

# *Do You Know That I Love You?*

Ralph

"No! Not again! If I have to hear *Do You Know That I Love You* one more time I'm gonna blow chunks! I swear I will!" said Chris.

"Those are fightin' words!" I yelled, with mock-menace. Chris was my best friend and I knew he was just pushing my buttons for fun.

"Oh yeah, that's right. I almost forgot about your *disturbing* obsession for Jordan," said Chris.

I took my hand off the wheel long enough to punch Chris in the shoulder. I turned the radio up louder and Jordan's beautiful voice filled the car.

"Oh God I can't stand it!" yelled Chris covering his ears. He began screaming and moaning, but he couldn't quite keep from laughing as he pretended the music was torturing him.

"It's horrible!" he said. "I can't take it!"

"Horrible?!"

"Yeah, horrible! Awful! Like fingernails on a chalkboard! If they made criminals listen to that instead of going to jail, there'd be no crime!"

"I'm gonna hurt you later for this, you know that don't you?" I asked him. Chris only smiled.

His protests did him no good. Chris knew it was useless. There was nothing I loved more than listening to Jordan. I'd practically worn out the latest *Phantom* CD and I'd only had it for three weeks.

"How many times have they played that song on the radio anyway? They must have played it a million times already," complained Chris.

"Not quite, but it's been number one for six weeks now." I answered. Chris rolled his eyes.

"You know Ralph, I have no problem with you being gay and all, but do you have to have a thing for someone so damned ugly?" He jerked back as I took a swing at him. Chris laughed. He loved making fun of Jordan. He knew how it irritated me.

"Ugly? You'd kill to look like him and you know it!"

"Yeah, right!"

"You're just jealous because you don't have millions of teenage girls screaming for you."

"And one teenage boy," said Chris smiling. I couldn't help but smile back. There was no denying that I had a thing for Jordan. Okay, it was more than a thing, I guess it was close to an obsession. As far as I was concerned, Jordan was the most beautiful boy in the entire world.

The song ended and Chris let up on Jordan for the time being. I cut Chris some slack, and decided not to kill him for making fun of my boy. Chris and I had been through a lot together. Not many guys would have been as cool as Chris when they found out their best friend was gay. I

remembered how I trembled when I told him, and how relieved I was when he told me it didn't matter to him, and that he loved me like a brother. Friends like that were rare. Chris was the only guy who was aware I was gay, and was one of only two people who knew. Denise was the other. I was nearly as close to her as I was to Chris. I was lucky. I didn't have many friends, but I had good ones.

I turned the car onto the gravel road that led toward our farm. It was a dead end, in more ways than one. It wasn't long before I pulled up in front of the house and Chris and I got out. Mom and Dad were gone, so we had the place to ourselves. We raided the refrigerator, went to my room, and turned on the radio. Chris started thumbing through my CD's.

"*Phantom, Phantom, Phantom* import, *Phantom, Phantom* import, *Phantom* single, crap, crap, crap. Don't you have anything decent?" said Chris as he flipped through my CD box. "Ah, here we are, something cool at last."

I crossed my arms and gave him a dirty look for his comment. I wasn't really mad. Chris liked to tease me, just like I liked to tease him about drooling over Julie Paterson all the time. He had it bad for that girl.

Chris put his CD on and we sat on the bed and listened. We fiddled around with a computer game for a bit, but it didn't take us long to get bored. There just wasn't that much to do. Chris turned on my little television.

"Ohhhhhh look! Your idol is on," said Chris gleefully. "I know we've got to watch this. Couldn't miss out on your dream boy now could we?"

I ignored Chris. My eyes were drawn to the screen. It was showing Jordan and the other band members coming out of some studio, being mobbed by girls.

"And you said he was ugly. Look at all those girls after him."

"Nah, they're after those two other guys. See 'em all going for that one with the long black hair."

"His name is Ross," I said. "He is pretty hot, but he's no Jordan. I wonder how many years it took him to grow his hair that long?" I was almost speaking more to myself than Chris. I'd kind of forgotten he was in the room. Some reporter started talking and I turned up the sound.

"...once called a one hit wonder, *Phantom* has become the hottest pop group on the scene with no less than three multi-platinum albums. They're been favorably compared to the *Beatles*, and looking at the scene behind me, I am reminded of the Beatle-mania that swept the country several decades ago. *Phantom* is no British invasion however, with band members coming from Indiana, Virginia, and New Mexico..."

