

FAST LANE

BY KRISTEN ASHLEY

Acknowledgments

Many moons ago, I had the occasion to *really* listen to the song “Life in the Fast Lane” by The Eagles.

I’d heard it before, tons of times.

But on that listen, something struck me.

Being a romantic at heart, a romance novelist and addicted to romance for as long as I can remember, that song captured me as lyrics often do. Especially if a love story is told. Any kind of love story. Even the ones without happy endings.

Maybe especially ones without happy endings.

So much said in a few spare lines. So many emotions welling. And as is the magic of music, on each new listen, it happens again like you’d never heard that song before.

I became obsessed with it, inspired by this cautionary tale, and determined to find the right story that would fit that inspiration.

It was something I thought I’d fiddle with “someday,” which is where a great number of my ideas or inspirations are relegated.

Then I read Taylor Jenkins Reid’s *Daisy Jones and the Six*.

I have never, in my life, put down a book because I was loving it so much, I had to draw it out for as long as I could. And then, weeks later, I picked it up, only begrudgingly, because I knew opening that book again would mean finishing it, and I never wanted it to end.

The fresh, unique way TJR told that story as an oral history of a 70s rock band blew my mind.

The no-holds-barred, warts-and-all, brave, open, honest characterizations gripped me.

I was in love with Daisy on the first page.

My adoration of Billy swiftly came after.

I was enthralled by a band and a story that wasn’t even real, but it felt like it was.

Oh yes, it felt like it was.

Right in my gut.

I was what you should be with a piece of art.

Obsessed by it. Gripped by it. Moved by it.

Changed.

It was then it happened.

Slotting into place, these two inspirations worked so beautifully together—an epic 70s rock song, an innovatively-told fictional tale about a 70s rock band...

As Stephen King said, “If you don’t have time to read, you don’t have the time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that.”

My world opened upon reading *Daisy Jones and the Six* in more than one way, and I thank Taylor Jenkins Reid, and, of course, The Eagles, to the marrow of my bones for being the impetus for this happening.

I would break the bounds of my very own writing to explore new ways to tell a story. I would tackle difficult subject matter. I would present myself with a new challenge in a way I haven't since I first started writing to share a raw, emotional story, break even more rules, rip the lid off creativity, make my story *immediate* to my readers, and I wouldn't hold anything back.

It wasn't that I wasn't doing this before.

It was that I'd quit pushing the boundaries because I found my happy place in my writing...and I liked it.

But after reading *Daisy Jones and the Six*, I knew it was time to push down the accelerator, flip on the turn signal, and hit the fast lane.

The Story

[Off tape]

Just talk like you're telling a story. But please do it clearly so the recording can pick you up.

[Jesse Simms, founding member and bassist of Preacher McCade and the Roadmasters clears his throat. There is a long pause.]

I know it's a long story to tell, and some parts are difficult, but...

Jesse:

I didn't know at first.

[Another long pause]

[Off tape]

You didn't know what at first?

Jesse:

That it was her. That it was Lyla.

That once he met her, it was and always would be Lyla.

THE 80S

Nicky and Ricky

Jesse Simms, bassist, Preacher McCade and the Roadmasters, formerly Zenith:

It was my band. A lot of people don't know that. It's been in a few articles. A few books.

Everyone thinks it was Preacher's band.

But it was me who started the band with Tim in my garage when I was sixteen.

Tim was lead guitar and lead singer. I was bass. We used to fuck around on our guitars a lot before we picked up Nicky and Ricky Pileggi. The twins. They were the rhythm section. Nicky on guitar, Ricky on drums.

Nicky and Ricky are lore though.

It's funny, and you'll see I'm not laughing, how everyone knows the story about Nicky and Ricky and not many know it was my fuckin' band in the first fuckin' place.

Not Preacher's.

I see the look on your face.

And yeah, it became his band and not just because the name was changed. I know that. I knew it all along. I knew it when he took over my band. I *wanted* him to take it over. He was...he was...

He was *Preacher McCade*, man. Even *before* he was Preacher McCade, you know what I'm sayin' to you?

A man like that, his looks, his talent, the way he was, especially the way he was, in *that* way, if a man like that wants your band, you give it to him.

But Preach and me, we got tight.

I mean, he changed my life even before it all went down, you know?

So it wasn't that he was a badass. It wasn't that he was a mean-as-a-snake motherfucker.

It was his talent, man.

I knew.

I knew with that man in my band, my band was going to be something.
And we were.

You hear that song “Click Click Boom” by Saliva?

That was way after us. But the minute I heard those lyrics, hey.

That was me. As a kid.

Everyone else was listening to Culture Club and Duran Duran and Kaja-fuckin’-googoo.

I was listening to Metallica. AC/DC. Iron Maiden. Whitesnake. And what I thought of as the “oldies.” Led Zeppelin. Pink Floyd. Rush.

And, man, from the beginning, Prince. I mean, overall, he was not my jam, but that dude could play a fuckin’ guitar. He could frame a song.

Fuck.

Sitting in my bedroom, plucking on my bass, listening to that music, dreams of being a juke box hero in my head.

So, I started a band.

And I had bad acne. Bet you know that. Everyone fuckin’ talks about that thanks to Nick. So, I couldn’t get a girlfriend or get laid if I made a deal with the devil to do it.

Nope, [shakes head] wrong about that.

Guess I made a deal with the devil in the end.

A devil named Preacher.

[Laughs]

Yeah.

Anyway, seein’ as I couldn’t do what every other sixteen-year-old boy wants to do, find some girl and fuck her, or at least hold her hand, I started a band.

But it was about the music for me too.

Yeah.

Totally.

All I wanted to do was rehearse and find gigs.

Nicky and Ricky, they’d rehearse all right. They weren’t as into it as Tim and me. But they were down to get good enough to find some gigs. Get paid in six packs. Get laid after.

We scored some basement parties. A few gigs out in some cornfields with generators and kegs and no one listening to a note we were playing because they were all smokin' pot or feelin' each other up.

Then we scored that girl Heidi's party.

You know, for the life of me, I can't remember her last name. I know she was the middle of five hot sisters. Everyone in school knew about Heidi and her hot sisters.

And it's weird, man. That I still don't know. [laughs] I should grab a yearbook, except I don't have any yearbooks. Burned all of mine.

Figure you know why.

You'd think Heidi whoever-she-was would come forward and say it was her. It was her party where it came together.

Though she and her sisters probably got that house cleaned up and her parents never knew.

Her dad was a cop, a cop with five hot daughters. [chuckles] Got my girls now and they're beautiful so I know what kind of hell that guy lived.

But everyone knew about Heidi and her hot sisters and everyone wanted in Heidi or her hot sisters' pants and everyone was scared as shit to try anything with Heidi or any of her sisters because her dad would fuck you up.

So, maybe even now, years later, that guy was such a hardass, they do not want their dad to know Heidi threw a rager while they were out of town.

What I do know is that I'd turned seventeen and the band was closing in on being nearly a year old and I thought that meant something.

Bands don't last long. You seen *The Commitments*? [laughs] That's every band's story right there, man. One way or another.

One lives.

And a hundred die and the deaths are always ugly.

I also know that the band's shit was coming together, we'd been at it so long, we'd gone from being bad to being alright.

And I remember that, right before that gig, Ricky had painted this kickass logo on his bass drum that dulled the sound of that motherfucker, but we didn't care.

We were the Zeniths and that logo with the back of that long-haired dude with his ripped arms opened wide and the stars all around, like he's got the heavens under his command.

Man, that logo was *the shit*.

Someone got hold of that drum kit, you know. I lost track of it, but someone got hold of it and knew what it was. Sold it. Made twenty-five thousand at some auction.

Can you believe that shit?

[Shakes head]

Crazy.

[Clears throat]

I also remember that Heidi's oldest sister came home from a date in the middle of that party and she lost her goddamned mind.

