and you raised your chin. Inhale, exhale. Look at you, like a figurehead decorating the prow of a ship. “I’m so happy.”

“Because of today?”

“Because of today. I can’t stop thinking about it. Or talking about it, obviously.” You looked out at the sea, and your face took on the same expression you wore when you caught your breath between the verse and the chorus. “Every night when I pray, I ask, ‘What am I supposed to do?’ And today I got the answer.”

I nodded and played with the rip in my jeans. “I feel like I saw into the future.” (I saw into the future twice that day.)

“Wow. I mean, it was just a few songs. But being up there...it changed me.”

“I really wanna do it again.”

“We will.” You drummed on your thighs. “Did you see Larry when it was over? He was vibrating. You? Your sound was so huge in that gym I couldn’t believe it. And Adam’s just...a star.”

“So cool. And Bono,” I started, trying to find the words.

“Yeah?”

“There is something about you. You seemed to change once you got up there. Into...I think you could be great. Like, truly great.”

“Edge.”

“And I watched the faces in the crowd go from ‘we know this guy’ to ‘wait a minute, who is this guy?’ to ‘we are watching someone really special.’”

You blinked a few times. “You think so?”

“I know so. Because I was one of them.”

“Edge. I don’t know what to say.” You took my cold hand. “Thank you.” I glanced at our clasped hands, wedged into the tight space between our thighs. We looked at each other for a count of four, and then we both started laughing. “Let’s go home,” you said.

“Okay.”

We walked back on the same sidewalks we used to get to the sea, and I imagined meeting my past self along the way and giving him a nod. Good things are going to happen to you down there, Former Me.

We listened to records for a while, only it wasn’t the passive experience we were used to. Now we were asking each other if we could learn to play certain songs, or wondering how you might sing a chorus, or critiquing a guitarist’s sound, seasoned performers that we were. It was fun to dream that we had the chops to mimic what any of those bands were doing. It was fun to dream that we had any kind of chops at all. But we had the love and we had the spark, and we knew it, and that was more important than anything else. We could get anything else with time. Probably.
You paced around my little room, occasionally flopping on the bed or spinning around on my desk chair, and I sat on the floor and wrote things down on a pad of graph paper. Gill poked her head in several times to gape at you.

I was brushing my teeth after we had said good night and you had settled into Dick’s room. Gill breezed by the open bathroom door and made a face at me in the mirror. “He’s too old for you,” I mumbled with a mouth full of toothpaste.

“A girl can dream,” she said in a sing-songy voice as she twirled down the hall to her room.

Two Evans children were dreaming about you that night. I got into bed, turned off my lamp, and smiled to myself. From my bed I saw multi-colored lights outlining our neighbor’s roof. Red, yellow, green, and blue. Green and blue. My eyes, your eyes. He knows what color they are. Apparently he’s thought about them a lot. And I guess that was when you stopped being Bono in my mind’s narrative and started being He. Him. You.

He’s in my brother’s room, but he’s more than a brother.

I imagined you sleeping in that bed, your body a glowing ember surrounded by dark blue shadows. You were white and yellow and orange and red and purple, and just like a flickering ember, the colors shifted as you breathed. You were alive. Luminous.

He kissed me.

Your eyes are your face’s most magnetic feature, but your mouth runs a close second, and when the two work together, your target never stands a chance. Your lips. Red like a girl’s. Right there on my face. Claiming me.

It’s okay to think about it again and again. No one knows what goes on in my mind. I can not and should not control where it wants to go, and if thinking about him hurts no one, who cares? My imagination is dark and warm, and it’s growing. It’s my refuge. It wants me to be happy.

I wanted to feel your lips against mine. I wanted to kiss you back. What would that feel like? I had kissed a couple of girls before, and yes, one boy, but you were different. You were almost a man. Your chin was rough when it grazed my face. You had veins on your hands and hair on your chest. You were older than me, and I decided you needed to be the one to make that happen, and if you did, I would follow your lead.

Beautiful, glowing ember, are you thinking about me?

I rolled onto my stomach, and the mattress felt like your chest.

But he’s a boy.

I did not care. I just did not care. With you...everything changed.
I could have turned this into a really long chapter, but I'm going to divide it into two parts, both of which will be written by Bono. When you read this one, which is around 3000 words long, I think you'll see why I chose to cut it off where I did. :) 

Introducing Guggi and Gavin!

I gave Larry my favorite line here. I almost titled this "King Arthur Stuff." But a kitten's gonna win every time with me. <3

Thanks so much to all who have read and said nice things to me about this story so far! I am having a blast writing it.

PS Trivia! This chapter contains their safe word--my B/E's safe word, that is. I really couldn't guess what their safe word is in real life.

Edge, if everything you wrote in your alternate universe of us had actually happened, I would not have been able to stop myself from marching straight into your room and having my way with you that night. That would have made this story a lot shorter, and knowing you, it would have been a mistake. Probably. No, it would have. The sexier thing to do would be, well, you can read it yourself.

I'm sure the people who write about us try to make us seem like we know what we're doing, and likewise I could not resist the urge to turn myself into a flirtatious and manipulative little bastard in the name of advancing the timeline and creating some sexual tension. But you know me. I'm shameless in my greed for you. So. Suspension of disbelief for the sake of the story here, okay?

Side note: how do our fanfiction writers manage the problem of our wives? How do we want to deal with them here? I would like to suggest that we tell them the way we did in real life: eventually. Once things officially began to spiral out of control for us.

I have more to say here, Edge, so I'm going to write the next chapter, too.

I love you. Come over tonight. I need to kiss you.

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“I mean it, you guys. I’m serious. What I’m about to say stays here with us, got it?”

“Yeah, sure, whatever you want.” Guggi continued to decorate his three-ring binder, which was covered with denim-colored fabric. His black ballpoint pen rumbled as he filled in a neck shadow on his drawing of David Bowie. “Cold up here,” he added, shivering as he pulled a blanket around his narrow shoulders.

“Gav?”

“I’m listening.” He was watching a neighbor struggle as he pulled an ex-Christmas tree from his front door to the curb.
“Then what did I just say?”

“You’ve got a secret,” he said with a yawn. “So what is it?”

I sighed. “You’re the only ones I can talk to about this. Can I trust you? You have to promise me.”

Guggi looked up from his work. “Pinkie swear.”

“You can trust us, Bono. Jesus Christ,” Gavin said, rolling his silver-lined eyes, which was a new look he was trying out for 1977. “This had better be something explosive.”

“Okay.” I took a deep breath, and my next sentence came out as one word: “Something’s going on with Edge and me.” They glanced at each other. “Something...more than just friends.”

Gavin sat beside Guggi and me on the floor and leaned against his tower of milk crates filled with records. Straightening his kilt, he said, “Well, sure. That’s because you’re bandmates. Bonding is happening. Completely understandable.”

“There is that, but there’s more. It’s becoming...romantic. I think.”

“Sweetheart, you’re blushing.” He pinched my cheek.

“Do not make fun of me, Gav.” I tried to stare him down for a few seconds.

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I’m sorry.” His expression seemed sincere.

“You and Edge.” Guggi nodded at his binder. “It’s very rock ‘n’ roll, actually.”

“You guys might become halfway cool if you’re not careful.” Gavin smiled. “You must tell us everything.”

“Yeah, what have you, uh, done to him?” They laughed, and I glared at them until they calmed down. Guggi patted me on the shoulder. “Sorry. Go ahead.”

I took another deep breath. “Well. A couple of weeks ago after we played in the gym? I went to his house and I kissed him. On the cheek.”

Gavin leaned over, kissed me roughly, and, gesturing triumphantly, he announced, “We are now even, the Edge!”

“It wasn’t like that. It was...slower.”


“ Seriously?”

“You okay with that, Guggi? It’s for research. Come on, Bono. It means nothing.”

“Yeah, I won’t tell Edge you kissed me.”

“You fucks.”

“No, come on. Do it.”

Guggi pulled his blanket over his head like a bridal veil and batted his eyelashes at me.

“God. What the hell.” I looked out the window at an overcast sky. “I was upset because I was
thinking about Mum, and Edge was trying to make me feel better. So he pats me on the back, and it turns into a hug, and then before I know it I’m kissing him, here. And he’s nervous but not moving away.” I kissed Guggi, who was trying very hard not to laugh, and while I was unsuccessful in duplicating our kiss, the placement and timing were accurate. Gavin gave a slow whistle.

“And then, later that night, we were looking at the sea, and I touched his face like this. He didn’t pull away. I said I love to look at him.” Guggi chuckled and leaned into my hand. “And we held hands for a bit. I mean…”

“Right,” Gavin said. “That’s not something most lads do.”

“But you know how I can be,” I said with a shrug.

“Well, have you done any of that with me?”

“No.”

He winked. “Would you?”

I recoiled a bit. “You’re like my twin brother.”

“That’s true.” Gavin put his hands together with his fingertips touching each other. “Alright. I think it’s fair to say that something’s up between you and our dear Edge. He’s into it. And you’re into it, too, yes?”

I closed my eyes and nodded.

“Does Ali know?” Guggi asked.

“No. And that’s the other thing. Should I tell her?”

They thought about this. “What’s happened so far is something, but it’s not much. I’d see if it goes anywhere else first. No need to alarm her needlessly in the meantime. Guggi?”

“I guess that makes sense. Do you like Edge the same way you like her?”

“Ali is an angel. Edge is...like this alien creature.”

“A big-headed alien you can’t stop kissing.”

“Shut up, Gav.”

Guggi continued. “But with Ali you feel…”

“Like everything is right in the world.”

“And with Edge…”

I tried to find the words. “It’s...fuck. It’s like, electricity.”

“Hmm.” Gavin twisted three fibers of his orange shag carpet together, let them unravel, and twisted them again. “What are you doing with Ali?”

“You know. We go on dates. Walk around together. Hold hands. Come back home and kiss or whatever. Not too much. She wants to take it slow. Because of course she does.”
“Okay. Go just as slow with Edge. Slower, actually.”

“Why’s that?”

“I dunno. It’s got to be a strange situation for him, so that seems more fair, maybe?”

“He’s pretty shy. I want to kiss him like I kiss Ali. I sort of can’t stop thinking about it.”

“Okay. If he does anything—if he makes any kind of tiny, little scaredy-cat move—reward him. Until then, maybe just keep giving him these kisses of yours that are not really sexy but they aren’t really not sexy either. Touch him in weird places that he’ll puzzle over for days.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Like where?”

Gavin turned around and flipped through some albums, landing on Station to Station. “Touch his elbow. I don’t know.”

Guggi laughed. “Yeah. Drive him crazy with elbow touching.”

“Get under his skin. You have your ways.”

“Okay.” I began playing with the carpet, too.

He put his arm around me. “Does our darling boy feel better now?”

“Yes, Da. Thanks.”

“Wanna kiss Mum again?” Guggi asked.

“Nah, I’m good.”

Thus began my three-month campaign to insinuate myself into your world, which was not difficult because thanks to the band, our lives were running in tandem. We shared everything from food to gloves to novels, which I would lend to you with marginalia and underlined passages that were designed to provoke. We listened to music and worked on homework together, and even though I was older, I asked for plenty of help. I tortured you with innocent kisses on your cheeks, forehead, and hands, which I doled out as sparingly as I could tolerate, and yes, I made sure to touch your exceptionally pointy elbows, along with your wrists and knees (and basically anything else that would bend). I stroked your fingers with my hot little hands. Rubbing your shoulders, invading your personal space, slipping notes into your pockets, repeatedly calling you by the name I gave you, deferring to you whenever it made sense, creating little jealousy traps that I would rescue you from after a certain amount of time had passed...frankly, Edge, I was impressed with myself, and my infatuation with you became more obvious with each passing day.

Winter melted into spring, and we spent part of our Easter holiday rehearsing at Adam’s posh bungalow. His parents were preparing to leave for an extended weekend on Capri when we arrived, and his glamorous mother breezed by us, clad in a towel and leaving a haze of Shalimar and cigarette smoke in her wake. “Boys,” she said with a nod of her immaculately-coiffed blonde head.

“Jesus loves you more than you will know,” I muttered to you.

“Yeah, koo-koo-ka-choo,” you whispered with a grin.

We were there to prepare for our doomed-from-the-start gig at St. Fintan’s School, the first performance for which we would be paid, and I had the bright idea for us to cover Nights In White
Satin. We spent the afternoon in Adam’s living room puzzling over that labyrinth of a song, which sounded more like *Days In Black Burlap* once we had put our stamp of incompetence on it. But I insisted we keep plugging away because, for some reason, I believed in us.

After butchering it for a couple of hours, Larry tossed his drumsticks on a couch and glared at me. “It’s like these guys went to music school or something. What makes you think we can do what they do?”

“Plus it’s a stupid song, you have to admit.” Adam said.

“Yeah, what’s it even about?”

I looked into the middle distance and made some sweeping hand gestures. “It’s about knights and their ladies or whatever. Long distance love, and it sounds like they’re writing letters and, you know. Girls love that King Arthur stuff.”

“Bono, it’s not knights with a K. It’s nights with an N. Like day and night,” Adam said, grinning.

“Also name one girl who loves King Arthur stuff,” Larry said, exasperated.

“Oh. Well, I dunno what it’s about then. But maybe if we brought in some girls to sing with me, or maybe we could get somebody to play the flute part…”

“I’m actually learning a thing or two from trying to play it,” you said, coming to my defense in your own wonderful way.

“Yeah, see? I say we take a break and come back to it with fresh ears.”

“Sure. That’ll do the trick.”

They went to the kitchen. Tired of trying to figure out someone else’s creation but never really making any satisfying noise, I sat down with the acoustic guitar you let me borrow and found myself playing a couple of random chords in a sequence and rhythm of my own invention. I was unwittingly writing my first song. You stopped what you were doing to listen, and for the first time that afternoon, being in a band was fun. “What’s going on, Edge?” I sang a few times in a row, and you sat beside me and joined in until we burst into laughter.

“That’s the way I always thought this would be,” you said. “Us making things up.”

“Maybe we’re not cut out to play other bands’ songs.” Your belt was embellished with silver grommets, and I tried to put a finger through one of them.

You pushed your hair off your forehead and grinned at me, and I caught a glimpse of you as the little boy I had seen in the framed photographs your parents kept over their fireplace. “It came to you naturally,” you said.

“I didn’t even think it through. It just sort of arrived.”

“Yeah.” You nudged my ankle with the toe of your shoe.

“It was ten times easier than what we’ve been trying to do, that’s for sure.” I set the guitar on the coffee table. “I wanna look around this house, what do you say?”

“Cool.”

The Claytons’ home was filled with books about things like architecture and photography. Persian
rugs covered hardwood floors, original art filled the walls, and the spotless kitchen seemed to exist for decoration only. We went outside, opened a door to the small greenhouse that was attached to the south side of the garage, and stepped into its bright and fragrant humidity.

“I wish we had a greenhouse,” you said, and if I’d had any money at all, I would have given you one right there on the spot. Your inquisitive eyes took in the trays of seedlings lining one wall, a succulent collection along the other, and a line of tables running down the middle that were crammed with exotic flowers. The floor was damp, and a haze of condensation covered the ceiling, where the blades of a fan rotated lazily. We were careful not to knock anything over as we admired the plants. I became enthralled with a tropical lily whose leaves seemed to be made from green patent leather when I heard you gasp with pleasure.

I approached you as you examined a tall orchid whose white flowers, almost unreal in their perfection, were growing in a gentle curve along an arch-shaped branch. They framed your curious face, and you caressed each one with your beautiful fingers as if they were the most delicate things you had ever seen. You smiled at their rosy little mouths, and once again I understood how truly special you are, Edge.

I came closer and stood beside the last flower on that branch. It was at eye level, and you continued to study the orchid until you paused and looked at me. In one seamless movement, your fingers shifted from the last white petal to my lips. You traced them with the same gentle touch before moving down to my chin. Your other hand drew a slow line along my jaw and disappeared behind my ear, and you began to tremble. “Please,” you whispered.

“Yes.”

I slipped a hand under the collar of your ironed white shirt, and the pulse in your neck vibrated softly against my palm. Using the same amount of effort it might take to coax a kitten into its bed, I guided your lips to mine. I kissed you, Edge. A split-second of paralysis was followed by heat, and along with this came a lightning strike that ran through my body and into yours and through your body and back into mine. Your hands were still on my chin and neck, gleaning information, and I heard a delighted sigh flutter through your torso as we stood there, chest to chest, in that heavenly setting.

I opened my tear-filled eyes a bit and saw that yours were closed. You were in my arms, completely vulnerable, and all mine. I pulled away to whisper your name, and you whispered mine, and we kissed again. I parted your lips with my tongue and willed my legs to remain firmly planted beneath me because I was kissing a boy, kissing a young man, finally kissing whatever you are, Edge. And at that moment, hundreds and maybe thousands of people all over the world were experiencing their first kisses too, but I knew for a fact that none of them were feeling a connection as powerful as ours. Your tongue glided over mine, and your eager lips drank me in. I remembered to breathe, and my nose bumped against yours. Even that was overwhelming to me. We were breathing each other’s air. We had never been so close.

Your hands moved to my shoulders and down my back, and standing forehead to forehead, we tried to process what had just happened. We held each other for a moment, astonished and inarticulate.

A brief third kiss was initiated by me in an attempt to verify that the previous two were real. Your lips shifted into a smile as I did this, and I smiled back at your bashful eyes. My darling.

A drop of water fell onto your pink cheek, and I wiped it away.

“Did you think this through?” you asked softly.

“So many times.”
You nodded. “Me too.”

“So many times.”
In my imagination, that kiss became a secret baby cherub the two of us were obliged to look after and protect from mortal eyes. Whenever I thought about the kiss, the cherub was in my custody, and whenever you thought about it, he went over to you. He was supervised constantly, needless to say.

As much as I wanted to spend every waking moment kissing you again and again, a part of me recognized that to do so might diminish the magic of that first time. And I wanted you to dwell on that first time for at least a week, Edge. I wanted you to crave another encounter with me to the point of physical pain. Because god knows that’s what I was dealing with. And besides, finding a spot where we were guaranteed privacy was surprisingly difficult.

Also we had to be students (bother) and we needed to learn more songs for our performance (the less said about that fiasco, the better). The two of us felt compelled to tone things down when we were at school. But I made sure to monopolize at least thirty minutes of your time before we fell asleep most nights. I dragged the phone into my room, shut the door, and climbed into bed. I remember that defunct landline number of yours to this day, and I can still hear your hushed, after-hours phone voice.

“Hi, Bono.”

“Edge. Edge, Edge, Edge. What’s going on?”

“I was just thinking about you. How are you?”

“Well, I have good news and bad news. The good news is, I got into University College Dublin.”

“Hey, look at you. That’s great.”

“Well, not so fast. The bad news is, if I fail Irish, they won’t let me graduate, and guess what? I’m gonna fail Irish.”

“Ahh, B.”

“Did you just call me B?”

“Yes. B.”

“A mini nickname inside a nickname. I love it.”

“You’re my little bumblebee.”

“Oh, do you think so? Well, the actual good news is: if and when I fail Irish, I will have to repeat this
school year.”

Unsuccessfully stifling a laugh, you said, “You should call it a postgraduate year.”

“I like the way your mind works, Edge. So I won’t have to go to college, and I can just take one class and hang around with you guys at school. It’ll be so much more convenient.”

“Well, I have some bad news.”

“Oh no. What is it?”

“My parents are making us spend the summer in Wales.”

The summer? “Fuck.”

“Yeah. I mean, we do it every year or two, but this time it’s...Dad can work while we’re there, and it’s a whole stupid thing.”

I traced my finger around the phone’s dial. “Edge, I’m gonna miss you so much.”

“I hate that I have to go.”

“And I had all sorts of plans for us.”

“Like what?”

“Well, more of what we’ve been doing. Maybe get out of the city and drive somewhere.”

“Neither of us have cars.”

“Details, details.”

“Not that it matters now.”

I lowered my voice. “I wanna get you in another greenhouse one of these days.”

You paused. “Sometimes...I swear it’s all I can think about.”

“I know. I love our little secret.”

I heard you exhale. “Can we...tomorrow?”

“I think we should, now that the damned clock is ticking. Any ideas where we could go?”

“I’ll try to figure something out.”

“So will I.”

We thought about that for a bit, and you broke the silence with, “I’ve never had a kiss like that before.”

“You have kissed other people, though, right?”

“Yeah, but this was different.”

“It was different for me, too, Edge.”
“It seemed like a portal to another dimension opened up.”

I laughed. “I was that good, eh?”

“You know you were.”

I kissed the receiver. “Now I really want to do it again and see if you still think so. In the interest of science.”

“Yeah.”

Luxuriating in my cozy bed, I yawned and said, “When I saw the way you were studying that orchid, I just knew. All I needed was a sign from you that it was okay.”

“Please.”

“Edge. I want you here right now.”

“I wish I could be there.”

“It was magic.”

“It was.” A few seconds of silence. “Bono?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you like me as much as you like Ali?”

“Edge. Yes. Of course I do.”

“It’s kind of weird…”

“It is weird to feel this way about two people at the same time. And one’s a boy and one’s a girl.”

You cleared your throat. “I mean, I still like girls.”

“So do I.”

“I wasn’t expecting this at all.”

“Right.”

“But…”

The leaves on the tree outside my window had grown to the point where I couldn’t see the house across the street anymore. “I think this is a gift, Edge. We’d be fools to say no to it. It’s too good.”

“I want more,” you whispered.

“I’ll see that you get it. Don’t worry. We’ll figure this out.”

“Okay, B.”

“B.”

We rehearsed in the band room after school the next day, and as Adam and Larry were getting ready to leave, you whispered to me, “Tell them Mum is picking us up but she’ll be a little late.”
"But I don’t need a--" Your locked eyes with mine and you tilted your head. "Oh."

Larry gathered up his books. "Are you coming?"

"No," I said, checking my hair’s distorted reflection in a tuba. "You see, Edge’s mum was supposed to be here now, but they called him down to the front office before we started practicing, and apparently she’s gonna be late, like maybe twenty minutes late because--why is she late again, Edge?"

Larry blinked.

"She, uh, our neighbor broke her arm and she needed to go over there and help her fold some laundry and do some other things around the house, I guess, so--"

He gaped at us. "Jesus Christ, I truly do not care."

"Make sure the door locks behind you or Mr. McKenzie will throw a fit," Adam reminded us as he tucked his bass away in its purple velvet-lined case.

Once they had left, you turned off the lights and led me into Mr. McKenzie’s storage area, which was a cramped room that housed the extra piano and a table and shelves laden with sheet music, some records, and an old stereo. We had been in there a hundred times, but a dark and empty school building is always deliciously unnerving.

"I wonder what he’s listening to," I said, putting the needle on the record that was already on the turntable. I squinted at the label as it rotated in the dim light. "Chopin Nocturnes." Delicate, icy piano notes swirled around us like little bits of white plastic in a snow globe.

You took in the piles of sheet music, which were scattered around with that special brand of teacher disorganization that is unique to the end of a school year. "So many songs," you said.

"Maybe one day we’ll write songs that will sit in some music teacher’s storage room."

"I hope so."

"And then maybe a couple of boys will look at them and want to be like us."

You took my hand, and we faced each other. The setting sun was visible through the window of the band room’s door that led outside. The golden light bounced off the floor and shimmered on brass instruments here and there. Some of it reached us in our otherwise gray room. Half of my face was illuminated, along with a sliver of yours and a hundred sparkling dust motes. You said, "I have to force myself to stop staring at you, you know."

"Oh."

"But now I can do it."

"And I can stare right back at you."

"Your face..." Your finger tapped on every freckle in that cluster under my left eye. "These are beautiful. This little dot, too," you added, touching the one near the tip of my nose.

"If you like them so much, maybe you should kiss them."

"Maybe I should." I closed my eyes as you approached me, and I felt your lips land softly on the places Mum claimed the angels kissed me before they sent me to her.
“They belong to you now,” I whispered, kissing your chin.

“Thank you.”

I felt your hands in my hair. You tipped my head up an inch or so, and our mouths reunited, accompanied by another jolt of awareness that what we were doing was worth any price we’d be asked to pay for it. Each of us shuddered as yearning transformed into a pleasure so sublime I was actually somewhat afraid of it. But not afraid enough to stop. Oh, and you had been formulating some ideas for me since the last time, hadn’t you? There was your tongue, seeking out more things to claim, and there were your teeth, gently biting my lower lip.

“Edge, yes,” I said quietly. We took a breath and gaped at each other in wonder.

You gave my neck some attention and murmured, “What’s better than this?”

“Nothing.”

Chopin’s icy notes had formed a crystal lake where an ethereal figure skater floated and spiraled effortlessly.

We carried on like that whenever we could during that last month before you left for Wales. Each time, and there were eight of them, we began to come to terms with the enormity of our situation. We were falling in love.

Time number eight: Guggi’s parents were gone for the evening, so he threw an impromptu end-of-school party, which consisted of about a half-dozen boys playing Dungeons and Dragons in his basement rec room, several of their disappointed-looking girlfriends (not including Ali, who had better things to do), and some of Gavin’s miscellaneous pals who were listening to records and passing around a bottle of Night Train (horrible). I felt it was my duty to circulate between both groups for at least a while, but I ended up sitting with you as you occupied yourself with album art and liner notes. You were sad and couldn’t stay long because your parents wanted to get an early start the next morning. “Come with me,” I said, and, figuring it was the last place anyone else would go, I led you to the laundry room.

I was about to turn on the light when I felt your hand over mine. “I can talk better in the dark,” you said, closing the door. And then your arms were around me. I held your slender form and felt a sob against my chest that brought tears to my eyes.

“Oh Edge.”

“I’m gonna miss you so much.”

“I am, too.” I stroked your hair and kissed your forehead.

“I can’t even call you. It’s too expensive.”

I hadn’t considered this. “Fuck.”

“Will you write to me?”

“Of course I will.”

“I mean it. Please, Bono.”

“I mean it, too, love. I will write to you. A lot.”
You sniffed and nuzzled my earlobe. “You said ‘love.’”

“That’s because I love you, Edge.” I kissed your damp, salty cheek en route to your mouth. I had been saving that word for too long, and it seemed to make you happy as you kissed me back.

“God, I love you, too.”

We sank to the floor and sat with our backs against the washing machine. I put my arm around you, and you rested your head on my shoulder. “It’s gonna be okay, Edge.”

“Yeah?”

“I’ll write so many letters to you. I’ll make them fun. I promise. And when you come back...Christ, I’ll be all over you.”

“It’ll be like a movie scene.”

“Right. You’ll be at one end of a field, and I’ll be at the other end, and we’ll run towards each other and just--” I kissed you some more, and your hands moved over my chest.

“We’re in love.”

“Yes we are, Edge.”

Later I walked with you to the bus stop. It had rained, and the gleaming pavement reflected the street lights. Raindrops fell from leaves at the slightest provocation. We sat on the damp bench at the end of my block, and you gave me a roll of stamps and a piece of paper. “That’s the address.”

“I don’t have anything to write mine on.”

You smiled. “I know where you live, B.”

“Of course you do.” I had an idea. I pulled my new-ish razor blade necklace from underneath my t-shirt. “Would you like this?”

You blinked a few times and nodded. “Yes.” I took it off and handed it to you. “It’s still warm,” you said, holding it to your lips.

“Put it on before it gets cold.”

You busied yourself with the clasp and said, “I wish I had something for you.” You felt through the pockets of your jeans. “Want a guitar pick?”

“Absolutely I do.”

“Blue like your eyes.” You handed it to me, and I gave it a kiss before pocketing it.

The stupid bus, which we both flipped off as soon as it came into view, arrived according to its stupid schedule. “I love you,” we whispered in unison, giving each other one last glance. You boarded, climbed up to the top part, and looked down at me with your hand on the window. I held up mine and watched as the stupid bus took you away.
Once I returned home, I dug through Mum's dwindling stack of variety greeting cards. I selected one that said "Easter Blessings" and had a picture of the Easter Bunny rolling around in buttercups. "I miss you already, the Edge," I wrote inside. I drew a weeping bumblebee alongside this and ran it out to the mailbox. Thus began the summer of 1977 and our intense, Victorian letter-writing romance.

As soon as I received a letter from you, I fired one back, and I enjoyed this rapid pace and grew to need it. The letters were not particularly controversial. They were mainly conversational, at least at first...just two close friends trying to stay in touch. I feel like that summer was ultimately good for us. Even though you were gone, our rapport intensified, and I came to know you much better as a person through your writing. And drawings. We illustrated our notes to each other and drew on the envelopes and so on. I carried your letters to my room as if they were rare treasures. And indeed they were.
Dear B, thank you very much for the touching Easter greeting. I miss you. I miss my friends and my house and my band. I miss Ireland.

Swansea is a medium-sized industrial city that's surrounded on three sides by the Irish Sea. It juts out into the water like a stubby pinkie finger. If this place were situated in the Caribbean, I'm sure it would be paradise. But this is Wales. It's gray, cool, and damp.

There are no good radio stations here, so I'm being subjected to lots of disco and soft rock. Please send help.
We are staying with my aunt and uncle. Gill is delighted because she'll get to spend time with our cousin Jane, who is around her age. No other cousin options are available to me, and when Dik found out about our Wales trip, he made sure to enroll in a summer course right away. So I am alone here most of the time, and other than adults, my only real companion is Gogo, my aunt's beloved corgi. He is built like a grinning tank and has a big, hilarious rump he seems justifiably proud of.

Well Edge, the big news from my neighborhood is this: Gavin has a job at a slaughterhouse, of all places. Don't worry—he's not on the killing floor or anything like that. They keep him out front as a sort of receptionist. He's doing so well that his superiors don't seem to mind his outlandish costumes or increasingly sophisticated makeup looks. He and Guggi have taken to wearing dresses when they go out, and they tend to beat up anyone who hassles them. Gavin's mum even made a dress for him. Can you believe that? They tried to get me to join them, but I put my little foot down, although Gav persuaded me to submit to his sky blue eyeliner. I insisted that Guggi draw it on me, as he seems to know his way around a pencil. After he did this, Gav seemed almost angry. “No man should be allowed to look that pretty,” he pouted. Then we three pretty things sat outside on the wall at the end of Guggi's cul-de-sac. We looked down the hill at the withered residents of Dublin's finest insane asylum as they puttered around on the green and enjoyed the warm weather. G+G jokingly refer to them as "virgin prunes," which is such a weird combination of funny and mean. I never know whether to laugh or take offense.

So that is the kind of summer I am having.
I have eaten more cockles* this summer than I've had in my entire life. They are this city's number one food--just these ugly, gummy little wads in a briny soup, and you have to work to pry them away from their shells. A really fun side dish is something called laverbread, which is seaweed that you cook all day in a big pot of water until it turns into glop, and then you make thin patties out of this glop and coat them in oatmeal, and THEN you fry this stuff in lard. It's about as far as you can get from bread, unless the "laver" in laverbread means "the opposite of."

*stop it
In an attempt to teach him a lesson about responsibility, Adam's parents have forced him to go to London this summer and work in a fish market. He sent me a postcard of the queen with “God Save the Queen” over her face—which I have enclosed—and his handwriting is nearly impenetrable. But I think I can make out *smoking...lots of great records...really wild scene.* Can you make sense of the rest? Anyway. It seems like he's having fun.

But I want the two of you to come back here so we can be a proper band again. While Larry and I attempted to play a few songs together, it’s just not the same, obviously. He said that this situation is, and I quote, "a bitch." I'm just as scandalized as you are, Edge. Our little drummer boy is growing up, and he's feistier than ever. Actually he's been practicing all the time, and Edge, he's so good and very loud...just teaching himself and playing along to songs on the radio.

Larry’s dad, who looks just like him, has been very kind to me, and it's like we all belong to a sad brotherhood of men who have lost the women they love. I want to ask Dad if he would like to join me when I go over to Larry's house, but he just sits there in his gloomy chair in his gloomy living room listening to his gloomy opera records.

On a positive note, I think I've got a job at the petrol station on Richmond Road. I need to get an actual microphone with its own amp, I've decided, and while I was looking at them in the music store, I saw a guitar that would look just right in your hands.
B, yesterday Gill caught me admiring the envelope you decorated with a guitar, which was very good, by the way. “Oh, is that another letter from your boyfriend?” she asked, and I'm sure you can imagine her taunting (and let's face it, jealous) tone.

"He’s my bandmate, and there's a difference," I said lamely.

I really miss you. I miss the things we do.

Sometimes I like to I walk to the city's library, find a quiet spot, and read about whatever subject looks interesting. Things like earthquakes, big cats, oceanography...I'll even look at cookbooks to remember what a non-cockle based diet entails. The number of books about sex are, predictably, few. As in there are two of them, and they cover topics that are merely sex adjacent. I am now an expert in all parts of the female reproductive system, specializing in menstruation. I also know what will happen to me if I become pregnant, so if you have any questions about either of these topics, please feel free to ask.

This afternoon Dad noticed me pulling at the neck of my t-shirt and looking down at the necklace you gave me along with my chest because, to be honest, things are happening there. So he laughed and told me that all Evans men receive a hairy chest on their sixteenth birthday, and I was right on schedule. Additionally, I think I'm going to be just a little bit taller than you when I return, unless you have grown, too.

Adam sent me a letter telling me to run to Swansea’s record store and buy Horses by Patti Smith and report back. He enclosed ten pounds (!) to help me do this. They had to special order it. B, this record has turned me upside down.

* 

Edge, congratulations on your new record and birthday present. Unfortunately my long-awaited growth spurt has not yet arrived. Please try not to get too much taller than me. I can't wait to see you again, and I want to listen to that record with you.

Ali's parents have whisked her away to spend a month with her mum's family, so now I am doubly lonely. She has been shelving books at the Dublin City Library this summer, and they love her so much that the job will be waiting for her when she returns.

We have been seeing each other when she has free time. It's uncanny how much her personality reminds me of yours, love. The fact that the two of you entered my life at roughly the same time amazes me, and I know for a fact that she would be just as happy with you as she is with me, if not much happier. But evidently the two of you have the misfortune of being attracted to your opposite, which is me. And I love you both. And yes, I need to tell her about us...as soon as I figure out how. I will. I promise. I feel like such a greedy idiot for thinking I could be with either of you, let alone both of you. But I don't think I could be truly content with one of you gone. Maybe there’s a hole in my heart so big that it takes two people to fill it. Thank you for being patient with me, Edge, and please know that if you meet a girl and you fall in love with her, I will not stand in your way.

As long as you still love me, too.

And as long as she is somehow okay with me. Christ.

I will tell Ali. I promise, Edge. I love you so much. I can feel it growing inside my heart.
Every day I walk Gogo to the shore. Along the way we can rely upon a stranger—usually a girl or a woman—to stop us and swoon over how adorable Gogo is and how much they love his dear little face and his plump little arse, and he laps it all up and lets them pet him for as long as they like before I walk and he swaggers away.

We sit under a cluster of trees on a hill near the water before we turn around and go home. I look out at the sea and think about you on the other side and wonder what you are doing. I think about our kiss in the greenhouse surrounded by all of those plants feeding us oxygen, and the way your lips felt, and your tongue, and the way an entire world opened up for me, and suddenly I was seeing new colors and hearing new sounds.

And I'll pet Gogo, who will roll onto his back so I can scratch his belly, too, and when he smiles up at me, I tell him I love him.

Edge, should I be jealous of this Gogo character? Just kidding. He sounds delightful, and I'm glad you have a sweet companion. Please kiss him for me.
My stint as a petrol station attendant ended mere days after it started. I expected the job to be dead easy, and one where I would have plenty of time to daydream and write songs and letters to my boyfriend. Because that is what you are, Edge: my boyfriend. Just writing that and seeing it written in ink on a piece of paper turns me on, Edge. How about you?

But back to the job. Did you know an oil crisis is starting to happen? Cars were lined up around the block like a big horrid snake, most of the people were impatient and angry, and exactly none of them tipped me. Also apparently it's my fault that oil prices have become so outrageous. So I declared the job bullshit and quit.

To celebrate my independence, G+G took me on a two-day trip to Dingle, where Guggi has relatives who didn't mind a handful of weirdos sleeping on their living room floor. I spent my hard-earned petrol salary on three tickets for a boat tour around the harbor. We donned life vests and joined about twenty American tourists on a decent-sized boat that patrolled the bay and its rugged outcroppings.

Our guide promised that we would see dolphins or he would give us our money back, and indeed we did. Smiling, slick, and clearly flirting with us, they chased the boat and burst from the waves, seemingly overjoyed to be dolphins. I wanted to touch them. Instead I started singing, just a string of happy vowels, and I swear one of them squealed at me as it leaped into the air, wet and shiny.

Behind him was a massive triangular rock formation. Diagonal stripes of sediment layers ran throughout it. I imagined that it had been thrust from beneath the earth's surface and into the sky by some incredibly powerful and patient force. I wish you could have been there, too.

PS Guggi cut my hair. It's...maybe you'll like it.

*I*

My aunt and uncle took my family on a tour of castles and ruins around Wales. I tried to imagine the way these crumbling castles must have looked when they were new, along with the people who lived inside them. Maybe a young man sat in that tower and looked out over the rolling hills and thought about the friend he had fallen hopelessly in love with, and the romantic moments they had shared, and how much longer would he have to wait to see him again? Where is that long-ago young man now? Maybe he’s me.

We also visited a church that was humble on the outside, but from twenty yards away I could hear this incredible noise escaping from inside. It was a sound so beautiful I could almost see it as a bright white light that shot through every window and gap in the walls and crack in the foundation. We opened the door and looked in. The pews were clustered into four groups. All faced the center, where a woman was moving her hand rhythmically and directing the entire congregation in a capella four-part harmony. And their sound was huge. Their voices were like bells. They kept singing I'm going home, and it made me want to cry because I will be home very soon. And that is the power of music. What else can do that?

I want to sing like that with you. I want us to play our own songs.

I’m going to take Gogo on our last walk, mail this, and I will be with you the day after you read these words, probably. Thank you for writing to me this summer. I love you very much, B.
School began, and you were not around for that useless first half-day. Your family’s car ferry from Liverpool to Dublin was late, and of course you didn’t miss anything of consequence, except for the spectacle I made of myself. I wanted to start my postgraduate year at Mount Temple with a bang, so I arrived on the scene wearing an appropriately stupid outfit and a safety pin piercing my cheek (Adam insisted that this was the height of fashion in London). Instant uproar from staff and students alike. Ali was repulsed and broke up with me on the spot, but I knew this was one of those 24-hour breakups. I was sent home, where I amused myself by calling your number every couple of minutes until, miraculously, your sister answered. David Howell “The Edge” Evans was home.

“Hello?”

“Gill! It’s Bono. How are you, my darling?”

She smothered a shriek. “Ehm, hi! Hi Bono! We’re back, finally. How are you?”

“It’s been quite a morning. You do not want details.”

“Oh, but I do.”

“Well, word to the wise? If you’re thinking about piercing your cheek, Gill, do not. More trouble than it’s worth, okay?”

“Okay. Not to worry.”

“Can Edge come out to play?”

“I’ll get him.” She sat the phone down and yelled, “It’s your boyfriend!”

And then I heard your smiling voice, just as I had remembered it but with an additional teaspoonful of Welsh.

“Hello, Bono.”

“Edge, Edge, Edge. Dad will be at work for the rest of the day. I am alone. Please come over here. Just come on up to my room.”

“I’ll be there before you know it.”

“Good. I love you.”

“I do, too,” you mumbled adorably before hanging up.

I spent the next half hour in a mild panic as I put on a different shirt and tidied up my room. Dad saw to it that the house was always impeccably clean, and I provided an ample amount of slave labor to that end, but since he never set foot in my room, things were a bit more relaxed there. Your blue guitar pick was displayed prominently on top of my radio, which was playing My Sweet Lord by George Harrison. I imagined our band as The Beatles, but the personalities didn’t quite match. I knew this much, though: you reminded me of George.

I could barely contain myself when the front door opened and closed--and I think you locked it, too--
and then I heard your footsteps as you climbed up the stairs and walked down my hall, and then there you were, standing in my doorway and holding a record. Green eyes, dark hair, big smile, laughing, hugging me.

“My sweet Edge, oh my Edge, I really wanna see you, I really wanna be with you,” I sang.

“Hallelujah,” you added.

You felt a bit bigger. You were indeed taller. Your skin and hair smelled like the sea. You were back, you were back, you were back.

You looked a bit tired but so handsome, all cheekbones and eyebrows and chin. We scrutinized each other’s faces, and you ran your fingers through my hair. “I like it,” you said, your voice low.

“Guggi’s mum called it a shag, sort of.”

“It’s cool.”

“Thanks, Edge.”

You touched my face. I had covered the piercing with a small bandage. “Is that okay?”

I peeled it off, revealing a little red dot. “An ill-advised piercing.”

“Jesus.” You kissed it gently, we moaned just a bit, and I was pro-piercing again. “Your face is perfect. Please don’t do anything else like that, okay?” Anti-piercing. “Unless you want to pierce this.” Your lips brushed against my left earlobe. “Or this.” And the other. Pro-piercing with restrictions.

“Whatever you say.”

You squinted at my eyes. “Is that blue?”

“It was waterproof and I had trouble getting it off.” It was not waterproof and I had no trouble putting just a tiny bit of it on.

“Pretty boy.”

“I love you, Edge.”

“I love you, Bono.”

I slipped a finger between the second and third buttons of your shirt. “Very nice.” You blushed. “You have more than I do.”

“I dunno, yours is just...lower.” You outlined this area on my shirt with your fingers, and clearly you had given the matter some thought, which was gratifying.

I nudged your left hand. “So this is the record that turned you upside down, eh?”

“Oh, Bono. She’s incredible.”

A defiant, androgynous, black and white Patti Smith stared at me in her white button-down shirt, black ribbon, and slim pants. She held a dark blazer with a silver horse pin on it over her shoulder. Same frizzy hair, same exquisite bone structure, same formidably intelligent gaze. “Christ, Edge, she looks exactly like you.”
“I kind of thought so, too,” you said with a grin.

“Let’s play it.”

I turned off the radio and turned on my record player. You removed the record from its sleeve, and, barely touching the outside edge of it with the palms of your hands, you set it on the turntable.

We sat on my bed and listened to the first somber piano chords. And then: *Jesus died for somebody’s sins but not mine.* “Holy shit,” I whispered, and you took my hand and nodded.

We continued to listen, our hands dancing with each other.

“She made me feel...less alone.”

“You’re not alone anymore.”

My eyes grew wide when I realized that she was bulldozing Van Morrison’s *Gloria.* But not bulldozing, *Improving.*

“She’s singing about a girl,” I whispered, and you nodded, and after about three minutes of building, her strange, swaggering voice led her rampaging band to a climactic spelling of that girl’s name, G-L-O-R-I-A. I looked at you in awe, took your face in my hands, and gave you the kind of ecstatic kiss that can only come from months of waiting for it and thinking about it and wanting it more than anything else in the world.

“Baby,” you sighed as we moved down onto the bed, our heads sharing my pillow. We looked at each other for one gasping second--we were on my bed together--and then our mouths reconnected, our hands frantic under that galvanizing umbrella of music.


All of this happened in the space of two minutes and thirty-seven seconds as we rode out the song.

Breathing heavily, we paused during the silence between *Gloria: In Excelsis Deo* and *Redondo Beach.*

“Edge,” I whispered.

“Bono.”

“Look at us.”

“Here we are.”
“At last.” I toyed with the razor blade necklace resting on your collarbone.

“Do you want that back?”

I looked up. “Oh no, it’s yours, Edge. It belongs to you now. Did I not make that clear?”

You shook your head and smiled. “Not really.”

“God, her voice. If she can be a singer, I can be a singer.”

“You’re right. You could be just as good.”

I shifted on the bed and glanced down at your jeans. “Are you as uncomfortable as I am?”

“In the best way.”

I took a deep breath. “I think we should slow down.”

You shrugged. “I guess you’re right.”

“Not because any of this is wrong, okay?”

“Okay.”

“It’s just...there are so many things we are going to do together, Edge.” I kissed along your jaw. “And I want to take my time and appreciate all of them.”

You swallowed. “Yeah?”

“I want to do everything.”

“Baby.”

I put my arms around you and said, “I want to go to sleep tonight thinking about us making out on my bed. I want to think about your skin. The hair on your chest and your arms. You calling me baby. And that’s about all I will be able to handle for now.”

You nodded. “Me too.”

“That’ll be after I call you and we talk about it for a long time.”

“Oh yeah,” you said, remembering. "We can finally talk on the phone again.”

“We can.”

You touched the choppy lengths of hair near my neck. “You can keep writing to me if you want to, though.”

“So can you. We can do whatever we want, Edge.”

“Good.”

I kissed your forehead. “Yeah, I think I’m going to demand lots of love letters from you.”

“Of course.”

We kissed again, held each other close, and continued talking like this for the duration of side one.
“I’m in love with you,” you concluded. You kissed the little red dot on my cheek, and we listened to the needle tap against the last groove of the record. Its quiet rhythm sounded like a beating heart.

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*Edge, dear god, why didn't we do this?*

*I love you,*

*B.*
This is the first of probably several Edge chapters. It’s not particularly sexy, but it describes the formation of a necessary alliance.

I’ve become aware of the fact that when Bono was young, his Dad rarely if ever let him use their phone. Not the case in this fic!

When I was seventeen, I didn’t know who Sappho was, either. :)  
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_Doña_Isabel_de_Porcel

Thank you all for reading!

Bono, thank you for detailing our first year together. It was very romantic, and I am touched. However, I see you have conveniently left me to deal with the Ali Situation. Also I must somehow get us through another extended, sex-free period of time. I refuse to write about that until the two of us are eighteen in the story, as unrealistic as that may be. I do not wish to be put on some kind of watchlist once this story inevitably falls into the wrong hands. (Hello, U2 fanfiction readers. None of this happened. Well, it should have, and a lot of it is based on actual events. Just not the “good parts.”)

Alright, B. Please enjoy this PG-13 account of your post-graduate year at Mt. Temple. It might take a few chapters. I love you and miss you.

E.

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The phone rang at 12:17, much later than usual. By then I had learned to turn the ringer down to its lowest setting, and its soft dingding sound reminded me of the bell atop the toy schoolhouse that Gill used to play with. I pulled the phone under the blankets with me. My knees created a sort of sound-muffling tent. That was my plan, anyway.

“Edge?” you whispered.

“What’s wrong?”

“I told her.”

“Oh. Wow. Are you okay? Is she okay?”

“I hope so, and I hope so.”

Adrenaline coursed through my body, and I was suddenly wide awake as you proceeded to set the scene: you had taken Ali to the small park near her house, and the two of you sat on the floor of its small bandstand. As far as I could tell, no bands ever performed there, and it seemed to exist solely for teenagers who were desperate for privacy in the dark. You and Ali could be found there almost every Friday night. I couldn’t begrudge you that. Our band, under its current name The Hype, had
begun practicing three times a week, including Saturday and Sunday. So Fridays were reserved for Ali.

“And she was looking so beautiful, Edge.” (Of course she was.) “Don’t you love her in red?”

“Sure.”

“Okay, ehm, anyway, when we walked to the bandstand, I picked up this pinecone, and I guess I needed to do something with my hands because I was kind of prying those little segments off one at a time and flicking them into the center of the floor. She looked at me and she said, ‘Okay, what’s wrong?’ Like how did she know?”

“Girls...they just know stuff, B.”

“So I looked down at that poor half-pinecone and then over to her. The sun was behind her, and her hair was lit up like a dark orange halo, you know? And I’m sure she was bracing for some story about Dad, right? But instead I summoned all my courage and I said, oh Edge, I said, ‘Things are starting to happen with Edge and me.’ And she said--”

“‘What do you mean, things?’” I guessed.

“Her exact words, Edge. ‘What do you mean, things?’ And I said, ‘I love you, Ali.’ She nodded. ‘But I also love Edge.’”

“Oh, Bono. You actually said that?”

“I did. And while I had no idea what her reaction would be, somehow it felt good to finally tell someone, you know?”

I attempted to process this. “I love you, too. So what did she say?”

“Well, she was stunned, of course. I’d been trying to figure out what to tell her for months, but this completely blindsided her, poor thing. She said, ‘Wait. You’re in love with me and Edge?’ And I nodded like this is the kind of news couples share all the time and there was no need to explain because I am a stupid bastard. ‘But I thought you liked girls.’”

“Oh man.”

“‘I do. I guess I like both, maybe? But he’s the only…’” Pauses like that don’t happen with you unless you’re upset.

“Baby.”

More silence. “She said, ‘He’s the only boy you love.’ And I nodded at the trees. So her mouth is wide open, right? ‘What makes you think you can be in love with two people and one of them is a boy and that’s just gonna be totally okay?’”

“She makes a good point.”

“Yeah. ‘I don’t think it’s gonna be totally okay. I want it to be. But I wouldn’t blame you if you said this was too much to ask.’”

I could hear you shifting around in your bed, and the roar of a pillow moving too close to the receiver reminded me of walking against the wind.

“Still there, Edge?”
In the dim light, I made eye contact with Patti, whose album was tipped up against my bookshelf. “Are you kidding?”

“Okay. This was rough. She was shaking her head, and she said, ‘So I’m not enough for you now?’ And I said, ‘You’re more than I deserve. And so is he. I just...I’m a lot to deal with, Ali. You’ve said so yourself. Many times.’” You coughed. “Because I am, Edge. I really do need you both. You believe me, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“You’re amazing.”

“If you say so.”

“You are. Alright. So. We were both in tears at this point, and we talked for a couple of hours. My legs fell asleep on that concrete floor. And I don’t wanna go into it because we kept repeating the same things. I told her over and over that I didn’t want to lose either of you because having the two of you in my life--as strange as it is, it’s the first time I’ve ever felt right, you know? It’s the first time since Mum died that I’ve really felt at peace. And secure. And understood. And I know how unreasonable it is for me to expect you to share me like I’m some kind of incredible fucking prize. I’m unworthy of either of you. And yet I still need you both. I know that in my heart.”

I tried to find the right words. “You’re special, B. Sometimes people are just...special.”

“Well, I didn’t feel very special tonight, making my girl cry because I was asking so much of her. I mean, this is not the kind of love story young girls dream about, right?”

“Well, maybe some of them.”

“Heh, maybe there are three or four girls currently walking the earth, but you’d be hard-pressed to find them.”

I smiled at the receiver. “So you kept going back and forth. Did she come around at all?”

“She said she needed to think about it. Obviously.”

“Yeah.”

“I asked her if she still loved me. She told me she did. We were quiet, and she moved closer and kissed my cheek. She said she has always loved everything about me--and if this was a part of who I am, she would try to accept it.”

“Wow.”

“But you and I, Edge, we’ll probably have to keep what we have together a secret. Like, if she accepts this, she’ll still be kind of my official person I love. And that doesn’t mean you’re anything less than Ali. It’s just...”

“It’s okay. I don’t know if I’ll ever be ready to let people know about us. Maybe someday if the world ever changes and Ali doesn’t mind. But guys like us--they get killed for this, Bono.”

“Edge”—your voice cracked on my name—“If anything ever happened to you because of me, I—“

“Shh.” I waited for your breathing to slow down. “I’m very good at keeping secrets.”

“In a perfect world, none of this would matter.”
“The world isn’t perfect, Bono. But our love is the closest thing to perfect that I could name.”

The smile returned to your voice. “I know. It takes my breath away.”

“Are you gonna be alright tonight?”

“Yeah.”

“Call me back if you’re not. Or…”

“Or what?”

I looked out the window in the direction of your house. The neighborhood was quiet and still. “We could just stay on the line all night. Listen to each other sleep.”

You sniffed. “I’d like that.”

*

We met for band practice the next day. Both of us were wiped out and not really able to keep up with Larry, who took on his standard Why am I even in a band with these losers? expression, and Adam, who merely shrugged, helped himself to a packet of crisps from Mr. McKenzie’s personal stash, and watched us bicker.

After we called it a day and agreed that maybe we should spend the rest of the weekend getting our collective shit together, you pulled me into the band room office for the kind of post-practice alone time to which we had become accustomed.

I studied your face—eyes puffy and somewhat bloodshot, chin and jaw rough. Same delicious mouth, though, and the same roaming hands. And the same sighs and moans that made me imagine a tight, spiraling coil inside my body, and one little tap, one little bump might cause it to unwind rapidly and violently. By then you were all I cared to think about. Your taut little body pinning mine against the door...your tongue penetrating my mouth and giving me all sorts of ideas...

Then you said, “Ehm, Ali would like to talk to you if you wanna meet her at the library. In about an hour...”

I blinked. “What?”

Kissing my cheek, you said, “Yeah, I mean, you don’t have to but maybe you should get to know each other better, maybe.”

I put my hand over my face, and you brought it back down. “Oh, B. I am not ready for this.”

“It’s okay. Neither is she.”

“She’s in my English class, but we haven’t really had a chance to talk too much yet. I mean, she’s nice, but she’s nice to everyone. I dunno.” I glanced at Mr. McKenzie’s desk calendar, which was crammed with his individual instruction schedule. The weekend boxes included the type of geometric doodles one tends to make while on the phone. I rolled my eyes. “I guess I’ll do it.”

“Good. Here,” you said, putting a small metal object into my hand. “Mum would have wanted you to have this.” It was a golden bee pin. “She used to call me her bee charmer. You should wear it on your jacket, like Patti does.”

I smiled at it. “You keep giving me jewelry, you know.”
“I’m afraid I can’t stop myself.”

It was an unseasonably warm afternoon, and I regretted my decision to walk most of the way to the library from the school because once I reached the entrance, I realized I was sweating. It probably wasn’t just because of the heat. Ali was at her post and in the process of finishing her shift. She put an armful of books onto a cart and straightened up a stack of cards. Looking up, your perfect figurine of a girlfriend noticed me standing there and watching her like a creep. “He said you wanted to see me?” I asked quietly. I guess it was technically a question.

