

The Final Note

By

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Excerpt #2

Skeet walked into the office of Lexicon recordings, his current record company. He had started out with Stan at Atlantic and recorded two solo albums there but because of his lackluster solo success and the breakup with Stan, they subsequently dropped him. He had gone shopping for a solo deal when he had met Dave Schwartz, president of Lexicon, at an after party when he was backing up Wynton Marsalis. Dave was a bass player of some renown in his own right but had decided to start Lexicon so he could stay off the road. The company had moderate success but, like Skeet's solo career, had never really taken off.

When they first met, Dave was a little in awe of Skeet. He had offered him a lucrative deal very quickly, and some days he regretted it, but he liked Skeet and really wanted him to succeed. He just felt he was missing the fire and passion in his own work that he was putting into everyone else's and Dave hadn't figured out a way to break that cycle. That is, until now.

Skeet checked in with the secretary who asked him to have a seat then she picked up the phone to let Dave know Skeet had arrived. Almost before she hung up the phone Dave emerged from the office. He was tall with an odd smile.

"Skeet! How are you doin', man? Come on in," he said, escorting Skeet into his office. "I'm really excited about this record! I think you may have a winner here." Dave walked over to a bar in the corner of the room. "Drink?" he asked.

"Just some water would be great." Dave tossed a bottle of water across the room and poured himself a glass of bourbon. He made his way back over to the desk and took his seat.

"It's a shame about what happened to Patti's benefit yesterday. I know you were playing with Niles. You gotta be disappointed."

“Yea. Yesterday was a long one. I was also supposed to play with Pat Torpey in a little reformed Mr. Big.”

“Mr. Big? Didn’t Billy Sheehan used to play with them? What happened to him?” If any other record executive had asked this, Skeet would have assumed it was small talk but being a bass player, he knew Dave’s interest was genuine.

“Oh he’s still with ‘em. He hurt his wrist a couple of days ago and I was just fillin’ in. He was doing the singing though.”

“Really? I thought Eric Martin was the singer,” Dave said.

“He was. You know how bands are. I’m sure somebody’s feelings got hurt about something and... at any rate. Eric’s not playing with them right now, and I’m disappointed I didn’t get to either. It sounded really great I was wanting to jam,” Skeet replied with a hint of disappointment in his voice.

“It was in the Tribune this morning that some guy blew up the transformer. They claim it was the station manager over at WXXX. Not sure why though. Sounded kinda psycho.” Dave said.

“He is,” said Skeet.

“You know him, Skeet?”

“Oh, not well. Just met him yesterday. It’s a long story. Anyway, I don’t want to waste your time with this stuff.”

“Oh I gotcha. Time to get down to business,” Dave said with a smirk. He reached back and turned pushed a button on the sound system. The familiar sounds of the lead off song, “Velvet Paradise”, from Skeet’s album started. “I’ve had a copy of this in my car playing non-stop ever since I got it. I think you’ve really done it this time.”

“I’m glad you dig it man. I wasn’t one hundred percent sure I had the right formula, but if you say it worked, then it must have worked.”

“And the guitar work right...” Dave paused, waiting for a particular spot in the song to arrive. “...is incredible! Who the hell did you get to play with you on this? It’s fantastic? The only guy I could think of was Derek Trucks or maybe Sonny Landreth.”

Skeet sat and listened intently. It was as if he was hearing the guitar runs for the first time. It suddenly dawned on him that it’s because he WAS hearing them for the first time. It was his album, but the guitar was not the same! It was some of the most fantastic SLIDE guitar

playing he ever heard. He was speechless. The sound was phenomenal but Skeet didn't know where it came from.

"Am I right? Is it Trucks or Landreth?" Dave asked.

Skeet still sat speechless. Slide guitar is not a style that many people had mastered and especially not at the level he was hearing. Slide guitar involves using a piece of glass or metal to control the notes on the guitar instead of pressing the frets with the fingers. For any but the most gifted player, it would sound like cat with its tail caught in a screen door. But this obviously was a gifted player, but how did it end up on the album that Dave had received? Skeet's mind raced. Could Brian be playing a joke on him, or Dave? And if so, who the hell did they get to play it? And how was it so perfectly mixed without having the master files which were tucked away in Skeet's studio.

"Skeet? You ok buddy?" Dave's voice snapped him back into reality. He knew he had to say something, but what? How could he tell him that this incredible guitar was not something he had anything to do with or knew anything about? Skeet panicked.

"No, not either of 'em," Skeet said.

"Well who then? Please tell me he's not tied up in another deal. We are gonna need him for a tour and promotion and everything. Your playing with that playing is gonna put all of us on the map!"

"Umm...I'm not sure of his status. I'll check and get back with you though," Skeet said, trying to buy him some time to think.

"Well is he from Chicago? We should get him on the phone and start negotiating now." Dave was very anxious to get started.

"He's... touring in Europe right now. But I'll talk to him in the next couple of days and see what the situation is like."

"You've got to. I want to get this rolling as quick as possible," Dave said. He pointed to spindle that looked like it had about 40 CDs stacked on it. "I've already made a whole stack of duplicates. I've sent them out to all parts of the company. This is our top priority. I've got several artists listening to it so they can get some cover design for the album and if it's ok with you, I'm gonna contact Wynton to see if he'll contribute to the liner notes. Our mastering guru Tom Perkins is gonna do the final mix and master."

Skeet cut him off. "Yea, um. I'd really like to get Shawn Thorpe to do the final mix and master. I really respect his ability and I want to give him a shot at this."

"I don't know, Skeet. We are banking on this one pretty heavy. I wanna make sure it's done right," Dave said. The hesitation sounded in his voice.

"I tell ya what. Give him a couple of weeks. If you don't like what he does, get your guy to do it." Skeet was having trouble concentrating. The music playing was familiar but brand new to him at the same time. He was trying to listen to Dave, listen to the music, figure out how the hell this happened and what he was going to do about it.

"Ok. How about this. I'll have Tom mix it and you have your guy mix it. When they're done, we'll just see which one we like best and go with it."

"Sounds fair. Thanks Dave. Look, I really gotta run," Skeet said as he stood up and slowly began making his way toward the door. "Hey, can I take one of those copies. I don't have copy with me and I'd like it for my drive."

"Sure," said Dave. He pulled one off the spindle, grabbed a sleeve from a box out his drawer and handed it to Skeet. "But we need to get the distribution worked out. And a photo shoot. We're gonna need a photo shoot."

"I'm sure you got it covered, Dave. Now I really gotta run. I'll call ya in a couple of days." Skeet almost bolted for the door.

"Um...yea...ok," said Dave.

Skeet left the office and headed for the elevator as quick as he could. He had to get away. He was having trouble answering the questions Dave was having now and he knew he would get more flustered if he kept trying to dodge.

The elevator doors opened and he jumped in and pushed '1'. As the doors closed, he felt a sense of relief. He thought if he could think for just a minute he could figure this out. The elevator reached the bottom and the door opened. His mind raced with thoughts and he couldn't calm down.