I remember playing and watching those two fight. Heidi was drunk off her ass, it was kinda funny, especially with her sister screeching in her face.

And while this was happening, her date was leaning against an archway, arms crossed on his chest, boots at the ankle, watching us play.

I caught a load of him, and he gave me a shiver, man.

I saw why she'd want some of that...but, *fuck*.

He gave me a shiver, that guy was so intimidating.

It was Preacher.

Preacher McCade.

Heidi's sister closed shit down. She was a ballbuster, that one was.

But, [laughs] oldest of five hot sisters, dad a cop, she'd have to be a ballbuster.

She could let loose, and I had occasion to be around Preach when he got done with her, so I know she did and she'd have to, to keep her hooks in Preach.

But she wouldn't let any of her sisters let loose.

It was when me and the guys were loading up our gear. Nicky, Ricky and Tim had gone in to grab more shit, I was stowing my amp. I was in the back of Tim's dad's pickup that we used to haul our shit to our gigs.

He'd have to steal it, Tim did. But his dad would be passed-out drunk, so that wasn't hard.

I heard a thump on the side of the bed and looked down to see a fist had landed there.

I looked and there was Preacher, standing by the side of the truck, looking up at me.

I did not want to be alone with this dude. That was my first thought.

It didn't get better when he started talking. And I remember every word he said like it wasn't over thirty fuckin' years ago.

Like it happened an hour ago.

"Your drummer sucks," he said.

I didn't say dick, part because he was flipping my shit, part because I knew he was right.

"Your rhythm guitarist works," he kept going. "Barely," he said.

I just stood in the bed of that truck, staring down at this guy, saying nothing.

He didn't quit with our first rock review.

"Your lead's alright."

Yup.

You guessed it.

I still didn't say dick.

"You're a rock star, brother."

That was what he said.

He looked right in my eyes and said, "You're a rock star, brother."

My parents fought. They did it loud. But they loved me, you know? Both of them did.

Dad was kind of a wuss, but he was a decent guy. Mom was pushy, but she could be sweet a lot. It wasn't all roses at my house, but, you know, I had love.

Me and my sisters were tight.

And we had love.

I had no idea why they stayed together since it seemed most the time, they hated each other's guts, but that didn't leak to me. Mom could be hard on me. Mom could make Dad lay down the hammer on me. But I knew others had it rougher.

Tim's shit at home was whacked. He'd do anything to escape it.

And when I learned Preach's story...

[Trails off]

But yeah, man. Yeah.

[Quietly] Yeah.

When Preacher said that to me, I grew two stories tall. I was goddamn Superman. I could conquer the world.

“Got a pen?” he said after that.

Hell no, I didn’t have a pen.

But you better fuckin’ believe I found one.

And with Tim and Ricky staring at us, Ricky not looking happy, Tim already fucked right the hell up in hero worship like me, Nicky walking up to us carrying Ricky’s snare and stand, doing that with his mouth hanging open, Preacher wrote his number on my palm.

When he was done, he said, “You wanna do somethin’ with that shit, call me.”

Then he walked away.

I’ll tell you what, I got home, and I wrote that number down on a piece of paper so fast, scared that shit would smear, my hand had to be a blur.

Bet if I still had that piece of paper, it’d go for a million.

No joke.

I’d never sell it though.

Frame it, yeah.

Sell it?

Not for a million dollars.

Okay, so me and Tim were seventeen, Nicky and Ricky already eighteen, Preach was twenty. I mean, [laughs] he’s like, *adult* to a seventeen-year-old, you know?

But he strolled into my garage in that way he moved for his first jam with us and *Jesus*.

Shit.

Just watching him move?

I could practically see the groupies straining toward us, screaming our names.

But then he played.

And sang.

Shit.

We had a band meeting after he left, and Ricky did not like Preacher at all. Wanted nothin’ to do with him.

“What’s an old guy like that want with us? It’s creepy, dudes,” he said.

Preacher was two years older than Ricky.

I gotta say, hindsight.

[Long pause]

“He’s totally gonna edge you out, Timmy,” Rick told Tim.

If I remember, Tim shrugged.

Everyone talks about it. How Tim was the light to Preach’s dark.

Man, when we...when we.

[Pause]

Preach stage left.

Tim stage right.

The fuckin’ bass, me in the middle.

Caught between light and dark.

My parents’ love for me. My sisters. Their hate for each other.

Then the band.

And then there was Lyla.

Caught between light and dark my whole life, you know?

Tim was not an attention guy. He wanted to play his guitar. He was more into the music than me.

Definitely more than Nick or Rick.

I mean, he didn’t talk much, but you got him rapping, it’d be about music. And he’d go on about shit I wouldn’t get until later.

About Bowie and Ziggy Stardust and how that shit was beyond. He was into Petty. And Springsteen. The dude listened to Joni Mitchell and Carole fuckin’ King. Stevie Wonder. Johnny Cash. Jackson Brown. Patti Smith.

None of us knew who the fuck Leonard Cohen was. But Tim did.

Preach did too.

Dolly Parton. The Eagles. Fleetwood Mac. Elvis Costello.

The guy did not discriminate.

Hell, when Paul Simon released *Graceland*, fuck. Tim listened to that so often, back then, if I heard “do, do, do, do...do, do, do, *do*,” [humming opening of “You Can Call Me Al”] one more time, I’d fuckin’ kill someone.

He blasted out the Runaways.

He was Joan Jett’s biggest fuckin’ fan. If she’d asked him to be in the Blackhearts, he would have dropped everything to follow her anywhere she went.

Yeah, he’d even drop *us*.

Believe it.

I think he had a little punk down deep in his heart.

It was quiet. Punk ain’t quiet.

But listen to his solos and tell me he wasn’t screaming about something.

And you know, when Mellencamp got airplay, we hadn’t even started the fuckin’ band. We were in junior high, for fuck’s sake.

And it was Tim who said, when we first heard “Hurts So Good,” “This is the guy.”

I mean, that wasn’t even “Jack and Diane.” And he was listening to *Chestnut Street Incident* and *John Cougar* and “Ain’t Even Done with the Night.”

It was also about Mellencamp for him, and all of us, I guess. Seein’ as we’re all from Indiana. Except Preach.

So, Tim did not care that Preacher edged him out.

Especially when we heard the guy sing.

Tim got lead on a lot of songs. As you know. For sure. He was a decent guitar player, but with Preach in the band, we all got better.

We had to match him. The way Preacher played guitar like it was second nature, didn’t even look down at his strings. Moved his fingers, and miracles came out.

But there were a few songs he passed along to Tim to play lead guitar, also sing, but really, no one would sing lead, you know, regular, except Preach when we heard him sing.

That deep, raspy voice that had that Cajun lilt.

That was one of the things I thought made him even more badass. He’d say “dis” and “dat” and “dos” and “dem” instead of “this” and “that” and “those” and “them.”

You'd say something, and he'd reply, "talk about," and you would not know what the fuck he meant. But it was a Cajun thing. After a while, we all said, "talk about" and every time we did in the beginning, it'd make Preach smile.

He was just him.

Twenty years old and he was just him. He wasn't gonna change for anybody.

Like the Beatles, when everyone else from over there was singing in an American accent, they were all, "Fuck that." They were English. They sang with an English accent. And that was that.

That's rock 'n' roll, you know.

You take me as I am or kiss my ass.

Preach was all about that.

Tim was all about that too, in Tim's way.

I think he felt relief when Preacher came along, and he didn't have to carry the band.

He could just play.

And when he could just play, he got better. So much better.

On "Best of" lists, you know. *That* much better.

Though, down from Preacher on those lists, just sayin'.

[Off tape]

You're on "Best of" lists too.

[Long pause]

Yeah, I know.

The shit hit the fan when Ricky stopped coming to band practice and Nicky was being weird when he did.

Preacher had been with us for a few weeks by then. But I figure he'd sussed shit right out, doin' this maybe the first time he jammed with us.