“Hey,” she whispered, a confused expression on her face. “But he said you wanted to see me, Edge.” We looked at each other for a moment and slowly began to smile.

“That little loser,” I said.

“Oh, he is such a loser,” she said, stifling a giggle. “Follow me.”

She led me outside to a narrow alley between the library and a hotel. Both buildings were covered with ivy that had small purple berries. We sat on the steps near the library’s side door.

I glanced at her mouth. You had kissed it many times. “He told me about your, uh, discussion last night.” I turned my attention to the cracks in the asphalt.

“It’s been a weird day.”

“I know what you mean.”

“So quiet in there. My mind keeps replaying last night on a loop.”

“I couldn’t play worth a damn today.”

Some kids walked by, and she picked at her fingernail polish. A sigh. “I suppose I should hate you, but I can’t. I love him, and I can’t hate someone he loves.”

I rubbed my neck. “You’re a really good person, Ali.” I felt a small hand touch my shoulder.

“You are, too, you know. He talks about you all the time. I guess I should have seen this coming.”

“No, it’s too crazy.”

“I mean, we both love him. And he’s just...a lot.”

“To say the least.”

“I’ve never known anyone who can talk so much about anything at all.”

I huffed out a laugh. “One time he started talking about The Ramones, and he didn’t come up for air for a solid twenty minutes. I was watching the clock just to see.”

“Do not get him started on The Clash.” She fished around in her purse for a tin of hard cherry candies and gave me one. A van rumbled through the alley. Its windows were rolled down, and
**Close To You** by The Carpenters was playing on its radio.

“They’re so punk,” I said, imitating you, and she laughed.

Her shoe kicked mine gently. “He can be very persuasive sometimes.”

“Dangerously so.”

We watched the late afternoon traffic. Ali chuckled to herself and said, “If we were smart, we would join forces.”

I nodded. “I’m pretty smart.”

“So am I.” She noticed the bee on my rolled-up jacket. “That’s cute.”

“He gave it to me today. It was his mum’s.”

She laughed. “He gave me this last night,” she said, pulling a necklace from beneath her turtleneck. “That’s cute.”

“‘He gave it to me today. It was his mum’s.’

‘I nodded. ‘So am I.’ She noticed the bee on my rolled-up jacket. “That’s cute.”

“‘He gave it to me today. It was his mum’s.’

She laughed. “He gave me this last night,” she said, pulling a necklace from beneath her turtleneck. It had a silver butterfly charm. Or maybe it was a luna moth. “God help us. He is frighteningly lovable.”

“And a loser.”

“A lovable loser.”

Eye contact. “Our lovable loser?”

She exhaled. “Yeah. Ours.”

* 

A couple of days later in English class, I took my seat in the annoying horseshoe-shaped desk arrangement Mrs. Walsh thought would promote class participation. All it did was make me feel even more self-conscious than I normally would when it was my turn to answer a question or read something.

The fall term was still in its infancy, and our weekend assignment was to browse through the sweet-smelling pages of our brand new literature textbooks. Blessedly young and a bit of a renegade, Mrs. Walsh told us to find a poem that spoke to us. It could be anywhere in the book, and she said we should let the small illustrations of famous art guide us if we weren’t sure. “Look for a poem or a picture that makes you feel something,” she said. And then we would be forced to share it with the class.

Ali was sitting with a few of her friends who were relatively serious students at one end of the horseshoe. I was on the opposite end and hoping Mrs. Walsh would be merciful and start with my side so I could get my poetry reading out of the way and relax for the duration of the class. It was not to be. Instead she began with Ali’s end.

“What’s your poem, Ali, and why did you pick it?”

“It’s Fragment 31 by...” She glanced at her book. “Sappho? Is that how you say it? It’s on page 40.” Everyone flipped to that page. Next to the poem was a photo of a sculpture of Aphrodite. Her nose had been partially chipped way.

“Yes. Sappho was a woman, by the way. Her work was meant to be sung, so if you’d like to do that, Ali, go right ahead,” Mrs. Walsh said with a wink.
"Please don’t make me sing," Ali said, alarmed.

"No, you don’t have to. What do you think the poem is about?"

"I think it’s about jealousy, and that’s something I don’t like to be."

"I think we’re all jealous sometimes, and poetry can make us feel like we’re not alone, wouldn’t you say? Go ahead and read it to us."

"Do I have to stand?"

"No, you can sit."

"Oh good," Ali whispered. She took a deep breath and began to read.

_that man seems to me to be equal to the gods_
_who is sitting opposite you_
_and hears you nearby_
_speaking sweetly_

_and laughing delightfully, which indeed_
_makes my heart flutter in my breast;_
_for when I look at you even for a short time,_
_it is no longer possible for me to speak_

_but it is as if my tongue is broken_
_and immediately a subtle fire has run over my skin,_
_I cannot see anything with my eyes,_
_and my ears are buzzing_

_a cold sweat comes over me, trembling_
_seizes me all over, I am paler_
_than grass, and I seem nearly_
to have died._

_but everything must be endured_

"It just kind of ends," Ali said, looking up.

"That’s because this is a part of a longer poem that was lost. We don’t know what the rest of it is. I suppose we all have to decide for ourselves what we should do when we are jealous. Do you think Sappho wants to stop being in love?"

"No. Maybe she can still be happy."

Mrs. Walsh moved on to the next girl, and Ali gave me a Mona Lisa smile.

An eternity later, it was my turn to read. As I waited, I memorized my poem to the point of not knowing it at all anymore. I had selected it the night before, trying to find anything I could relate to, when I landed on a painting by Goya of a young woman in a black lace veil. She looked a lot like you, or possibly a daughter you might have with Ali one day. She had luminous skin, prominent eyes and lips, and she was standing in a way that made her seem confident.

"David, what’s your poem?"
“It’s on page 218. By Lord Byron.” The sound of pages turning made me nervous.

“Oh, very romantic. What do you think it’s about?”

“I, uh, it’s about a girl who’s really beautiful, but she’s not like most girls who are pretty. She’s...darker.”

“So she’s not a Barbie doll. What else?”

“She’s a good person. And maybe she’s quiet? He likes her a lot.”

Mrs. Walsh nodded. “Makes sense to me. Go ahead.”

If I thought standing up in front of people and playing a guitar and singing was going to be how I would make my living, I supposed I ought to get over my fear of public speaking. Why was reading poetry aloud in front of a dozen kids so much harder than playing a song? It just was. I cleared my throat.

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that’s best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o’er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o’er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

There was no way I was going to put an exclamation point on that. I looked over at Ali and gave her a secret smile. Her dark eyes met mine, and she smiled back at me. She touched her luna moth, and I touched my bee.
This chapter introduces a new (canon) character, about whom I know very little, so nearly all of what I have written is of my own invention. I hope you like this character.

Thank you for your encouragement, and thank you for being so patient. It's been a very busy summer for all of us. :) 

PS I’ve been having trouble with italics here, wtf AO3?

To: the most exquisite Clash fan I know.
From: the man who loves you.

I have one more chapter to write, and then it'll be your turn. Thank you for being so patient.

Your eyes looked tired, but the photo I saw of you in New York last night brought me to my knees.

-----

“Can I interest you in an educational field trip, my love?”

Your whispering lips near my earlobe caused every hair on my arms to stand on end. I had been cramming for a test, and I turned my attention from my chemistry textbook to your grinning face.

“Where are we going?”

You held up four small pieces of paper--tickets--and fanned them in front of your mouth like a geisha under the cafeteria’s fluorescent lights. “The Clash, Edge. The fucking Clash!”

“What? Let me see,” I said, grabbing the tickets. Friday, October 21, Trinity College. General admission. The Clash.

“In two weeks’ time. Can you believe it?”

“How did you--”

“Six pounds for the four of us. It wasn’t hard, Edge.”

“Oh my god.”

“You may now praise me.”

No one was paying attention to us. I pulled you down to sit beside me, and I whispered in your ear, “I have never been so attracted to another human being in my entire life.”

You leaned back in your chair and laughed at the ceiling.
“It’s the truth,” I told your endless neck.

“Stick with me, Edge, and I’ll make all your dreams come true.”

Two weeks later, as soon as classes were dismissed, you, Adam, Larry, and I ran to the bus stop and paced around excitedly for a few minutes while we waited. When the double decker bus arrived, we piled into seats in the top part (by then it was understood that we would always sit in the top part). “I’m so bored with the U.S.A., I’m so bored with the U.S.A., but what can I do?” you chanted, your head on a swivel.

“This kid I know said they wouldn’t let them play last night in Belfast,” Larry said while leaning forward, his head between ours. He was still not entirely on board with the Clash, but we hoped to change his mind.

“Yeah, they’re gonna be so pissed off tonight,” you said merrily.

Adam patted Larry’s shoulder. “I’ll look after you, lad.”

“Enough with your fookin’ ‘lad,’” Larry blustered, shrugging off Adam’s hand. But I could tell he was a bit relieved. He would undoubtedly be one of the youngest fans there. You and I glanced back at him. We would look after him, too.

I took four foil-wrapped cheese sandwiches out of my bag. “Mum wanted us to eat,” I said, distributing them.

“I hope they play Police & Thieves,” I heard Larry tell Adam.

*!

We lingered outside of the Examination Hall, a grand room whose capacity was about 1,200. Ultimately they managed to squeeze what seemed like a few hundred additional fans into the show. You wanted to be among the first people inside, and since we had arrived several hours early, that was likely. A few dozen probable-fans also circulated around the area. Gazing at Parliament Square’s imposing gray buildings, we did our best to blend in.

As the sun began to set, a queue had become well-established, and fans of every stripe clogged the square. Across the way, elegantly-dressed older couples filed into another building to attend a donors’ function, and they looked at us with a mixture of disdain and horror.

A stranger to no one, you made friends with a cluster of young men ahead of us in the queue, and you puffed yourself up like a proud little peacock as you told them about your band. “We’re called The Hype. Have you heard of us? We’ve been around for about a year, yeah. That’s Larry, our drummer. He used to be in a marching band, and he is really, really good. And Adam plays bass, and I think he’s gonna be our manager, too. I’m the singer and I write lyrics, and Edge--” You put your arm around my shoulders. “Edge sings too, and he plays guitar. He also writes songs. He has this new one called Life on Another..., what was the name of it again, Edge?”

“Life on a Distant Planet.”

“Of course! Life on a Distant Planet. Well, he is brilliant. He tells stories with his guitar, I swear.”
Shoulder pat. “Our next show’s at Mount Temple. You should check us out sometime!” You went on to interview them about their favorite songs on the Clash’s album and other bands they liked. Some of your new friends were at least a half-foot taller than you, and you endeared yourself to them so completely that they let us stand in front of them once we were inside the hall. Otherwise we would have had a hard time seeing anything.

The crowd was overwhelmingly male. As they continued to pack us into the ornate room, the temperature increased by about ten degrees, and a haze of testosterone rose above our heads and gathered in the nooks and crannies of the hall’s high vaulted ceiling. Large-scale portraits of Trinity’s most prominent minds, many bewigged and resplendent in academic regalia, decorated the walls. “I wonder what they’d make of the Clash,” I asked you as I pointed at them.

Your excited eyes twinkled. “I think Oscar Wilde will find them highly amusing.”

I looked over at Larry, who smiled back at me, and Adam, who was in his element. We were packed together like a brand new box of matchsticks, and since no one could see us, I took the opportunity to hold your hand for a moment. You raised an eyebrow at me, glanced down at our hands, and nodded. “You’ll be rewarded for that,” you murmured, and I allowed myself to stare at you for a few seconds.

The crowd erupted as the band emerged from a side door. The stage couldn’t have been more than two feet above the floor, and we were a few people back from the sweet spot between Mick Jones and Joe Strummer. Instruments were grabbed, positions taken, and within seconds they tore into London’s Burning.

That black and white photo on the cover of their album had somehow come to life, and there they were in front of us in full color, living and breathing and taller and skinnier than expected. The stage was tiny, but they took advantage of every square inch of it, slashing the thick air with their arms and the necks of their guitars. The songs were presented as blurred, raging versions of the originals, and one song crashed into the next. Their enormous sound seemed to vibrate through their convulsing bodies. They were almost like dancers. As they created their music, they became it.

The audience was a boiling cauldron, and an energy exchange between the band and the crowd was established immediately. We stopped being individuals. We slammed into each other in a way that was uncomfortable and semi-dangerous but exhilarating. Primal. It was hard to take offense at the sweaty atmosphere because I was contributing to it as much as anyone else.

A small percentage of the audience was there to riot and make fools of themselves, but our cluster knew every song and shouted along with Joe, who made eye contact with me during Garageland. I felt an indescribable thrill during that one second of human connection with this being I thought I knew and who at least partially belonged to me somehow.

I checked on Larry, who shouted, “I get it now!”

You were a sponge as you watched the Clash interact with each other, and your face was the picture of bliss as you sang along. I want to make you look like that, too, I thought. Over the course of an hour and a half, our bodies collided repeatedly in one of the few public places where such actions were encouraged. “Edge!” you yelled. “Can you believe this?”

I wasn’t just watching a concert. I was seeing a blueprint unfurl. This was a new way to be a band. This was something we could do.

We sang until our voices all but disappeared. The show ended as abruptly as it began, and we moved slowly toward the exit, dazed and waiting for our hearing to normalize. “Practice tomorrow.
Mandatory,” you announced to the three of us, although it went without saying. I couldn’t wait to get a guitar in my hands.

Once we were outside in the wonderfully chilly air, I felt like I was breathing real oxygen for the first time. And as thirsty as I was, it seemed oddly drinkable, too.

“Coming, Larry?” you asked as we began walking in the direction of our bus stop.

“Da’s parked on Frederick Street,” he said sheepishly.

“Now that is posh,” Adam said in admiration. “Your own chauffeur--can I get a ride, too?”

“Okay.”

Talking nonstop, we walked with Larry for a few blocks to where his impossibly-youthful father was waiting for him and reading a newspaper by his car’s interior light. He waved at us.

“You guys wanna ride, too?” Larry asked.

“Nah, we’ll catch a bus,” you said. “You really had fun, didn’t you, Larry?”

“I did.”

“Good man.”

We started to walk back together, and I wasn’t too surprised when you led me into a dark alley and an even darker alcove behind a parked truck. “Edge,” your hoarse voice whispered while you eased my back against the rough brick wall. We kissed, our lips cool and dry at first. But our mouths warmed to each other rapidly.

I buried my hands in your hair and sighed against your purring, salty neck, “God I want you.”

“I want you, love.” You pulled my shirt up a bit and your fingers climbed from my stomach to my chest. I shivered. You kissed my jaw. “Tonight was…” You couldn’t find the words.

“I know.”

You moved between my legs, and two heat-generating entities who also wanted each other were kept a fraction of an inch apart, cruelly separated by a few layers of denim and a couple of zippers. “Tonight I realized once again…” you began as I put my hands in your back pockets and pulled you even closer. “That this is what I want to do.”

“Yes.”

“And I want to do it with you, Edge.”

“Yes.”

“Beside me.”

“Yes.”

“Up there.”

“Yes.”
“Everything has changed.”

“Yes.”

Another long kiss, hot and urgent. A bite that would leave a mark.

* You were right. After that night, everything changed. We began to improve as a band. We still had a long way to go, and the handful of gigs we performed that fall were admittedly hit and miss. But we had a goal we were working toward and a vision of the future. And you, love, on your best nights you transformed into something more complex and luminous than anyone could have imagined. Watching the early days of your evolution was spellbinding.

I disappeared inside my guitar. What once was inscrutable became clearer, and with each passing hour that it was in my hands, it became part of me. (I could say the same thing about you.) Practicing was no longer something to be endured. Now I needed to play to feel like myself. When I was alone with it, my guitar transported me to a dreamlike place where I could think deeply. And soon it turned into my second voice.

During Christmas break, we practiced at my house when we could. My parents were generally tolerant of the noise, and Mum was happy to see all of us. But more often than not, she and Dad found excuses to go shopping or volunteer at church or visit friends. Mercifully, they forced Gill to tag along, although whenever she could she sought your charmed attention in a way that was uncharacteristically flirtatious for an Evans.

“He’s just. So. Cute!” she shrieked at me more than once, and after a while I shrugged and nodded.

“You think so, too?”

“Well, he’s kind of undeniable. He’s a star.”

“He’s totally a star!”

Sometimes your Cedarwood Road crew stopped by the house to pick you up, and they listened to us as we played Street Mission and other songs whose lyrics you made up as you went along. I bonded with Gavin and Guggi over Monty Python while you finished talking to every other person in the room. But usually you found excuses to delay their arrival so you and I could have some time alone together in my room. And this was absolutely fine with me.

One afternoon after practice, you joined me at my window. We watched my neighbor’s gray laundry flap limply under the pale sun. “I swear it’s the same every week,” I said. “Her bras make me sad.”

You chuckled and made yourself at home on my bed. Noticing a lump under my pillow, you investigated and retrieved a floral-decorated paperback. “What’s this, the Edge?” you said with a cheeky grin. “My Secret Garden?” You leaned against my headboard and flipped through it.

I sat beside you and gave your knee a squeeze. “It’s really fascinating. It’s a collection of sexual fantasies by actual women. You should read it sometime, B.”

“Excuse me? How the hell did you get this?” you asked, pausing to read a random sentence and looking up at me in disbelief. “Holy shit, Edge!”
“None of them involve you.”

You winked. “Yet.”

“Yet.”

“I’m leaving with this.”

“Well, I’m not finished with it.”

“Doesn’t matter.” You held it over your head, and I swatted at it, and thus began a truly half-assed battle between two boys who would rather be kissing. Soon I was on my back with you straddling me and holding my wrists down. “Right where I want you, Edge.” I accepted my punishment of a dozen kisses.

“Do you think about me when you’re in this bed?”

“You know I do.”

“What do you think about?”

“It doesn’t take much.” I squirmed a bit, and you freed my hands. I touched the old sweatshirt you had worn to the point that its ribbed neck had separated from the shoulder. An enthralling, crescent-shaped expanse of skin that included part of your collarbone was visible, and I traced the perimeter with a finger. Then, supporting myself with my elbows, I kissed your exposed skin. “I’ve been wanting to do that all afternoon.”

“Oh Edge. I think about you all the time. You and these infernal buttons of yours,” you said, going to work at the neck of my shirt. “All mine,” you sighed, leaning down and kissing the hollow of my throat.

I stroked your hair as you did this. “It’s like my mind sort of shuffles through fantasies before I land on The One. At least the one for that night, you know? Do you do that?”

“Yes. That’s exactly what it’s like. The shuffling.”

“You are in all of them.”

“Edge.” You took my hand and kissed it.

I took a deep breath. “I wanna know what it’ll feel like.”

You smiled at me gently. “This is what it will feel like,” you said, taking two of my fingers in your mouth and sucking them. Your expression was one of pure adoration, and I stopped breathing. Then you returned to your hands and knees before lowering yourself onto me. For the first time I felt the weight of your entire body on mine, and it was warm, gorgeous, and truly overwhelming. I felt my legs wrapping themselves around yours, and this was followed by the slow, deliberate grinding of your hips against mine. I was under your blue-eyed spell. “And that’s what it will feel like, Edge. Part of it, anyway. I want it as much as you do. Probably more.” You placed a possessive kiss on the mouth you already possessed. You glanced around the room. “I want you to think about me in this bed of yours, Edge. Tonight and every night.”

“I will.”

We smiled at each other. You lifted your chin at the book you were going to take with you. “Just out
School started again on a dreary, fog-plagued Thursday that made the end of the school year seem impossibly out of reach. But graduation was indeed on the horizon for you and me. Larry still had a couple of years to go. Adam and Mount Temple had decided to part ways, citing irreconcilable differences, and both parties were very happy with that development. He vowed to devote his time to managing our band and was brimming with schemes that would take us straight to the top.

Larry and I were in an afternoon art class together, along with students with various levels of experience. I had already taken a couple of years of art, so Mr. Gallagher, our hippie-ish teacher, let me do what I wanted most of the time. A new girl was sitting at the table I considered to be mine, so I sat across from her. She wore a dark green dress and a motorcycle jacket covered with pins of bands, most of which were unfamiliar to me.

“Hi,” she said, running a hand through her short black hair. “Is this your table?”

“You can sit here, too. I’m David, but everybody calls me Edge.”

Her glittery fingernails picked at the paint-splattered table. “I know who you are. You’re in that band, aren’t you?”

“How do you know about my band?”

“You played at my school last year. And you have a The, too, don’t you?”

I shook my head. “It’s a long story.”

“You were good.”

“Thanks.”

Larry walked by our table, which was where he usually sat, and gave me a pat on the back that seemed to say “have fun with the pretty girl.” He graced a neighboring table of swooning girls with his annoyingly handsome presence. Then Mr. Gallagher breezed into the classroom and gave me a wave. “Good Christmas, Edge?”

“Yep.”

“Be with you guys in a minute.” He played some air guitar and drifted over to his supply room.

“He seems fun.”

I smiled in his direction. “He’s kind of the best.”

“How old are you?”

“Sixteen.”

She nodded. “Seventeen. We moved across town last month.”
I looked around the ramshackle room. “This is a good school.”

“It doesn’t really matter to me. I’m out of here in June.”

“Me too.”

She blinked. “At sixteen? You must be pretty smart.”

“I do okay.”

We looked at each other. Her kohl-rimmed eyes were enormous and an unnerving color I would later categorize as aquamarine. “My name is Aislinn.” She extended her hand.


“I know.”

“You’re so cool.” Mr. Gallagher called to of his group of ten students. “Welcome back to art class. Hope you had a good break. And everyone say hi to Aislinn, over by Edge.” She raised her hand and smiled shyly at the class. “She comes to us from St. Fintan’s, and I’m telling you, this girl can draw like Raphael.”

I grinned at her, and she shrugged.

“Today we’re just gonna do something nice and easy and draw each other. Advanced people, too. So come on up here and get a piece of paper and draw somebody at your table. Okay, let’s do it!”

Aislinn and I spent the rest of the class drawing each other and talking about music. She worked at Sound Cellar, a dream record store job to be sure, and I asked her questions about that. She had access to new releases days before they went on sale, along with tickets to any show she liked. Including the Clash. She had seen them too, and we agreed it was a life-changing experience. She had stood near Paul Simonon’s area of the stage (“because have you even seen him?”). As I drew her with a series of curved lines, I began to realize that not only was she too beautiful for me, she was also too talented and too cool for me. Out of my league in every way.

Meanwhile she drew my face with an effortless cross-hatching technique and created an uncanny likeness of a gawky boy she had known for less than an hour. “I’ve never seen a face quite like yours,” she said.

“Thanks, I guess?”

“It’s a compliment. You’ve got cheekbones for days.” She studied me some more. “Actually, you kind of look like you could be in the Clash. Or maybe their little brother.”

“Your eyes are....extraordinary,” I said, taking your favorite word out for a spin. She winked at me.

Mr. Gallagher walked by and looked at her drawing. “What did I tell you, Edge?”

“Yeah, she’s something else.”

“Thanks,” Aislinn said, erasing a bit of my hair.

“And this kid,” he said, pointing at me. “This kid can do anything he wants. Some kind of polymath, I swear.”

“I believe it.”
The girls at Larry’s table squealed. All of them had been drawing him, and they forced him to pick the best one. He blushed at their attention.

Aislinn continued to talk with me every day in art class, and while we weren’t exactly girlfriend and boyfriend, she seemed to like me more than most people, and I enjoyed having her around. She was refreshingly honest and even blunt in a way that most girls weren’t, and as a new student, an aura of low-key glamour and exoticism surrounded her.

Aislinn shared a few classes with Ali, and the two became friends. Occasionally they watched us rehearse in the band room, where Guggi and Gavin took a shine to her as well. Aislinn still kept in touch with her friends from St. Fintan’s, though, and she spent a fair amount of time with them.

While an Aislinn/Edge relationship had the potential to create a pleasing symmetry with you and Ali, I could tell your feelings for Aislinn were mixed. You were happy I had a new friend, but at the same time you wanted me all to yourself, even though you knew that wasn’t exactly fair. She wasn’t a threat to you—I made sure you understood this—but she was a new variable added to our equation.

One morning between classes, Ali grabbed my hand and led me to a quiet stairwell. “I’m pretty sure Aislinn’s on to you and Bono,” she said. “You might want to talk to her.”

“I know it’s corny. I’ll make Bono go too, and we can do it as a group, how about that?”

“This is a lot.”

Her face radiated sympathy. “It’s fine, it’s fine,” she said, giving me a quick hug.

So I worried about this for a few hours before I saw her in art class. She was hiding behind an easel in the corner of the room and squeezing a tube of acrylic paint onto a palette. She had been working on a self portrait for a couple of weeks.

“It looks exactly like you,” I said.

“I can see about five things that are wrong with it, but that’s sweet of you to say.”

“I feel like I could go up to her and she would just start talking to me.”

“Oh yeah?”

I stage-whispered into painted Aislinn’s ear, “Wanna go to the dance with me?”

“Yes,” she whispered back.

“Ali said she’d make Bono go too, and we could all go together.”

“That might be fun. I like Bono.” I glanced back at Aislinn and was rewarded with a smile. “I know you like him, too,” she said quietly.
I looked at my shoes and took a breath. “It’s just a band thing. A singer and guitarist thing. You know.”

“There is that, but you actually like each other. Maybe even love each other. I’ve watched you. I can tell.” I didn’t know what to say. “It’s okay, Edge. I get it. It’s pretty cute.”

“We like girls, too.”

“Girls like Ali and me.”

“Yeah.” I tentatively reached out, touched her index finger, and asked her painting, “Still wanna go to the dance with me?”

She took my hand in hers. “Yes. We’re friends, Edge. We? Are friends. Going to stupid dances and doing dumb teenage stuff. Okay? Casual. It’s not a big deal at all.”

I exhaled. “You’re kind of amazing, Aislinn.”

Even though it was casual and not a big deal at all, the dance still managed to be somewhat disappointing. The gym was decorated with twisted crepe paper streamers and snowflakes cut from folded pieces of paper. Our guidance counselor moonlighted as a DJ for local weddings, and his disco ball and rudimentary light show created an atmosphere that was semi-festive. Most of the younger students were there; the older ones had figured out better ways to spend their Friday nights. But I know Ali appreciated the opportunity to be a teenage girl doing regular teenage girl things for a change, and she and Aislinn had fun dressing up. You and I went along for the ride, figuring we’d be treated to terrible pop music that would make us feel superior as avant garde punk musicians. People have always underestimated my skills as a dancer, as you know, but I think I opened a few eyes during Night Fever by the Bee Gees. And even though we were clumsy during slow dances, Aislinn seemed to be having a good time. But in a last-minute development, her other friends stopped by at 9:00 to take her to see a band they knew from St. Fintan’s, and she wasn’t terribly apologetic about that.

I just wanted to go home. I stood with my back against the wall and waited, knowing the next bus would arrive in thirty minutes. Meanwhile I watched you dance with Ali. And hold her close. And kiss her. We made brief, longing eye contact during the Theme to Mahogany, and you mouthed, “Sorry.”

Do you know
Where you’re going to?
Do you like the things
That life is showing you
Where are you going to?
Do you know?

Do you get
What you’re hoping for?
When you look behind you
There’s no open doors
What are you hoping for?
Do you know?
The song was like a music box, and her voice was sad and pure. Avant garde punk rocker or not, it pierced my heart, and I knew I had to get out of there.

Snow had begun to fall, and I was shivering at the bus stop a couple of minutes later when I heard your running footsteps approach--I could recognize them even then. “Edge,” you said, your breath billowing around you. “Come with me.” I followed you behind a large hedge beyond the sidewalk, and then I was in your arms. I was warm again.

“You should go back to--”

Your heart was racing. “She saw you leave. She told me to go after you.”

“Oh. Bono.”

We both said “I’m sorry” at the same time, and we kissed.

“You know I love you, Edge.” Snowflakes sparkled and melted upon contact with your hair and skin.

“Yes.”

“If things were different...if I could tell the world about us I would.”

“I know. I love you. It’s okay. I’m sorry. I mean...she’s alright. She’s just not you. I was hoping I’d feel some kind of magic and everything would be easier, but I didn’t. And I’m sure she didn’t either because she just left and it was like she was relieved or something.” I wiped away some tears and sniffed. “I just wanted to be with you.”

“Sweetheart.” You pushed my damp hair off my forehead and kissed it.

“Your eyes are so beautiful.” I heard the sound of diesel and air brakes. “Stupid bus. Fuck.” I turned to get on it, and I said, “Tell Ali I said thanks. She’s always so nice to me.”

“Tomorrow in the band room, okay? We’re not done yet.”

“Okay.”

When I arrived at the band room the next morning, you were the only one there. You were sitting at the piano in the center of the room and playing random notes with one finger. “Hey, B,” I said, feeling a little bashful and setting my guitar down.

“We’re the only ones coming today, Edge,” you said, standing. You were wearing that sweatshirt I liked. “I may have told Adam and Larry that practice was canceled.”

“Oh really?”

You grinned, flicked off the light switch, and walked to Mr. McKenzie’s shadowy supply room. I followed you inside (because following you had become my life’s occupation, apparently).

“Don’t laugh,” you said, pulling a small plastic box from your duffel bag. Inside: a red rosebud boutonniere. I laughed, of course. “Fuck you, Edge, you’re letting me put this on you,” you said, pleased with yourself. “I should have done this last night.” I beamed at you as you pinned the rose to the chest pocket of my old green utility jacket.
“You are too charming for your own good.”

“Thank god for that.” You kissed my cheek. “We are having our own little dance here in room 108, I hope you know, Edge.”

“Oh, are we?”

“Yes.” A record was hiding under your bag. You turned on the stereo and went through the ritual unique to playing music, a ritual as beloved as those leading up to smoking a cigarette or drinking a cup of tea. “It’s one of Mum’s. She used to sing it to me before bed,” you said. A lonely, feminine voice filled the small space. You put your arms around me, and we swayed together in a way that was awkward yet absolutely right.

While I’m far away from you my baby
I know it's hard for you my baby
Because it's hard for me my baby
And the darkest hour is just before dawn

Each night before you go to bed my baby
Whisper a little prayer for me my baby
And tell all the stars above
This is dedicated to the one I love
(Love can never be exactly like we want it to be)

You whispered, “Mum loves you, Edge. I’m sure of it.”

“Baby.”

We kissed until the song faded into the next, which was Twelve Thirty (Young Girls Are Coming to the Canyon). “They always make me think about California,” I said.

“We’ll go there someday. We’ll go everywhere together. I promise.”
This is the first part of Edge's description of March, 1978, and it concludes with the following chapter. I hope to post it sooner rather than later (at least half of it has already been written). I just didn’t want to drop a 10,000 word bomb on you all at once.

Thanks for your support of this story and especially your lovely comments! I owe a couple of you some responses. It's gonna happen! Fictitious Characters has taken over the bulk of my brain. All I wanna do is write it. These boys are The Cutest. I really hope you love this part, which is a prelude to The Next Part. I've been working toward that one for months and am so excited about it. <3

Bono, the next two chapters contain a few minor inaccuracies regarding exact dates, but I did it for the sake of the story. This is fiction, and I’m writing it the way it should have happened. I promise it’ll be your turn again after the next one, and I’m sorry I left this chapter on a bit of a cliffhanger. But I think you’ll recall how everything turned out.

I also apologize for the lack of sex here. But there is plenty of love. And for what it’s worth, I can’t wait to hear you scream my name as I fuck you senseless next weekend.

Love,
E.

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“I have some amazing news for you, Edge. Are you sitting down?”

I turned my pillow over to the plumper, cooler side and shook my head at the receiver. “You know perfectly well that I’m in bed.”

“What are you wearing, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“An old t-shirt. Underwear.”

“Colors?”

“White. Black.”

“You certainly know how to paint a word picture, love.”

“Thanks, B. So what is your news?” I had a pretty good idea of what the news might be.

I could hear the smile in your voice as you said, “Adam called about an hour ago, and I insisted I be the one to tell you. Our little band is going to be on television, the Edge. We’ll perform next Saturday afternoon, and the show airs on Tuesday. Can you believe it?”

“No. That’s crazy. Can you believe it?”
“No. Except...yes.”

“So they bought our little fib?”

“Sounds like they did.”

“Well, we can’t just play that Ramones song again and say it’s ours.”

“We’ll play one of our own. We’ll play Street Mission, what do you think? That guy won’t know the difference.”

“You’re probably right.”

“Edge? We’re going to be on TV.”

“Fuck.”

“Things are starting to happen for us.”

*

A couple of weeks later, the band and assorted parents gathered at my house to watch our performance on my family’s television. It was the best of the four options we had. Mum prepared enough Dublin coddle to feed a small army an early supper, and it was just right on that cold and rainy March evening. The adults (my parents, Larry’s father, and Adam’s mother) ate in the dining room while the rest of us took our plates into the living room and watched a tedious quiz show while we waited for Youngline to begin.

Faced with not one but three dreamy boys who were neither playing instruments nor quarreling with each other, Gill didn’t know what to do with herself. She sat with us and interviewed Larry, who granted her a brief audience.

“What was it like, being in a real TV studio?”

“It was smaller than I thought it’d be.”

“Yeah?”

“It was cool to watch the cameras and all the stuff that goes on in the background that you never see. Kind of like looking inside the cockpit of a plane.”

“Wow, you’ve been on a plane, too?”

“No. But I guess that’s what it might be like.”

I could tell you were nervous as we sat together on the couch. You were more fidgety than usual, and you almost spilled your glass of water when you set it down on the coffee table.

“Okay there, B?”

“It’s weird. I’m just sitting here, but it’s like I’m feeling stage fright for us.”

“You were great.”

“The more I relive it in my head, the more I think I looked totally stupid.”
I leaned over and whispered, “All I wanted to do was kiss you when I saw you.”

“Likewise, Edge.” You smiled at your plate and said, “As god is my witness, I’ll never wear white pants again, though.”

Gill played hostess and picked up everyone’s dishes. She grinned at you. “Larry says you’re gonna be in a talent show in Limerick…?”

“Right, in a couple of weeks. But we won’t be the Hype anymore. We’re calling ourselves U2 now…since Sunday night.”

Gill glanced in the direction of the kitchen. “Oh no.”

“What’s wrong with U2?” Adam asked.

“Um, nothing. But I wish you would stop changing your name. So it’s You Two spelled like t-o-o or t-w-o?”

Adam grinned. “No. It’s just the letter U and the number 2 smashed together. Steve said it’d look good on posters.”

“It makes no sense,” you grumbled. “But it’s the name we hate the least, so…”

“U2…” Gill mused, walking away.

“Galileo,” I muttered, answering a question from the quiz show.

“The answer is Galileo,” the middle-aged host said, nodding at his contestants.

“The answer is Galileo,” the middle-aged host said, nodding at his contestants.

“Now see, even that would be a better band name,” you said.

A few minutes later Gill returned with the adults, and we sat on the floor in front of them so they could be comfortable. The program we were on was a tedious sketch comedy show for teenagers. None of us watched Youngline, and its smarmy host was about two decades too old for his job. The parents sipped Irish coffee and talked among themselves throughout. Predictably, we were featured in the final five minutes of the show. During a commercial break, I asked, “Remind me again why we wanted to be on this thing?”

“Because we want to be famous.”

“But nobody watches this show.”

You rolled your eyes. “Thank god.”

An advertisement for toothpaste faded into our host introducing us for the last time as the Hype, and with equal amounts of excitement and revulsion, the four of us witnessed the spectacle of U2 performing on television for the first time. As if you were watching a horror movie, you looked at the screen through parted fingers.

Fashion misstep or not, your mostly white outfit seemed to magnify your luminous star quality, along with every jittery and exaggerated movement you made. Mrs. Clayton chuckled during one of your wide-eyed close ups. Leaning forward, she patted your shoulder and whispered, “Absolutely adorable.” Gill could not stop squealing.

Everyone applauded during Larry’s moment in the spotlight when he grinned nervously at the camera. His father patted him on the back and said, “Love you, son.”
You left the stage briefly during my solo—you had thought it was a Jim Morrison thing to do that we should emulate—and it was as if the light in the studio had dimmed significantly, although technically nothing had changed. Adam, unflappable and looking cool as ever, stood beside me, and we played together for a few seconds before I turned to the camera and treated the show’s 73 viewers to a second-long, nearly full-screen view of my backside. You whistled and hooted.

“What the hell is in your pocket, Edge? Paper from a straw?” Adam laughed.

Larry grinned. “I wanted to tell you, but by the time I noticed it was too late!”

“Listen to him play, though,” you said admiringly. “Best part of the song. And he’s singing, too!” You looked over your shoulder at my parents. “He does it all.”

“You are so talented, love,” Mum said to me. “We should get you a better guitar,” she added.

All of us cheered when you returned to the center of the stage to finish the song. “That boy’s a star,” I heard Mrs. Clayton tell my dad, who got off the couch and put his arm around your shoulders.

“Really good, lad. Proud of you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Dad kissed my cheek. “My boy.” The song ended, and we faded to the show’s credits. Everyone stood and cheered, and you groaned at the ceiling in a mixture of embarrassment, happiness, and relief.

Mum gave me a hug. Upon seeing you, her face contorted with fondness and compassion, and she kissed your beaming face. “Your mum would have been so proud of you, I’m certain of it, love.” And then, looking over at Larry, she became misty and repeated the action.

“Hey, I want a kiss, too,” Adam said, and soon she had covered all of her kissing bases.

The phone rang and Gill ran to answer it. “I know!” she shouted. “They’re all here with me! I know! I can’t even talk right now! Call you back!” Spinning around, she announced, “Cake! Kitchen!”

Once we were crowded around the kitchen table, Gill appeared with a rectangular cake with chocolate frosting decorated to resemble a television. On the screen were the words “The Hype,” which she had crossed out with two ropes of licorice. A small, last-minute U2 made from marshmallows occupied the corner of the screen, and the television’s dials were embellished with four lit candles. “Happy birthday, U2,” she sang, and we indulged her and sang the same line three more times before blowing out the candles. You kissed her temple as she cut the cake, and oh wouldn’t she have a story to tell her friends?

A couple of hours later, after most of the cake was consumed and you had kissed me behind the stairs with a promise of “call you tonight,” I played some records and finished homework that seemed even less relevant to my interests than ever before. Then I pulled the phone into my room as usual. Gill had spent a long time with it herself, and as I waited for you to call, I imagined your first fan cooing to her pals about you and your romantic little kiss. The next day Aislinn informed me that she had tried to call a few times to congratulate me but the line was busy.

I was eating a second piece of cake and just about to flip Rocket to Russia over to side two when you called.

“Hey Edge.” Something about your voice was off.
“What’s wrong?”

“This guy. This fucking guy.”

“Uh-oh.”

“So I went home and there he was in his chair squinting at some horrid old book under his fucking dim lamp like it’s the 1800s or whatever. And I come in the door, and I just wanted to say hello to him and possibly ask him if he’d seen us. He doesn’t even look away from his book and he holds up his hand and does that ‘one moment’ gesture of his because heaven forbid he interrupt his precious paragraph to talk to his son, right?”

“Oh boy.”

“So ten years later when I finally have his attention, he says, ‘Dishes are waiting for you.’ This fucker. I put my books and things down on the dining room table with a thud, and I huff out to the kitchen, and I do the blasted dishes but I’m making a lot of noise, because why the fuck can’t he even pretend to care like everybody else’s parents?”

“Unbelievable.”

“And then once I’m done with his fucking chores, I go past his chair and I say, ‘We were on TV tonight.’ And he says in this so-what voice of his, ‘I saw it.’”

“Okay.”

“And I stood there for something like ten more years thinking, This bastard’s gonna make me ask, isn’t he? I’m glaring at the back of his head and I say, ‘Well, what did you think?’ And do you know what he says?”

“I couldn’t begin to guess.”

“He says, ‘Not my cuppa tea.’ This fucker.”

“That should be the title of our first album, you know? U2: Not My Cuppa Tea.”

You paused and started to laugh. “This is why I fucking love you.”

“Language, B.”

“This is why I love fucking you.”

“Back to your story,” I said, happy you were unable to see my face.

“Okay. Well, I said, ‘Maybe it’s not supposed to be your cuppa tea.’”

“Exactly.”

“And he kind of does this little exhale and says, ‘Wish she could’ve seen it, though.’ She. He never talks about her, Edge.”

“Oh. Well, that’s pretty nice.”

“Yeah. It was. And that’s when I should have turned around and shut myself in my room and forgotten all about it. But I didn’t, and I’m just standing there behind him wanting more, and that’s when he says, ‘You’re having a laugh.’ And I’m thinking, Here we go.”
“Wow.”

“I come around to face him and I ask him, ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ And he makes this big show of getting out his bookmark and placing it in his book just so and putting the book on the end table and then sitting back in his chair with his hands on the armrests. And he looks at me and kind of shakes his head.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, Edge.” You sighed. “He says, ‘When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.’ He gives me this look. ‘You’ll be on your own soon. This is fine for a laugh, but when you’re an adult you’ll have responsibilities and no time for this...band of yours.’”

“Oh.”

“And I wanted to scream at him and I almost did but instead I said, ‘You don’t understand. We are serious about this. This is what I want to do for the rest of my life. I feel like I’m meant to be in this band.’ He scoffs, and I tell him, ‘You sing, too. You know what this feels like, don’t you?’” You stopped talking for a few seconds, and I could hear you breathing as you experienced that conversation all over again.

“Baby.”

“So he says something about how the road I wanna take is an impossible one, and life is hard enough as it is, and a wise man would avoid taking risks and indulging in fantasies that aren’t ever gonna pay off and whatever else he said. I just looked at him and said, ‘I need to do this. I don’t have other options. This is the only thing for me.’ And I told him about the talent show in Limerick, and I said that when we win it maybe he’ll start to see that this could actually be something that’s halfway worthwhile, and then I stormed off.”

“Damn.”

“So, uh, now we have to win it.”

“Yeah, no pressure or anything.”

“Fuck.”

“It’s gonna be alright, Bono.”

“Thanks.”

“Try to relax...”

“Okay. You’re a good listener.”

“You know? I wanted to tell you that I loved watching you. I wish I didn’t have to stand beside you all the time. I want you to sing to me.”

“Oh, I’ll sing to you.”

“Yeah?”

“I plan to spend the rest of my life singing to you.”
We thought about that, and I imagined us as old men singing together. I yawned. “That was fun tonight.”

“Yeah, it was.” You yawned. I heard a faint crackle of static on the line followed by a low chuckle from you. “In conclusion, can I join your family, Edge?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to marry into it.”

“Are you proposing?”

“Maybe I am.”

“Well, maybe I accept.”

“Maybe we should get some sleep.”

You rolled over. “Yeah. I can’t believe it’s only Tuesday.”

“Same here. See you in the morning.”

“I love you.”

The next couple of weeks passed quickly. We rehearsed on our usual days along with additional ones whenever we could all get together. Our objective: play three songs competently. Learn how to end them like a legitimate band. On paper, it seemed laughably simple, but in reality we struggled more than most bands might have. We had no idea what to expect with the Limerick talent competition. On good days I half-expected us to be up against ventriloquists and pre-teen magicians. On bad days I pictured us in a battle of the bands with Led Zeppelin Themselves and the reunited Beatles.

Larry designed a U2 logo in art class, and Mr. Gallagher dropped everything to show him how to silkscreen it onto t-shirts that Larry gave us. Aislinn, who had attended more gigs than we ever had, came up with some good stagecraft ideas. Guggi and Gavin hung out in the band room as well as sort of senior advisors, along with a revolving door of other friends who were curious. As the competition loomed on the horizon, a nice entourage of supporters had formed around us. They wanted to come along with us as our travel plans began to firm up. Money was pooled, and with the help of Adam’s parents, train tickets were purchased and hotel rooms were reserved.

Aislinn and Ali wanted to join us, but Aislinn had to work, and at the last minute Ali came down with a nasty cough. I didn’t want to admit it, but I was relieved to learn this news. The event was going to be stressful enough, and we couldn’t afford to deal with the added complication of girls. And I wanted you all to myself, of course.

Accompanied by Adam’s parents and Larry’s father, who helped us with our gear, we boarded a predawn train bound for Limerick on St. Patrick’s Day. Our friends planned to take a train that left at a more reasonable hour, but we wanted to get there early to find out what was going on.

You arrived looking devastatingly broad-shouldered and sleek in a leather jacket that fit you like a second skin. “Where did you get that?” I asked you, touching its black, buttery sleeve.

You fiddled with its zipper. “Last weekend I told Gavin’s mum about what was going on today, and she bought it secondhand, and then she tailored it for me. The sleeves were too long, and the waist was too wide. But she said it was easy to fix. Wasn’t that nice of her? I couldn’t believe it.” Your
voice was a little hoarse.

“All mums love you.” And sisters. And their friends. And their grandmums. And women of all ages and backgrounds, really.

We sat beside each other in seats near the back and watched the others pile in. The sky was still dark as the train left the station. “Don’t you just love this time of day?” you asked, watching the lights of Dublin recede through the window. “I feel like the day hasn’t even started, but I’m already a step ahead of everybody else.”

“Yeah, me too,” I said. “I know I should try to get some sleep, but I can’t.”

“There’s no way I’m sleeping. Not today. But,”—you lowered your voice to a whisper—“maybe we could pretend.”

“Okay.” After a bit of time had passed and most of the passengers had quieted down and were attempting to sleep, you rested your head on my shoulder, and I tipped my head against yours, and we whispered softly to each other in the dark.
Ohhh this was such a tough chapter to write! I took the several hundred words we know about that Limerick talent show and expanded them to over 7,000. Go me? There was just so much to figure out, and in the end I condensed what was actually a two day event into one action-packed day.

I stole Gavin's "frontman/guitarist with mystique" line from Almost Famous, a movie that never gets old. I could not resist. And "It's what I live for" is from Arthur. I feel obligated to drop at least one Arthur reference into every fic I write, so here you go. <3

I hope you'll enjoy reading this way more than I enjoyed writing it! Kidding. I'm fine. I'm just exhausted. Please share and kudo and comment and support this crazy thing I'm making for you. Thank you and much love to our beautiful boys.

B, I am pleased to inform you that it is finally your turn to write. Please enjoy covering the rest of 1978 and into 1979, if you are so inclined. I felt the need to describe our day in Limerick in minute-by-minute detail. This was not easy and I do not recommend writing this way, but you've got to admit it was an important day for us, what with our [spoiler alert] winning the competition and my further erotic awakening later that night. (That should motivate you to slog through the following 7,300 words. I apologize, sort of.)

Love, E.

When we left our heroes, they were pretending to sleep on the train...

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A couple of hours later, the city of Limerick came into view. It was smaller than Dublin, but it was also a lot more picturesque, with medieval fortifications and elegant white marble architecture at the junction of two rivers. Banners and posters advertising the Limerick Civic Week Festival and the Pop Group 78 talent competition were hung from streetlights, and we saw them in shop windows here and there. The prize of 500 pounds and a chance to record a single for CBS Records was nothing to sneeze at.

“Uh, I think this thing is a big deal,” you said, clearing your throat. “Damn it. My voice isn’t so great.”

“Sore throat?”

“Not really. Maybe I just need to drink some water. I dunno.”

“Try not to talk too much today.”

“That’s hilarious, Edge.”

When we arrived at the train station, Mr. Clayton rented a car (a Jaguar, to our delight) to help us haul our gear to the Stella Ballroom, which was the venue we’d been assigned. Most of those twelve
spots were within walking distance of each other, and thirty-six bands would compete in the preliminaries during the day. Then the top seven bands would play before a live audience at the Savoy Cinema in the evening. We agreed that if we didn’t make the final seven, we still wanted to watch that part of the competition.

“So we’re just playing for three or four people this morning?” you asked the man who checked us in at the small club.

“Yup.”

“Not gonna be too different from our usual gigs, then,” Adam said. He leaned his bass against the wall and went out to the car to help our makeshift crew with the rest of our gear, which we arranged in a corner of the ballroom.

“Could you tell the judges I think I’m losing my voice?”

“I’m sure they care,” Larry mumbled to me.

“Uh, noted,” the check-in man said without noting it.

We were on our own for about an hour after that. We sat together in a coffee shop and strategized while the parents left to explore the city with the unwritten understanding that their presence during the preliminaries might make us seem even less cool than we were.

I made sure you had plenty of tea with honey, a glass of orange juice, and a pastry with blueberries in it because blueberries seemed sort of healthy. And I put my finger to your lips whenever I thought you were about to pontificate. You kissed my finger at one point, and another time you grabbed my hand and bit my wrist.

“Hey, I didn’t know you wore my shirt,” Larry said as if he had spotted a drawing of his on my refrigerator.

“Yeah,” I said. Thinking several layers of clothing might make my chest appear less skeletal, I wore one of Larry’s U2 shirts over a button-down and covered all of it with a dark blazer. “You did a good job with them.”

“So how nervous are we, on a scale of one to ten?” Adam asked.

“Ten.”

“Ten.”

“Ten.”

“Four,” Adam said with a grin.

“Four? From you? This really is a crisis,” you laughed.

“I think we’re gonna be up against pros, or something,” Larry said. “I had no idea.”

“It’s okay,” you said. “This’ll be good for us. We’ll get our name out there at least. And if they say no to us this morning...we’ll still have a fun day in a new city and sleep in a hotel. Like a little vacation!”

“I’ve never stayed in a hotel before,” Larry said, and the rest of us exchanged looks that said We are in a band with the most precious drummer of all time.
“You’re gonna love it, Larry,” you said, smiling. “The first hotel room of many.”

Another band was in the process of setting up their equipment on the ballroom’s stage when we arrived. They were at least ten years older than we were, and when the bass player looked up from his work and noticed our wide-eyed faces, he gave a low whistle.

“Testing, testing, 1, 2,” the singer said into his microphone. He made eye contact with you and sang, “Here we come, walking down the street...”, and the rest of his band laughed.

You shot him a withering grin and said, “Yeah, well, I’m too busy singin’ to put anybody down.”

“We’re just tryin’ to be friendly,” Adam added, and we busied ourselves with our gear while they tuned up.

Intimidation tactics notwithstanding, those charisma-free guys played nothing but workmanlike Eagles covers. Once they had cleared out, we set up our equipment. Larry seemed especially nervous, and he almost dropped a cymbal as you helped him with his drums. The third act arrived—an all-girl folk group—and you acknowledged them warmly as you tested your microphone. “Wise men say only fools rush in, but I can’t help falling in love with you.” They were instantly charmed, of course.

When the trio of judges entered the otherwise empty ballroom and sat in folding chairs at a table near the stage, you stepped into the role you were born to play: showman.

“And you are...U2?”

“Yes, ma’am. We’re from the north side of Dublin.”

“All the way from Dublin! You lads look awfully young.”

“Well, I’m almost eighteen,” you said with a flirtatious grin.

“How long have you been together?”

“I dunno, about a year and a half, right, Edge?” I nodded. “A year and a half. By the way, I’m afraid my voice isn’t in top form today.”

“It isn’t? You poor thing.”

“But I’m gonna try my best.”

“Good lad. And what’ll you play for us today?”

“Three songs. Originals. Street Mission, Life on a Distant Planet, and an Irish one about a black cat that we wrote especially for today.”

“Delightful. Whenever you’re ready.”

You turned around and looked at each of us. Little nods. Larry counted us down, and we were off to the races. I don’t remember much about the next eight minutes, but your voice sounded surprisingly powerful, and you moved like a wild animal that refused to be domesticated. While you sang to that empty ballroom as if it were standing room only, Adam and I attempted to complement your larger-than-lifeness with our more low-key composure. Larry kept his head down and drummed loudly. The judges instinctively leaned back in their chairs as they watched us (but mostly you) perform our strange little set. And then it was over. Panting into the mic, you thanked the judges, who applauded
and smiled at us. “We’ll post the results on the door at two o’clock.”

And that was that. The parents were outside the ballroom waiting for us to finish, and by the time we had packed up our gear and eaten a light lunch, we were able to check into our hotel. Your head remained in performance-mode throughout, like the filament that remains glowing in a light bulb for a while even after it has been turned off. I easily imagined a future version of you who would have the stamina to sing for two hours or more and then stay awake for the rest of the night coming down from your performance.

We had reserved three rooms in an older hotel near the city centre: one for Adam and his parents, one for Larry and his father, and one for you and me. As we rode in the elevator together, you and I tried not to look too much like a couple of cats who had just eaten a couple of canaries, but that act lifted the second we were inside the room together.

“Edge, could this situation be any better?”

“No.”

We dropped our bags on the floor and immediately fell into each other’s arms. If your throat issue was contagious, it was in my possession within seconds, and I couldn’t have cared less about it. You pushed me against a closet door, and I pushed you against a wall, as if we wanted to be absorbed by each other. “God, finally,” you whispered.

“I barely even care about this show tonight.”

“That is nonsense, but I completely understand.” Another long kiss that led from my lips to my neck—your mouth was hot and beautiful and everything in the entire world and—“But we should probably wait until tonight.”

“Because…”

“I wanna be on fire for you when we get up there.”

“You just assume we’ll make it to the next round.”

“Behold the power of positive thinking.”

I bit your earlobe and glanced at the unremarkable room. “This is really nice.” (I had stayed in exactly three hotel rooms in my life.)

“It’s the loveliest room I have ever seen.”

I noted the two beds, walked over to the window, and peeked through the curtains. “We can see the rivers and the castle, too.”

“Brilliant.”

I walked back to you and started putting my clothes in the dresser’s bottom drawer. “You can have the top drawer.”

“You’re not just gonna…keep them in your bag?”

