



Trouble at Tweeter

When Jenn quit the band, she quit *loudly*. So loudly, in fact, that you might want to cover your ears.

‘I am totally outta here.’

‘What?’

‘I quit.’

‘Hunh?’

‘I quit. You heard me.’

Of course I heard her. The entire state of Illinois heard her.

‘I’m quitting,’ Jenn yelled, ‘because you act like everything is all Naomi, all the time, and yeah, you’re the one that the people see and hear first and foremost, fine, I accept that, you’ve been out front since day one, but it seems like you’ve conveniently forgotten there’re three other people on stage with you, and one of them – namely me – is pretty much the person who makes this band sound the way it sounds, and if we don’t sound the way we sound, we’re still stuck at Beaned playing for, like, sixty people, and people are gonna realize that when they hear my solo stuff – and they *will* hear my solo stuff, trust me on that one, Naomi – and I’m also outta here because of what you’ve done to my brother, and I don’t care that you didn’t mean to,

you did it, it's done, it can't be undone, and you know what else, well, I'm almost embarrassed to admit this in front of the entire tour bus, but I will because I'm on a roll here, but part of the reason I'm outta here is because I wanted this guy, and you took him, and he macked on me, and I didn't go for it, and I didn't tell you, and I don't know why, and whether you know it or not, honey, these are the kinds of things that tear bands apart, and, for that matter, tear friendships apart!

It was the kind of harsh run-on sentence that makes you want to find safety under a fort of down-filled, satin-covered, perfume-scented pillows. The kind of harsh run-on sentence that makes you want to jump out of a tour-bus window. The kind of harsh run-on sentence that makes you want to throw somebody out of a tour-bus window.

The kind of harsh run-on sentence that makes you want to give up Double Stuf Oreos as atonement for your sins.

Later on, I feebly joked to both Marnie and our tour manager Gib that we should've named this tour 'The Murphy's Law Tour'. That would've been kind of funny, actually; the record label could've made up a bunch of those high-school letterman tour jackets. You know which ones I'm talking about, the ones with the big letter on the front, and the faux-leather sleeves. They could've had a huge 'N' for Naomi pasted on the right breast, the phrase 'And Then' – which, as I'm sure you know, is the name of our biggest selling single – embroidered on the left, and, in big letters on the back, 'THE MURPHY'S LAW TOUR'.

Okay, I'm exaggerating a little bit. If you tell people you're living a Murphy's Law existence, it implies *everything* is going wrong, and that wasn't the case here – it was just that one big wrong accompanied by a handful of little wrongs. Even so, the letterman jackets would've been pretty hilarious.

Then again, I was selling enough records – or, as Mitch Busey and the fine folks at Éclat Records kept putting it, ‘putting up mad numbers’ – that they could’ve afforded to skip the letterman thingies and do up those jackets in leather. And I don’t mean leather like motorcycle jacket leather, but rather leather like a light brown, Roberto Cavalli soft calf skin. Granted, those retail for as much as \$3000, but I *was* ‘putting up mad numbers’, remember? (It’s worth noting that in my pre-mad-number-putting-up days, I had no idea what soft calf-skin leather was, nor had I ever heard of Roberto Cavalli.)

In any event, it all came to a head in Chicago, which had become one of my favorite cities. Before our first tour, this born-and-bred Brooklyn girl had hardly been *anywhere*. But once my band and I hit the road, once I got a taste of life away from the East Coast, I fell in love with traveling, the freshness of setting foot in a new city, smelling the non-New York smells, walking on the relatively clean non-New York sidewalks, checking out the local boutiques. And by the time we pulled into Chicago for what was the third time, I’d seen enough of America to be able to discern just how wonderful the Windy City was. But if you’re being accurate – and like I said, this book *has* to be accurate, if only so you awesome fans will stop buying any of those aforementioned cheesy bios – we weren’t actually in Chicago, but rather in Tinley Park, a suburb about fifty miles south of the city.

Chicago had been great to me, but Tinley Park that night, not so much. I guess the good Chicago vibes got lost somewhere on Interstate 57, which was unfortunate, because the Tweeter Center is where the big boys and big girls play. Like Earth, Wind & Fire. Like Alanis Morissette. Like Barry Manilow. And I don’t want to hear a single nasty comment about Barry Manilow. The guy rocks.