He worked during the day, no clue at what. He had his own apartment, but he hadn't asked us around. Had his own car. Beat-up POS, but he had his own car and we all thought that was cool seeing as we were in our parents' rides if we were in anything.

Tim still rode his fuckin' bike everywhere. [Laughs] Guitar strapped to his back. [Laughs more]

People at home, they still talk about seein' ol' Timmy Townes peddling around on his bike with his guitar on his back.

When Rick bailed, Tim'd play rhythm while Nicky hit the drums. Or Tim'd hit the drums while Nick played rhythm. Tim'd play a lot of rhythm in the end, so this was good practice.

Didn't feel that way then. Never feels good when someone bails, and Nick would not say dick about why Ricky was gone, which felt worse.

And man, this is where the story gets famous. Nick blabbing his fuckin' mouth after, you know, the band became the band and people would listen to what he had to say.

Kicked out of the band and made money off us anyway.

But whatever, man. He told no lies, mostly, so I guess, [pause] whatever.

[Off tape]

So it happened that day like he said?

[Nods]

Yup, he left some shit out, but yeah.

Those dudes rolled up, walked up *my* fuckin' parents' driveway into *my* fuckin' parents' garage, and...

[Pause]

Shit.

You know, there are times in your life that are etched into your brain.

My life, there are a lot of those times.

But I had help remembering things.

My dad, maybe he wanted me to live his dream. I don't know. He was into rock 'n' roll too. He played the bass too. He was in a band when he was a kid too.

He's the one who got me into it. He bought me my first bass when I was ten. He'd listen to his music a lot. The Allman Brothers Band. Lynyrd Skynyrd. The Outlaws. He'd listen to it loud when Mom was out of the house.

But when we started rollin'. When Preach came to the band. Dad gave me this little notebook.

He said, "Write everything down, kid. Every gig. Every practice. Every song. Every girl. Every city. Every stretch of road. Write it down, 'cause there'll come a time, you won't want to forget."

And you know, Dad got sick. And then Dad died.

And what did I do?

I went to every fuckin' Kmart I could find, and I bought up every notebook they had that was the same size and brand and color of the one my dad gave me.

Still got 'em all.

Every one.

Natalie counted them once. I don't remember how many of them she said there were.

Over fifty.

[Off tape]

I'd like to read them.

Wouldn't everyone?

So, these guys roll up, yeah?

These fuckin' guys.

And I'm not ashamed to say, I near-on pissed my jeans.

Tim's behind the kit so that means Nicky's standin' there and this is what he didn't fuckin' say all the times he told this story.

He had to hose down our garage floor after, yeah?

And he went home in a pair of my jeans, gym shoes *and* shorts and it wasn't just piss he tied up tight in that trash bag and put in our bin, you know?

Pissed himself, shit his pants.

And Nicky is not my favorite person in the world, all these years, his big, fat mouth, you know why, and that shit is not *ever* gonna change.

But like I said, I nearly lost it too, these scary motherfuckers walkin' right up to my friend in my own goddamned garage.

"Where's Ricky?" they said.

And that was when it happened.

We were all so freaked by these motherfuckers showing up, we didn't pay any attention to Preacher.

"Get gone."

That was what he said.

Didn't leave his place behind his mic. Didn't take his guitar off his shoulder.

Just stood there, looking at them, and told them to, "Get gone."

"We want Ricky," they said to him.

"Don't give a fuck what you want," he said back. "He ain't here. Get gone."

They didn't get gone, as you know.

They tightened up on Nicky, one of them lifting his hand to point a finger in Nick's face, and I figure this was about the time he shit his pants.

And then Nicky crashed into the cymbal, the floor tom, big racket, and Preacher was in their space.

He had his guitar slanted on his back and a look on his face...

[Trails off]

[Leans forward, puts elbows to his knees]

I'm taped, what are you writing?

[Off tape]

Things people can't hear. Like you just leaned forward. Or when you smile.

Right. Why?

The story will be richer.

[Pause]

Right.

Go on.

You heard "Bad Bad Leroy Brown"?

Yes.

Ricky was a high school drug dealer. He's in the joint now, never learned. Three strikes was the worst thing that could happen to him. He had about twenty of 'em before that program rolled out and he got his "third." Now, he'll never get out.

It started back then. Dealin' weed and blow to high school kids.

[Shakes head]

And these three guys supplied him.

I do not know their beef. To this day, I do not know what Ricky was pullin' to piss them off.

What I know was, Preacher McCade got up in their shit, and when he did, he did not speak a goddamn word and they still knew that they did not come to my parents' driveway, walk up to their fuckin' garage and ask for Ricky.

They got a load of Preacher and they turned and walked away.

We never saw them again.

I asked about that Croce song not because Ricky was Leroy Brown.

Not because those dudes were.

Because Preach was.

[Off tape]

What happened then?

Nicky got himself cleaned up, hosed down the garage, was ready to take off, but Preach caught him at the end of the driveway before he went.

You heard Nick tell it. I wasn't there. I was standin' in the garage by the door to the house, pissed as shit that Ricky was such an asshole and wanting his twin brother outta my sight, even if that might mean I'd never see my jeans back.

Nick Pileggi, ex-rhythm guitar of Zenith as told to Tune magazine:

“He said Ricky was out.

I told him it wasn't his band.

He said Ricky was out.

And this was Preacher.

So, Rick was out.”

Jesse Simms:

Rick wasn't missed.

And like Preach said from the beginning, he sucked.

It was Preach who found Dave [Clinton, drummer of Zenith and Preacher McCade and the Roadmasters].

Dave was a year older than Tim and me in high school. By then, he was already graduated.

We didn't know him, but we knew him, you know? The way it is in high school.

Didn't know he played the drums, though. Just knew he was a pothead.

[Laughs]

And shit, [smiles, laughs, shakes head] even I didn't know how bad Ricky was until we had Dave.

Suddenly, I kid you not, the first song we did with Dave, "Start Me Up."

[Smiles again]

Dave.

[Shakes head]

He was nineteen, man. He sings "You make a grown man cry," with the rest of us, it was like we'd been on the road together for twenty years.

Dave was the shit.

Wild man.

Christ.

Dave.

[Smiles and keeps smiling]

[Off tape]

Will you talk about what happened with Nick Pileggi?

[Stares silently]

You don't have to.

It isn't shit nobody knows, you know? Because he has a big, fat mouth. Fuckin' asshole.

[Long pause]

Preacher—

Yeah, back then, Preacher took care of his ass. But the damage was done. Nothin' Preach really could do.

[Taps with fingers on arm of armchair]

One thing in my whole life that my mom and dad were in accord on was what Preacher did to Nick, you know?

Nicky stayed with the band after Ricky was out. Few months. Heading into graduation. Preach and Dave were already at work finding us gigs. *Real* gigs. Paying gigs. At bars and clubs all over the Midwest. Anywhere that would take us, they got us on the schedule.

I did not apply to colleges, neither did Tim.

Mom was pissed.

Dad got it.

Neither of Timmy's parents gave a shit.

We were takin' it on the road.

Preacher had songs before he came to us, worked them out with the band. They were good. You know 'em. Everyone does.

"Give Then Take" was a hit before it was an actual *hit*, and we all knew it. Angsty, dark, pissed-off rock 'n' roll. So dark, man. Deep in a pit, pitch black, sister.

Band defining, you know?

This was before Guns 'n Roses really hit. If you weren't Petty, Springsteen or Mellencamp, rock was hair bands. Mötley Crüe trash. Thinkin' they're badass because they put dots over vowels. What the fuck? I mean those guys were imbeciles, assholes and imbeciles. Clowns. Serious.

That is not rock 'n' roll.

Ratt. Poison. Cinderella. Warrant. Okay, maybe some talent, mostly hair.

