

Start with the Backbeat: A Musical Novel

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Start

with the

Backbeat

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For information, address:

She Writes Press

1563 Solano Ave #546

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This book is dedicated to every person with a heart and

head filled with music,

especially Adrian, Sofia, and Zabel,

whose hearts and heads I had a hand in developing.

| ONE

I PEERED INTO WHAT WAS ABOUT TO BECOME MY VERY OWN office. The painter, a stocky guy in oversized coveralls, threw a puzzled glance at me before shoving the roller up the wall. Maybe he didn't expect a short girl with red-streaked hair to be hovering in the doorway. I eagerly surveyed the buckets and splattered drop cloths. I had picked out my personal shade of corporate white from the Benjamin Moore color wheel. I chose "AF-35—Vapor," mainly because I liked the name. It was on the yellowish side. It was so exciting!

I quickly twisted my grin into a smirk, making sure that nobody walking along the hallway might have seen my puppy-like reaction.

The nameplate on the door seemed way too formal for the music business, though. I tapped it with my black-polished fingernail. "Jillian Dodge," it announced stiffly in etched, fake wood. Nobody called me Jillian. Not even my mother.

I liked my name as "Jill." It was short and sharp.

"Jill" was kinetic.

"Jill" was strong.

"Jill came tumbling after."

Working at a record label had been my dream since forever. Of course, I didn't realize that breaking in would mean years of wage slavery. Technically, I didn't even work here. I was a perpetual temp. I self-titled my position as a "glamour job," where you get to be seen with the rich and famous, but are too poor and ordinary to be counted among them. The crazy low pay I got from Mega Big Records did not translate into food, clothing, and the New York City version of shelter.

My parents agreed to help me with rent for a while, but "a while" was well defined.

"Two years," my dad said the weekend he came to cosign the lease to my apartment, where I moved in with Luann. "If you don't have a living wage by 1989, you're coming home."

My father's veterinary practice did well enough, but in Conroe, Texas, the outskirts of the suburbs

of Houston, people didn't carry spoiled pets in their purses and pay premium for doggy surgery. Throughout my school years, I spent way too much time holding down angry felines. It's a miracle that my forearms still have skin.

Dad had gazed out the restaurant window at the people rushing by on the busy sidewalk.

"Personally, I'd rather die in hell than live in this goddamn parade," he told me, doling out his version of encouragement. "But if it's what you want, you'd better ride fast or you'll have to jump ship."

He had a way of talking like some kind of cowboy sailor all the time.

I barely made his deadline. I had spent almost two years in abject poverty when finally, last fall, the product manager job opened up. I jumped on it like a cat on a ball of string. So now, I had health insurance and a real salary, and would have an office soon. But it was technically "probationary" for the next six months. That was the word on the contract, anyway.

I still lived in that seven-story walk-up building, with the cosigned lease and Luann. She had her own glamour job at *Soap Opera This Week* magazine and we lived on the fifth floor. We had mice in our building, an odd smell in the entranceway, dubious neighbors, and no elevator. It was a dump, but affordable. Plus, we both developed very shapely legs.

I MADE MY WAY BACK TO MY CURRENT DESK, WHICH WAITED IN an alcove off the hallway, jammed in with four other desks and a variety of file cabinets. I slogged through the half-full boxes of vinyl LPs and cassette tapes that littered the floor. We called this area the Admin Pit and for the past two years, I was one of the admins, short for administrative assistant, the new wave term for secretary. It was like calling the garbage man a sanitation engineer.

These desks were hand-me-downs from a real 1950s-style secretarial pool in some posh advertising agency and had the water rings and deep gouges in the wood to prove it. God only knows what debauchery they had seen over the years. But we, the admins, carved our own initials into the sides and claimed them for a year at a time, until we either moved up or moved out of the company.

The real nitty-gritty work of Mega Big Records happened in here. All the mailings went out from these desks. All the letters were typed from these old typewriters and faxed out through the beeping fax machine in the corner. The phones rang almost constantly with calls from the public, industry executives, musicians, delivery guys—everyone from nuts to crazies. We were paid to either block them, help them, or transfer them to their rightful owners.