I stopped listening. The camera had gone to a tight shot of Jordan and I was spellbound. Every time I looked at him it was the same. I couldn't imagine that anyone could be so beautiful. He could easily have been a model if he wasn't a singer, more than a model, an angel.

"You're totally hopeless," said Chris, looking at me.

I smiled at him without taking my eyes off Jordan. Despite his words, he understood me. He just liked to torment me.

"Let's go outside," said Chris.

The piece on *Phantom* ended, so I was more than willing to depart. We left the small farmhouse and I followed Chris to the barn. The barn was old, and big, built by my grandfather some forty years before out of wood and concrete block. I think it's what I liked best about the farm. Chris had a special liking for the hayloft and that's where he led me. As soon as we'd both climbed up the wooden ladder, he turned and faced me. I knew what was coming.

Chris grabbed for me, but I was more than ready for his surprise attack. I dodged him. We circled each other, looking for an opening. Chris darted in and grabbed my upper arms. We struggled against each other, lost our balance, and tumbled into the hay.

We rolled around, each trying to get on top of the other. Chris was a little stronger than me, but I had a slight height advantage and my longer arms made up the difference. Our wrestling matches usually went on until we were both breathless. Neither of us minded that, we both loved to wrestle around in the hayloft, Chris especially.

Our muscles bulged as we struggled and we got all sweaty and hot. Straw started to stick to my damp forehead. I brushed it away with one hand and it was a mistake. Chris slammed me back and got on top of me before I could stop him. Before I knew it, he had his knees on my shoulders and my hands up above my head. I was doomed.

"I guess we know who the real man is here," said Chris laughing.

"How long did it take to create this little fantasy world you live in Chris?" I asked him.

"Funny!"

"Okay, I'll let you up weanie-boy, if..." Chris paused to think of something suitably nasty. A smile spread across his features and I knew he'd come up with something. "All you have to do is say 'Jordan is butt ugly' and I'll let you up."

"Never!"

"Oh, we have ways of making you talk," said Chris in his best German accent, and started to tickle me. "Say it, say it!"

"I will die first!" I said laughing. He was killing me. I hated being tickled like that and he knew it. I was powerless to stop him.

"Say it! Jordan is butt ugly!"

"Jordan... is.... gorgeous!" I laughed harder than ever.

"Wrong! Try again punk." Chris tickled me without mercy. It was torture. I was writhing on the hay, twisting and turning, trying to get away.

"I'll just keep doing it. Say it Ralph!"

Chris was having way too much fun. He got so tickled with himself that he threw his head back and laughed. It was a mistake. I saw my chance. I hooked my leg around his neck and pulled him backward at a high rate of speed. He hit the hay and I pounced on him. Before he could stop me, I pinned him.

"Okay straight boy, it's payback time." I tickled him. Chris wasn't as ticklish as me, but I still found his torment satisfying. He squirmed in an attempt to free himself.

"Okay Chris, now you say 'Jordan is my favorite singer' and I'll let you up! No, I'll make it easy on you, just say 'Jordan rules' and you're free."

"Oh no! Not that! I'll never say that!"

"Say it!"

"Jordan is a girl!" he yelled as he laughed.

I tickled him harder for that, then looked down at him and smiled.

"I can see you're going to be difficult. I think it's time for trial by drool."

"No way, that is not cool!"

"You know what I wanna hear. You just better say it before it's too late."

Chris squirmed as the long line of spit grew closer and closer to his face. I could tell he was getting panicky.

"Okay, okay! Jordan rules!" he screamed.

I pulled the spit back into my mouth.  
"You cut that one close," I said.  
"That's disgusting," said Chris.  
"And oh so effective," I laughed.

Jordan

"Hey Jordan, time to get up, dude." I slowly came to consciousness as someone shook my shoulder. I opened my eyes and focused on Chad, the leader of the stage crew that traveled on tour with us.

"Seattle," he said, before I could ask him where we were. I'd asked that question so many times he'd come to anticipate it. I slept so many nights on the tour bus, and moved from one hotel room to another so often, I didn't know where I was sometimes.

"We'll be ready for the sound check in another hour. Breakfast is on the table when you're ready," said Chad.

"Thanks."