Best of the bunch? Bon Jovi. Dudes had heart as well as hair and didn't think solely with their dicks. Put that heart in their music. That's why they're still around. And that's why they were authentic rock. Take them out of the decade where the likes of Crüe pissed all over the genre, they'd still have respect.

And then there's Def Leppard.

Now that's a band who knows brotherhood. They stood by Rick Allen and he worked his ass off not to let them down.

And they pulled no punches they didn't want to change the world with their music, they just wanted to have fun and make others do the same. And they did. The lyrics to "Pour Some Sugar

on Me” are not gonna hit any poetry books, but to this day, that song comes on, no matter what I’m doin’, I turn it up.

Now those guys, Bon Jovi and Def Leppard?

That’s rock ’n’ roll.

But I’ll say, my opinion, the only real thing was Lita Ford and she had no hope, havin’ a vagina and a guitar. But if you asked me, hair bands shoulda meant women rockers because there were some chicks who could seriously play that no one knows now, you know?

Lita is one of them.

But us, back then?

We’d been together awhile. We had Preach and his looks and his guitar, his voice, his songs. We had Dave, and that man was mean with a backbeat, guy had Bonham-style licks, and first thing he did was set himself up a cowbell. Now that’s rock ’n’ roll. [Smirks] Tim gettin’ older, comin’ into his own. Nick had that Italian stallion thing goin’ on, that is, he had it if you asked him.

And I could play bass. Nothin’ to look at, but, I mean, now people talk about Flea. Back then it was Geddy Lee, Jack Bruce, John Entwistle, Chris Squire, John Paul Jones, and of course, McCartney.

And there’s me.

I could play, I was in a rock band, I didn’t have to be good-lookin’. Rock’s all about that.

Mick Jagger?

Point made.

So, you know, we’re good to go. Toss off those graduation robes and hit the fuckin’ road, Springsteen-style.

Then...

[Trails off]

It’s not a surprise, or at least I thought at first it wasn’t a surprise, how Mom and my sisters took to Preacher.

He had it.

For women, they couldn’t fight it, he was *that guy*.

He banged Heidi’s ballbuster sister the whole time since I met him to when we hit the road.

And anyone he wanted whenever, wherever.

And I heard Heidi's sister lost it when he took off and left her behind.

But my sisters? My mom?

Especially my mom.

Not like that, of course.

It was later, when it went down, I realized how different it was.

It took Preacher a while to share with me, yeah? I mean, you could listen to his music and know he did not grow up with the Nelsons. But he didn't share at first.

But my mom was a mom.

She knew without him having to say dick.

Preach started havin' dinner with us after practice and before he'd take a girl out on a date because no one said no to my mom, but also because she needed to do that, you know?

Be a mother to a motherless son.

Instant she knew he was adrift, she dragged him in.

And Preach was also *that* guy. Especially with certain women.

He knew she needed it way more than he needed it.

So, he gave it to her.

I'll tell you something about Preacher McCade you might not know.

If you were a woman, and you meant something to him, he'd twist himself into knots to give you what you needed.

My mom needed to be a mom.

Last place he wanted to be, sitting at our table, eating my mom's lasagna, and not because Mom didn't make kickass lasagna. She did.

It was just...

[Pause]

There were a lot of things that made Preacher McCade.

Doing that for my mom was one of them.

Doing what he did for Penny was another.

My sisters, both of them, had crushes on him. But it was candyland stuff. He was too old, he was in the band, he thought of me as a brother even when I didn't know he thought of me that way, and they got that vibe. Chicks, they get those vibes.

So, they were his little sisters too.

So, when Nicky knocked up my sister Penny.

Yeah, that was not gonna go well for Nick.

Not with me.

Not with Preach.

No fuckin' way.

[Off tape]

Nick Pileggi alleges McCade put him in the hospital.

No clue. Preach messed him up, all right. Asshole should have gone to the hospital, but don't know if he did. After that, never saw the guy again, and I thank God for that.

You were there.

Fuck yeah, I was. Guy knocked up my fifteen-year-old sister.

He's in *my* band, and he's sneakin' my little sister out of her bedroom window at night, takin' her somewhere and bangin' her?

[Shakes head]

Penny told me before she told Mom and Dad.

I sat there, holding her hand when she told Mom and Dad.

But Penny told me something she didn't tell Mom and Dad, and that was that she told Nick she wanted him to use a rubber and he said he wouldn't, and if she didn't, he'd find someone else who would, without a prophylactic.

And she was into him. She really liked him. Convinced herself she was in love with him.

But he told her a guy couldn't get off if he had to wear a rubber. Told her he needed it wet.

I'm serious about this shit.

She was fifteen, she believed his ass. Part, I figure, because she'd do anything to keep him. Part, I figure, because she was fifteen and hormones fuck you right up.

Nick told her, he pulled out, it'd all be good.

No problems.

Told her that's the way everyone did it.

Yeah.

Nick.

A real peach.

He didn't share that shit wide either.

[Shakes head]

And you got folks who don't want sex education in schools.

[Scoffs]

[Quietly] Fuckin' lunacy.

She told me, we told our folks, then I took off and told Preacher.

And we found Nick.

I knew what Preacher would do, that's why I found him.

[Smiles]

Preach, he grew up down South, you know? He can be a gentleman.

He let me get my licks in before he took over.

Pileggi contends Preacher McCade broke all the fingers on both of his hands and this is why he can no longer play guitar.

Got no comment on that.

But you don't deny you and McCade sought him out to assault him.

He knocked up my little sister.

Pileggi's later lawsuits were dropped. He says he dropped them because Tommy Mancosa and Preacher McCade himself found him, threatened him, and he was forced to back down.

Got no comment on that either.

Pileggi—

[Leans forward]

Listen, *I was there*. I'm not even sure you were born yet. But *I was there*.

I know, when we hit it, Pileggi did everything he could to take his piece of flesh. I know it 'cause it was *my flesh* he was stripping.

They made her have him, or Mom did. Penny wanted to get an abortion. Mom made her have it and give it up. She wasn't raisin' another kid.

Big fight, no surprise. Dad was for an abortion, and if not, helpin' Penny raise it. He wanted what Penny wanted, however that was.

Mom said no. Adoption.

And what Mom said went.

So, Penny had him, and gave him up.

Nick didn't care about any of *that* shit.

No.

He wasn't involved in *that*. He had nothing to say about *that*. After Preacher and me got done with him and shit got real, couldn't get the fucker on the phone. Went to his house, he was with "cousins" in Texas.

He was a ghost.

His old band starts making massive cake, suddenly, he's there.

Got *lots* to say.

I'll tell you this, and that's the last we'll talk about Ricky and Nicky fuckin' Pileggi.

A week ago, just a week ago, I'm sittin' next to my sister at dinner, and she's off her head, yeah?

It started back then, you know?

She hid it and then she came of age and didn't hide it so much and lived her life, and she can set it aside to go to work. Set it aside to get shit done. But the witching hour starts, the wine comes out and all bets are off.

And that part's on me. Yeah? On me and Mom and Preach and Tim and my baby sister Lana.

Preacher though, he saw it, called it and said it more than once, "We gotta get Penny in hand, brother."

He said it but even he didn't do dick about it.

We all danced around it like...

[Trails off]

So, she's drunk and chatty and gettin' loud like she's been doin' for, oh, I don't know...thirty some-odd years.

Then she gets quiet and I know it's gonna happen, man. I know it.

I know it because it's happened so many damned times, there's no way to count.

Each time, sister, hear this.

It's a knife in the gut.

For me.

So, if I feel that, you gotta get what *she* feels and how she's been drownin' that in booze for decades.

But I gotta give it to her because she's my sister, yeah?

So, I do. I sit next to her and it happens.

She says, "He's in his thirties now. He could be married. I could have grandbabies. I wonder if he knows. I wonder if they told him he wasn't theirs. I wonder if he'll ever find out his uncle is famous."

That was a good one.

There were good ones. "I wonder if they sent him to college." Or, "I hope they weren't too hard on him during potty training."

