

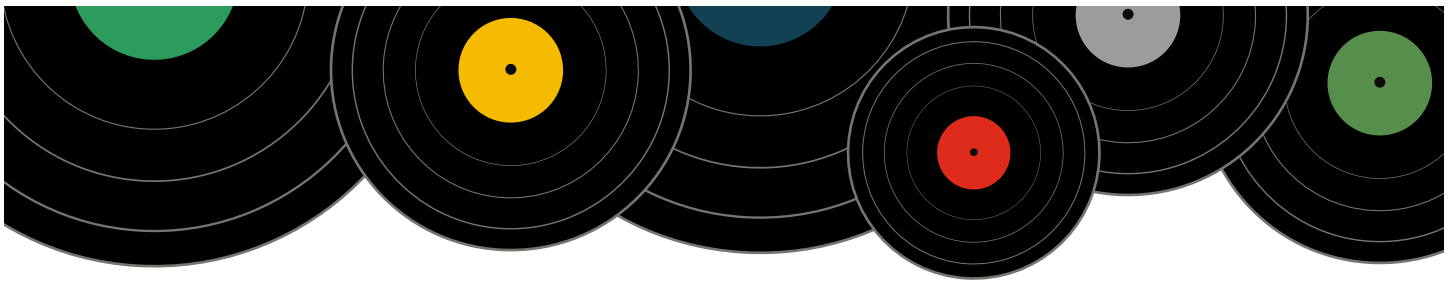
CHARM CITY ROCKS

A LOVE STORY



MATTHEW NORMAN

BOOK CLUB KIT



DEAR BOOK CLUB MEMBER:

I can't tell you how much it means to me that you've picked *Charm City Rocks* for your group. It brings me great joy to imagine you and your friends gathered together discussing Billy, Margot, Caleb, Robyn, Aaron, and Lawson. I sincerely hope you like them all as much as I do. As far as imaginary people go, they're a good group.

Over the years I've had the chance to join in on some book club discussions of my work—in person and via computer—and one of the most common questions I'm asked is, "How'd you get the idea?" So, I thought it might be useful to address that here.

Sometimes novel ideas show up fully formed. That was the case with my third novel, *Last Couple Standing*. Far more often, though, they arrive sneakily, usually in the form of a seemingly innocuous passing thought that for some reason just builds and builds. A few years ago, that passing thought for me was, "What does a random Tuesday afternoon look like for a rock star?" Because that's the funny thing about rock stars: we typically only see them when they're actually being rock stars, like at concerts or in music videos or all glammed up for TV appearances. But, yeah, what about on a Tuesday . . . between albums . . . when they're not on tour . . . and maybe after they've fallen out of the limelight a bit?

From there I started obsessing, because that's what novels require: obsessive behavior. I created a fictional band. I broke that band up in spectacular fashion. I came up with a romance—a couple of failed romances, too. I invented people and I gave them backstories. And then I put those people in Baltimore, Maryland, because that's where I live, and I've always enjoyed writing about places that are right down the street from my house.

But enough about the book. Let's talk drinks. Of course, wine is a popular choice for book clubs. Fair enough. But if you feel like rocking out a little, I recommend getting your hands on some National Bohemian beer, otherwise known as Natty Boh, which is the official beer of Baltimore. If you like it, well, I'm impressed. If you don't like it, keep trying, it's an acquired taste. And I promise that burning sensation in your mouth is only temporary.

