

AS EASY AS A NUCLEAR WAR

SHORT STORIES INSPIRED BY
DURAN DURAN SONG TITLES

PAUL CUDDIHY

First published in 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the copyright holder

Copyright © Paul Cuddihy 2015
Published by Drone Publishing

The right of Paul Cuddihy to be identified as the author of the work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

Cover design: Siobhann Caulfield
Cover photograph: Tony Hamilton
(Special thanks to Joe Hamilton for his enthusiasm and patience during the photo-shoot for the cover)
Additional artwork: Tam McKinley

ISBN: 1499337507
ISBN-13: 978-1499337501

Track List

1	Rio	1
2	Like An Angel	3
3	Skin Trade	13
4	All You Need Is Now	29
5	Come Undone	35
6	Hold Back The Rain	40
7	Planet Earth	43
8	Of Crime And Passion	66
9	Careless Memories	72
10	Sound Of Thunder	80
11	Girls On Film	89
12	Electric Barbarella	95
13	Save A Prayer	97
14	The Wild Boys	121
15	Someone Else Not Me	132
16	The Chauffeur	139
17	Hungry Like The Wolf	146
18	Last Chance On The Stairway	162
19	Violence of Summer (Love's Taking Over)	164
20	The Reflex	174
21	Ordinary World	184
22	Lonely In Your Nightmare	192
23	A View To A Kill	201
24	Pressure Off	223
25	Is There Something I Should Know	231

PAUL CUDDIHY

The cool thing about reading is that when you read a short story or you read something that takes your mind and expands where your thoughts can go, that's powerful.

TAYLOR SWIFT

I used to take my short stories to girls' homes and read them to them. Can you imagine the reaction reading a short story to a girl instead of pawing her?

RAY BRADBURY

You listen to a piece of music and it will remind you of something – it might make you happy, it might make you sad, but it is very emotive. And I think that Duran Duran have always understood that.

NICK RHODES

Careless Memories

Once asked dad his proudest moment. Quick as a flash he replied, “Italy winning the 1982 World Cup.”

Never mind the birth of his four children, his wedding day or the moment he first set eyes on mum – fifteen years of flaming hair hiding behind her parents, avoiding eye-contact with the boy who set her heart racing. It was love at first sight that summer’s day on the seafront at Ayr.

“July the fifteenth, nineteen forty-eight,” mum would say whenever we asked her to recount the story. Dad sat in the armchair that was his and his alone, shaking his head, but we saw the sparkle in his eyes when he looked at mum, or whispered sweet nothings in his smoky-breathed Italian accent when he thought no-one was watching. He loved his Eileen with as much passion and intensity as when he first set eyes on her, a schoolgirl on holiday with her family, him a young man of twenty-one, selling soothing ice-cream for parched throats.

They never spoke that first time. Mum just nodded when asked if she’d like a cone. But dad sought her out, appearing at the beach or in the expanse of grass behind the seafront where mum and Aunt Margaret played with a ball, or even at their table one night as they sat eating fish suppers in a cafe.

Francisco Renucci – “Everyone calls me Franco,” he told her in between throwing the ball to her or Margaret. He’d join them when his ice-cream sold out rather than return to his father’s shop for fresh

supplies, which would later earn him a clip round the ear and a volley of abuse in machine-gun Italian. There were no objections from either girl. Who wouldn't want to be seen playing with the boy whose looks had caught the attention of many other girls along the promenade? But Margaret was only twelve and while she might have harboured a crush for Franco, he only had eyes for mum.

Her age was a major stumbling block, as was the age gap when that was discovered, and it took a combination of arguments sparked by her fiery, Irish temper that took an eternity to rouse but was a tempest in full flow, and dad's persistence – travelling up from Ayr to the south side of Glasgow every weekend for chaperoned dates – which eventually wore down my grandparents' objections. Just under two years after that first encounter at the seaside, my mum, having turned seventeen a fortnight before, walked down the aisle of St John's Church in the Gorbals on the arm of her father. Aunt Margaret followed behind, clutching a feeble bouquet of flowers, while my grandmother sobbed quietly in the front row, oblivious to the occasional frowns from Father O'Hara standing at the foot of the altar waiting for the bride-to-be to reach the handsome young man standing proudly in the freshly pressed black suit he'd borrowed from a cousin. The church has long since vanished, erased like so much of the past, along with the street it once stood on.

My favourite picture of my parents is a black and white image taken outside the church – the newly-married Mr and Mrs Renucci. She's wearing a nervous smile, perhaps with thoughts of her impending wedding night weighing heavily on her mind, while he

grins, probably with slightly different thoughts of the impending wedding night. I got the photograph blown up and framed for their thirtieth wedding anniversary and it continues to hang proudly in their living room, a time of innocence caught forever on camera. I wonder if dad, when he used to look at it, remembered the day or recognised the young couple in the frame.