And there were bad ones. "You think he's okay? I hope he didn't get sick. Dad got sick. Nick might have something in his family. You think he got sick?" Or, "What if he's like Nick? What if he does some girl like Nick did me or worse?" Or, "What if he turns out like Ricky? What if he's dealing drugs to kids? They should know about that. They should know to look out for that and help him around it."

Got a million of 'em, sister.

A million what ifs.

Torture.

Pileggi opened his mouth and I lost track of how many people came forward, sayin' their kid was Nick Pileggi and Penny Simms's kid. Paid for so many fuckin' DNA tests, 'bout bankrupted me.

Every one of 'em, she'd have hope. Every one of 'em, she'd get crushed. She can't go lookin' for him, signed that right away.

She has to wait for him to come to her.

If he does.

I could probably pull some strings. Hell, I've got the money.

She won't let me.

“It’s gotta be him,” she says. “If he doesn’t know, I don’t wanna mess up his life.”

It’s taboo, talkin’ about it. No one can take a stand without gettin’ piled under shit.

And most of the people with the loudest mouths about it have no connection to it. They’ve made up their minds and decided how it’s gonna be for everybody, on both sides.

I’ll tell you what, you gotta have no heart in your chest, you sit a night with my drunk-ass sister who used to be beautiful, used to laugh a lot, now looks like she spent her life at the bottom of a bottle, looks twenty years older than she is, twenty years older than *me*, and I spent over thirty years in a fuckin’ rock band.

Sit next to her and hear her talkin’ about the kid her mother forced her to give up, and not get it. At least a little of it.

Just a little.

Don’t get me wrong. If my nephew is somewhere out there havin’ a good life, bein’ a good man, loved by his folks, his friends, his woman, if he has one, or his man, whatever...good.

Good.

But I’ll never know that.

Penny’ll never know that.

A woman’s gotta have a choice.

And it’s gotta be *her* choice.

’Cause it’s gonna be her, not the guy, not some white man behind a pulpit, not some other white guy with a senate seat, who lives with the consequences, either way.

Or it’s gonna be her who doesn’t figure out how.

So, yeah.

Band started with me, Timmy, Nick and Rick Pileggi.

We went on the road, still as Zenith, and we were Preacher McCade, Tim Townes, Dave Clinton and Jesse Simms.

We picked up Tommy on the way.

Later came Josh.

And we were gonna take rock by the balls.

And then came Lyla.

Tommy Mancosa

Jesse Simms, bassist, Preacher McCade and the Roadmasters, formerly Zenith:

You seen the movie *Roadhouse*?

[Off tape]

Yes.

[Laughs]

Well, in the beginning, that's the kinda gigs Preach and Dave could find us.

[Shakes head]

I still don't know how Dave and Preacher found the money to buy that old truck-bed camper shell and pickup.

I know they both had cars and then they both didn't, but we had that truck with the camper shell on it. The kind that went up and over the cab of the truck.

We rolled out, fittingly they picked me up last, so we did this outta my parents' driveway, heading to our first gig, which was outside Cincy, and Dave slipped a tape into the deck and the opening theme from *Star Wars* played.

Preacher is behind the wheel and he's bustin' with laughter.

Never seen him laugh like that. By then, I'd known him near-on a year.

Never seen him laugh like that.

We were on our way, man.

We were on our way.

Now, I sensed Preacher was a serious dude when he stared down three drug suppliers.

And I was pretty impressed with what he did to Nick, but Nick was an eighteen-year-old fuckup.

Still, Preach was six foot four and a powerhouse.

Back then, you could stand him up and ask a hundred people, "What's this guy do?" and not a soul would say, "Lead singer and guitar of a rock and roll band."

I'd bet there'd be a lot of answers of enforcer, though.

I mean he was tall and packed and *ripped*.

You know, *Rocky*-style ripped.

We had no money to go to a gym, you hear what I'm sayin'?

But he'd put on that Rangers baseball cap backwards, his cutoff sweats and you didn't talk to him.

The man could do pushups from his fingertips.

[Shakes head]

Yeah.

His fucking *fingertips*.

But, until we went on the road, I had no idea Preacher was a bruiser.

And Dave?

Dave was a crackpot.

[Chuckles]

So, they weren't big fans when people threw their beers at us just because people can be assholes, especially when they're rednecks and drunk.

Because we did not suck.

We weren't awesome, but we didn't suck.

No reason to throw your beers at us.

And in order to play those bars, me, Dave and Tim had fake IDs. Wet behind our ears. We'd barely been out of Mooresville, Indiana, and when we were, it was with our parents to go to Florida to hit Disney World when we were kids or a beach when we were older.

You know?

So yeah, right now I will confirm the lore. In the beginning, there were brawls. And there were a lot of them.

And yeah, right now I'll confirm that Preach was protective and he didn't allow shit to fuck with the band.

And last, another yeah, the second Dave saw Preacher's arm go up to pull off his guitar, he'd jump his kit and be all in.

And since those two were in, Tim and me had to wade in because, man, these were our brothers. You took their backs.

But then...

[Pause]

We met Tommy.

By this time, we'd been on the road, I don't know, four, five months.

Summer was over, I know that.

Felt like we'd been on the road four, five years, I know that too.

And we were outside Chicago.

I know that too.

I'd have to look up my notebooks to know exactly when it was, but it doesn't matter.

I was pissed as shit because we were in that camper where we rode and slept, and they all fucked chicks.

But I wasn't pissed about that.

It was cold as fuck, and Dave was alternately smoking a bong—and we barely had enough money to eat, and Dave got his hands on weed, probably using our money, which did not make me happy—and holding ice to a fat lip.

And Preacher's knuckles were all split and he was lying on his back with his long-ass legs up the side of the camper, his head hanging over the bench of the table that turned into a bed 'cause his nose wouldn't stop bleeding.

Two of my knuckles were split and I had a tooth loose.

And before we even left the joint, Timmy had a shiner.

That was when someone hammered on the door.

Preacher was on his feet in a flash and Dave was mumbling shit like, "Fuck, I can't fight. I'm high," and Timmy had his head bowed and was staring at the crappy-ass carpet of that camper, probably hoping what I was hoping. That no one had come to kill us after we got out of that last brawl that included Preacher having to deliver a beatdown to the bar manager who didn't wanna pay us.

And after that, we had to haul ass.

In a *camper*.

When that knock came, I was in the middle of delivering a lecture, something I did a lot before Tommy, something that made me feel like I was my mom, which I fuckin' hated.

I was doing this reminding Preach and Dave we kinda needed all our fingers to work so we could play music.

I'd learn, you know, later, where that shit came from for Preach.

I'd think about it a lot.

Hell, I still think about it a lot.

Wondering...

[Pause]

You know, if I should have let him...

[Trails off]

If he'd been able to get more of it out. If he'd have been able to work it out of his system.

If we hadn't met Tommy.

Needless to say, Preach shoved me out of the way and opened the door.

Tom was outside.

I think Tommy said something like, "You'll wanna let me in and listen to me."

Now, Preach was a brawler and Preach had shit he was dealing with but Preacher was far from dumb.

Tommy Mancosa, as you know, was five foot eleven. Preach had five inches and probably fifty, sixty pounds on the guy.

But Tommy was also a former marine, still had the buzz cut, no neck, and he did not get the nickname "Bulldog" for nothin'.

There never was a Preacher versus Tommy smackdown.

From the beginning, total simpatico with those two.

But if it had happened, I wouldn't lay money on either of them, 'cause honest to Christ, I'd have no idea who'd come out on top.

So, what I'm sayin' is, Preach did not get up in his shit.

He just said, "I'm listenin', but I'm not lettin' you in."

Tom said, "Fair enough." Then he said, "I'm gonna make you guys the biggest rock band there ever was."

I was standing behind Preach.