Chad smiled, closed the curtain, and left me to myself. He knew I wasn't too talkative in the mornings. I sat up in my bunk and looked at the clock at my feet, 10:30 a.m. No wonder I felt rested. I usually had to get up much earlier.

I grabbed the remote and turned on the little color television at the foot of my bunk. There was nothing on but some game and talk shows, so I turned it back off. I didn't really want to leave the comfort of my bunk. It was small, but cozy. Each of us had our own bunk on the tour bus. At the foot of each bunk was a combination TV/VCR, a phone, and an alarm clock. It wasn't a bad set up really.

I pulled the curtain back and slipped to the floor. I dressed and walked toward the front of the bus. I smiled, there was a large paper sack that said "Burger Dude" on the side sitting on the table. The sack was already open and Ross and Kieran were chowing down.

"You better have saved some for me!" I said.

"Hey, would we touch your French toast squares and cinnamon mini's?" said Kieran.

"Yes."

"Well, you're lucky, we didn't get to them yet."

I pulled the sack toward me and pulled out a couple of boxes. I loved French toast squares from Burger Dude, although I hadn't been there for over two years. It was a long time since I'd been able to go out to a public place like Burger Dude like a normal boy. It was the price of fame. I took a drink of iced tea and munched on a French toast square.

"Ah man, I forgot to ask Chad to check out keyboard two, some of the keys were sticking last night," I said as I began to wake up.

"So that's what that horrible sound was, I thought you forgot how to play," laughed Ross.

"Funny man!"

"Chill Jordan, you know Chad, he'll have it fixed before you ask him," said Kieran.

He was right. Chad was more than just another stagehand. He was in charge of the instruments and treated them like his babies. He was also a whiz with the sound system. He'd gotten us out of more than a few jams, like the time the main soundboard blew just seconds into the Orlando concert. He had a new one set up almost before we knew it. Chad looked and sounded like

a California surfer and said "dude" more than anyone I knew. He appeared to be a bit slow witted, but it was an illusion. I didn't know anyone as sharp as Chad. I relaxed and enjoyed my breakfast.

"Think our hotel will have a pool?" asked Kieran.

"Think we'll get a chance to use it even if it does?" said Ross. He picked up his drumsticks and started banging on the table until Kieran took them away from him. That didn't stop Ross, he just drummed with his fingers. He could never sit still for more than five seconds.

Ross was right, we had a busy day ahead. We had to do a sound check, then do the set list, and then get over to some radio station or other for an on-air interview. After that, there was a short autograph session scheduled, then it was off to a press conference, then to another autograph signing at some record store, then back to the hotel to get ready for the show at 8 p.m. Before the show, there was a meet and greet backstage at 7:15 and a few more people to meet after the concert. Somewhere in there was lunch and supper and hopefully a little time to rest. It was unlikely we'd be seeing the pool. Even if we did have time, our bodyguards were likely to nix it, especially mine. Mike watched me like a hawk.

We sat and ate and talked. Breakfast was the only quiet time of day. I enjoyed my time alone with Kieran and Ross. They shared my love of music. They kept me laughing, too, especially Ross. He was crazy. I think it had something to do with him being a drummer. Every drummer I'd known was a little wild and a bit off tilt. Ross was in a world all his own when he got behind his drum set. He gazed off into space on the slow songs like he didn't know where he was, and turned into a mass of flying hair when we kicked it up. Come to think of it, he was in his own little world most of the time.

Sometimes Ross and Kieran seemed almost like my brothers. I was an only child and had long yearned for a brother, perhaps even a sister, perhaps not. I knew there was no chance of a sibling. It wasn't going to happen. Sometimes I thought of Ross and Kieran as the brothers I never had. In some ways, we were a lot alike. In others, we were not. We sure didn't look alike, Ross had hair as black as mine was blond, and Kieran's hair was light brown. Our looks were different, but that didn't matter. What mattered was on the inside, and on the inside we were close.

I peaked out the window before stepping outside a few minutes later. There were already a few girls hovering around outside, even though it was nine hours until the concert. The windows of the tour bus were tinted, so we could see out and no one could see in. There were only about a dozen of them and I was relieved. Sometimes just getting in a building could be difficult when the crowd was large.

Mike and the other body guards, Shawn and Rod, were waiting on us just outside the bus. They looked a little like secret service men with their sunglasses and ear pieces. They also looked a little like professional wrestler's, because they were big and intimidating. I gave Mike a nod and he opened the door. The girls immediately started screaming and jumping up and down. It wasn't bad since there were so few of them, but when there was a large group, they sometimes hurt my ears.

