

## 7. I MANAGE

Back in Atlanta. I try to catch my breath after all my adventures. It has only just begun. But I do not realize this. I have fond memories of watching the National. The first gig where I saw them was at the Echo Lounge. There were maybe ten people there if that. This would have been a very difficult moment to endure if I was in a band. From that point on, I have found Matt's performance totally endearing. He seems like a Shakespearean actor in search of the appropriate soliloquy. Under the circumstances his portraits are of lost souls seeking nobility in farce. The inter-woven guitars of the brothers Dessner, Bryce and Aaron, underline the urgent quality of the music. I talked to Bryce briefly after the show. I told him that I worked with Luke at Echo, and I was impressed with his guitar tone.

I know those first few years were very much career-defining for the band. They had moved to New York from Cincinnati. Some of them supported themselves doing other artistic projects. Working with dance troupes. Trying to keep their name in the public eye. I kept getting emails detailing their progress.

When they finally come back to Atlanta, the buzz is starting to build. Their guitar work has always been more lyrical than bands such as Interpol or the Strokes. They are committed to exposing the soul not just flirting around its darker reaches. They admit a certain boorishness in their search unlike the other bands who cling to their more comfortable pretenses. The National have built part of their reputation by playing shows in England and the continent. They work diligently to acquire a loyal following.

I remember those Chicago evenings sitting on Brenda's porch and listening to the "Geese of Beverly Road". That particular song summarized something about our time together. The song begins like a piece of chamber music. A constant note on cello provides the lament. "We set off the geese of Beverly Road." Brenda and I are the pranksters of the song. Love offers purpose to our trivialities. Once back in Atlanta, I am growing more nostalgic about those moments. We share our guilt. We lean on each other just to survive. I want to go back to Chicago." Serve me the sky with a big slice of lemon."

I put on "Cherry Tree." The reflective moments are enhanced by the piano tinkling. The violin adds to the tension. "Don't look at me, I'm only breathing. Don't look at me, I'm only discreet." The violin become more desperate in the break. "I can't stand our separation." The music appears to motivate everything that follows.

"About Today" is perfect for my mood. It takes me from my present into a time of wonder. "I was far away. You just walked away. And I just watched you." It is so perfectly simple. The feelings of loss are so immediate. I hang on to this memory.

This is my way to hold on to Brenda. I know that this is terrible. It would have been better to have stayed. There has been so much time since we've been together. But I cherish my memories.

The National's success convinces me that there is something more that I can do to get involved. I need to find a band like this and get them out on vinyl. I contact Luke. I ask him to recommend some bands that would be worth getting on vinyl. He has been working with one group that he thinks is the next big thing. I am a little hesitant to play into his enthusiasm. But I am willing to give them a listen.

I call my cousin. His friend owns a convenience store.

“I want to know how much they make on cigarettes in a year. Maybe they could take all the money that they save on taxes and put it into a business.”

“They don’t actually save the money. The vendor does. That’s who Vinnie works for.”

Nevertheless, Reggie is able to work some deal out where they can skim forty thousand or so off the top. I guess that this is really going to happen. I’m actually going to be working for the mob.

I’m going to have to go back to Chicago to seal the deal in stone or should I say blood.

The Sun Runners are Luke’s kids. They have hard rock swagger. And they are ambitious. Their music is a leisurely mix of rock riffs with harsh psychedelic styling. I want to bring them up to Chicago to record. It’s going to take them a couple of weeks of rehearsal to get them ready. I leave it to Luke to help them get in shape. He helps them work out a series of rough demos so that they can get a good feel of the songs.

When I visit the rehearsal space, Luke has the mics set up everywhere. He is using a modest setup and recording to his computer. The first song that they play is “In a Sparkling Instant”. “Nothing like a setback to back you into a corner. From the get go, you gotta’ get out on your own.” The singer is Cam Pearson. Rail thin with shoulder length hair, he is the epitome of the lifestyle. We are just trying to keep him focused on the music before he self-destructs. There is no doubt that we are on to something big. The band moves from these dreamy instrumental breaks to the depths of experimental surges. Cam flails his Strat around to elicit this wave of other worldly howls. On his 335, Jay is doing an arpeggiated line that is thick with delay. This is the dreamscape. Lee starts to play high on the neck. Steve does these cymbal splashes that are punctuated by a slow ruffle on the toms. Then Steve hits the snare and everything stops.

“It’s nothing but you talking to you, talking to you about you, you’re only your gossip in a ring in a mirror.” The band comes back to the chorus in a marvelous flourish, “It’s an instant, a sparkling instant.” Cam is on fire. It’s only a recording session, but he needs a stage to let loose. I can see a crowd collecting around them. Girls hoping to be rained on by the sweat of Cam Pearson.