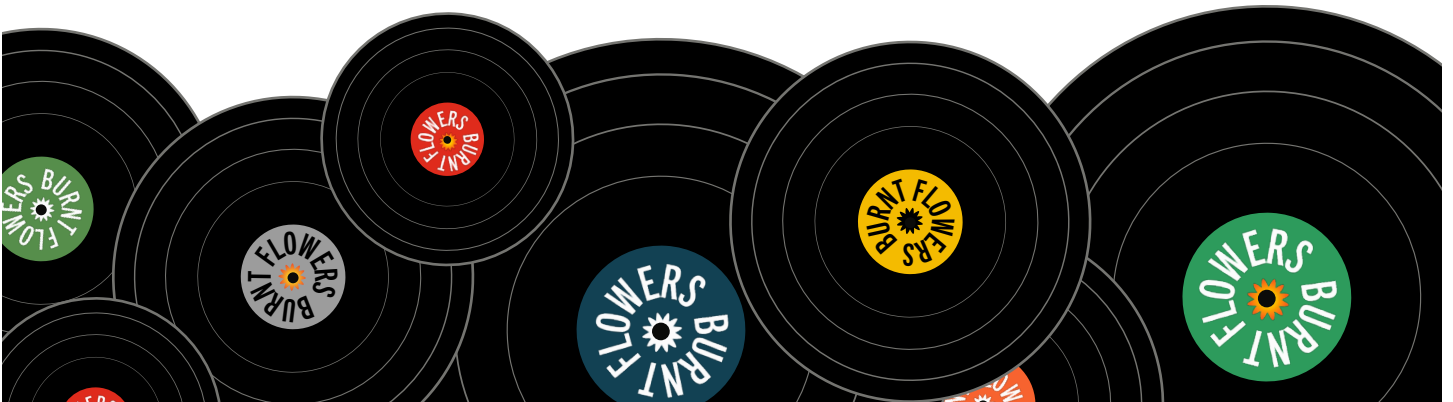
Thanks again for picking *Charm City Rocks*; you've made my day. Have fun talking about it, and say hey to Billy and Margot for me.