The Tweeter is what Mitch Busey and those music

industry types refer to as a ‘shed’, which is loosely defined as ‘a state-of-the-art outdoor concert arena with a bandshell that seats six thousand or so people, and a lawn area with room for another three thousand’. Do some quick addition, and you’ll see that when those places were filled up – as was the case almost every night on this particular tour – that meant there were over ten thousand watching and listening to me sing. But by that time, I was used to performing for a *lot* of people.

Right before we hit the stage, I peered out from the wings at the crowd, and while it was great to see a multitude of people in the seats, it was even greater to see the lawn. Not the people seated on the lawn, but rather the lawn itself. I pictured myself on that lawn with some wine, some bread and brie, some grapes – and me cuddled up in Seymour’s lap. Or *somebody’s* lap. Seymour’s lap, while truly comfortable, had been giving me grief. Well, not his lap, actually – more like the rest of him. What I *didn’t* picture, especially in light of me and my band’s crises, was giving those ten thousand people their money’s worth.

I had another problem that night, and from my perspective, for a few minutes, that crisis seemed as bad, if not worse than the Jenn or Seymour issues.

That problem: my bra.

Marnie, my assistant/styling goddess/masseuse/jack-ette-of-all-trades, was out for a late dinner with one of her local friends, so I was left to my own devices that night, which, considering the complexity of the infamous brassiere was not a good thing. I’d gotten better at putting on the space-age undergarment without help, but, as I learned that night, if you’re in a rush when you’re jamming on the thing all by your lonesome, it’s virtually impossible to do it right. (That’s fine German engineering for ya.) Instead of suppleness, lift and separation, I got stagnancy

and aureole. The aureole part would've thrilled Mitch Busey and the fine folks at Éclat Records no end – nothing would've made them happier than if I got all skanktafied like, say, [Allegedly Virginal Ho-Bag-Looking Blonde Diva], or [Pint-Sized Ho-Bag-Looking Sometimes Blonde Sometimes Brunette Diva], or [Has-Been Fake-Boobed Ho-Bag Diva Perpetually On the Verge of a Comeback]. These girls, the record label folks believed, were my competition. And one of the best ways to keep up with the competition, in their horny, chauvinistic minds, was to fight sex with sex.

Despite the fact that by then I'd more or less come to terms with how my body looks, I was less-than-proud of my less-than-boobs, and it would've been way too embarrassing to give the first few rows a peek at them. But it would've been way *more* embarrassing to ask Jenn or Travis or Frank for help, so I hit the stage in a state that would've made [Pint-Sized Ho-Bag-Looking Sometimes Blonde Sometimes Brunette Diva] proud.

So here's the official Murphy's Law scorecard: the bra was messed up. Jenn was mad at me – although I didn't know just how mad until after the show, when she relinquished her position as our band's keyboardist/chief composer/musical director/background vocalist. I was mad at Jenn, mostly because she was mad at me. Frank was annoyed with everybody, and justifiably so, because everybody was being annoying, myself included, and Frank didn't like it when his fellow musicians were being annoying, because Frank is all music, all the time, screw the drama. As for Travis, he was seemingly mad at . . . *nobody*. But considering what he'd been through, I was surprised our floppy-haired, sweet-natured, easygoing bass player hadn't developed an ulcer. But I had to sing, Murphy's Law notwithstanding, and I'm a trouper, always have been, and

the show must go on, so the show went on. And what a show it was.

The Hoohah Johnson Experience opened up for us, and those guys almost stole our thunder. They always kicked ass, but that night, they cranked their energy level up a notch or four. Hoohah's first single had only been out for a week, but their worshipful fans, already well familiar with their new material via some in-concert bootlegs that a fan had illegally uploaded, sang along with that soon-to-be hit with as much gusto as our worshipful fans would later sing along with 'And Then'. We knew we had to throw it down hard just to save face.