We pause for a break. I talk to them about the plans. “We’ve got the money for the record. It’s going to be a small deal for distribution. And I’ve set you up with a small tour heading out from Chicago. We’ve got you in Double Door there. And a bunch of places in Michigan and Canada.”

Jay is more circumspect, “Why don’t we just tour the Southeast.”

“That’s going to happen after the CD is pressed. You’re going to be in Chicago already. I just want you to do some gigs to prepare for the recording. I’ve got you paired with a couple of acts that have a draw.”

They seem convinced by my logic. Lee wonders why we don’t record in Atlanta.

“I mean we live here. Why do we have to get in a van and go drive up there. We’ll be away from what we know and love.”

They’re going to be able to stay at the studio for that week. I really don’t understand why it’s such a big deal.

“This is a great studio. They did a lot of the major albums of the nineties. And they have

the pulse of the contemporary indie scene. It will be perfect for the band.”

The studio still cuts to tape. That will preserve some of the vintage quality of the band. I have no doubts that the experience will be what they need. Lee and Jay are still holding out.

“This is about your success,” I remind them.

Lee notes, “You’re the one with all the ties to Chicago.”

I remind them, “I got you a deal. It not as if Sony is here with an alternative.”

Lee is too cocky, “They might be if we had good management.”

“Trust me on this. If we do well with this, it going to be the first step in getting the deal that you want.”

Cam is the deciding voice. “I don’t need to tell you all what a bad major deal can do to destroy a band. It’s about the music. Not limos and groupies. The door’s open if you guys want to find something better somewhere else.”

Cam has put himself on the line. Jay comes over immediately. Lee is still a hold out. When he realizes the rest of the band is in, that sways his mind. We all hug. It is going to happen.

The band has decided on twelve songs for the album. I give the demo to Dan Snyder who’s the chief engineer at the studio. He’s going to work with the band at producing the record. We could try to bring in someone else. I’ve talked with Jason about possibilities. But Dan will more or less oversee the production. He’s worked on a lot of stuff and has a seasoned hand. He knows exactly what we want.

I head back to Chicago to plan the time in the studio. Dan listens to the Luke’s demo. He lights up, “These guys are more than ready. You need to get them up here immediately.”

Dan rearranges his schedule. I still have to work out some of the economic details. But soon they are heading north in their van.

“Monterrey” is going to be the first song on the album. It starts with a slide guitar part by Jay. Cam comes in with his haunting introduction, “I don’t mind if you leave me here, there’s no better place to be.” Cam then digs into the guitar with an aggressive riff and the rhythm section follows right behind him. “You can hear the bells toll, but they won’t ring for me. [...] Monterrey!” The band doesn’t give in to a mellow idyll. There is that edge that makes their sound so distinctive. They decide to lay the tracks for the song before they start the short tour. This is going to give Dan a clearer reference point for the rest of the album. He is also able to work them in between some high-paying sessions at the studio

After they get the first song finished, I wish the guys luck as they head on the road. I’m going to stay back here and make more plans for them when they get back. I hear great reports about their shows in Lansing and Detroit. I figure that it’s smooth sailing the rest of the way. The words from Monterrey echo in my mind, “That mountain goes on forever, one day it’s going to be me.”

I’ve been back and forth with business that I’ve barely had time to talk to Brenda, much less see her. With the guys on the road, I feel that I can relax temporarily. I am pretty excited to see Brenda again. We meet in our regular place, The Pyramid Lounge. When I see her, I lean over to give her a kiss. She moves so that I am only able to brush her cheek with my lips.

“I’ve missed you,” I tell her.

“I don’t know how to tell you this. I’ve moved in with someone.”

“You’ve got a roommate?” I ask.

“I’m going out with someone. Paul and I live together.”

“Who’s Paul?”

“He’s at the Art Institute. He’s studying painting. I couldn’t wait any longer for you to come back. Besides, we were never really together.”

I feel this hollow just hearing her tell me this. It might sound strange to admit this. After all I was with Lana. But that turned into a disaster. And Brenda always seemed to be the one.

“How is it being with Paul?”

She tells me, “He’s very nice. There’s just a weird side to it all.”

I ask her to explain. She doesn’t want to go into it. All that she can say is, “I’m the one who knows when to stop.”

If she has become tolerant of his cruelty, there is little that I can do to affect her. She has adapted to Paul’s challenges. My interest is only academic.

I wonder if she implies that they engage in role-playing. Or is it more than that. Does she share her pain with him? This submission hardly sounds like the woman who was so confident in calling all men carnivores.