I smiled up at you. “Come on, B. It’s new drawers. You’ve got to admit, it’s kind of fun.”

“It is kind of fun.” You were leaning against the bathroom door and staring down at me. “C’mere, Edge,” you whispered. You made a beckoning gesture with the fingers of your right hand, which
was near your hips and at my eye level. I found myself crawling a few feet over to that hand, and when I looked up at you, you caressed my chin with it. Then your fingers slid their way up to my parted lips. I kissed them and took two of them in my mouth. I heard you gasp as I began to suck, and—had you been planning this?—your relaxed fingers became progressively rigid and erect, still in my mouth but gradually pointing up toward the ceiling and tipping my head back. With an expression of pure longing, you lifted that hand, and I slowly rose to my feet while sucking you. Your eyes were bedroomy and dark, and you sighed quietly as I alternately kissed your fingers and your mouth. “My love…”

We were rudely interrupted by a staccato knock on the door and Larry’s voice saying, “We’re going down now.”

Stifling a laugh, you said, “Be with you in a second.”

We made eye contact and grinned at each other. “To be continued?” I asked.

“You’d better believe it.”

We straightened ourselves up and met Adam and Larry in the lobby. “Let’s go!” Larry whined. “It’s almost time.”

“How do you like your room, Larry?” you asked.

He grinned. “It’s the best. Did you see the little soap?”

We took off for the ballroom, and I looked up at the buildings on Shannon Street and smiled. We were a group, but we were also a family, and I felt valued and loved by the three of you. Plus we were having an adventure together. How many teenagers like me get to feel that way?

The sidewalks were crowded for a St. Patrick’s Day parade. A marching band of bagpipers roared beside us as we walked up the street. Larry bobbed his head to the beat of their impressive drumline, and you attempted to click your heels.

We arrived at the ballroom in time to see the sign-up man tack a piece of paper on the door. “There it is,” Larry said, watching him. “I don’t wanna look.”

“Oh, but I think you should be the one, Larry. You got us into this contest. You started our band in the first place, for god’s sake,” you teased him. But he nodded grimly and walked up to the door as we stood back.

We cheered when he spun around, a dazzling smile of disbelief and joy on his face. “We’re in the finals!” he shouted. We ran to the door to see this news for ourselves. It was true. Our ecstatic group hug was accompanied by several dozen fifes and drums. Adam went inside the ballroom to find out what we needed to do next while the rest of us celebrated and came to grips with the fact that soon we would be competing against bands who were undoubtedly far more experienced and in front of an audience that would be much bigger than the ones we were used to.

You ran to a pay phone and called Gavin. Yelling over the din of the parade, you told him what had just happened. To spare your voice, I took the phone from you and said that if any of our friends were on the fence about coming to Limerick, we needed them now, and they should all hop on the next train. Then I attempted to make a quick call home to my giddy mum who would not stop talking and simply could not get over it and wanted to know what the hotel was like and made me promise to call her again later that night after Gill’s school play and had way too many miscellaneous other questions and then I ran out of change. We sprinted back to the hotel to let the parents know. We
were grinning like maniacs the entire time.

We found ourselves with a few hours to kill before we had to move our gear to the Savoy Cinema. It was a few blocks from our hotel, so we decided to take a look at the place. A festival employee saw us peeking through the doors beneath its impressive Art Deco marquee, and he allowed us to enter the dusty-smelling theater.

“This place used to show movies until a few years ago,” he said. “Now they just use it for things like tonight.”

We expected to see a typical movie theater with a small stage inside, but we were shocked to discover a grand interior housing some 1,500 seats along with a surprisingly large performance area. I watched your eyes draw a line from the center of the stage to the far-off seats in the balcony.

“Be just as you were this morning,” I whispered to you. “You’ll reach them.”

“Do you really think I can?”

“I know you will.”

Rattled by the size of the venue, we thought the best thing to do was to relax in our hotel’s lobby and work out a plan for our performance. The four of us sat on a long couch, and I took notes on the back of a pamphlet outlining a list of things to do in Limerick. Larry and Adam thought we should perform the same set from the morning, but you felt the last song was too slow and wanted to end on a more upbeat note. I agreed with you and suggested we substitute *The TV Song*, which was our sort-of tribute to the band Television. That song was trickier to play, and we were less sure of ourselves with it, but it ended with a satisfying bang that we could usually pull off. You were the one who would have to sing it, so we decided to end the set with that song, and since we couldn’t rehearse it properly with instruments, we talked our way through it a few times along with the other tunes. Then Adam and I practiced on imaginary fretboards, and Larry air drummed. You gazed into the middle distance and seemed to be communicating with imaginary beings. Your pink lips formed silent words, and your eyes were wide and seemingly lit from within.

One by one, we stopped practicing and began paying attention to the people outside walking past the hotel. “I wanna change my shirt,” Larry said, standing up.

Adam nodded. “I think I’ll take a shower.”

You glanced at me. “Edge, would you like to look at the castle?”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s meet back here in a bit, okay?”

Out on the sidewalk, I cautioned you against straining your voice any further. You agreed, and we bought a couple of plastic cups filled with a shockingly sweet punch from a street vendor. It seemed to be the only non-alcoholic beverage available to us, and it turned our tongues green immediately.

We joined the numerous citizens and tourists who were crossing a long bridge that spanned the River Shannon. Some kind of carnival was being held in the courtyard of King John’s Castle on the other side. My mind was preoccupied with the evening ahead of us, and I didn’t want to corrupt my thoughts with the carnival’s sensory overload. Neither did you, so we sat on one of the benches that dotted the bridge and took in the 600-year old castle’s massive cylindrical forms and imposing surrounding wall from there.
“I wonder if King John ever had a battle of the bands over there,” you mused.

“Musical excellence was probably not a huge priority back then.”

“I’m glad I’m living now. I would not have enjoyed being a blacksmith or whatever.”

“And I’ll bet that castle was freezing,” I said, pulling my jacket tightly around myself.

“Can you imagine the toilet situation over there? Probably just an open sewer.”

“Good thing you’re gonna be a 20th century rock star, then.”

“It’s really the only option that makes sense for me,” you said ironically but meaning it. You admired two fingers on your right hand. “You made these fingers very happy today, the Edge.”

“It’s what I live for,” I said ironically but meaning it.

We grinned at each other and did some people watching for a while before we headed back. Our friends had arrived at the hotel, where they checked into their rooms, and you were swept up in their enthusiasm. Our beautiful little king.

Eventually people were fed, we got organized, and our gear was hauled to the theater. Each group had been assigned a small area backstage to store instruments and get ready. Unsurprisingly, the other six bands were older than we were, and many of them had ties to Limerick and seemed to know each other. We were too intimidated to introduce ourselves, and they didn’t care enough to ask. They shrugged at us as they exchanged road stories. One of the girls from the folk group came over, kissed your cheek, and said she was happy we had made it through, though.

A jolly woman with a clipboard distributed papers with the evening’s schedule printed on them. The lineup had been determined randomly, and we were exactly in the middle, number four of seven. Each band would have ten minutes to set up behind a closed curtain after the previous band had finished performing. Judges from Hot Press, RTE Radio, and CBS Records would sit in the first row, and we were encouraged to find seats in the reserved area near the front so we could watch the show with our friends, too.

We were able to seat our parents, school friends, and the Lypton Village in its entirety in our section of the theater, and as the seats began to fill up, the noise level rose. “Wow,” I said, looking behind me at hundreds of people of every age and description.

You had been focused on the stage and the gilded but slightly shabby architectural details of the theater for quite some time, and you asked me, “Should I look?”

“I’m not sure. There’s a lot of people here. It’s...maybe you should.”

You turned in your aisle seat, took in the crowd for a couple of seconds, and turned back to me. You mouthed the words, “Holy shit,” and I nodded. “More people are here than at the Clash.”

“They’re going to be in the dark,” I said. “Most of them.”

“Yeah. But I feel like I should try to look at the ones I can see and maybe pretend to look at the ones I can’t.” You picked at a hangnail nervously. “Otherwise what’s the point?”

“The way you move...you belong in a place like this. You’re too big to perform on tables and in stupid basements and stuff.”
“First time anyone’s ever said I’m too big for something.”

“You’re big in all the right places.”

“Fuckin’ love you,” you said, rolling your eyes. “Well, I hate to break it to you, Edge, but after this it’ll be back to playing stupid basements.”

“Not for much longer, B. I watched you this morning. I saw the way the judges looked at you. Face it: you’re special.” You looked over your shoulder again. “Remember to breathe.”

Inhale. Exhale. “If I could kiss you I would.”

Gavin ambled down the aisle and squatted beside you. He had painted his eyebrows metallic gold. “How are you feeling, love?”

“Nervous. A good kind of nervous, maybe.”

“Just be yourself. Edge? Move. Be Mick Jones, got it?”

“I’ll do what I can.”

He patted your shoulder. “I’ve said it a million times. You’re the magnetic frontman and he’s the guitarist with mystique. It’s a classic dynamic.” Gavin smiled at us. “Can’t miss.”

“Thanks, Da,” you said, and he pinched your cheek.

“You guys have improved so much. So just have fun up there. It’s about showmanship. If you don’t know what to do, just look over here at us and smile, okay?”

“Okay.”

“Now let me through, darlings.” He passed me and had a similar pep talk for Larry and Adam.

The lights flicked off and on, the last stragglers found seats, and soon the competition was underway. The woman with the clipboard introduced each band and told the audience where they were from, and every act played three songs. The first to perform was a country music band, and the second played rock standards embellished with traditional Celtic instruments. Both were frighteningly competent. After the second band finished, we got up to cheers from our section. We tried to stay out of the way of the third band as they set up their instruments.

“Everyone’s so good, Edge,” you said.

“They’re good, but they’re not all that exciting, you have to admit. They don’t have that spark.”

“We might have the spark, but sometimes I think that’s all we’ve got.” You touched my shoulder. “Except you’re a genius, of course. You’re our secret weapon.”

“You’re our star.”

You looked around. “I think I feel kind of sick.”

“Wanna get some air?”

“Maybe.”

“Come on.” I spotted an exit sign and gestured to Adam and Larry in a way I hoped would
communicate *He just needs a moment, no big deal,* and I walked you to a stage door that had been propped open with a wedge of plywood. Outside was a small parking lot with a dumpster and a street light. “Deep breaths,” I said, over the racket of the third band, who were slaughtering *Smoke On the Water.*

You bent at the waist and looked at the concrete. I put my hand on your back and felt air fill your lungs. You released it slowly. Two more. You looked up at me and seemed better.


“No. You’re walking beside me.”

Deep Purple Jr. completed their set to polite applause, and we sprung into action. Having fewer instruments and amps than the others was advantageous, and we set up with a few minutes to spare. So we huddled together. “Let’s just have a good time,” you said. “We can do this.”

“Absolutely,” Adam grinned, seemingly unflappable.

“Guys?” Larry asked.

“What’s up?” I asked.

He looked at all of us. “I’m glad I’m in a band with you.”

“Well, you’re the backbone of this thing, Larry,” you said, putting your arm around him, and he smiled. “Are you ready?”

“Yeah.”

“Let’s go.”

We got into position, Clipboard Lady made eye contact with me, and I nodded. From behind the curtain, we heard her say, “And now, all the way from the north side of Dublin, please welcome U2!” The curtain opened as Larry tapped out a four count. I made the mistake of looking directly at the spotlights, which were much brighter than what we were used to, and I was blinded for a few seconds. Thanks to that month’s countless run-throughs of *Street Mission,* I managed to play that song’s beginning cords with ease. The first shapes that penetrated my white-green haze were your hands. One was in your hair, and the other pointed at the last row of seats in the balcony, like Babe Ruth pointing at center field before hitting a home run. You looked over your shoulder at me, and we sang and smiled at each other.

Watching yourself on television had prompted you to make a few changes in your performance. You were less jittery, and your movements were larger and cleaner. You fit the space. I can’t remember what I was doing, although “be Mick Jones” entered my mind a few times. I did my best to loosen up and sort of make shapes in the air with the neck of my guitar and hop around and I really don’t know what I did. Larry’s dead-serious eyes were on you most of the time. Adam strolled over to my side of the stage like he was taking a walk in the park and hit a pose beside me that was so cool it made me thankful for the thousandth time that we had him in our band. His sound in the theater was huge and deep, and mine stuttered along on top of it. When my solo came around, you did not leave the stage a la Jim Morrison. Instead you sort of squatted/knelt near the side of the stage and watch me play as if I were Jimmy Page and not some geeky kid. Not really knowing what to do with that, I smiled in Gavin’s direction and heard a distinct hoot. You returned to your microphone to finish the song--your little heels on the floorboards made vibrations only I could feel--and dumb song or not,
you sold it to our audience with that astonishing charisma you had even then. And they rewarded you for it.

Buoyed by their response, you strutted back to Larry and got him to smile before he began *Life on a Distant Planet*, my strange contribution to our catalog. The seeds for that one were planted the previous summer when I was walking Gogo and pining for you and being bored out of my mind in Wales. Nine months later, this newborn baby of a song was being played for way too many people. You liked my solo very much, and I had developed the habit of standing completely still as I played it. This made it seem more important than it was. You took the opportunity to linger at your microphone and tilt the stand toward you. You looked out at the crowd as if you were driving a particularly beautiful sports car and your favorite song was on the radio.

I tried to gauge our judges’ reactions to *The TV Song*, but what I could see was inscrutable. Maybe a hint of a smile; maybe the slightest bob of a head. I decided to focus on my playing. Realizing this was your last chance to make an impression, you sang the lyrics with an audible smile in your voice and made brief check-ins with all of us. I was last, and you put your hand on my left shoulder and watched me play for a moment, and we giggled at each other, thus satisfying our contractual obligation as the magnetic frontman and the guitarist with mystique.

And then it was over. We received a respectable amount of applause, particularly from our friends who were going berserk. You thanked the audience, said good night, and Larry gave a little wave from behind the drums as the curtain closed.

We had about two and a half seconds to catch our breath and confirm that our performance was over with no major screw ups, and then we executed the quickest load out in recorded history. The next band rolled their gear on from stage right while we shoved our stuff out of the way stage left. I looked in your eyes during this process, and I don’t think I’ve ever witnessed another human being who was so thoroughly alive.

“Edge,” you said, your face aglow.

“That…”

“Yeah.”

The four of us stood together in our spot backstage. Simultaneously relieved and sad it was over, we gaped at each other for a few seconds. Larry broke our stunned silence. “That was so cool!”

“It was! It fucking was,” you said, hugging him.

“We survived,” I added.

“We thrived, Edge.”

“The lights almost blinded me at first.”

“Me too.”

“Me too.”

“Me too!”

“Well done lads,” the clipboard lady enthused while pulling a pen from her bun and making a check mark somewhere on her list.
“Thanks, ma’am,” you said with a smile.

She lowered her reading glasses and studied you. “Well, aren’t you something?”

“I hope so.”

“Bright boy. Now off you go,” she said, making a shooing gesture. “If you hurry, you’ll be able to see the other acts.”

We returned to our seats with a few minutes to spare, and our section of supporters cheered for us. Gavin gave you a big hug and punched my shoulder. The RTE Radio judge got up, shook your hand, and whispered something to you in such a way that the other bands sitting near us seemed offended. “He said we were splendid, pass it on,” you whispered to me, and I sent the message over to Larry and Adam.

The house lights lowered, and the rest of the acts performed. I don’t remember much about them as I was busy reliving our set, including two minor missteps of mine that happened while you were being especially magnetic, thank goodness. Also distracting me: your left foot, which was alternately nudging my right foot and tapping to the beat of Cheap Trick, Supertramp, and Styx covers. We were the only group who played original songs. I kept looking around the auditorium and trying to make sense of the four of us playing on a stage that grand.

“You were wonderful,” you said.

“Proud of you, B.” We sat back and listened to the all-girl folk group sing *Fernando*. The flask that had been passed down our row was empty by the time it reached us.

The hour passed with excruciating slowness, and we knew we were being watched (because every time I looked behind us or to the side, somebody was doing just that). We were dying to run out into the street to let off some steam, but instead we attempted to play it cool, as if we entered talent shows all over the country every week or two, and as if we weren’t four teenagers with limited prospects who were desperate for any kind of validation, two of whom were in love with each other.

But eventually our clipboard lady returned to the stage with the results, and she counted down the winners starting with third place (Acceptabletramp). My money was on the girls, so when they won second place, I was confused. But as they ran onstage to collect their trophy, I noticed that clipboard lady was looking directly at you and grinning. Seconds later, she announced that we had won.

Our row: bedlam. You and I looked at each other and yelled, as did Larry and Adam, who rose and pushed us out of our seats and into the aisle. People were applauding, and our rival bands were shocked. *Who are these kids?*

We let Larry accept our trophy and check and begin his grand tradition as an adorable but difficult interviewee.

“All the way from Dublin, are you?”

“Yes.”

“And how old are you lads, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“I’m fifteen and a half,” Larry said to audible cooing from some of the women and all of the girls in the crowd. Then he pointed at us and said, “Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen.” And he had nothing to add, so big brother Adam stepped in and thanked the people behind Pop Group 78 and sponsors Harp Lager very much indeed.
“And what do you plan to do with the prize money?”

You leaned into her microphone. “We aim to buy a van!” She patted your shoulder. Not knowing what else to do, I opened my jacket and pointed at our Larry-designed U2 logo, the curtain closed, and the show was over.

We were hustled backstage for a quick, deer-in-the-headlights photo or two, and then we returned to our jubilant friends and family. Since we were too young to be served in pubs, we returned to our hotel to wind down.

Normally at parties, you had a tendency to flit from friend cluster to friend cluster until everyone had received a dose of your charm. But that night I noticed a change in the pattern. I was reminded of the solar system model my teacher in primary school had on her desk, with the sun in the center and the planets rotating around it. You sat, sunlike, on an ottoman in the center of the lobby, and people circled and approached you and stood in the light of a star that had just been formed.

I caught your attention and told you I was going up to our room to call Mum with the news before it got too late. “I’m planning on having a coughing fit in exactly thirty minutes,” you said, glancing at the clock over the front desk.

“See you soon.”

“Oh, hey, Edge…?” You seemed a bit confused.

“607. Six-oh-seven.”

“Got it.”

Mum and Gill were overjoyed when I told them we had won, and this was quickly followed by regret that they weren’t there to witness it. “Stupid play,” Gill pouted.

“How was it?”

“It was fine, I guess.”

“Your sister was perfection.”

“Still wanted to be there. Was Bono…?”

“He was perfection, too.”

“You sound exhausted, love.”

“I kind of am. I’ll tell you all about it when I get home.”

“Yes. This phone call is costing us a fortune, I’m sure.”

“Hopefully no more than 500 pounds.”

I thought about the day, which seemed as long as a week, while I took a quick shower. I pulled on some underwear and was towel drying my hair when I heard a key in the lock, followed by your husky voice.

“Oh hi, Edge.”

“Hi.”
You looked me up and down. “Alone at last.”

“Yeah.”

The room was dark except for the light from the bathroom. I walked backwards until I bumped into the corner of the bed, and you were right there with me. I tossed my towel on a table by the bed and ran my fingers through my still-damp hair. When I sat down, I heard the mattress springs creak.

“Wanna join me?”

“Yes.” Your fingers caressed my cheekbone, and you leaned over to kiss me. “God, Edge.”

“We did it.”

“We actually did.”

The room was a little chilly, and I shivered, so I pulled the aggressively-tucked blankets back and got in bed. I watched you kick your boots off, followed by your jacket, t-shirt, and striped jeans, and as you had done in countless daydreams, you climbed in beside me. We faced each other in the semi-darkness and kissed again, and our bodies slid across the smooth cotton sheets until no space remained between us. My cool skin. Your hot skin. Warm.

I kissed your neck and breathed you in. You were a microcosm of all we had experienced that day: the train, the ballroom, the pre-spring air, the hotel, the theater, and just...you. “I could take a shower if you wanna--”

“No. I like you this way. Stay with me.” The skin of your inner arm was so soft, like the petals of an orchid.

“Anything you want, love.” Your hands explored my chest and ribcage.

I studied your face. Fifteen-hundred people had stared at it earlier that night, but I had its undivided attention. “You were astonishing tonight, Bono.”

“God, I love you.” I closed my eyes and felt my body sink into the mattress as your weight shifted onto mine. My arms slipped around your back as you sucked my bottom lip. I moaned, and you smiled. We were both so hard.

“Baby,” I managed to whisper.

“Stay exactly like that,” you said, straddling me and sitting up. “I just wanna...explore you.” You bent to kiss my collarbone. Your finger drew a line down the center of my chest, and your mouth followed in its wake. “Now, Edge,” you said, your tongue flicking against my left nipple and sending shockwaves throughout my entire being, “We are going to be good boys tonight, okay?”

“Oh?”

“As good as we can be, anyway.”

“What do you mean?”

Your hand reached for the nape of my neck, and you pulled up so my chin was pointing at the ceiling. You kissed it and moved to look into my eyes, your voice hypnotic. “You’re not eighteen. So we’re going to do as much of this kind of thing as we can possibly stand, and then I’m going to go into that bathroom and do what needs to be done, and you’re going to stay in this bed and do what needs to be done, and then we can spend the rest of the night together. Right here.”
“B…” I whined.

Your teeth grazed my extended neck. “Yes, E. This won’t be the last time we share a bed, and soon we’ll have a record deal, and soon people will pay us to play our songs for them and we’ll get to sleep with each other in their hotels. Night after night.”

“Oh, you think so?”

“I know so.”

We kissed and thought about this dreamlike future. “It’s my turn now,” I murmured as we traded places. Then I took in the dark beauty of your chest and stomach, with its fascinating whorls of fine hair and the dark line that led down to the promise of more beneath an elastic band and straining white cotton. So much to study. You were right. Maybe we should take our time. Maybe all I needed was to spend the night sleeping beside you. Maybe all I needed needed was to see your face first thing in the morning. I covered your chest with kisses and gentle little bites, and your back arched. Your hands pushed my hair back so you could watch me do this. “Roll over.”

An expanse of creamy, freckled skin, two dimples on either side of your spine...I instinctively lowered myself so my chest rested against your back. You turned your head to one side, and I kissed your cheek and ear. “I love every last bit of you,” I sighed, and the way our bodies fit together that first time would haunt me for months. My hips soon became impossible to control, so I sat up and lowered the waistband of your underwear just a bit, just enough to see what I wanted to see, and your body was more beautiful than anything I could have imagined. Your left side was softly illuminated by the golden bathroom light, and the cool lights of the city could be seen in the shadows on the right. I moved to sit beside you. The whiteness of the bed made you seem somehow more real, and I touched your taut thighs--so much more substantial than my own. You squirmed and laughed a bit.

“Ticklish?”

“You have no idea.”

More compact than tall, you were nevertheless perfectly proportioned, and I felt an exquisite ache flow through my body, an ache that told me I was a man and you were what I wanted. I had already felt versions of this ache many times with you, of course, but this sensation was sharper, greedier, and more possessive. I had to have you. Maybe not that moment, but one day when the time was right, you would belong to me completely, and I would belong to you. Completely.

“Come back up here. I’m lonely,” you said. I moved back up to face you and pulled the blankets over us. Our bodies connected once again, and we were kissing once again, only with more urgency. Your tongue was deep in my mouth and sliding against mine, and you held my head in your hands as you lovingly devoured me. My hands were eager to begin their lifelong occupation of memorizing your body. I felt the satisfying sensations of two notes being played in harmony, of hearing a beloved song for the first time, of buying a ticket and holding it in my hand. Your throat vibrated with a low hum of pleasure beneath my lips, and your hands were similarly frantic for me. I loved the sounds you made, and I continually tried to tell myself to remember every second of our time in that bed so I could relive it again and again. You pulled my hips closer until they touched yours, and we gasped as that particular complex of nerves connected and new carnal sensations came online. Damp cotton is an excellent conductor of electricity. We were almost painfully close, and all we wanted was more. All we wanted was everything.

I began to tremble from the delicious tension that was racking my body. Technically we were not naked, but I had never felt so vulnerable and out of control. But I knew I was safe with you. I knew I
was loved, and together we were discovering new things in a way that was right and inevitable.

“Baby,” I moaned.

“I know. So am I,” you murmured sympathetically. One more kiss, and you were out of bed. With a cheeky grin, you tossed my towel at me and padded off the the bathroom. You didn’t close the door, and for a few seconds I saw your shadow on the floor in front of the dresser. The bathroom’s tile floor made sure I heard your shallow breathing as you seemed to sing a wordless song for me, a variation on the one I was singing for you, one that ended with a thud against the wall dividing us and your voice calling my name.

“Edge--”

“Bono--”

I imagined you lying beneath me as I listened to you catch your breath in there. This was interrupted by the hiss of the shower. I shifted over to your still-warm side of the bed, stared at the ceiling, and the world disappeared.

I was almost asleep when you returned to bed, my steamy and squeaky-clean lover. “We did it,” you whispered with a smile.

“Yes we did,” I said, not knowing exactly what you meant. We had done a lot of things that day.

I made room for you as you got into bed with me, and since this was the first time either of us had attempted to sleep with a romantic partner, we fumbled around a bit as we tried to get comfortable. And while I loved being able to kiss you throughout the night, and while I loved seeing your eyes open and sparkle the next morning as you remembered where you were, what I loved the most was your beautiful head and hand resting on my chest, my arm around your shoulders, and my fingers idly stroking your hair. Your body relaxed and melted into mine as you fell asleep, and you whispered to me.

“Edge.”

“Bono.”
We're In a Band

Chapter Notes

So! We are back to Bono POV here and for the next several chapters. This one begins right where the last one left off, post Limerick competition. It took a few days for me to shift from Edge to Bono voice, and I hope I managed to erase the handful of instances where I accidentally lapsed into Edge. By the time I finished this, I was fully in Bono mode.

Speaking of voice, I would like to dedicate this chapter to our hero Bono, as silly as that sounds (what am I even doing?). Whatever; I wrote this with so much love in my heart. The last scene was written after he lost his voice in Berlin. I hope this turns out to be just a momentary thing and he will be back in championship form in no time. Please please please. But you know what? Even if he lost his voice forever last night, he is still worthy of a lifetime of adoration and fic tributes, no question about it. He is Our B and we love him.

EDIT: HE’S OKAY!❤

Other notes: I’m positive the terms "vision board" and "color story" did not exist in the 70s, but I neeeeeded Gavin to say them. Thanks for indulging me. The shopping spree was based on favorite things they wore over a few years. Penneys is a legit store in Ireland, but it is not the same thing as J.C. Penney in the US. Also I am not sure if Chuckles were/are a candy in Ireland, but a google image search seemed to indicate that yes, they were/are. Phil is a real person I know nothing about, and other than the name/gender, Phil is 100% my own creation.

This is a fun chapter with a little weepy part, which is hopefully par for the course for me. I love you for sticking around. <3333

Edge. First of all, thank you for writing about my postgraduate year and all the difficult parts I’d managed to avoid. Second of all, damn you for saddling me with Our Tough Year plus seventeen months of impossible abstinence. How can teenage you and I keep sex from happening, I ask you?

And third of all, now that I have finished this part, I am in tears. The more we write and read about this alternate history, the more I find myself believing it actually happened. But it didn’t, and it should have.

Please come over and comfort me, my love.

B.

——-

“Spelled your name wrong,” Dad said when I showed him the photo of us in the Evening Press.

Right, I’m not Paul Henson, I’m fucking B-o-n-o, I wanted to say, but I shrugged it off. Instead I smirked at myself ignoring the camera in favor of staring at you and essentially giving you a trophy, which you deserved for more than one reason that night. Nothing anyone could say would bring me
down from the high I was on. Not even Dad.

“Placing first out of thirty-six is a pretty good accomplishment, you have to admit,” I said.

He laid his fork down and looked up at me from the kitchen table. “I’ve gotta hand it to ya, son. You did what you said you’d do.”

“Indeed I did.” I walked over to the refrigerator, looked inside, and shut the door. Now was the only logical opportunity to broach the dreaded topic. “I was wondering. We want to pursue this and see how far we can go. Strike while the iron’s hot, right?”

I could hear his eyes rolling. “And?”

“I wanna put off school for a year. Edge is doing it. Adam’s finished. Larry’s gonna quit in a couple of months, too.”

“So where do you plan on living?”

“I was hoping I could stay...here.”

He looked at our photo one more time, folded the paper, and huffed out a mirthless chuckle. “You’re getting a job, then.”

“I will. I want to.”

He handed me his plate. “We’ll see how it goes.” A rumble of fingertips against the table. “Alright. You’ve got a year, Henson.”

I was so happy I kissed his cheek. “Thanks, Dad. You’ll see.”

He shook his head. “The clock is ticking.”

“I couldn’t believe they spelled your name wrong,” you said that night over the phone. “And Larry’s, too! From now on, we’re gonna have to spell everything out for people.”

“And what was going on with that thing about Adam being our leader?”

“I think he must have told them he was our manager?”

“Who knows.”

“Doesn’t matter. We won, B.”

“We fucking did!”

“And everything after.”

“And everything after.”

“I can’t stop thinking about it.”

“Neither can I.”

“You made your fingers hard in my mouth.”

“I felt your weight on top of me.”
“I wanna do it again.”

“God, me too, Edge.”

The entire week after the competition was loaded with too much to think about, and you were more adorably lovestruck than ever. Between classes you passed me brazen little notes that said things like Your back slamming against the bathroom wall and Your skin is so warm and soft first thing in the morning. When you weren’t driving me to distraction, elusive melodies were waking me up at night and begging me to remember them. Or Ali was “helping” me with Irish and all I wanted to do was write songs about her eyes. Our win was such a rush that I needed to feel that next rush, that next win, that next step up the ladder. And would that be enough? Would we ever truly be satisfied, or had we doomed ourselves to a treadmill of always needing more?

Most of the time my thoughts of the future were interrupted by practical concerns. We put our dream of owning a van on hold because, wouldn’t you know it, any decent used van cost far more than 500 pounds. We needed to capitalize on winning the competition as quickly as possible, and the easiest way to do that was to get Steve to make some posters and maybe hire a photographer. We needed to convince the right people to talk with us. And buy some clothes. All fun things.

You, Adam, and I invited Ali and Aislinn to help us look for new clothes. Gavin and his mother were obvious choices too, since he was the only one in our circle of friends with any real fashion sense, and she had become the band’s (or at least my) default seamstress. Larry didn’t want to waste our money on himself, claiming his existing clothes were fine, and anyway, no one ever notices what the drummer is wearing.

Ali was excited for us, of course, and after a month of being just-friends with you, Aislinn seemed to be giving you a long second look. She tried not to be completely transparent about why she had renewed her interest in you, but it was obvious enough to me. I watched her carefully. I didn’t want her to hurt you again. And some selfish reasons may have also come into play.

Anyway, the next week the seven of us met at Penneys after school to see what we could find. You and Adam stood near the entrance and talked about our upcoming recording session which would happen at the end of April. Gavin, all business in head-to-toe royal blue, came prepared with a Polaroid camera and a selection of music and fashion pictures he had torn from magazines and glued to a piece of cardboard. He presented this to me as we waited for the others, explaining that he’d had a slow day at the slaughterhouse.

“Nice collage, Gav.”

“It’s a vision board.”

“I see.”

“So what kind of color story are we thinking about?”

“Color story? I dunno if that matters. I’m positive we can’t afford full-color posters, so…”

“Okay, then. Black and white.” He looked up at the sky. “I’m thinking about a young Velvet Underground. And you’re Nico.”

“But I wanna be Lou Reed.”

“Sorry, love. Adam is your Lou. Ask anyone.”

I glanced at Adam, who was staring into the distance in an unintentional approximation of Lou on
the cover of *Transformer*. Fair enough. “Okay. My thought is that we’ve all got to wear stovepipes.”

“Of course. You’re not hippies or whatever. Art school chic.”

“Larry doesn’t see anything wrong with his flares.”

“Then Larry can stand in the back. You don’t want to look dated. You want things that are classic, so when you see these pictures in twenty years, you won’t be embarrassed.” I tried to imagine being thirty-seven and failed.

Ali and Aislinn rushed across the street to meet us, followed by Gavin’s mother, who had been window shopping. “It’s gonna be so much fun to shop for boys,” Ali said with a laugh, kissing my cheek.

“You know, it really is,” Aislinn said, and she had the nerve to fondle my little bee that was on the lapel of your jacket. You gave her a winning smile. And in we went.

The next hour was a veritable feeding frenzy of clothing and accessories, and after a while you, Adam, and I gave up on trying to find things, ensconced ourselves in the fitting rooms, and let everyone else bring the clothes to us. Bland pop music from the store’s P.A. filtered in, and we sang along with it during lulls. Adam seemed to get all the fun things with asymmetrical necklines and interesting graphics, and he made them seem cooler by association. You and I were more of a puzzle.

Aislinn had made you her personal project, and you didn’t have a lot of ideas for her beyond wanting to be comfortable and needing things that would be easy to play a guitar in. Also you wanted to look less skinny, as if that is a problem. As if having a body whose shape doesn’t fluctuate whenever you eat so much as a sandwich is a problem. But I digress. Aislinn clicked her tongue at you. “Horizontal stripes! There’s your solution.” And she returned with a white shirt with dark horizontal stripes that magically created the illusion of bulk.

Ali and Gavin put their heads together regarding me. “What do you think about a turtleneck on him?” he asked.

“Yes. I’ll find one if it kills me.” She was gone in a flash and returned some time later with a black turtleneck she had found on the clearance rack in the ladies’ department. Gavin applauded her ingenuity. I balked at this, but Ali reminded me that it was spring, and tight black pullovers were not easily found, and I should take what I could get. I tried it on, and it fit me like a second skin.

“Gorgeous. Perfect,” Gavin said, nodding and taking a photo.

“He’s so fucking annoying.” Gavin put his arm around Ali, and they beamed at me like proud parents.

You and Aislinn were laughing. “What else should I get you?” she asked.

“I’ve always liked him in a white shirt,” I chimed in. “With buttons.”

“Okay,” she said with a hint of skepticism. “I’ll find one.”

“Get one for him, too,” you said, admiring that turtleneck on me.

I raised an eyebrow, a useful skill I had recently mastered. “So you like me in white, the Edge?”
“Yeah.”

*I never wanted, I never wanted to touch a man, The way that I wanna touch you* Toni Tennille sang as Gavin, Aislinn, and Ali studied us for possibly a second too long. Then they took off to dig up some more things for us.

“Hey, don’t you like me in white?” Adam said with a wink as he leaned against his fitting room door, shirtless.

“Well, we can’t all wear white,” I said. “And you look good in anything. But you’re right. I love you in white, Adam. Maybe one day it’ll become your signature color. Nice bracelet, by the way.”

“I can’t get it off,” he said, fiddling with the tag.

“I guess you’d better buy it, then,” you said, nodding.

Gaviñ’s mother was on trouser duty, and she had unearthed some dark jeans with straight legs that fit you perfectly but were much too long on me. “I can hem them in a jiffy,” she told me confidentially. “Maybe take them in at the knee a bit while I’m at it.”

“Oh, would you?”

“Anything you need, love.”

A selection of white shirts were presented to you and me, and a minute later we emerged from our dressing rooms still buttoning them up. “Go all the way up, Edge,” I said.


“I guess so,” she said. And I was right. You looked like an angel. An angel I would gleefully corrupt.

“Ooh, I think I picked out the wrong kind of shirt for you,” Ali said, pointing at my cuffs. “This kind needs cufflinks, right? Do you have any of those at home?”

“No.”

“Yeah, unless you have cufflinks, they’re just gonna flop around.”

“Actually, I kind of like them floppy,” Gavin said. “Can’t you just see him on stage? Waving his arms around and everything? They’ll magnify every move he makes. Like wings.”

“Like an angel,” you said.

“Yeah,” Ali agreed.

“I saw something else out there I wanna put you in,” Gavin told me. “One second.” He returned with a beautiful black blazer that felt dangerously luxurious. “Put that on over the turtleneck.”

I did as I was told and opened the dressing room door to slow clapping from Adam. “Oh Bono, you look so handsome,” Ali cooed, straightening the lapels a bit.

“Tall, even,” Aislinn conceded.
“Pretty little fucker,” Gavin chuckled as his mother whacked him with her purse.

I glanced at you, and you mouthed the word, “Wow.”

I looked at the tag on the sleeve and muttered, “Shit.” It was far too expensive for our budget. “You don’t wanna know.”

Gavin shrugged. “Something to dream about when you sign that big record contract, then,” he said, helping me out of it and hanging it back up. He and I looked at it wistfully. “But that works on you. That is sexy.”

“It’s not too dressy?”

“Maybe it’s a little too dressy,” he said, putting his arm around me. On the way to the cash register, he scooped up a three-pack of white t-shirts, saying, “For baby James Dean. With a face like his, it’s really all he needs.”

Satisfied with our new wardrobe, we paid and left the store together. Gavin’s mother drove us back to Cedarwood Road, and the rest of you waited for the bus. She had parked beside a shoe store, and I noticed a Help Wanted sign in its window. How hard could it be? I thought to myself.

And I was right. It was not hard. In fact, at the end of my first day on the job, Mr. Murphy told me I was a born shoe salesman, so I had something to fall back on in case I failed at being a 20th century rock star. Hell, given the chance, I’d have gladly done both things. Graham’s shoe store mostly catered to women and was, for Dublin, one of the more high-end shops. I was essentially being paid to hone my flirtation skills for several days a week. I quickly learned that all people want is for their uniqueness to be appreciated, along with some eye contact, a smile, and a question or two that made them feel special. Add the innocent touch of a charming young man, and you’ve just sold another pair of pumps, Bono. An attractive middle-aged woman came in every Monday afternoon at the beginning of my shift, and I happily knelt before her and measured her feet and complimented her pedicure and buckled little straps on shoes and sandals that she usually bought with her seemingly unlimited funds before sashaying out the door in a cloud of Miss Dior. It was, in short, a dream job.

“Edge, this side gig is the fifth greatest thing that’s ever happened to me,” I told you one night during our usual check-in.

“You’re probably the only person alive who could make selling shoes seem halfway sexy.”

“Halfway? Oh, it’s all the way sexy. Plus that Monday woman reliably slips me a fiver on her way out.”

“This whole thing smacks of teen prostitution.”

“Do you want the band to have a van or not, Edge?”

Steve had a photographer friend named Phil who had agreed to reserve a block of time on a Saturday morning for a photo shoot with us. We arrived at an apartment building near Trinity College and were surprised to discover that Phil was a young woman, albeit a slightly androgynous one, with asymmetrical, two-toned hair and heavily-lined eyes.

“It’s a male-dominated profession. I like messing with their minds a little,” she explained as we filed into her cluttered living room, whose walls were crammed with examples of her excellent work (mostly cityscapes and gritty industrial settings). Not knowing what else to do, the four of us took a
look at them while she loaded film into her camera.

“I know that alley,” I said, admiring one.

“Yeah, it’s commissions like you guys that allow me to explore the stuff I really love,” she said. “No offense.”

“None taken. I sell shoes so I can sing,” I said with a smile.

She studied my face and glanced at you, Adam, and Larry. “Wow. You’re all just kids, aren’t you?’

“I’m afraid so, ma’am.”

“Oh my god, do not call me ma’am. I feel ancient enough as it is.”

“Are you kidding? You’re easily the coolest-looking person in Dublin.” I pointed at the rest of you. “We are U2. That’s Adam, Larry, and Edge. My name is Bono.” Feeling cheeky, I kissed her non-camera-holding hand. “B-o-n-o. Pleased to meet you.”

She smirked and turned to the rest of us. “Is he always like this?”

“I’m afraid so, ma’am,” Adam said.

“Alright. Follow me, Babyface and the...Babyfaces.” Her second bedroom was her studio, and a plain white backdrop dominated one of the walls. “Hope you don’t mind my no-frills aesthetic,” she said, turning on a series of lights and raising the blinds of two large windows.

“It’s exactly what we want,” Adam said. “Sort of a Velvet Underground idea, if you know what I mean.”

“I can make that happen for you,” she said, looking at you and Larry. “What’s the deal with the quiet ones?”

“I play guitar,” you said, holding up your case. You weren’t sure if she wanted us to bring props.

“I hit things,” Larry mumbled.

“Edge and Larry are the band’s true musicians,” I explained, beaming at you, so sweet in your new striped shirt. And striped belt!

“Well. You’re all positively dreamy,” she said. “The cutest boys I have ever seen.”

“I bet you say that to all the bands you take photos of,” I said.

“Guilty. But this time I mean it. The lips on this one...”

“Yeah, he’s gonna be a posh Irish model one day, aren’t you, Larry?”

“Not on your fookin’ life,” he said with that baby bird scowl of his as Phil burst into laughter.

She turned on her stereo and flipped through a crate of albums. “Velvet Underground, you say?” She found their live record from 1969 with a woman’s (very nice) backside on the cover and put it on the turntable. “If you’re not careful, you may learn something.”

Lou Reed’s nonchalant voice filled the room, and he spent some time talking with the band’s miniscule Texas audience, asking them if they’d rather hear one long set or two short sets, whether
anyone had school the next day, and his thoughts on the Dallas Cowboys. Then the band began a six minute version of *Waiting for the Man*.

“My usual band package is I’ll do some group shots and then I’ll have you sit for me one at a time. Sound good?”

“Sounds great,” I said, and she directed us to stand in front of the backdrop.

“Do you want me to hold my guitar?” you asked.

“We’ll do some with and some without, how about that?”

“Sure.”

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Adam said. “Bill Graham’s gonna talk to us when we record our demo.”

*The Bill Graham?* I asked, astounded.

“From Hot Press.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” I murmured, and you shook your head in disbelief. “That’s amazing, Adam.”

“Shows what you can accomplish once school is out of the picture,” he said with a grin.

Larry leaned over and tried to wrap the bells of his flared jeans around his ankles in an attempt to disguise them. “Should’ve listened to you guys,” he said quietly.

“No, I kind of like that you’re different,” Phil said. “If it bothers you, we can put you in the back. But let me do at least a few with you in the front, okay?”

“Okay.”

She studied us in our little cluster. “Have you boys ever done this before?”

“No,” Adam said, moving me to the front. “Are we doing something wrong?”

“Oh, not at all! It’s just...you look like you belong together. Four totally different types. Like Queen or The Who. Or, wow, you’re actually a baby Beatles, except somehow more lovable, for god’s sake.” We laughed at this, flattered, as she finished setting up her equipment. “You’re like opening a new box of crayons and they’re all perfect and lined up in a pretty way.”

“Or a pack of Chuckles without the disgusting licorice one,” I suggested.

“Exactly.”

“The lime one’s the worst,” Larry said.

“Which one do you wanna be?” I asked.

“...Lemon.”

Phil spent about fifteen minutes photographing us—full length shots that had me asking the question that would plague me for the rest of my life: *What the fuck am I supposed to do with my hands?* She had a few ideas, and she gave us little instructions on how to tilt our heads and where to position our chins and feet and things like that. By the time we were finished, we all wished we’d had an older sister like her.
Later she set up a white box for us to sit on while she took individual shots, about two dozen each, and she mercifully took care of you and Larry first. “Let me put you lads out of your misery,” she said, and I watched her light you in a way that made you resemble Jesus Christ or some kind of cowboy, and you followed her directions to the letter. “Such a pro, this one,” Phil said, and you seemed pleased. Femme Fatale was playing.

“Isn’t his face incredible?” I couldn’t resist asking her.

“And he’s only going to get more handsome as he gets older. I can guarantee that, sweetheart.”

Larry and Adam were similarly cooed over, so by the time she got to me, I couldn’t wait to sit on that box. When I showed her the turtleneck I had brought along, she urged me to change into it, so I did.

“May I stand over here?” you asked, moving to the corner of the room by the window. You looked out at the college buildings that were nestled in fog.

“As long as you don’t block the light, sure.”

I sat down and stared at her camera’s lens as she clicked away. “You remind me of old paintings of the apostles, or David, maybe,” she said.

“How’s that?”

She walked up to me and turned my face to the window. “You know that moment when they hear the voice of God, and he tells them what to write? It’s in your eyes.”

Returning to her camera, she whispered, “That profile…” and trailed off. I stared at you, and you smiled. “That’s it,” she said.

“Yeah?”

“Look into the future, love.”

* *

Larry called his father as the session was winding down, and after saying goodbye to Phil and us, he and Adam left together.

“Are you hungry?” I asked, pointing my chin at a fish and chips place down the street.

“Sure. You must be starving.”

“Could you hear my stomach rumbling up there?”

“Not really.”

“Well, it was.”

“Poor baby.”

The fish and chips place was not exactly a restaurant—it really was just a place—but there were a handful of tables for the few non-takeaway customers. The windows were steamy, and aerated grease accumulated near the ceiling in a very fine haze, which is the hallmark of any great fish and chips operation. Our food came wrapped in newspaper cones, and we doused it with malt vinegar. “So good,” I groaned, devouring the golden bits and pieces. Your eyes twinkled.
“That was fun,” you said.

“She was crazy about you, Edge.”

“She was crazy about you.”

“She was crazy about all of us.” I licked tartar sauce off my finger. “And how about Bill Graham?”

“I know!”

We settled in and watched a young couple order food. Their small twin boys cavorted around the tables, and I waved at them.

“We’re brothers!” one of them piped up.

“Are you brothers?” the other one asked.

“No,” you said. “We’re more than brothers.”

“How can you be more than brothers?”

Big smile. “We’re in a band.”

“I wanna be in a band!” the first one said. Their mother rounded them up and they skipped away.

It was good to be alone with you, and I was glad I had suggested it. Since the Limerick competition, we had returned to our routine of stealing time together in the band room and anywhere else that guaranteed privacy. Of course it was never enough and we could not come close to matching our night together in that blessed hotel room. We thought about it constantly and brought it up so often that we developed a sort of conversational shorthand for it with its own special tone. We knew what we were talking about.

“Skin.”

“Bed.”

“Wall.”

“Fingers.”

“Chest.”

“Arms.”

“Night.”

“Morning.”

“Edge.”

“Bono.”

I sipped on my Coke and made eye contact with you. “Love.”

You blushed. “Four weeks ago.”

We let that sink in. I wanted to perform again and sleep with you again in equal measure—two lusts
growing inside my body that had become inseparable friends. I couldn’t hold your hand in public, so I had to settle for staring at you. Your elegant nose. Your wild hair. Your artistic hands. Your flawless skin. Your shy smile.

“Edge, when you were a little kid and you had nightmares, would your parents let you sleep in their bed?”

“Yeah. I guess so. I never really had a lot of nightmares, though.”

“Well, I did, and you-know-who would never allow it. Of course. But if Mum heard me crying, she’d slip into my room and hold me until I fell asleep again.”

“I would, too.”

“I know you would, Edge.”

“Yeah.” You leaned in.

“So anyway, after she died, I started sleeping with an extra pillow beside me, just to feel some pathetic little comfort when I thought about her.”

“Ahh, B.”

“And it’s not like I set out to create a fake Mum. It was just something I did, and I really didn’t think too much about it, you know? It was an extra pillow. No big deal.”

“Okay.”

“Well, a couple of years ago I was in Psychology class. Did you ever have Mr. Nolan?”

“No. I think I had to take Chemistry instead. But I know who you’re talking about.”

“He was okay. Showed a lot of films, you know? So did Mr. Leary across the hall. Ali and her friends call their classrooms Cinema 1 and 2.”

“Heh, that’s pretty good.”

“So one day Mr. Nolan showed us a short film about a psychological experiment they did on baby monkeys. Do you know what I’m talking about?”

“Yes, I know what monkeys are.”

“Fuck you so much, the Edge.”

“You wish.”

I looked at the beige (formerly white) ceiling. “So these monkeys. Little tiny baby monkeys. They separated them from their mothers and put them in cages with two fake mothers. And one was made out of wire and it barely even looked like a monkey, but it had a nipple where the baby monkey could get milk. And the other fake mother looked a little bit more real but just barely. It didn’t have a nipple but it was covered with cloth so it was softer than the wire one.”

“That’s pretty fucked up.”

“It was. I couldn’t believe what I was watching.”
“This is why I want to play music instead of being a scientist.”

“Right? They were so mean to those little monkeys! And so the baby monkeys were terrified and they’d cling to the cloth mother constantly, even though she couldn’t feed them. They needed comfort, whatever comfort they could get from that fake cloth mother. I mean, they’d get milk from the wire mother sometimes, but it was always back to the cloth mother.”

“Okay.”

“And the point of it was, I guess, that children need love more than anything else. And children love their mothers for reasons beyond getting food.”

“Seems pretty obvious.”

“Yeah. So we were watching these poor little monkeys with their big sad eyes, and towards the end of it I could hear some of the girls in class crying, and I was really fighting it. When class was over I hid in the bathroom and cried for about a half hour, and then I just went home. Such as it was.”

“Baby,”

“And I got in bed with my extra pillow and thought about what that really was for me.” I looked at the foggy window and down at the newspaper cone, whose tip I had been rolling and unrolling. I felt your foot bump against my boot and stay there.

“I’m so sorry, B. I wish I could’ve been with you.”

“Yeah. Me too. Well, here is the good news. Four weeks ago. Hotel.”

“Yes.”

I lowered my voice, not that the elderly couple in the corner could hear us over the din of the fryer. “When we were sleeping, and you were curled around my back? In the night I woke up thinking it was the first time I had fallen asleep with anyone since Mum. And it felt so good I had tears in my eyes. Except this was better. Skin.”

“Yes.”

“Skin and just, love. For the first time in years.”

“I love you, B,” you whispered, blinking.

I wiped away a tear. “We’re in a band.”
Heyyyyy hope you like lots of Bono narration because this one is a biggie. It is a continuation of the previous chapter. I am happy that I broke it into two parts because together they would have been unwieldy.

Contains a minor Pulp Fiction quote. Can you find it?

Before I wrote this chapter, I knew nothing about what one had to do to record a song in the late 1970s. I still do not know very much, so if I am way off in the first part of this chapter, I apologize. U2 themselves did not go into a whole lot of detail regarding this first recording session, other than it was difficult and confusing and, to quote Bono, they got "tetchy" with each other. Thank you for bringing us that excellent word, Bono.

He actually wrote that song on that day.

I love you for reading and supporting my story. I suggest you all sit back with a delicious meatloaf sandwich and enjoy this chapter, which has a big sexy part waiting for you near the end.

Edge, it appears my verbomania knows no bounds. Please enjoy/endure the following account of our time in the recording studio (which was pretty close to what actually happened) and a couple of weeks after that (which, unfortunately, was not).

I’m keeping our heroes on their best behavior. Mostly. Your speech in the car was similar to something you actually said to me in real life, though, after the movie. After the backlash. And I was comforted and flattered by it, and I think that was when the seeds were planted. So I am reframing it here. You will recognize it when you read it, I hope.

Love,
B.

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We weren’t ready at all.

But as we walked into Keystone Studios that Thursday afternoon, Do Ya Think I’m Sexy? was firmly stuck in my head, and I thought to myself, “People record stupid songs all the time. How hard can it really be?”

The receptionist was the kind of blonde goddess one might imagine lives in Malibu and drives around in a pink Corvette (no offense to your mother’s orange Volkswagen Beetle that you drove us to the studio in, of course).

“U2? Here to record tonight?” I asked her lamely.

She checked her desk calendar. “Yes. Welcome to Keystone Studios, boys.” You and I sat down with our gear in the small, wood-paneled waiting area while she put on her jacket and pulled her
purse out of a drawer.

“Leaving so soon?” I asked.

“I’m afraid I don’t stick around for the late shift,” she said, glancing over her shoulder as she walked to the door. We had been granted one free session in the studio, and weeknights were the least expensive. Adam was about to enter, and he held the door for the goddess as she left. He gaped at us comically.

Outside in the parking lot, we heard Larry’s father tell him, “I want you out here at eleven. Not one second later.” We got up to help him get his drums out of the trunk, and Mr. Mullen drove away.

“Sorry,” Larry said. “He’s been a real bastard about school this week.”

“You’ll do fine on your exam tomorrow,” I told him as we brought the drums inside.

“I’ll have to if I wanna get outta that place anytime soon.”

“We’ll have you home by the stroke of eleven. Don’t worry, Cinderella,” Adam assured him.

“Cinderella at least got to stay out until midnight,” Larry grumbled. He looked around the reception area. “Isn’t there supposed to be...a guy?”

I opened the door to the hallway that led to the studio and called out, “Hello? Mr. Hayden? Jackie?”

“C’mon back,” someone said. We wrangled our instruments through the skinny corridor and reacquainted ourselves with one of the judges from Limerick. He reminded me of a young Donald Sutherland. We gaped at the studio’s 8-track recording equipment with its dozens of sliders and controls. The place smelled like an ashtray.

“Nervous?” Jackie asked.

“Yes,” you said.

“Nothing to it, lads,” he said confidently, and he helped us set up inside the cramped space on the other side of the studio’s window. “Now what we’re gonna do is this. We’ll run through your first song with everyone playing and singing at the same time. And then we’ll use that track to guide you when you record your parts individually. Understand?”

We nodded. It seemed easy enough. Logical, even. “We’re ready whenever you are, Jackie,” I said like I was Stevie Fucking Wonder. Over the next hour, we attempted to create that initial track for *Inside Out*, a hastily thrown-together song we thought we sort of knew. It was supposed to sound like *Wipeout* by way of the Kinks, but instead it was a jumble of noise. No one could keep proper time, and the less said about my strange, faux-English accent the better. I had been listening to a lot of Siouxsie and she had rubbed off on me somehow. And as was our wont in those days, we began to get a bit tetchy with each other while the clock’s second hand whirled around with sickening speed. Once we finally had a sketch of a track to work with, we were all shell-shocked, and while no one thought to ask me about it, I was hungry as fuck, Edge.