There are many things he no longer remembers. Our names. Who we are. Where he is. Mum makes a daily pilgrimage to the care home he now stays in, praying for a rare moment of recognition but knowing he will greet her like a stranger. I prefer to go myself. Mum's pain and dad's bewilderment is often too hard to witness.

We sit and talk. Well, I talk and he stares into space. On sunny days I dress him in his warmest clothes and we wander outside and park ourselves on one of the wooden benches planted in the middle of the garden. I don't know if the fresh air does him any good, but there are times when we almost have a conversation. The weather. Birds singing in the trees. The state of the garden. It's not much but it means everything to me. I fill the inevitable silences with my own memories, which seem to grow more vivid as his fade from view.

"Remember when Italy won the World Cup? Remember that, dad?"

Of course he doesn't. Proudest moment of his life. Once he would talk about it with the enthusiasm of a small child describing the presents Santa had brought, and I would hang on to every word. I remember it myself, the house a sea of bodies like someone was bidding to make the Guinness Book of Records for

the most people crammed into a semi-detached, three-bedroom house, everyone wearing the sparkling blue of the Azzurri or the red, white and green of the Italian flag. I had draped one flag out of my bedroom window, eager to let everyone know where our loyalties lay.

Dad, the self-appointed cheerleader, wandered from room to room, re-filling glasses of wine, handing out cans of Tennent's lager, breaking into chants of 'Italia! Italia!' at every opportunity. We were split between living room and dining room, with a television in each, all eyes glued to the screen, a collective prayer rising up for an Italian victory.

And when Marco Tardelli scored the third goal, the goal that would bring the World Cup back to Rome, there was cheering, screaming, people jumping and hugging like a sudden storm of flesh, wave after wave rising and falling with joy. Dad stood amidst this tempest as bodies bumped into him, seemingly oblivious to the chaos. I was hugging my sister, Maria, the two of us screaming in unison and jumping up and down, but I could see dad, not moving or shouting or celebrating. He was crying. Tears streamed down his face and he made no effort to wipe them away. For a fleeting moment I was alarmed but almost instantly I realised they were tears of joy. Mum saw him too and she glided over to him, reaching up and brushing away a tear from his cheek. He moved towards her hand and kissed it gently. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

Then Alzheimer's came along, messing up the files in his mind, mixing the index cards so that he could no longer organise his daily life. The magic of that moment, when his beloved mother country brought

tears to his eyes, was gone, turned to dust like the pages of an ancient manuscript touched by rough hands. Just another sadness to add to the pile already accumulated these past two years. No matter how often I talk about it, describing the goals like a football commentator, recalling the ecstasy of Tardelli's face as he ran to the touchline, there's not even the faintest flicker of recognition.

We're sitting in the television room one day, dad in the armchair directly facing the screen while I slouch on the couch, flicking through an old copy of *Hello*, only vaguely aware of the droning noise in the background.

"Forza Italia," my dad says in a weak voice. I sit up, startled, letting the magazine fall to the floor.

"What did you say? Dad? ... Dad?"

He continues to stare at the television and I notice for the first time the blue shirts darting about on the screen. It's a football game, Portsmouth against Grimsby Town. His pupils dance excitedly like bees in a jam jar as he follows the players chasing the ball. I've not seen him so alert for a long time. Grimsby in black and white stripes, Portsmouth in the blue of Italy.

"Forza Italia," my dad says again. His hands grip the arms of his chair so tightly I can see the veins sticking out.

"Dad, it's not Italy," I say. He doesn't hear me. I watch him for a few minutes. It's almost like he's back, good as new, eyes glued to the television, shouting for Italy. I know it can't last, and it doesn't. A break in the action for adverts is like a light switch being flicked off and he is once more sitting in darkness.

I order the DVD that night. I don't tell anyone. Not mum or my sisters, not even Kate, though I'm tempted as we lie in bed. I don't because it's my secret. Mine and dad's.

He's already sitting in the television room when Helen, one of the care workers, shows me into the room.

"Franco, you've got a visitor. It's Paolo. Your son."

Dad turns towards the door, looking directly at Helen for a moment before turning back to the television.

"We'll be fine," I say, shuffling past her and making for the television.

"Just give me a shout if you need anything," she says before disappearing out the room, closing the door behind her.

"Hi, dad." I lightly kiss his forehead and then kneel down in front of the television. He watches me, his head bobbing up and down slightly. A trail of saliva hangs out the side of his mouth and I stop to wipe it clean with a tissue.