Mike and the others often had to push a path open for us, but it was a bit calmer this time. I was just barely aware of our guards watching the girls, glaring at them to keep their hands to themselves. Even though each of us had had a bodyguard for two years or so, I still wasn't quite accustomed to it. They were necessary, however, not so much because anyone was out to hurt any of us, but because crowds could get out of hand. I'd been injured more than once by well meaning fans pressing in to get a look at me.

Kieran, Ross, and I took some time to sign a few autographs and shake hands with the girls that were hanging out near our buses. We talked with them a little bit too. I really liked talking to

the fans, especially when there were only a few of them. Just talking wasn't enough for Ross, of course. He had to propose to more than one of the girls before we moved on.

"You'll have to forgive Ross," said Kieran. "We seem to have misplaced his straight-jacket again."

One girl was so excited she screamed right into my face. I never quite got used to that. Another one looked like she was going to pass out and I actually had to grab her shoulder to keep her from falling.

"Oh my God! Oh my God! Jordan touched me! He touched me!" she shouted over and over as we turned and went inside.

"Ohhhhh will you touch me?" mocked Ross when we were alone once more. "Please Jordan, you're soooooo cute." He burst out laughing. He lived to give me a hard time. Had I been the type who tended to get a big head about things, I'm sure Ross would have taken me down instantly. He never let me take myself too seriously. Neither did Kieran, but Ross was definitely the crazy one of the group.

I wondered how long those girls had been standing out there, and how long they'd remain to see if we came back out. I'd grown used to the girls for the most part, but sometimes it was still hard to handle. Don't get me wrong, it's not that I didn't like it. Who wouldn't love getting all that attention? It's just that it got to be a bit much. In the very beginning, it was overwhelming. I just couldn't get used to hundreds and hundreds of girls screaming my name and trying to touch me. It just didn't seem real. Sometimes I didn't even feel like I was me anymore. It had grown easier with time. I enjoyed it when we got a chance to meet a few of the fans at a time. It was much better than when there were huge crowds. You just can't interact with hundreds of people at once, unless it's a concert. That's what I really loved best, the concerts, and the music.

We stepped out onto the stage. The auditorium was huge. Seattle was a major venue. It was quiet at the moment, but I knew every seat would be filled that night with thousands of screaming fans. I stepped up to keyboard two and played a small section of one of our songs. Yeah, Chad had already taken care of whatever was wrong with it. He looked over at me and smiled. I gave him a thumbs up. He was the best.

Ross checked out the layout of his drums, while Kieran fine-tuned his guitar. In a few minutes we were ready to run the sound test.

"Okay, how about 'Til I See You Again'?" I asked.

Ross started a drum beat and we began playing. The sound technicians began making adjustments on the sound boards and moving around speakers and microphones. The amount of work there was to do before a concert always amazed me. It was the stage crew that did the work, but I still found it overwhelming. Sometimes I didn't see how they did it all. It was one thing when we had several hours to set up, but it was quite another when we were rushed. I'd seen the crew throw everything together in just a couple of hours when we were running late. Chad was always there overseeing it all. No matter how tight the schedule, he made sure everything was perfect for the concert. Chad was an absolute genius with sound equipment. Sometimes I swore he could make a sound board out of toothpicks and dental floss if he had to.

I had a bit of a rough start, but then I warmed up and really got into the music. "'Til I See You Again" was one of my favorites. It was a ballad and one of our slower songs. I'd written most of it myself, but Ross and Kieran had helped out with a few parts that I couldn't quite seem to get. We all had input into just about every song, although sometimes one of us did most of the work on a particular song.

"Can you hold it a minute, Jordan?" came a voice from a loudspeaker, cutting over the music. We cut off while the stage crew did some tinkering with cables.

"Okay," said the voice from above again.

"Where we left off," I said, and we started playing.

We had to pause once more before the end of the song, and then twice during "Jump Back". After that the sound check was over. We played a couple more songs just for practice. I loved playing my music. I didn't know what I'd do if I wasn't able to perform. Sometimes my problems almost overwhelmed me, but when I played, I felt like everything was going to be okay.

