

# AUDIO DISTORTION

Journeys End

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*“I’ve been there, Willie – on the other side. I’ve stood in the middle of a thousand tear-covered cheeks, whose owners were smooshed up against the front of the stage, and I listened as every single one of their voices sang along. I’ve felt the magic you, Cadi, Stanley, Emily, and Emma can create...”*

*~Victoria Morgan*

one

EMMA

As I sit here alone, in this dark arena, my feet dangling off the end of the stage, I find myself truly amazed at how far we've come – both as a group and as friends.

Who could have known?

Three CDs – the first of which was multi-Platinum within weeks of release, the second very close to being rated Diamond, and the last expected to be Platinum within days and multi-Platinum by the end of the month. And... our very first digital single release, downloaded over fifteen *million* times in six years. And, as if that isn't enough, our producer took steps to video tape a number of the performances from the second tour, and when it was over, they released a DVD.

All this from five kids who met in a pizza joint.

Our third tour starts right here, in five days. The same place our first tour started six years ago.

*Staples Center.*

Because our first tour turned into some absurdly giant production, which got completely out of control, when we went back to Europe to finish the six cancelled shows, the five of us decided to control our own destiny. We politely explained to the promoter and our label, that we'd only go if they let us do it *our* way. When, in only five days, the six shows turned into thirteen, they quickly agreed.

The five of us, our instruments, some technicians, some wardrobe people, and of course, our producer – that was our tour team.

No 'dancers'... no 'back-up singers'... no 'bizarrely gigantic electronics'.

We felt that the fans came to see – but mostly to *hear* – us. And that's what we intended to give them. The sensations, the emotions, and *the passion*, that is *Audio Distortion*.

*Just us and the music.*

After we sold out two shows at the first venue, and sold out a single show at the second, the music world took notice, and we were once again in the headlines.

A month after we finished what the world took to calling the 'Recovery Tour', we gave Donna first shot at interviews, and followed that with appearances on GMA, The Morning Show, The View, and MTV even did a piece on us for Behind the Music.

Life had, once again, put us in the 'fast lane'. This time, however, it was on our terms.

We spent the next nine months, writing, and rediscovering our friendships. Eventually, we had yet another 'masterpiece' as our producer likes to call it. They released a couple of singles over a three month period, and once they charted, the label released our second CD. Much to our surprise, the critics were actually pretty nice to us – compared to the razzing we got after the first tour crashed. The same day the CD broke the top ten, the label conceded, and scheduled our next tour.

Our tour in support of *Replay* was nothing short of amazing! At the first tour meeting, our engineer suggested we use smaller venues – 10,000 or less – rather than large arenas. This would make for much more intimate shows, allowing us closer contact with fans. It also meant more shows. But, as a band, we all jumped on the idea, agreeing that working a bit harder, was fair trade off for being able to interact with our fans.

For 159 consecutive days, we gave ourselves to our fans – as completely as we could. We performed thirty-six shows in twenty-two weeks, and did at least two interviews at each stop. When it was over, we were all completely burned out, but knew we'd done the right thing.

In return for our dedication, our fans kept us near the top of almost every chart there is – *in almost every country* – for close to a year.

After the tour's final show at Moby Arena – where we've ended both tours – the five of us sat down and decided we needed a break... from music, from each other, and from our lives in general.

Cadi went home to England, to rest and wind down.

Willie flew to Australia to hang out with some new friends he made while we were performing there.

Emily took her brother and sister, and went to hide out at her house, on Lake Tahoe.

Before they disappeared, Emily and Willie put the word out – Discovery Studios was running in a 'limited' status, and that neither of them would be there for a while. Having just finished a tour, their clients of course, understood.

Stanley and I went to hide out at a very secluded piece of property his father owns, in the mountains of northern New Mexico. Over the previous six months, we discovered that fame not only does strange things to people – but to *relationships* as well.

We spent our time, desperately trying to find a way to stay in love.

TWO

EMMA

“Good morning, gorgeous,” Stan says, sitting down on the edge of the bed, and handing me a cup of coffee.

“Back atcha,” I reply, taking the cup, then leaning forward and gently kissing him.

“You missed an amazing sunrise.”

“Yeah, that’s okay. I was having an amazing dream...”

I follow my comment with a devious smile.

