

Chapter 14

Skeet's poker games were legendary in the music community, especially around Chicago. Not that the stakes were particularly high or the play was particularly spectacular, but Skeet really knew how to put on the dog every time he hosted one. There was the mandatory supreme selection of adult beverages. The Bulls, Bears or Cubs were always on the big screen and the best tunes were always on the stereo. But still none of this was the thing that separated Skeet's games from the average. It was the food.

Skeet did two things really well. Music and food. He had learned the basics of cooking in the orphanage and one of his foster care families was with a very talented restaurant chef who taught Skeet all the tricks of the trade. He had a real knack for it. Going to a poker game at Skeet's place was like going to the best buffet one can imagine. If you were lucky enough to actually get invited to dinner, it was 5 star cuisine, all the way. No matter what the occasion, he made everything from scratch. Brian had always said that Skeet's life was inspired by wanting to make people happy, and what made people happier than food and entertainment.

Skeet found cooking strangely therapeutic. To him, it was almost a meditation experience. As he prepared the food, there was nothing else but the food and him. To watch him cook was like watching him play bass, a masterful display of exactly what was required and nothing more.

Skeet was busy in the kitchen and running behind. He couldn't get his mind wrapped around preparing the food because all he could concentrate on was the recording and how he was going to handle it.

The door bell rang and it was Shawn. Brian greeted him and before he could get his coat off, Skeet was yelling from the kitchen. "Shawn! Come here a minute." Shawn looked at Brian. It was unusual for Skeet to be in the kitchen and carry on a conversation. Shawn finished taking his coat off and shrugged and headed for the kitchen.

"Skeets! What's up?" he said, grabbing a deviled egg off a tray. "Look if this is about me and Chapin, I know she wants me, but I'm bowing out to you. I'm happily married and I don't think Jen will let me keep her as a pet." He giggled and popped the egg in his mouth.

"Naw Shawno." Skeet said in a very serious tone. "I wanna ask you something."

"Sounds serious, man. Whadda ya need?"

"First, who's the best slide guitar player there is? Who's the baddest man on the planet?" Skeet asked.

Shawn cocked his head sideways and paused. "Ummm...OK...active player?"

"Yea"

“Easy. Derek Trucks. Hands down. Sonny Landreth is right up there, but best guy playing? Trucks.” Shawn said with confidence. “Why?”

“Let me ask you something else. And I’m being serious here. Did you get Trucks to play on the album I recorded?”

“No. Why would I do that? Well, I mean if I could get Derek Trucks I would have. But I’ve only met him once. What’s this about, man? I’m confused.” Shawn said.

Skeet wiped his hands off on a towel and reached over and pressed play on a portable CD player. The music started and they stood there and listened. The mysterious guitar came in and Shawn, who had been leaning on the counter, stood up straight and turned his ear toward the music, as if he was straining to hear. “That’s not Trucks or Landreth.”

“I got that far. But who the fuck is it?” he asked.

Shawn just looked at him. “If anybody should know, you should.”

“What do you mean?”

“That’s Stan Balch. I’d recognize that guy anywhere. Ok. I thought you guys haven’t spoke in years. How’d you get him to play with you again? And more importantly, why wasn’t I there doing the recording?”

Skeet felt like his heart stopped. How the hell could it be Stan? They hadn’t spoken in over 15 years, and the last time they had, it wasn’t very pleasant. Stan had completely disappeared from the scene soon after. He hadn’t even heard anything about Stan in years and years. And why the hell would just magically show up on the track.

“I have no idea. None at all. And what’s even stranger, it’s only on the disc we sent out. I checked the master downstairs and there is nothing on that. Someone did this without remixing,” Skeet said.

“Can’t be,” said Shawn. “I can hear it, man. It was mixed in, not mixed on top. You sure that’s not on the master?”

“I checked it myself, but you did most of the work on it and I’m no techno-guru. Would you take a look just to make sure I’m not...or maybe am...losing my mind?” Skeet asked.

“Sure. I’ll go right now,” Shawn said as he headed out of the kitchen.

“I’m coming with you. I need to make sure for myself,” Skeet said and followed Shawn, leaving all his food preparation on the counter.

Skeet and Shawn burst through the studio door, hit the light and started turning all the power on. “The system is booting. This shouldn’t take long,” Shawn said. He tapped on the computer’s

keyboard and adjusted some of the faders on the mixing board. Shawn leaned back in his chair and the music began. There was no sign of the mystery track. Shawn grabbed the mouse and scrolled around, clicking here and there. “Nothing. I don’t see any sign of anything we didn’t do together. This is damn spooky.”

“Hey. The guys are here, and they want food. Ju gots work to do, Lucy!” Brian said. He had just arrived in the doorway.

“Ok, I’m comin’,” Skeet said.

Brian glanced at Shawn. “No sign of it?”

“None,” he replied.

“Let’s go. I got some cooking to do.”