I could tell Jackie was becoming disenchanted with us, but he gamely asked Larry to play along with the track while the rest of us took a break. Adam would go second, followed by you and then me. The three of us sat on a scratchy tweed couch behind Jackie’s mixing board and stared at each other. As it turned out, recording a song was not something that came to us naturally. Although Larry sounded okay from time to time.
As we sat there reassessing our entire future, we heard a knock on the studio door, and there was Bill Graham, looking like a full-color version of his editorial photo. Not much older than us and taking everything in with his otherworldly blue eyes, he shook Jackie’s hand and asked how things were going. “About how I expected,” Jackie said, shrugging. “Good kids, though.” Larry continued to bash away, and Bill watched him for a minute before turning to us. Adam, who had been pestering Bill for weeks, introduced himself and us, and Bill laughed off his apologies for being so forward.

“Any band that’s worth a damn does whatever it takes to get noticed.” He pushed his dark hair off his forehead and smiled at us. “Consider yourselves noticed.” I pulled a folding chair up to the couch, and he sat down with us. It was hard to hear ourselves speak while Larry was drumming, but luckily it was almost Adam’s turn. While they traded places, you and I told Bill about U2’s brief history and the musicians who were our heroes. Adam began playing to the track, and his rumbling bass vibrated through the studio’s furniture. “So Adam is your manager as well?” Bill asked.

“Yeah. He sort of wanted to.”

“He’s a nice kid. Maybe a little too nice. If you’re interested, I know someone who is looking to manage a new band. A ‘baby’ band, preferably.”

“Who says we’re a baby band?” Larry muttered.

“Well, just look at you.” Fair enough.

“Why is he interested in a baby band?” you asked.

Bill smiled. “He’s tired of dealing with jaded old pros like the ones you met in Limerick. He wants a band he can guide from the beginning. But it has to be the right fit. He’s rather picky.” He took out one of his business cards and wrote a name and phone number on the back of it. Paul McGuinness.

“This Paul...he’s good?”

“He’s smart and he has some experience in show business. And he’s not afraid to be a little pushy when necessary. Give him a call if you like. I’m sure he’d enjoy meeting you.” Bill stood and shook our hands. “As I did. Have a good night, lads. It’ll get easier after this, I promise.”

“Oh! We just had photos made, if you think you could use them,” I said, standing. “Let me get my bag.”

Bill seemed amused as I rifled through my duffel bag, unearthed my Irish binder, and handed him an 8x10 of us. You were looking particularly precious in it, holding your guitar...the same way you held me. “To answer your question, I’ll be happy to write a little blurb about you, Bono.”

I grinned. “Thanks for being here, Bill. It means a lot to us. And please tell Paul McGuinness to expect a call.”

The rest of the evening was bumpy, with stops and starts and the general awkwardness that comes from trying something new. Your job was the most difficult, and you had a rough time playing to the track at first. Your guitar’s volume was bashfully low (you later said you thought that was what you were supposed to do since this was not a regular live performance). I watched you struggle and wished I could help you as you became increasingly self-conscious. Eventually you recorded a couple of decent takes, and you took off your hair-denting headphones, visibly relieved. It was nearly nine o’clock.

Given enough time, I might be able to come up with a bullshit explanation for what Inside Out’s lyrics meant, but if I’m honest I’d have to say they were a simply-dressed word salad that made sense...
to me when I wrote them in early April. The lyrics’ haphazard nature made them difficult to remember, so I had to rely on what I had scrawled on a piece of notebook paper. Even though it was strange to be in that small room singing into that big microphone by myself as the rest of you watched, after a while I found myself enjoying the process. Your face in the window helped me relax and unleash my voice, which poured out of me like a rampaging tiger, and I hadn’t the faintest clue about taming it.

The clock was ticking, and Jackie seemed eager to get another song going, so the four of us piled back into the performance space and started to play Night Fright, another relatively new song. Why we chose to record unfamiliar tunes was anyone’s guess, of course. Initial nerves out of the way, we played an acceptable version after about seven attempts. Once Larry had run through his part twice, we had officially lost track of time, so we were surprised to see an annoyed Larry Sr appear beside us at 11:05. His son was engrossed in his drums and did not look up until he was finished, at which point he saw his father staring at him with crossed arms, and he sighed, “Oh, shit.” And that was the end of Larry’s time in the studio.

The rest of us spent another couple of hours there, recording our parts and watching Jackie cobble them together into demos. “I wish my sound was bigger,” you said, finishing your English homework while listening. Jackie had turned your volume up as high as it would go, but you still sounded slightly anemic. “You can always play as loudly as you like in there, you know,” he told you, but it was a bit too late for us to hear that excellent advice.

Eventually he played a rough version of Inside Out, and you, Adam, and I winced at various points. “I just feel like we sound better live,” I said, yawning.

“Of course you do. You’ve got kids screaming and you’re distracted by them and you’re having a good time together. But when you strip all that away and actually listen to each of you, your mistakes become crystal clear, unfortunately.”

“Yeah,” you said dejectedly.

“Don’t worry about it too much. The more you perform, the better you’ll get. I’ve seen it happen a hundred times. You can always shop these songs around and see if anyone’s interested, but you should give yourselves a chance to grow.”

“Do you think we can get to where we should be?” I said.

“Of course you can. You’re a born performer. And the four of you together...there’s something special going on that doesn’t come with practice. You either have it or you don’t. You have it, and it’s more important than anything else.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“It’s why you won that competition, you know.”

We smiled at each other. It was nearly 1:00, and two of us had school the next day (actually later that morning). After thanking Jackie profusely for his time and encouragement, we headed out to the studio’s small parking lot.

Adam started his father’s boxy Renault. “Oh yeah, I might have a job delivering plates and bowls and things,” he said, looking up at us. “I’ll get to drive a van.”

“Cool,” you said.

“So when we get a van, at least one of us will know how to drive it,” he said, turning on the car’s
headlights.

“That’s the spirit.”

He waved goodbye, and exhausted, we collapsed into the bucket seats of your mum’s car. Your parents had been teaching you how to drive that spring, and your learner’s permit allowed you to practice as long as you had a passenger with a license. Such as mine was. Dad and Norman had begrudgingly taught me how to drive the previous summer in case I needed that skill for a future job, but I never got to use Dad’s car for anything fun, of course. Not that I blamed him. I was and am an average to below-average driver. But that was good enough for you.

We looked at each other. “Hungry?” you asked, and I laughed. “We’ll see what’s in the refrigerator.” In the midst of all the excitement that evening, it was easy to forget that I had planned to stay overnight at your house for a few dreamy hours before wretched school would force us out of your snug, cozy bed.

Your family was asleep when we snuck in, of course, and the refrigerator’s light made us squint. Hope you had fun, boys was written on a piece of paper attached to a couple of meatloaf sandwiches. You grabbed them, took my hand, and silently led me through the dark house to your room upstairs. You closed the door and turned on a dim lamp. “Your mom is the best,” I said as quietly as possible. Then I stretched out on your bed in anticipation of making sweet love to that sandwich. You stifled a laugh and joined me.

“You’re sleeping with me,” you whispered while removing the waxed paper from your sandwich.

“Why, Edge…” I said. A mouth full of meatloaf could not stop me from kissing your cheek. I gestured at the door and swallowed. “We won’t be discovered?”

“I’m a teenage boy. They know better than to barge in on me when I’m in my room. Let’s just say they’ve learned a thing or two from my brother.”

I nodded knowingly.

“I’ll wake us up in time. And if I hear anyone coming, I’ll roll onto my sleeping bag down there.” I looked at the floor. A sleeping bag and pillow were by the bed. Clearly you had thought of everything.

We took turns in the bathroom as quickly and quietly as we could. “Looks like we’ve got about four hours,” you said, checking your clock radio as we cuddled in your bed wearing t-shirts and underwear (just to be on the safe side).

“I hate how tired I am,” I whispered against your shoulder. But I loved the way your legs felt as they intertwined with mine: surprisingly solid, warm, and soft with silky dark hair.

“Me too.” Your hand rested against the small of my back. We kissed, sleepy and content, for a little while. Your tongue was slow and heavenly, and your sheets smelled like they had spent the afternoon luxuriating in the sunshine.

“Just kissing is making me hard.”

“Me too.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, B.”
Your clock radio flipped on approximately fifteen seconds later at 6:00. *I've seen your picture / Your name in lights above it / This is your big debut / It's like a dream come true...*

“Respect to Steely Dan,” you yawned. We listened to those two coked-out guys and their battalion of studio musicians and thought about the kind of time and money that went into the production of that slick piece of work. You buried your face in my neck, I looked out at the pink sky, and we were back where we were fifteen seconds earlier. Someone turned on a faucet elsewhere in the house.

“We should probably get up.”

“If you really think so.”

You let me use the bathroom first, and after a while we reconvened downstairs in the kitchen, where I chatted with your lovely sister, who was always so curious about U2 in general and me in particular. And I asked your mother how she could have possibly known that I had been craving a meatloaf sandwich for days and days and if psychic abilities ran in her family.

“Not to my knowledge, but my great aunt Filomena was, shall we say, touched...?”

“Very interesting, Mother Edge.”

She chuckled and slid a couple of fried eggs onto my plate. “Coffee?”

“Lots of cream, lots of sugar, please.”

You walked in and joined your sister, father, and me at the table while your mum returned to the stove. “Someone looks awfully sleepy,” she said to you.

“Today is gonna be endless,” you said, putting your heavy head down on the table and looking up at me.

“At least it’s Friday, right?” I asked, and you nodded.

“Tell us how it went last night,” Gill said, and I launched into a quick description of our first recording adventure and how it was a little more than we’d bargained for. Eggs arrived for you, and you sat up and added a few comments from time to time.

“Most bands take days and days to record, though, right?” your father asked.

“I guess I kind of thought we’d go in there like Elvis and make some one-take magic, and we’d be on the radio this weekend, you know? But apparently there’s a lot more to it.”

“I’m sure it was a good learning experience,” he said.

“Do you want to try it again?” Gill asked.

“Of course,” I said, looking at you.

“Even though we weren’t ready at all, it was fascinating,” you said, chasing a slippery bit of egg around your plate with a fork and trapping it with a piece of toast.

“You’ll get another chance, I’m sure,” your mum said, patting your shoulder.

“Just keep playing and learning your craft,” your dad said.

“I believe in you,” Gill said, nodding at me. I winked at her.
“Oh. We’ve also got a lead on a manager who’s looking for a young band,” you said.

Your dad thought about this. “Would you let me talk with him before you make any big decisions? I don’t want some charlatan taking advantage of you lads.”

“Sure.”

I love your family, Edge.

A few days later at the shoe store, I was delighted to see you walk in without warning. I was taking several boxes of rejected shoes back to the storage room. I immediately stopped what I was doing to take care of you, obviously.

“Good morning, sir. How may I help you?” I asked with unabashed glee.

You rolled your eyes. “Well, I was in the neighborhood—”

“You were not.”

“In fact I was, so I thought I’d stop by. Mum wants me to get shoes for graduation. Because apparently these are not gonna cut it.” You indicated your standard gray runners.

“Leave everything to me.” I had you sit down, and I knelt before you. “Let’s get you measured.” I batted your hands away when you attempted to unlace your right shoe. “That’s my job.” I placed your socked foot on the metal measuring device and had you stand.

“I used to be a nine. I’m pretty sure my feet have stopped growing.”

“You are in fact a ten, Edge. A perfect ten.” I may have fondled your ankle just a tiny bit. “So what are we thinking about for shoes? Because I see you in a boot. One your mother would approve of, probably.”

“You’re the expert,” you said, smiling.

And didn’t I have a field day, trotting out as many options for you as I could find and advising you on fit and comfort and what suited you, my darling boyfriend? And didn’t you enjoy watching me dote on you, on my knees, between your legs? I saved my personal favorites for last. The leather was black and supple, the design was classic, and something about the sturdy silver buckle on the side made me ever-so-slightly lightheaded. I put both of them on you, straightened your black jeans over them, and said, “These are the ones.”

You got up and looked at them in one of the floor mirrors we had. “They feel better than the rest of them.”

“Right. No annoying wearing-in period with these.” I raised my chin at Mr. Murphy, who was reading a newspaper at the other end of the store. Business was not exactly booming that morning. I whispered, “So sexy I’d kiss them if I could.”

“Maybe later.”

I took your money at the cash register, and we stared at each other while I attempted to make the transaction last as long as possible. “Thank you for helping me...Bono,” you said, slipping me a fiver. And something about your tone was direct and shockingly hot. As simple as that sentence was,
“Wanna do something with me later?” you asked me the following Saturday afternoon while we were practicing in the band room at school.

“Always.”

You were wearing your new boots. They contrasted with your old painted jeans in a way that was just so you, and you stood at least two inches taller than me. Which I also liked. Kind of.

You smiled at your guitar as if you were sharing a private joke with it, and we continued to work on songs and generally mess around until sunset. Larry was in a jubilant mood because he had passed his intermediate exam with flying colors. This allowed him to leave school early if he wanted to, and at the end of the month he would begin a job as a messenger for a U.S. company that was exploring the Irish Sea for oil. Lots of our contemporaries were choosing this route—most families relied on their children to provide additional income, and Larry’s father encouraged him to do this.

“Can’t believe we’ll all be out of here at the same time,” he said. We would need to find a new rehearsal space soon, and I knew you and I would miss the band room a great deal.

“Maybe we should do a farewell performance on the last day of school,” I suggested to nods from the rest of you.

Later you offered to give me a ride home in the Volkswagen, and when you pulled onto the M1 and headed north, I felt the need to say something. “I don’t wanna tell you how to drive, the Edge.”

You patted my knee. “Thanks.”

“But is there some reason why you’re not taking me to my house?”

“Everything I do is for a reason.”

“You don’t say?”

“Enjoy the ride, B.”

So I sat back and did as I was told. You turned on the radio, saying, “I think the signal will still be able to reach us.” *Teenage Kicks* was playing.

“Oh, I love this song.”

“Do you ever listen to Capital? It’s a pirate radio station I found last week. No adverts or anything.”

“I will now.”

I looked out the window. The lights of the city faded to dusky countryside, and I felt safe and content in that egg-shaped car with you. I blew on the window and drew a bee in the condensation with my finger. Elvis Costello, Talking Heads, The Boomtown Rats, The Jam, Devo, Blondie, The Clash... twenty-five minutes of songs we loved. We sang and you held my hand from time to time. You slowed the car down as we approached the sleepy coastal village of Skerries. I had been there a few times as a child with my parents, who liked to look at the windmills and a lighthouse on an island in the distance. The town was almost level with and perilously close to the sea, and I imagined a respectable storm at high tide easily taking everything out.
But not that night. You seemed to know what you were doing as you drove us to a dark and obscure parking lot near the water. Had you made a trial run before taking me there? You must have. You parked beside some kind of shed, shut off the engine, and smiled at me.

Reaching behind your seat, you pulled out a white box and gave it to me. I squinted at the sticker on the lid in the dim light from a faraway street lamp. “Mannings Bakery? I fucking love you. Whatever this is.” Inside was an oversized circular cream puff, which you told me was a choux ring. It was filled with Irish cream and covered with coffee-flavored icing. Two forks.

“Happy birthday, almost,” you said, kissing my cheek. “Do you want a candle? Because I’ve got a candle.”

“Dazzle me with your candle, Edge.”

You dug into your jacket’s pocket and produced a small red candle and a lighter. You planted the candle in the frosting and lit it. Oh, that ring looked delicious. “Please don’t make me sing happy birthday.”

I smiled at you. “Why don’t you whisper it?”

You nodded, pushed my hair away from my ear, and breathed. “Happy birthday, dear Bono.” There was that tone again. I moved my head a bit and kissed your mouth. “Make a wish.”

“Oh, you know I will.” I blew out the candle, whose wick remained a red-orange ember for a few seconds, and the car smelled faintly of sugar and smoke. Then, laughing, we proceeded to demolish that choux ring. You cracked your window, and the eternal sounds of the sea filtered in.

“So are we getting out? Can’t really see anything now. Did you in fact bring me here to drown me, Edge?”

“That was supposed to be a surprise.”

“Psycho.”

“I just wanted to go someplace private where we could make out for a while, and I know you like the sea. And we’ve got this incredible car at our disposal,” you said, reaching behind you and patting the car’s small, bench-like back seat.

“Sounds good to me.” We got out of the car, and in the glow of its dome light, we pushed the front seats forward. “Gonna put this dry cleaning up front,” I said, lifting the garment bag that had been laid across the back seat.

“That’s actually for you,” you said.

You had my full attention. “What did you do?”

“Open it.”

I unzipped the bag, and nestled inside was the black blazer I had tried on and loved and whose price tag was bullshit. “Oh, Edge.” You were pleased with yourself. “But how?”

“You know last weekend when I bought these boots from you, and I said I was in the neighborhood? This was why I was in the neighborhood. They were having a sale.”

“Still. It’s too much.”
“I had some money saved from last semester.”

I nodded. Your parents, who considered your academic career to be your actual job, paid you for your good marks. This practice started out when Dik was a little boy, and you and Gill demanded equal treatment when you started receiving grade reports. While I’m sure your parents came to regret introducing this motivational system, their children’s stellar classroom performances spoke for themselves, and anyway, soon they would have only one child to deal with.

“Also some of that shoe money may have gone toward this jacket. Put it on.”

“Anything you say, love.” I took it off its hanger and slipped it on. My yellow t-shirt was not the best thing to wear with it, but it felt exactly the way I remembered. The dome light clicked off, and we were engulfed in darkness again.

“Yeah. When you put it on that first time, you were so beautiful I was just...stunned. And it made me angry to think that somebody else might buy it. Because it belongs to you.”

“Thank you, Edge. I don’t know what to say.”

You touched my face. “I’m sure you’ll think of something.” You pulled me close, and my hands caressed your chest and your neck, and we were kissing in the dark for god knows how long. We were exactly where we wanted to be, two boys in love, two almost-men in love.

Your face was deliciously rough, and when I bit your neck, I could feel the hairs on your arms stand up. I took your right hand and lifted it to my face. Kissing your wrist, I whispered, “Not now, but one day. Do you want me to suck you?”

You stopped breathing. “Oh yes.”

Inspired, I nuzzled the baby-soft length of your inner forearm with the tip of my nose and followed with a line of little kisses. “I want to, Edge. I think about it all the time.”

“Baby.”

Deeper kisses along your arm. “The skin of your cock will be just as soft as this skin, probably softer. But at the same time you’ll be hard. So hard.”

Your breathing became shallow, and your fingers stroked my hair as I continued to pretend. I slid my lips along the side of your wrist, moving halfway down your forearm and up again. Your hips shifted, and you seemed to be adjusting yourself. I did the same. “Oh god,” you whispered.

“Do you like the way this feels, Edge?”

“Yes. Please.”

Good. Because I didn’t want to stop doing it. While I couldn’t really see you, I could hear you, and I could feel every muscle in your body becoming beautifully tense. I loved that I had made you that way. I felt like a sculptor. I held your arm tightly and continued to treat it the same way I would wish to be treated. My tongue became a bow sliding along the strings of a violin. And then I was sucking your wrist in earnest. You writhed beneath me, clearly losing control and giving it all to me, and I smiled against your skin.

“And then, Edge, when the time is right, I’ll tap my tongue right here where I can feel your pulse.” I did this for a few seconds, and you gasped. “Right here until you come.”
“Baby...” Your back arched, your head tilted back, and you shuddered and moaned with pleasure.

“Edge, love,” I released your arm, returned to your mouth, and kissed you until my lips felt swollen and smooth. I had made you come for the first time.

You hovered in a state of bliss for a couple of minutes, and as you slowly came down, you patted your jeans and said, “Well, that’s a mess.”

“Those jeans? Who would know?”

“Good point.” You touched the sleeve of my new jacket. “Maybe you should take that off for a while.”

“It’s served its purpose,” I said, draping that pretty thing over the back of the passenger’s seat. And because being short has its advantages at least once or twice a year, I stretched out with my head on one end of the back seat, and I put my bent legs in your lap. Your hand worked its way under my shirt, and I raised my body so you could push it up higher. We moved around a bit. Then I felt your lips glide across the shelf of my ribcage, and I knew I was a goner.

“This is alright, B,” you said. “We can do this.”

“Yeah.”

“We’re just two boys in a car. Talking and kissing.”

Holding me tightly with your beautiful hands and kissing my stomach? Sure, we could do this. “That’s really all it is.”

“We’re being so good.”

I moaned. “So good.”

I thought I was being very clever with your arm. But you...your mouth. It was slow and deliberate as it worked its way over my torso, waking up every hair, every cell that had previously just been along for the ride with me, lazily drowsing under dozens of shirts for nearly eighteen years until that night in that car with you, when all of them were shocked awake as if they were caught in an earthquake.

“Ticklish?”

“I’m fine. You’re perfect. Keep...doing that.”

“I love doing this.” You kissed your way along the waistband of my jeans—maddening, and once you reached the center, I felt your chin rub against something that was definitely not just along for the ride.

“God, Edge.”

You moved up so our faces were closer together. You sucked on my earlobe and said, “That jacket...”

“Yeah?”

“When I saw you in it, you were just...upsettingly beautiful.” Your breath was warm against my cheek, and as it harmonized with the sound of the waves outside, I imagined I was being cradled by some loving, benevolent force.
“Oh.”

“You were. Your face, your hair, your body...I kept seeing you every night when I closed my eyes. And your lips.” You kissed them. “Thank god you let me kiss you. They were so red that day.”

“Red.”

We were forehead to forehead, and one of your hands returned to my shirt, coaxing it up some more. “I felt this almost painful urge to push you back into your fitting room and do things to you, but at the same time I didn’t feel like I could even touch you.”

“Oh, love.” I touched your dear face. I already knew every angle and every plane by heart. Another kiss. Possessive.

“And I think you’re gonna have a hard time in the future, because men will see you, and they’ll be jealous of you because you’re brilliant and all the girls will love you and you’re just so beautiful, but in this strange way that’s definitely male but also kind of female.” That hand was leisurely exploring my chest, stroking me and pinching gently. I could barely breathe.

“You’re unusual and sometimes just...startling, and yeah, that will make men jealous but also kind of confused because they’ll want to be you but in the back of some of their minds they’ll also just want you, and they won’t be able to do anything about either.” Your hips, after enduring heroic levels of restraint, finally came to rest against mine, and I felt you thrust. You were becoming hard again, but I felt like I was climbing higher, up into the sky.

You weren’t stopping. Your voice seemed distant and muted, but I heard you say, “So some men might feel like they should hate you because they’re sort of repulsed by the way your beauty makes them feel, you know? I mean, it’s so Irish to hate the one who has everything. But I don’t. I never will.”

“Edge,” I groaned.

You raised your hips and kissed my cheek. “I’m so in love with you.”

“You take my breath away,” I whispered.

You returned to my stomach and kissed it some more, only these kisses were more insistent. Hotter. Your tongue slicked me down and worshiped me, and again, your chin. You knew exactly what you were doing to me. I was soaring, and when I looked down I saw the tops of clouds. Then: “Not tonight, but some night in the future...do you want me to suck you?”

Did you actually say that or had I imagined it? Whatever the case, a response of Oh, yes was not inappropriate. Just the thought of you taking me in your mouth...I was so close. Higher. I was reaching some dizzy realm where all the blood in my body wanted to be in one and only one place.

“Edge...I just wanna hear myself say it to you.”

“Yes.”

“Fuck me. Oh my god.”

I lost control. That orgasm was shattering. I was breaking the sound barrier and reaching the outer limits of the atmosphere where the sky shifts from blue to black and all the stars come out.

“Baby,” you repeated as I caught my breath. You kissed my damp forehead and held me in your
“Edge. Edge…”

“I know. So good.”

“I’ll never get over this.”

“I won’t either.”

Forehead to forehead once again, we laughed softly.

We got back in the front seats, and when you started the car, I noticed the bee I had drawn in my steamy window. I rolled it down so you could see outside, and we exited the parking lot, with each of us enjoying the sly thrill of having gotten away with something a little dangerous. I turned the radio down as we drove back to the main road.

“What you said… Edge, I’m nobody special.”

You glanced at me. The right side of your face was bathed in the faint amber glow of the console. “Bono. Believe me, you are. You are to me, and I know you will be special to a lot of people.”

“I’m just this…guy.”

“You’re the boy—you’re the man I love. I meant every word.”

“I love you, too, Edge.”

You nodded back at the jacket. “I want you to take that home and keep it in your closet. And when you start feeling like you’re just this…guy, I want you to put it on and feel it surround you. That jacket is me. It’s my love for you.”

I drew a small heart in the reformed condensation on the window.

We drove home, both of us quiet but affectionate. I put my hand on your knee and said, “You’re younger than me but sometimes you seem older.”

“Mum says I’m an old soul.”

“Maybe you are.”

My actual eighteenth birthday was the following Wednesday because it was obviously too much to ask for it to land on a weekend. I got ready for school, poured myself a bowl of cereal, and worried about the upcoming Irish exam I really needed to pass. I gazed out the kitchen window and onto our street. Nothing new. Overcast. A sparrow hopped along the window sill. The garbage truck was at our neighbors’ house. Had I remembered to take out the trash? I had.

“Morning,” Dad said, opening the refrigerator and removing the butter and a jar of marmalade.

“Hey.”

“I couldn’t find anyone to wrap it.” He set a small shopping bag beside my orange juice and patted my shoulder.
“Dad,” I said, picking it up.

“Happy birthday, Paul.”

“What is it?” I asked, grinning and peering inside. It was a book—a leather-bound journal—and a hinged box containing a dark blue pen with a white dot on the clip. It was heavier than the sort of bargain-bin pens I was used to holding, and I loved it right away.

“I thought you could use it when you write your songs,” Dad said, turning to slice some bread.

“Yes. I will do that. It’s beautiful.”

He nodded at the toaster. “You’re a good son. I don’t say it enough.”

“Ah, thank you, Dad.”

“Any plans for your birthday?”

“Ali’s doing something for me after school, I think, as a surprise. She’s been acting suspicious.”

“She’s a nice girl.”

“She really is.”

* 

The good thing about having a birthday on an ordinary day late in the school year is that word will get around because everyone is bored out of their minds. In an unprecedented and gratifying dual public display of affection, Ali kissed me and you hugged me by the main entrance. Then plenty of friends, acquaintances, and people I barely knew wished me well that morning. Each one of them spent the first nine months of their lives—their pre-lives—growing inside the belly of a woman, I thought as I sat down at a table in the library to endure the first of several free periods I had during the day.

I looked out at the dull sky and thought about Mum. I knew so little about the story behind my own birth, which must have been relatively unremarkable. There were no tales of me being born in a taxi or during a frightening hail storm. No Mum in distress or Dad fainting. But eighteen years ago, right around the same time I sat down in the library, I made my way out of that woman’s body and into the world.

And there I was. I took out my pen and my journal and made up my own story.

Monday morning
Eighteen years dawning
I said how long
Say how long

It was one dull morning
I woke the world with bawling
I was so sad
They were so glad
Lia Fáil

Chapter Notes

The world is garbage right now, so please enjoy the following sunny chapter about our young heroes, set in June 1978. I would like to dedicate this one to MissEllaVation, who fights the good fight every day. <33333

That thing about institutional green is true.
Mother Edge really did make lunch for them.
I decided that in the 1970s maybe the grass on that hill was substantially taller than it is now. Because romance.
The name of the ice cream place is real, or at least it was real. I heard about it on a podcast last week.
We just clicked over to 500 hits on this story, so thank you very much for reading and coming back.
If you ever visit the Lia Fáil, please give it a kiss for me. :)

I continue to bite off more than I can chew with these chapters, Edge. Once again, this one will conclude the next time I write to you. In the meantime, it appears that I have a date with Oprah on this gorgeous autumn day in Chicago. We will be going shopping, and it will be televised, and I sincerely hope you won’t be too embarrassed by how un-rock ‘n’ roll all of it is. If nothing else, it may shut me up temporarily regarding this latest obsession of mine. And despite your thoughtful arguments against it, I am afraid the all-caps and the parentheses are here to stay. I am prepared to accept any disciplinary measures you may have in mind for me. And now, allow me take you back to a simpler time. Please let me know your thoughts after you have (RED) this.

(B.)

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“Well.” Mr. McKenzie said upon reading the contract. He stroked his salt-and-pepper beard. “It looks like CBS would essentially own you and everything you would create over the next five years.”

Still coming down from our farewell performance at Mt. Temple, the four of us were clearing out the flotsam and jetsam that had accumulated in our section of the band room’s instrument storage area, which was essentially a wall of open wooden boxes. I was on my hands and knees and had just discovered a mint-condition pink eraser in a back corner of my storage compartment. I sat up and tossed it to you.

“Thanks, B.”

“So it’s a deal with the devil?” I asked Mr. McKenzie.

“Yes, and this devil seems to think you’re desperate and stupid to boot. If I were you, I would politely decline this offer.”

You nodded and peeled your masking tape name label from your wooden box and looked at the
blank space it left behind with a certain amount of sentimentality. “Yeah, that’s what Dad said, too.”

“Don’t worry. You’ll get other offers. The students loved you today.”

“Thanks. And thanks for letting us practice here,” I said, smiling at the Hot Press blurb about us that Mr. McKenzie had tacked onto his bulletin board. He had taken down most of the other posters and notices that had decorated the band room’s walls.

Larry stuffed his things into his gym bag and looked around, his bright eyes still so childlike. It seemed a shame that he had to quit school. “I can’t believe this is over,” he said.

“Ahh, but it’s just the beginning for you lads. You can always come back and visit, you know.”

“Okay.”

“Where do you plan to rehearse now?”

“Dad’s garden shed. The acoustics are perfect,” you said, kissing your fingertips sarcastically.

“If we moved some things around, I wonder if we could use Mum’s greenhouse, too,” Adam mused while you and I exchanged a look. “But maybe the noise would make the glass vibrate too much.”

“I would not recommend doing that.”

He motioned for us to help him stack the chairs, and soon the room looked empty and large. I glanced at his office door fondly. Then Mr. McKenzie put on his Greek fisherman’s cap and picked up his trumpet and a crate full of records. We followed him outside. “Have a good summer, boys,” he said as he walked to the faculty parking lot.

“Thank you, sir!”

“You can call me Jack now,” he called over his shoulder.

We glanced at each other and silently acknowledged the weirdness of calling a teacher by their first name. “Bye, Jack!” I yelled.

Yeah. It was weird.

* 

A few days later, we had a gig at the Project Arts Centre as one of two acts supporting The Gamblers. Paul McGuinness, with whom Adam had been playing phone tag for a few weeks, hinted that he might be there.

We were waiting for Adam in the ramshackle backstage area, and he rushed in, uncharacteristically flustered. “He’s here. He’s actually here.”

You eyed his pink leopard print jeans. “Glad I didn’t wear mine tonight. Imagine the embarrassment.”

Delighted, Adam said, “You have them, too?”

“No.” You shook your head, my misunderstood and mildly exasperated genius.

“Anyway. McGuinness is here. At a spot in the back.” He took a seat beside Larry at a card table in the center of the room and helped himself to a few snack crackers from the opened box that was
presumably for us.

“What does he look like?” Larry asked.

“I dunno. A chubby Elton John? With an ascot?”

Larry recoiled slightly. “Is that a good thing or a bad thing?”

“No idea. He saw me walk in with my bass and introduced himself.”

“Was he nice?”

“Yeah. He has a British accent. And old, too. Easily in his late twenties.”

I nodded at the three of you. “Wow. I hope we have a good set.”

We still had no way of knowing how any show would go, of course. It really was a coin toss. Some
nights we connected, and other nights we did not. Technical difficulties were often to blame, along
with our own incompetence. We were also at the mercy of our audiences, which could range from
enthusiastic to apathetic to hostile. Since we were the first of two support acts, our performance
would be brief.

You were sitting on the floor with your back against a wall and writing something in a small spiral
notepad. I sat beside you, grabbed your pen, and added a block-letter U2 to the wall’s peeling and
graffiti-adorned paint.

“This paint almost matches your eyes,” I said, admiring my handiwork.

“It’s called institutional green. They use it in hospitals.” You smiled. “Do you wanna know why?”

Oh, Edge. “Of course I do.”

“You know when you look at a color for a long time, and it starts to burn itself into your eyes? And
then if you look at anything else you’ll see the opposite color, kind of like when you look at the
sun?”

“Oh. I guess…?”

“Well, the green is for the doctors. When they’re operating they see a lot of blood, and the opposite
of red is green, so when they look up after cutting into someone’s stomach or whatever, they see
green. So green walls make it easier for their eyes to adjust.”

“What the hell, Edge?”

“Mr. Gallagher told us about it one day when we were doing color wheel stuff.” You shrugged and
took your pen back.

I looked at you with the kind of disbelief one reserves for teeth-gnashingly cute baby animals and
hoped this band thing would work out...if for no other reason than it would allow me to spend years
and years sitting around and listening to you say things.

Following a quick sound check behind a curtain the color of a bruise, we stood backstage and waited
to be announced. I pictured the crowd--most likely not there to see us--and I imagined myself
winning them over.

“Let’s get ‘em, B,” you whispered.
“Every last one of them,” I said. And I meant it.

The three of you began playing the first of five songs, and you didn’t sound half bad in that small theater. This gave me enough confidence to make eye contact with every face I saw, male or female. It didn’t matter. If they reacted, I threw another look back at them that I hoped would say, *You belong to us now.* I kept doing that until I turned to you. *You belong to me now, Edge.*

You grinned and lowered your eyes, and your playing was effortless, as if our songs had become a part of your body. Larry seemed relieved, and Adam’s pink leopard pants went from looking questionable to inspiring envy. Our last number was a cover of Wire’s *Mannequin.* You had heard them on that pirate radio station of yours, devoured their album, and taught us that song a couple of weeks before the gig. I scanned the crowd of about two hundred for possible McGuinnesses, and near the back wall I noticed the glint of spectacles catching the light. I pointed at that sparkle and sang, *Tell me, why don’t you tell me, tell me, why don’t you tell me.*

“Thank you. We’re called U2,” I said as we finished our set to respectable applause. A girl on your side of the stage had been dancing with abandon the entire time, and I grabbed her outstretched hand as we exited. She kissed my knuckles and left a scarlet lip print behind. I showed it to you and pressed it against your cheek as the curtain closed. We collected our gear. The next support group was called The School Kids, who were surprisingly menacing, and we tried to get out of their way as quickly as possible.

Paul McGuinness was waiting for us in that little institutional green room. He stood when we entered and gestured at us with a half-eaten cracker. “Not bad at all, lads. I’m Paul. Would you like to go to the pub next door and talk?”

“Yes,” we said in near-unison, and we introduced ourselves as we exited through a back door. The night air felt like the embrace of the ice maiden of my dreams.

Paul shook your hand and asked you a couple of questions while Larry, Adam, and I followed. “He is not wearing an ascot,” I whispered to Adam. “You are a huge liar.”

“Well, you’ve heard him speak. Doesn’t he sound like the kind of man who would be right at home wearing an ascot?”

“You may have a point.”

The pub was crowded, and the five of us pulled some extra chairs around a tiny circular table and sat down. Paul told us a bit about himself. He was a sort of jack of all trades in the local entertainment business and had dipped his toe into the worlds of music and film production. He was married and had responsibilities, so if he decided to manage us, he would give the job his full attention and do whatever he could to help us succeed. I didn’t know if he was courting us or if we were courting him, but he scored some points with me when he complimented your unique playing style.

“He keeps getting better each time,” I said while you rolled your cocktail napkin into a tight little cone.

Paul turned his attention to me and said, “I’ve watched so many bands where the singer can’t be bothered to acknowledge the audience. But you look people in the eye. It’s refreshing.”

“It’s just something I do,” I said. “If you can’t make a connection, why are you even up there, you know?”

“Exactly.” He looked at Adam and patted his own thinning hair. “Many a man would give his left
arm to have a head of hair like yours, lad.” We chuckled, and then all of us followed his eyes over to Larry, who clearly recognized Paul’s *How old can you possibly be?* expression and massaged the bridge of his nose in frustration. “You still have egg shell on your beak, don’t you?” Paul asked with a grin. As we laughed, he muttered to himself, “Christ, all of you do.”

We talked about Dublin’s music scene for a while before Paul announced that he needed to get home soon. As he rose from his chair, he looked at all of us and said a sentence I wanted to tattoo across my chest: “I think you have what it takes.” Nodding at Adam, he said, “I’ll be in touch.”

Once he was gone, Adam leaned forward and asked, “We want him to manage us, right?” Nods from all of us. “So do I,” he said.

We bumped into Guggi and Gavin on the sidewalk near the Project Arts Centre. They were part of a cluster of young people who were listening to a street preacher. The spitting image of James Taylor, he rattled off the Beatitudes with joy in his voice and his eyes directed skyward. One of his three associates, a woman with feathered strawberry-blonde hair and a serene smile, handed out fliers with a big logo at the top whose style could only be described as groovy. “Shalom,” it said.

I pocketed the flier and promptly forgot all about it, which was understandable given the circumstances. But Guggi and Guggi had been watching that Shalom group for a lot longer than the rest of us had that night, and they talked about them and looked for them whenever we were anywhere near Temple Bar.

Finally liberated from the confines of Mt. Temple, we were excited to step into the real world. What a relief it was to rehearse every day without also having to memorize poetry or figure out fucking triangle minutiae or translate our country’s impenetrable language into one that the rest of the planet could understand. Day after day of limitless free time stretched out before us.

The band met every morning at your house to work on new songs in your father’s shed. The word “shed” implies a grim, one room country shack kind of structure, but in reality it was a well-kept two car garage without the cars. Your dad liked to tinker around in there with his various obsessions, and that summer his focus was woodworking. The scent of sawdust and varnish was appealing and, if one forgot to crack a window, one could develop a bit of a buzz. We helped him move his things to the left side, and we occupied the right. Luckily most of the neighbors either did not mind the noise or were away at work while we practiced. And your mum could be counted on to bring us lunch.

“Cheese sandwiches, anyone?”

“Mother Edge!”

She seemed to understand that Larry and I needed extra attention, and she doted on us in a motherly way, with her questions about whether we were getting enough sleep or if we minded all that hair in our eyes or if we wanted more tea. She also had a tendency to slip extra snacks into our coat pockets and give us the kind of hugs she knew we weren’t receiving.

“You boys are so serious. It’s wonderful to see,” she said on several occasions.

And we were serious. If our dream was to become our livelihood, we didn’t want to waste a moment. But Adam, Larry, and I had afternoon jobs several days per week. This afforded you some extra time where all you did was practice and improve. You craved those solitary hours with your guitar, and most mornings you had new ideas to present to us. Adam continued to chip away at Paul McGuinness, who was still very interested but unwilling to commit until he saw us perform a couple
more times, and Adam hustled to secure gigs for us that summer.

But we were still boys, and the weather was spectacular for Dublin, which is to say it was occasionally partly cloudy and not completely chilly and damp. “Edge,” I whined one lovely afternoon when it was just the two of us in the shed. You were playing the same chord sequence again and again, and I was lusting over your hands and envying your fretboard.

“Yeah?”

“I wanna go somewhere.”

“Like where?”

“I don’t know. I wanna get in the car and drive. Or have you drive. Just for a change of scenery.”

You thought about this for a few seconds and grinned at the shed door. “I’ll ask Mum.”

You left and returned a few minutes later jingling the car keys and asking, “Have you ever been to the Hill of Tara?”

“There was a picture of it on the cover of my Irish textbook, but no, I haven’t.”

“How is that even possible?”

“I dunno, Edge, Dad’s not one for taking random joyrides these days.”

“Ah. Sorry.” You kissed my cheek sheepishly.

I smiled. “It’s fine.” I kissed you back. “I wanna go! Show me your Hill of Tara.”

We got in the Volkswagen, and you consulted a map that was stashed beneath the driver’s seat along with a Mad magazine from the previous summer.

“Hey, can I borrow that?”

“It’s Gill’s, but I’m sure she won’t mind. Actually, knowing her? She’ll be thrilled.” You pointed at Alfred E. Neuman’s face. “I used to kind of look like him when I was little.”

I was aghast. “Fucking blasphemy, Edge.”

You grinned, placed the map in my lap, and traced a route with your index finger. “It’s up here,” you said, pointing at a spot some forty miles northwest of Dublin and surrounded by nothingness. “Looks like M1, M50, M2. And then I assume there will be signs. Wanna navigate?” I gazed at you vacuously. “M1, M50, M2,” you repeated a few more times.

Following some standard roundabout confusion where everyone seemed to be winging it, we eventually joined the traffic on the M1 and headed out of town. The scenery became greener and greener. I rolled the window down a bit and stuck my hand outside, enjoying the wavelike feeling of the wind, and I took a deep breath of sweet, fresh air. “This, Edge. This is what I wanted. Two boys on a summer road trip.”

You nodded. “It was a good idea.”

“M50 coming up,” I said. You were already in the process of exiting.

“Nice job, B.”
We talked about the usual items: Ali, who would be spending half of the summer with her relatives again; Aislinn, who was hanging around with the crowd from her old school when she wasn’t working at the record store (and your ambivalence regarding this situation); how our next gig was on July 31 and what a lifetime away that seemed, my request for an extended guitar solo from you for *Out of Control* and, of course, the elusive Paul McGuinness.

“Devil’s advocate: do we really need a manager?” I asked.

“You know we do. Managers take care of the pain in the arse things so we can focus on making music.”

“I hope so.”

“Assuming we ever get paid more than ten pounds apiece.”

“Of course. M2.”

You grinned. “Way to go.”

A large flock of birds flew in a sort of blobby formation off in the distance, and that black-dotted shape shifted around in midair like an amoeba under a microscope. This was an Edge-like idea if ever I heard one, and I smiled, admiring your ability to influence my thoughts.

“What if he ends up being a parasite?” I asked. The pirate radio station was fading, so you attempted to find another one. Queen. *You’re My Best Friend*. “A little on the nose, wouldn’t you say, Edge?”

You moved your head from side to side along with the music. “If he’s a parasite, we’ll find someone else. What we want is a symbiotic relationship.”

I settled in. “Go on.”

“It’s where two different organisms join forces and it ends up being good for both of them. Like there’s this fish in the ocean that hides from predators in...I think it was a sea anemone, and they are poisonous, but those particular fish are immune to the poison. And the sea anemone eats bits of the fish’s food and, you know, its waste. Everybody wins.”

“So we need Paul McGuinness to eat our waste. And he will protect us.”

“Exactly. Textbook symbiotic relationship.”

As you predicted, signs for the Hill of Tara began to pop up, and we followed them until we came to a nondescript parking lot near a very old church and a bookstore that undoubtedly catered to tourists. Otherwise we were in an ocean of emerald fields bordered by hedgerows and stone walls. “When you reach the top of the hill, they say you can see one-fourth of Ireland,” you told me. “And it’s not even that big of a hill.”

We walked behind the church and its ancient cemetery, where a grandmotherly sort of woman held a piece of paper against one of the tombstones and a young boy rubbed a red crayon over it. We exited through an iron gate and looked for the path in the grass that would lead to the hill. A middle-aged couple were walking arm in arm toward us. “It’s so beautiful,” the woman said happily.

“Are you Americans?” I asked.

“Why yes we are, son,” the man said. He looked like Glen Campbell, sort of.
“Big fan.”

The woman beamed at me. Her voice dripping honey, she said, “You’re just as Irish as you can be, aren’t you?”

“Guilty, ma’am.”

“Looks like you’ve got the place all to yourselves, boys,” the man said before we parted ways.

“Edge is a rhinestone cowboy / riding out on a horse in a star-spangled rodeo” I sang inanely. We followed the narrow, grassy path up the hill--about the length of a few city blocks. When viewed from above, a massive earthworks formation in the shape of a sloppy number 8 or possibly a couple of fried eggs could be seen, but this was not discernible from our vantage point on the ground. Other than the deep trenches outlining the fried eggs, the hill was devoid of trees or crops or anything remarkable. We were surrounded by grassy fields dotted with plump sheep under a big dome of sky dotted with plump clouds, and the view was becoming increasingly impressive.

“They call this place the soul of Ireland,” you said, taking my hand and leading me up to the hill’s breezy and wide summit. “And at the top is the Lia Fáil. Which means…?” You gave my hand a squeeze.

“Hilarious that you think I’ve retained even a drop of what I learned in Irish class,” I said, a bit out of breath.

“It means Stone of Destiny.”

“Oh! You mean the thing on the cover of my book.”

“Right. And there it is.”

I burst out laughing. “Edge, it’s so short--the photos I’ve seen make it seem like it’s twenty feet tall!” The weathered (and utterly phallic) column of grey granite stuck up from the hill at approximately one-fifth of its anticipated height.

You sat down on the flat stones that radiated from the column like sun rays. Lowering yourself further and pretending to take a worm’s-eye-view photo of it, you said, “Well, if you get way down here, it looks a lot more heroic.”

I joined you on the ground and looked up at it. “Good to know. If we manage to become a successful band, and I’m standing on a stage all the time, maybe I’ll be able to trick people into assuming I’m tall, too.”

You pinched my cheek. “I think it’s cute that you’re not tall.”

I grinned. “Ahh, you like your little Bono, don’t you?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact, I love him.”

“Good.” With the Lia Fáil and a few birds flying overhead as our only witnesses, I eased you onto your back and kissed you. My fingers caressed your pale neck, and as a gust of wind swirled our hair and the tall grass around us, you rewarded me with a soft groan of pleasure. This was followed by a smile as you glanced at the Lia Fáil again.

You pushed your sun-warmed hair off your forehead and gazed up at the sky. I kissed your wrist and then your temple. “They used to crown kings here,” you said quietly. “Supposedly the Lia Fáil
would scream if a set of challenges were met by the new king. He’d touch it, and the stone would let out a screech you could hear all over Ireland.”

“Fun story.” My hand wandered down your torso.

“Yeah.”

“The Irish are quite fantastical.” I wanted to strip you naked right there.

You touched my lips. “I’m kind of surprised you didn’t set it off.”

“I haven’t even begun to try, Edge,” I said, rising to my feet. I took the Lia Fáil in a tender embrace and kissed it in the same way one might kiss the top of a child’s head. And we listened. Nothing.

“My darling stone,” I said, stroking the place where its hair would be if it had any, “My name is Bono, and this is Edge, my associate. And lover. And we aim to be rock stars. Or at least get a record deal, if you have no objections.” It did not object.

Chuckling, you got up and put your arms around the stone in a similar way, facing me. You said, “And now, stone, I am going to kiss you. And I hope it’s okay that I was born in Wales.” You paused, and the stone was, of course, silent. “And then the next true king of Ireland will kiss you, and you will scream.” You kissed the top of the weathered old rock, and I placed my grinning lips exactly where yours had been.

We waited.

A sheep bleated in the distance, and we doubled over with laughter.

 Hungry for a late afternoon snack on the way back to Dublin, we drove through the quaint village of Dunshaughlin in search of anything humans could consume. The miniscule business district seemed hopeless until I spotted it.

“Oh, Edge. That is exactly what I want.”

“Where?”

I pointed at the small ice cream shop and heaved with glee.

“‘Dingle Cream’? What kind of name is--”

“We must stop!”

The ice cream, which we ate from sugar cones at a sunny outdoor table, was dreamy perfection. I had strawberry, and yours was…

“Pistachio, Edge?”

You shrugged as if this were everyone’s go-to flavor. “It’s tremendous,” you said, offering me yours. “Expand your parameters, B.”

“Thank you.” The time was right for eye contact. I licked the pale green ice cream and moaned. “Okay, that is stupidly good. Try mine.”

You cleaned up the drips along the lip of my cone and, winking, you nodded your approval.
“You swallowed my Dingle Cream, didn’t you, the Edge?” I deadpanned seductively, and you rolled your eyes.

We sat and watched the world go by. In the case of Dunshaughlin, this meant that we watched two cars go by. So I turned to stare at your shirt. “Yes?” you asked.

“Undo that second button. As a personal favor to me.”

You blushed. “The things I have to do as the consort of the future king of Ireland. I swear to god.”

In an instant my entire being became focused on a slender, arrowhead-shaped expanse of sexy darkness. I may have whimpered.

“I could watch you eat ice cream cones until the end of time, you realize,” you said. I thought about doing something lewd with the remainder of my cone but decided to eat it like a normal person because that already seemed to be working for you.

I raised an eyebrow. “Are microphones also a problem?”

“You have no idea.”

Sultans of Swing was playing on the radio when you started the car, and we listened to it quietly while we returned to the main highway. I had heard it once or twice before and enjoyed its story of a band of old guys whose style of music was on the way out and they weren’t cool anymore. I wondered if that would happen to us. How long would we even get to be in a band?

“I’m never gonna be this good,” you said during the second guitar solo.

“His kind of playing isn’t really your thing, though.”

“I’d like to be able to play lots of different ways and then pick and choose what I do. But I’m no guitar hero, let’s face it.”

“Well, you’re a hero to me.” I thought about this. “Maybe you could invent a whole new way to play.”

You chuckled. “Sure, B.”

I reached over, gave your knee a pat, and held it there for a bit. Then I felt the wiry solidity of your slim upper thigh, so different from my own. “I love being in the car with you,” I said.

“Me too.” The sun, now lower in the sky, was on your side of the car, and it lit your elegant profile with a golden line. I closed one eye, and in the space between us, I traced my finger over the line. “I wish we had a place where we could be together and not have to worry about people finding us,” you said.

“I know. I keep thinking about my birthday in the car. And the hotel.”

You nodded at the steering wheel. “All the time.”

“Yeah.”

You bit your lower lip as you considered what to say next. I moved my hand a few inches higher, and you squirmed a little. “I miss your skin against mine, Bono,” you said in your darker tone of voice that made me ache.
“Yeah. That warm feeling is like nothing else.” I stretched my arms and leaned forward in the seat even though I had no reason to do so.

“And just...being able to watch you. Your body on that bed.” Your left hand touched the small of my back and moved down.

I stared at you until you stole a split-second glance at me. “I wanna make you come again, Edge.”


“And not in the dark next time. I wanna see you.” My fingers moved up to examine the collar of your still-slightly-unbuttoned shirt, and then lower, where I felt your beating heart and dark, downy hair.

I withdrew my hand, and you inhaled and exhaled. Eyes on the road. Both hands on the steering wheel. “We need to find a place.”

“We will, love. I don’t know how, but we will.” I leaned over and kissed your cheek in an awkward way as stupid Dublin came back into view. Your skin smelled like sunlight. I placed my hand back on your thigh, and I knew I wouldn’t want to let go.

“Thanks for taking me up there, Edge.”

You nodded. “I love you. Your majesty.”
As I finished the previous chapter, an unplanned idea popped into my head, and I debated whether I should include it here. I decided to just start writing it to see where it went, and this is the result. I still have a list of things to write about regarding the summer of 1978, and they'll be in the next chapter. In the meantime, I hope you'll enjoy this sweet little diversion.

RIP Montserrat Caballe.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZ2q87D3KQY
I'm not sure what Bob did at the post office so I gave him a cool job.

Edge, I’ll never forget the first time we toured the States, and you woke me up to show me a firefly you had caught near our motel room on the outskirts of Memphis. “Look at it, Bono. An actual firefly.” We had never seen one before. You turned out the lights, and we watched it crawl across your hand, its abdomen glowing a faded yellow-green. Then it flew from your fingertip and landed on the ceiling, and we watched it until we fell asleep.

I should have kissed you. I wanted to.

Love, B.

“...Oh.”

I leaned in and touched your shoulder. “I talk about you so much it’s kind of weird that he hasn’t met you yet. Or Adam or Larry, for that matter. And he will be nice to you. You’re the son he’s always wanted.”
Your eyes were wary. “I feel like I know too much about him.”

“Yeah. He can be a real pill sometimes, but...he likes quiet people like you and Ali.”

“He met Ali?”

“She saw him at the Post Office and introduced herself, if you can believe that.”

You shook your head. “That girl is something else.”

“Don’t worry about it. We’ll have supper together, and then you and I can go upstairs and listen to records the rest of the night.”

Deep breath. “Alright. I’ll call Mum and let her know. You’re sure it’s okay?”

“You’re sure it is. Oh, but first...would you mind taking us to the Eurospar? I was supposed to pick up some groceries.”

“Sure.”

“It’s going to be fine, Edge.”

I got back in the car, and we drove about a mile to the grocery store. I was a familiar face there, as Dad was forever dispatching me to fetch this or that, and I was usually happy to do so because the people there were kind to me. And it got me out of the house.

The store was bustling with activity, and we made a beeline to the deli, where sweet old Anna greeted me. “Well hello there, mo stoirín,” she said with a smile that created a bevy of soft crinkles all over her face.

“My little darling,” you muttered, pleased with yourself.

“Anna, have you been outside this afternoon?”

“I will in a while, love.”

“It’s glorious.”

You became engrossed in the variety of meats displayed behind her glass counter. She glanced at you and stage whispered, “Handsome lad.”

“He’s my bandmate. Plays guitar. Smartest boy in school, too.”

You looked at her self-consciously. “I’m David,” you said.

“Pleased to meet you. And what can I get for young Paul and young David?”

“I think we want a roast chicken. And some of that potato salad Dad likes. Enough for three.”

“How about some coleslaw, too?” she asked.

“Perfect.”

She wrapped up a lovely chicken along with potato salad and coleslaw for five. I reached across the counter and took her hand. “Thank you, Anna.”

“Of course, mo stoirín,” she said, giving it a squeeze.
Feeling celebratory, I scooped up a pound cake as you examined the prices she had written on the deli containers. “Does she always give you extra?”

“Always.”

And at home, as always, Dad was sitting in his chair watching the news, and I asked, “Dad, is it okay if David stays over tonight? This is David Evans, from the band.” You walked over to his chair and shook his hand.

