

## Liz Lydic.

### And You Were There

He said, “Sweetheart, come on up on stage with me.” And my body answered, ‘I’m coming,’ and the next thing I knew, ten-year old me was lifted out from the front row of the Richfield Coliseum near my hometown of Streetsboro, Ohio. The incident was a novelty for audiences back then, in 1988, but for me and George Michael, it was our dawn.

The paparazzi died down after a few months. My parents helped a lot, explaining in trustworthy voices how it was fine that I was with George (or Go-Go, as I called him) in England, and that they were busy with their jobs and each other anyway, so it all worked out. There was one Metropolitan Police Department visit, which, even in my youth, I knew was just for looks. The bobbies tried to act stern when they knocked on the door, but then everyone was smiling as soon as Go-Go answered, and by the end of the hour, we were all dancing to “Monkey.”

The next decade, I spent with him. I’d call my parents now and then, over those years, and they’d ask me what British food I’d eaten, marveled at the cities I’d visited, and were giddy about the famous people I’d met. They never wondered about Go-Go or how I helped him with his happiness or career.

Not until a year after living with him—in which time I had already visited Florence, been parasailing, met Aretha Franklin, and gotten my period—did Go-Go ask me why I was at one of his concerts by myself when I was ten. To tell him the truth would have sounded rude, so I just shrugged and smiled, which made him shake his head in apparent awe. Why I had been there, alone, he should’ve known. “Because,” I would have said. “You told me to. You sang it to me. To come to you. And I did.”

So quickly was I part of Go-Go’s regular friend group, and the people I didn’t see but once a year would always tell me how grown-up I was becoming, hugging me and bringing me around the room to show off my height and curves. The parties at our house, or that I

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went to with him, were full of color, bright and “brilliant,” as we said in Europe. Looking back, I see that the grown-ups in my life were split when it came to me, or maybe time itself was split: sometimes, it was clear that they trusted me to be part of their world; sometimes, I don’t think they remembered I was around; other times—many times—I had the sense that they thought I didn’t catch on to their activities and innuendos, that I was too young to notice the sex, the drugs, and the energy. In fact, I saw everything, and the salaciousness of so many parts of life in general had intrigued me even back in Ohio. Now, I was living within it, rather than watching from afar on the “telly.”

That ten years later Go-Go would accuse me of using him after all that was unbearable. Even at 20 years old, I understood that his angst was coming from chronic disappointment.

“Let go of the idea of me!” The outburst came in the middle of a scattered discussion that started with planning a new chicken recipe and had worked its way to his frustration in creating the *Faith* album. When he yelled this about the idea of him, it was in a voice I’d never heard, and I didn’t recognize it as a song lyric. No matter how we argued that night—and the days following—he could not be convinced of my worship, or he could not trust that it was compatible with my all-out love. Soon after I moved back to Ohio, through a single one of Go-Go’s cohorts that stayed in touch with me, I found out there was a new young girl living with him in Oxfordshire. Not once after that could I allow my brain to form the thought that ‘it wasn’t about me.’

My life after that was a breadcrumb-filled path of dating and falling in love with gay and, later, married men. I held a series of stable, yet immature jobs. I always had Go-Go and a reunion in the back of my mind, imagining he’d call me, telling me everything he’d been through, that he’d had to push me away in order to bring me back. I carried a phone with me everywhere, even after his death. It was possible the heart attack was a fake, that he’d had PR put the story out in order to be left alone, except, perhaps with me.

On Sunday nights, the night of the week that thirty years ago Go-Go and I would have made appetizers and danced, I watch hours of his videos on YouTube. The tears come effortlessly. I close my



eyes and see not the two-dimensional lines of his earring, or his sculpted facial hair like on album covers, but the pores and the blemishes. I smell the aggressiveness in his cologne and hair products, and even his breath. I feel the coarseness of his skin, not at all smooth. “You’re going to die,” I tell my Go-Go on the screen.

I’m going to die, too.

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