At that, Tim and Dave pushed up close and we all stood there, behind Preach, looking down at this five-foot-eleven hunk of muscle with a fighter's face and mean eyes wearing a beat-up leather jacket who looked maybe five years older than Preach.

"You a scout?" Tim asked.

"Nope," Tom answered.

"You a manager?" Tim asked.

"Not until now," Tom answered.

Seriously.

That's what he said.

Guy had big balls. Huge. *Enormous*.

Not until now, he said.

[Shakes head while chuckling]

"You sayin' you wanna be our manager?" Preacher asked.

"Yup," Tommy says.

Preach shut the door in his face.

He turned to us and said, "Vote."

Dave was the first to say yes, which came as no surprise.

"He doesn't know dick," I pointed out.

"We don't know dick either," Dave reminded me.

"We don't know dick about this guy," I kept at it.

"We don't get *paid* dick by *anybody*," Tim reminded everybody.

Preach turned and opened the door and Tommy was still standing out there, in the cold.

"Until we make cake, you don't get paid," Preacher told him.

"Deal," Tommy said.

And that was how we hired Tommy Mancosa.

It wasn't Tommy but Preach who took me in hand.

Tom had found us some gig in Michigan City and he and the other guys were out with their posters and staple guns, papering the city with band shit, this Tommy's new thing. We'd never had posters before Tom.

I'd slept in the cab. I was cold, pissed I'd had to sleep in the cab and in no mood to wander around Michigan City, putting up posters.

And Preach was fucking some chick in the bed over the top of the cab.

When I heard he was done and took the time Preach took before he rolled her out—because even if it was a one shot, Preacher was not a slam-bam man—I got out of the cab and went to the camper at the back.

He was standing at the little stove, frying bacon.

I barely climbed in when he asked, eyes on the bacon, "You gay?"

"No, I'm not fuckin' gay," I told him, backed to pissed but now pissed because, you know, it was the eighties. You didn't ask a man shit like that in the eighties and ever get a yes or make the man you asked pissed as shit.

Even so, I'm not gay.

That was when Preach looked at me. "Why don't you get laid then, brother?"

"Look at me," I told him.

He was looking at me, so he just repeated his question.

"Pizza face," I said.

He had a fork in his hand, lifted it my way, and said, "That's the last time I hear shit like that from you."

That was it.

He made us bacon and eggs and we ate them at the table where he'd been bleeding a few weeks before.

That was Preacher McCade too.

He knew he was a good-lookin' guy with a good body. Straight up, he was full of himself. Totally vain.

It was confidence, sure.

But it was also vanity.

[Laughs]

Sayin' that, he could have been ugly as fuck, and he would have thought he was the shit.

That was just how he was. That was just how he thought everyone should be.

Knowin' his story, I don't know how he got there, took himself there, got to that place in his head where he was at one with himself, and I never asked.

I just know he did.

The thing was, it wasn't something he had that he held over anyone else.

In the way Tim needed it, he did that shit with Timmy too. I didn't know when or how, I just saw Tim come into himself and how Preach settled into that, so I knew he had a hand in it.

Dave didn't need it.

Dave needed drumsticks, pussy, pot and blow, and Dave was all good.

[Chuckles]

I got my first blowjob in Michigan City.

It was a Preacher castoff, he told her to blow me, she did, and I did not and still to this day do not give that first fuck.

I've had more experience since.

[Grins]

So now I know.

That woman gave righteous head.

Lost my cherry, as it were, in South Bend.

She was not a castoff.

She was mine.

Her name was Beth.

Even though she was just a one go, guys sang "Beth" to me for the next I don't know how many months.

Don't care about that either.

[Grins again]

I love that fuckin' song.

I don't know how he got it, or if Tommy got it, it was probably Tom, but they got it.

It was Preach that gave it to me, though.

My mom had wanted me to go to the doctor. Always on my ass about picking, so I didn't pick.

Or squeeze.

I didn't want to think about it. I just wanted to wake up one day and it'd be gone.

Preacher and Tom did something about it.

Took two months using that cream they got their hands on, prescription shit, and then not a single zit.

Never came back.

[Points at face]

That's Preacher's, sister.

It was Tommy *and* Preacher who called my shit out.

It wasn't long after South Bend.

The seal was broken, and I was on a tear.

I don't know where the guys were, but I was in the camper getting laid.

Got off, she took off, and I was gonna try to find the guys, so I cleaned up, took off after her, still tucking my junk in my jeans.

Saw Tom first, he was down the lane from where we were in the RV park.

He gives a head lift, I think to me, but I closed the door and Preach is there, leaning with his shoulders against the camper.

I'm all "Hey, dude."

He's staring in the distance and all "You figure your shit out."

"What?" I ask.

That's when he looks at me.

"I listened to that whole thing, it didn't last even ten minutes and it was about you, brother. Figure your shit out."

Needless to say, I repeated my question because I didn't know what the fuck he was talking about.

"You get her off?" he asked.

You know...

[Shakes head]

Shit.

I lived more than half my life wide open and not every second of it was stellar.

And it is no lie, I have never felt as humiliated as I was right then.

“Learn to eat pussy,” Preach advised. “You need pointers?”

I think I broke a record tellin’ him I did not.

Even though I probably did.

“Fingers too, brother. Until you figure out the g-spot, and after, man. She’s got a clit for a reason. You hear?”

He waited for me to nod and then waited more, like he wanted me to know how important this was.

I figure I somehow communicated that I got it because he took off and joined Tommy to do whatever it was they did.

Mostly planning world domination.

It’s stone-cold, but true, that Tommy was about brand even before anyone called it a brand.

A fan did not leave a gig without being satisfied, you get me?

For Preach, it was something else.

You know about Lyla.

So, I figure you get that too.

It was Christmas when they told me.

We were home, had some gigs Tommy set up in Indy, but we all got to sleep in beds in our own houses.

Or our parents’ houses.

Penny had just had the kid and she was a hollowed-out shell, and that is no fuckin’ pun.

They told me, and I scoured town until I found whatever chick’s bed Preach had fallen into and I knocked on the door until he answered, barefoot, no shirt, jeans not done up, and no words needed to be spoken what I’d interrupted.

He took one look at my face, and it was her pad, but she took a hike and he got the Jack and we sat in her living room, me on her couch, Preacher sitting on her coffee table in front of me.

“Dad’s got cancer.”

He caught me at the back of the neck with his hand and just held on, staring in my eyes.

You know, that moment lasted so long, when I think about it now, I’m surprised I’m still not sittin’ on the couch, looking into Preacher’s eyes.

I told you about getting those notebooks at Kmart.

I didn’t tell you, it was Preach that drove me around to all of them, miles and miles, until I thought I had enough.

He didn’t bitch once.

We were in Pennsylvania when we got word.

Pittsburgh.

Me and Preach, a map and a Yellow Pages so we could find Kmart.

I wrote that down too.

That’s somewhere in the first notebook Dad gave me.

I wrote down those patches of road Preach drove in Pittsburgh the day Dad died.

Every stretch.

Preach and me flew home. The band voted. Tim stood down, because he was my oldest friend, but he knew Preach was the one who should go. Not for me, for Mom and the girls.

We didn’t make dick and every penny we could, we set aside ’cause Tommy played it that way.

He wanted us in a studio. He wanted us to cut a demo. Studio time cost a fortune.

He was getting us more money and sometimes managed to get us takes of the door. That was part that Tommy was a man it was hard to say no to and part that we were getting a following.

Seriously.

Sometimes, we’d play “Give Then Take” and people would sing it with us, not that first record pressed, not a joke.

Tommy found the cheapest seats he could get, and I’ll always owe it to the boys that they let us have the money so we could fly home for Dad’s funeral.

Preach was the rock, you know? Not just for me. For Mom. Penny. My baby sister, Lana.

He did dishes, man.

[Leans forward, shaking head then hangs it]

[Mumbling] He did everything.