“Ah. So this is the famous David you talk about night and day.”

“The very same,” I said.

“Pleased to meet you, sir.”

He looked you over and apparently deemed you worthy of dining at the Hewson table. “It’s good to put a face to the name,” he said. “You can sleep in Norman’s room.”

“We have a chicken!” I enthused.

You followed me into the kitchen and called your mum to let her know what was happening while I prepared three plates of food and drinks for us. We placed them on the rarely-used dining room table, and I opened a window. Dad turned off the news and put a record on the stereo. “A little Puccini,” he said, sitting down at the end of the table. “Well, doesn’t this look good?”

You and I sat across from each other. “Anna gave me the plumpest one they had,” I said. Dad turned in his chair and coughed a few times. “You okay there, Dad?”

“I must have caught something at work. Dealing with the public day-in and day-out will do that to you.”

You nodded, and I watched you shift into when in doubt, interview them mode. “B-Paul says you work at the General Post Office?”

“That’s right.”

“It’s a beautiful place.”

“A lot of history is in that building. The Irish Revolution began there, as a matter of fact.”

“I remember that from school. So what do you do there?”

Dad looked at you in an appraising way and cleared his throat. “We’re in the process of switching over to a system that is completely automated, and I’m in charge of making that happen.”

You grinned. “I have so many questions.”

Amused, I sat back and listened as the two of you talked about automated mail sorting for a few minutes. You made Dad feel important and interesting, and I could tell he was charmed by your earnest curiosity. He was in the process of inviting you to take a tour of the facility once it was set up when he began coughing again. “Blasted summer cold,” he said.

“Mum makes good chicken soup,” you said. “If you like, I could take home what’s left of the chicken and the, uh, carcass, and I’m sure she’d be happy to send some soup home with Paul tomorrow.”
“Ah, no son, that’s alright. Don’t worry about me.”

“You’ve been kind enough to let me stay here tonight. It’s the least I can do.”

I beamed at you. “His mum is an excellent cook, Dad. Believe me, you do not wanna pass this up.”

“Well, okay. If it’s not too much trouble.” He smiled and paused. He held his right hand aloft and outlined fluid shapes in the air with his fork. A soprano’s voice swirled in from the living room, and we watched him conduct her brief aria. He mouthed her words, “O mio babbino caro, Mi piace, è bello, bello.” He lost himself in the beauty of the music for a few moments, and then he looked at us in a semi-bashful sort of way. You clapped your hands politely, and he bowed his head a bit. I honestly could not believe what I was seeing.

“The singer’s name is Montserrat Caballe, if you can believe that,” he said.

“She sounded sad,” I said. “What was she singing about?”

“It’s a Romeo and Juliet kind of story, with a feud between families, and a son and a daughter from each family fall in love.” He nodded. “The singer is the daughter. She’s upset about the situation, and she is saying something like, ‘Oh my dear papa, I like him, he is so handsome.’ And if she can’t be with him she’ll throw herself into the river.”

We laughed at this. “I mean, that’s what I’d do,” I said.

“It’s really the only thing that makes any kind of sense;” you said, finishing your chicken.

I cleared the dishes, sliced up the cake, and listened as Dad asked you what your Plan B was in case the band didn’t work out. You said you would enroll in college next fall and study to become a scientist or an engineer like your dad.

“David’s family is originally from Wales,” I said, setting down three cake-laden dessert plates. “You should meet his dad sometime. I know he likes to sing, too.”

“He’s a tenor,” you added.

“Maybe I will,” Dad said.

Dad retired to his chair and television after supper, and you and I took the dishes to the kitchen. “I have a whole system,” I said, filling one side of the sink with soapy water and the other side with clean water, and together we washed and dried the plates, glasses, and silverware. “You realize you are his favorite person now,” I whispered, grinning at you as you shook your head and chuckled. I dotted your cheekbone with a fingerful of soap bubbles.

We said goodnight to Dad, who advised us not to play our music too loudly, and went up to my room. I closed the door and took you in my arms, “So proud of you, David,” I sighed, kissing you.

“I love you, Paul,” you murmured. “But doing this with him down there is...a little weird.”

“I understand,” I said with a smile. “Luckily for us, he leaves for work at 7:00 every morning. So we’ll have the place to ourselves for a while before we leave.”

“That is an interesting piece of information.”

“It really is.”

I flipped through my records and landed on *Black and White* by The Stranglers. “Adam’s gonna try
to get us on the bill when they play here in September,” I said.

“Yeah, he told me about that this morning,” you said.

We sat on the floor and listened to side A and became intimidated by their sound, which was kind of punk but also kind of something else. “We’ll be better by then,” I said.

“I certainly hope so.”

By the time we were two songs into side B, we had become bored with The Stranglers, so we looked at each other and silently mouthed various terms of endearment and obscenities. I put on *This Year’s Model* by Elvis Costello and said, “I don’t want you to sleep in Norman’s room. Fucking nightmare of boxes in there. We keep bugging him to do something with them.”

“I’m sure it’s fine.”

“No. I’ll sleep there. You can have my bed.” I looked up at the ceiling. What day even was it?

“Yeah. I changed the sheets three days ago.”

You thought about this, and your mouth curled into a slow smile. “So your bed will smell at least a little bit like you.”

“Do you like that idea?”

“How could I not?”

“I really like the idea of you in my bed.”

“Baby.”

I opened a dresser drawer. “You can borrow anything you want in here.”

“Okay.”

“Whatever you choose will become very special to me, of course. So choose wisely.”

“I always do.” You stole a kiss.

We spent the rest of the evening lying on the floor maybe just a little too close to each other while we listened to my albums and read rock ‘n’ roll magazines. “Really fun day, B,” you said at one point.

“I’m so happy you’re a stickler for drivers’ license rules, Edge.”

We took turns showering and got ready for bed. You went first, and when I was finished, I couldn’t resist returning to my room to kiss you goodnight. You were reading by the warm light of the lamp on my bedside table. “Look at you,” I whispered, kissing your forehead and lips. You returned my kisses with the ardor of a man, but your eyes were vulnerable and loving as they looked up at me.

“I’ll think about you and dream about you all night.”

A few minutes later, I pulled Norman’s stale sheets over my head and smiled. You were sleeping in my bed on the other side of the wall, a glowing firefly surrounded by deep blue shadows. Your body was cool and dark, but your core was white and yellow shot through with pale green, and you showed your secret light to me, only me. You were perfect. Alive. Luminous.

The night passed swiftly. Norman didn’t leave a clock in his room, so I could only guess what time it
was. But it was summer, and the eastern horizon began to glimmer well before 5:00. My father rose an hour later, and I heard his familiar sounds as he moved about the house: a faucet, a toaster, a kettle, a kitchen chair. Eventually those sounds shifted to a briefcase closing, keys jangling, and shoes on the hardwood floor. Restless, I got up and went downstairs to say goodbye to him.

“Feeling better?”

“About the same.”

I yawned. “Thanks for being nice to Ed-David last night.”

“He’s a fine lad.”

“Yeah. He is. Have a good day, Dad.”

I heard you moving around upstairs as I got breakfast for us (tea and cake), but you were back in my bed by the time I tapped on the partially-opened door to my sunny box of a room. “Good morning, the Edge,” I sang quietly.

“Hi,” you said, smiling and sinking beneath the blankets a bit.

“Did you sleep well?”

“I woke up a couple of times, but I liked it because after a few seconds I remembered where I was.”

I fed you a bite of cake, let my bathrobe fall to the floor, and slipped in beside you. “I’ve been awake for hours. Waiting,” I said, stroking your hair.

“So have I.” You were wearing my Buzzcocks t-shirt, and I snapped the waistband of your/my gray briefs. You did the same thing to me. Then we were kissing, and our eager bodies reunited. “Skin,” you whispered.

We pulled off our shirts and let them fall to the floor, and that glorious tingle ran through us as our chests made contact at last, followed by our legs and then our hips. And it felt so right, like returning home after walking in soul-chilling rain. Warmth spread from my heart to every extremity and back again. Your miraculous hands, so at home on a guitar, were all over me, gleaning information and confirming hypotheses. “Most beautiful arse I’ve ever seen, I swear to god,” you murmured, pulling me even closer.

“Just so you know, Edge,” I said, tracing a finger over one of your eyebrows, “today is laundry day.”

You paused, smiled, and said, “Noted.”

I tilted your head back and went straight for your neck, being careful not to leave a mark on that pearly skin, although I was sorely tempted. You needed to shave...but really, you didn’t. I liked the gentle bite of your stubble under my lips and tongue. My beautiful young man. Mine. Mine.

Back to your mouth. We were ravenous for each other. I wanted to slow down and savor you, but I couldn’t, and I became overwhelmed with the vast number of choices I had before me. I wanted everything at once. I didn’t want to slow down. We were young and in love and had stolen this rare opportunity to be together in my bed--of course an erotic frenzy was appropriate. We had our entire lives to savor each other. That morning, however, was all about greed.

You were hard against my thigh, but I knew an even better place for you to be, and the resulting
friction made you inhale sharply. “You love it, Edge, don’t you?” I whispered. “You love the way that feels.”

“You’re so good.”

Simple sentences were all we were capable of producing, and even those were a challenge. We communicated via a series of moans and sighs and gasps and glances. I watched your face—the picture of angelic bliss—as we found a rhythm worthy of sustaining until we had no choice but to go faster and harder. We were breathing heavily and straining against damp cotton briefs that would have a tale to tell their brothers in that drawer, brothers I should not have been thinking about because I was on top and your hands were welded to my backside, and I knew if I looked down at our grinding bodies I would come in an instant, and I needed to ask you something first.

“Edge, are you gonna come for me?”

“Yes, baby.”

“I wanna watch.”

“I know. I want--”

“What do you want?”

“Wanna watch you come, too.”

“I’m almost there.”

“I’m almost there.”

“If I look down, Edge…”

“God, look at us…”

Your back arched, and your body, taut and shuddering, writhed against mine. You stifled a groan, and I said, “You can be as loud as you like.” This sent you all the way over, and I repeated *Come for me* under your cries of release. Then you repeated my name, my new name, my real name until I joined you in your state of bright euphoria.

We collapsed into each other’s arms, panting and sticky, and I was formulating a half-baked excuse that would allow us to stay in bed all day (something along the lines of “we caught Dad’s cold”) but thought better of it.

I kissed your chest and felt your chin settle on my head, and we were locked together in stillness. I inhaled—the green bar of soap from my bathroom sink was mixed with hair and skin, both damp from our exertions. “Do you think it can always be like that?” you asked. Your voice resonated in your chest and produced a lovely vibration against my ear.

“Yes. Always like that and maybe even better.”

I noticed a gossamer tumbleweed of dust on the floor by my bookshelf, cruelly exposed by the sun. Our tea was getting cold. A truck rumbled down the street. My clock radio flipped on, and an ad for Penney’s was playing. None of it mattered. Just you.
Around this time in U2's history, Bono, Edge, and Larry became involved with a small, non-denominational, charismatic Christian group called Shalom. I don't really know all that much about this group, and I wasn't super interested in digging into it. As you'll see, my Bono has made Shalom into a different kind of collective.

A gentle warning: Ireland in the 1970s would have been a rough place to fall in love with your best friend, and in this chapter our boys encounter someone who harasses them (contains a slur that has since been reclaimed).

I'd like to dedicate this chapter to fouroux, who sent me a pebble that I will always cherish. <3

Thank you for reading and supporting this story with your kind words of encouragement. Much love.

Edge, I continue with our story, and as you will see, I’ve taken a number of artistic liberties with our friends from Shalom. This is fiction, of course, and I’m in charge, so I’ve written them the way they should have been. You’ll see.

And now I’m going to take a walk along the shore and pick up pebbles for a while. I love and miss you.

B.

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“You’ve got to admit you’re curious.”

“I guess I am, but...I don’t wanna get caught up with some kind of cult or whatever they are.”

“They’re not a cult, Edge. They’re interesting people, and we’re just hanging out with them for an hour, probably. You, me, Gavin, Guggi, them. You haven’t even seen Guggi’s new place yet.”

“Yeah, I know. What’s he calling it again?”

“The Willows.”

We got off the bus and walked a few more blocks to the house Guggi was renting with a few friends in one of Dublin’s many run-down neighborhoods. I stubbed my toe on the uneven sidewalk and recovered with a hop-skip that made you smile. We were walking west and squinting at a pre-sunset that was at exactly the wrong angle and would not disappear until nearly 10:00. Your hand shaded your eyes from its golden light as you tried to make out house numbers.

“I’m pretty sure it’s that one,” I said, pointing at a tan bungalow with a dark brown roof. Wish You
Were Here was playing on the stereo within, and a massive papier-mâché sculpture of a fanciful owl with long blonde hair stared at us from the porch. “Gotta be.”

“There are no willow trees here.”

I patted your shoulder fondly. “I think he was being ironic.”

You mounted the steps and said, “Here we go.”

“Just keep an open mind, Edge. That’s all I ask.”

The Shalom group had not arrived yet, so Guggi showed you around the house while I made myself at home on the floral couch in the living room. “Can you believe someone was just gonna throw this out?” Gavin asked, joining me.

“You've got to be joking.”

He nodded at its velveteen harvest gold and avocado blooms. “So it’s a little dated.”

Gravity began pulling my body sideways into the center of the couch one millimeter at a time. “Yeah, who cares?” The windows were outlined with all manner of Christmas lights, several Calder-esque mobiles hung from the water-stained drop ceiling, and charcoal drawings of our friends decorated the paneled walls. “I love what he’s done with the place.”

“The lights were my idea.”

“Are you staying here now?” I helped myself to the bowl of popcorn that was on the flea market coffee table.

Gavin noticed a sock on the floor and kicked it under the couch. “That appears to be the case. We’re gonna try to get this band idea off the ground one of these days.” He yawned. We heard you laughing upstairs, and Gavin smiled. “How are things with you lads? I hardly ever see you.”

“We’ve been rehearsing every day at his house. But Larry’s there only about half the time because of fucking work, and Adam wrecked the van he was driving for that delivery job, so now--”

“I mean you and Edge.”

“Oh.” I batted my eyelashes at him. “I don’t kiss and tell.” I braced myself for the shoulder punch I had coming and laughed upon receiving it. “It’s…” I lowered my voice to a whisper. “I love him so much, Gav. There’s a lot going on beneath that quiet exterior.”

“Are the two of you…?” Gavin raised an eyebrow, which he had studded with those little silver balls you see on fancy cupcakes sometimes. Using glue..? Maybe icing...?

“Well. If you wanna know the truth, we’re waiting for him to turn eighteen. But in the meantime--”

Gavin grinned, brushed some dust off his beret, and put it back on. “You’re doing everything but.”

“Not everything, not even close. We’re working up to it very, very slowly. But I swear to Christ he does things to me that--oh hey, Edge! What do you think?”

“Seems pretty cool,” you shrugged as Gavin snickered and patted me on the back.

“You said you were gonna get the--never mind,” Guggi grumbled, throwing his hands in the air and stomping out to the kitchen. He returned with a dozen cans of ginger ale. Gavin rustled up an old
newspaper to protect the beyond-protectable coffee table from the cans’ condensation. Flustered, Guggi grabbed a few ashtrays and cracked a window or two.

I shot Gavin an amused glance, and he whispered, “He’s shockingly domestic when he has half a mind to be.”

“They’re here,” Guggi stage-whispered from the kitchen, and the rest of us, dazzled, peeked at them through the blinds in the living room. They—the James Taylor look-alike, the strawberry blonde, the tall fellow in black, and the one with the scarves—were admiring the owl.

“Shine on, you crazy diamond,” Gavin murmured before trotting out to greet them with an extravagant bow. “Hello, Shalom! Welcome to The Willows!” Backlit by blazing sunset colors, the women kissed his cheeks and gaped at his eyebrows.

“Well, it was nice knowing you, B,” you joked quietly. “Please try to find time to write to me.”

I attempted to tickle you, failed, and we joined everyone in the kitchen. Introductions were made: Shane (their leader), Declan (his brother), Frida (a bubbly Australian), and Molly (quiet and intense): please meet Gavin, Guggi, Bono, and The Edge.

Some of us picked up chairs from the kitchen table and brought them into the living room, and we sat around the coffee table as the needle on the stereo hit the end of side two repeatedly. Guggi took care of that and invited us to help ourselves to refreshments. Gavin chuckled at his use of the word “refreshments.”

Molly sat on the couch beside Gavin, who highly approved of her embroidered platform boots and voluminous dishwater-blond curls. Frida joined them and popped the tab on one of the ginger ales. “Thank you so much for this,” she said, grinning at Guggi. “I didn’t realize how thirsty I was.” I was captivated by her accent immediately and made a mental note to try it on for size later.

“My pleasure. I hope you’ll take some with you.” She raised her can in a sort of toast, and he shot Gavin a look that seemed to say, I told you getting refreshments was a good idea.

A brief lull settled over us as both groups seemed to be sizing each other up. At least that was what I was doing. Gavin cleared his throat dramatically and announced, as though he were a detective in a murder mystery, "I suppose you're all wondering why I've gathered you here today."

Shane chuckled, ran his hand through his hair, and said, "If you guys don’t mind, I’d like to go ahead and answer the top five questions people have about us, okay?" We nodded. “First, Shalom means peace. Second, we’re not a cult. Third, we all have day jobs. Fourth, we’re not a band. And fifth, my brother and I are not romantically involved with Molly and Frida. This isn’t Fleetwood Mac.”

“Well, that answers all of my questions, so thanks a lot for coming out here,” I said, standing up and making a move to leave with my share of the refreshments. This got a laugh, and you grabbed the waistband of my jeans and pulled me back down.

Shane patted me on the shoulder and said, “We’re actually here because of you.”

“Is this an intervention?” I asked with a grin.

“We were at the Project Arts Centre back in May. We saw your set, and we wanted to meet you guys, but you disappeared,” Declan said.

“No kidding?”
“We got pulled away, sorry,” you said.

“Yes. A real high stakes showbiz meeting. You know how it goes.” I turned to Shane. “We saw you on the sidewalk about an hour later. But...you watched us play?”

“We did! We were very impressed, especially with the way you connected with your audience.”

“You’re just magnetic...Bono. You all have such fun names,” Frida said.

“We are part of a secret society,” Gavin said, making a sweeping gesture. “A ragtag group of artists and misfits. And everyone gets a fun name. Because why not?”

“I think it’s lovely,” Molly said, looking at the four of us. “You’re fortunate to have found each other.”

Declan leaned in as if he had something important to say. His voice was deep but gentle. “And just imagine that. All of you are alive at the same time, living in the same city on this...this island in the Atlantic Ocean. And somehow you became friends, and you’ve created a family of your own.”

“And here we all are.” Guggi gazed at the wall of our friends and seemed to drift off into a reverie.

Shane followed Guggi’s eyes and nodded at the drawings. “Artists are special people. But usually the thing that makes you special makes you different and lonely. It’s okay to be different. And while most churches will try to scare you into conforming and becoming just like everybody else, I think it’s important to remember that Jesus loved people who were different.”

Guggi picked at his fingernails, many of which were stained with blue ink. “The church I grew up in...all they did was scream at us about eternal damnation. They gave me bad dreams but not much else.”

“Oh, yeah,” Shane said knowingly. “I would say most people do not experience God in a conventional church setting. Don’t get me wrong; churches definitely have their moments, but more often than not, real transcendence happens outside of organized religion. I mean, do you ever have moments where you feel like you’re exactly where you need to be? And maybe you’re connected with a higher power?” We thought about this for a few seconds and nodded. “It can happen anywhere. I felt like I received this...calling, I’d guess you’d say, while I was waiting on line at the pharmacy, of all places. I really can’t explain it.”

The rest of the Shalom group shared similar stories of epiphanies they’d experienced while watching a sunrise, walking in a forest, and seeing the world from an airplane window. They encouraged us to share any examples we might remember from our own lives.

Guggi smiled shyly. “All I know is that when I’m drawing or painting...when I am making something...I feel like I’m completely in control. And that’s great. But when I’m doing my best work, I feel like I’m being guided. Like I’m not alone. I go into this place in my mind that shuts out the world, and when I finish, I’ll look at the clock and it’s hours later than I’d assumed. Then I’ll look at what I’ve made, and I won’t really know how I did it. Does that make sense?”

“That must feel amazing.”

“And I sit there and think, who did this? Was that even me?”

“You definitely have a gift,” Declan said.

Gavin shrugged and looked at the stereo. “If I’m completely honest? I feel the presence of God when
I listen to David Bowie. His voice on *Heroes* really speaks to me, right? And I guess I have to be in a certain kind of mood because I can also play it as background noise and it doesn’t grab me by the jugular. But one night I was feeling utterly misunderstood after a fight with Da, and I stormed up to my room and played it. And that song brought me to my knees. Ugly crying. Totally messed up this turquoise thing I was trying out...anyway. I played it again. Fetal position on the floor. Again and again, until...comfort. I had this feeling that I could be like him if I wanted to. I had this feeling that life is worth living and we should be brave.”

“Yeah. Encountering art can do that for sure,” Molly said. “I stood in front of a self-portrait of Vincent Van Gogh and couldn’t hold back the tears.”

I looked at you. “When I’m singing, and when we’re having a good night--because that’s not always guaranteed, right, Edge?”

“To say the least.”

“But when I’m up there, something happens to me. I feel powerful but humbled at the same time, you know? And at the center of it is this feeling, this voice that is telling me I’m exactly where I need to be. Maybe it’s God. Maybe it’s Mum. It’s somebody. I don’t have a lot of options, I know that, but this...this is what I’m supposed to do. And I might go crazy if I ever have to stop.” The kitchen chair’s legs were uneven, and I had become energized to the point that the chair was wobbling, and you reached over and steadied it.

“That’s an incredible place to be,” Shane said.

“And like you said, the connections I make with people in the crowd...I think I’m becoming addicted to that.”

“All of you have gifts. And you can use those gifts to glorify God, but the way you do it doesn’t even have to be obvious.” Shane turned to me. “You could be singing about, I don’t know, a mountain, but the way you sing it, and the connection you have with your audience, and the feeling of inclusion you have the power to create...that can make someone out there feel less alone, and seen, and you might be the only person who ever reaches them. You might even bring them closer to God.”

“Wow,” I said. “I’ve never really thought about it like that. Most of the time we just wanna be sure we’re all playing the same song at any given moment.” Frida grinned at me. “But thank you for saying that. I want us to be the kind of band that can help people to…” I couldn’t find the words. “Just help people. I want kids to listen to our records after fighting with their dads and feel better.”

“Yes,” you said.

“And Edge--this one right here--he’s the one with the gift.” I beamed at you, so handsome in your new denim shirt.

“No, B. It’s you.”

“It can be both of you, you know,” Molly said.

You shrugged. “I definitely feel something when I play my guitar, like what Guggi said. I just lose myself and hours can pass without me realizing it. And it’s like I have a new voice. A clearer one, with its own language.”

“All four of you are part of this unusual world only creative people can appreciate,” Frida said with a smile.
I put my hand on your shoulder. “And he loves it the most, I think. It’s like you don’t just want to play your guitar. You need to play your guitar, even if you’re alone. Or else you won’t feel like yourself.”

“Yeah.” You and I made eye contact, and I could tell you wanted to add something.

“What else…?”

You smiled at your hands, and once you started talking, everyone in the room began to disappear until it was just the two of us. “If I really want to feel the presence of God, it’s in nature, like watching sunrises or being in a forest.”

“Right.”

“A few weeks ago my brother took me out to Whiterock because we were bored, and, you know, I miss doing things like that with him. That beach is my favorite because there are so many pebbles, and they’re a nice size and really pretty, and when the waves reach the shore you can hear the pebbles colliding inside them. ‘Like a bag of bones,’ Dik said.”

“Such a Dik thing to say,” I said, grinning.

“He likes to toss them back into the bay, but I’ve always thought that was kind of mean because these rocks are at least several million years old, right? And they’ve been in that water bumping into each other forever until they’re as smooth as they can be, and they’re all inching their way closer and closer to the shore. Then they finally make it to the beach and they can relax at last, and a hundred years later some kid throws them all the way back into the bay?”

“That is pretty mean, Edge.”

“So I just look at the rocks, and that day I picked up one that I really liked, and I picked up another that sort of reminded me of the first one. I held them in my hand for a bit, and when it was time to go, I put them down next to each other. On the way home, I kept thinking about how there were millions of rocks on that beach, including all the rocks underground, and I was probably the only person who had ever noticed those two and felt like putting them together.”

“Yeah.”

“So maybe that’s how God sees us. Maybe we’re the rocks, and God is the one who puts some of us together. And all the rocks seem pretty much the same. Maybe not everybody gets picked up and placed beside another rock. Lots of people go their whole lives without finding anyone who understands them. But some of us do, and when we’re placed beside each other, there’s this instant recognition. A spark. We realize that this person is special.” You looked at the ceiling for a second and returned to me. “I could pass by a million different faces and not even consider them. But this one. I’m meant to be with this one.”

“That’s right.”

You paused and said, “I wouldn’t even know you if Dad took a job somewhere else when I was a baby.”

I studied your face. “I can’t imagine not knowing you.” We remembered where we were, and you became bashful. “Oh hi,” I said to everyone. Frida and Molly were a little misty and holding hands.

“That was beautiful,” Shane said.
“The love you have for each other is so genuine,” Molly said. She caught your eyes and mouthed the words, “It’s okay.”

“Their whole band is like that,” Gavin said. “This little family. I’ve never seen anything like it. And they’re still...becoming...whatever it is they’re going to be.”

“Well, you can count us among your first fans, okay?” Shane said.

“Wow, thank you.”

We talked for a while about a Bible study group they wanted to organize--something casual but focused on answering big questions and reaching like-minded people of all backgrounds. This interested me a great deal. After Mum died, I had drifted away from her church. Being there only made me feel sad, and Dad’s seemed impenetrable to an outsider. He still attended, but only sporadically now, and he seemed to know that Norman and I would find returning to Mum’s church strange. So to find people who actually seemed to care and were willing to talk with my friends and me about God and Jesus and how to be an artist too, apparently--that would fill a void in my life. We said we’d definitely consider meeting with them again once things got organized, and our conversations seemed to be wrapping up.

“I’d like to give you something to think about on your way home,” Declan said, flipping through his Bible. He read, “1 John 4:7-8: ‘Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Frida said a prayer that thanked God for the gifts of love and art and new friends, and we said our goodbyes.

You and I walked back to the bus stop in the balmy twilight and talked about our general impressions of the four Shalom members. And as we sat waiting for the bus under a streetlamp that was bombarded by insects, we began to go a little deeper.

“I loved what you said, Edge.” I nudged your ankle with my shoe.

You seemed shy. “It just came out of me. I didn’t mean to--”

“No, it was good. They might as well know about us. They didn’t seem to care that we...are...”

“I’m pretty sure Frida and Molly are, too.” You glanced at me.

I nodded. “Yeah.”

You exhaled and looked at your feet. “It felt good, actually. All the secrecy...sometimes it gets to me.”

“Wait. It does?”

“I know what we’re doing isn’t wrong, and we’re not exactly lying to people, but we’re not telling them the truth either, and that doesn’t seem right.”

“I know,” I said. “We don’t have much of a choice. I wish things could be different.”

You picked a blade of grass that was growing out of a crack in the concrete. Twirling it between your fingers, you said quietly, “When they were leaving, Molly took my hand and said, ‘You boys touched my heart, and I think if you find someone like that who loves you, you need to hang onto him for as long as you can.’” You took a breath. “And I said, ‘I love him more than I can say.’” You looked up at me, and tears were in your eyes.
“Oh Edge.”

“And she said, ‘I know you have God’s blessing.’” Your voice cracked halfway through that, and you leaned over and gasped.

I moved closer and put my arm around your shoulders, and you dropped the blade of grass on the ground. “Edge. I love you,” I whispered, and we sat there for a few seconds gathering our composure when a pair of boots passed into my line of vision.

“Fuckin’ queers,” a voice said.

Without even thinking about consequences, I sprang to my feet. I literally saw red at that moment, and I grabbed his shoulder. “What the fuck did you just say?” I yelled as he turned. I don’t remember what he looked like. Around our age, maybe. It didn’t matter. I was livid.

“You heard me,” he said, spitting on the pavement.

I got right in his face, and my hands became fists. My voice was low and primal as I said, “He’s my best friend and I love him. Why the fuck should you care?”

He turned and shrugged me off. “Fuck off, man.”

“Leave us the fuck alone!” I shouted as he walked away. The entire exchange couldn’t have lasted more than ten seconds, and when I returned to your pale, astonished face, I remembered to breathe.

“Bono,” you managed.

“You’re not going home by yourself,” I said. My mouth tasted like copper, and my heart was racing.

“Are you okay? I should’ve--I didn’t even--”

“Edge, you were upset.” I sat down and kicked the sidewalk. “Christ, what an arsehole. Fuck.”

“Were you scared?”

“I didn’t even think about being scared. Something just clicked in me.”

You watched my fists as they gradually began to relax into...hands. “That was amazing.”

I glanced at you. “It was?”

“Yeah. It all happened so fast.”

The bus arrived. We hurried up the stairs—the upper compartment was empty—and sat all the way in the back. I took your cold hand, and you squeezed mine tightly. “Fuck,” you whispered to the window.

“Edge.”

You were trembling. “Bad things could have happened back there.”

I touched your chin and shifted it until we made eye contact. “You’ve got to know this about me, Edge. If I’m cornered, I’m gonna fight. I just am.”

You shook your head. “Yeah. I don’t know why I didn’t--”
“I don’t ever want you to fight, Edge. Stay just as you are. There’s something innocent about you, and I hope you’ll never lose it.” I squeezed your hand.

“No, I should’ve--”

“Seriously. You were in a vulnerable state of mind and in no condition to fight at that moment.”

Your eyes were the palest shade of green under the bus’s fluorescent lights. “But I want you to know I would fight for you as well. I love you. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you.”

I sighed. “I know you would, Edge. But tonight it was just...it was my turn.” I smiled at you.

“You’re right. You’d do it for me; I know that.” Caressing your knuckles with my thumb, I said, “Except you shouldn’t. Those hands are your fortune. Mine too, for god’s sake.”

You huffed out a little laugh at this. “Proud of you, B.”

“Thanks,” I said. “You were brave in your own way earlier tonight. Braver than me.”

“You think so?”

“Fuckin’ love you,” I said, kissing your cheek.

“Shit, what a weird night.”

“Yeah. I was serious about you not going home alone,” I said. We were approaching the stop where you would normally get off to catch the bus to Malahide.

“Do you wanna stay over?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. Because I don’t want you to go home alone, either.”

We found a pay phone near the bus stop, and I called Dad. He answered after a couple of rings.

“Hewson residence.”

“Dad, I’m gonna spend the night at David’s if that’s alright.”

“Are his parents okay with that?”

“Yeah. I’m just kind of worried about him. Some arsehole was hassling us tonight.”

“About what?”

“Calling us names. It doesn’t matter. But I saw red. Got in his face. You know how I can be.”

Dad chuckled. Oh, did he know. “I’m sure a boy as gentle as David is not used to that kind of thing.”

“No. I didn’t want to leave him waiting for his bus by himself. He’s pretty rattled.”

He cleared his throat. “That’s the right thing to do.”

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Tell Mrs. Evans I said thanks for the soup.”
“I did that last week.”

“Tell her again.”

“Okay, Dad.”

We were quiet during the bus ride to your neighborhood, and we watched the north side’s darkened storefronts transition to sleepy Monday night houses. My adrenaline rush was fading, and I began to feel tired, but I was excited to spend time at your house, of course. The lights were mostly out when we arrived, except for the one over the front door and the one above the stove. Clad in her dressing gown, your mum was peering into the refrigerator when we walked in, and she seemed flustered when she noticed me. “Heavens, boys!” she said.

“Can Bono stay here tonight?”

She smiled at me and patted her hair, which she had set with clusters of pin curls. “Of course you can. Are you hungry? I wish I had something to give you…”

“It’s the strangest thing,” I said, astonished. “I’m actually not hungry.”

That stopped her in her tracks. “What’s wrong, love?”

You spoke up. “We were waiting for the bus when this creep called us a couple of ‘fucking queers,’ and Bono got in his face and told him a thing or two before I even knew what was going on.”

She was stunned by your matter-of-fact account. “You did?” she asked me, and I nodded.

“He was quite a hero.”

“Come here, sweetheart,” she said, and she gave me the kind of hug that makes everything better. “Thank you for looking out for our boy,” she whispered.

“Dad wanted you to know how much he loved that soup. Again,” I said.

“I’m making leek and potato soup tomorrow,” she said, fishing an empty margarine container out of a drawer. “I’ll send some home with you in this.” Thus began a series of soup deliveries between our houses starring this container. This culminated in Dad actually having dinner with your family because it was getting ridiculous.

“He’ll lose his mind, Mother Edge.”

She grinned at me and gave you a hug as well. “You’re okay?” she said, searching your face.

“Yes, Mum.”

“Did you have a nice time at your Bible study...whatever it was?”

“We really did.”

“Good boys,” she said. “Off to bed with you.”

Once we were upstairs, you located a new toothbrush for me that you had received from your latest trip to the dentist, and we got ready for bed. You rolled out your sleeping bag—a mere formality—and tossed an extra pillow on it. I turned off the light, and we climbed into your cool, soft bed together.

“I really don’t--” you started.
“I know. It’s fine. I just wanna do this,” I said, putting my arms around you as you rested your heavy head on my chest.

“You’re so beautiful.” Your put your hand over my heart, and your fingers moved gently across my skin. You exhaled the way a pet might just before it falls asleep. “I love you.”

Your hair tickled my nose, and I smoothed it out of the way and kissed your forehead, which smelled like the night air. “You’re my best friend, and I love you, Edge,” I whispered.

“My best friend, too.”

Dim blue light filtered into your room though the curtains, and I could just barely make out your books, stereo, records, and posters. Your guitar case was propped up against the closet door. The ceiling light reminded me of an eye, and I stared at it and said a silent prayer thanking God for you. I kissed your forehead one more time.

“Edge, if we went out to your beach tomorrow, do you think you could find those rocks again?

You smiled against my chest. “Yes.”
Not Like Guitars

Chapter Notes

Lots going on this time!

Not to get too spoiler-y, but nearly all of the main plot points actually happened in one way or another, including the lodge house, the Pink Floyd connection, the timing of the NYC trip, the gift, and the Hot Press mention. The stories about the zoo and the sleeping bags were my own invention. But I'm pretty sure the latter happened.

I hope you'll like it. I think we need something like this tonight (i.e. the night after the end of the e+i tour--please enjoy my e+b chapter).

When will you join us down here, love? Ali and our little brood are enjoying a perfectly wonderful and relaxing couple of weeks by the sea, but it’s your birthday, and I’m not with you.

Oh Edge, you know I love Ali. I love her dark beauty. The swell of her hips and the allure of her breasts are sources of endless fascination to me—two of many—along with the mysterious otherness of her sex and her secrets I can never truly know. We are bound together so tightly I can’t imagine a world without her in it.

But you. You know my secrets, and I know yours. An understanding exists between us that can only happen when… A man instinctively knows what another man wants. A woman can learn, but a man already knows. We have given each other the freedom to be our authentic selves when we are together. You are my collaborator in all things creative, and for me that aspect of our partnership rivals and often surpasses the bonds of matrimony and even parenthood. And what is sex if not a collaboration between two people who delight in each other?

I’ve led a privileged life, full of countless blessings and milestones that truly take my breath away. You were there for the vast majority of them. But I have witnessed five events in my life that were so sacred they changed me forever. Four of them were the births of my children. The fifth one is at the end of this chapter.

Christ, please come down here as soon as you can. The white room aches for you. I ache for you.

I love you,

B.

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“How is he making that sound?” I overheard you ask no one in particular as we moved our gear off the stage at McGonagles. Adam had miraculously secured an additional handful of support gigs for us at that venue in July. Our performance space resembled a cramped grotto dominated by a massive and incongruous fake tree on the wall behind Larry. Its limbs spread out along the low ceiling and were decorated with tacky plastic palm fronds.

“What sound?” I asked, lifting my chin in Paul’s direction. He had finally made up his mind to take us on, and his first order of business was to force McGonagles’ management to delay our start time
that night to an hour when an actual audience might be around to watch. This meant shifting the lineup of the evening’s two other bands. Insisting that this happen was something we wouldn’t have dreamt of doing ourselves, but Paul wasn’t opposed to throwing his weight around, and as a result, we had a good set. He raised his glass to me.

You looked into the middle distance and said, “That. Pink Floyd?”

“Oh.” I had been in my own post-performance head space and hadn’t realized McGonagles was playing music.

“Dik used to play that when he was at home. *Echoes*? It’s something like thirty minutes long, and it takes up an entire side of their album. He showed it to me one time. There are no spaces dividing the record up into songs. Just this solid side of music.”

“I mean, that’s kind of the opposite of what we want to do.” Progressive rock was punk’s official enemy, along with disco, although I had envied Pink Floyd’s battalion of soulful backup singers on many occasions. Maybe one day.

“Yeah. It’s not punk. But the things he’s doing...sometimes it doesn’t sound like a guitar at all.”

“No idea how he’s doing it.”

You had become more fixated on guitars than ever before, mainly because a week later you would visit New York City. Your dad needed to be there for work, and the rest of your family planned to tag along. The trip would coincide with your birthday, and hints were being dropped that a new guitar, possibly a Les Paul, might be in the cards for you.

The four of us helped Larry with his kit. “See you at the lodge tomorrow morning?” Adam asked.

“You bet.” I said. We were excited about the lodge. This was another Paul initiative. He had watched us practice at your house in the shed and could see we were outgrowing it. Free lunches from your adorable mother notwithstanding, acoustically it was a disaster, and we could tell your dad was longing to reclaim his woodworking space.

Paul had some dubious connections, and before we knew it we were setting up our gear in a condemned lodge house we were able to rent from the owner at the bargain basement price of five pounds per week. This would keep the electricity on and the water running. (I told my Monday woman about it while I laced the gorgeous chestnut-colored riding boots she ultimately bought, and that was when she began slipping me tens on her way out the door.)

While condemned, the lodge wasn’t that bad, and it was a couple of miles north of Malahide with a mobile home park and a petrol station nearby. Its west end had suffered from fire and water damage, and the heating and cooling system needed to be completely replaced. The majority of its eight rooms featured suspicious and/or alarming details including creeping black mold, holes punched through bathroom doors, chipped and peeling paint, weeds sprouting from window sills, bandages stuck to ceilings, duct tape running along walls, filthy and often damp carpets, and frightening toilets.

But one salmon-colored upstairs room--where the owner had slept pre-condemnation--was in decent shape. And when stripped of all furniture, the lobby was relatively spacious. Our guitars and drums sounded much more impressive, and my voice was huge in that high-ceileded space, with its large windows that faced the sea. We spent a couple of days cleaning and moving things into our new rehearsal area and felt very grown-up indeed.

On the last day before your family’s New York trip, you and I remained in the lodge after Larry and
Adam went home. “I kind of love this place,” you said, leaning against the front desk and looking around. I touched a section of dark wooden paneling that was disturbingly sticky and regretted it immediately. You smiled at me and continued, “Except that room with the chunks of ceiling all over the floor--why does it smell like raisins in there? Does it smell like raisins to you?”

“I guess I didn’t pick up on that, Edge.”

“I can’t not smell raisins.”

You followed me upstairs to the salmon room. When Paul gave us the grand tour of the place, he told us that pretty much every room was off limits from a safety standpoint. But you and I smiled at each other when he praised the salmon room thusly: “Well, I’ve certainly stayed in worse.”

We stood in the doorway, and I took your hand and asked, “Do you wanna say it or shall I?”

“Go ahead.”

“When you return from New York, let’s stay here overnight.”

“Absolutely.”

“To celebrate your birthday.”

“We’ve got to.”

I nudged the stained mattress on the floor with my foot. “This is kind of...questionable, though.”

“Yeah.” You shrugged. “But what if we covered it with plastic? Like a big plastic tarp? I think we have one in the shed.”

“And then we could put a couple of sleeping bags and pillows on top.”

“Perfect.”

I took your other hand and faced you. “Gonna miss you, Edge.”

You kissed my earlobe and whispered, “Me too.”

“Phone me as soon as you return. I don’t care what time it is, okay?”

“Okay.” You looked down at our chests: plain navy blue t-shirt, black Blondie t-shirt, two beating hearts.

“Are you excited?”

“Yes.”

Your mouth was eager for attention, and I was happy to provide it. You moaned softly as I kissed you harder and deeper.

“I can’t wait to hear all about it. New York City...imagine that.”

You nuzzled my neck. “I wish you could come with me.”

I lifted your chin and gazed into your sweet, intelligent eyes. “One day we’ll go there together.”

“As a band.”
“Yeah.”

We kissed again in that condemned lodge house that, once I really thought about it, smelled vaguely of raisins.

* 

Tan and lovely, Ali returned a couple of days later after spending July with her relatives. She had secured two secretarial jobs (at an auto insurance agency and with her father’s electrical business) and was keen to have at least a little fun before they began. I suggested we spend the afternoon at the zoo. It was a step up from our usual “let’s walk somewhere and see what happens” or “I’m hungry, are you?” dates and novel enough to be memorable. Plus Dublin is loaded with museums and places of interest that locals tend to ignore. So we took a bus to the zoo--on a Tuesday, so it wasn’t particularly crowded.

She knew you were visiting New York that week. “Edge is so lucky,” she said as I bought tickets for us.

“I wonder what he’s doing right now,” I said. “It’s his birthday.”

“Oh yeah, I guess it is,” she said. “He’s probably still asleep.” You weren’t one to sleep late, so I shot her a questioning glance. She grinned. “Because of time zones.”

“Of course. He said his parents might get him a new guitar.”

“Wow. What are you gonna get him?”

“I have a tiny idea. I’ve got few days to figure it out.”

The zoo’s verdant atmosphere was surprisingly romantic as we followed the trails in an aimless sort of way. The animals had plenty of room to roam and seemed content in their natural-looking settings. I put my arm around Ali’s waist and imagined we were in the garden of Eden.

We stopped at the hippopotamus habitat, and she squealed with delight at the adorable baby hippo that had emerged from their pond. “Is there anything cuter?” she said, grinning at the little fellow’s shiny, rubbery skin and all-around chubbiness.

“If you described a hippo to a blind person, they’d have no idea how that could possibly work out to be something this cute.”

“Yeah. Hippos do not translate well on paper.”

The African animals were the zoo’s biggest stars, and we spent plenty of time with the giraffes and cheetahs, but Ali and I had no problem falling in love with the standard barnyard animals in the small petting zoo. Young children toddled around with their parents and cooed at the piglets, chickens, and ponies and made the appropriate noises for each one.

Ali squatted down to get a better look at a pygmy goat, and I took in the curve of her hips. Dear Ali.
A little boy stood beside her, and she showed him how to feed it the pellets we had bought. I was charmed by this scene, and I joined them on the ground and kissed her neck. We looked at each other, and the idea of Ali and children seemed like the most beautiful thing in the world to me.

Eventually we stumbled upon the sprawling gorilla enclosure. Its lowest part could be viewed from behind glass. A cluster of teenage girls stood near it. “They’re not gonna come out,” one of them said, obviously wanting to leave. “Maybe they’re sleeping.”

“I really wanna see them, though.”

“Alright.”

We decided we really wanted to see them, too, so Ali and I sat on a bench, held hands, and waited for a few minutes.

“There! There’s one!” the patient girl announced excitedly, and we rose to our feet. A silverback gorilla emerged from a cave-like area and paced around slowly. He was followed by another male who leaned against a tree stump and played with a stick he had found. The first gorilla approached the girls, much to their shrieking delight, and studied each one carefully, his breath fogging the window. One of the girls pressed her hand against the glass, and the gorilla mimicked her action. “Oh my god,” she whispered as he stood there for a few seconds before strutting back to his friend. Or possibly brother. Their relationship was such that they had no problem grooming each other, in any event.

“That gorilla was extraordinary,” I said later as we attempted to locate the zoo’s exit. “The way he put his paw--or is it a hand?”

“It seems more like a hand to me.”

“Right. Hand. The way he put his hand against the glass and looked at that girl--what a special moment.”

She winked at me knowingly and tucked a lock of gleaming hair behind her ear.

“What?”

“That will be you one day if things turn out the way you want.”

“Ali.”

“I’ve seen how girls look at you now. It’s already started.”

“You’re the only girl for me. You know that.” She took my arm. “But I don’t plan to live in a cage.”

“But that’s what fame is, don’t you think? This zoo is beautiful, and those animals want for nothing and have all their needs met by people who love them, but they’re not free. That gorilla might as well be Mick Jagger. I’m sure Mick Jagger is having a great time, but he can’t escape his fame.”

I shrugged. “I just wanna make music. It’s all I’m able to do. Hopefully we’ll earn enough money to tour this country in a cruddy little van. That is my long-term goal right now.”

She laughed. “It is not, and you know it. Your long-term goal is to make thousands of people love you. If not more.”

I kissed her cheek. “You’re fuckin’ right, as usual,” I mumbled.
She put her head on my shoulder. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to bring things down.”

“It’s okay, Ali. I love the way your mind works.”

We paused at the rhino enclosure and watched one of them wallow in a big mud puddle. “A lot of these animals are rare and endangered, and they would suffer in the wild. So I’m glad they’re safe here. But zoos always make me a little sad, sorry.”

“You are the sweetest creature walking the planet, do you know that?”

She pulled me in for a hug. Her deep brown eyes met mine as she touched my jaw. “I missed your face so much.”

“I missed yours, too.”

She glanced at a vending cart by the exit. “Do you want to get some popcorn?”

“Always.”

Since you had gone all-out on my birthday present, I wanted to give you something special as well. So I went to Waltons Music on Georges Street to see what I could find. You and I had been there before to buy a Vox amp for you and a better microphone for me. But I knew I was out of my depth when I saw their long wall of gleaming guitars, some of which I knew by shape, and a glass display case filled with guitar accessories, about which I knew very little.

A trio of employees were playing cards and listening to King Crimson at the back of the store. All were in their twenties and dressed in various shades of music geek. The skinny one stood up when he saw me. “Need some help?”

“Yes. I’m in a band--”

“What band?”

“We’re called U2?”

He looked over his shoulder at his friends, and they shrugged.

“Anyway, it’s our guitarist’s birthday, and I wanted to buy him something he could…uh…” I trailed off.

“What kind of guitar does he have?”

“A Stratocaster, but he might be getting something new this week. I’m not sure what it will be.”

“Huh. What’s he like?”
“He’s kind of like you guys, to be honest. I think he’s some kind of genius.”

He chuckled. “I mean what kind of music?”

“Oh. He likes The Clash, Patti Smith, The Ramones, Television, stuff like that.”

“Okay, good.”

“He was talking to me about Pink Floyd last week, though. He wanted to know how they make their guitars...not sound like guitars.”

This caught their attention. The other two guys stood up, and the bearded one asked, “Does he have any effects pedals? Like an echo unit?”

I smiled vacantly. “I’m gonna say no?”

“Well, there’s no way he’d have this. Brand fuckin’ new.” He pulled a box from the glass case. His freckled hands were trembling just a bit. “I swear to Christ I’m gonna ask this thing to marry me.”

I read the box’s futuristic logo. “Deluxe Memory Man? What is it?”

“We’ve been playing around with it for a few days. Ed? Let’s show him. Follow us.” They led me to a storage room, where “Ed” had a Telecaster hooked up to a small, dark box with six knobs on it. This was plugged into an everyday-looking amp.

“So. Nothing fancy here with the guitar and the amp.” Ed started playing a couple of ordinary riffs on the guitar. “But listen to this.” He turned on the Memory Man, and the other guys started fiddling with the knobs as he played. Suddenly the guitar...didn’t sound like a guitar. It sounded kind of spooky, like a gong being struck in a long tunnel. Another knob turn, and it became a stuttering siren. Another: a foghorn, except pretty. I felt like I was hearing colors.

“Holy shit,” I said.

“It’s fuckin’ amazing, right? And we’re just beginning to scratch the surface of what it can do.”

“So this will work with any guitar and amp?”

“As far as we know.”

“How much?”

The phone rang while I was making some oatmeal for Dad and me, and I knew it had to be you. I answered it and stood at the stove stirring while holding the receiver between my jaw and shoulder. The cord was stretched to its breaking point.

“Bono?”
“Edge! You’re back!”

“Hey! Good morning? It seems like it ought to be midnight. Really weird.”

“How was New York?”

“Unbelievable. B. I don’t even know where to start. It was like being in a movie. That entire city was one huge movie set. The buildings are insane.”

“Here you go, Dad.” He grunted as I set his bowl of oatmeal on the kitchen table and abandoned mine on the counter. I sat on the dining room floor and was prepared to grill you about New York for a solid half-hour. But first things first.

“Did you get a Les Paul?”

“No. I got a Gibson Explorer.” Your voice was as calm as ever, but I could hear the glee bubbling up beneath it.

“I don’t know what that is.”

“It’s a weird shape. Part of it reminds me of your nose. You’ll just have to see for yourself. I...it’s perfect. I can’t wait--”

“Shit. I have to work today, but wanna meet at the lodge this afternoon?”

“And stay overnight?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s do it.”

“See you soon, the Edge.”

“I’m gonna try to take a nap now.”

My afternoon at the shoe store positively dragged, and all I could think about was our upcoming night at the lodge. While you were away, I had stocked the salmon room with a selection of snacks and beverages for us, along with pillows and my sleeping bag, knowing you would bring the rest. After work I bought a Prinsesstårta, which is a Swedish princess cake, because the color of its domed fondant covering matched your eyes. And getting you a princess cake was hilarious. Then I rode the bus past Malahide and waited for you in the lodge.

Your mum let you borrow her car, and you came to the door weighed down with a bag, an amp, a guitar case, and a plastic tarp. I gave you 1.5 seconds to set everything on the floor before I took you in my arms and kissed you. “Edge! Look at you.”

You reached into your back pocket and showed me your driver’s license. “It’s a lousy photo, but I can finally drive now. All by myself.”

The tiny photo was dominated by dark hair and that handsome chin of yours. Shy smile. “Well, I love it. Fuck! I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you. You’ve got to see this thing,” you said, grinning and setting your guitar case on the front desk. You touched one of the latches and looked at me. “You’d better brace yourself because it’s odd. Okay?”
Dead serious, I stood beside you, nodded solemnly, and I may have fondled your ass. “Bracing.”

“Alright,” you said. Latch, latch, open, blue velvet, Gibson Explorer.

“Son of a bitch!”

“Isn’t it amazing?” You ran your fingers along its strange and angular body and neck, obviously deeply in love with it. I almost felt jealous, but that was short-lived because I fell in love with it immediately, too.

“It actually fucking looks like you. You know how people pick dogs that resemble them? That’s you and this guitar.”

“Well, this is your nose,” you said, touching the white pickguard.

“Heh. That’s your jawline, and this is your cheekbone,” I said, touching the lacquered perimeter of its honey-colored body. “It’s gorgeous, Edge. Did it just...call out to you when you saw it?”

“It did, and the second I held it, something about it felt so right. Then when I played it, I knew. It’s weird, but I feel like there are songs in it.”

“Wow. Plug it in and show me.”

You took the Explorer out of its case and continued to talk while you set things up. “Dad and Dik made me try out a bunch of other guitars after this one because they didn’t want me to make a rash decision I’d regret later. But I only had eyes for this one. No contest.”

You strapped it on and turned around, and I gasped. The guitar gave you an instant swagger. “Edge. That’s the one. That is exactly the guitar you need to be playing. You...really do match.”

“The man at the store said it’ll feel like I’m wearing a canoe for a while, and I’m probably gonna bump into things with this part--he called it the tail fin. And some people say this reminds them of a hockey stick or a banana,” you said, indicating the headstock with its six tuners in a straight line.

“I’m crazy about it. Let’s hear it.”

You played bits and pieces of *Out of Control*, and the Explorer created a sound that was fatter and juicer than what we were used to. As you played, you radiated peace and a sense of discovery, and I fell even more deeply in love with you. I couldn’t wait to give you your present, and I tried to decide when the right time would be. Should we eat your cake first, or was now the perfect moment? Would it steal the Explorer’s initial thunder, or--

“So what do you think?”

“It’s sexy and it’s magic, Edge.”

You looked happy, and then you remembered something. “Oh! Did Adam call you today?”

“No.”

“We got a mention in Hot Press.”

“Oh yeah?”

“About the McGonagles gigs when we opened for Revolver.” You gazed at the ceiling, as if doing so would help you visualize the exact words printed on its dodgy plaster. “Revolver recovered in
time, but they had better not stand still, as U2 are ready to pass everyone.” You face mimed exaggerated disbelief. “I mean—”

“Jesus Christ, Edge.”

“We’re ready to pass everyone, B.”

“Oh my god.” I didn’t know what to do with myself. I was overflowing with energy. “This calls for a celebration. Let there be cake! And Guinness!”

“I love you,” you said, carefully replacing the guitar in its case before giving me a kiss on the cheek.

“Are you talking to me?” I teased.

“Of course I am. I’m so glad you like the guitar.”

“You couldn’t have made a better choice.”

I had remembered to bring a bottle opener, but I had forgotten about a candle or any kind of plates or silverware. So we sat on the floor, tore into your hilarious princess cake with our bare hands, and laughed at each other like children. As we ate it, you managed to tell me about your adventures in New York City. Each day included a visit to someplace educational and someplace touristy, all of which you described, along with the city itself. “The pace of New York is unreal. It’s like there’s this constant humming. Not really humming, exactly, but a vibration? It’s like you when you’re excited. That vibration is always going on in the background. It makes Dublin seem like a very small place. And the buildings are so tall and crammed together really tightly. Then in the middle of everything is this enormous park.”

