

# NYLON

no doubt's  
gwen stefani

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# gwen's Kingdom

AFTER TWO YEARS AT WORK ON A NEW ALBUM, NO DOUBT'S GWEN STEFANI RETURNS TO SATURN – AND ROCK STARDOM. IN THIS MODERN FAIRY TALE, SHE'S REMODELING THE CASTLE AND RETHINKING MARRIAGE.

BY SEVEN MCDONALD

PHOTOGRAPHED BY JONTY DAVIES

STYLIST: HAVANA LAFFITTE  
MAKEUP: MATHU ANDERSEN  
HAIR: DANILO FOR JOHN FRIEDA NYC  
SHOT AT MILK STUDIOS

Top by Diane Von Furstenberg, diamond choker by Illuminata for Fragments

"The bathroom is a mess," says Gwen Stefani, pushing open the door. "We're going to redo it." Glitter and appliqué stars lay on the side of the tub, left over from a makeup session earlier this morning with her four-and-a-half-year-old niece Madeline. "She's so rad," Gwen smiles. A drop cloth leads out to an adjoining balcony, where a house painter practically appears to be whistling while he works.

Outside, the sky is Disney blue. It's spring. Butterflies land on blooming jasmine. The driveway to Stefani's Mediterranean-style castle, tucked in the hills of Los Feliz's old Hollywood glamour, is steep and winding, and at this moment, its heavy metal gate sits wide open. Workers are high on scaffolding, busy giving the place a complete overhaul. The stone walkway is covered with a child's colored chalk drawings (courtesy of Madeline, who, along with her single mom, Gwen's little sister, Jill, lives here as well). In this house, girls really do rule. The youngest women of the Stefani clan are presently redefining the family unit. "I'm like the bad dad," explains Gwen. "The one who's always leaving."

This is a postmodern fairy tale. And even though this MTV princess has everything a girl could want, Gwen remains down-to-earth and as open as the gate out front. It's hard to imagine many celebrities who would suggest their home, while under renovation, be the location for a late-morning interview. Yet this may be the precise secret to Stefani's success. She has never sold us a bill of goods. She has always been completely honest about who she is – vulnerable, unpretentious. Just Gwen. The moral of the story may be simple: Girl tells the truth, we identify.

Gwen's hot pink hair is up in a messy ponytail. Her expressive

eyes are lined maroon, and her perfect bow lips painted to match. Padding her barefoot magenta toes through the dramatic hallways of her first home, she continues, "We've lived here for two years. That's how long it took to make the record." No Doubt's much-anticipated fourth album, *Return of Saturn*, has proved worth the wait. The first single, "Ex-Boyfriend," a frenzied ska kiss-off inspired by an off-again period in her four-year, now very much on-again, relationship with Bush's alarmingly sexy frontman Gavin Rossdale, has earned Gwen the impressive placement as the first girl in over a year to be #1 on So. Cal's preeminent radio station, KROQ – a fact she is modestly surprised by, even though No Doubt's last album, *Tragic Kingdom*, sold 15 million copies worldwide. "I just thought we'd been gone so long," she says, "that we would have to start all over."

Dressed in sweats, the responsibility of being a trendsetter seems to be the furthest thing from her mind. Today, as her song goes, Gwen is just a girl. Not exactly the same high-octane, vinyl-pant-wearing girl that spawned countless Gwenabees – the affectionate term coined for the fashion-conscious fans who made a healthy contribution to the gross national product a few years back with their collective retail raid of cropped tops, peroxide, and Indian bindis. Rather, she's just a girl who is feeling the first bit of exhaustion after returning to the hustle of rock stardom. One who is just wondering how she'll manage balancing all those adult things: career, family, boyfriend, self. Meandering down a circular staircase, past religious art from India and the Catholic Church, Gwen shrugs, "I'm a lady now. It's weird."

