

A high-contrast, black and white close-up portrait of Bono, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting his facial features against a dark background.

# SURRENDER

40 songs, one story

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By  
**BONO**

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40 SONGS, ONE STORY

# BONO



ALFRED A. KNOPF NEW YORK 2022

THIS IS A BORZOI BOOK  
PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

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[www.aaknopf.com](http://www.aaknopf.com)

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2022938826

ISBN 9780525521044 (hardcover)

ISBN 9780525521051 (ebook)

Drawings by Bono

Creative design by Bono with Gavin Friday

Cover photograph © Anton Corbijn

Cover design by Bono, Gavin Friday, and Shaughn McGrath

Author photograph © John Hewson

ep\_prh\_6.0\_141716075\_c0\_r0

*For Ali*

I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea  
Sometimes I turn, there's someone there, at times it's only me.

—Bob Dylan, “Every Grain of Sand”

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# PART I

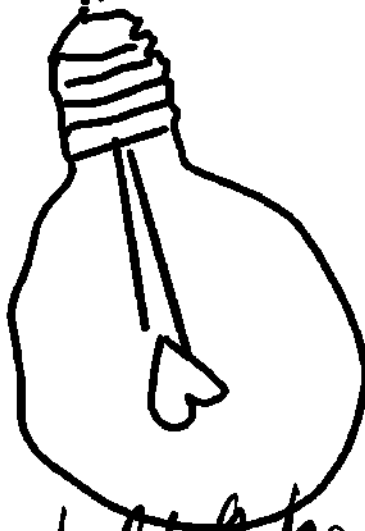
I can't change the world but I can change the world in  
me.

—SFX Theatre, Dublin, December 1982

## Lights of Home

*I shouldn't be here 'cause I should be dead  
I can see the lights in front of me  
I believe my best days are ahead  
I can see the lights in front of me.*

*a bicuspid view of the world  
starts way before*



*I am told I have  
an eccentric heart.....*

I was born with an eccentric heart. In one of the chambers of my heart, where most people have three doors, I have two. Two swinging doors, which at Christmas 2016 were coming off their hinges. The aorta is your main artery, your lifeline, carrying the blood oxygenated by your lungs, and becoming your life. But we have discovered that my aorta has been stressed over time and developed a blister. A blister that's about to burst, which would put me in the next life faster than I can make an emergency call. Faster than I can say goodbye to this life.

So, here I am. Mount Sinai Hospital. New York City.

Looking down on myself from above with the arc lights reflecting on the stainless steel. I'm thinking the light is harder than the steel counter I'm lying on. My body feels separate from me. It is soft flesh and hard bone.

It's not a dream or vision, but it feels as if I'm being sawn in half by a magician. This eccentric heart has been frozen.

Some remodeling needs to take place apart from all this hot blood swirling around and making a mess, which blood tends to do when it's not keeping you alive.

Blood and air.

Blood and guts.

Blood and brains are what's required right now, if I'm to continue to sing my life and live it. My blood.

The brains and the hands of the magician who is standing over me and can turn a really bad day into a really good one with the right strategy and execution.

Nerves of steel and blades of steel.

Now this man is climbing up and onto my chest, wielding his blade with the combined forces of science and butchery. The forces required to break and enter someone's heart. The magic that is medicine.

I know it's not going to feel like a good day when I wake up after these eight hours of surgery, but I also know that waking up is better than the alternative.

Even if I can't breathe and feel as if I am suffocating. Even if I'm desperately drawing for air and can't find any.

Even if I'm hallucinating, 'cause I'm seeing visions now and it's all getting a little William Blake.

I'm so cold. I need to be beside you, I need your warmth, I need your loveliness. I'm dressed for winter. I have big boots on in bed, but I'm freezing to death.

I am dreaming.

I am in a scene from some movie where the life is draining out of the actor in the lead role. In the last moments of his life he is vexed and questioning his great love.

"Why are you going? Don't leave me!"

"I'm right here," his lover reminds him. "I haven't moved."

"What? It's not you leaving? Am I the one walking away? Why am I walking away? I don't want to leave you. Please, don't let me leave."

There are some dirty little secrets about success that I'm just waking up to. And from.

Success as an outworking of dysfunction, an excuse for obsessive-compulsive tendencies.

Success as a reward for really, really hard work, which may be obscuring some kind of neurosis.

Success should come with a health warning—for the workaholic and for those around them.

Success may be propelled by some unfair advantage or circumstance. If not privilege, then a gift, a talent, or some other form of inherited wealth.

But hard work also hides behind some of these doors.

I always thought mine was a gift for finding top-line melody not just in music but in politics, in commerce, and in the world of ideas in general.

Where others would hear harmony or counterpoint, I was better at finding the top line in the room, the hook, the clear thought. Probably because I had to sing it or sell it.