“I believe they call that enormous park in the middle of everything Central Park,” I said sagely.

You flicked icing at me. “Yes. Central Park. It’s so beautiful, and it smells like honeysuckle. In places. But mostly New York smells like diesel and asphalt and occasionally...piss.” You took a sip of your Guinness. “Thank you for this, by the way.”

“It’s a meal in and of itself, really.” I crawled over to you and whispered, “Happy birthday, dear Edge,” and you shivered in a way that pleased me a great deal. “I’ve got a present for you.”

“What could it be?”

“One second.” I retrieved it from my duffel bag and placed it in front of you. I’d managed to wrap it in aluminum foil and had scrawled To The Edge, Love Bono on it with a black marker.

“Thanks, B.”

I tapped the corner of my mouth with a finger, and you kissed me there. Shaking the package yielded no clues, so you smiled at me and began to open it.

“Do try to save the wrapping paper, Edge. It’s awfully expensive.”

“Oh, I will,” you said. And then you saw it. “Wait. What is--how did you? This is the deluxe--oh my god, Bono. I saw one last week--”

“Yeah. I thought you’d like it.”

“Where did you--”
“Waltons. I had some help from the guys there. They’re in awe of this thing, Edge, and it’s brand new, and I knew you’d be into it, too.” By then you had taken the Memory Man out of its box and were back at the front desk opening your guitar case. “So you just plug it into the amp and your guitar. It’s supposed to work with anything.” You were way ahead of me.

The first kiss between the Memory Man and the Explorer sounded like bells. Chiming, echoing, icy bells that chased each other around the lobby. Our jaws dropped, and your eyes were shimmering. “Bono,” you whispered. “I…”

I turned one of the knobs a bit. I had no idea what I was doing, but it seemed like the Memory Man was designed with an experimental, trial-and-error approach in mind. You played an E flat chord and created a metallic, penetrating racket that sounded like someone pounding on a door rapidly. We looked at each other as if we had seen—or rather, heard—a ghost. Or some kind of messenger.

“Bono. This is it. This is it. This is what I want a guitar to do...oh my god, thank you.” Tears of joy and and disbelief were in your eyes. Seeing you this way made me emotional, too, and for a long time we stood there at the front desk creating new sounds and staring at each other, enchanted.

It was late. We tore ourselves away from the lobby, went upstairs, and covered the mattress with the tarp, followed by your unzipped sleeping bag and topped with mine. The room was a bit chilly, but we didn’t care. We were in bed together again.

And you were one grateful young man, weren’t you? I was on fire for your tongue and neck and hands. I had missed everything about you. And did I have a plan for us that night? Oh, Edge. Of course I did.

I watched your fingers take possession of my chest from behind. “Which hand do you use?”

You were biting the nape of my neck at the time. “What’s that, baby?”

“Which one,” I said, reaching beneath the waistband of my briefs and taking myself in my left hand, “do you use?”

“Oh.”

I looked over my shoulder at your face, which was dimly lit by the adjacent bathroom’s green nightlight. You closed your eyes and smiled shyly. “Mostly right. But either one, really.”

“Good. You’re on the right side, then, and I’m on the left. On our backs.”

“Okay.”

We changed places on the mattress, and I took your left hand. “I wanna watch you,” I said. “We can stay covered. I just want to see your face.”

“And I can watch you?”

“I hope you will, Edge.”

I arched my back, looked up at the ceiling, and turned my face to you. “Baby,” you murmured, your eyes dark and flashing. I moved until we were shoulder to shoulder, and we gave each other the kinds of dreamy kisses we liked to imagine when we were in our separate beds. I heard the snap of an elastic waistband, and the tarp made tell-tale, crinkly sounds. Thinking you might enjoy a distraction from that, I made a few pleasurable little sighs, and then, as an additional birthday present, I gave you some things to think about.
“I love it, Edge. Give me some more.”

“Oh.”

I let that sink in for a while. Then I said, “Please. Go deeper. I want it.”

“Yes. Anything.” Your breathing quickened, and we moved to face each other.

A minute or two passed, and a stifling heat spread over my skin. Frantic for you, I whispered, “That’s right. I can take it.”

“Fuck.”

I moaned. “I love how you fuck me, Edge.”

I closed my eyes, imagining it, and suddenly you were on top of me and pinning both of my hands above my head. I liked the hot, sharp dizziness this produced in me, although my cock was furious with you. A delicious wave washed over my body as your darker voice told me, “You’re staying still. Just for a minute.”

“Oh, Edge.” Your mouth took control of mine. I wanted to feel the weight of your body, but you remained poised above me.

“It’s better if you do it like this.”

“Please…” I said, gasping.

“You’ll come so hard.” Your words went straight to my cock.

“Yes.”

“And so will I.”

Breathing heavily, we stayed this way for as long as we could bear it, and then you returned to your side of the bed. I repeated your name with increasing levels of urgency, and soon your name commingled with mine. They bounced around the room and down the stairs, where I’m sure your guitar and Memory Man heard the names of their new master and his beloved singer.

I think it was several hours later when I woke up to discover you kissing my forehead. Our bodies were intertwined. “Edge, love,” I whispered contentedly against your shoulder.

“B. I need my arm,” you whispered back, kissing me again.

“What time is it?”

You yawned. “No idea. It’s still night, though. Go back to sleep.”

“Still on New York time?”

“It doesn’t feel like it’s night yet. I was just gonna go downstairs and...”

I yawned. “Play with your new toys?”

“Yeah. I didn’t want you to wake up and wonder where I was. I’ll keep the volume way down.”

“Okay, Edge.”
I drifted off to sleep again and dreamt about being trapped in a dark room with a small, bright window near the ceiling, and I kept trying to get up there to look outside. I felt around in the darkness for things I could stack and climb, but it was precarious and I fell again and again. But I finally made it up to the window and looked out at a blinding light. Then the walls dissolved and there I was, teetering on a mountain of furniture and squinting at a glittery sun that seemed so close I could touch it.

I don’t know how long I had been asleep, but when I opened my eyes I heard your guitar faintly. Not wishing to disturb you, I dressed and opened the door as quietly as I could. I watched you, my oblivious darling, from the top step.

You had figured out how to turn on a single ceiling light. Inside its warm circle, you perched on the front desk with your guitar and gear, and you played that E flat messenger chord again and again at a very low volume, filling the room with singing red birds. You paused occasionally to make adjustments to your Memory Man and the Explorer’s tuners, and you jotted notes on the paper bag from the bakery. After trying a few other chords with these new settings, you crossed out a line, made a correction, and nodded at it. I could tell you were on to something. In deep concentration, you revisited that messenger chord and alternated it with an A flat and a D flat in a nagging rhythm.

Your expression changed from industrious to...astonished. You bit your lip and played the chords again. Even at that low volume, they sounded the way an insistent tap on the shoulder feels, and I shivered in recognition.

It was one of the most profound experiences of my life, Edge. It was my privilege to watch your talent crystallize into genius. Still playing, you gazed at the light above your head, and a tear sparkled as it rolled down your cheek.

My baffled Edge composing I Will Follow.
And now: the tough times begin.

The two performances described here really happened, although as usual I was not given much to work with (spoilers): "Airport hotel, six people expecting something else," and "They didn't give us a sound check or a dressing room, and they treated us like shit, so Bono yelled at them about heroes and we stole their wine." Somehow I turned that into 5400 words. :) Apologies to the Stranglers, who I turned into a horde of barbarians. I don’t know much about them beyond what you’ll read here. But they were mean to my boys, so that’s what you get.

Thanks for being patient with me! I'm back on track now. I would like to thank moccji on IG and Tumblr for the incredible fan art inspired by this fic. I am absolutely blown away! <33333

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"What’s it like, taking off?” Larry asked you. We were sitting on the ground in a parking lot near the airport and watching a 747 heave itself into the night sky. I buttoned my denim jacket and wondered if my gloves were still in the coat closet at home.

“Yeah.”

"Really relatable, Edge.” Larry tapped his hands on his knees as if they were bongo drums along with Miss You by the Rolling Stones.

“It’s seriously fun. Taking off and landing are the best parts. The rest is just a whole lot of sitting around. But it’s cool to look out the window and see the tops of clouds.”

“Yeah. Maybe someday.” Larry looked at his watch, which was not a fashionable accessory as much
as it was a symbol of his oppression.

“We’re gonna have to start attracting audiences in at least the double digits before we can even think about America,” I said. “Christ, what a shit show.”

“I dunno, Bono. That woman in the white coat seemed amused by your curvy little arse while her husband checked them in,” Adam said, raising his beer bottle in my direction.

I sighed. “That’s because we were between songs. I guess you didn’t see her expression of horror once we started playing again.”

“We might as well face it. We are not an airport hotel band.” Adam started peeling the label from his bottle.

Larry laughed. “When they booked us, I bet they assumed we were gonna have tin whistles and fiddles and walk around with bloody shillelaghs.”

“Six people. Jesus.” I looked at the sky: no moon, no stars.

“I think it’s fair to say two of them didn’t hate us.”

“They were just being polite, Adam,” I said. “‘We came to see The Wolfe Tones, but your drummer looks so much like our grandson we decided to stay.’”

“At least I’m starting to get a handle on the Memory Man,” you said.

Larry spat on the ground. “Bane o’ my existence, I swear to god.”

“I’m sorry it’s been so hard. Thanks for putting up with me.”

We nodded and sang along with the oo-oo-oo-oo-oo refrain half-heartedly.

As a tool for creating fun, abstract sounds from a guitar, the Memory Man was unparalleled. But precision was not its game. Its little dials had no real markings. In what I thought was a genius move, you had used a white china marker to pinpoint the exact position of each knob for every song, labeling them with tiny letters and numbers only you understood. Between songs, you would hurry over to the Memory Man and adjust the dials like a bank robber cracking a safe in a race against time. The problem was that you had to hit those marks precisely, and if you were off by even a tiny bit, the delay would shift to a slightly different tempo that the rest of us would have to adapt to, and these changes hit Larry the hardest.

The Memory Man made us sound like no one else out there, but lots of times we felt like we were back at square one as a band, and our late summer gigs ranged from acceptable to terrible.

Unfortunately, the music industry types Paul had convinced to see us only came to the terrible shows, and none of them attended the acceptable ones. And our demo failed to persuade the rest of Ireland’s A&R people to check us out at all. This airport hotel “performance” would have been funnier if it hadn’t happened at a time when we were beginning to see how far away our dream truly was.

“T-minus eight days until The Stranglers,” you said, as if any of us needed reminding. We would be opening for them at the Top Hat Ballroom—an airplane hangar-like venue—in front of a crowd of 2,500 people. It would be our biggest show to date, hot on the heels of our smallest one.

“I love this damn song,” I said as Gerry Rafferty’s Baker Street began to play. Its piercing saxophone cut through the noise pollution of taxiing jets and other traffic.
“If you love it so much, maybe you should take up the sax, Bono,” Adam said. “Really round out our sound.”

I rolled my eyes and threw a leaf at him. “I’d fuckin’ do it if I thought it would help us,” I said. “Run it through the Memory Man and see what happens.” We listened to the song for about a minute, and then I began to sing along.

You used to think that it was so easy
You used to say that it was so easy
But you’re trying, you’re trying now
Another year and then you’d be happy
Just one more year and then you’d be happy
But you’re crying, you’re crying now

I stopped singing because those lyrics hit a little too close to home. I glanced at you, and your head was bowed. “Ah, Edge. It’s fine. You’re figuring it out. You are. You were really good tonight.”

You raised your weary head. Your eyes were shining. “So were you guys.”

“Wish somebody could have seen us.”

“We still got paid, though,” Adam said, passing ten pound notes to each of us.

I held my tattered note up to the street light and studied its crosshatched image of a lovely young woman with a harp. “Her face always seems like it’s saying, ‘Sucks to be you,’ don’t you think?”

“It kind of does.”

Larry stood. “Well, it sucks to be me. Gotta work tomorrow.” One by one the rest of us rose to our feet. We paused to watch an Aer Lingus commuter jet whine its way down to the tarmac. Its wheels hit the ground with a thud and a shriek.

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“Tonight. Mandatory propaganda session at Edge’s,” I announced at the end of a workmanlike practice session at the lodge house. I could see our drummer wracking his brain for some excuse, any excuse, but we all knew he had the next day off. “That means you, Larry.”

“I’ll pick you up,” Adam added.

“Fine.”

The three of us had been talking amongst ourselves about Larry’s waning interest in the band, which was becoming noticeable now that the momentum from the Limerick competition had evaporated, and people who could have helped us were telling us no. Being in U2 wasn’t as much fun as it used to be for him. If anything, it was simply more work heaped upon his young shoulders.

Adam and I had been walking along Drury Street earlier in the week, and we looked at a crusty wall that one of the record stores had surrendered to posters and gig announcements from local bands. Most had printed a single image multiple times and glued them together en masse. “We should do that,” Adam said.
“We should, but we can’t afford to print more posters.”

Adam picked at the corner of a flier for The Vipers. “They put these on here with wallpaper paste, right?”

“I guess.”

“I’ve got a lot of that at home. Mum redid my bedroom last month. She wants to turn it into a den—except what’s the feminine version of a den? Because it’s for her.”

“I believe they call it ‘a room of one’s own.’ Right?”

He shrugged. “Probably. Anyway. She wants that room when I move out, and this was her subtle way of letting me know. I’m living there on borrowed time, it appears.”

I thought about this. “Does she have any leftover wallpaper?”

“There’s one or two rolls, I think.”

“What does it look like?”

“It’s lots of little courtship scenes from long ago. Ladies on swings, walking hand in hand with men wearing wigs, bullshit like that. In a sort of raspberry color.”

“Why can’t we use that? Just roll out the wallpaper so it’s really long and paint something-something-U2 on it. Dad’s got buckets of old paint in the basement. Then we’ll put it up here with your wallpaper paste. And there are other places in town where we could do it, too.” And that is how Operation U2 Propaganda and Larry Motivation Increaser was born.

We met in your kitchen because your mum had made oatmeal cookies that needed to be sampled. She listened as we told Larry about our project, and we laughed at Adam’s wallpaper. It was so not-punk that it was completely punk. We kicked around a few ideas for what we should write, but we couldn’t come up with anything great. During a lull, an ad for a popular antacid came on your mother’s little television with its stupid Indigestion can happen to anyone! jingle.

“U2 can happen to anyone,” Larry mumbled.

“Fuck! That’s brilliant!” I yelled. “Sorry, Mother Edge.”

“It’s fine,” she said, chuckling.

“All in favor?”

We were all in favor.

We shifted our base of operations to your father’s shed, where we unrolled and cut the wallpaper to several nine-foot lengths. Adam and I excused ourselves from drawing the letters, as our penmanship was laughable, and we let you and Larry take over that step. Meanwhile we raided the shed for paintbrushes and removed the pudding-like skin from the surface of Dad’s paint buckets. Then we oversaw the lettering process and said things like, “Look at them. So fucking capable.” Larry flipped us off, but I was happy to see him smiling.

Soon we were all on the floor painting the letters with various shades of black and gray. The paint’s sickeningly sweet fumes made me cough. I stood up to stretch and noticed Gill standing in the doorway. I walked over to greet her, and she presented me with a plastic bag filled with a dozen U2
pins she had made herself. Touched, I dropped to my knees and kissed her hand. She pointed at you as you carefully outlined a block letter H before filling it in with neat horizontal and vertical strokes. You were oblivious to us and one hundred percent on task.

“Gotta love him,” Gill whispered.

I looked at her. “I do.”

“I know.”

I felt myself blush, so I picked at some paint that had landed on the front of my t-shirt and obscured Johnny Rotten’s face.

She put her hand on my shoulder. “Don’t break his heart.”

I smiled at you. “How could I?”

“I’d be obligated to murder you, and that would be a shame because you’re the singer in my favorite band.”

“I promise.” I gave her a hug.

“He loves you.” Her whisper was similar to yours.

“I always wanted a sister.”

The painting process took longer than we thought it would, but the paint dried quickly, and we stood back and admired our work. Larry and I took the paintbrushes to the kitchen and rinsed them out in the sink. “They look better than I thought they would,” I said.

“It was really fun.”

“Do you lads need help putting them up?” your mum asked as she walked by.

“Are you volunteering?”

With a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, she said, “I’ll drive the getaway car.”

The five of us piled into the Volkswagen, armed with paste, brushes, and three rolls of painted wallpaper, and away we rode to the first of several prime graffiti locations. I sat in the center of the back seat, the better to invade your space and furtively touch your paint-stained hands. But since your mother was driving, I toned things all the way down, of course.

As she parked near the first spot, we coached her. “If anybody asks questions, we’re just kids and we don’t know what we’re doing is against the law,” you said.

“No idea. And everyone else has already done it, so where’s the harm?” she asked.

I patted her shoulder. “You’re pretty cool, Mother Edge.”

“Thank you, love. Are you sure you’ll be warm enough?”

Quickly as you please, we barreled out of the car, unrolled the wallpaper on the sidewalk, and set to work applying wallpaper paste to the back of it. Some of us were dead serious about this, and some of us were laughing idiotically and getting paste all over our fingers. We stuck our massive wallpaper poster over an untold number of older notices. I wanted to slice into the wall and present you with a
chunk of it, with layer upon layer of colorful posters stuck together like a striped piece of sedimentary rock.

Our first two stops went smoothly, but the last one was fraught with anxiety because just as we were beginning to stick the poster to the wall, your mum called out, “Lads! Hurry!” We finished the job in a rush and dove back into the Volkswagen just as a police car passed by. Howling with laughter, we drove away. But before she dropped us off at our homes, your mum made a victory lap of each graffiti site where our wallpaper posters were now on obnoxious display. We hooted at each one and were especially pleased when we returned to the scene of our third and final crime.

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“Stupid Paul’s friend’s wedding,” I grumbled as the four of us waited near the stage behind a stack of black and silver tour cases. Each was stenciled with “STRANGLERS” in white. This would suffice as our dressing room, said Stranglers had decided, and without Paul around to stand up for us, we were forced to take what we could get.

“They’re so mean.”

“And big.”

“And old.”

You sat on the floor in silence and seemed to be visualizing something. We had also been denied a sound check, much to your dismay. If anyone could figure out a way to take care of this task mentally, it was you, but I didn’t like seeing you worry unnecessarily.

“I’ll be right back,” I said. I entered the bowels of the backstage area in search of the band we were supporting, thinking I might be able to change their minds about the sound check. They were in the largest of their several dressing rooms and playing cards and drinking beneath a hazy canopy of cigarette smoke.

Knowing JJ, their singer and bass player, liked to decorate his guitar strap with pins and badges of various punk groups, I set one of Gill’s pins on the table beside him and asked him if he’d like to add U2 to his collection.

Disgusted, he snarled at me, “Uh, fuck no.” Then he tossed the pin onto the floor and smashed it with the heel of his boot as his band mates roared.

“Wow,” I said, walking away and becoming more enraged with every step I took.

“I hate to see him leave, but I love watching him walk away,” one of them shouted.

I joined the rest of you by the cases. “Okay, they are officially the worst,” I huffed. My hands were shaking, and you reached up and took one in your cool, steady grip.

I pulled you up, and you murmured, “It’s gonna be okay.”

After scanning the swarming crowd for friendly faces, we came up empty. More often than not, Dublin’s punk audiences weren’t only there for the music. They were also there for the recreational violence opportunities, and before we even set foot on the stage, it became clear that we would be
the Stranglers’ sacrificial lambs.

“I just wanna get this over with. To hell with it,” Larry said, putting on his tough-guy act. But I could sense his apprehension as our largest audience continued to file in.

“That’s the spirit,” you said.

Adam smiled. “This is the part in every rock ‘n’ roll movie where the band gets booed off the stage and everyone hates them, but after they pay their dues, they soar to the top of the charts.”

I nodded. “Alright. Let’s pay our dues, then.”

One of the Stranglers’ scariest roadies stomped onto the stage, and reading from a wrinkled scrap of notebook paper, he bellowed, “From the north side of Dublin, please welcome our little friends, The U-2s.” I swear I heard the unnecessary hyphen in there.

Catcalls and sarcastic laughter greeted us as we grabbed our instruments, and we responded with a few seconds of screaming microphone feedback that resulted in at least a thousand Fuck yous hurled in our direction. They left the house lights on during our performance, the better for us to memorize every hateful expression on every face for as far as the eye could see.

“This is Out of Control,” I said, watching Adam and Larry as they built the song’s indestructible foundation. Then you constructed your brittle, towering walls, archways, vaulted ceilings, and flying buttresses. I scrambled to the top of your highest bell tower, looked at the sky, and sang.

I loved that song so much it didn’t matter that the audience was a collection of every school bully who punched me for being small, every neighborhood loser who laughed at the idea of me pursuing a dream, every record store employee who sneered when I had the audacity to buy something mainstream, and every homophobic stranger who called the two of us fucking queers.

I abandoned my usual attempt to connect with them. They were clearly a lost cause. Instead I smiled at you and your gorgeous canoe of a guitar as the crowd yelled at us to get off the stage. I vamped while you adjusted your Memory Man, lying about how pleased we were to be supporting our heroes the Stranglers. You nodded and tore into the dark introduction to Stories for Boys, a new song we barely knew how to play. But you must have hit the marks on your dials perfectly because your sound stopped the onslaught of verbal abuse for about ten seconds. Yeah, you fucks. He’s brilliant, and there’s nothing you can do to stop him.

A plastic cup of beer hit me on the knee, causing me to fumble the end of the second verse. This was followed by a couple of others that missed their mark, fortunately. Adam saw this and, shooting a disappointed glare at the front row, he stood beside me--practically in front of me--and kicked the cups out of the way. You mimicked his actions, stood at my right side, and we shared my mic during the chorus.

Near the end of the song, I heard a sickening ping from your guitar, and you looked at me in shock. One of your strings had broken, and it dangled from the Explorer’s headstock in an ugly spiral. You didn’t have a backup guitar, and there was no time to replace the string. You were forced to limp along with five strings during our last trio of songs, not that the crowd could tell the difference or gave even the slightest of damns.

But to our ears, our sound was fucked, and this must have shown on our faces. Our tormentors smelled blood in the water, and the garbage throwing and the booing began in earnest. We retreated and played in a cluster around Larry, each of us telegraphing messages of support to you, and somehow we made it to the end of our set.
“We’re called U2,” I said while the rest of you collected your gear.

“Fuck U2!” yelled many. I flipped them off and, pelted by cups, I helped Larry with his drums. As soon as our equipment was safely off the stage, I made a furious beeline to the dressing rooms, followed by the three of you.

“Look who’s back,” JJ said, blowing a kiss at me.

“Your song about how there are no more heroes?” I yelled. “I don’t believe it. You’re not my heroes anymore, but I still have plenty.” Oh, I was a mighty little volcano.

“Had a rough time out there, did ya, love?”

“Yes, thanks to you.” I looked at the ceiling and felt my hands become fists. “I swear to Christ, if we’re ever in your position, we’ll treat younger bands with respect.”

“Our fans eat bands like you for breakfast.”

Their drummer, who must have been twenty years older than us, scowled at me. “Stupid boy. What did you expect? They paid to see us, not you. You’re cannon fodder.”

“You get the audience you deserve, and they’re all arseholes,” I snapped.

“Fuckin’ babies.”

“Well, when I’m your age, I hope I won’t be as bitter and mean as you.”

“Funny, that’s exactly what I told your mum last night.” They exploded with laughter.

My jaw dropped. “Oh, fuck you,” I heard you mutter as you stepped in front of me and moved towards four men who could have easily snapped you in two. Seeing red, I followed you until Larry and Adam grabbed our arms and pulled us back.

“Not worth it,” Adam said. “Come on. Let’s go.”

“You goddamn bastards!” I shouted at our former heroes as Adam and Larry wrangled us into the hallway. Still laughing, the Stranglers made their way to the stage. I finally remembered to breathe and put my head against the cool concrete wall, gasping.

You were by my side. “Bono.”

“Let’s just go,” Larry said.

I closed my eyes and exhaled. An idea was forming. “Not yet. Come on,” I said, running a hand through my hair. All of you followed me to their dressing room where I picked up a bottle of wine.

“We’re at least taking their fucking booze. Who’s with me?” Larry and Adam chuckled at this, and a slow grin moved across your face. We hustled our gear and as much alcohol as we could carry out of the Top Hat and into our cars. Once again Adam distributed ten blasted pounds to each of us.

“Sucks to be us,” Larry said, nodding at the lady with the harp.

“We really should get out of here,” you said, eyeing a couple of security guards who had just exited from a backstage door.

I slid into the Beetle’s passenger seat. “Tomorrow morning, okay?” I called to Adam as he started his car.
“Yeah.”

“Larry?”

“Sure.”

After a quick car ride where you drove and I drank and talked incessantly, we stopped at the petrol station near the lodge house to fill up the tank (goodbye, blasted ten pounds). We also called our parents to let them know we wouldn’t be coming home until the next day. My hands were trembling again as I fumbled with the pay phone’s receiver.

“Listen to the sea. Breathe in and out with it. That’s right,” you said gently.

You unlocked the lodge house door in the dark, and I concentrated on the sounds of the black water as it lapped against the shore fifty feet away. When you turned on the lobby’s lights, my shadow appeared on the sand and rocks. My legs were freakishly long, and my head disappeared in the darkness.

I entered the lobby, fell into your arms, closed my eyes, and sighed a defeated, “Fuck, Edge.”

“It’s okay. It’s over.”

“Yeah.”

You lifted my chin and looked into my eyes. “I’m proud of you, B. The way you stood up to them? Like David versus Goliath.”

I chuckled. “My kingdom for a slingshot and some rocks.”

“Yeah.”

Brightening, I said, “But Edge! I’m proud of you. Playing with that broken string?”

You shook your head. “I’m never gonna be without a spare guitar. That’s one lesson I learned tonight.”

“What do you think caused it?”

You glanced down at your guitar case. “It seems like it broke on the bridge. Maybe something sharp is happening there? I’m gonna take it to Walton’s tomorrow and see what they think.”

I nodded. “Tell them I sent you.”

“Wanna come along?”

“Of course I do.”

Possibly in an attempt to change the subject, you unbuttoned the collar of your white shirt. And then the next button. And the next. “I think I was so nervous my body forgot to sweat,” you said. I slid my hand inside--soft, warm--and felt your beating heart.

“We should all be so lucky.” You lifted my semi-damp turtleneck and did the same, and you kissed me.

“But I love it when you’re all hot and sweaty,” you whispered, kissing my temple and smiling sweetly. I touched your hair. It was becoming so long it seemed almost feminine, and a protective
reaction pulsed through my body. You continued to mirror my movements, and I knew you must have felt the same way about me.

“Say it again, Edge.”

“I love it when you’re all hot and sweaty?” you whispered against my cheek.

“No. I meant something else.”

“What do you want me to say?”

“The thing you said right after he made that crack about Mum.”

You seemed pleased and got into character. “Oh, fuck you.”

“God damn it, Edge, I love you.”

You laughed and shivered. Summer was over, and some mornings the lobby was so chilly we started talking about bringing in a space heater. “Let’s go upstairs.”

We were still too distracted and upset by the night’s events to concentrate on anything sexual, and it took a while before we fell asleep. I just wanted to hold you and be held by you and relive the horror of our performance. I felt less alone knowing you had seen and heard the same things I had, and we agreed that Larry and Adam were the best people to be in a band with, and that was enough for us that night.

“We’re gonna have to tell them about us one of these days,” you said sleepily.

I kissed your shoulder. “I know. We will.”

“Do you think they’ll be okay with it?”

“Well, what would you do if they told us they were in love?”

You grinned. “I’d laugh my arse off.”

I pinched your chin. “I dunno. They’re pretty cute together.”

“Yeah. I’d be fine with it.”

“I think we’ll get some laughs and some tell me something I don’t already knows. Larry might be flustered by it, but he’s our brother, you know? He loves us in his gruff little way.”

“Yeah.”

Rain began to fall, and it sounded louder under the lodge house’s substandard roof than it did at home.

“I love falling asleep when it rains.”

“Me too.”

The top sleeping bag covered our bodies completely, including our heads, and hidden from the world, we made promises to do lovely things to each other in the morning...promises we kept.

And I thought about those things the following evening in my room: my fingers in your wet, eager
mouth and yours in mine. You made the rest of my body exceedingly jealous until I had the bright
idea to slowly lower my hand, sliding it down my chest and stomach one inch at a time until there
you were, sucking my fingers next to the part of me that wanted your mouth so badly it almost hated
you, Edge. But how could it hate you when, dear god, you were finally right there where I wanted
you, kissing me through a filmy layer of saturated cotton—

“Paul. Last time I’m gonna say it. Get down here and take out the trash.”

Fucking chores. I needed a place of my own, and soon. When I returned to my room, my hair and
face soaking wet thanks to the rain that was probably never going to stop, I was filled with the
irrational urge to dismantle the light fixture above my bed. Goodbye, prissy white ceiling light with
way too many fleurs-de-lis for anyone’s taste. Hello, simple, bare-bones lightbulb. My new aesthetic.

The swinging bulb created tilty, seasick shadows in my room, and I looked at the dark and distorted
version of myself on the wall near the door. I remembered watching Norman shadow box years ago,
a sport he had abandoned when he moved out of the house. I punched my shadow a couple of times,
and then, convinced Norman’s old gloves were somewhere in the truckload of boxes he kept in his
old room, I set off to find them. I knew it might take a while, so I flipped Darkness of the Edge of
Town to side two, and I could hear the songs faintly through the wall.

Norman was always the more organized Hewson child, but that wasn’t saying much, and the boxes,
if they were labeled at all, had words like “misc” and “stuff” written on them. I felt very smart when I
came up with the strategy to ignore all boxes that were too small for boxing gloves and worked my
way through collections of books, winter clothing, childhood memorabilia, and other items a person
tends to accumulate while living in the same house for eighteen years. At the top of a box filled with
school papers, I discovered a black and white photo of Mum that took my breath away. She wore a
pair of sunglasses, which she had slid down her nose in a flirtatious manner, and was laughing. I
pocketed this image, forbidden in our house, only to take it out again just as quickly. I touched her
dark hair and traced the curves of her face. Oh, Mum.

Finally I opened a box that reeked of old runners. The gloves were at the bottom.

I returned to my room with the photo and the gloves and set them on my bed. Side two was finishing
up. The bored elitist working the cash register at the record store sneered at me when I bought the
album, but I didn’t care. No, Bruce Springsteen’s music was not punk and it was barely even cool,
but it was sad, romantic, and majestic, with pianos and Hammond organs and what even was that? A
glockenspiel? He could sound like the most beaten-down man in the world, and then he roared like
no punk singer I had ever heard.

I studied the photo of him on the album cover. He stood in a bedroom as small and ordinary as mine,
decorated with the kind of dusty-looking floral wallpaper grandmothers like. Wearing a black leather
jacket and a white t-shirt, he stared back at me with eyes so dark I could barely make out their pupils.
One tiny white sparkle dotted each eye. He looked troubled. The back cover was almost exactly the
same as the front, except he had removed the jacket. He was built like you: a big head with too much
dark hair, narrow shoulders, slim frame. Maybe he was our older American cousin...the most
extraordinary Everyman making music he believed in.

He wouldn’t have treated us the way they did.

I tapped on the lightbulb and put on the gloves. Moving shadows surrounded me, and I punched
them all.

Boy
Stupid boy
(Spoilery stuff follows.)

This chapter contains an important moment in Bono's life: the time he saw the Ramones. He was the only U2 member at their 1978 Dublin show, and for a while I thought it might be amusing to have Edge go with him. But ultimately I decided it would be more fun to have B describe it to E in one enormous run-on sentence. (Don't worry--I've chopped it up into sentences and paragraphs.) You can see the band perform an entire concert that was filmed before a bland German studio audience a couple of weeks before they hit Dublin in the following incredible video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WgdD3F73CY&list=RD-WgdD3F73CY&start_radio=1&t=1742

Also, in U2 by U2, Larry says that his mother died in 1976, and that's the timeline I went with for this story. I learned much later that she actually died in 1978. GOOD JOB ON THE FACT CHECKING, U2! Her death was also the catalyst for Larry quitting his job and concentrating on the band full-time, and Bono was instrumental in helping him through the grieving process. Well, as Bono has taught us in recent years, there is no end to grief, so this chapter is my attempt to reconcile the timeline weirdness. And in the end it doesn't make a whole lot of difference. I guess.

Shoutout to MissEllaVation, who has been my commenting rock, you guys. But I adore any and everyone who comments, so please do. I'd love to know your thoughts. <3

Edge, love, I think I have one more chapter to write here, and then it will be your turn again. I know you have been aching to describe 1979, our toughest year (well, tied with 1991), and I am confident that you will do so with grace and ease.

I want this to be real.

B.

-----

“I can’t begin to tell you how jealous I am.”

I smiled at the receiver and rolled over in bed. “It’s alright, Edge. Your sister’s choir performance was every bit as important as the fucking Ramones.”

“Each song had an audience participation component. You do not want details.”

“Oh no.”

“Oh yes. Tell me about the Ramones.”
“Edge. I don’t even know where to start.”

“Well, it’s only 10:00. Must have been a pretty short concert.”

“It was barely an hour from start to finish, but you’d never know. They must have crammed two dozen songs into it. I was exhausted when it was over.”

“Big crowd?”

“Oh yeah. The audience was a who’s-who of Dublin’s music scene. I can’t believe you, Adam, and Larry weren’t there.”

“Neither can I,” you sighed.

“Okay. Well, Gavin, Guggi, and I got there pretty early and found our seats, and we were six rows back, but it didn’t matter because everybody rushed the stage as soon as they came on. We were way up close in this boiling cauldron of people.”

“Could you see alright?”

“Sometimes yes and sometimes no. But the Ramones are really tall, at least to me.”

“Everybody’s really tal--”

“Hilarious, Edge. Joey is an actual giant. Legs like airport runways.”

“Who knew?”

“He’s got this thick mass of black hair that covers most of his face--you can kind of see the tip of his nose and his mouth. Plus dark glasses. And his big white hand has the mic in a death grip at all times. He’s in this permanent lunge, but sometimes he jumps. I have never seen anyone so focused. Nothing else matters to Joey. So he’s this colossus in the middle and then you’ve got Johnny and DeeDee on either side of him like bookends with matching bowl haircuts, and Tommy’s hunched over his drums and all business, and this band is so tight, Edge, so fucking tight and they’re just rampaging from one song to the next.”

“You might want to take a breath.”

I took a breath. “And Joey: it’s like normal shirts don’t fit him and when he’s really into it you can see maybe four inches of exposed skin between his shirt and his jeans, but he doesn’t do anything to fix it--and they’re all wearing the same thing: black leather jackets, t-shirts, jeans. And maybe eight songs in, Johnny and DeeDee took their jackets off because it must have been 7,000 degrees in there and it was 1,2,3,4 right into the next one. And they’re just as incredible as Joey. Fucking heroes. Crowd going crazy, yelling along. My throat is sore, seriously. So loud I felt the bass in my chest. It was punishing, and I mean that in the best way possible.”

“I wasn’t sure if they were gonna be amazing or kind of, I don’t know, sloppy.”

“It was like being inside the center of the sun. Joey said one sentence at most between the songs, if they stopped at all. And the other thing is? They are here in our city right now, Edge. They’re breathing the same air as we are.” I took a breath.

“I wonder where they’re staying?”

“But here’s what I love the most about them: they believe in their songs. It’s like they are proud of
them and they want to give all of them to us as quickly as possible. And the songs just seem like they’re fun to play and the band...there’s nothing they’d rather be doing. They exist to deliver these songs. And I want us to be like that. I think on our best nights, we can be. We are. And if there was any doubt in my mind before tonight, it’s gone. This is what I want to do. I know that for a fact.”

“Even though it’s hard at the moment?”

“I’m sure they’ve had their tough times, just the same as anyone. But they’re on the other side of it now, and we’ve got to get over there, too. We just have to keep working and getting better.”

I heard an amused little sniff. “You can count on me, Coach.”

“See you tomorrow morning?”

“Of course. Dad got us a space heater.”

“Oh good. Tell him thanks for me.”

“Okay, B. Try to get some sleep.”

“Who can sleep? I’m calling Adam and Larry next, and I’ll probably be up until at least 2:00.”

“Glad you had fun.”

“Fucking wish you could’ve gone.”

“We’ll see them together next time.”

“Oh, and Edge? My hair is darker. A lot darker.”

“No kidding?”

“Gavin was in an experimental mood.”

You exhaled. “I can’t wait to see it.”

“Sweet dreams, Edge.”

“Who can sleep?”

*

We had one show in October, but thanks to Paul’s connections, a second demo session awaited us at the end of that month, so we devoted our mornings to rehearsing for it. When I didn’t have to work at the shoe store, I spent my afternoons writing new material with you in the lodge house. I treasured our time together.

When I arrived the next morning, you were tuning the second-hand radio and landed on a pop station that was playing *Don’t Leave Me This Way*. Its celestial strings reminded me of a place I wanted to believe was real. You turned and offered me a tin of cherry-flavored cough drops. “They’re kind you like, not the ‘evil ones.’ Christ, look at you.”

“What do you think?”
You came closer, touched my hair, and moved my face into the light. “It makes your skin look really pale, and your eyes look really blue. And your lips are so pink.”

“I take it these are good things?”

“Of course, B.” You kissed me slowly and deliberately.

“That’s a relief.”

You held a lock of my hair between your thumb and index finger and regarded it tenderly. “I asked for a camera for Christmas.”

“Do you want to take pictures of me?”

“Oh yes.” You touched my face, and I gazed into your eyes.

“Thanks for the cough drops, Edge.” I was about to kiss you again when Adam rolled into the parking lot, and a minute later the three of us watched Larry arrive in an unfamiliar Fiat driven by a beautiful blonde girl.

“Who is that?” I asked.

“I think she was in a class with me...yeah, she was in art. She sat at a table with Larry sometimes. Anna? Ann. Her name is Ann,” you said. I noticed that all of our right legs were casually moving in time with the beat of the song.

Ann parked the car and opened the passenger door for Larry, who put his arm around her shoulders and limp-hopped to the door with her. His left foot was encased in a protective boot.

“The Freewheelin’ Larry Mullen, ladies and gentlemen,” Adam said.

“When did that happen?” you asked.

“The foot or the girl?”

“Either. Look at them. Like a couple of dolls,” I said.

Adam laughed. “I wanna dress them up in cute little outfits and have tea parties.”

You opened the door and introductions were made. Ann, a 1970s dream girl if ever there was one, was initially quiet and shy. I pulled a couch we had discovered by the side of the road over to the corner where we played. It was covered with several old blankets, and I encouraged Ann to make herself at home. Checking out our unusual practice space, she removed her green trench coat and immediately put it back on. I turned off the radio and cranked up the space heater.

Meanwhile, Larry was telling you and Adam about the accident he’d had at work and how it messed up his foot.

“...So I’m off work until it heals,” he concluded, not sounding the least bit sad about it.

“It seems like it was their fault,” Adam said, shaking his head. “You should quit.”

“I bloody well want to.”

“Sue them and quit,” you suggested.
“Can you still play?” I asked.

“I’m curious to find out.”

I helped him over to his drums and we got set up. “This is how you know you’re in a real band,” I announced, smiling at Ann. “Girls come to watch you practice.”

“Does your girlfriend stop by sometimes?” she asked.

“Ali doesn’t like our music, I’m sorry to say.”

“Oh no!”

“She likes…” You laughed, and I grinned at you. “She likes easy listening music. Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole. Et cetera.”

“You’re kidding.”

“I’m dead serious. Edge?”

You nodded. “He’s telling the truth, Ann.”

“We’ll win her over, though. Someday. As God is my witness.”

Larry tapped his drumsticks together four times and we began playing a song whose working title was *The Fool*. While the sound of his bass drum was approximately sixty percent less furious than usual, Larry seemed pleased with his ability to drum at all. Amused to have a visitor, the rest of us made every attempt to capture Ann’s attention, but she only had eyes for Larry, and I caught him smiling at her a few times.

Ann had a part time job at a bank, and she had to leave an hour later. As she gathered her things, she asked you how Aislinn was, and you told her you hadn’t seen her in a few months.

“I figured she’d go on to college. She’s so talented,” Ann said.

“The last I’d heard, she decided not to go. She already knows how to draw and paint, and college is expensive, so…” You shrugged.

“Yeah.”

“Say hi to Mr. Gallagher for me.”

“I will. He misses you.”

“I miss him, too.”

Larry hopped over and gave Ann a bashful peck on the cheek, to the quiet amusement of the rest of us. “Make sure your lights are on,” he said, glancing at her car’s misty windshield.

“Okay. See you later.”

I stood by the window with him as he watched her drive away. He waited until her red tail lights were completely out of sight. “She seems like a good driver to me.” I said.

“She is.” He looked at his hands. “I just don’t like anniversaries. It was a morning like this one when Mum…” He shook his head.
“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Two years ago next week.”

I looked at him for a few seconds and felt a wave of empathy. “Let’s get some lunch later. My treat.”

“Well…”

I put my hand on his shoulder. “Please. I want to.”

“Okay.”

You and I were well on our way to mastering our own nonverbal language by then, and as you placed your guitar back in its case, I caught your eye. Is it okay if I get lunch with Larry? He’s having a tough time, I attempted to relay via a glance at Larry and a deliberate chin dip. You nodded good-naturedly. Sure. That’s sweet of you. You will return later, though, and I will devour you.

When practice was over a bit later, Larry and I caught a bus that was headed for the city centre, and Larry’s neighborhood was along the way. Not wanting to make him walk any farther than necessary, I suggested that we get lunch at Lin Kee, the Chinese takeaway that was on the same block as his house. A small grocery store was next door to it.

“That reminds me of the one I go to all the time,” I said, watching a woman laden with brown paper bags exiting the store. “When the deli woman found out it was just Dad and me at home, she took me on as a sort of project.”

“Mrs. Zhou is the same way,” he said. I opened the door to Lin Kee and helped Larry hop into the steamy and altogether delicious-smelling place.

“Ni hao,” Larry called out.

“Xiao niao! What has happened to you?” exclaimed a beautiful woman standing behind the counter of the small shop. The ends of her chic gray bob kissed her cheekbones.

“Bashed my foot at work. It’s not a big deal,” Larry said. “Mrs. Zhou, this is Bono. He’s the singer in my band.”

“Oh, your famous band! A pleasure to meet you...Bono?”

I shook her hand. “I admit it’s a strange name, ma’am.”

She studied me. “Another blue-eyed baby bird.”

“Xiao niao means baby bird,” Larry said parenthetically.

Mrs. Zhou set us up with a couple of large containers of chop suey for the price of one small. Larry said he couldn’t accept such an offer and told her we wanted to pay the full price, but she insisted. Larry refused again, and she insisted again. I watched this perfunctory little dance with a smile on my face, and when it was over, I paid for one small, and Mrs. Zhou was thanked profusely by two blue-eyed baby birds.

“Where do you want to go with this?” I asked.

“Let’s just take it to my house. Nobody’s home.”

Larry’s cramped kitchen was exactly as I had remembered it, and I imagined you leaning against the
sink, barely fifteen years old and quietly taking everything in, including me.

I poured two glasses of water, and we sat at the kitchen table. Larry’s chopstick skills were enviable but, given his musical instrument of choice, predictable. We inhaled the chop suey, and my body cried out with hosannas of delight at being fed actual vegetables. “You’re so lucky to live down the street from that place,” I said. “She loves you very much, I can tell.”

“She’s nice to everybody.”

“Ann is crazy about you as well, incidentally.”

Larry blushed. “Do you think so?”

“She couldn’t take her eyes off you today. I mean, she barely even looked at me.” I winked at him.

“She’s nice to everybody.”

“Some girls prefer drummers, Bono. What can I say?”

“Well, be sweet to her. She’s lovely.”

He nodded. “I will.”

Several framed photographs were arranged on a shelf near the kitchen table, including one of Larry’s mum playing in the grass with his sister Cecilia. “You’re lucky you get to have pictures of her.”

“You don’t?”

“I don’t know why Dad thinks that’s any kind of solution, but…” I moved in to get a closer look. She seemed like a formidable woman, and she didn’t resemble Larry very much, except for her smile. “She looks really happy there.”

“She used to make Dad laugh. He always told me the one you want is the funny girl. And that was Mum. He’s changed a lot since she’s been gone.”

“Where is he today?” I asked, fumbling a slippery snow pea.

“He’s been throwing himself into work lately. Cecilia’s working at Swenys Pharmacy now, so some of the pressure is off me for a change.” We looked out the window at their fenced back yard: gravel driveway, small patio, large evergreen tree.

“You should quit while you can and focus on the band, Larry.”

“I’d like to.”

“Your mum would want you to be happy.”

“Yeah. When I said I wanted to play drums, she encouraged me the most.”

“My mum was the same way.”

Larry fiddled with a small ceramic container on the table that held several packets of sugar. “Does it ever get easier?”

“I wouldn’t say it gets easier. I’m never gonna be the same. Like today, that song on the radio came close to messing me up. Don’t Leave Me This Way? All these random things take on double meanings, and nobody else gets it.”
“The other day they played *The Way We Were* at the grocery store and I had to hum *California Über Alles* to drown it out.”

“Oh. Barbra Streisand is brutal.”

“Cecilia loves her, so…”

“Man. I’m sorry.” I chased a mushroom with my chopsticks. “I wonder what kind of person I’d be if she were still here, right?”

“Right.”

“I don’t know what I’d do without the band. You lads are my new family.”

Larry rested his head against his hand. “Sometimes it’s the only thing that feels right to me. Even when we fuck up.”

“But we’re getting better.”

“I think so.” Larry looked at his mum in the photo and nodded.

“You can always talk to me about your mum, okay? Because I’ll need to do it, too. Edge is an excellent listener and he’s very kind, but he doesn’t really know what you and I have gone through. Nobody could unless it happened to them, and he’s lived a pretty sheltered life. And good for him. But you get it. And I get it. And we can be there for each other.”

“I’d like that.”

“I know I’ve said it before, but you should come with Edge and me to Shalom sometime. It’s Monday evenings, and they’re having it at Mt. Temple now. It’s just good people talking about...things like this. Last week I brought up Mum for the first time, and we got into a big discussion about why bad things happen, and how it’s not punishment from God. Bad things just happen. Stuff like that.”

“Maybe I will.” Larry dug into the white plastic bag and retrieved four fortune cookies wrapped in crispy cellophane. He tossed two to me.

“Does she usually give you extras?”

“She said I should always have a backup fortune in case I don’t like the first one.”

“Alright, baby bird,” I said, grinning at him and cracking into mine. “*Patience is your alley*. What does that--is that a misprint? Do they mean *ally*?”

“Maybe they mean Alison Stewart.”

“Probably. Gotta be patient when you’re with me, that’s for sure. What does yours say?”

“A *ship in harbor is safe, but that’s not why ships are built.*”

“That fortune cookie is trying to tell you something, young man.”

Larry ripped into his second cookie. “I mean, that’s a good fortune, but I always check the other one.”

“Obviously.”
“Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the conquest of it.”

I opened my second cookie and began a low chant: “Quit your job, quit your job, quit your job.” Larry smiled and munched on the pieces of his cookies. “Okay. The person you are thinking of is also thinking of you.”

“In bed.” Cheeky grin.

“Larry, I am truly scandalized.”

He brightened and looked at me as if something had just occurred to him. “Ann had a question today.”

I took a sip of water. “Yes, Ann?”

“She was watching you and Edge, and she said, ‘Is something going on with those two? Are they…you know.’ And Adam and I have our theories, but I wasn’t sure what to tell her.”

I took a deep breath. “Wow. I did not see that coming. Eh, in a word, yes.”

He nodded.

“You don’t seem too surprised.”

“Well, I do have eyes, Bono, and I have a ringside seat to your moony, sweetheart arses whenever we perform. But yeah, Ann picked up on it right away.”

“Girls…they just know stuff.”

“Yeah. So.”

“Are you okay with it?”

He glanced at the ceiling. “You dummies better not break up and decide you don’t wanna be in U2 anymore because if I’m gonna quit my job, I want this band to be something I can count on.”

I grinned. “You should absolutely quit your job.”

“You’re in love?”

“Oh Larry. We really are.”

He gave me a pointed look. “And Ali is somehow okay with this?”

I shrugged and huffed out a laugh of semi-disbelief. “Patience is my Ali.”

I explained our situation a bit more before I helped Larry into his living room, where I turned on the television. I demanded that he lie down and be a kid for the rest of the afternoon. I elevated his foot, covered him with a blanket, and endured his mumbled “fookin’ eejit” insult as I kissed his forehead. I said goodbye and left him there, content, cozy, and watching cartoons.

I took what was left of my chop suey in case you wanted it, and I sat at the bus stop, which was merely a wooden bench that left me exposed to a damp and biting wind. Low, gloomy clouds threatened to drench me to the bone, so the overloaded bus was a welcome sight indeed. I boarded and squeezed my way down the center aisle, where I grabbed a metal pole, surrounded by humanity.
As if from out of nowhere, I was struck with an awareness of my own consciousness: I was alive, I was technically a man but I still felt like a boy, and I was living in a small Irish body in the late 1970s. What was I before 1960, and what would I become after I died? Why was I...me? Why did I have to be--why did I get to be--Bono? I thought about this for quite some time until I noticed that the bus had cleared out and was approaching the end of its route near the lodge house. You were waiting for me there, miraculous you, also alive at the same time I was, and living in the same place, too. And you were deeply in love with me.

I exited the bus and ran across the parking lot. Inside the door was a new sign you had made that read Space heater: check it. Is it off? THIS MEANS YOU. No exceptions. You walked over and wrapped me in a loving embrace.

*He is why I am here. He is why I am me.*

Those afternoons we spent together writing songs were precious to me. Sometimes we worked together, and other times we worked separately: I read and scribbled in my journal while you experimented with your Memory Man.

“Edge, what is the name of your neighbor whose bras make you sad?”

“Mrs. Brown.”

“Perfect.”

That day we sat on the couch and moved the heater as close we dared. I became hypnотized by its metallic hum and its horizontal orange wires, glowing and breathing behind their steel cage. Every once in a while you stopped playing to rub your hands together and blow on your fingers. This was my cue to take your hands in mine and warm them. Later on I walked to the petrol station and bought flimsy paper cups of hot chocolate from their below-average dispenser.

You cradled your cup in your hands and tipped your nose into the steam. Fidgety, I took a break from what I was writing (something loosely inspired by *Lord of the Flies*), kissed your cool cheek, and stood to look at the sea in the fading light. It was dreary and gray in a way that seemed sympathetic to our cause: two lovestruck young men collaborating on an artistic undertaking that would consume their entire lives if they were lucky. The sea was serious, and so were we. I noticed your reflection on the window—a miniature version of you sat tuning your guitar on the slate-colored horizon. I touched the cold glass and traced the line of your back.

The air became warmer as I returned, and I felt an aching affection for you. I stood beside you and tilted your chin up. Looking into your eyes, I said, “I want you, Edge. Every day. Every night.”

You lowered your gaze for a moment and looked up at me again. “Kiss me.”

I leaned down and, still holding your upturned chin, I kissed you greedily and delighted in your soft moans. “You love me, don’t you, Edge?”

“So much.”

“Where do you want me?”

That October we fell into a pattern where we worked for as long as we could before we ultimately succumbed to each other, and those sessions usually began with a request from one of us: *Lie on your stomach and let me look at you,* or *Take off your shirt and stand against that wall.* And so on.

“Follow me.” You led me to the landing at the top of the stairs and had me stand near its tall, wide
banister. “Lean against that,” you said. I did so, and my head dropped back so I could see the lobby’s ceiling upside down behind me. My chest was displayed as if on a table before you, and you carefully unbuttoned my dark shirt, which you untucked. It fell away from me as your lips took possession of my neck, my chest, and my stomach and murmured things like “darling boy” and “love every inch of you.”

Blissfully delirious, I whispered, “Change places,” and soon I was on my knees before you and kissing you through your jeans. I loved watching you receive pleasure and the way it racked your body with need.

“Patience will be rewarded,” I said in a soothing tone while I restrained myself from ravishing you.

“That’s what they say,” you sighed.

I brought you back up to face me and eased my hand beneath your wool cardigan and t-shirt. I was addicted to your skin, and I whispered, “I can’t wait for you to fuck me, though.” Still mostly clothed, I was hard and insistent against your leg.

Your lips at my neck, you asked, “Baby?”

“Yes, love?”

Soft kisses up to my temple. “I wanna know what it feels like too.”

I swallowed. “Does that mean what I think?”

You closed your eyes. “I just want to hear myself say it.”

“Edge.”

“Fuck me, Bono.”

“My love.”

A few weeks later, we were recording new demos in a different studio, and our extensive practice sessions (and Larry’s total commitment to the band) resulted in an easier time for all of us. I had just run through Shadows and Tall Trees repeatedly and returned to the other side of the glass to find you sitting on a couch in an adjacent waiting room. My leather gloves were in a neat stack on the armrest beside you, and I watched you slide your fingertip up and down the length of one of the fingers. Oblivious to me, you became engrossed in this activity. I smiled as you held the gloves in your hands the way one might carry a baby bird. Then you brought them up to your cheek and closed your eyes.
Many things are happening in this long chapter! Sorry about the relative lack of Adam/Larry here. This was just A LOT to write already. (spoiler-y content below)

The extras in Cork were based on actual people or combinations of people, and those are actual early-days quotes, too. Cork really loved baby U2, and you can watch a cute doc about that here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OflhSX8SYsk

The bad kisser anecdote was based on an actual Edge anecdote (one in which he did not provide nearly enough details, so I was happy to embroider the heck out of it).