## Ralph

I sat at the edge of the pond, throwing a rock at its smooth surface now and then. The waves rippled out in a great circle until they disappeared. I was bored and lonely. I wished that Chris or Denise was there. It was usually fun when they were around. The old farm could get pretty boring when they weren't, however. There just wasn't that much to do on a farm in the middle of nowhere. It wasn't even a working farm. My parents kept a few chickens, but that was it. The corn that grew in the fields was planted and tended by someone else. My parents rented out the land, rather than try and farm it themselves. Mom did have a small garden, but that was it.

It wasn't the farm that was the problem. It was about as exciting as watching paint dry sometimes, but it was something else that made me feel lonely. I couldn't even begin to count the number of Friday nights I'd stayed home. I was seventeen and I'd never dated. There was a reason for that. I didn't like girls. Even if I did, I'd probably still be in the same fix. I wasn't all that good looking. I wasn't ugly I guess, but I sure wasn't one of the hunks that made the girls drool. I was plain at best, with ordinary brown eyes and hair, and an ordinary, even somewhat pudgy build. I wasn't quite fat, but close. I sure wasn't one of those boys with a perfectly flat stomach and well-defined abs. Maybe it didn't matter. I didn't give two cents about attracting a girl, and finding a boyfriend in southern Indiana was about as easy as finding a needle in a haystack. I felt like I was the only gay boy in the world sometimes.

I reached into my pocket, and pulled out a wrinkled piece of paper. I'd been trying to write a poem earlier, but I wasn't sure I had it quite right. I read over the words again:

*I see him in my dreams,  
but he's not really there.  
I yearn for him,  
look for him in every face that passes,  
but he does not come.*

*I've waited for him forever,  
but he does not appear.  
Will he ever?  
Is he real?  
My dream boy,  
the one that I love?*

That's why I was lonely. I didn't have anyone, and I had the feeling I never would. I had this feeling that I was supposed to have met someone, but that it didn't happen. I felt as if I were living in a time-line that wasn't supposed to be. Something had gone wrong and I had never met the boy who should have been the love of my life. I guess that was just silly, however. I threw another stone into the pond and watched the ripples travel without purpose until they disappeared.

I lay back in the grass and felt the sun shining warm upon me. An image of my dream boy came into my mind, Jordan. I felt kind of silly about it sometimes, like some starry eyed girl, but he was my dream boy. He had been since the first moment I saw him singing on television. Actually, he'd been my dream boy even before I first saw him. He was wandering around in my mind long before I even laid eyes upon him. I was shocked when I did see him for the first time. It was as if some fictional character had suddenly stepped from the pages of a book and become real. It was as if Jordan had stepped right out of my own mind. I couldn't help but love him.

I guess that's why I had every *Phantom* CD ever made, recorded every single television appearance, and clipped every photo and mention of him out of the papers. I had a whole scrapbook of Jordan clippings, largely thanks to Denise. I was too embarrassed to buy teen magazines that were usually purchased by girls, but Denise did it for me. Whenever one came out with Jordan on the cover, she got it for me. I must have spent a fortune on those things, but I didn't care. I loved him. I could spend all day looking at him, or dreaming about him.

*Phantom* was on tour for the second time and Jordan was going to be in both Indianapolis and Fort Wayne. The band hadn't even come to Indiana during the first tour. Both cities were hours away, but I'd been thinking about trying to get to the concert anyway. Who knew when I'd have another chance? This could well be the only time that *Phantom* performed anywhere close. Seeing Jordan in person would be the fulfillment of a lifelong dream.

I knew I'd feel out of place, however. There I'd be, me and a few thousand screaming girls. They'd probably all wonder why I was there. I'd look like a freak. I'd probably be the only guy there alone. All the rest would be there because their girls wanted them to go. They'd probably all be looking at me like I was some kind of weirdo.

It made me sadder still when I thought about not going. I could just picture myself on the night of the concert, sitting alone in my room, knowing that I could have been in the same theatre as my dream boy, knowing I could have seen *him*, in the flesh.

I've heard that when you die, you don't regret the things you did, you regret the things you didn't do. Something clicked inside me. I didn't care what those girls thought, or their boyfriends, or anyone else. Damn it, I was going to go. This was probably my only chance to see *Phantom* in person, and I wasn't going to give it up because of what someone might think.