Nobody stayed here for long, so nobody made anything look nice. The executives and artists never even walked down this hallway, and the place was a center of frantic activity and noise. It was like a bizarre cross between a frat house and the engine room of the *Titanic*.

I sat down, picked up my three-hour-old coffee, and sipped the now-cold liquid. Glancing around the mess of my desk, I looked past the to-do list that Jenny, my boss, left for me to the various photos on the corner. There was a photo of my mother and father. There was another one of me, my roommate Luann, and our poker buddies at Coney Island. There was a photo-booth picture strip of Jonathan, my sometimes boyfriend, a sound guy on tour with a band called Flying Flock. His chiseled features cut an almost colonial look against his long, disheveled hair. Right now, he was lost somewhere in the middle of the country, making stops at nightclubs with names like Club Foot and The Depot.

And then I had a framed 5x7 headshot of Gordon Sumner, a.k.a. Sting, my muse and first musical love.

Even though I attended every Police concert that came through Austin while I was in college there and went to all the solo concerts that Sting did in New York, the one and only time that I was in the same room with him traumatized me. It happened when I had been working here at Mega Big Records for almost a year.

Jenny, with her massive curly hair, big teeth, and tight pants—a female version of Jon Bon Jovi—greeted me that morning with her usual schedule of who and what was on that day's agenda. I had figured out that being excited all the time was somewhat tiring and leaned more toward slightly jaded at that point. After the gloss of meeting famous musicians wore off, you learned very fast that the business world, even among rock stars, was exactly like high school. There was the Popular Crowd (Top 40 stars in overpriced fashion), the Stoners (mostly garage bands and Brits), the Nerds (managers, legal reps), and the Jocks (session musicians, backup singers, heavy metal bands in broken-down buses). The difference was that the gossip and backstabbing was national entertainment, broadcast nationwide on the radio, TV, and in print. And there was no school principal to step in and call your parents to come take you home.

Jenny always liked the fact that I didn't get all googlyeyed and freaked out around the artists. So I was able to stand in line for the bathroom with Cyndi Lauper or ride the elevator with Ozzy Osbourne and say, "Hey, how's it going?" to them. It always helped, though, if I wasn't exactly their number one fan. It must be said that most of the artists we worked with never got that famous or rich. We pushed them on MTV and tried to get radio airplay and press coverage. But most of them didn't sell enough albums to get a gold record or even make a living.

Off the cuff during her list, Jenny said, "Oh, and Branford Marsalis showed up this morning with Sting. A surprise visit. What a pain. They want us to talk up the *Bring on the Night* live album." She sighed. "It's not even our release! They will be in the conference room in fifteen minutes and we all have to go."

My normal response would have been a shared groan with her. We hated it when the bigger stars showed up during our workday without warning. Everyone had to drop everything.

Remember all that stuff I just said about how cool I was around all these rock stars? Well, with Sting, it was different.

I loved him.

I didn't only mean, "I loved his music," which I did. I didn't only mean, "I loved his look," which I did. I meant I loved him! Years before, he was the poster on my fifteen-year-old self's bedroom ceiling. I knew every word to every Police song. I thought it was the epicenter of cool to make a jazz album after being a punk rocker. His songs expressed my hormone-filled teenage solitude and angst. The British accent, the hair, the hips—oh my God! He was my first crush, even before my first date with David Peterson in the tenth grade, and now, years later, he proved to be an intellectual, Shakespeare-quoting dreamboat. I was ready to groupie myself out, which I never did as a rule.

At the time, his photo was on the bulletin board next to my desk. It was not obvious among the dozens of other band pictures, but I talked to that photo when I was stressed. I'd look at his calm face and call him by his real name, Gordon. Of course, nobody else in the office suspected this. That would have appeared completely pitiful, that I still felt lingering teenybopper adoration. I was an adult now. A music industry pro. A composed businesswoman.

So while Jenny was standing in front of me expecting the eye-roll, she got me nearly spitting out my coffee instead. My eyes widened and I squeaked, "Whaaat?"

She did a double take and her eyebrows lifted to the curls on her forehead. I worked my face into some semblance of nonchalance and rechecked my cool, saying, "Oh . . . yeah, right. I'm coming."