Bono actually learned some mime-like moves from a choreographer who studied with Marcel Marceau at around this time, and the senior center bit was my attempt to make that happen.

Sometimes I'll see Gene Kelly dance and he reminds me of Bono. Like, not a lot, but sometimes, when he seems to be moving slower than the tempo of a song.

The demo cassette description was based on an actual demo that was for sale on eBay last month.

Ali's plan was real and they made it happen.

I've been waiting to write Edge's speech at the end for six months, if you can believe that.

Wow, thanks a lot for staying with me on this very very long story. I hope you're all still digging it. <3

Edge, what follows are a handful of scenes from the first months of 1979, and I have made every attempt to move this story forward so you can finally take over. The baton has been passed.

I’ve never wanted to be one of those people with no regrets. Without fail, they live narrow, unenviable lives. I think a regret or two can give a person an attractive patina of wistful insight. The person with regrets has made important choices, and every choice came with the idea of another life they might have led had they made a different decision.

Everything we’ve written here is tinged with regret, isn’t it? I have said many times that I wish this could be real. But by describing the consequences of a decision we could have made, of a road we could have taken, aren’t we making it just a little bit real? Because when I lose myself in these words, I believe in these boys. They’ve become a part of my heart, and maybe this is enough.

And on that note, I will begin my chapter with a bit of dialogue that is probably completely out of character for you, or at least it’s out of character for seventeen-point-five year old you, but I could not resist making those words come out of your mouth. Please make them real the next time I see
you.

I love you,
B.

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“How do you want me?”

You loaded a roll of film into your new camera and gave me a delightfully dirty leer. “I guess I always imagine you on all fours. Either that or, well, freshly laid.”

“What the fuck, Edge?” I sputtered in faux outrage.

Shaking your head, you said, “I’m just kidding. I imagine you in other positions as well.”

Laughing, I rose from my chair by the lodge house’s sea-facing window and made a move to lovingly throttle you, but somewhere along the way I became distracted by your slender neck, so pale against the confining collar of your denim shirt, and your lips, which belonged on mine. “God, I’ve missed you,” I said for the fourth time that rainy morning. “Oh! I forgot to ask. How was Gogo?”

“He was wearing a Wales football jersey for pretty much two solid weeks. It has his name on the back and a big number one. Red and white, of course, so he looked very festive when we went on walks.”

“Outrageous.”

“I took a couple of photos of Gogo surrounded by girls. They couldn’t get enough of him.”

“Or his handsome escort.”

You scoffed. “I was merely an afterthought.”

I unfastened your shirt’s top button, kissed the warm hollow at the base of your neck, and buttoned you up again. “I find that difficult to believe.” Returning to my spot by the window, I asked, “Now, how do you want me, Edge?”

“Exactly like that. Look out at the water.” You approached me and took pictures at unpredictable intervals. You were still learning how to use the Olympus. Since film was expensive, you spent a lot of time adjusting the focus and composing your shots.

“I wanna look at you now,” I whined, bored with the water and the spitting rain.

“Go ahead.”

The camera was an extension of your eyes and your mind, and I gazed into the lens with love in my heart. You were very serious and professional, and I wanted to live up to the version of myself you believed in. “Would you let me take a picture of you?” I asked when you lowered the camera. “Last one on the roll, maybe?”

“Sure.” You handed me the camera, and after showing me which button to press and other rudimentary instructions, we changed places. “It’s set up so you don’t have to focus.” You sat down, touched the window, and shivered. “I can’t wait for spring.”

“Me too. This weather is the worst.” I smiled. “Okay, Edge. Make love to the camera.” You
chuckled, and I took the photo. “When do we get to see these?”

“Mr. Gallagher said he’d help me set up a darkroom in one of the bathrooms here. And he’s going to ask around and see if anyone he knows has equipment I can buy used.”

I handed you the camera, sat on your lap, and smoothed one of your eyebrows. “So it might be a while.”

“Yeah, sorry.”

“It’s okay. I can be patient.”

You untucked my white shirt and slid your hand up my back. Goosebumps spread down my legs as you said, “Yes you can.” You kissed me and whispered, “My love.”

“1979’s gonna be our year, Edge. I can feel it.”

*

A couple of weeks later, you and I were in an even more celebratory—or rather, delirious—mood. We had finished a support gig for XTC in Cork that was, for us, a rousing success. After spending a few hours in a pub near the Arcadia Ballroom with the promoter (who joked that XTC and U2 sounded like algebra to her), a local DJ (who accepted our demo tape), and nearly everyone in the front row, we stumbled back to our hotel room. We were able to afford such a luxury because apparently audiences in Cork appreciated us four times as much as those in Dublin. Larry and Adam were next door, and one of them had the presence of mind to turn on the television to drown us out.

We weren’t that loud. And anyway, we spent most of our time in the bathroom.

“We’re only making plans for Nigel,” you sang to the ceiling. “We only want what's best for him.” Adorable.

“I smell like a brewery,” I announced, peeling off my black turtleneck and tossing it on the floor. “And Jesus Christ, could that ballroom have been any smokier?” I coughed for dramatic effect.

Turning, you took me in your arms and kissed my neck. “Salty.” Inhaling, you added, “Your hair reeks of cigarettes.”

“I could say the same of you.”

“Whatever could we do to solve this problem?”

“I simply could not guess,” I said, sweeping the white shower curtain out of the way with a dramatic flourish and examining the faucet. “How do you think we--”

You turned a knob clockwise and lifted a small metal fixture. “That’s how.”

“My hero.”

Your gray pullover joined my shirt on the floor. You busied yourself with unwrapping the complimentary hotel toiletries that Larry was undoubtedly rejoicing over, and I was way ahead of you in the stripping department. Soon I was in the shower, and the hot water felt positively glorious on my skin. I closed my eyes and let it stream over me. Then, accompanied by a jarring gust of cool air, there you were in front of me, blushing and adorably awkward with your little bar of soap.
“C’mere, Edge,” I said, pulling you close. “This is okay for us to do.”

Your hands were on my shoulders, and you regarded them with your usual expression of disbelief, saying, “Guys take showers together all the time.”

“Sure. At school. Athletes in locker rooms. Stuff like that.” I shifted us around in a clumsy dance so you could stand under the spray, and I grinned as it deflated your hair and dripped down your face.

“Yeah. We can do this. It’s technically not sex. It doesn’t count,” said the young man whose backside I was clutching in a decidedly non-platonic manner.

“Of course we can. I mean, we’re in a band together. It’d be weird if I never saw you naked, right?”

“Right.”

“Plus we’re conserving water.”

“A valuable natural resource we shouldn’t take for granted.”

“Wise words.” The yellow, floral-scented soap caused our bodies to slide against each other in a slippery, dolphin-like way. I simply could not get enough of it. I looked down at our dark chests and smiled. “God, you’re gorgeous.”

“So are you.”

My tongue felt hypersensitive to everything yours was doing to it, and I groaned with pleasure. Naked, with you, at last.

You put your thumb in my mouth, and I latched onto it greedily. Meanwhile, the rest of our hands united in an effort to marry two hard, slick, eager young grooms, both of whom had pledged their love to one another, to have and to hold from this day forward, to love and to cherish. With my body I thee Edge worship, oh yes, oh yes.

You were an ecstatic, pink-skinned angel in my hands, squeaky clean, gasping, and calling my name, and baby, and my name again. Then I surrendered to you completely in our white cloud of billowing steam. My legs buckled beneath me when your intuitive hands took me to our sacred place, and, gasping, I knelt before you. A torrent of hot rain cascaded down my back as I kissed your thigh.

My eyes elected to take the scenic route up your body before they paused on your bashful face. “Edge. You’re mine to look at now. Don’t you understand?” I turned off the shower and we stood facing each other as the mist began its gradual retreat. Your hair was plastered to your forehead, and, gasping, I knelt before you. A torrent of hot rain cascaded down my back as I kissed your thigh.

“Baby.”

I shrugged and smiled. “Do you like what you see?”

“Oh yes.” Using the tip of your finger, you touched the center of a whorl of hair on my chest—pinpointing the eye of a tiny storm. Then the finger moved up the center of my neck to my chin and gently tipped it up. You kissed me, and I kissed you back in a state of shivering bliss. “Have you and Ali ever done anything like—”

“Not even close.”
You moved to open the curtain, but I saw that little smile, Edge.

Eventually, towel-dried and content, we found ourselves between bleachy white sheets on a bed that was neither a broken down mattress on a suspicious floor nor a skinny twin bed that forced our bodies to overlap in uncomfortable ways. We sprawled on our backs for a few luxurious moments, and then we moved to the center of the bed to hold, kiss, and whisper to each other throughout the night.

“That sound guy was amazing.”

I rested my head on your chest and looked up at you. “Joe?”

“Yeah. He actually seemed to care about us.”

Soft hair tickled the tip of my nose. “I liked him, too. He even gave me half of his sandwich. And he said he thought your sound was really interesting.”

“That promoter…”

“Elvera.”

“You’re so good with names.”

“Thank you.”

“When you were in the men’s room, I overheard her tell that DJ she thought there was something ‘heartfelt’ about us, and the DJ…”

“Pat.”

“He described you as incandescent.”

“Holy shit.”

“Yeah. He’s right. You are incandescent.” Hand in my hair. Forehead kiss.

“Well, he asked me to send him our album, and I told him, ‘That’ll be the day.’ And he said—get this, Edge—he said, ‘Sooner than you think.’”

“That does it. We’re moving to Cork. We’ll live in this room, and we’ll play every weekend at the Arc, and we’ll have a record deal sooner than you think.”

Larry pounded on the wall. We grinned and gave each other sleepy kisses.

“You’re such a good kisser, Edge,” I whispered.

“That wasn’t always the case.”

I decided you needed to be spooned. “I assume you have a story to back up that claim.”

“Well, do you remember my friend Shane?”

“You mean my predecessor, the mini Paul Newman, Shane? How could I forget?” I nipped the back of your neck.

“Well, one summer we went to church camp together. I think I was ten or eleven.”
“Okay.”

“Shane had some kind of camp girlfriend, and we were talking about her and girls in general, and he said, ‘You probably don’t even know how to kiss.’”

“That little manipulator.”

“I asked him, ‘How can I learn when all the girls just wanna kiss you?’ And he said, ‘Maybe I can teach you.’”

I coughed. “I’m at a loss for words, Edge.”

“And we had kissed before, once or twice when we were little, but this was different. So most evenings we met each other in a grove of cedars just off the trail we all had to hike every morning, and he taught me how to kiss.”

“Was there any adult supervision at this camp? Just asking.” I re-familiarized myself with the hair on your stomach, and lower.

“He seemed to think I was too sloppy. Which, maybe.”

Clicking my tongue, I asked, “Did it ever occur to you that maybe you were already a very good kisser and he just wanted you to kiss him a whole lot more?”

“No. But he taught me a couple of techniques I continue to practice to this day.”

“Show me.”

You rolled over. “It’s too dark for you to see this, but I’m looking in your eyes.”

“Groundbreaking tip, Shane.”

“Every kiss has to matter. You have to think about each one as you do it. So when I’m kissing you, B, I am always thinking.” Your lips were tender and slow and, yes, thoughtful. You paused, “Every now and then you have to say something good without moving away.” Another thoughtful kiss was followed by a dark whisper. Your lips were a fraction of an inch from my mouth. “Beautiful boy.”

“Fuck, Edge.”

“Baby.”

“Yes.”

“I can’t wait to fuck you.”

“Oh…”

“Things like those.”

“You’re such a good kisser.”

Several times during the wee hours I woke from erotic dreams only to discover your lips and your hands exploring me, and I felt deeply loved and very fortunate.

The next morning we were awakened by the sound of a baby crying on one side of us and Larry and Adam laughing on the other. The walls were also thin enough for us to hear drawers being opened
and shut and duffel bags being zipped. We tossed our belongings into our bags.

“I’ve got that day-after-Christmas feeling,” you said.

“I do, too.”

“Could’ve stayed in that bed with you forever.”

“If only.”

“Thank you again, sir. We appreciate this opportunity,” I said, nodding at the phone with a sense of accomplishment before I hung up. Grumbling at the damp morning paper our carrier had once again left vulnerable to the elements, Dad bulldozed his way into the kitchen and sat at the table.

“I assume that wasn’t a record company.”

“Rest assured you’ll be the first to know when it is, Dad.” I slumped in the chair across from him and took one of the middle sections of the paper. My fingertips smudged the black ink. “It’s probably not gonna amount to much, but that man on the phone was from a little four-track studio where they usually record radio advertisements, and he’ll let us come in and...you’re not interested, I can tell.”

“Hmph.” Dad glanced at the clock near the stove. “You’re certainly waiting until the eleventh hour to get your life sorted, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. Tick tock, tick tock.”

Dad took an annoyingly prim sip of tea. Black, no milk, no sugar.

I rubbed the bridge of my nose and the ink found a second home. “You seem to think signing with a record company is as easy as getting a job at the grocery store.”

“One of those options is irrational and the other is not.”

For a few minutes the only sounds in the kitchen were newspaper pages being turned in an aggressive manner and the revolting, faint whistle of Dad’s nose as he breathed in and out. I skimmed over the advice column, which never had anything to say about dealing with encouragement-averse widowers, and I also glanced at a series of ads for businesses with various Valentine’s Day promotions. You and I had agreed that this was a bullshit holiday, and we made a solemn oath that our gift to each other would be amnesty from this bourgeois oppression. (Although I had already made you a card, and I was anticipating some candy from you.) Ali would expect us to do something too, of course, but what would be romantic yet inexpensive or, better yet, free?

As if he had read my mind, Dad said, “Your girlfriend stopped by the post office yesterday.”

“Oh?”

“Had a mass mailing for that auto insurance place. Sensible girl.”

“Yes, Ali is indeed very sensible.”

“A nice girl like that deserves someone who will provide for her.”

Bloody hell. “You don’t need to lay her share of the pressure on me too, Dad. She’s doing just fine all by herself.”
Actually she never put any overt pressure on me, but in an almost subliminal way that is unique to brilliant girls, Ali had made it clear that the only way she saw a long-term future for us was if the band succeeded...or if I found something else to do. Which I suppose was pressure, but at least she did not attach a June 1979 deadline to it.

Still. If our parents and loved ones were impatient for us to get a record deal, I was four hundred times more impatient, and I had grown weary of explaining to everyone that we had to pay our dues first. Because, honestly? Fuck dues.

Later that day after work, I was walking around aimlessly and killing time before the bus arrived. I passed a senior citizens’ center, and a sign in one of its windows advertised a Valentine’s Day dance featuring “the tunes of yesteryear.” I put on my best Charming Young Man face and walked inside, where I picked up on the fading scent of lunchtime bacon and cabbage.

Two dumpling-shaped women sat at a table in the center of a big open room. They were eating vanilla ice cream from small metal bowls and playing chess. Six white-haired elders were seated around a television in the corner, and they chattered away while a younger attendant flipped through the channels. “May I help you, son?” he asked.

“Ehm, I had a question about the dance,” I said lamely.

“Dance committee’s over here, sweetheart,” one of the chess ladies called out.

I approached them. “May I join you?”

“Of course, love. Sit down. What is your name?”

I grinned. “My real name is Paul, but everybody calls me Bono. After that hearing aid store...?”

“Oh! I know that store. My husband bought his hearing aids there back in ’71. Or was it ’72?”

“Now why would you want the same name as a hearing aid store?”

“It’s a long story, ma’am, and I’m not sure if I remember it exactly. What is your name?”

“I’m Nora. And this is Aileen.”

“Nora. Aileen.” I gazed at them conspiratorially, and they leaned forward. “I have a huge favor to ask.”

“Just name it, darlin’.”

“My girlfriend loves old music, and I was wondering if she and I could come to your Valentine’s Day dance. I promise we won’t get in the way. We’ll be on our best behavior.”

“Oh!” Nora squeaked, and they looked at each other as if this was the cutest request they had ever heard. “Of course you can! We would be delighted to have some young people here with us!”

“We’re going to have decorations and punch and white tablecloths and...” Aileen was breathless.

“Well, thank you both very much. This is helping me out in a big way, believe me.”

“Oh, it’s so romantic.”

“You should get her a rose, a red rose!”
“And do dress up, love.”

I grinned. “I have a nice jacket. And she...Ali is the prettiest girl in the world.”

More glee. I examined the chess board and, whispering in her ear, I advised Aileen on her next move. Then we noticed that a hush had fallen over the television group as Singin’ in the Rain began to play, and, with one lady on each arm, I walked us over to the couches. Enchanted, we watched Gene Kelly’s iconic interpretation of a tune so irresistible it stayed in my head for a week. His every move exuded the defiant joy of being alive and being in love. It was the kind of performance that made grown women misty-eyed, even though it was the exact opposite of sad. He was magnetic. What a star.

“I wish I could move like that,” I said to no one in particular when the song was over.

“Then you should talk to Daniel. He’s a choreographer,” Nora said, and a man in a tweed blazer saluted me from his spot on the couch.

“Well, I don’t really mean dance, like tap dancing or whatever. I sing in a band, and sometimes I don’t know what to do when I’m up there. But he”—I pointed at the television—“you can’t take your eyes off him. And he makes you feel things, too. I wanna be like that.”

“Gene Kelly is one of a kind, but he has a few tricks up his sleeve that anyone can learn.” Daniel rose to his feet and began walking the length of the room, mimicking Gene Kelly casually strolling in a downpour with a sort of slow-motion grace. As I followed along and tried to duplicate his stride, Daniel said, “He lets the music tell him what to do. A dozen different influences, and he puts them together like jazz.” He paused and studied me. “And he’s a sturdy little lad like you. He doesn’t want to move or look like a rich man.”

“Sounds like he’s the Johnny Rotten of dancing.”

“Don’t know what you mean there, but I’d be glad to help you, if you like. I know a fair amount of mime, too.”

“You don’t say?”

“I’m here most Saturdays. What did you say your name was, lad?”

“Everyone calls me Bono. It’s a long story.”

I knew I had scored an incalculable number of points with Ali as she cooed against the lapel of the jacket you gave me. We swayed in an artless, young-people kind of way in the corner as When I Fall In Love played “by request for Miss Alison.” I kissed her fingers and smiled at the fragrant red rose on her wrist, also a hit.

My new octogenarian friends beamed at Ali and me as we took a break from dancing and sat at one of the small tables. “I had a bit of a run-in with Paul today,” I told her because I am Mr. Romance.

She sighed.

“Same old thing. I want him to do more for us. Because really, what does he do? Adam still gets most of our gigs. So I asked when Paul was gonna talk to people in London and shop our demo
around there, but he doesn’t think we’re ready yet. We’ve got nine songs, Ali.”

She smoothed the skirt of her lovely red dress. “Maybe he thinks you need more experience in front of an audience?”

“He told me I have what it takes. But Irish record companies aren’t interested in us, for whatever reason, and I don’t want us to languish here forever. Also Dad’s being a...” I shrugged. “It’s just frustrating.”

“Yeah.”

I touched her cheek. “I’m sorry. I’m done. I sound like a broken record these days.”

“Well, maybe you should stop complaining and actually do something.”

“Like what?”

“I might have an idea.” Ali smiled as Somewhere Over the Rainbow began to play. “But this is my song, and you’re gonna dance with me now.”

* * *

And she did have an idea—a bold and generous idea that frankly astonished me—but I knew I would have to face some difficult discussions with a few key people before it could happen, and the first one was you.

We arranged to meet at the lodge house during a day off for the band. You were excited to show me your darkroom, which you had finally set up in the least offensive guest bathroom. Earlier that day, Paul had informed me that Tara Records were not interested in us, and in an attempt to comfort myself, I put on the jacket you gave me. I decided to wear it to the lodge house because...well, it couldn’t hurt.

When I arrived, you were sitting at the registration desk and peering at a glossy piece of paper. “Check out this contact sheet, B,” you said with a smile. “Nice jacket, by the way.”

“This old thing? A very sexy young man gave it to me last year.” I kissed you, and then I tried to make sense of the little rectangles on the sheet. It was a positive print of the entire roll of negatives. You had created it to determine the keepers, but with each image, it seemed like I was looking at two things at once. “Uh, very artistic...?”

“It’s a complete mistake. They’re double exposures. When I took those pictures of you, I thought I had a new roll of film in the camera, but I actually put in the one I used when I was in Wales. So it’s two dozen pictures of you on top of...Wales.”

“Oh, wow.”

“And some of them are actually pretty cool.”

“Beginner’s luck.”

“Beginner’s incompetence, but...look at this one.”

“They’re so tiny.” I leaned in until we were cheek to cheek. There I was, sitting in the palm of your hand. “So you took a picture of your own hand?”
“I didn’t mean to. I guess the camera went off while I was holding it.”

“But I love that. I love it when you hold me in your hand, Edge.”

You ignored this. “Most of them aren’t worth printing, but look at these.” You pointed at my face in the waves, girls fawning over Gogo and now also me, my eyes looking directly at you with Christmas lights all around me, you smiling at pebbles on the shore.

“Those are amazing. I have something for you to look at, too,” I said, pulling a cassette tape from my pocket.

“The U2 Demo,” you said, reading the label on the skinny side of the plastic case. “Did you do this?”

“I used decals.”

“Nice idea.” It was better than what we had been distributing, in any event. I had decorated the front with red and yellow brush strokes along with six song titles. You nodded with approval and opened the case. Inside was a short, typewritten biography of the band. I tried my best to sound like an impartial rock critic when describing us, but I lost the thread in a couple of spots. “You worked very hard on this,” you said, undoubtedly drawing a curtain of charity around the handful of glaring typos and misspellings in that section.

“I’m gonna make a lot more, too.”

“It’s really good, B. I’m impressed. Wanna go up to the darkroom?”

“Just try to stop me.”

We raced each other upstairs to the guest room that was next to our salmon-colored room. Its carpeting was horrifyingly damp and squishy. “The bathroom is actually okay,” you said, closing the door and plunging us into total darkness. Then you turned on the exhaust fan and flicked on a red light, and I saw the white trays and the plastic jugs of vinegar-reeking chemicals lined up on the tub and toilet. You had brought in a chair and turned the sink into a desk with a timer and an enlarger that reminded me of an oversized microscope. The cracks along the door’s perimeter had been sealed with duct tape and cardboard.

“Look at this, Edge. Look at what you’ve made. I’m proud of you, love.”

You proceeded to tell me all about the equipment and what it was for and how you had located those photography tools, but really all I cared about were your white face and hands, now a lurid shade of red. Your hair and eyebrows and shirt were pitch black. You paused mid-sentence to gape at me as well. I imagined us as vampires from a Hollywood B movie. So naturally I went straight for your neck.

I watched you enlarge and develop the double exposures we liked. You were quiet and completely absorbed in your task, and I became caught up in it, too. We made hushed comments about the photos as the shadows and details bloomed before our eyes. The process was unpredictable and borderline magical, and I loved sharing that cramped, red space with you. As you worked on the last photo, I studied the ones that were drying on a clothesline-like wire. They really were extraordinary.

Now was the time.

“May I keep the one of you with the pebbles?”
“Of course.”

“I want to take it with me.”

Shrugging amiably, you said, “Sure. Take it home.”

“I mean I want to take it with me...to London.”

You looked up from the fixer tray. “Wait. London? When?”

“Well, it’s not a sure thing yet. But…” I took a deep breath. “Ali and I might go there next month to meet with music journalists and record companies and sort of give people our demos. I know Paul is supposed to do that, but I wanted to be...the advance party.”

Your fingers trembled just a bit as you shifted the photo from its tray and hung it up. “How is that even possible?”

“Yeah. I know. It’s Ali. She’s been saving money. She said she would pay for everything.”

You were just as astounded as I was when Ali proposed this idea. “And her parents are just gonna let her go to London with you? And, I guess, stay there for a while?”

“Maybe two or three days.”

“Seriously?” You sat on the chair and looked at your hands. I wanted to touch your shoulder, but I couldn’t do it.

“We will have to convince them, but she thinks we can.”

“Even her father?”

“Even her father.”

You exhaled and gazed at the brand new photo of me with the lights.

“But I’m asking you first. Because if this is crossing a line, I want you to tell me.”

You kept looking at the photo and appeared to be in deep thought.

“I love you, Edge.”

You sighed. “I love you, Bono. But…”

“But what?”

“But Ali.” You paused for a few seconds. “She’s going to get everything, you know. She will marry you. She will live with you. She will have your children. She will sleep in your bed. She will be the one you can love and acknowledge...openly. She will be your wife. So of course she should have all of those things.”

“Edge.”

“And I am your lover.”

“I love you.”

You stood. Riveting eye contact. “And if I am your lover, I get to be first in one way. I get to be first
only one time. I get to have you first. Not Ali. I need it to be me. So I can feel...some kind of balance.”

“Of course, Edge. Of course.”

“Can you promise me?” A tear slid down your cheek.

I took you in my arms and sobbed against your shoulder. “Oh yes, Edge, I promise. I adore you. Anything you say.” I looked into your eyes, so lovestruck and sad and beautiful. “You’re just as important to me as she is. I want you to know that.”

“I know. I just needed to hear you—“

“I understand.”

“I needed to say that.”

“Of course. I’m glad you did, love.” We kissed and embraced, and we were quiet for a while, just breathing together and calming down as the exhaust fan rattled overhead.

“I need some fresh air,” you said, flicking on the regular light. Our close, romantic hiding place became an ordinary bathroom with a lot of extra clutter, and we were two boys, two men who were baffled once again by the love they shared.

“I need some, too,” I said. Together we went downstairs and walked outside to look at the sea.

You took my hand and squinted at the overcast eastern horizon. I knelt before you and kissed your brilliant fingers.

*]

“Ahh, fuck. Can you stop by the lodge house first? I forgot something.”

Ali winced and made a quick right turn. “Okay, but you’d better hurry. We don’t want to miss our flight.”

I hadn’t forgotten anything, but I needed to leave a gift for you. I ran inside, picked up an empty Coke bottle from the floor, and filled it with water. I took four semi-crushed dandelions from my coat pocket and put them in the makeshift vase. On a scrap of paper I wrote:

*Edge! First dandelions of the spring. I wanted you to have them. Love, B.*
Hey gang, we'll be in Edge POV for the foreseeable future, and it took me a while to get into this chapter. I love writing Edge, and shifting over to him was no problem, but I had to write about him being lonely, and that's rough. I promise you the chapter ends on a happy note, though. I can't sustain the emo for much longer than several thousand words.

Spoiler-y issues!

I've read conflicting stories about Edge meeting Aislinn in school and at a Buzzcocks show, so in the interest of fairness and accuracy, I've managed to make both of them true here.

I played around with the timeline JUST A BIT for the sake of the story. All of the main plot points happened, but in my version some of them are off by a few weeks/months. But no more than six months! I'm not some kind of maniac.

And the leather pants fit the real timeline almost exactly.

Aislinn returns in this chapter! I was inspired by a beloved movie/comic book character when I wrote about her here. Can anyone guess who it is?

A full paragraph of Bono's London account: I am in the process of living it. I'm telling you, it's tough to be a creative person with a dream.

The lyrics at the end? There are several different versions online. I went with the one that fits the story. Your mileage may vary.

I like you for reading and I love you for commenting. xoxoxo

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“Hey, could you turn that down? I’m trying to study.”

“Yeah. Sorry, Gill.” I adjusted the volume and returned to my post on the bed, where I had spent the afternoon lying on my back and staring at the ceiling.

“What are you listening to?”

“The Buzzcocks. Or I guess it’s just Buzzcocks.”

“Never heard of them.”
“I’m gonna see them Thursday night.”

She picked up the record sleeve and tilted her head to one side. “Is he saying ‘orgasm addict’?”

“Heh, yes. This song’s pretty dumb, but most of their lyrics are incredible.”

“Which one is the singer?”

“No idea.”

She was just about to leave and close the door behind her when she stuck her head back in. “How are you doing?”

Hello, ceiling. “Okay.”

“When did you say he was coming back?”

“Friday. Any other questions?”

“I’m done. Hang in there.”

I’d considered attending Shalom that night but decided against it. Since you and I were a single entity there—since we were BonoandEdge—I knew the only question anyone would have for me would be Where’s Bono?, and I didn’t want to have to explain it again and again.

Things moved quickly after our darkroom conversation. Ali had been clever and made air and hotel reservations long before she mentioned the possibility of a London trip to you. She even went so far as to research addresses and names of people and publications that could help us. She figured she could cancel these plans if her parents said no. But somehow they didn’t, and could anyone ever say no to you, especially when you had her by your side? You and Ali were off on your great adventure before I had the chance to catch my breath. This was probably for the best—no use wasting a month or whatever brooding about it. But just like that, you were gone.

We had no easy way to communicate with each other, of course. I spent that week feeling like I was married to an astronaut, and I worried about your safe return during a torturous, five-day radio blackout as your spacecraft reentered the earth’s atmosphere.

I scanned the sky a lot more than usual while you were away. Was it sunny where you were? Could you see the moon from your hotel? The leafless oak tree outside my window was laden with buds that made the its smaller branches seem thicker than usual, and the sunrise behind it created masses of black lines that reminded me of the lead framework in stained glass windows. I searched those lines to find hidden shapes: your neck and upturned chin, your jawline, your forehead, your nose. Your ankle and foot in a boot. Your beautiful upper lip. Dark hair patterns on your stomach.

I wanted things to go well for you. Of course I did. It was in my best interest for the trip to be a success, and for heaven’s sake, I was and always will be utterly in love with you. But it should have been me—it should have been the entire band—getting lost over there and seeing new things and meeting people with you. Would I have minded if maybe once a day some minor detail went wrong for you? A squabble with Ali, confusion while riding the Tube, an incorrect address, a noisy hotel: was I secretly hoping for some of those things? Maybe. Maybe just a little.

Adam, Larry, and I took the opportunity to firm up some of our songs and play around with the setlist while you were away. While we were able to focus on our instruments perhaps more than ever before, your absence was glaring. It was as if we had become an entirely different band. I attempted to sing lead initially, but taking on your part was difficult. I tended to slip back into my usual
harmonies, and the songs sounded strange without you. So most of the time I didn’t sing, but I heard echoes of your singular, powerful voice in my mind, and the ache of missing you settled around me. The dandelions were still in the Coke bottle and were turning into white puffs.

Larry liked the idea of *An Cat Dubh* followed by *Out of Control*. He wanted us to try to blend the first song into the next, because *An Cat Dubh* never really had an ending we liked, but we couldn’t figure out a good way to transition to that faster tempo.

“Maybe we don’t have to speed up. What if we slowed it all the way down first?” Adam asked. For a couple of days, we made a number of attempts to pull that lumbering ship of a song into harbor, but at one point I noticed that Adam and Larry had stopped playing and were listening to me. I had brought in a tape recorder in case we came up with anything you might want to hear, and Adam hit record and nodded at me to keep going. Unsure of what I was doing, I played a few chords that reminded me of a baby taking some wobbly, tentative first steps. I repeated this sketch and added small flourishes and variations. Adam and Larry created a slow, steady support structure beneath my guitar, and after a couple of minutes of this, we smiled at each other.

“Maybe he can come up with something to sing over the top of it,” I said as Adam began his chugging introduction to *Out of Control*. You weren’t Bono. As always, in my mind you were simply “he.”

Pleased with this breakthrough, we recorded and played it again and again for about thirty minutes. Then I poured coffee for us from my thermos, and we drank it on the couch.

“Seems like we get a lot more done without his bossy, chatty arse,” Larry said.

Adam grinned and tipped his cup in my direction. “Wanna become a three-piece, Edge?”

“I dunno. For me a solo career is the only thing that makes sense these days.”

Adam nodded. “This is true. We’re holding you back.”

“Fly away and be free, baby bird,” Larry said.

“I’ll fly off to London with my guitar and get a record deal before he does.”

We looked at our cups, and I sighed. “I wonder what he’s doing right now,” Larry said, breaking the brief lull.

Adam threw an arm around me. “He’s probably telling people about our genius guitarist who can make sounds no one has ever heard, sounds that are also colors, sounds—sounds you can taste!”

“Sounds you can smell!”

“Sounds...you can feel.” Adam ran his fingers through his hair, and, wide eyed, he gazed into the middle distance. His voice went up an octave. “Deep in your heart, deep in your very soul. The greatest guitarist of his generation, just you wait and see.” Breathing heavily, he beamed at me with love and awe and batted his lashes.

“Bloody perfect,” Larry said, laughing.

I chuckled and fiddled with a pointy scrap of fingernail that had been bothering me all day. I pulled it off, and it stung and felt raw.

Adam put his hand on my shoulder. “You alright, Edge?”
“It’s...it’s a weird week.”

“He’ll be back before you know it, and then just try to shut him up,” Larry said.

“In a few days we’ll be hearing all about it. Over and over again.”

“54 hours.” I had become an expert in breaking down days into hours and had set up a mental countdown clock. 24, 48, 72, 96, 120.

“See, that’s nothing.”

“Would you two like to have lunch at my house?” Adam asked, glancing at me.

“Can’t. Gonna meet Ann in a bit.”

“I’d like to,” I said.

“Good.”

We heard the sound of wheels on crumbling pavement and turned to watch a white van as it pulled into our parking lot. “Who the hell is that?” Larry asked, squinting at the driver.

“No idea.”

“I’ll go see what he wants,” I said, swallowing the last dregs of my coffee.

I opened the door and gave an indifferent wave to the van’s driver, a delivery man of some sort. He scrutinized our decrepit lodge house and asked, “Jesus Christ, you don’t actually live in this dump, do you?”

“Nah, my band just practices here.”

“Ah. I see. Well, ehm, is there a...” He peered at a scrap of paper in his hand. “An ‘Edge’ here?”

“That’s me.”

“How is that a name?” he called over his shoulder as he retrieved something from his van.

“It’s a nickname. Long story.”

He presented me with a small item wrapped loosely in green tissue paper. “Well, young ‘Edge,’ enjoy.”

“Okay. Thanks?” I dug into my jeans pocket and gave him a few coins as he chuckled.

“There’s a nice lad. Have a lovely day.”

I closed the door and, as I returned to Adam and Larry, I pulled off the tissue paper. It was a plant: a blue flower growing in a small ceramic container, and its scent was sweet and strong. I’d seen this kind of flower at Easter before but didn’t know its name. Small, megaphone-shaped blooms were clustered around a short, green stalk and surrounded by long, narrow leaves.

“Did you guys do this?”

“Heh, no,” Larry said.

“We probably should have, but no.”
Stuck in the soil, alongside a plastic tag that said *Hyacinth care instructions* was a little white envelope.

_E, I love you and miss you, B._

“Oh look, he’s blushing!”

“Cutest fookin’ thing I’ve ever seen.”

Adam’s house was exactly as I remembered it, and I asked if we could eat our takeout spaghetti in the greenhouse. I brought the hyacinth with me, thinking maybe Adam’s mum would have some ideas about what I could do with it beyond its tag’s vague “partial or full sun” instructions. Also I didn’t want to leave it alone in my car. This was lunacy, but whatever. I loved and missed you, too.

Of course I had to see if the orchid was still there. It was, and it seemed bigger than before. “It’s grown so much that Mum had to repot it a few months ago. The entire operation was fraught with drama,” Adam said. My fingertip made brief contact with one of its white blooms, and I silently marveled at all that had happened since the last time I touched them.

“Ehm, do you remember when we were all here trying to figure out *Nights in White Satin*?”

“Ha, yes. Ages ago.”

“Bono and I snuck in here and kissed for the first time. Well, it was the first time we really kissed.”

“You’re kidding.”

“No, we did.” I moved about a foot to the left. “Right here is basically...ground zero.”

Adam nodded, recalling the day. “Yeah. Now that I think about it, I remember talking to Larry after you guys left, and we thought you were both acting strangely.”

“Really? I mean, the rest of the day is a blur to me.”

“It was a long time ago, but yeah, the connection you have with each other: maybe that’s when it kicked in. The temperature of the room changed.”

“We never learned that song.”

“It’s a stupid song. But I’m glad you found what you wanted in here.”

“I did. It’s been almost two years.”

“He adores you, you know. It’s impossible to miss.” Adam pushed his glasses up on his nose.

“He adores lots of people.”

“No. This is capital A *Adore*.”

“Well,” I said, smelling my flower’s tiny megaphones, “he’s pretty adorable, too.”

We pulled a couple of folding chairs in front of the orchid, struggled to eat our spaghetti with useless, plastic takeaway forks, and managed to get marinara sauce on our shirts. Adam proposed a lemon-lime soda toast to the orchid, and I was wiping my chin with a napkin when Adam’s mum strolled
into the greenhouse wearing a pink shift with matching pumps. She was the kind of woman that men in old movies stood up for when she entered a room. So I stood up.

“My, how you’ve grown,” she said appraisingly, kissing me on both cheeks.

“Hi, Mrs. Clayton.”

She eyed the hyacinth on the floor near my chair. “Is that for me?” she asked with a wink.

“Mum…”

“It’s mine, I’m afraid. A gift.” I picked it up and let her see it.

“Hyacinths are such a joy. They’re loud and exuberant, and they never get very tall.”

“I was wondering...what am I supposed to do with it?”

Mrs. Clayton rotated the plant’s container a couple of times. “Well, you’re a very lucky young man because this flower is a perennial. Keep it inside for as long as you like. Then after the bloom goes away, just let the rest of it wilt naturally, and in the autumn you can plant the bulb somewhere. Does your mum have a flower garden?”

“She has some tulips and daffodils and things.”

She nodded. “Plant the bulb near them, and next spring it will bloom again.”

“I’d like that very much.”

“If you take care of this, it will always come back to you.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Clayton.”

“Of course, darling.”

She wandered back into the house, and I watched a wide shaft of light penetrate the clouds on the horizon. It fell on the south side of Dublin somewhere. “That big ray of sunlight over there. That’s what being with him feels like,” I said to Adam, pointing at it. “And when he’s gone, I’m under the clouds.”

“Your sunbeam will shine on you again very soon,” he said. “I wish I had someone like that.”

I blew my hair off my forehead and drew your trademark bee in the condensation on the glass. “I swear, I was expecting a girl.”

“You probably should have specified.” Adam smiled and knocked on the glass. “Universe! I am expecting girls. In a variety of colors and sizes, please.”

“I’m sure you’ll get your wish. You’re the cool one.”

He drew a sun around the bee. “Not much of a contest, but thanks anyway, Edge.”

I managed to smuggle the hyacinth into my room. It was eventually discovered by Mum, who simply said, “How thoughtful,” while I pretended to be absorbed in a book. That night I moved it to my bedside table, where its scent infiltrated my dreams in much the same way that you had insinuated yourself into nearly every aspect of my life. Countless things reminded me of you: leftover meatloaf in the refrigerator, hundreds of songs on the radio, a cache of notes I kept in a hiding place behind
the bed. I couldn’t take a shower without imagining you, naked and kneeling before me, with bright eyes and swollen lips.

I felt strange attending a concert alone, but I shouldn’t have been concerned. Most Buzzcocks fans seemed to be introverted, geeky young men like me. The queue on Wolfe Tone Street didn’t seem particularly chatty, and I was glad I’d brought along a magazine to pass the time. When I was finished reading, I handed it to a bookish fellow standing behind me, and he seemed relieved that I’d given him a way to shut out the rest of the world for a while.

The medium-sized venue was shabby and unremarkable, and of course U2 would be fortunate to headline there one day. I stood in the middle of the crowd, and the thick, hazy atmosphere triggered some low-level agoraphobia that made me question why I was even there, but those thoughts went out the window as soon as the Buzzcocks (or I guess they’re just Buzzcocks) began to play. The band looked exactly like the rest of us in the audience, and Pete Shelley was not particularly concerned with showmanship, but the songs...they were ferociously catchy odes to rejection, bitterness, and love’s complications. Dripping with sarcasm and yearning, they were the voice of the ugly friend, the third wheel, the one who watches from the perimeter. They were not your kind of band. They were my kind of band.

*I just want a lover like any other, what do I get?*
*I only want a friend who will stay to the end, what do I get?*

Pogoing to these songs was my tribe’s equivalent of singing the blues to feel better, and I was happily lost in the music for the bulk of the show. At one point I scanned the crowd to confirm that everyone else was doing the same thing, and they were. Then I saw, standing about ten people to the right of me, a lone girl. A girl with aquamarine eyes.

Aislinn.

Should I move over to her and say hello, or should I stay where I was, hoping she wouldn’t notice me? My question was answered when the band took a pre-encore break. She spotted me and made a beckoning gesture.

I mumbled apologies to ten fans as I squeezed past them, and then there she was, a smiling girl I hadn’t seen in nearly a year. We hugged gracelessly--shaking hands or simply doing nothing would have felt stupid. She smelled vaguely of cigarettes and seemed thinner, but otherwise she was the same too-cool Aislinn I remembered. “Hey, Edge,” she said.

“Hey.”

“They’re amazing, aren’t they?” she said loudly as the crowd’s yelling increased. Time for more Buzzcocks.

“Oh. So great,” I shouted.

*You spurn my natural emotions*
*You make me feel I’m dirt and I’m hurt*
*And if I start a commotion*
*I run the risk of losing you and that’s worse*

“I love this song!” she shrieked.

“Me too!”
We were too far from the stage to really see anything, so we sang along and sort of jumped around next to each other during the band’s brief but energetic encore. A painted portrait of a glaring Debbie Harry decorated her denim jacket’s back panel, and the front was covered with Aislinn’s usual exoskeleton of band pins. She danced like the rest of us, but with a lot more style.

When the house lights came on, we had a chance to really look at each other. Her hair was still short but she had dyed it a dark emerald green. “That color is amazing,” I said.

“Thanks. You’re taller.”

“Not all that much, but yeah.”

“I remember those graffiti jeans.” She pointed at a faded game of tic-tac-toe we had played on them in art class one day. Raising an eyebrow, she asked, “Where’s Bono?”

Of course. “He’s in London this week trying to get people interested in our demo. With Ali.”

“Huh. Wow. I thought you guys were joined at the hip.”

“Well, we usually are. I miss him. He’ll be back tomorrow.” I rubbed my neck and let her exit before me. “Do you need a ride home?”

“Oh, would you? That would be terrific.”

“It’s parked around the corner. I like your jacket.”

“Thanks. I wish I had more time to paint, but I really...don’t.” She sighed and looked at her hands. “Sorry I was such a bitch last year.”

I shook my head. “It’s okay. You weren’t. And we were just kids. What did we know about anything?”

“I guess.”

I unlocked the car, and we got in. It was strange to see her occupying your seat. I started the car and immediately switched the radio from whatever pop station it was on to the pirate radio station. But Aislinn probably took note of the nanosecond of Nick Lowe’s *Cruel to Be Kind* before it became *London Calling*. “Are you still at that record store?” I asked.

“Uh-huh. I’m there every day now. You should come by sometime.”

“It must be the best place to work.”

“It can be, but it’s also pretty annoying. Okay, you’re gonna need to take a left up here.”

“Sure.”

“Kids come in and try to steal things, so somehow I have to keep one eye on them and the other eye on the cash register. New release days are a nightmare. And a few of the regulars are just...real creeps.”

“I’m sure.”

“It’s like they’ve never met a girl who knows anything about music before. They wear me out.”

“I’m sure. Sorry.”
She patted her pockets and put on some lip balm. “I thought I would be able paint sometimes, but I’m too tired at the end of the day.”

“Well, you’ll always have that skill.”

“Maybe, but really...I just don’t have any ideas. Turn right.” She brightened a bit. “You guys are getting good.”

“You’ve seen us?”

“That new thing you’re doing with your guitar is so cool. I was there when you opened for The Stranglers.”

I groaned. “I feel sorry for you. That was truly a shit show. I broke a string.”

“The crowd was awful.”

“The worst.”

“But you did alright! I liked that first song a lot. My friends did, too.”

“Thanks.” I chuckled. “The Stranglers were so mean. Bono and I almost got into a fight with them, but Larry and Adam pulled us back. So we stole their booze and left early.”

“Nice. They were a complete train wreck, in case you were wondering.”

“Good.”

“So what’s going on with you guys?” She pointed at a side street, and we entered a sketchy-looking residential area.

“We’re trying to get a record deal, but no one in Ireland wants us, so like I said, Bono’s in London trying to see what he can do. We’ve got a manager now, and he doesn’t think we’re ready for that yet, and he wants us to keep growing. But we need to get a deal pretty soon because we asked our parents to give us a year to make that happen. And if nothing comes of it, Bono’s dad is probably gonna kick him out, and I’ll have to start school in the fall.”

“That would suck. You can park over here.”

“So you’re not living at home anymore?”

“I’m sharing an apartment with some friends.”

“Very cool.”

“It kind of is, and it kind of isn’t. Alannah is a slob, and Shannon is forever short on cash. I miss not having to cook and clean and pay for every little thing.”

“It is pretty nice.”

She nodded. “You’re still with your parents?”

“Yeah.”

“Hold onto that for as long as you can, believe me.”
“I’ll try.”

She grinned and touched my arm. “I knew you and Bono were still together.”

“How?”

“It’s written all over your faces when you’re onstage.”

“Do you think we should tone it down?”

“Are you kidding? It’s part of your appeal.”

“Well, how about you? Are you...with anyone?”

She rolled those otherworldly eyes of hers. “No. It’s been a rough year. I dated a few of the guys from the record store. But most of them are poseurs. Or alcoholics. Or drug addicts. Or worse: some of them are musicians.”

“Ha, thanks a lot, Aislinn.”

“It’s a bloody disaster.” She smiled. “They all made me miss you, I’ve got to say. You’re so smart, and you’re creative, and...you’re just really kind. I’m ashamed that I took you for granted.”

I shrugged. “Thanks for saying that.”

“A good man is hard to find.”

“Flannery O’Connor.”

She whistled. “You just scored some cool points, Edge.”

“We had to read her in school last year.”

“That is some bleak shit.”

“Bleak but unforgettable.”

“Yeah.”

I put my arm around her and gave her a genuine hug. “I mean it,” she said. “Come and see me at the store, okay? And when U2’s first record comes out, I’ll put you in the window.”

“It’s a deal.”

*

I was sitting on the concrete sidewalk and idly drawing a tree near the lodge house’s back door when I heard a car pull into the parking lot. I shielded my eyes from the setting sun and walked to the front of the building to see who it was. Ali was in the process of dropping you off, and neither of you noticed me. You kissed her cheek, and over the running engine and the blast of music I heard as you opened the door, you said, “Thank you, Ali. Thank you.” She smiled and waved as you grabbed your suitcase (your father’s suitcase) from the back seat. You were wonderfully early, and I thought about going back indoors to create the impression that maybe I wasn’t beside myself anticipating your return. But I was beside myself, and I knew you enjoyed shameless displays of affection more than anything else. So that’s what I gave you.
And there you were, my conquering hero, clad in black and backlit by golden sunlight and pink clouds. You spotted me. “Edge!” you shouted, running up to me, dropping your suitcase, and embracing me so tightly I almost lost my breath. My entire body woke from its 120-hour stupor. I’ve always pictured my soul as a veil-like substance trapped inside me, for some reason. And at that moment I imagined that my soul rushed up into my chest, slid in front of my lungs and my heart and slipped between my ribs until it was as close to the surface of my skin as it could possibly get in order to almost touch your soul.

“Bono. I’ve missed you so much.”

A truly dazzling smile. “Me too. Did you like the flower? Was it pretty?”

“It’s exquisite.” You kissed my cheek, bent over to pick up the suitcase, and we hurried inside.

“Are these leather?” I asked as I pushed you against the wall and gave your taut backside a squeeze.

“I may have gone on a bit of a spree.”

“I fucking love them.”

“I fucking love you, Edge.”

“Baby.”

We kissed, and the electric shock wave I felt that first time in Adam’s greenhouse returned, only it was hotter. It had learned a few things. This never gets old, and it’s been two years, I thought. Maybe it will always be this way.

I pulled back to study your face: startlingly beautiful as ever, eyes animated but sleep-deprived, mouth ready to unleash a twelve-hour monologue about your trip. And all I wanted to do was watch it move and listen to it.

“Couch,” I said.

“Yes.”

I turned on a thrift store floor lamp, sat at one end of the couch, and with a groan of pleasure, you stretched out and rested your head on my lap. “I am so happy to be home,” you whispered, gazing up at me. I caressed a lock of hair near your ear and smiled at you lovingly. We had planned to meet, catch up, and go home later that evening. Your father was expecting you. But you were right: this was your home.

Your tale was long and entertaining and full of missed buses, uncomfortable beds, unanswered phone calls, odd food, lost umbrellas, and not getting to see anything good. Each day was spent locating people who might be sympathetic to our cause and showing up unannounced with a demo, a cute girl, a foot in the door, an Irish accent, impeccable manners, and a little bit of star quality. You did your best to be assertive without being aggressive, and more often than not, music journalists and record industry types were at least amused by your charming determination. You convinced a number of them to listen to our demo, even when they had other things to do, while you waited outside their offices or in coffee shops. Many had advice or tips on other people you could contact. Whenever someone asked why your manager wasn’t doing this instead, you winked and told them the same thing you said to me: you were the advance party.

I leaned over and kissed your dear forehead. “You must be exhausted, B.”
“I kind of am.”

“There’s no way I’d be able to do what you did. I’m proud of you.”

You yawned. “I guess doing this kind of thing comes to me naturally—and I believe in us more than anything else in the world. I told at least a dozen people that you are a genius.”

“Ah, baby.” I yawned.

“But going over there wasn’t easy. At all.” You took my hand and held it up to the light, examining my fingers one at a time. “I’m sure this will come to you as no surprise, Edge, but I have no sense of direction, and this was hammered home time and time again. Without Ali, I would still be wandering around Leicester Square in a daze.”

“I’m sure it wasn’t that bad.”

You shrugged. “I tried to be upbeat, as if discovering U2 would be the opportunity of a lifetime for those guys, but I hope they didn’t see…” You paused for a few seconds, and I touched your cheek. With a sigh and a subdued voice, you said, “I hope they didn’t see how desperate I am to make this work. I have no other choice, Edge, and you know that. I want to do this with you and Adam and Larry for as long as I possibly can. I want—I need us to stay together. And I don’t know if I was successful over there. All I can do is replay those conversations over and over in my head and pray to God I didn’t fuck this up.”

“Bono. What you did was courageous. And you are so young. They’ve got to at least respect that.”

Your eyes filled with tears of frustration, and sympathy tears formed in my own. You bit your lip. “And then it’s just...the special humiliation of asking for things.”

“My love.”

“Seriously, Edge. It was humiliating. I spent every day asking for favors from complete strangers and hoping they might see something special in this creation that has become my entire life and is so precious to me, to you, to all of us. I asked them to believe in it too, and these are people who make the decisions that have the power to lift us up or crush us. It’s such a helpless feeling: depending on others to nurture a dream they clearly don’t care about. And it’s presented by this needy little creature whose sudden presence in their day is merely a nuisance. I tried to convince them and even myself that yes, I had every right to raise my hand and ask questions.” A tear spilled onto your cheek, and I wiped it away. I had never seen you look so vulnerable.

“Come here,” I whispered. You sat up and we held each other. “You had every right to ask questions, love.”

You shivered—the kind of chill that is unique to exhaustion. “I’m just glad it’s over.”

“I missed you so much.” I took off my jacket and covered you with it after you sank back down onto the couch.

Sustained eye contact. “I love you, Edge.”

I took your hands in mine. “You’ve become such a huge part of my world, you know. Even when you’re gone, you’re still...absolutely everywhere.”

“Can I be completely honest with you?”
“Of course.”

A crooked, mischievous grin. You were returning to me. “Ever since that night in Cork, I get hard in the shower. Automatically.”

I laughed. “Same here.”

You turned your head and kissed the fly of my jeans. I tousled your hair and tickled you until you shrieked. Then, calming down, we stared at each other again. By then it was dark outside, and occasionally headlights of cars pulling into the petrol station illuminated the east wall.

“I also keep replaying what you said when we were in the darkroom, about how Ali is gonna be this and that and everything else to me, and you’re just...my lover. And I felt bad because you’re so much more than that to me, Edge.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I was being dramatic.”

“No. You weren’t. You opened my eyes in there.”

“In the dark.”

“Under that red light. You did.” You nodded. “And on the flight over, I tried to define what you really are to me in a way that other people might understand if we ever told them.”

“So what am I to you?”

Your expression became tender in the warm glow of the lamp. “The closest thing I came up with is this: we’re like soldiers. That’s all four of us, this band of brothers. And a profound bond has formed between you and me. Plus it’s a life or death struggle we’re in because we are fighting for the future we want to have, where we can be together as much as we like. So I guess we’re a different kind of soldier because we’re motivated by love and creation, not hate and destruction.”

“The act of creation--when we solve a problem together and things start to click or if the song just arrives, it’s the best feeling of all.”

Your hands gripped mine tightly. “And that is something we share that Ali and I do not. You are my creative partner and my romantic partner, and those two things overlap all the time. And it’s like we’re the parents of these songs. I can’t compare it to anything else.” You looked at the ceiling, as if new songs were up there waiting for you to pull them down. I followed your gaze and felt your hand on my cheek. “So, Edge. How was your week?” I laughed. “Christ, I’m horrible.”

I slid my hand down your thigh and shuddered with lust. “It’s fine. You’re the one with the big story. I dunno. I missed you and wondered how you were doing all the time. And I went to a Buzzcocks show last night.”

“Oh, yeah! Were they great?”

“Totally great in this low-key kind of way. Just what I needed, really. And guess who was there?”

“I’m going to say...Phil Lynott.”

“Fun guess, but no. Aislinn was there.”

You gasped. “Not the Aislinn. Holy shit. How was she?”

“You know, she was a little different. She’s spent a year on her own, and it’s been kind of rough for
her. She seemed humbled. And she said a couple of things that made me feel better about the way she disappeared when school was over.”