I got up and walked up the hill to the house. I went into my room and got onto the internet. I found one of those on-line ticket sites and searched for *Phantom* events in Indiana. Two were listed, one in Indy at the Murat and the other in Ft. Wayne at the Embassy Theatre. I clicked on the Murat link first. Indy was about two and a half hours away. Ft. Wayne was twice that far, or more. My heart fell when I saw the words "Sold Out".

I was getting nervous. I went back and clicked on the Embassy link. I was in luck. It read "On Sale". I used the form to search for the best seat possible and crossed my fingers. I was disappointed with the result. The best I could get was in the balcony, near the back. Jordan would probably look like a little action figure from that far away. I wondered for a moment if it was worth it, a six hour drive for a bad seat. The ticket was close to \$30 and I'd have to get a hotel room too.

I didn't even know if my parents would let me go so far away by myself. The seconds ticked by. The screen said I had only 5 minutes to reserve the seat. Since it was so far back, it was probably one of the last ones left.

It was a bad seat, but it was to see *Phantom* after all. Even just being near Jordan would be the thrill of a lifetime. I could actually be in the same room with him. That made up my mind. I made the reservation. Luckily, I had my own credit card. It only had a \$200 limit, but that was more than I needed. My reservation was confirmed. I smiled. I was going to see *Phantom* live. I was going to see Jordan for real. I couldn't wait to tell Denise. I wasn't so sure I'd tell Chris.

## Jordan

*Torque*, our opening act, finished and the stage crew quickly began setting up for us. The crowd started chanting "*Phantom! Phantom!* and even "*Jordan! Jordan!*" and it got louder and louder. I took a deep breath and felt the butterflies in my stomach that were always flying around just before a performance. I knew they'd disappear when I got out there. I was always nervous before a concert, always pumped during it, and always drained after the euphoria of it all wore off a few hours after the concert. I looked to my side and saw Kieran nodding his head up and down in time with the beat of the crowd. He looked a little tense, like he always did, but eager to go on. Ross was tapping his drumsticks together, and in the air, and on me, and Kieran, and whoever chanced to walk past. He was like a jet all revved up to blast off. He was smiling. He loved it. All of us loved to get out there and do our stuff.

Moments later, we were announced and went running onto the stage. Everyone was standing and screaming and clapping. There was a crowd of over 12,000 and they were deafening. I ran to my keyboard and jumped right into "You Don't Know", the first song in our set. My butterflies flew away, I was tripping.

The music seemed to flow into my fingers from the keyboard, or maybe it was the other way round. Either way, I felt it surge through me, like a powerful wave. I changed when I got out there and sang, I transformed into something new. I felt like I became the music. The music and I were one, there was no difference between us.

I looked into the crowd as I sang and played. Everywhere there were faces looking at me, mostly young girls, but a lot of guys and older people too. I smiled and sang. I let the cheers and screams flow over me like a wave. It was the best feeling in all the world. A lot of famous people said they didn't care for all the attention, but I didn't believe them. It was a pain sometimes, it could even be frightening, but it was impossible not to love it. I felt like I could walk on air.

We finished the first song and the screams grew even louder than before. I really think a jet could have taken off in there and no one would have heard it.

"I think you're all excited tonight!" I said into the microphone. The sound system carried my voice all over the auditorium, even above the screams of the crowd. That made them scream ever louder.

"Let's pump it up!" I said and dove right into "Rock It Down Deep". I could feel the adrenaline running through my body. It was hard to maintain contact with my keyboard, I wanted to leap into the air and run all over the place. I really felt like I could do just about anything on stage. The power from the crowd was indescribable. There was all this energy just coming at me, it was incredible. Performing is like nothing else in all the world.

We played three more songs in quick succession, then ran off stage for a set change. While the stage crew moved instruments closer to the edge of the stage, I pulled off the long-sleeved shirt I was wearing over my tank top. It was hot as blazes in there. I noticed that Kieran took the opportunity to get rid of his leather jacket. I knew he had to be burning up in that thing.

We ran back out and played "I'll Keep You Up All Night". The crowd was wild. I slowed things down a little with a ballad, then brought it down a little more. I liked to do that—pump up the crowd with some fast paced stuff, then bring it down, then drive it up again. The highs and lows made it all flow beautifully. It was such a rush!