For the two years that Gwen has been living here, she has



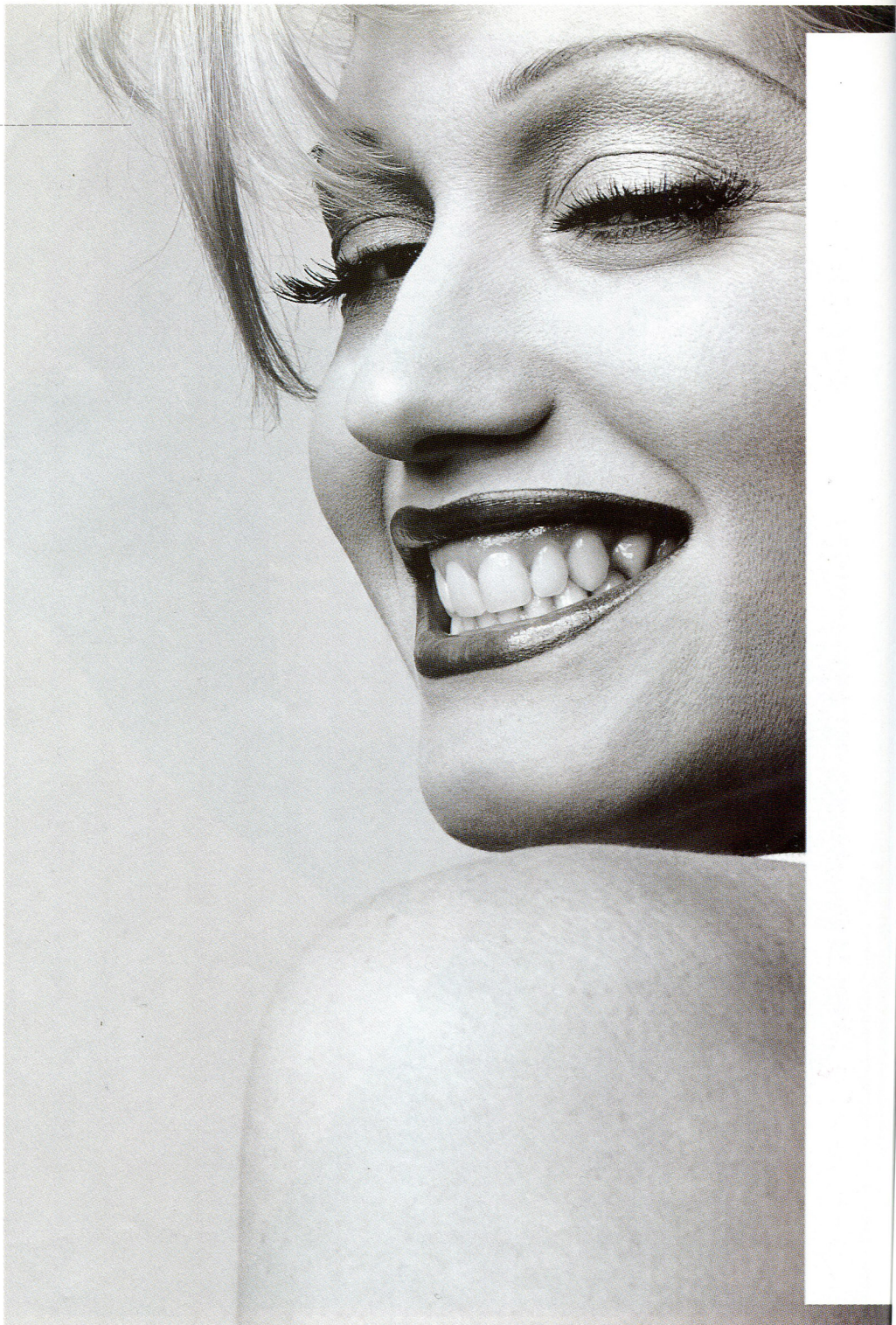
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Tank by Calvin Klein Underwear, skirt by Christian Lacroix, diamond cuffs by Cathy Waronker.  
Opposite: Tank by Calvin Klein Underwear, jacket by Kitty Boots, jeans by Helmut Lang Jeans.



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been growing up. She turned 30, and most of her thoughts, as well as most of the songs on her new album, are about trying to understand who she has become. "My boyfriend said, 'You are going through your Saturn return,'" continues Gwen, referring to the period astrologers believe to be one of intense reassessment, especially for women. (The planet Saturn, which is said to rule the sense of identity, takes nearly 30 years to return to the place it was at the time of one's birth.) "I don't know if I believe it. But I liked the idea of a title that explained that stage in my life."

Settling in a sun-drenched sitting room, a few feet from the recently redesigned kitchen, she elaborates, "It was a really confusing time for me, just trying to figure out who I was, which Gwen was the real Gwen. I haven't figured it all out. I don't think I will, but I feel a lot better and a little clearer. It was such an emotional process, the making of this album. So I thought *Return of Saturn* was a cool title, and not only on a personal level: As a band, we've grown up a lot musically. It's an evolution." A tray filled with grandma's china offers strawberries, hummus, and black tea. Gwen pulls off the stem of a bright red strawberry and runs through the key events.

"I'm from Orange County. I never even thought I would go to New York, let alone play in India in front of thousands of people. Then suddenly, it was like, 'Whoa, here we go around the world.'"

"I came off the tour and went right back to my parents. I had my old clothes and makeup box. I remember thinking, 'Wow. I am totally normal.' It didn't even faze me. And then, wheeew!, depression. Like never before. Nothing was making me happy. I don't like that feeling of, like, 'Okay, I am going to have some ice cream and then I'll feel better,' and it doesn't work. Like, 'Wait, ice cream doesn't work?' " Catching her breath, Gwen smiles. "Sometimes I go off on tangents."

Gwen grew up in Anaheim, California, the suburb most famously known as the home of Disneyland. The lawns in her neighborhood were green. The family was close-knit (she has two brothers and a sister). She attended a Catholic youth group, was obsessed with *The Sound of Music*, and once told her kindergarten teacher that when she grew up, she hoped to be a bride. She loved Saturday morning cartoons, *The Muppet Movie*, make-up, and her older brother, Eric. "I pretty much lived through him," she admits. "In high school, it was like, 'I'm Eric Stefani's sister,' 'cause that's what I was. I didn't need to be anything else, you know? I never really had ambition or any kind of drive."