[Long silence]

[Coughs, lifts head, but does not sit back]

He slept on the floor by my bed in my old bedroom. Mom hadn't moved anything out. We didn't have a guest room. He didn't sleep on the couch. He slept on a sleeping bag on the floor by my bed the whole week we were there.

One of those nights, that was when he told me.

Told me how he knew his version of giving then taking and how fuckin' serious-ass ugly that shit was.

Told me about his parents.

About why he was not in Louisiana but in Indiana and, "We'll tour one day, brother. But we will not go down there. We will never go down there."

New Orleans is a party town and it's a fantastic place. I've been there more than once.

But we never played there.

Not once.

He didn't tell me that to lay a heavy vibe on me.

He told me that so I could rejoice even after my loss.

Preacher had what he had.

My dad cowed to my mom, hated doing it, didn't hide it, didn't stop doing it, ended up hating her for it.

But in the end, she stood by his side and she took him to his treatments, and she held his hand when he slipped away and she wept at his funeral holding my hand and Lana's hand, while me and Preach held onto Penny.

And my dad loved me.

It was fucked up, but it was family.

What Preach had was just fucked up.

So, I got what he was saying.
I *felt* what he was saying.
Dad was gone and that sucked.
But I'd had a dad like him.
So, I was lucky.

We went back to the band and it felt like I was seven hundred years older.
And that much wiser too.
That was when I noticed it.
We were all ambitious.
We all wanted to play stadiums.
But none of us were as ambitious as Tommy.
And Preacher.

I didn't think much on it, but after the funeral I did. I figured it out, because we had no money to make posters. We had no money to put ads in the papers of places where we'd play.

I don't know if he had some payout from the marines or if he'd been socking money away before he saw us play or what. I never asked.

Tommy told you what Tommy thought you should know. We all learned that early, learned not to question it, learned to trust it.

Trust him.

But Tom Mancosa didn't just manage the band.

He invested in it.

Me and one of the guys would be head to foot in the bed above the cab, sleepin' off a gig, and the booze, weed and pussy after, and the other in the cab or off in some chick's bed.

And Preacher and Tommy would be at the table in that camper, heads bent over it, Tom going over his strategy, Preacher okaying it.

Tom Mancosa faced making us the biggest rock band in history like he'd face going to war, ready and equipped to fight battle after battle until you won the whole fuckin' thing.

You know he's almost as famous as we are.

So, just sayin'.

He was a great fuckin' general.

[Off tape]

Isn't this around the time the band took on Josh Hardy?

Yup.

And the famous Larry Bird speech?

[Laughs for a long time]

Yup.

Josh was keys.

He came to us.

We did a tryout.

He was good.

Really good.

Tommy hated him on sight and Preacher stared at him like he was a bug he was about to crush, so I don't know why both of them voted him in, but they did.

Looking back, I think it was because Preach's music was transcending, you know? This is why we'd later take on DuShawn and his horn and piano and talent. Preacher needed more for us to play in a way it was worthy of the songs he was writing.

We were never a four-man band when it came to Preacher's music.

Not really.

We needed keys, piano, horns, backup singers.

I honestly don't think they thought Josh would last very long, but he was what we could get at the time and they wanted the band to be more. They wanted more for the music. They wanted more for the audience.

And when the time came, they'd lose him and get someone who worked.

But Josh worked, at the time.

Dave had crazy-ass, curly hair and ended up tearing off his tee when he was playing 'cause he was sweating so bad. Short. Burly. Hairy.

Preacher had that long, layered look and a beard. John Bonham, Bob Seger, you know, staying true to the seventies because they were cool, and he hated the eighties shit that was happening, because it was not cool.

When we played, he wore a button-down with the sleeves rolled up over his elbows.

Or a short-sleeved Henley with the sleeves rolled up to his shoulders.

Or tight tees that made his chest look like a wall.

Timmy looked like a clean-cut surfer. A month rolled 'round, Tim didn't miss hitting a barber no matter where we were so he could get a cleanup. Always wore concert tees for other people's bands. Kiss. Van Halen. Drove Tom insane that Timmy was advertising other bands while playing in ours.

[Laughs]

Preacher was my spirit animal.

[Laughs again]

So, I had the thick, seventies mustache and long hair and scoured vintage shops for cool T-shirts like he sometimes wore, but I switched 'em up, wearing a vest over them and lots of necklaces.

[Laughs again]

Also started doing his Rocky workouts, pushups, pull ups, sit ups with something heavy on my chest.

Smoke a cigarette and then go on a five-mile run.

[More laughter]

Play bass in a rock band, get chicks.

Play bass in a rock band and have a good body.

Get more chicks.

What can I say?

I was nineteen, man.

[More laughter]

Josh rounded shit up, feathered hair on top, long on the bottom, not a mullet, but cut the sides, and there you have it. Wore a rolled bandana around his forehead even when he wasn't playing, which was douchy, even then. Always in a shirt with the sleeves cut off and unbuttoned down the front to wherever.

At first, I thought it was just that we'd gone through a lot together, on the road, and before, with Nicky and Ricky and Penny and my dad dying.

I thought this was why Josh didn't fit in.

In the end, it came clear Josh didn't fit in because he was an asshole.

Josh came on board, we'd hit a town, and Tom would find us rehearsal space.

It might have no heat, but it'd have electricity.

And he was a drill sergeant about that shit, sister.

Even Preacher would bitch about it.

We were getting more gigs, thanks to Tom, for sure. Always Friday and Saturday nights.

Bars'd get bands in for live music nights to pull people in during the week, we got a lot of those too.

If you don't do it, you think it's easy, standing up there, three, four hours a night, playing sets.

But it's work. It's physical.

After getting loose and laid after a gig, we didn't want to eat breakfast and haul our asses to a warehouse or someone's basement or whatever and practice for four, five hours.

[Off tape]

This is the Larry Bird speech.

Yeah.

'Cause we were about to hit Indy for some gigs and I hadn't been back since my dad died and I was tweaking. Preach had his eye on me, and straight up, we'd been at it, no breaks, except for a funeral, for over a year.

Lotsa road. Setting up. Tearing down. Booze. Women. Drugs. Brawls.

So, I guess Tommy had enough of us moaning, and he says, "You know, Larry Bird went out and shot hoops for hours every night as a kid."

We all knew who Larry Bird was, but we had no idea why Tommy was talking about him.

"Every fuckin' night, he's out there for hours, throwing a ball at a basket," he says. "Night after night. Now, the guy is tall. The guy's got talent. He could get on a high school team and be

a star just bein' nearly seven foot. He could get on a college team mostly for the same reason. But this tall, white guy isn't gonna be shit beyond that, unless he practices."

We got in then.

[Chuckles]

"Man's poor as dirt," Tommy tells us. "He doesn't wanna be poor and live in a tiny town in southern Indiana the rest of his life. Doesn't want his momma poor for the rest of hers. What's he gonna do about that?" Tommy asks. "He's got two things. The guy is nearly seven feet tall and he can handle a ball. *That's* what he's gonna do about it."

[Smiles]

Then he says, "You can have talent. And honest as fuck, you don't need it. Half the people who are rich and famous are famous 'cause they're pretty. Probably dumb as rocks, half of 'em. Most of 'em would work at McDonald's if they didn't have a killer smile. That sucks, but it's the way of the world."

And you know, he was right about that.

"You can have passion," he says. "And you need it, 'cause this shit is hard work, and if you don't got the fire for it, you're gonna fail."

Gotta say, Tom was right about that too.

But Tommy was right about a lot of things.

"But you want respect," he says, "you gotta be good at what you do, and to be good at what you do, you gotta practice, you gotta go at it hard, and gotta do it *a lot*. No one who's got talent, money *and* respect gets it pissin' about and givin' thirty percent. They earn it because they give it their all."

[Lengthy pause]

"Now," Tommy said, "you gotta make your minds up. You gonna get a little because you're all pretty and you can play in a rock band? Or are you gonna earn it all?"