“I really enjoy being with him. I’m such a physical person. Paul gives me what I need.”

I imagine an octopus sucking up her body with its tentacle.

It is requiring an immense concentration on my part to remain in the present. This is getting all so confusing. The present has always been dependent upon some future moment offering reality to the present. My future with Brenda was not simply a dream on my part. It was entirely a real event in the future. As real, it made possible everything that is happening in the present. Since that future no longer exists for the two of us, there can no longer be a present for me.

I am starting to freak out. It is as if I am not here. It is like a television station whose reception is drifting in and out. The future can no longer transmit back to the present.

Brenda asks, “Is something wrong?”

“I’m not feeling well.”

She tries to make things right, “Maybe, I shouldn’t have come. I only seem to be upsetting you.

This is much worse than upset. I feel like a comedian who is dying on stage. I need one joke that can get them all excited again. It’s not working.

Brenda reminds me, “We never made any promises.”

But I had intended to come back. And she knew this. There was really nothing that I could do to change things. There’s really nothing that I can offer her to make her leave Paul.

I feel as if I am back at the festival. Paul and Brenda are this couple who pass me. They seem so right together. I can only wonder what would allow me to take his place. I wish that she could pretend. He’s not here now. Is the impression that he has left on her really so great as to make her forget all our fun together? I have risked too much in coming back. What can I do to get me back into her life?

Jimmy is a little resentful that I have chosen the Sun Runners over his band Sacred Hearts.

“The Sun Runners are from Atlanta. I’m working down there.”

“But you came up here to get the money for your label. You could keep it in the city.”

He really won't accept my explanation. He ends up criticizing me for Brenda. “You never slept with her when you were here before. And now you've lost her. She's not going to carry a torch for something hypothetical. You needed to get involved when you had the chance.”

Jimmy's cynical attitude is hardly scoring points with me today. He's really not doing much to console me.

He tells me, “There are loads of other girls in Chicago.”

I say, “But none are Brenda.”

He won't yield. “You're turning her body into this into this sacred object. You never got that close to really make that kind of difference. Sex is sex. There is no mystery. It's only because you didn't follow through.”

That's hardly true. I think that I feel something even deeper for Hattie. It's just that Hattie is more self-destructive. And I can't go back.

I have been distracted from the real reason that I am back in Chicago. I get a call at 3 in the morning. I have just started getting ready for bed. The band has been picked up for a cocaine charge. Jay and Lee are in jail. Cam and Steve are frantic.

I tell myself, “Lee and Jay were the ones who were against the whole trip. And now they fuck it up.” I say nothing. I try to remain cool. Cam needs me to help them out. I first consider driving up there. But I tell them to hold tight. In the morning, I tell my uncle. I also call Jason's manager. I hate to bother him. My uncle has some connections in Windsor. But Jason's help is more above board. I go with his advice.

The guys are able to pay a small fine. The charges are dropped. I cancel the last two dates. They finish the tour prematurely and head back to record.

Jay apologizes. All Lee can say is, “I guess I fucked up. I was having fun.”

More of that kind of shit, and we're going to find a new bass player. I'd even get Jimmy to take his place. Sure there's chemistry, but this is business.

Appropriately the band begins with the song, “We Can't Do a Thing.” I feel like I indeed have a bunch of children that I need to keep in line. These guys haven't even got off the ground, and already they are playing the rock star trip. This kind of theatrics is done!

The band tracks as if nothing serious has happened. The guys are even better after having played a number of gigs together. I just have to keep their noses clean.

“Is She Taking Care of You” is a real departure from the other material. It's a cynical commentary addressed to the man who has taken away the singer's lover. Cam doesn't let the hurt bring him down as his voice contains all the bite that sends chills through the new man's body. For him, this is a warning not to get in his way. He is cold-blooded.

“Water Mocassin” is a rousing number that recalls groups such as the Db's and Let's Active. It is pure pop. You can feel the swamp bubbling under in Jay's guitar. Steve has this wonderful drum roll that takes it back into the chorus. “I never let it get me down; it was coming after me. Water Mocassin. Water Mocassin. Water Mocassin.” Jay ends it all with another great slide guitar part.

The boys are ready to really rock it out. Steve cues them for the intro of “Border Crossing”. The song now has an ironic element. Both Jay and Lee are looking down as they record their parts. They are pretending to be concentrating on their instruments. In fact, they are

hiding their eyes. They don't want the words of the song to be used against them. "You know I'm not coming back!"