“Are we still on a ‘break’, or are you up to writing this morning?” Stan asks, as he stands up, and crosses the room to the window.

“Yeah... right... ‘on a break’. When have the two of us ever been on a break? We can’t help ourselves, and you know it...”

I take a sip of coffee and watch, as he laughs at my comment, and pulls the curtains back on the giant floor to ceiling window, allowing the day to stream in.

“But... I need some alone-time, before we start.”

He turns around, looks at me, then walks over and again kisses me.

“I’ll be back in about an hour – I’m gonna take Waldo for a hike.”

“Yeah,” I mumble, fighting off a laugh, “you mean *he’s* gonna take you...”

Waldo is Georgie’s Akita – her *136 pound* Akita. Whenever we come to the wilderness, we always bring him with us. He’s so big and so strong, that

we've actually given up on using a leash – which usually ends up with someone being dragged.

“See you in an hour,” Stan says, as he disappears into the living room.”

A few minutes later I hear Waldo bark, and the door close. I throw back the covers, climbed out of bed, and go to the window. I watch for a few moments, and once Stan and Waldo disappear into the woods along the dirt driveway, I turn and wander into the living room.

It isn't a new feeling that is gnawing at me – quite the contrary, actually. I've been having the same strange dream, and slightly ominous feelings, since we began the European leg of the last tour. The strange part is, I get the impression – although he's never said it – that Stan is having the same feelings.

I sit down at the piano, and start playing. While nowhere near the keyboardist Stanley is, with his help I've gotten pretty good. I play the same sequence of notes I hear, each time I have the dream. After a few seconds I play them again, then reach up and pick up my coffee. After taking a few sips, I'm about to put the cup back where it was, when a photograph on the divan across the room, catches my attention.

Then, just as it has so many times since the whole 'band' thing started, my heart takes control of my hands. I stand up, my eyes still locked to the photo, cross the room, and get my notebook. I find a spot that gives me a clear view of the photo, sit down on the big rug that covers most of the living room, and start writing.



## three

Emily

I'm sitting on my deck, looking over the roof of the studio below us, out at the glistening water of Lake Tahoe. I'm completely lost in thought when Sarah comes up behind me, and gently lays a hand on my shoulder.

"What's buggin ya Sis?"

"You really want to know, or are you just being nice?"

"I'm your sister – I want to know. Brendan and me don't like seeing you all depressed."

"Yeah," I hear from behind me, "you're no fun when you're like this," my brother offers.

"Sorry guys... I'm just... well... confused I guess."

"Ready to give up being a rock star, Sis?"

The moment Brendan asks the question, I turn and look at him. It's as if he *knows*...

"You guys think I'd be crazy to do that... right?"

"Not if you don't want to do it anymore," Sarah quickly replies. "You seem pretty unhappy."

"Well, not exactly unhappy..." I start to say, but am interrupted by my phone ringing. Brendan picks it up, glances at it, then hands it to me.

"It's one of your 'sidekicks' ..." he says, laughing.

I glance at the Caller ID, flip it open, and answer it.

"Hey, Cadi! Kinda late in your part of the world, isn't it?"

"No... more like absurdly early – it's 1:00 AM."

"So... what's the crisis?"

“What makes you think there is a crisis?”

“Cadi, you’re calling someone who is 5500 miles away, at one in the morning. I find it hard to believe you’re just bored...”

“I need you to come here.”

“When?”

“Just like that? No ‘why’?”

“It will probably take me at least twenty-four hours to get a flight out of Denver. I’ll have to take the twins home first.”

“You didn’t answer my question, Emily.”

“No, Cadi... no ‘why’. Doesn’t matter why. You need me, I’m on my way.”

“What’s going on?”

“Like I told the twins... I’m just confused. Maybe, you can help me sort things out.”

For just a second, there is silence over the phone, which is followed by what I’m certain is Cadi laughing.

“Maybe, Em... we can help each other. See if you can fly into Birmingham – it’s closer than London and lots easier to get into and out of. Text me your flight info and I will come get you.”

“Will do. See you in a day or so. Bye.”

I close the phone, and look at Sarah and Brendan.

“Well guys... fly or drive home?”

“FLY!” they blurt out in unison.