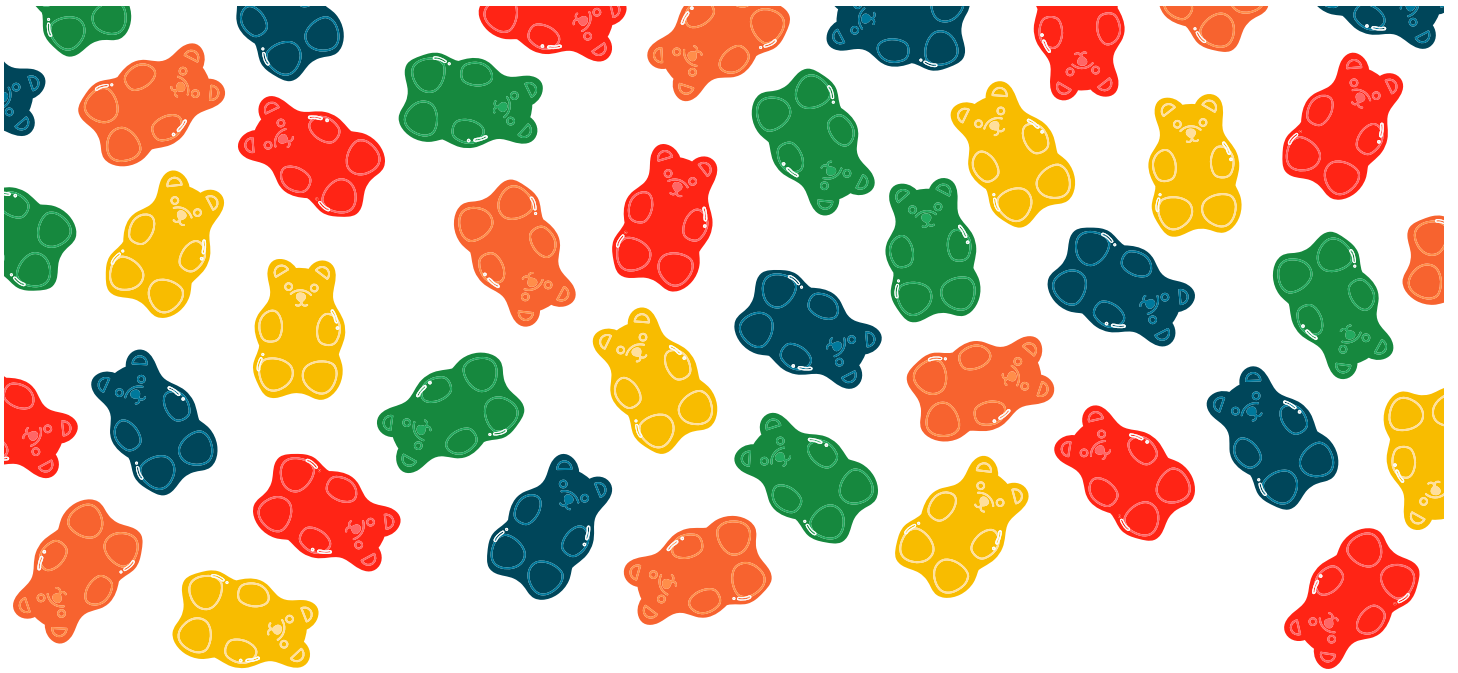
Best,

MN

QUESTIONS & TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What's a "Lesson in Art and Manhood" that you wish you could teach or learn?
2. Margot seems to be haunted by the word "recluse." Is she one?
3. Margot says "First loves brand you." Do you agree or disagree?
4. Do you think Margot would have returned to Burnt Flowers if not for Billy?
5. Should Billy have chased after Robyn when she ran away after his proposal? Why or why not?
6. Robyn has been romantically involved with Billy, Aaron, and (briefly) Lawson. What do each of these men bring to a relationship? Who would you choose?
7. How does the novel depict the relationships between the children and their parents? Did you relate to these depictions?
8. What sacrifices do the characters make for love? Is sacrifice always necessary to find love?
9. Where do you picture these characters 5 years in the future? Do you think Margot and Billy stay together?
10. If you were Caleb, would you have picked Hopkins over Stanford?
11. How would you have reacted if you were Margot discovering that Lawson was having an affair with Nikki?