[Slouches in seat]

Yeah.

That was the Larry Bird speech.

To this day, I have no clue if Larry Bird actually went out and practiced like that when he was a kid.

But it doesn't matter.
No one bitched after that.
And we had a good number of gigs.
But we practiced.
All the fuckin' time.

Lyla

Jesse:

They'd tease him, in the beginning, you know?

[Long pause]

[Off tape]

No, I don't know.

Her name was Lyla. Dave and even Tim would tease him.

Lyla. Layla.

Get it?

[Another long pause]

They learned not to tease him, though.

I didn't understand. Not in the beginning.

She was...

[Lengthy pause]

Not *his scene*.

Straight up, he didn't seem to be hers, either.

Nothing seemed to be her scene.

We hooked up with her and her friends at the bar where we'd played, and she was not into it.

I mean, her friends and her, chalk and freakin' cheese.

Serious.

She wasn't into the bar, the music, the band.

Tight with her friends, you could tell, but us and everything around us?
Nope.

She didn't even dress like them. Like a rocker-groupie girl.

She didn't even dress eighties, Madonna teased out hair and rubber bracelets and lotsa lace.
Or neon. Or whatever the fuck.

No, you know, that isn't right.

She did.

Flashdance.

Shirt falling off her shoulder. Jeans. White Nike classics. Cortez. If I remember, with a blue swoop.

Nikes.

First time we saw Lyla, she was in Nikes.

[Smiles]

They told us they had booze and blow and mushrooms and maybe some acid and a pool.

And they were party girls.

Lyla wasn't, but they were.

That was serious too.

Serious as shit.

Party girls like that and a pool?

[Smiles]

We were all in.

Even Tommy.

Josh took off somewhere else though. Found some other chick he wanted to party with, and he went with her.

Josh did that kind of thing a lot.

And he may say it different, but we wanted him with us, and we made that clear.

He took off and did his own thing.

So that's on him, no matter what that guy says.

We went with Lyla's friends. And I was twenty by then. I was in a rock band that no longer had trouble getting gigs. There were entire cities where I had pussy waiting for me when we got back to them.

But I was on my home turf.

Indy.

First time back after Dad died.

So, I was rattled, you know?

Preacher, I could tell, had a mind to me.

Tim ate the 'shrooms, Dave dropped the acid.

[Shakes head]

They didn't have a mind to dick.

Or at least not anything but their own dicks.

Lyla sat in a lounge chair she'd pulled away from the pool, up close to the house, and every once in a while, she'd get up to take a walk and clean shit up.

Clean shit up!

[Hoots, shakes head, grows serious]

[Speaking softly] God, Lyla.

Most of the time though, she laid in that lounge chair against the house, far from the pool, you know, like...*glaring* at us.

Preach was an equal opportunity, benevolent almost-rock god.

I remember seeing him with his jeans bunched up to his knees, sitting on the side of the pool, his feet and calves in the water, her friends barely clothed in the water, wet and hanging off his legs and his every word, and he'd glance over at her.

When he was in the mood to spread his love, everyone was invited.

We all were nailing serious tail, but I don't think anybody but Dave had had a threesome.

But that was not unusual for Preach.

Or more, you know?

That night, I had one girl, he had two, three were in with Tim and Dave, tripping, and Tommy was fucking another one in what we would find out later was one of the girls' dad's waterbed.

And looking back, I knew Preacher was more into her than the two he had.

I also got why.

Kind of.

Now, again, it was the eighties. We're talkin' Jane Fonda workout videos and Jamie Lee Curtis in that movie *Perfect* and one-pieces making a comeback because the legs were cut so far up the hips, a girl had to shave.

And Lyla was not...

[Pause]

That.

I mean, there was a reason anorexia became prevalent during that decade and didn't let go. It wasn't right, it wasn't good, but it was the way it was.

But Lyla was not that way.

Tits *and* ass.

A lot.

Of both.

And, from what I could tell that night, bad attitude.

But fuck, the longer the night wore on, Preacher couldn't keep his eyes off her.

She'd do a lap to clean up ashtrays or beer bottles or whatever the fuck, and honest to Christ, he didn't miss a step.

Not that first step.

She had what they now politically correctly, but also, it's gotta be said, just plain correctly call *curves*.

Freddie Mercury called them fat-bottomed girls.

But man, she was pretty.

Lotsa hair.

Perfect skin.

You know, and a way about her.

It was part that attitude.

Part the mystery.

You know, tell a man, “don’t touch, you’ll get burned,” he’ll become obsessed with the fire.
It’s just how it is.

She screamed *don’t touch*.

And Preacher, man...

Preacher could be obsessive.

In a big way.

But it was the eyes.

I gotta believe, and this would prove true, in a way, if it wasn’t Preach, it would be somebody.
Another rock star. A photographer. A painter. *Someone* would fall in the muse of Lyla’s eyes.

But as you know, it was Preacher.

Eventually, my girl said she had some coke hidden in her purse.

We went in, did lines, she went down on me, I went down on her, we smoked a joint to mellow out, and then we banged.

When we were done, everyone was either passed out or boning. It was late, nearly morning, she said she had to go home, so she took me back to our motel.

We were staying in motels then. Shitty-ass ones, but we slept in beds.

Yeah, battle by battle, Tommy was winning the war.

We could only afford two rooms, though, and Dave, Tim, or Josh had to take turns sleeping on the floor unless one of them passed out in a bed another one was in.

This was because, most of the time, I shared a room with Preach and Tom always slept in the camper.

It just was what it was.

My band (at the time).

Preacher’s talent.

Though, a lot of the time, I’d end up in the other room or hanging with Tom in the camper because Preacher had company.

I thought for sure he was back at the party house tangled in girls.

I was looking forward to crashing and a shower, or the other way around.

So, when I opened the door to our room, I was not prepared for what I saw.

Not even close.

It didn't rock my world.

It changed it.

After what I saw, it'd never be the same.

I'd never be the same.

And Preacher would never be the same.

Not again.

He had Lyla with him.

They were both on his bed, legs twined, and she was tall too, model tall. So, between the two of them, they had a lot of leg to twine.

Lyla's head was on his chest, her arm around him so tight, it disappeared around his back because he was lying on it.

No shoes for either of them, but each fully clothed.

Preacher had both his arms around her.

She was asleep.

He wasn't.

No lights, just the dawn coming in through the door I'd opened.

He looked at me when I was in the opened door, didn't say a word, just shook his head.

He didn't need to do that. I was already backing out.

I closed the door, hit the motel's diner, ordered coffee and waited for the others to join me.

We did that by then, after every gig, no matter what we got up to.

We had breakfast together in a diner close to or in our motel, if it had one.

Just us six.

Tommy's orders. He'd suss out the diner we'd meet at about ten seconds after we checked in to whatever motel we were gonna stay at.

Even Josh didn't miss breakfast.

Band bonding.

Chicks came and went.

The band remained.

We'd do that for decades.

Except sometimes, one chick, who sadly came and went, would join us.

And only the first time she did would anyone have a problem with it.

I sat in that diner, though, gotta tell you, shaken.

It wasn't Lyla.

It wasn't Preacher.

It was maybe partly that I'd never seen that, the way my parents were.

I'd never seen anything that pure.

That right.

It was definitely that I saw Preacher holding a woman like he was holding Lyla.

I saw the look on his face before he looked to me.

Christ.

[Pause to swallow]

That look on his face.

I was glad he had that, feeling some relief, and not a little fuckin' joy, a whole lot.

And it was that I wanted it for myself.

Just *that*.

What I saw Preacher had with Lyla

A woman asleep, cradled in my arms, trusting me in her vulnerability, tied up in me.

Holding me tight.

That started my quest.

I'd look for just that for years.
Goddamned *years*.
I thought I had it a couple of times.
I didn't.

Until I found Natalie.

FAST LANE drops on 10.15.19

Available in digital, print and audio.

[Pre-order now!](#)