I remove the contents of the bag – a DVD, a large Italian flag and a box of drawing pins. I unravel the flag and began pinning it on the wall behind the television. Dad's eyes flicker between the screen and me, though whether it is the flag or the blue Italian football top I'm wearing which catches his attention I don't know, but I tell myself he has recognised something even if he can't explain what it is.

The flag securely attached to the wall, I take the disc out of its case and slide it into the machine. I fast-forwarded through the copyright warnings and adverts for other DVDs until the main feature is

about to start. I pause the film and 'The 1982 World Cup Final' hovers on screen in gold lettering against a black background. I stand up, my knees cracking as I straighten my body and look down on dad, whose gaze now rests on the flag.

What is he thinking of? Can he see his younger self running through the dirt track roads of Badolato, the town in southern Italy where he and his family lived until they emigrated to Scotland in nineteen thirty-one, as much for his father's own safety as for any dreams of making their fortune? Socialists did not tend to have a long life-span in Mussolini's Italy. Is it the barbed wire of the camp on the Isle of Man where he and his father and his brothers were interned during the Second World War? He would lightly touch the metal with his fingertips and stare at the carpet of green and yellow which stretched as far as the eye could see, dreaming of running freely through those fields until his lungs were fit to burst.

Or does he remember Sunday, July 11th, 1982, and all the people packed into our house? His friends. His family. His Eileen.

I sit down on the table beside his chair and point the remote control at the DVD machine. The television screen dances back into the life with the regal tones of a brass band announcing the main attraction. Then the Italian and West German players stride out of the tunnel into the humid Madrid night. I glance at dad but immediately look back to the screen. I want to see his reaction but I'm not sure I can bear it if there is nothing.

I wait for the goals, hoping that they will provide the catalyst for something ... anything. I'm almost tempted to press fast forward.

“Foull! Dirty German bastard.”

I nearly fall off the table as dad shouts at the German defender Paul Breitner, who has just fouled Roberto Bettega. I burst out laughing. Accompanying the words are the faintest traces of a hand gesture. He had always been so articulate with his hands and arms, unable to say anything without painting a picture with his limbs on an invisible canvas. The rest of the game is punctuated with occasional shouts, usually abusive and anti-German. It’s more than I could have hoped for.

With eight minutes of the match remaining, Marco Tardelli scores *that* goal. I’m on my feet cheering, the emotion of the occasion in the television room sweeping me up like a leaf caught by a sudden gust of wind while dad claps. He claps. Tears well up in my eyes and roll down my cheeks and I have a sudden, overwhelming urge to hug him. He sits, a smile on his face that I imagine he wore when he first saw mum on that Ayr seafront, and he waves his arms in front of him.

“We’ve won the cup, Paolo,” he says and I cry. He remembered my name. He remembers.

He retains the nervous excitement of the game even after it finishes and Italy have paraded the trophy round the stadium, though I can see that it is beginning to fade. I stop the DVD and return to the start, wiping my tear-stained face with my sleeve as I wind through the adverts again. Pressing the play button, I kneel at dad’s side as the music begins and we wait to see if Italy will win the World Cup again.

This story was first published in The Scotsman newspaper in July 2014 under the title, Proudest Moment’.

Electric Barbarella

I wrote a two-chord song which I played to my family. Everyone applauded politely but I knew there was something missing.

“It’s a bit too political,” my dad said.

“It’s a bit too naughty,” my mum said.

“Can you play Electric Barbarella?” my gran asked.

“Sorry,” I said. “I don’t know that one. Who sings it?”

“Duran Duran. It’s not one of their best-known songs, but it’s still a great wee tune. You should learn it.”

She started humming it.

“Maybe I will,” I said.

I didn’t have a title for my own song but the chorus went like this:

Is that a weapon of mass destruction in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?

If Hans Blix turned up on your doorstep would you invite him in for tea?

And if he discovered you’d run out of biscuits there would be a ruction.

So let me get my hands on your weapon of mass destruction.’

The chord change was from ‘G’ to ‘C’ every eight bars and when I played it in my bedroom it sounded fine.

“What about putting an A-minor in the middle?” my gran suggested. I just laughed but when I tried it, the difference was amazing.

“How did you know to do that?” I asked.

“Nick Rhodes told me,” she said, winking at me.

“Who’s he?”

She just smiled, and started humming the song again, and I guessed it was probably an old boyfriend she didn’t want to talk about.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Cuddihy is a Duran Duran fan, and has been ever since he first heard *Planet Earth* back in 1981. He was fourteen at the time. He is considerably older now, and maybe even a little wiser, yet he still remains a devoted Duranie (And, no, that's not Cockney rhyming slang!)

If he had to choose just one Duran Duran song for his Desert Island Discs, it would be *Save a Prayer*. If he was allowed two, then he'd also opt for *Secret Oktober*.