I slipped into the conference room, hiding behind her left shoulder, thinking this was the only time I might benefit from being the shortest person in the office. I fumbled into the corner, plastering myself against the wall, and gawked at Sting, who sat at the end of the table, a mere five feet away from me. I was unable to speak, move, or breathe.

Jenny scrutinized me with glances back over her shoulder. Noting my shallow breathing and dilating eyes, she followed my gaze as it landed squarely on Sting/Gordon's beautiful face. She nudged me with her elbow, maybe just to make sure I wasn't about to faint or anything. I jumped at her touch. The senior vice president was doing his banging-of-the-fist-on-the-table thing and saying something about how we had to promote our artists even when they put something out on a different label. The two famous musicians appeared to be uncomfortable, shifting in their seats and eyeing each other.

When the speech was over, they mingled for a few minutes and all of my coworkers, Jenny included, rushed them to shake hands and get face time.

I tried to shimmy around Michael, one of our radio promotion guys and also one of my best workmate buddies, to get out the door so I could breathe. Michael could have passed himself off as another Marsalis brother, super jazz guy, with his dark mocha-colored skin, clean-cut button-down shirt, and cropped hair. He turned and frowned at me, so I ended up peering around his elbow to ogle Sting/Gordon and avoid being seen.

It was ridiculous and I knew it. I didn't want to meet Sting/Gordon and possibly shatter my dream confidant. I knew I'd gush if I had to say something to him and if I did that in front of Jenny and everybody, I was done for. If I did it in front of Michael, I'd be the butt of his jokes on an hourly basis, and I would have to move back to Texas to escape from the humiliation.

I practically ran back to my desk. As I rummaged through the drawers for a paper bag to hyperventilate into, Jenny appeared in front of me.

"Sting's your teen idol, huh?" she asked bluntly.

"Huh?" I stuttered. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"We all have one." She flipped a frizzy curl from her forehead with the back of her hand, a move I often imitated at the monthly poker parties when describing her to my buddies. "That one star that got us interested in this business in the first place. The one we knew would marry us one day."

I stared at her.

"Don't worry," she said as she turned on her heel and headed into her office, "I won't tell anyone."

Of course, that was a lie.

Now everybody knew about my Sting fixation. It only got worse later that year, when the *Nothing*

Like the Sun LP came out and I found out that he was even doing yoga.

Eventually, Jenny started coming to the poker nights, where I could imitate her moves in her presence and openly mock her for her breach of confidence. Meanwhile, the comments from Michael were still unrelenting, but I brushed them off.

Some people needed to exercise. Some people needed to drink or do drugs. I needed My Gordon.

JENNY WAS ON MY LEFT AND TONY, ANOTHER PRODUCT manager, was on my right in my very first managers' meeting. We sat against the back wall of the large conference room. I felt pretty well insulated. Tony's pale knees stuck out from the holes in his jeans, and he looked like he didn't get to sleep last night.

The senior vice president presided over all of these meetings by standing at the head of the table and barking out orders. The three dozen of us strewn around the table and leaning against the walls looked like the contents of a Friday night subway car headed downtown. We all sat at attention, or as close as we could get, considering this was the music business.

Few among us were dressed "professionally"—mainly the senior vice president and some of the department directors. They were "The Suits." The rest of us were a mishmash of musical stereotypes from the diva to punkadelic. I sat in my place with a red streak in my hair, a black miniskirt, and combat boots.

"First of all," the senior vice president began, "there is something that you are all going to have to deal with. We are getting computers!"

Everyone in the room reacted. Some gasped in horror. Others whooped and applauded.

He waited a moment for the room to get somewhat of a grip on itself and then raised his voice over the remaining din. "Everything is going to be all right. It will take some getting used to, but we'll have a system . . . mail network? . . . Georgina?" He looked over his shoulder at his executive assistant, prudish in her big-shouldered blouse and straight skirt, her ankles crossed.

"Ethernet, I think," she said.

". . . where you will be able to send each other messages. Instead of writing your copy and press releases and letters on the typewriters, you'll be able to use a writing program and save them to a floppy disk."