After a couple of quick calls, I find a charter that’s willing to fly us into Municipal, a smaller airport southeast of Ft. Collins, instead of Denver International. The nice part is, they’re taking some cargo as well, so it costs me much less than if I had booked commercial seats.

We arrive at 4:00 the next morning, and Mom is waiting for us.

## four Willie

I'm sitting in the airport bar in Sydney, waiting for my flight home, staring at my half-finished beer. I find myself thinking about home... and the others.

I came here, seeking some kind of escape – from music, from the 'fame', and... from my life.

During our last show here, I met some really cool people – people who looked past the rock star, and actually saw Willie Morgan. The night it happened, I was suffering from a bit of insomnia, and had actually *snuck* out of our hotel at 1:00 AM...

\*\*\*\*\*

Not even sure what I'm looking for, I wind up in a small, quiet, internet café, on a side street, about three blocks from the hotel. After a cursory glance around, I go to an empty terminal next to a small bar. When the barista walks over, I order a cappuccino, and then go about signing into the terminal in front of me.

At the same time the barista sets my coffee down, a girl – sitting at the only occupied table – walks up, orders two lattes, then turns and smiles at me. I return her smile and go back to my email.

A few minutes later, I hear what sounds like a heated discussion coming from the table the girl is at, and when I turn to look, the same girl walks up again.

"Excuse me," she says, with a seriously cool Aussie accent, "but aren't you Willie Morgan?"

In a comical and completely joking manner, I put my index finger to my lips and say, "*shhhssss!*"

The poor girl cracks up laughing, which is what I'm hoping for.

"Not to worry mate," she whispers, playing along, "I'm not going to go bonkers on you or anything. We," she points at her friends, "were just arguing the point, and I had to prove I was right."

I turn and look toward the table which has four people sitting at it, and again, in as comical a manner as I can pull off, say, "I have no idea who she is talking about!"

This time, everyone breaks up laughing, including the barista.

"Well then mate, come on over and tell us who you really are," one of the guys at the table yells.

"That's my boyfriend, Roger. Like he said, you are welcome to join us. I personally, think a convo with you, could be quite educational..."

"Because?" I ask, finishing my coffee, and indicating to the barista I want another.

"*Because...*" she replies, a big grin on her face, "aside from the rock star we all know and love, I'm betting there is also a *normal guy*, in there," she reaches out and taps my chest with two fingers, "somewhere."

Over the next two hours, I make five new friends. And, the cool thing is, they're *Willie's* friends, not the rock star's...

\*\*\*\*\*

When I came back two weeks ago, searching for a place to hide for a while, they welcomed me into their lives again. Roger and Miranda share a really nice apartment near downtown. They're still in college – or as they call it here, university. Miranda's younger sister, Marla, is living with them, as she has just started school.

And yes, they tried to do a little match-making.

I have an awesome time, especially hanging out with Marla – who it turns out didn't know who *Audio Distortion* was! – but when it comes time to go home, I find I'm still *very* conflicted. I can't seem to escape the same annoying question that has been plaguing me, for the last few months.

*Is it time to let go of the fame...*

Lost in thought, I'm signing autographs for some kids, whose parents brought them into the bar when they recognized me, when I hear them call my flight. I excuse myself, drop a tip on the bar and after picking up my laptop, turn and head for my gate. Two steps later, I knock her down.

As the embarrassment sweeps over me, I kneel down and start apologizing, while at the same time, gathering up the papers that scattered when she fell. When I turn to hand the papers back to her, the moment our eyes meet, I damn near faint...

*"Victoria?"*

"Hey, Willie," she replies, as I take her hand and help her to her feet.

She takes the papers from me, I quickly retrieve her satchel, lay it on a table next to us, and watch as she manages to get the jumbled mess back into it.

*"Hey Willie?"* After almost five years, that's all I get?" I ask, as I hear the second call for my flight.

"Well... we're in a bar in an airport, Willie," she says, putting the satchel over her shoulder and pulling the hair out of her face, "so I'm kind of limited. But..." she continues, a big smile on her face, "how about I give you this..." She stops midsentence, stands on her tiptoes and gently kisses me. "I gotta get to my plane. Maybe, you can knock me down again sometime soon!"

Before I can say anything, she's out of the bar and headed across the terminal – with me in hot pursuit.