Guess what? We threw it down hard. My band mates, always in fine form, were in *finer* than fine form that hot summer night. Travis and Frank were flying in bass-and-drum heaven. Our rented string section – they were only on the road with us for a couple weeks, so I don't remember any of their individual names, please forgive me – proved to be worth the money, laying down a bed of harmonic goodness that had me imagining Seymour and I doing dirty, dirty things out on the Tweeter Center's lawn. (Yeah, the guy had become a thorn in my side, but he was great at doing those dirty, dirty things.) And Jenn – my partner, my protector, my oldest friend in the world, and the best musician I've ever performed with – kicked the piano's ass.

So we played song after song after song and then, next thing I knew, it was our third encore, and we kicked into 'And Then', for the bajillionth time. I'm not complaining about how frequently we've performed 'And Then', mind you; no matter how often I sing it for an audience – and I sing it a *lot*, at every single one of our concerts, for that matter – it gives me chills, each time, without fail. I always feel a tangible love radiating from the crowd; a love for that sweet, sexy Jenn-penned ode to romance. But how could

they not fall in love with it? The tune is so honest, and heartfelt, and sincere, and earnest, and straight-up *hot* that they can't *help* but fall in love. Not for nothin', but they also fall in love with me a little bit, because it's me who's doing the singing. But that love vibe shouldn't really be for me, in a way, because 'And Then' isn't really my song. It's Jenn's. I just borrowed it from her. And she never asked for it back, not once, not even when she was ready to strangle me with a mic cord.

We finished the song, and, with the Tweeter crowd's cheers still ringing in our ears, Gib hustled us offstage, past the dressing rooms, past our crew people, and on to our tour bus. Always precise and punctual – and I love punctuality – Gib didn't like us to dawdle. He constantly feared that some overzealous fan might find their way backstage and try to grope Jenn's top, or my bottom – or, as likely would've been the case that evening, my aureole – so night after night, the moment the curtain dropped, we were outta there.

I went into the back of the bus and tore off that stupid, German-engineered bra which, much to the chagrin of Mitch Busey and the fine folks at Éclat Records, I destroyed, costing them about \$6,500. I threw on my favorite light blue flannel jammies, slinked into the middle section of the bus, and crawled into my bunk.

What seemed like three seconds later, Jenn screamed, 'BAND MEETING!'

I rolled out of my bunk, crashed on to the floor, skinned my knee, then crawled up to the front of the bus. Jenn glared at me and said, 'Naomi, get up off your knees. Save that for Ass Boy.'

Frank looked away, embarrassed beyond words. Travis looked away, both embarrassed and disheartened.

'That's really cold,' I told Jenn.

She shrugged. 'Just calling it like I see it, honey.' Travis

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and Frank looked like they'd be happy to jump out of the bus right then and there – especially Travis – even though we were cruising along at about eighty miles an hour.

'You've made your position on the Seymour matter abundantly clear,' I said.

'And you've made your position with Ass Boy abundantly clear, too. Or should I say *positions*?'

'Now you're just being mean.'

'Hey, if the kneepads fit,' Jenn said.

Frank mumbled, 'On that note, I'd like to point out that it's way past my bedtime, and I'd really like to be in my bunk right now.'

And on that note, I'm going to tell you about Jenn Bradford.



*Jennifer Bradford: Friend Extraordinaire,
Goddess of the Piano, Giver of Awesome Advice
and Encouragement*

‘Can you imagine how that conversation would go?’ I asked Jenn the morning she unilaterally decided we were going to become rock stars. ‘“Mom, Dad, guess what, Jenn and I want to be professional musicians, so maybe you could just hand me my college fund, because it’ll be impossible to be rock stars while at the same time going to classes and stuff.” That’d go over great.’

‘It *would* go over great,’ Jenn said. ‘Your parents are mad cool, and they’d totally tell you to go for it.’ This kind of positivity is one of the many reasons I unconditionally love Jennifer Bradford. No, I don’t just love her, I *lurve* her, always have, always will. She’s the sister this only child always dreamed of.