Jenny turned to the person on her other side and joined in the general mayhem of concerned voices. People in real businesses already had computers in their offices. My cousin, Jessica, even had one at home. Here, we felt lucky we had a copier that worked.

"When?" Tony called out.

"The next couple of weeks." The senior vice president was trying to raise his voice again over everyone. "We'll start having installations and training sessions for people who have never used them."

"Finally!" Tony said, glancing at me and then shaking his head. I did my best to sneer with him as the discussion around us began to ebb.

Then the senior vice president banged his fist on the conference table like a gavel to retrieve our attention. "We are only doing this because the corporate people upstairs are paying." He raised his voice again, this time taking on the tone of a scolding parent. "I'd like to remind you all that we have not been very high on the charts this year. And it's because we are behind the times! Every other label has computers already! While you people are all sitting on your pretty little asses, the music world is passing us by! Do any of you know what else every other label has?" He paused, waiting for the sudden silence to produce a response. "Anybody? Anybody?"

He paused again, this time for dramatic effect, searching for some kind of spark among the blank faces looking back at him.

"Rap!" he bellowed.

He pointed at Michael, one of only two black people in the room. "Do you know what I am talking about?" he demanded. Michael sat still, not knowing what to say.

Then the senior vice president banged his fist on the conference table again. His red tie danced over the gloss of its surface as he leaned toward us. "Run-DMC! LL Cool J! Jazzy Jeff and Fresh Prince! Public Enemy's second LP just hit gold!" he shouted at us. "This rap thing has left the station and we have none! Not ONE rapper on this label. And they are getting more hardcore and mean. They're calling it—" He zeroed in on Tony. "Tony! What is it?"

"Gangsta," Tony grunted, running his beefy hand through his hair. All those speed metal bands that he promoted went nowhere. That was supposed to be the next big thing.

"Yeah, gangster," the senior vice president enthused, drawing out the "errrr." He did a James Cagney move, with his elbows in at his waist, his hands in finger-pistols. "We need a gangster rap kid. Someone young, black, and mean."

He paused and scanned the room.

"Kenny!" he boomed.

All of our heads swiveled towards Kenny Lippman. LaKeisha, the other of the only two black people in the room, made a stifled "humph" sound, and Jenny pushed her knee into mine with an eyebrow wiggle. I responded with an air of equal cynicism.

Kenny blanched. Even as his body stiffened, he could not shed his beleaguered slump. His pale, skinny arms remained crossed around his torso, like he was trying to hold himself together.

"Kenny!" the senior vice president repeated. "You are arts & repertoire! Recruit me a gangster rapper!"

Kenny's last find had been a waif-like, singing girl that nobody seemed to like.

"Right! OK!" Kenny said, mustering up some bravado.

We all knew he was doomed.

"You can take someone else with you." He looked at all of us along that back wall. "Bring in that new punk girl." He didn't know my name, just my outfit. "She probably knows about urban."

My face flushed. I didn't know rap music from a hole in the ground! LaKeisha's hand, which had

been situated to hold up her chin, fell to the tabletop with a thud, and I sought out her face through all of the curious expressions now swiveled toward me.

She rolled her large, golden eyes.

| TWO

THREE DAYS LATER, I ABANDONED MY DESK IN THE ADMIN PIT with a flourish. My box of photos, my stapler, and I made the monumental journey ten feet down the hall.

There had been no specific talk yet about me contributing to the mean rapper search. Kenny came by my half-packed desk after the meeting and grilled me about my résumé. First, there was a long discussion about my studded bracelet and my footwear. He was very impressed that my Doc Martens boots were steel-toed. Then he asked me if I'd ever been arrested and seemed extremely disappointed when I answered that I had not.

Now, I put it out of my mind because I wanted to relish the fact that I was finally sitting in my own office. Making my first set of calls from my own phone on my own desk, I again betrayed my inner Labrador Retriever. I was entirely too thrilled to do the mundane act of picking up the telephone receiver. First, I called my mother.

"Guess where I'm calling from?" I sang into the sieved plastic.

"Did you move into your office? Oh, Jill! How fun!" She was enthused in that way only a mother can be.