"Victoria! Hang on!" I call after her.

"I can't miss my plane," she replies over her shoulder, without looking back.

"But..." I start to say, and then lose my train of thought when I see where she's going.

"I swear... *you are about rotten!*" I whisper over her shoulder, as we stand in line at the gate.

"I know... but it was fun watching you get all excited. You always were pretty easy, Willie."

I glance over her shoulder, and see that she's sitting in coach, at the back of the plane.

"You gonna let me upgrade your seat so that you'll be close when I figure out how to get back at you?"

"Nope. I like sitting in coach. I meet lots of interesting people," she replies, still smiling, as she hands her boarding pass to the attendant. Once she gets it back, she turns, gives me the most devious smile I have ever seen, then without a word turns, and heads down the jetway.

When I hand my boarding pass to the girl, she points out that, as a first class passenger, I could have already boarded. I smile, take the pass back after she scans it, and say, "Yeah, but then I would have missed out on knocking Victoria down..." as I join the line in the jetway.

And yes, as you may have already guessed, the moment the seatbelt light goes out, I'm in coach, right next to Victoria.

The guy I trade seats with, as well as the Flight Attendants, are pretty sure I've lost my mind...

five

Catrin

Since I returned to England, I've discovered I don't fit any longer. Being with the others, on the road, my accent has faded and I sound – and act – American.

I am, lost between identities.

My parents still live here in Southport, and Papa is still teaching in Liverpool. I'm pretty sure they intend to retire here someday.

The day I arrive, the first thing I do, is go in search of my best friend – Leonard. He's the administrative wizard for the small orchestra, in Churchtown, that I joined while I was recovering. The look on his face, when I walk into his office, is priceless.

Some of the other musicians hear me talking, and assuming a 'yank' is about, come to find out who it is. Again, the looks that are generated when they discover me are priceless.

The strange part is, you wouldn't know I ever left, nor would you know I am part of one of the biggest pop bands on the charts. To all of them, I'm just Catrin...

We (about fifteen of us) end up sitting on the stage just above the orchestra pit, talking – for close to three hours. As everyone eventually filters out – well after midnight – I find myself alone with Lenny.

"I know this is probably quite tacky, Cadi, but will you sign these..." he asks, holding out a copy of each of our CDs, "for me?"

"I'll sign a hundred for you, Lenny, if that's what you want," I reply, taking the CDs and the pen he

offers, then sitting down on the edge of the stage, and letting my feet dangle.

“What are the possibilities you could get Emily to sign them...” he asks, in a somewhat mumbled tone.

Something in the way he says it, makes me turn and look at him. His eyes give him away...

“*Just Emily?*”

The moment I ask, he turns bright red.

“Well... the whole band of course,” he replies, looking pretty embarrassed.

“Okay Len... we’ve been friends too long. What’s up here?”

“What’s she like, Cadi?”

“Emily? She’s the most driven person I know.”

“You must think this odd... after all I’ve never even met her.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s something... I can’t explain it, Cadi. When I see her on TV... or hear her singing...”

Before I even realize it, I have the biggest, goofiest grin spreading across my face.

“LENNY! Do you have a ‘crush’ on Emily?”

When Leonard finally makes eye contact with me again, he has a serious and somber expression, which makes me serious as well.

“To most it would seem like that, I’m sure... But to me, it *feels* like something more than that. I simply don’t know how to explain it, in a manner that will make sense. Weird... right?”

“Leonard, ‘weird’ is five kids who meet in a pizzeria, becoming pop music superstars. ‘Weird’ is the lead singer, falling completely to pieces, and yet recovering, and getting the band back together again. ‘Weird’ is my life, for the last six years...”



I lean over and put my arm around Leonard's shoulders.

"You, having unexplained feelings for a girl you've never met, is just part of life. Emma would call it 'fate and destiny'."

He again, looks me in the eyes.

"Is that even possible? Can two people, on opposite sides of the world, share a destiny like that?"

I hand the signed CDs, and pen, back to him, and for a moment, he sits quietly staring at the photo on the front of *Replay*. I watch as he gently touches the part of the photo with Emily in it, and somehow, I know. I pull out my phone, and hit autodial.

"I don't know if it's possible, Lenny - but I bet we can find out..."

Emily answers on the third ring.