—

But now I see that my advantage was something more prosaic, more base. Mine was a genetic advantage, the gift of...air.

That's right.

Air.

“Your man has a lot of firepower in that war chest of his.”

That’s the man who sawed through my breastbone speaking to my wife and next of kin, Ali, after the operation.

“We needed extra-strong wire to sew him up. He’s probably at about 130 percent of normal lung capacity for his age.”

He doesn’t use the word “freak,” but Ali tells me she has started thinking of me as the Man from Atlantis, from that 1970s sci-fi series about an amphibian detective.

David Adams, the man I will owe my life to, the surgeon-magician, speaks with a southern twang, and in my heightened Blakean state I begin to confuse him with the crazed villain of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. I overhear him asking Ali about tenors, who are not known to run around a stage hitting high notes.

“Aren’t tenors supposed to stand with two legs apart, firmly rooted in the ground, before even considering a top C?”

“Yes,” I say, without opening my mouth and before the drugs wear off. “A tenor has to turn his head into a sound box and his body into a bellows to make those glasses smash.”

I, on the other hand, have been racing around arenas and sprinting through stadiums for thirty years singing “Pride (In the Name of Love),” the high A or B depending on the year.

In the 1980s the stylish English songster Robert Palmer stopped Adam Clayton to plead with him. “Will you ever get your singer to sing a few steps lower. He’ll make it easier on himself, and all of us who have to listen.”

Air is stamina.

Air is the confidence to take on big challenges or big opponents.

Air is not the will to conquer whatever Everest you will encounter in your life, but it is the ability to endure the climb.

Air is what you need on any north face.

Air is what gives a small kid on a playground the belief that he won’t be bullied, or if he is, that the bully will have the air knocked out of him.

And here I am now without it, for the first time.

In a hospital emergency room, without air.

Without breath.

The names we give God.

All breath.

Jehovaaaah.

Allaaaah.

Yeshuaaaaah.

Without air...without an air...without an aria.

I am terrified because for the first time ever, I reach for my faith and I can't find it.

Without air.

Without a prayer.

I am a tenor singing underwater. I can feel my lungs filling up. I am drowning.

I am hallucinating. I am seeing a vision of my father in a hospital bed and me sleeping beside him, on a mattress on the floor. Beaumont Hospital, Dublin, the summer of 2001. He is deep breathing, but it's getting shallower and shallower like the grave in his chest. He shouts my name, confusing me with my brother or the other way around.

"Paul. Norman. Paul."

"Da."

I jump up and call a nurse.

"Are you okay, Bob?" she whispers in his ear.

We are in a world of percussive, animated whispers, a world of sibilance, his tenor now become short tinny breaths, an s after every exhalation.

"Yesssss sssss sss."

His Parkinson's disease has stolen the sonority.

"I want to go home ssssss I want to get out of here sssss."

"Say it again, Da."

Like the nurse, I am leaning over him, my ear close to his mouth.

Silence.

Followed by another silence.

Followed by "FUCK OFF!"

There is something perfectly imperfect about my da's exit from this world. I don't believe he was telling me or the very vigilant night nurse to

fuck off. I'd like to believe he was addressing the monkey that had been on his back for a large part of his life.

He had told me in those final days that when accepting his cancers, he'd lost his faith, but he also told me that I should never lose mine. That it was the most interesting thing about me.

Emboldened, I read to him from a psalm of King David, Psalm 32.

David was in a fair bit of trouble himself. Da was not in the mood for a sermon and I saw his eyes roll, likely not to heaven.

*While I kept silence, my body wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.  
Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;  
at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach  
them.  
You are a hiding-place for me; you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.*

Was this for him, or me?

The old man confessed his admiration for what seemed like me having “a two-way conversation with the man upstairs.”

“Mine is all one-way, but knock it off, will you? I'm trying to get some peace here.” Well, he didn't get it here, but I want to believe he found it there.

Where's there? Home.

I don't know if I know what that is.

I say goodbye. I take a deep breath and head off to look for it.

—

Spring 2015.

More cold white fluorescent light. Steel and glass.

Nausea.

This time it's no life-threatening affair. I'm staring into a mirror in the bathroom adjacent to a dressing room under an ice hockey arena in

Vancouver, Canada. It's the first night of the Innocence + Experience Tour.

I was never vain when I was younger. I would avoid standing in front of mirrors. But here I am, in the white-tiled bathroom, staring at my own face to see if, on some second glance, it might become more attractive.

I can hear the rumble of a crowd through the walls, singing along to Gary Numan's "Cars": "Here in my car / I feel safest of all / I can lock all my doors / It's the only way to live / In cars."