After a few more songs, we did "Deep In The Night". I liked that one because it gave me a chance to get out from behind my keyboard. Kieran had a lot of freedom of movement. He could go about anywhere he wanted with his electric guitar, but I was kind of tied to my keyboard. Ross was the least free of all. He was stuck to his drums for pretty much the entire concert. I don't think he minded. Actually, I knew he didn't mind. He was meant to play the drums. He played the drums even when he wasn't playing them. He was always tapping on something. I glanced back and caught a glimpse of him bobbing his head up and down, looking like nothing but a mass of flying black hair. Ross was in his own little world, and it was where he belonged.

I ran to the very edge of the stage as I sang. There were fans pressed right up against it, all of them reaching out for me. I leaned down shook hands as I made my way across the stage, although "shook" probably isn't the way to describe it, it was more like "touched" hands. I tried to get to as many of them as I could, but there was never enough time. Sometimes I couldn't believe how many people were pressed right up against the stage, and they were only the beginning.

I went back to my keyboard to play a small verse, then grabbed my water bottle and ran back to the crowd. I took a swig, then showered the crowd with the rest as I sang. I leaned down and gave it to a girl who acted like it was made of gold instead of plastic. I resisted the temptation to throw it into the crowd. I'd learned that was a bad idea. It caused a lot of shoving and pushing. I'd learned that if I leaned down and handed something to one person, that no one else tried to push in and get it, well, most of the time.

I ran back to the keyboard for the end of the song. When it finished, the crowd was going crazy. We jumped right into another. When I was playing, I felt like I was in another world.

I caught glimpses of Kieran as he played his guitar. He loved performing as much as I did. He also cared about our fans as I did too. His eyes were on them often as he played. Kieran and I both tried for a lot of eye contact with the fans. When we looked right into their eyes, there was a special connection there. Kieran was smiling, happy to be sharing what he loved most, and happy to be loved for it.

Ross seemed as if he were from a different world. When the beat was slow, his mind drifted off into space. He was aware of the fans as well, however. I could see the flash of his dark, penetrating eyes as he scanned the crowd and peered into one face, then another. When the pace was fast, Ross was a wild man. He was little more than a blur. His ability amazed me. I knew I was lucky to be with him. In my opinion at least, he was the greatest drummer in the world.

Most of the time, I wasn't consciously aware of Kieran and Ross, although there was always a connection between us. They didn't seem like separate individuals when we played, but rather like another part of me. When we performed I was most aware of the fans, and the music. That was everything.

Before I knew it, we'd been playing for almost an hour and a half. Time always slipped by like that. I was drenched with sweat. My heart was pounding wildly in my chest. I was exhausted

and yet felt exhilarated as if I never wanted to stop. I didn't want to stop playing. I wanted to keep on singing and playing forever. At the end of the song, I took a moment to just look out over the crowd. They loved us, they really did.

I wondered if they'd still love me if they knew the truth. I didn't let it bother me. I pushed it out of my mind, as I always did.

"I hope all you guys have had as much fun as we have!" I yelled into the microphone, not sure if even the sound system could make me heard over the screams this time. I could feel the waves of sound from the crowd, vibrating my body. "You guys rock!" The crowd screamed even louder. "We've loved being here in Seattle! Have a great night!"

Kieran and I waved to the crowd as we walked off stage. Ross ran to the edge of the stage and handed his drumsticks to a girl, then followed us. We stood off stage for a few moments, listening to the crowd scream. We caught our breaths while waiting to go back on. It was something we always did. We acted like we were finished, then went back out and did one more song. Everyone expected it. It was a tradition. After just a few moments more we ran back out to cheers even louder than before.

"There's one more song we thought we should play!" I yelled. "I think you know this one!"

We jumped into "Do You Know That I Love You" and it was wild. While Ross was doing his drum solo I stuck my hands above my head and got the audience clapping. I started playing again and clapped some too to keep them going. I loved to watch all those girls really get into it, the guys too. There were some really cute ones in the audience, guys that is. I never failed to notice them.

We finished up, ran to the edge of the stage, and shook more hands. We stood back, joined hands, and bowed. The cheers were deafening. My ears were ringing from it. We waved as we ran off stage and made our way backstage. I could still hear the screams as I sat down and took a breather.

In just a few moments, there would be about twenty members of our fan club coming backstage to meet us, get autographs, and have their pictures taken with us. We did that at nearly every tour stop. I loved it. I'd be completely drained in a couple of hours or so, but I was so pumped after a concert that I needed to calm down before I could rest. Meeting a few fans was just the thing. There was nothing like being a rock star.