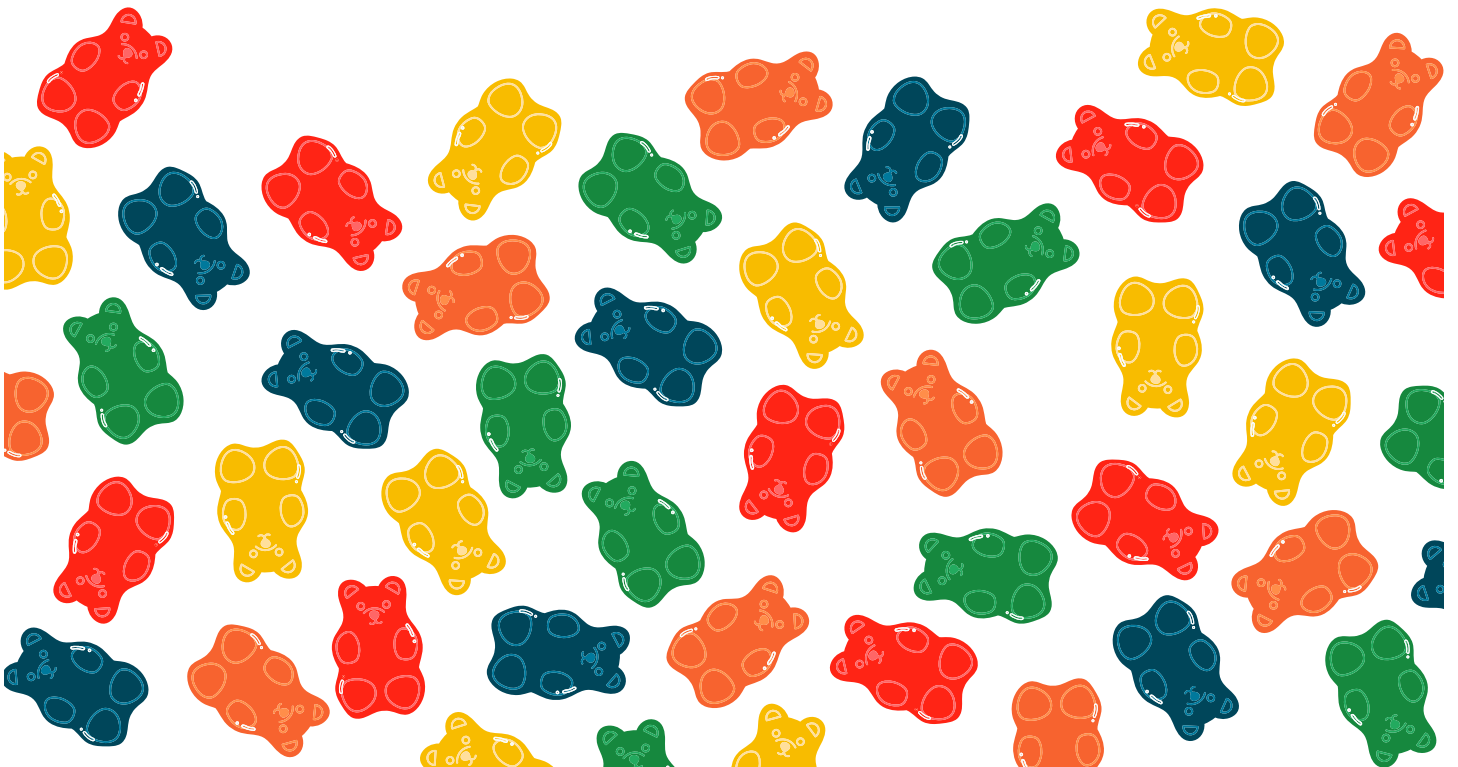




SNACK SUGGESTION

As a seasoned book clubber, you probably have all kinds of snacks ready to go. It's worth mentioning, though, that gummy bears make a pretty significant appearance in *Charm City Rocks*. So, if you're the type of group who likes to stick closely to the text, maybe consider picking some up. I'll let you decide if those gummy bears are gummy bears or . . . "gummy bears."

Either way, enjoy.



THE OFFICIAL CHARM CITY ROCKS TOUR

As mentioned in the letter above, *Charm City Rocks* is set in and around Baltimore. In fact, many of the locations in the book are quite real—if slightly fictionalized. I imagine that if Billy Perkins himself were giving your group a grand tour, he'd be sure to stop at the following spots.



THE SOUND GARDEN

Located in Billy's neighborhood of Fells Point, The Sound Garden is one of the best record shops in the country. For the sake of fiction, I changed the name to Charm City Rocks and installed a rack of Orioles caps by the register.

THE PRETZEL TWIST

Depending on the day, Fells Point can smell like a lot of things. More often than not, though, it smells like baking bread because of The Pretzel Twist. For poetry and proximity, I changed the name to Hot Twist and moved it directly across the street from Charm City Rocks.



THE HORSE YOU CAME IN ON SALOON

America's oldest continually operated saloon, the last known destination of Edgar Allan Poe before his mysterious death, and a great live music spot, "The Horse" was the perfect spot to launch Margot Hammer's accidental comeback.

MR. TRASH WHEEL

Officially called the Inner Harbor Water Wheel, Mr. Trash Wheel is a trash interceptor that floats about the waterways around Baltimore.

It's a confusing sight, particularly if you don't know what it is, so I added it to the scene in which Margot is briefly lost after running out of Charm City Rocks. Oh, and you can follow the weird, bug-looking thing on Twitter, if interested: @MrTrashWheel.



CAMDEN YARDS

Home of the Baltimore Orioles, Camden Yards is, for my money, the best spot in the city on spring and summer evenings. One historical note, it's widely credited for starting baseball's nationwide return from the suburbs back to the cities. And no gameday visit would be complete without buying a beer from vendor Clarence Haskett, aka "Fancy Clancy." Go O's!

THE OFFICIAL
CHARM CITY ROCKS
SOUNDTRACK

All five of my novels feature music, but none more than *Charm City Rocks*. And while some of the songs that appear in the book don't really exist—see *Burnt Flowers*'s three fictional albums—I'm sure you'll recognize most of these. Not a bad playlist, if you ask me.
Have some "gummy bears" and turn it up.

SWEET CHILD O' MINE Guns N Roses • **ARE YOU GONNA GO MY WAY** Lenny Kravitz
LET IT BE The Beatles • **KARMA POLICE** Radiohead • **GOODBYE YELLOW BRICK ROAD** Elton John
SOLITARY MAN Neil Diamond • **WE GOT THE BEAT** The Go-Go's • **LET'S GO CRAZY** Prince • **LEVITATING** Dua Lipa
NOVEMBER RAIN Guns N Roses • **SUPERSTITION** Stevie Wonder • **BRANDY (YOU'RE A FINE GIRL)** Looking Glass
BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY Queen • **DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'** Journey

EBONY AND IVORY Paul McCartney & Stevie Wonder • **THE ROLLING STONES**
STAR SPANGLED BANNER Jimi Hendrix • **ENTER SANDMAN** Metallica • **CHAMPAGNE SUPERNOVA** Oasis
JEREMY Pearl Jam • **TINY DANCER** Elton John • **OPPOSITES ATTRACT** Paula Abdul
OH! YOU PRETTY THINGS David Bowie • **SWEET CAROLINE** Neil Diamond • **LET'S SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER** The Rolling Stones
THE GHOST IN YOU Psychedelic Furs • **BORDERLINE** Madonna • **LIKE A PRAYER** Madonna
THUNDERSTRUCK AC/DC

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MATTHEW NORMAN

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LAST COUPLE STANDING



ALL TOGETHER NOW