Just as her hometown needed the creative vision of animator Walt Disney to transform it from an orange grove to an enchanted kingdom, Gwen may have never become a superstar if it wasn't for the vision of Eric Stefani. "He is a real, pure, true artist," Gwen says of her now 33-year-old brother, who coincidentally became an animator for *The Simpsons*. It was Eric who encouraged Gwen to sing. "I can't explain it. It was like, 'Come sing a song.' I would sit by him at the piano. It's kind of weird to think about now, but it's just something we always did." It was also Eric who introduced her to ska. Gwen would spend hours listening to her brother's albums: Madness, The English Beat, Fishbone. At night, the two would go to clubs. When Gwen was too young to get in, she would sit outside and listen to the music filter through the walls.

During Gwen's senior year in high school, Eric's friend John Spence decided to start a band. He asked Eric to play keyboards; Eric asked Gwen to sing backup. They named their group "No Doubt." That was Spence's favorite thing to say. They landed a gig opening for The Untouchables, and gained a local following right away. "There weren't very many girls in the scene at that time, and it made us different or whatever," explains Gwen.

A few months later, John Spence went into a park, shot himself in the head, and died. "It was just the worst thing," Gwen remembers. "It wasn't like, 'Oh, he's depressed, or he's taking drugs' and everything, it was just like, 'Bye, gone.'"

The first time she laid eyes on bass player Tony Kanal, Gwen knew he was the one. The year was 1987 (shortly before Spence's death). He was coming to audition for the band. He was wearing

baggy pants and Mexican sandals. She made the first move. After that, they were inseparable.

By the time No Doubt recorded *Tragic Kingdom*, they'd been together eight years. But their first album, *No Doubt* (1992), had been all but shelved by Interscope. Gwen and Tony were at Cal State Fullerton, where she was studying art; he, psychology. Eric had already worked on a few episodes of *The Simpsons* and, frustrated with the label's interference in the second album, he decided to quit the band. "My brother was the lead creative force. When he left, it was traumatic," Gwen remembers. "But at the same time, all the creative energy fell into my lap. Then Tony and I broke up. That was like being amputated from your best friend. It was, like, the worst experience, but for the first time in my life, it was that feeling of, 'Wow, this is what I should be doing.' Suddenly, I had a story to tell."

That story – the one about her boyfriend leaving her, and her not wanting to hear the truth – along with the other one about being a sheltered girl in a boy's world, were exactly what a generation of young women were listening for. "Naively, I don't think I ever thought anyone would hear those songs," she reflects now. Whether or not Stefani, her label, or the radio stations (at the time, KROQ said it would take an act of God to get No Doubt on the radio) knew it, Gwen was about to become a huge star.

"Gavin's band was really popular and they were on our label," explains Gwen. "We had all these little punk rock rules. Anything that was popular on the radio or TV, we were like, 'Whatever!' All we ever heard was 'Gavin, Gavin, Gavin.' We were like, 'Please!' "

Sometimes destiny intervenes. Trauma, their new label (an imprint of Interscope), put the two bands on the road together. One night, after Gwen got off stage, she went to Bush's dressing room to introduce herself. "I walked in and I was like, 'Oh my God! That's what everyone is talking about!' 'Cause he's so beautiful. It was definitely one of those instant, instant things."

Still recovering from her breakup with Tony, Gwen was determined not to make the same mistake twice. "I was like, 'Why am I going to go out with you? You're in a band. You live in another country, and you are too cute.' Everything about that just says, 'wrong, hurt, bad idea.' But I couldn't help myself. I remember telling my girlfriend, 'Well, maybe I'll kiss him on the last day of the tour.' Three days into the tour we were, like, making out. It was so cute. And it felt really good to have the tables turned. It was fun to have someone fall for me. He saved me."

It has been said that fairy tales and myths are metaphors for our potential, that they help us understand our relationship with ourselves and the outside world. In most old-fashioned fairy tales, the arrival of Prince Charming occurs on the last page. But this is a new age, and we now know that every happy ending most likely marks an even happier beginning. And, in this tale, girl finds love, and then finds herself. "It's like, how did I get so faithful to my freedom, become so independent and self-centered?" says Gwen, leading the way into her dramatic sunken living room. "It's confusing to think that [marriage] is not as important as it used to be. I always thought it was what I wanted so badly in my life. But now that my eyes have been opened, it's been put on the back burner. There are a lot of love songs on this album, because, suddenly, that's the hard part for me. I have my boyfriend, who I love so much, but I can't do both real well, there's not enough time. My passion is the band. To write those songs . . . I can't even believe I can do it. I mean, I'm still shocked."

Leaning up against an antique chair, she looks up to the high ceilings. "This is kind of the grown-up room."

The patter – barely audible – of tiny feet can be heard through the hall. Madeline is home. Fidgeting with an opalescent cape tied around her neck, the child explains that her makeup is fading from an afternoon spent playing in the sun. Gwen asks if she wants to take it off. No, the four-year-old replies, she wants Gwen to give her a touch up. Soon, two sets of bare feet, one much smaller than the other, will climb the nearby staircase, back to the bathroom, glitter, and appliqué stars, exactly where this day began.