

**LATE, LATE
AT NIGHT**

RICK SPRINGFIELD

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

When I turned fifty, I wrote a song about my life so far, to see if I could fit it into a three-minute pop tune.

I could.

My Depression

*Born in the Southern Land where a man is a man
Don't remember too much, warm mama, cold touch
Postwar baby boom, fifty kids in one room
All white future bright but living in a womb
Got a TV receiver Jerry Mathers as the Beaver
No blacks, no queers, no sex. Mouseketeers
Daddy kept moving round, I can't settle down
Always the lost new kid in town*

*Mannlicher lock and loaded, JFK's head exploded
Dark figure at the fence, end of my innocence
Hormones hit me, chew up, spit me
Get stoned, get plastered, always was a moody bastard
Guitar fool, kicked out of high school
Joined a band, Vietnam, Mama-san, killed a man
Daddy gets real sick it's too intense I can't stick it
Buy myself a ticket to the U.S.A.*

*Oh my God, it's my life. What am I doing kicking at the foundation?
That's right, my life. Better start thinking 'bout my destination*

*Hollywood sex-rat, been there, done that
 Jaded afraid I'd never get a turn at bat
 Last in a long line, finally hit the big time
 Gold mine, feeding time, money/fame, I get mine
 Use it, abuse it, Daddy dies, I lose it
 Get a wife get a son, beget another one.
 Head said "God's dead," motorcycle body shred
 Midlife crisis rears its ugly head*

*Prozac, lithium, could never get enough of 'em
 Last wills, shrink's bills, sleeping pills, sex kills
 Edge of sanity, my infidelity
 Looking in the mirror and thinking how it used to be
 Don't like the skin I'm in, caught in a tailspin
 Honest-to-God vision, spiritual transmission
 Climb aboard the life raft, looking back I have to laugh
 Take a breath, don't know if I'm ready for the second half*

*Oh my God, it's my life. What am I doing kicking at the
 foundation?
 That's right, my life. Better start looking at my destination*

*My life, my depression, my sin, my confession,
 my curse, my obsession, my school, my lesson.*

For anyone with a short attention span, that should cover the major details of my life, so you can put this book back on the bookstore shelf. For those of you who want to hear the deeper cut, many thanks and read on . . .

PROLOGUE

A SWINGIN' TEENAGER

So here I am, seventeen years of age, feeling as ugly as the ass end of a female baboon at mating season, unloved, very much in need of a good caressing by some attentive young woman and, right now, swinging by my neck at the end of a very thick twine rope like some pathetic B-Western movie bad guy. I'm thinking to myself as I lose consciousness, "Wow, somehow I thought it would all end so differently."

Thank God I haven't succeeded at a lot of the things I've tried, like this suicide attempt for instance. But thank God I *have* succeeded occasionally. Because in a furious flash-forward, of the type that can only happen in the movies or in this book, I am thirty-one years old and standing onstage with a very expensive guitar strapped around my very expensive suit, playing a rock-and-roll song that I wrote. The audience of this sold-out show is clamoring for more. A bevy of young girls is waiting backstage for me, and there's a middle-aged bald guy standing on the side of the stage, smiling at his healthy profit, ready to hand me a big, fat check when I'm done.

Wait . . . Wait, wait, wait, wait! Just a second here . . . So if I'd succeeded in offing myself back in my teenage years of staggering angst, I would have missed all this? Evidence, I think, that when we are at our lowest and ready to give in and go belly-up forever and for always, we should take a step back and say, "Is this the absolute *best* move I can make right now?" And then give ourselves an extra year or two or three.

I am walking, breathing, living proof that, considering how depressed and full of self-loathing and self-pity I am right now, swinging by my skinny, teenage neck three feet off the ground, thinking that I am

worthy of not much more than the gig of pre-chewing hay for a horse with bad teeth, good things can still happen. It's just the law of averages, and the law is on our side, losers. Yay us! So to those who are at the bottom of the emotional heap—and it's crowded down here—there is still reason for hope! Not that the teenage idiot I was (who is, by the way, still swinging freely from a crossbeam and turning a lovely shade of blue) would have believed that *dopey, feel-good* phrase anyway.

Although by nature I tend to gravitate toward the bleaker side of things, I have been open to and have received signs throughout my life that have given me hope when I'd thought there was none. A part of me believes that these signs are directives from the gods. I've stayed surprisingly receptive to them, even though part of me thinks I'm full of shit to take them as any kind of actual, meaningful omens.

