



Fleetwood Mac

"Landslide"

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07/1975

Reprise

# Landslide

Laura Eppinger

"Turn this off! Her voice is ugly!" I was a sharp-tongued 10-year-old having an ungracious reaction to the voice of Stevie Nicks.

*The Dance*, Fleetwood Mac's reunion album, had just been released and my father was debuting it through the centerpiece of the living room—his five-disc CD changer. In our house, a shrine.

Mom pulled me aside and encouraged me, "If you don't like her voice, listen to the lyrics and try to image why Dad likes this song."

But there could be no such empathy from fundamentalist me. Not in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Could I imagine myself a father of four by age 30, patriarch in the childhood home he bought from his parents, raising his brood while he watched his father's generation age and die? Of course not.

As a matter of fact, I still can't. But my heart has thawed on the matter of "Landslide."

By god I tried to leave our Polish Catholic enclave off the Raritan River. I did for a while. I got the wind knocked out of me out in the wider world while I was pursuing activist and community development work. Suddenly I was back home living at the top of the hill on our dead-end street.

I was trying to build something like a career when a mismanaged youth program fell into my hands. I wanted to write grants to fund staff, I wanted to evaluate lesson plans. Instead I got: A room full of 20 eager, dangerously quiet teenagers asking if I'd take over as leader. Of course I said yes.

I didn't think I liked high schoolers. And then I met this group. These anime-loving, politically savvy, kind yet fierce kiddos who showed up to meetings. And recruited their friends. They performed garden work as community service. They led fun programs for younger children. They translated important documents into Spanish. They led and they served. They just needed an adult in the room.

A year passed this way and I had to admit it: I liked teenagers. Well, these guys at least.

Every spring we elected new club officers: President, VP and the rest. The teens gave impassioned speeches before the club election, listing off the ways they sacrificed for this club, the hours of service put in, their vision for the future.

As if struck from my horse on the way to Damascus, I saw for the first time: *These young people love this program they built and now run. And I love them for it.*

Later, after dropping off several of them at home (their neighborhoods could get rough and it was after dark), I caught all of "Landslide" on the radio. I teared up and wasn't sure why. I could only think, "I get it now. I may never have kids of my own but I know what it is to be in awe of them, and to love them."

I still had a lot to learn.

Perhaps the emotional urgency of the job was ever-heightened by the fact that funding was never secure. Often I wrote grants to pay myself. When it came, funding was always short-term. I'd buy myself one year at a time, at my dream job.

Once a year I'd have a panic attack thinking, "This is the year it all goes away. This is the year we don't get funded."

These were morose times indeed. When I tried to take stock on paper, I could see that I had: a used car that was falling apart, piece by expensive piece. A lease I could not afford to be on alone. \$2,000 in student loan payments to make PER MONTH. One full time job that took up my days and weeknights and weekends and I didn't care because I loved it. House cleaning gigs off Craigslist, hostess gigs, ad content writing, food service shifts, gigs, gigs, gigs to fill the gaps.

But these kids. They were my pride and my wealth. Working with them was probably the only thing I've done in my life that was worth doing. I could see so clearly that they were golden, inside and out, and it was my privilege to know them.

Ah Jesus. I want to stop writing.

In spite of all the Catholic school I am really good at birth control. I'd made it into my 30s without ever having to look at a person younger than me and think, "I've been afraid of changing because I built my life around you."

...But then of course, I'd only rented apartments near this job. I broke my back moonlighting as an early morning barista so I could buy a new (used) car in time for County Fair, when I'd be driving kiddos to work our booth, and I didn't want them to suffer with the broken A.C. one more summer (I'd made them do that for two already).

I knew my seasons based on community events: Late fall meant Trunk or Treat, spring meant community garden work, summer meant camp.

I never wanted to work with them, but soon I couldn't imagine having a job without them.

You know what is coming, because this is a song about love and loss, about love as grief. After three years of event-planning, supply-carrying, program-leading and ride-giving to the kids I love best, no one would pay me to do this job anymore. I got laid off on my birthday in July.

The kids are all right! They graduate high school and become campus activists and honors scholars and pre-med candidates. I'm not sorry for them. I'm sorry for *me*. And sorriest when I am stuck in traffic and do you know what song is a staple on classic rock radio? The studio version of "Landslide." CBS FM and Lite FM and loads of stops while I'm turning the dial to fight back tears play "Landslide" live regularly. Indie stations keep the weirdo Billy Corrigan cover in rotation.

I can't escape, not toiling in failing New Jersey suburbs, not crying in traffic, not student debt, and certainly not my own fragile heart.

That voice I heard in 1997 was raw and resigned and ambivalent and I was determined not to have an adulthood like that. But that's the song in my heart all the same.

The landslide brought me down.