She’s also the other half of my musical heartbeat; something I realized back in high school, back when Jenn and I would sit up in her bedroom and jam for hours at a time. We jammed on her amazing original tunes, and Joni Mitchell tunes, and Ani DiFranco tunes, and Sleater-

Kinney tunes, and Suzanne Vega tunes, and – when we got tired of making estrogen music – Beatles tunes. All this jamming did wonders for my voice, and for Jenn’s ability to compose, accompany, and harmonize. After we graduated high school, we decided to become a band. Or as much of a band as a singer and a keyboardist could be.

As it turned out, Jenn was right about my parents. Not only did they tell me to take a stab at rock stardom, but they demonstrated some serious awesomeness by giving me a chunk of my college fund without me even asking. Jenn’s parents also gave her a chunk, and next thing you know, we’re settled into a tiny, starving-artist apartment in the East Village. We knew our respective chunks wouldn’t last long, so both of us got jobs at a cute but lamely named coffee shop in Chelsea called Beaned. Bonnie, the manager, adored us primarily because we were wonderful servers. Actually, Jenn was a wonderful server who always had the customers eating out of her hand. Me, I was a decent server who managed to only spill three vanilla caramel lattes a week.

Three months into our stint, Jenn suggested to Bonnie that it might be mutually advantageous if Beaned were to present live music, specifically, us. A hardcore music fan, Bonnie agreed, and soon we were playing there every Wednesday night. Our temporary band name was The Intrepid Duo – silly, I know, but like I said, it was temporary. After about eight Wednesdays, in spite of Beaned’s limited capacity and low-tech sound system, we had some fans. That’s right, ladies and gentleman: skinny, klutzy Naomi Braver had fans.

Sadly, having fans didn’t help me in the kissable boys department. You see, at that point in my life, I longed to kiss a kissable boy, as my lips and tongue were virginal. No kisses for Naomi. I knew it would be tough to get the male division of our fan base to kiss me, because they were all in

love with Jenn, so I didn't even bother trying. Jenn – who, at the time, was juggling three or four boys, and had no interest in adding another one to the pile – sensed correctly I was bummed about my lack of success in the dating department, and when I was bummed, she was bummed, so she constantly offered me advice and encouragement, all of which was awesome.

'Naomi, let's face facts: you are a stone hottie. I know you don't think so, but you totally are. And it's not just your face and your body. It's also your voice, your demeanor, and your heart. Your insides are great, and so are your outsides. But I have to tell you, honey, your outsides could use some tweaking.

'Now I know you're Miss Anti-Make-Up, so I'm not talking a Tammy Faye Baker makeover here. Nothing drastic or dramatic. Just some Lancôme foundation – Maquicontrole is my personal fave – and maybe some Stila demi-blush – rose amber would look *so* phenomenal on you. Also, maybe a just a touch of Victoria's Secret Bronze Goddess Mosaic Power, and maybe some L'Oreal Endlessly Kissable – Shamelessly Nude would be a great color, because it's almost like you're wearing nothing at all – and a little bit of Christian Dior Maximize Mascara, and I'm thinking a scooch of Bare Escentuals shadow, and some nice Vincent Longo eyeliner.

'Oh, quit making that face. I know you think that's a lot of make-up, but it's not, and we won't put it on all at once, obviously, but what we put on, we'll put on so artfully that you'll look one hundred per cent natural. Okay, maybe ninety-six per cent natural, but that's cool. I've been operating at ninety-two per cent for the last five years, and that seems to be working pretty okay.

'We'll also hit Seventh Street, and go to all those thrift stores, and find you some cute little outfits that'll show off

your figure. Yeah, I know you think you have no figure, but you *totally* do. You have kind of a heroin chic model thing going on, except you look healthy. If you work it right, you could totally be Beaned's official long, lanky model girl. You are The Woman, with a capital T, and a capital W.

'And that voice of yours? Now I know that *you* know that you're the best singer in the world, even though you'd never say it out loud. And you talk so sexy. Deep. Throaty. God, imagine what you could do to boys with that voice if you put your mind to it. I mean, if this singing thing doesn't work out – which it will, so I shouldn't even have to say that – but if it doesn't, you could make a ton of money doing phone sex. Work it, girl. Work it *hard*.'

She was inspirational, no doubt. So the next Saturday at Beaned, after a rigorous make-up session, an excellent reason to 'work it hard' dropped right into my lap.