Another furious flash-forward—damn it, I wish there were cool sound effects in this book . . . *whoooooosh!*—it's 1979. I'm living in Glendale, California, with a girl named Diana. Playing guitar in a house band at a local restaurant bar. This is not where I'd hoped to be in my music career by the age of twenty-nine, but then again I also thought I'd be dead by now, "strung up," as it were, by the neck, so it's just as well that not all my expectations are met. One night there's a party at someone's house in Glendale after my bar gig, and I go there by myself while my girlfriend waits at home.

A tarot card reader is in attendance. I love these people. They let us pretend to possible bright futures, even when we have none, and right now, I have none. At least not any future I'd want to celebrate. So I pull up a chair and shuffle her cards. Bad disco music is playing in the background and I think to myself, "Is there *good* disco music?" She deals my hand. The Emperor. The Two of Swords. The Hanged Man. The Star. She looks up from the array of archaic cards and locks eyes with me from across the table. She wants me. Wait . . . no, that's not it.

"That's the most incredible card spread I've ever seen," she whispers breathlessly.

"Yeah?" That's pretty much it from me.

“Something big is going to happen in your life . . . and soon,” she answers as if definitively.

“Could you be more specific?” I ask. I want dates. Names. Exact amounts of cash. Truly, you can never nail these people down.

“Something . . . really . . . amazing,” she replies.

It will have to do. And it does.

As a seeker of encouragement and affirmation all my young life, I’ve become accustomed to positive if self-servingly vague prophesies from a range of “experts”: numerologists, astrologers, phrenologists (I do have a shitload of bumps on my head, so phrenologists have a party when I show up for a reading), tasseographists (look it up), and just plain seers. A year before the encounter with my disco tarot card reader, I’d gone to see a young Romanian with a brain tumor. It was widely believed that the unwelcome “visitor” in this man’s head had given him a special view of the future. Everyone in my acting class had consulted this guy, desperate to hear him say, “Yes, I see you in major motion pictures. You are successful . . . wealthy . . . deeply, deeply loved . . . and your likeness is being carved into Mount Rushmore along with those four old dead guys because you are just so fucking special.”

Honestly, I think that we’re all—every one of us—constantly and hungrily searching for signs that we are singular, unique, chosen. And that an equally singular, unique, choice future awaits us. Actors are the neediest bastards in this way; don’t ever let us pretend otherwise. Maybe we artist-performers need this kind of affirmation more than most, hence our career choice. I know that a strong, defining element of my character is the five-year-old inside me jumping up and down, demanding, “Hey, Poopypants, look at ME!!!” This need to be noticed and thought of as “special” has, to a large degree, charted my unholy course through adulthood. Dammit.

So when it’s finally my turn to see the brain tumor guy, this future-seeing Romanian looks at me and says, “I see gold around you—here.” He motions to my throat. I think, “Does he see bling? Am I going to be a pimp?” But he continues, “It’s glowing, your voice. Are you a singer?”

“My mum thinks so,” I answer. But I am actually heartened by what he apparently sees. Again, I put this “sign” in my back pocket against the times when someone will look at me and say, “You? I don’t think so, asshole.”

What is that *sound*? Whhhhhooooosshh!!! Yes, if this were a movie there would be amazing visual shit and music and sound effects and all. Use your imagination . . . we are now going *back* in time. Don’t sue me for your whiplash; I’m trying to keep this thing interesting.

Okay, I’m going to drop a name, watch your feet. There will be several warnings throughout this book so you can protect your toes. Here’s the first one: Elvis. But this is not the truly significant Elvis of my story. The most important Elvis in my life has four legs and black-and-white fur, barks, and is at the center of my heartache. No, this Elvis is the one you guys all know. I’m on a plane from Los Angeles to Australia via Hawaii in 1972, and Elvis (the two-legged, non-furry, singer version) is onboard too. My manager at the time is Steve Binder. Steve directed the Elvis comeback TV special in 1968, so I talk with him for a while about our common link. He’s a sweet guy and signs an autograph for my then-girlfriend in Australia, who’s a fan.

I get off the plane in Honolulu feeling oddly anointed by this small audience with the King. And as I’m walking down a side street, taking in the island’s frangipani-scented sights with Kohilo blowing gently across my face, I walk by a young lady standing in a doorway who’s wearing almost nothing and offers to tell my fortune. I say to her that I think my fortune is to get laid for a nominal fee, but she assures me she is an authentic seer and only wants to serve the Great Spirit she channels. She takes my hand gently and assures me I will be “successful in my chosen field.” Hahahahahaha. She adds that my “successful” future also includes a “*very* successful happy ending” in the back room for an extra \$150. See, I was right! Honey, I’m twenty-two years old. Call me when I’m seventy. I pass. But just like my chance meeting with Elvis, I take this encounter as a sign that big things are afoot for me, career-wise. Always such a positive boy. Except when famous rock-and-roll icons and skimpily dressed fortune-tellers aren’t there to make me feel good.