—

I am in the future I dreamed of when I first heard this synthesizer song in the late 1970s. I can't believe that now, turned fifty-five, I've opted for the DIY bottle-blond peroxide of that period. The color of a chicken wing, as a Spanish reviewer will later suggest. The rumble from the arena only increases the curdling of excitement I feel. I walk back into the dressing room, itself a time capsule, and complain that it looks just like the one we had on the last tour. I'm told it's been the same one for twenty years. Green hessian, fairy lights, tobacco leather couch. After all this time, why is getting ready to walk out and meet 18,474 of your closest friends so nerve-racking? It's the opening night of a world tour, but as usual I'm not alone.

Larry has an angelic aura about him, the look of someone who's seen through to the other side. I think that perhaps he has, having buried his father just yesterday. Adam looks like the lead in an art-house movie. Unruffled. Edge is tense and intense, but just about able to cover it up.

As we do before every show, we pray.

Sometimes it can feel as if we're strangers, praying to find the intimacy of a band that could be useful to our audience this evening. Useful? To music. To some higher purpose. In some strangely familiar way we are changed. We begin our prayers as comrades; we end them as friends finding a different image of ourselves, as well as the audience we're about to meet, who will change us again.

To be useful is a curious prayer. Unromantic. A little dull even, but it's at the heart of who we are and why we're still here as a band. Men who met as boys. Men who have broken the promise that's at the very heart of



rock 'n' roll, which is that you can have the world but in return the world will have you. You can have your messiah complex, but you must die on a cross aged thirty-three, or everyone has the right to ask for their money back. We've turned them down. So far.

We are men who bear some scar tissue from our various struggles with the world but whose eyes are remarkably clear considering the vicissitudes and surreality of a life playing stadiums for thirty-five years.

Now, through the walls, I can hear Patti Smith singing "People Have the Power," the signal that we have five minutes and ten seconds before showtime, five minutes and ten seconds before we find out if we still have the thing that people have turned up for, which is not just our music or our friendship. What's on offer is our band as a chemistry set, a chemical reaction between our audience and us. That's what makes a good band great.

The roar of the crowd rises as we head down the corridor from the dressing room, a roar that turns this mouse into a lion. I have my fist in the air as I walk to the stage, as I get ready to step inside the song. I will try over the next pages to explain what that means. But after forty years, I know if I can stay inside the songs, they will sing me and this night will be not work but play.

Nearly twenty thousand people are singing the choral refrain of "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)," and as Edge, Larry, and Adam walk down to the front of the stage, I walk up alone to meet them from the opposite end of the arena. I walk through our audience, through this noise. In my mind I am seventeen, walking from my house on the Northside of Dublin, all the way down Cedarwood Road, on the way to rehearsals with these men all those years ago, when they were boys too.

I am leaving home to find home. And I am singing.

## Out of Control

*Monday morning*  
*Eighteen years of dawning*  
*I said how long*  
*Said how long.*

# The made of Joey Ramone



I'm jumping around the living room of 10 Cedarwood Road to the sound of "Glad to See You Go" from the Ramones' *Leave Home*.

*You gotta go go go go goodbye  
Glad to see you go go go go goodbye*

It is 1978, the day of my eighteenth birthday.

These songs are so simple, and yet they express a complexity that's way more relevant to my life than Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Which I've just finished. Which took me three and a half weeks to read. This album takes only twenty-nine minutes and fifty-seven seconds. Songs so simple that even I can play them on guitar. And I can't play guitar.

Songs so simple even I might be able to write one. This would be some kind of personal revolution, the reverberations of which might be felt all the way upstairs to the empty room of my older brother, Norman. Or, more important still, down the hallway to the kitchen, where the da is sitting.

My da, who wants to talk to me about getting a job. A job!

A job is a thing where you do something you don't really like for eight hours a day for five or six days a week in return for money to help you do the stuff on the weekend you want to do all the time.

I know I would like to avoid work. I know that if I could do what I love, then I would never have to work a day in my life. But there's a problem. Even in my pimpled teenage obnoxiousness I know that this is unlikely if I'm not great at something.

And I am not great at something. I am not great at anything.

Well, I'm a pretty good mimic. My friend Reggie Manuel says the reason I ran off with his girlfriend Zandra was all down to my Ian Paisley impression. I'm quite good at channeling the bellicose ranting of the Reverend Ian Paisley, leader of the unionists in the North.

"*NOY SRRNDRRR.*" He would belch.

My Ian Paisley makes Zandra laugh so much that I tell myself she is vulnerable to my advances, but I also know she might dump me for Keith what's-his-face because it's not enough just to be funny. You have to be smart as well, and I am smart enough to know I'm not smart. Enough.

It wasn't so long ago that I was smart at school, but lately I can't concentrate on anything except girls and music. I'm smart enough to see a correlation.

I can paint quite well but not like my best friend, Guggi. I can write prose quite well but not as well as that gifted know-it-all Neil McCormick, who writes for the school magazine. I've played with the idea of being a journalist, fantasized about being a foreign correspondent, reporting from