“Like what?”

“Like she was sorry she took me for granted because apparently most guys are jerks.”

Your mouth tightened just a bit. “Did you kiss her?”

“No.”

“Did you hug her?”

“Yes.”

You shook your head. “I’m sorry, I’ve got no legs to stand on.”

“No, you don’t. But you do have these pants. Jesus Christ, B.” I tried and failed to slide my hand into one of the front pockets.

“I knew you would like them.”

“Are they comfortable?”

You chuckled. “Not at all! And thinking I could wear them home on the plane was stupid, too.”

“But they look so sexy. Distractingly so.”

“Well, that’s kind of the point of leather pants.” You rolled over.

“Oh, fuck you. Get up here.”

You sat on my lap, and your pants squeaked in an appealing way as we kissed for a long time. Your skin was rough, but I wanted it rough. I wanted you to abrade my face with your own, so that later on in my bed, I would still be able to feel it and truly know I had been thoroughly kissed by you. The delicious texture and scent of the leather and that tightly-packed body of yours would undoubtedly give me a lot to think about, too. “How the hell am I supposed to play my guitar while you’re wearing these?”

“I’m afraid that’s not my problem, Edge.”

You hadn’t even been gone for a week, but I felt like I was rediscovering your tongue, your ears, your neck and all their pleasures. I imagined a future for us populated by hundreds of these ecstatic little reunions.

“I can’t believe I almost forgot. We came up with a way to end An Cat Dubh.”

“No kidding?”

“It’s a segue—a sort of mini song between it and Out of Control—and they all flow together now. We recorded it for you.” I got up and set the tape recorder on your lap. I pressed play on the best iteration of that segue. As you listened, your eyes widened, and you gazed at me with childlike wonder. Sometimes you can look exactly like a little boy.

“Edge, it’s gorgeous. Oh my god.”
“Thanks.”

“That just came to you?”

“Yeah. I felt like I was discovering buried treasure with my name written on it.”

“It’s magic.”

“Don’t you love when that happens?”

You kissed my hand. “This is why I went over to London. People need to hear you more than they need to hear me.”

“No. They need to hear you singing on top of this. They need to hear all four of us together.”

“Can I take this home? I wanna listen to it before I fall asleep.”

Of course, my love. Of course.

* 

“Hello?”

“Edge. Listen.”

Gill was watching a game show in the living room the next morning, so I covered one ear with my hand and held the receiver against my other ear so hard that it ached for a while after the call. I heard my recorded guitar faintly over the phone line—no other sound for quite some time—and then, soaring over the top, came your innocent and angelic voice.

* Into the heart of a child  
  I stay a while where I can go back  
  Into the heart of a child  
  I can smile  
  I can go there  
  Into the heart  
  Into the heart of a child  
  I can go back  
  I can stay a while  
  Into the heart  
  Into the heart  
*
Hands

Chapter Notes

Spoiler-y notes!

This chapter takes place in May 1979. The G.B.H. was a real place that existed and was a rehearsal space for U2 and the Virgin Prunes at around this time, but as far as I can tell, no one knows what it looked like or where it was located. All I had was the name and the fact that it was somewhere outside of Dublin's city limits and possibly in the countryside. So I took some liberties with this place because Edge told me to. I consulted Irish real estate websites to find something that appealed to me, and if you're curious, I've posted some pictures on my Tumblr.

Bono had a car at this point, but I have no idea about what kind it was or how he got it.

DIK CAMEO REPEAT DIK CAMEO
And a fun example of the VPs (circa 1982) is here. I urge you to check it out because it is solid gold.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHZo_b9hcWU

I hope you know what I'm talking about when the oil-dripping lamp makes an appearance. My grandmother used to have one of these and I thought it was magical and weird.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yy8eYzDTGws

Thanks to fouroux for coming up with the joke about points. <333333333

The Bill Graham sections were quoted exactly.

They actually did bash out his headlights.

THANKS FOR STICKING AROUND! This story will end one day, I am pretty sure! Special thanks to MissEllaVation and Zoe2U for their wonderful, thoughtful comments that make my heart burst every time.

Not much time passes in this chapter, love. It’s just an afternoon, night, and morning. But it puts us in a place I changed completely through the magic of fiction. It should have been like this. Also, since it takes place on a very important day, I decided to escalate things. It’s still not sex, not technically, but our boys are knocking on its door.

I would like to apologize for the number of times I wrote the words hand/hands here. Microsoft Word is telling me it’s 54 times, but that can’t possibly be correct. Could it? But there are no other words for hands (55), and I refuse to call them extremities, phalanges, or appendages. I’ve probably made things worse by pointing this out.

But what we end up doing in this chapter is something that is often overlooked on the road to orgasm. It’s rarely the preferred route, but trying it for the first time with another person is no less profound than any other sexual pursuit. I wish the first person I experienced this with in real life was
you. I hope you feel the same way. There’s no reason why we can’t simulate that scene tomorrow night. My office downstairs has a mirror, and my hands are good at repetitive things.

I love you,
E.

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“Gentlemen! Courtesy of my beloved great aunt Oona, it is my privilege to present”—Gavin bowed with an extravagant flourish, his black vinyl skirt flapping in the afternoon breeze—“the Gingerbread House.”

The Virgin Prunes and half of U2 cheered and raised our bottles toward the sludge-colored, three-story former mill. Nine windows were scattered haphazardly across its facade in a way that was charming to most but made me feel defensive on behalf of right angles everywhere. I attempted to empathize with the builders who had toiled two centuries ago in the Irish countryside and probably did not have access to things like rulers.

It would be your new home, or at least one of them.

And it was also Mission Control for the Virgin Prunes. Along with a steady stream of bandmates, punk acquaintances, and other degenerates who treated The Willows as an all-purpose flophouse, Gavin and Guggi had alienated everyone from their former neighborhood and were keen to find a new place to rehearse and live.

Gavin’s beloved great aunt Oona, who had been every bit as eccentric as he was, had bequeathed the timeworn mill to him, along with a closet that was filled to overflowing with future stage costumes and cosmetics, including the white powder he had caked onto his face. Straightening a jaunty Hermes neck scarf that was decorated with crowns and eagles, Gavin smashed a sacrificial bottle of incredibly cheap wine on the front steps, kicked the shattered glass aside, and opened the door for us.

My first impression of the interior was one of oppressive weight, with its low ceilings, massive, exposed wooden beams, and rugged stone walls that were either painted white or left bare. A kitchen, dining room, and living room slash performance area occupied the first floor. Gavin insisted we refer to this space as the atelier but that was a step too far for most of us. Four bedrooms were on the second floor, and you would be staying in one of the third story rooms, where the roof created a cozy, triangular space. My brother and Pod had elected to keep their apartments near Trinity College, while the rest of the Prunes would live in the Gingerbread House. Doors to each room were labeled with construction paper tags painted by Guggi in a ghoulish script: Dave-iD, Strongman, Gavin, Guggi, and Princess Bono.

I was there to help you move in, and we packed as many things as we could into the Volkswagen, which was more or less mine at that point, and we made numerous trips up and down the narrow staircase.

“This looks nothing like a gingerbread house,” I said as we struggled with the mattress we had strapped to the top of your boxy little Renault 4—a birthday present from Bob that was actually a hand-me-down. He needed something more dependable, and you were delighted to take his old car off his hands.

“I think Aunt Oona was being cheeky,” you said, glancing over your shoulder while walking backwards into the house. “Apparently the children of Balbriggan decided she was a witch.”

“I see.”
“Don’t worry. I left a trail of breadcrumbs behind me as I drove. We’ll find our way back if we get too scared.”

Dik saw us attempting to mount the stairs with the mattress and came over to give me a hand with the low end.

“Thanks, Dik.”

“Sure. What do you think of the place?”

“I kind of can’t believe I’m actually going to live here.” You hit your shoulder against the banister and grunted.

“You can always stay at our house if you want. Have some decent food.”

We paused on the second floor landing and caught our breath. “I’m gonna take you up on that, Edge. And Adam and Larry. Ali said she’d help me with laundry and things like that, too.” You wiped your forehead. “I’m just glad to be out of the house. The old man was becoming positively tyrannical.”

I nodded. “That was pretty awkward when you left this afternoon. Okay, one, two, three.” We lifted the mattress again.

“Uh-huh.” You made eye contact with Dik. “I kept waiting for him to hug me or say something, anything, and it turned into a complete standoff, so we just got in our cars and left.”

“But did you see him as we drove away?” I asked.

“No.”

“He stood on the sidewalk and watched us until we had to turn, and I swear to god he waved.”

You paused. “Really?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m kind of worried about him, to be honest. Who’s he gonna yell at now, if not me?”

“Maybe he’ll take your leaving as a cue to sort of move on, you know?” Dik asked.

“I doubt it. He’s probably fuming in his chair right now, the old grump.”

“I’ll ask Mum to make him a pie or something.”

“This is why he fucking loves you, Edge.”

We set the mattress onto the floor in the middle of the sneezy-smelling room along with your other belongings, and the next order of business was to transfer Aunt Oona’s old things to the other upstairs rooms which were being used as storage. “Gavin claims there’s a bed frame up here, and I can use it if I want to.”

“I’m gonna go downstairs and see what kind of electrical situation we’ve got,” Dik said. You thanked him, and I gave him a pat on the back.

“You look so much alike,” you said, opening a slightly off-kilter window. The breeze felt heavenly, and we began to explore the room.
“Oh, do you think so?”

“Yes.”

I pinched your cheek. “Got a little crush on him, too?”

“No. The beard and those tiny glasses don’t really do much for me. But he is brilliant, just like you. I love watching him play.”

“He stands completely still.”

You laughed. “I know. You’ve got Guggi and Gavin screaming and freaking out and being lunatics, and he’s behind them like this weird statue.”

“He hardly even blinks.”

“It’s actually hilarious.”

“Hey,” I said, putting my arms around your shoulders and kissing you softly under the skylight. Sparkling dust specks floated around us like tiny stars. “Here we are.” We looked around: it was bigger than your room at home...except that wasn’t your home anymore.

“My new place.”

I kissed you again. “Happy birthday, Bono.”

“Thanks, Edge.”

Gavin’s family had sifted through the house’s contents and taken the things they wanted, leaving behind an odd assortment of furniture, housewares, and personal items. We spent an hour or so moving things and kept the bed frame, a desk, a small table, a chest of drawers, a bookshelf, and a few lamps. Soon the space seemed even bigger, and as we arranged the furniture and plopped the mattress onto its frame with a great deal of satisfaction, I envied your independence.

“Paul said we can play at that parking garage every Saturday if we want to,” you said, leaning against the window sill and admiring the posters you had attached to the walls, which was easily your top priority in arranging the room. The setting sun backlit the soft hairs on your forearms, which appeared to be outlined in gold. I stood beside you.

“It’s a weird idea, but I think it’ll be fun.”

We smiled at each other. “Gonna stay with me tonight?”

“Do you want me to?”

“I’m afraid of the dark, Edge.” You were not afraid of the dark.

“If you insist.”

Staying with you was a foregone conclusion, of course. I had plans for us. I gave you another kiss and felt you exhale against my cheek. We listened to the low rumble of four lads arranging their rooms below us and watched Dik’s car as he drove up the lane and parked. When he emerged with several boxes of pizza in his arms, we took it as our cue to run downstairs. “That’s my bathroom,” you said, pointing at a door at the end of the second floor labeled Guggi and Bono (and Gavin). “Gavin gets to use any bathroom he likes.”
“Master of the house.”

“Exactly. Pizza!” you yelled down the hallway, and soon all of us were in the dining room, helping ourselves to food from a place in Skerries that, while not in the same league as Pizzaland on Grafton Street, was nevertheless able to arrange things on large, circular pieces of dough. Gavin rummaged through the cabinets, found a sturdy candle one typically sees around the house at Christmastime, and placed it in the center of a pizza buckling under the weight of every conceivable topping. Lighting the candle, he commanded you to make a wish, and we sang happy birthday as you blew it out (some of us like normal people and some of us like Gavin and Guggi).

Dik and I sat on the floor and talked while you held court with your new housemates at the table and told them about our first major article in Hot Press. “Bill Graham thinks we might have a hard time convincing Ireland to play our music, and we may be more suitable for American audiences,” you said, opening a bottle of Guinness.

Gavin grinned. “That’s funny. He said the same thing about us. Except instead of America he thinks we’ll find fans in...Kyrgyzstan.”

Pod laughed. “Luxembourg.”

“Papua New Guinea.”

“Swaziland.”

“Azerbaijan!”

Laughter and applause. I was glad you wouldn’t have to live somewhere alone, and as if you knew I was thinking about you, you winked at me.

“I can see why you love him,” Dik said to me. I felt myself blush. “Come on, it’s too good of a secret for Gill to keep to herself.”

I looked at the floor. “I guess I can’t really blame her.”

“It’s okay. I truly do not care.”

“Wow, that makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside, Dik.”

“You know what I mean. I like Bono. He’s...it’s like there’s a light inside of him.” Dik gestured in a way that suggested a large round object.

“He said he loves watching you play.”

That triggered a rare Dik smile. “But you get what I’m saying, right? When we’re performing, Gavin and Guggi try to create this weird darkness. But with you guys, there’s light, and most of it is coming from him.”

“Yeah. You’re right about that.”

The discussion at the table had died down, and I knew Dik and I were being watched. We looked up in unison, and indeed everyone was staring at us with goofy smiles on their faces.

“Oh they’re just so adorable!” Gavin announced, putting his arm around you.

“Don’t you love seeing them next to each other?” you asked.
“Bloody twins. Dik, we should call you The Perimeter, what do you say?”

“No thank you.”

“Yeah, Dik, do not fall for it. You do not wanna be saddled with a The,” I said.

A bit later my brother and I escaped to your room, where he helped me set up a couple of surprises for you that required a second pair of hands. As he left to rehearse with the rest of the Prunes in their new space for the first time, I bashfully asked him to send you up. “Okay,” he said in a nerdy voice he liked to put on, and giving me a quick salute, he went downstairs.

Soon enough I heard the stamp-stamp-stamping of your little boots on the wooden stairs, and you met me in your room’s doorway, smiling and slightly out of breath. I pulled you inside.

“Alone at last, the Edge,” you purred into my neck. Your hair brushed against my face as I kissed the top of your head, and I inhaled the sunshine scent that was uniquely yours. “What have you been doing up here?”

“Just a few minor things,” I said, shutting the door. “Like that.”

“That wasn’t here before?” you asked, pointing at the full-length mirror on the back of the door.

“No. It’s new. And so is this.” I indicated the slide bolt lock I had just installed. “I thought you might like a little privacy from time to time.”

“Fucking brilliant. I love them, but I really cannot trust those guys. Did you know, Edge, that they considered wrapping my car—my new car!—in clingfilm and bashing out the headlights for my birthday?” You shook your head in disbelief.

“Horrible.”

“Yeah. And I wouldn’t put it past them to barge in on me and especially us at any time of day or night as some sort of fucked up initiation or whatever.”

“Well. They’ll probably find a way to work around this, so I’d continue to watch my back if I were you.”

You nodded. “Good point. Eternal vigilance.”

“Also there’s this.” I pointed at a nail by the door.

“That is exquisite.”

“That is for your keys. Always put them here. Every time.” I reached into your front jeans pocket, where your keys had created a tell-tale lump, and hung them on the nail.

“Got it. Awfully handy, aren’t you?” you said, and I huffed out a laugh. You looked around the room for other new things, and your eyes landed on the bed. “Okay, that comforter is definitely new.”

“Do you like it?”

“Oh yes,” you said, sitting on it and smoothing it with your hands. “It’s so silky. And black. Very sexy, Edge.”

“It’s red on the other side.”
“No kidding?” You checked. “Is there a new sex shop in town I don’t know about? One that caters to minors?”

I ignored this and took on that tone of voice I knew you loved. “I wanted to see what you looked like on it.”

A slow nod of appreciation. “My, my.” You lifted the comforter. “And new sheets, too?”

“I liked thinking about you sleeping in something I gave you.”

“I’m gonna sleep naked in this bed.”

“Good.” I stood in front of you and tilted your chin up. Looking into your eyes, I said, “I want you to imagine I’m touching your entire body all night long.” We stared at each other.

You exhaled. “Where did you put my old quilt?”

“It’s on that shelf.”

“It was Mum’s.”

“Oh. Definitely use it, too.”

“Yeah, I will. If I get cold. Sit down, Edge. Anything else?”

I pointed at a cardboard box in the corner. “Mum put together a care package for you. Towels, toothpaste, snacks...Mum kinda stuff.”

“Oh my God, I love her,” you said.

“She certainly loves you.”

You turned on your record player and found your copy of *Horses*. “A little Patti for old time’s sake, what do you say?”

Instantly transported to the post-summer reunion that took place on that very same mattress, you and I reenacted one of our first erotic scenes, and you whispered “Gloria” in my ear as I bit into your perfect, slightly salty neck. You smelled warm, familiar, and so alive. I thought about the things we had done with each other since that afternoon at your house, when the memory of seeing you with your shirt off and feeling your writhing body beneath mine was enough to keep me awake deep into the night. We had thrilled to our share of non-objective makeout sessions that left us literally aching for each other, but things had been escalating gradually since then. I was proud of us for taking our time and savoring every step of the journey, but my god, how much patience could two teenagers in love be expected to have? It was frustrating.

“91 days,” I sighed.

“Yeah?”

“Until I’m eighteen.”

“Oh Edge.”

Our mouths kept each other occupied until the room was dim. That, combined with the number of different ways you were able to say my name, all with unique implications, left me dizzy and hard.
Grinning, you pulled away and turned on a kitschy, oil-dripping lamp that created the illusion of rain falling around the Venus de Milo. Locating a folder in a plastic milk crate, you said, “I almost forgot. Those photos from the Trinity College shoot are here. You are seriously gonna die.”

“I’m afraid to look.”

We flipped through the black and white photos—with Guggi standing in for an absent Larry, no less—and laughed at some of your more out-there scenarios: you making a pass at a painted woman in a mural, you hiding between giant ventilation ducts, the two of us messing around with fire extinguishers. A few of the pictures were legitimately beautiful, though, and were solo shots of you gazing up at a light source. In one you seemed to hold light in your hands, and it made me fall silent.

“Yeah, I don’t know if I have much of a future as an art director.”

“You can do anything you set your mind to, B.” I kissed your jaw. “But you’ve never really explained this: why did you force me to hold random objects in so many of these?”

“That was strictly for selfish reasons. If you had to hold something, I knew your hands would always be in the shot.”

“So that’s why I’m presenting the viewer with a shoe here.”

“Yes. And...okay, brace yourself.”

“Is it the one I think?”

“Probably.”

It was the one. “Alright, this is the weirdest picture of the two of us that I have ever seen.”

“It doesn’t get much weirder.”

“I look like I’m seven years old, and meanwhile, you’re this...semi-nude sex object in the dark back there.”

“See, you’re innocent—”

I nodded sarcastically. “Symbolized by me holding two trash bins, as one does while seated on the floor.”

“You’re holding them like they’re the Ten Commandments. And I am clearly a bad influence. The image leaves the viewer with a feeling of ambiguity.”

“I’ll say.” Ignoring the entire left half of the photo, I focused on your bare torso and arms. On the day of the shoot, Patrick, the photographer, had said he couldn’t see you in the shadows and suggested you remove your black jacket and shirt as I secretly rejoiced. “Dream boy.”

“Do you like what you see?”

“Please crop me out of this thing and let me have the rest.”

“Crop you out? Never. We belong together all the time, Edge, even in this picture. Especially in this picture.”

Side one of *Horses* ended, and we heard the muffled and thudding sounds of the Prunes rehearsing two floors below us. Not wishing for my brother to provide the soundtrack for what would happen
next, I flipped the record over and turned it up a bit. Then I took your hand and led you to the mirror. “I wanna see you,” I murmured as I fumbled with the lamp on the dresser. It was small and decorated with shells and bits of coral, and it cast an amber glow near the door.

I stood behind you, and we watched my hands in the mirror as they ran down your t-shirt and pulled it out of your jeans. The hem of the shirt felt warm and slightly damp in my hands, and for a second I was jealous of a piece of fabric that was able to spend its day encircling your waist. I pulled it up, one inch, two, exposing a sliver of bare skin, a line of hair that needed to be traced with a finger once, twice. You turned your head to the side, and I watched myself kissing you, a picture no one would see but us. Your tongue felt like it belonged in my mouth more than my own did. I continued to lift your shirt with a teasing slowness that allowed me to appreciate every exposed bit of you while anticipating all the rest. Eventually there was nowhere else for the shirt to go, so off it came.

I set it on the dresser and kissed and adored the bruise on your dear shoulder. “Sweet baby, poor thing.” Then my hands were all over your chest, my darling adonis. I was struck as always by how different your flesh felt compared to mine: more substantial and powerful, but enveloped in a thin layer of voluptuous softness I hoped you would never, ever lose. The hair on your chest and stomach was, as always, exasperatingly sexy.

“Edge,” you whispered.

“Look at these hands of mine. Watch what they’re doing to you.”

“Oh god.”

My lips found that gorgeous boundary on your cheekbone where barely visible, fine hairs transitioned to something coarser and more masculine. My top lip slid across angelic down while my lower lip met with just a bit of resistance. Meanwhile my hand descended below your waist where I found you confined, straining, and hot for me. “Watch.”

“Yes.” You leaned against me, one hand in my hair and the other helping me unbutton and unzip you.

I took you in my left hand and stroked you. “I have a pretty good idea, but you’re going to tell me exactly what to do.”

You moaned. “Keep doing that.”

“No, tell me exactly.”

We made eye contact in the mirror for a moment, and your fingers met mine in that dark thicket. “Okay, put your thumb...here.”

“Yes. Tell me. Show me how.”

“Slower. Just a little. Not as tight. That’s right.”

“You know my hands love to learn new things.”

“Yeah.”

“Repetitive things.” This elicited a soft gasp from you. I moved my hand exactly as you had instructed me, and I had no intention of stopping. I could have stood there for 91 days, feeling the baby softness of your skin against my calloused fingertips. I loved watching your body change and shift as I continued to touch you, and although we were physically quite similar in that regard, my
mind could not stop itself from making comparisons between the two of us. I kissed your ear and whispered, “Take all the time you like. I’m very patient.”

“Yes you are.”

“Hypnotic, isn’t it?”

“Sort of.” Once again we studied each other in the mirror for a while. Then you bit your lip and returned your focus to my hand, your cock. “Oh, fuck. Faster.”

“Like that?” I kissed your neck.

“Yes. Oh god, look at you.”

“Just watch my hands. Let me do all the work.”

“Fuck me. Yes.”

You have always had a voracious appetite for pleasure. The curved lines that define your entire body suggest the existence of a spirit trapped inside that is forever pushing against its boundaries and seeking artistic, spiritual, and physical ecstasy on the other side. More love, more praise, more bliss.

*I can feel, I can feel, I can feel, I can feel*, Patti sang.

As I studied your ecstatic face that night, with each of its features seemingly engineered to be the ultimate example of Irish male beauty, I wanted to be you. But I was more than content to be the object of your affection with a front row seat to watch you mature into a true man.

Your shoulders pushed against my chest, and your breathing was shallow. You were almost there. You were very close. “Let it out, love,” I said.

“Edge, my god…”

“Make a wish,” I said. You surrendered to me with a cry that sounded like you were splitting apart, and your spirit was set free to gather all the pleasure it could carry before returning home to present it to your pounding, golden heart.

I caught most of it with your shirt, but some stayed on my hand, and instead of wiping it away, I rubbed it into the skin of my inner arm and wrist. I felt you sink into my body, and in some tiny way, you became a part of me. I looked at you and kissed my wrist.

Then you took me in your arms and took possession of my mouth with your own. “Your turn, love,” you said in a husky voice as you straightened your jeans and walked me to your bed.

“No mirror?” I sat down, and you eased my head back onto your pillow and began unbuttoning my shirt.

“No this time. I want to see what you look like on this silky black thing.” I glanced at your miniature Venus de Milo, who stared blankly at us between the bars of her oily cage. You looked over your shoulder and said, “Watch and learn, Venus. Watch and learn.”

I laughed. “Well, it’s a real shame because she has no hands.”

Smiling at me, you said, “Absolutely tragic. I’m sorry I brought it up, Venus,” and you turned the lamp so she faced away from us.
“Now that’s not fair, B. She’s been in storage up here for god knows how long. Don’t you think she’d appreciate a little entertainment, even if she isn’t able to join in?”

“Good point, the Edge.” You returned the lamp to its original position and helped me out of my shirt one sleeve at a time. “Speaking of points, did you realize you have the pointiest elbows of anyone walking the earth?”

“Oh, you think they’re pointy, do you?”

“They’re ridiculous, love. And so are your knees.” While pulling my jeans off, you patted one of my knees and feigned a terrible hand injury. Then, eyeing my underwear, you said, “Yes, so many, many pointy things on this lad. I should have named you The Point, you know.” By that time I had pulled you down onto the bed and was tickling you mercilessly. Your only defense was to divert me with kisses, a highly effective strategy.

“Teach me, Edge.”

“Yes, baby.”

Your bright eyes twinkled. “I’m eager to learn exactly how to please you.” That was a sentence I returned to time and time again during the following week.

“It shouldn’t be too difficult.”

“But I wish I had artistic hands like yours. I’m afraid I won’t be able to duplicate what you can do yourself. Not even close.”

I brought your fingers to my mouth and kissed them. “Bono. It isn’t an issue. Your hands will please me more than my own because...they’re your hands, love. They are attached to you. Christ, I won’t last until the end of this song.”

“This song is over nine minutes long.”

“I won’t last until the end of this chorus.”

Miraculously, I managed to outlast the song, but just barely, and you held me for a long time afterward whispering, “You’re the first.”

“So are you.”

“No one has ever made me come like that. All I had to do was let you take over so I could just...receive it. It was like nothing else.”

“Yes, baby. So beautiful when you come.”

“I love you.”

“I love you, B.”

Later, after we had availed ourselves of the bathroom, which was surprisingly adequate, we cuddled between sheets that were a bit too crisp and new and smelled kind of like the plastic packaging they came in. The racket downstairs had shifted from music to drunken revelry, and through the open window I heard Dik’s car drive away.

“Want me to close it?” I asked.
“No, the air is nice. Kind of like camping.”

“Since when do you camp?”

“Since never.”

I fell asleep reliving my turn on your bed, and the way you stripped me naked and how your diligent hands and corrupt expression turned me all the way on. My partner, my best friend, my lover. You asked questions and repeated my answers. You admired a body that was nowhere near your equal. But nevertheless you worshiped it, on your hands and knees above me. Your mouth was on my nipples, my stomach, my hip bone, my inner thigh. I begged you to take me in your mouth, but you stuck to the script. “91 days, love.” This made me want you even more, and your compact, capable hands took me to the place where you were the conquering hero, and you planted your flag with greed and tenderness.

Besotted and defenseless, I moved closer to you, rested my head against your chest, and closed my eyes. Hours passed as we slept peacefully under the darkest, starriest sky I had ever seen, and the night air circulated around us with a chill that made the bed feel even better. The dusty, stuffy room smelled fresh and new.

In a dream I imagined you floating on your back in a shallow pond in the moonlight, and your skin was slick with an oily substance that created dark, rainbow-like bands of color across your face, neck, and chest. Fireflies circled you and landed on your hair and cheek, and when you looked at me —

“Edge? I can’t sleep,” you whispered, waking me up.

It took a few seconds for me to remember where I was. As memories of what we had done with each other rushed to the forefront of my mind in a happy, pink flood, I checked your clock radio. 4:55.

“What’s the matter?”

“It’s too quiet.”

We listened: no cars, no neighbors, no airport noise, no sea noise, no friends doing things downstairs...just nature, with maybe a few faraway birds beginning their day.

“You’re right. It’s really different out here.”

“I suppose I’ll learn to like it.”


“Do you wanna go back to sleep, Edge?”

“Not if you’re awake. Are you awake?”

“Yeah.”

I sat up in bed, stretched, and you kissed my back and shoulders. “I know what we could do,” I said with a yawn.

“What’s that, love?”

“We could watch the sunrise. At that barn? Do you want to?”

You turned your head to the window. “Sure. It’s still pretty dark, though.”
“Mum put a flashlight in that box for you. She’s a big believer in giving people flashlights.”

“I’m gonna write a song about that woman one of these days.”

We dressed and gathered a few things: your Mum’s quilt, the flashlight, a transistor radio. Then we crept down the creaky stairs and out the front door. You held the flashlight while I stopped by my car. I retrieved the tin of cinnamon rolls I had stashed beneath the passenger seat, which was the only place I knew where they would be safe overnight.

“Edge! You got us breakfast?”

“It’s not really a birthday cake, but--”

“I want those cinnamon rolls more than anything else in the world.”

With the flashlight helping us find our way, we walked along the gravel path that led to the dusty old barn. It smelled faintly of sheep and was surrounded with deep, wet grass that soaked our shoes and the hems of our jeans. We organized our things on a small concrete platform by the barn’s east wall and, snuggling together beneath the quilt, we listened to the sounds of the predawn Irish countryside. More birds, insects, and frogs were calling to each other, and so were some cows from a distant farm. I took a deep breath and exhaled with contentment. “The air is amazing.”

“It could not be more wholesome.”

I turned on your pocket-sized radio. “I wonder what you can get out here?” The answer was not much. I settled on a rock station that had just started playing *Layla* by Derek and the Dominos, and I felt a pang of guitar envy at the song’s iconic riff. “Never gonna come up with anything that good,” I said.

*U2 belong to a whole other league,*” you said, quoting one of Bill Graham’s sentences from that Hot Press article.

I had memorized it, too. *Undoubtedly the best front man since Geldof, Bono is a powerfully charged battery of energy, and utterly unignorable.*

“Fucking love you. They were simply the most exhilarating performances by a local band I’ve witnessed in the last twelve months.” We smiled at each other in the glow of the flashlight. “Now give me those cinnamon rolls.”

The rolls were operating under conditions that were not optimal: they were a day old and had spent the night in a cold car, but they benefited from the fact that we were eating them outdoors, we were hungry, and we had no intention of sharing them. Their deliciousness made us lick our fingers and groan with joy.

I unrolled one. “You’re the good part in the middle, B.”

“That is the best thing anyone has ever said about me.”

“Happy day-after birthday.”

You displayed your sticky fingers. “And what are you? The runny icing? Because last night…”

I laughed. “I’m the outside part that keeps the middle safe.”

You kissed me, your lips sweet and affectionate. “Adore you forever,” you said. The flashlight was
angled so the light hit the back of your right hand, highlighting pale blue veins that made me wonder if everyone’s veins shared identical patterns or if they were as varied as fingerprints. Over your shoulder, the sun began to rise in the brightening, cloudless sky, and the colors of objects surrounding us slowly began to make themselves known. *Layla’s* beautiful piano outro began. “I love this part,” you said.

“Me too.” I found a chalky piece of brick and used it to draw mindless spirals on the concrete. Then I had an idea. Turning, I placed my hand on one of the barn wall’s larger stones and traced around it while you held the flashlight. “Your turn,” I said, positioning your hand on the stone and outlining it so our fingers overlapped.

“We’re holding hands, aren’t we?” you asked. “Let me.” I gave you the brick and you drew a B and an E inside each outlined hand. We looked at them with satisfaction.

Then we turned to watch the sun as it continued to inch its way above the horizon. Your face was otherworldly in that tangerine light. Sunshine...

“You can play piano a little bit, can’t you?” you asked.

“Yeah. I’m just okay.”

We were quiet again, and we listened to the rest of the song with your head on my shoulder and the radio between us. As the outro began to fade, you turned up the volume as loud as it could go. “I wanna hear the little bird at the end,” you said, holding the radio close to our ears. The bird sang sweetly for you. Then Robert Plant screamed at top volume, “Hey, hey mama said the way you move, gonna make you sweat, gonna make you groove,” and this startled you so much that you shrieked and dropped the radio. Laughing, I caught it for you and turned it down, but you had awakened every bird within a fifty-yard radius, and in a riot of noise, all of them took flight from wherever they were roosting. You stood up, spun around, and watched the birds swirl above our heads. I applauded, and you took a bow.
This chapter was going to be a lot longer, but I decided to wait and create a second part, which you'll read in the next chapter. The topic is exactly what you think it might be after you read this one.

All major (and most of the minor) plot points here are based on real things that happened. Including (spoilers):

meningitis
Paul and wires
Santa/Christmas in June
Sounds quote
birthday rejection
the Bowie remark
the thing with the lighter
the shadows/Gill
the shirt under the shirt

Things I made up: John's name (I read his real name somewhere, but it was merely a generic first name, and I didn't write it down and totally forgot about it), and the date Bono made the fork model for the 360 stage in Edge's opening note. I'm pretty sure this happened a few years before 2007, but for the sake of the story, let's say it's 2007.

Thanks to all who are still reading this. <3 I know commenting is a pain in the ass, so I won't ask again. At least not this time (although it is appreciated like you wouldn't believe). But my kudos are tantalizingly close to a big round number, and if you haven't already, I would appreciate it so much if you could help me get there. Thanks again and I hope you enjoy this connect-y chapter.

Edit: YOU DID IT! Yayyyyyyyy! I know this means a lot to teen Edge and teen Bono. ❤

Bono, you had no idea I was dreaming up this chapter yesterday at lunch as you talked with Willie about your vision for a future stage for us. Unable to create a clear drawing of it on a napkin, you grabbed my fork, his, Adam’s, and your own and stood them on the table, their tines touching and forming the center of a pyramid. “All the sound gear goes up here,” you explained, indicating the peak, “and what if we put a screen there, too? Circular, maybe? All of it over our heads? And we’re down here, and we can perform in the round! Edge, what do you think?”

“Sounds expensive. But I think it’s brilliant, B.”

“Is this even possible, Willie?”

“With you? Everything is possible.”

I smiled to myself because I was planning to describe our 1979 stages that featured such low-tech
elements as Christmas lights, white sheets, and plywood platforms we constructed and tore down so many times the individual boards remain firmly in my memory. I have splintered stress dreams about them to this day.

Look at how far we’ve come, my love. But also think about how magical those early days were. I would give anything to relive them with you.

Edge

——

“Look. He’s waking up.”

I took a deep breath and smelled sickly sweet industrial-grade disinfectant. Ah, yes. I was in the hospital. I opened my eyes and saw your concerned face hovering above mine. It was soon joined by those of Larry, Adam, and Mum, who asked, “How are you feeling, love? You gave all of us quite a scare.”

I coughed. “Better than yesterday, that’s for sure.” I noticed the plastic bag suspended over my right arm.

“Antibiotics,” she continued. “And it looks like they’re doing their job.”

“Good to see some color on those cheekbones again,” you said, boldly stroking one.

“Was it really meningitis?” I asked.

“They think so. Your fever hovered around 101 degrees for a few hours last night, but you’ve bounced back very quickly this morning.”

“When can I go home?”

“Possibly tonight or tomorrow.” Mum kissed my forehead.

“He’s not contagious?” Larry asked, and Mum shook her head. This prompted you to kiss my forehead as well, and you urged a laughing Adam and Larry to do the same. I felt rather ridiculous.

“Would you lads keep him company while I pick up some things from home?” she asked, gathering her handbag and knitting.

“Take your time, Mother Edge,” you said with a smile. “We’ll look after him.”

“Mum? Could you bring my book? The Cyberiad?” Aislinn had let me borrow it from her science fiction collection.

Mum nodded and gave my blanketed feet a squeeze. “Back very soon, love.” We watched her leave the room.

“So how did it go?” I asked.

“Oh my god, Edge. It was hilarious,” you said, leaning back in your chair and glancing at the ceiling. “I attempted to sing and play lead guitar. If you can imagine that.”

“It was lunacy,” Larry said.
“It was...experimental?” Adam added diplomatically.

“After a while he brought people up from the crowd and taught them your part and made them hum it.”

“There may have been an acapella segment. And a few guitar-free numbers. I think we played *Sweet Jane* two and a half times. Bottom line is, we need you, Edge. Your position in this band is secure. Rock solid.” You yawned, rubbed your stubbly chin, and stared at me. You were wearing some of your usual stage clothes. How long had you been waiting at the hospital?

I smiled at you with gratitude. “Was anybody even there?”

“More than last time! They were having fun. Lots of young kids.”

Larry stood by the window and took in the hospital’s parking lot. “I think that is our audience—the loser kids who can’t get into bars and clubs.”

“I think so, too,” Adam said, joining him.

I watched your fingers as they stroked the hairs on my forearm. You smiled as I shivered, and I wanted to kiss you. I asked, “So you built the stage and took it down like last time?”

“Right.” You raised an eyebrow. “Shall we tell him about what Paul did?” Adam and Larry turned away from the window and laughed.

“Tell me.”

“Okay, well, you know how that basement level of the parking garage is really damp, right? There were actual puddles yesterday, and that guy John was helping us set up again. He must have done something wrong because we were mid-song when we heard this awful pop.”

“Pop!” Larry shouted. “We all just froze, and then you couldn’t hear the bass or guitar anymore.”

Adam said, “So Paul ran up from the back and yelled at John. Then he squeezed behind the amps and pulled out some wires. I don’t know which ones, but I guess he knew what he was doing.”

Wide-eyed, you said, “And then he put the ends of the wires in his fucking mouth, Edge, and stripped off the rubber stuff with his fucking teeth. Spat the rubber parts out, jammed the raw copper wires back into the amps, and we were playing again.”

“Holy shit.”

“No kidding. And so I said, ‘This is why we have a manager,’ and everybody laughed. I wish you could’ve seen it.”

“Wow.”

You shrugged and ran a hand through your hair. “I mean, the crowd seemed sympathetic to our situation, so it was just a fast, silly little show. And I worked the door and let everyone in for half price.”

“Two pence?”

“Bono was really funny.”

“Oh was I, Larry?”

“The girls in the front were watching him like this.” Larry held his chin in his hands and batted his eyelashes. “You could have read Edge’s book to them for all they cared.”

“Maybe I’ll do that next time,” you said. “But anyway, you’re the cute one, Larry.” Turning to me, you said, “Seriously, Edge. You need to get better soon. You are irreplaceable. And we need you to do that interview at the radio station on Wednesday.”

“That’s still happening?”

“In a Santa suit.”

“What the fuck?”

“We had an idea.”

The less said about the skinniest-U2-member-as-Santa radio interview the better, but our “Christmas in June” residency at McGonagle’s was something everyone could really get behind. Each of us brought all the decorations we could carry from home and spent the following Thursday morning turning the performance area into something less cavelike. You and I were the first to arrive.

“You okay on that ladder, B?”

“Totally fine,” you said. You were untangling a string of blinking lights, and I was trying my best not to stare at jeans that were holding you so tightly I questioned your ability to father children in the future. “I’m not scared of heights. Are you?”

“I’d say I have a healthy amount of fear.”

You considered this and returned to your task. “If anything I’m afraid of the ground.”

Later we were wrapping multi-colored lights around the trunk of the fake palm tree that the McGonagle’s bartender insisted was incredibly cool and distinctive. Then white light flooded the space, and in the open doorway stood a silhouetted Gavin and Guggi with more decorations.

Clad in red, Gavin dropped his box and approximated a Fosse-like jazz walk as he approached us, singing, “He’s got electric boots, a mohair suit, you know I read it in a magazi-i-ne, ohhh, B-B-B-Bono and the Edge.”

A green-suited Guggi followed along, twirling a black feather boa and singing in falsetto, “Bono! Bono! Bono! Bono! Bono! Bono and the Edge.” The two faced each other and repeated this an interminable number of times as we laughed at them.

“We actually did read it in a magazine,” Gavin said, fishing an issue of Sounds from his box of tinsel and ornaments. Flipping to a page in the middle, he read, “Blah blah blah U2 is another great
undiscovered Irish band blah blah blah. That is coming from London, my dears.”

“Wow, really?”

“It seems your British adventure bore fruit,” Gavin said, pointing at you.

“Okay, if so it’s the tiniest blueberry in the whole wide world because all we’ve been getting are rejection letters. RSO even sent one to Dad’s house. Did I tell you about this, Gavin?”

“No.”

“Yeah, I guess you weren’t around when he called. He got my hopes up, and I drove to the house where he presented me with an envelope that was so thin it was practically transparent.” I could sense your temper flaring as you began to rev up. “And the letter said, ‘Your music is not suitable for us at present, so kindly fuck off, stupid boy.’ Dad was looking at me with this ‘ready to give up yet?’ expression, and I said, “Don’t even start,” and left. Would you believe the date on the letter was my birthday? Fuck.”

I put my hand on your shoulder, and you took a deep breath. “We’re a great undiscovered Irish band,” I said. “Only a matter of time until someone discovers us.”

“I suppose. They’re certainly taking their sweet time, though.”

“Until then,” I said, touching the tip of your nose, “Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer had a very shiny nose.” Gavin and Guggi joined in, and the three of us serenaded you until we made you crack a smile.

Along with our Dandelion Market performances, the Christmas In June shows were a fun way for us to forget about the disappointments, our self-imposed pressure to succeed, and the ticking clock. The fake-holiday format gave the shows an overriding playfulness. Loose and humorous versions of carols contrasted nicely with aggressive performances of our solid, evolving set of songs. Our local fan base continued to grow, and discouraged or not, your confidence skyrocketed. And, inevitably, someone noticed.

“Tell me about this Chas person,” Aislinn said. Her catlike eyes were ringed with thick black lines, a look that was echoed by the face of a shocked-looking Nina Hagen on her artfully-ripped t-shirt. I joined her behind the counter with the cash register and investigated what was on the record store’s stereo. “It’s Joy Division. Unknown Pleasures. I can’t stop playing it.”

I looked at the album cover’s digital mountain peaks. Lowering my voice an octave and adopting a monotonous, staccato rhythm, I said, “His voice makes me wanna talk like this.”

“Yeah, I know. Me too,” she said, doing the same and giggling.

A small line of customers had formed, and Aislinn took their money while I volunteered for bag detail. Pop compilation record (mild eyeroll from Aislinn), Aretha Franklin (a wink and a nod), Elvis Costello (a soft “oh yeah”).
“He wanted to impress you,” I whispered. The young punk looked back at Aislinn longingly before he walked out the door.

“Well, he has good taste. Too bad about those shoes.”

I shook my head and chuckled. “Do you enjoy judging people?”

“Honestly? Kinda,” she said, laughing. “Anything to keep this job halfway interesting.”

I returned to our conversation. “So this Chas guy is from CBS Ireland. Chas de Whalley. He’s interested in us, and he was at our last Christmas show.”

“That was the best one.”

“I didn’t notice him because he was with Paul in the back. After our set, Paul took him out for a drink, and he went on and on about us, Bono especially.”

“The boy’s a star.”

I leaned in and said confidentially, “Paul told me about this later. Chas thinks Bono is absolutely riveting and said he could be the next Bowie.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“Him, too.”

Aislinn laughed. “Does Bono know about this?”

“Not yet. I’m going to save it for when he’s feeling low.”

She paused. “He feels low?”

“More than you might think.”

She held up a finger. “This part. This part…” A taut, fidgety guitar line jangled through the store, accompanied by soft whooshing sounds—the exact opposite of any guitar solo I had ever heard.

“Wow.”

“I mean…?”

“Yeah.”

We listened to the rest of the song, and then I said, “It’s weird to look out at all those girls, especially at Dandelion Market. And they are clearly falling in love with him.”

“Your boyfriend.”

I felt myself blush. “My boyfriend.”

She pulled a second tall stool beside hers, and we sat down. “Are you jealous?”

Time to look at my hands. “Sometimes. It’s a weird mix of feelings. I mean, he’s in my band, and that’s his job. It’s great if girls fall in love with him.”

“And boys, too.”
“Yeah, boys too, no doubt.” I straightened a stack of coupons on the counter. “But it’s...the shrieking is pretty wild. And of course we want that. It’s a sign that we’re doing a good job, right?”

“Sure. It would suck if nobody got excited.”

“But at the same time, he’s such a flirt.”

Aislinn put her hand on my arm. “I don’t think he can help it. He’s just one of those people.”

“Yeah.”

“He has charisma.” She traced a star on the sleeve of my jacket with her finger.

“I know. I’m not sure if I’m explaining it very well.”

“No, I get it. Watching that can’t be easy for you. But you know what?”

“What?”

She winked. “A lot of us enjoy the brains of the operation, too.”

I huffed out a partial-laugh.

“I mean it! The sounds you are able to make--you give him this one of a kind platform to stand on. And he is clearly all about you, Edge.”

“Okay.”

She got up to flip the record over and said, “But I don’t know if he’s that great of a singer. Not yet.”

“I’m gonna tell him you said that.”

“Do not do that!” she said play-punching my shoulder while I ducked. “His voice is just this wild beast of a thing now, and we’re watching him learn how to ride it, and sometimes he falls off. But it doesn’t really matter because he’s got the rest of you--Adam, Larry, but especially you--making him sound like this...this thing that makes girls fall in love. Which is wild because he can’t dance to save his life, you know. Do not tell him I said that, either.”

I grinned and pretended to zip my lips.

“But he doesn’t even need to dance,” she continued. “He has this hypnotic way of moving that’s just a little bit slower than the songs, so you can’t take your eyes off him. It’s like he’s sort of stalking the music and hitting these poses, right? Plus what is that thing he does with the lighter?”

“Oh, like when he flicks it over and over really fast by his face?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s because he wants to make it seem like we have a strobe light.”

“I love it.”

I loved it, too. “Sometimes he visits this old man who knows a lot about mime, and he says he’s been boxing, too.”

“That’s an odd combination.”
“Bono is probably the only boxer-slash-mime in Ireland.”

She nodded. “Also what is going on with that hole in his turtleneck?”

I laughed. “He claims he snagged it on something, and he just kept pulling at the loose thread until it made a hole.”

“Through which you can see a nipple.”

“I think he’s trying to be provocative.”

“Little weirdo.”

“That’s my B.”

Chas watched us perform again at a community center for which we were ill-suited. We attracted an odd combination of small children, their bemused mums and grandmums, some baffled punks, and however one might describe our usual fans. But he told us we were even better than before, which was heartening, and he promised to attend our next Dandelion Market show.

You were determined to make that one count, and the following afternoon during our usual rehearsals at the lodge house, we did a bit of brainstorming to figure out how to impress him. Adam told us that he had been reading about how Andy Warhol used to project his movies directly onto the Velvet Underground during the band’s early days, and you embraced this idea immediately. But we couldn’t afford a projector.

Larry asked, “What about the thing where people do shadow plays, and there’s a light behind a screen or a sheet, and you make shadows and tell a story or whatever?”

“Oh my god, Larry. That’s it,” you said, the gears in your mind turning. “Let’s all think about that some more tonight, and we can discuss our ideas tomorrow.”

Talking a mile a minute about this a bit later, you sat beside me in the Volkswagen as I drove home. Your hand rested on my thigh, and I covered it with my own while steering with the other—this had become our standard traveling position.

*What songs do you think would work, Edge? And who should be behind the screen? Obviously me, as the rest you will be busy. But do you want to join me? Nah, then half of us would be back there and you already have so much to think about. So me. Maybe I could do it during an instrumental part of a song? Because god knows I never have any idea about what to do when I’m not singing. Say Edge, do you think I could stay for a while after supper, and maybe we could come up with some ideas to show Larry and Adam tomorrow? I’m so excited. I’m having ideas, aren’t you? I simply cannot stop them. This is going to be so much fun. You’re the best, did you know that? Did I ever tell you how amazing you are? Well, hello there, Gill.*

“Hey, Bono.”
Your jaw dropped, and you were silent for a second. Then: “Oh my god. Gill. Gill. Jesus Christ…”

“Is everything alright?”

You looked at her appraisingly. “Are you free Saturday afternoon?”

“I guess so. But we’re going to Wales the next day.”

The sky seemed to be saying something to you. “Oh wow. Oh yes. That’s it. That’s it.”

“Ehm, what is this about?”

“I don’t know. Yet. But I will know.” Still studying the sky, you murmured, “Ali won’t do it. I know that for a fact.” You returned your attention to Gill. “But look at you. Yes. That will absolutely work.” Dazed, you walked across our front yard and appeared to embark upon a silent discussion with our oak tree.

She turned to me. “Is he okay?”

“He’s...inspired.”

By the time we sat down to eat, I could tell an idea had solidified in your mind, and your eyes darted between Gill and me as my parents discussed their upcoming holiday in Wales. Dik and Gill would join them, and I would be allowed to stay in Dublin for our gigs.

They asked me for the hundredth time if I would be alright on my own. Ever the opportunist, you offered to keep me company while they were away, and my parents thought this was a great suggestion. Gill grinned at you knowingly. Meanwhile I tried to stifle a heart that was screaming for joy at my lungs, stomach, kidneys, and any other organ that would listen to it. Most of them took this news in stride, but my brain and especially my cock were shall we say moved by the very thought of you spending a week with me at my house.

After supper, you, Gill and I talked about your idea for the screen (which would in fact be a large white sheet suspended from the parking garage’s low ceiling). You thought the instrumental break in our new song Boy/Girl would benefit from some visuals, and you asked Gill if she would join you behind the screen to create a sort of shadow striptease.

Gill was simultaneously thrilled and taken aback. “Now wait. I’m not taking off my clothes...am I?”

“No. Not really. And neither will I. We’ll have things on underneath, but the audience won’t know that, right? They’ll be using their imaginations, and we’ll make it seem like we’re doing things...that boys and girls do.”

I cleared my throat, and you grinned at me.

Continuing, you said, “It’ll last, what, Edge? Thirty seconds? A minute? It’ll be over before we know it.”

“And the rest of the time we’ll do what?”

“I dunno. Dance? Kiss? We’ll figure it out.” You tilted your head to one side and said in a semi-seductive voice that no one on earth would ever be able to refuse for as long as you lived, “Come on, Gill, please? It’ll be fun.”

She looked at me. “Are you okay with this?”
“Yeah, Edge, are you okay with it?” That voice again.

“Sure. It’s fine, I guess. We’ll see how it goes.”

Soon we were dragging as many lamps and flashlights as we could find into my bedroom. I suspended a sheet from the ceiling with metal clips and string. With the door closed and the window shade lowered, the lamps and flashlights created a respectable glow chamber for the two of you. Was it weird to watch you and my sister pretend to flirt and strip while we hummed my guitar part? Was it even more weird for me to provide feedback throughout? You bet it was, but I have to say it made for an effective visual accompaniment for no money at all, and you were clearly enjoying the creative process.

Later on, as I drove you back to your car at the lodge house, you stroked my inner thigh and said, “I’d rather do it with you, you know, but we’d have to lose the guitar and change the title of the song.”

“I suppose Boy/Boy doesn’t have the same ring to it.”

“Not really. I mean, I don’t mind Boy/Boy. Obviously.” I pulled into the parking lot, and you kissed my cheek, en route to my mouth. Your tongue tasted like a faded version of those cinnamon candies Mum kept in a dish in the living room. My head fell back against the car’s headrest, and you leaned into me. I slid my hand under your shirt and sighed with pleasure. I could hear the smile in your voice as you murmured, “You need to ask yourself this, Edge: will you be able to handle living with me for a week?”

“Oh yes.”

“Doing things to you in your bed every night?”

“Baby.”

* *

“I want you to know, sweetheart, that your boy’s ‘look’ did not receive my stamp of approval today,” Gavin said. We were constructing our Dandelion Market stage for the fourth time, and as we hammered away, we watched you and Larry hang our black and white backdrop on the back wall. Steve Averill had designed the giant, semi-geometric U2 logo, and while none of us would ever be completely satisfied with the name of our band, we had to admit that from a design standpoint, that letter and that number looked fantastic together.

“Not liking the turtleneck with the hole or the checkerboard pants, are we? Are those new?”

Gavin sighed. “One assumes. He says leather trousers are too hot down here in the summer. That old turtleneck is making me sad.”

I squinted. “Is he wearing something underneath it?”

“It appears so.” Gavin watched me watching you. “He’s just so cute, though.”
I grinned.

“Are you two talking about me?” you asked.

“Always, B.”

It was impossible to tell if Chas was at the show because the space was packed with people we had seen at previous Dandelion Market concerts, along with friends they had presumably brought along. We won them over easily, and our instruments and your voice cut through their racket. Our music was loud, vibrant, and chiming as it bounced off the concrete and ricocheted against the ceiling.

And there you were in the center of it all: passionate, beguiling, and in your element. Your hair was drenched with sweat and curling against your neck. For the first time, our audience sang a few of our songs back at us and occasionally yelled your name. Astonished by this, you looked at me with a euphoric expression. *What a crime it would be to take all of this away from him. From us,* I thought. I hit a sour note. You laughed, and I shook it off.

Your routine with Gill was alarmingly realistic and easily the show’s highlight. The crowd seemed spellbound as the two of you executed a sort of Dublin punk tango, and from my spot to the right of the sheet, I watched your shirt fall to the floor. Gill was just as game as you were and looked...I really don’t want to describe my sister’s teenage body. But she was convincing and inspired any number of cat-calls. When it was over, you turned off the lights and pulled the sheet down. Thankfully still wearing those checkerboard pants, you strutted to your microphone in a black mesh sleeveless shirt through which every hair, muscle, and expanse of pale skin could be seen, and thanks to the see-through nature of the fabric, everything was emphasized with a sort of black outline.

To shrieks, whistles, and flat-out screaming, you hugged Gill, blushing in her leotard, and said, “This is Edge’s sister, Gill. She’s just as beautiful as he is, don’t you think?” You made a kissy face at me, and one tenth of a second later you were singing the third verse. With hands clasped above your head and your young, dewy torso on full display, you destroyed at least one hundred lives that afternoon.

One hundred and one.

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