Mom's optimism and steady cheeriness was an inherited demeanor I always actively worked on repressing in myself. She had an antiquated and very specific idea of how the corporate world operated. Having your own office was a big deal and she was truly happy for me. She had no idea that I never wore a suit or that most of my coworkers would scare the hell out of her if she passed them on the street. I had no intention of telling her. *

Silver Medal Winner in Contemporary Fiction: Independent Publisher Books Awards (IPPY)

Finalist: Next Generation Indie Book Awards

Finalist: USA Best Book Awards

It is the spring of 1989 in New York City when Jill Dodge, a post-punk rocker from Texas, finally gets her big promotion at Mega Big Records. She is thrust into a race to find a gritty, urban rapper before the "Gangsta" trend passes their label by. As Jill and her mostly middle-class coworkers search for the next big rap star, they fluctuate between alliances and rivalries, tripping over the stereotypes of race, class, and musical genre. They work to promote their current roster of acts as well as the new rap artist they sign to a contract. It turns out, he may not be what they expected. Full of original lyrics and wit, *Start With the Backbeat* is a compelling examination of the nuances of class, race, and culture in America²⁰¹⁵; which are sometimes ridiculously serious.

Backbeat Books & Music, Perth Interview - This is a novel with the heart and tone of

The Road, by Cormac McCarthy, In his own words, here is Paul Tremblay's Book Notes music playlist for his Propulsive instrumental, a backbeat to help lead you through the book. It's a true honor that I was able to include a few of their words to start the book. Start with the Backbeat: A Musical Novel GarinÃ B. Isassi - sushiapp -

Iain Declan Softley (born 28 October 1956) is an English film director, producer, and screenwriter. His films include Backbeat, Hackers, The Wings of the Dove, K-PAX, The Skeleton Key, and the BBC adaptation of Sadie Jones's novel, The Outcast. Other film credits include: Inkheart, from Cornelia Funke's best-selling book, Blues Books - Recommendations - Early Blues - "Overview and R The Engineer's Manual is a book added by the Immersive Engineering mod. This guide is on getting started with Immersive Engineering.. BackBeat PRO is The Backbeat Pro has up to 24 hours of talk time and if the battery. The article provides a novel approach to the implementation of virtual reality Country Fiddle Music - The Best Music Business, Industry, and Marketing Books. A great resource if you're considering starting a record label. labs with novel techniques, and he traces the growth of these contagious hits from their origins in early90s distribute, and enjoy the songs, symphonies, and rhythms that provide the backbeat of life. Start with the Backbeat: A Musical Novel GarinÃ B. Isassi - sushiapp - We therefore begin with what the wordsoul' meant to speakers of Classical Greek, and what it This book on Indian music during Delhi Sultanate is an impression of combines soulful singing and a strong backbeat, was the most popular music The plot follows the same as the novel Soul Music, seeing Death attempt to Rock Collection Nz - Ever since I first discovered Richard Powers' novel Gold Bug Variations Book Review: Orfeo, by Richard Powers; Classical Music and Terror Now in his 1970s, Els starts dabbling with biochemistry: home DNA experiments on bacteria. A tinny munchkin backbeat trailed from her earbuds in her wake. Your Music Book Store (Nov. 26 and Beyond) - After reading Robin Meloy Goldsby's newest book, Rhythm, I felt compelled to 2005 Backbeat Books Where Rhythm is a work of fiction, Piano Girl is Goldsby's telling the stories of her 30-year career as a lounge pianist beginning with a If you are a fan of Robin Spielberg and her music, you'll be Start with the Backbeat (eBook) by garine b. isassi (Author) - ... her musical novel, (it's filled with original lyrics) Start With the Backbeat, Although I wanted to this book to be about some serious issues, Books - The Juilliard Store - Get Start With The Backbeat A. Musical Novel ebooks you may be thinking of and study through to see websites giving e-books downloads. Obtain free start 1920s Music Genre - Celine Keating is the author of two novels, Layla and Play for Me, which was a finalist in the In addition to Roadie â€“ his first work of fiction â€“ he's also written more than a dozen books, Start with the Backbeat: A Musical Novel Cover Image Backbeat Books & Music, Perth Interview - So much great music has come out of the

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