Okay, another “Whhhhooooosshh.” It’s 1979 and we’re back in Glendale, California, again. Just minutes before I’m to head to the party and the tarot card mystic whose reading will presage a change in my life and my world.

“Aren’t you Rick Springfield?” the pretty young girl holding a Long Island iced tea is asking me at the bar. I smile a shit-eating grin. “I loved ‘Speak to the Sky,’” she continues, alluding to the hit song I’d had in 1972.

“What a trip you’re playing in a restaurant now,” she adds with a smirk, and I take that one in the gut. Do I really need her to point out to me that bugger-all has happened since then, it being 1979 now? I wonder if, despite my loser status in her eyes, she’s up for a fucking, but she disappears soon after and I am left to my dark feelings. Yes, I *am* a loser. Yes, I had a shot in 1972. Yes, I blew it. Yes, I am playing cover songs in a bar in Glendale. Yes, my life is about to change. Yes, I’m . . . wait. What was that last thing? Amongst the litany of shit? Was there some positive word? Hey, maybe all those oracles I’ve visited over the years, seers whose “visions” gave me hope, were worth the price of admission after all! Maybe thanks to them (as well as a serendipitous meeting with an insurance guy—more on that later) I harbor some faith in myself yet.

Disco sucks ass! Other than the Bee Gees, disco is a wasteland and in 1979 it is at its worst. Radio is ready for a change. The great and almighty electric guitar is about to make a comeback, thank Christ. AC/DC’s “Highway to Hell” is getting heavy radio play. Pat Benatar’s “Heartbreaker” looks as though it could actually be a radio hit, and Elvis Costello has just brought some serious, much-needed songwriting and playing credibility to punk with his inaugural album, *My Aim Is True*.

I, on the other hand, am playing Top 40, instead of my *own* music, in a bar and am making stained glass in my garage. But I am *listening* to all this new music on my radio, and I have actually started writing some solid songs again after a hiatus of almost two years. I’m excited by the new movement in music and am getting the itch to take a chance and start playing original songs again. I’ve spent the last seven years drifting in and out of near-poverty and missed every time I’ve made a grab for the brass ring. Mainly out of absolute boredom I’ve signed up

for this stained-glass class with the desperate and rather bizarre fantasy of becoming a professional stained-glass master, such is the state of my musical ambition after years of nothing but unfulfilled dreams. How capricious and unexpected the fates are. And you never know where the “nod” will come from.

I meet a couple at this glass class in the middle of nowhere in Pasadena. The girl is petite, dark haired, and really interesting looking, and she grabs my attention if not my loins. I write a song about the two of them. “Gary’s Girl” doesn’t have enough of a rock-and-roll ring to it so I rename him “Jessie,” misspelling the male version of the name because of the Los Angeles Rams’ Ron Jessie T-shirt I’m wearing at the time. I toss the finished song onto the heap with the rest of my unheard music.

My thirtieth birthday is fast approaching, and as far as the general public is concerned, my music career—what there was of it—has come and gone. I’ve had my shot: a Top 10 hit, some teen magazine coverage, a famous girlfriend, and the whole pop-idol-for-fifteen-minutes thing. In the eyes of the world (or at least those who even noticed), I’d shot for the David Cassidy throne and missed.

So I take a hard look at where I am now in 1979. In many ways I seem to be a happy man. I have a beautiful girlfriend, Diana, an ex-model who is artistic and loving; we rent a quiet suburban home with a flock of chickens (each individually named) in the backyard. We attend big Sunday dinners at her parents’ house; her brother Doug is my best friend; we share art projects and her very much loved dog, Sasha. You cannot be far from a dog or life is meaningless. Our friends and every busybody with a fucking opinion are sure Diana and I will marry. I assume we will. I guess this is what marriage feels like. I don’t know. I’ve never done it before. I love her dog, I know that much. Can I marry her dog? Is that legal?

My momentum is slowing. I’ve grown a beard and taken to wearing suspenders and flannel shirts. I’m settling down. But inside my head, a small, clear voice is rising. It is saying it’s time to save myself, my dream, my life. It’s getting louder and more insistent as the days pass.

I know in my heart that it’s time to run.