"Names my Father Called Me" uses Cam's acoustic guitar throughout. It is rooted in Southern rock. But it is the first step beyond. In the background, Jay creates these wails with his volume knob. The lambs are baying. "If I'm going to be Cain, then I better stand able."

It's been a long first day. We've tracked most of the rhythm parts on five songs. We are going to overdub the guitars and vocals. There are some things that Dan likes about the early takes with the drums.

Cam says, "I not satisfied with my voice."

He is curled up on the couch. He looks the worse for wear. Lee and Jay are up to party. Steve is his regular mellow self. He just wants a good night's sleep.

I tell Jay and Lee, "Just because you're back in town, I don't want you messing up. Jay takes the lesson to heart. Lee seems a little pissed. So be it.

Cam and Steve decide to turn in. I take Lee and Jay with me for some supervised relaxation. Maybe they'll lighten up after we spend some time together. Jimmy decides to meet us at Mabel's. He wants to see who I'm working for. I also want to avoid the Pyramid Lounge for the time being. I wonder if I can avoid Brenda before I leave the city.

I ask the guys, "What did you think?"

Lee surprises me, "I'm getting into it."

Jay plays it cool, "Im not sure if I've got my sound. The Vox is acting up a little."

I tell him, "Dan's really good. He can help you look at it."

The guys are starting to realize that they are still new to the game. Too many missteps, and they will be shipped back to Georgia.

Jimmy actually helps to break the ice. He is loading them up with drinks. Jay and Jimmy start to talk about guitars and amps. Lee and Jimmy talk about cars. They are all making eyes at the girls in the place. I breathe a sigh of relief. Maybe this will work after all.

I end up dropping Lee and Jay at the studio. They are going to have a long day tomorrow.

Jimmy leans over to me, "It's too early to quit. Let's go up to a 4 o'clock bar."

Many of the neighborhood bars close at 2. But we can still catch a drink at a 4 o'clock bar.

I ask him, "Do you want to talk about Brenda some more?"

He looks back at me, "I thought that you do."

At Estelle's he engages the waitress over her tattoos. This is really starting to seem like a waste.

"Why did you get me out here?"

He smiles, "I thought that there might be some honeys out here. Just something to get your mind off Brenda."

"Well, this place is bleak. What do you make of it?"

"This is life. Realizing that there's something that we want, but no hope of satisfaction."

"Smart girls are all in bed at this moment."

We stay until about 3:30. I've had enough.

The next day I have some errands to do. I need to pay cash for our session. Often studio like things to be paid for in cash. This enables them to have better control over their transactions.

It is important to maintain a constant cash flow. I head over to the bank to facilitate the deal. Money has been transferred to my account for the transaction. Ariane is my teller. I am flirting with her. She looks me in the eye. She has a great smile. I am getting a little excited even though I am in a bank

I hand Ariane my ID. She is comparing it to what is on her screen.

“Nothing is coming up for your account. She tries the number. She tries my name. For the time being nothing.

She jokes, It’s almost as if you don’t exist.”

As long as I don’t register, I am feeling uncertain about myself. I am sweating. Other people in line are looking at me. Do they see it too. I feel as if my transmission is becoming more and more faint. I am not here.

I smile at Ariane as I leave. She does not even see me anymore. They will have to reverse the transaction. I will get the cash somehow.

I have to collect my wits when I am outside. I can barely see my reflection in the window. Everything is happening too fast. I need to slow down. First, Brenda, and now this.

I go back to my uncle’s for a rest. I can’t really do too much at the studio right now. Maybe I should have never come back to Chicago.

I lie in the bed. I am unable to move. I need to motivate myself to get going. The band could use my input. I feel paralyzed.

Once everything clears up, I decide to show my face at the studio. I have their envelope full of cash. I give it to the studio manager. He writes me a receipt. Then I make my way to the control room.

The band is finishing the basic tracks for the last few songs. Cam has benefitted from a good night’s sleep. The Dynamic Duo are a little hung over. Steve is his usual brilliant self.

Cam is inspired in his version of “Out of the Wild” His voice just echoes naturally throughout the room “Restless Highway, shake these bones, you’ve found your calling in flesh and moans. When you leave, you can’t come back. Out of the wild and onto the track.” The song is a plaintive lament in the Neil Young tradition. You can just sense the mountain stream making its way through the wilderness. It speaks of a deeper subjugation of the spirit and the fight to throw off its yolk.

Cam describes the struggle, “The self is often our greatest enemy. We wrestle ourselves in darkness trying to make it back to the light.” His struggle might sound a little self-absorbed. But the drama is captivating.

The song continues to replay in my head. Once he says, “Onto the track,” the band just explodes. For this song, Cam plays an energetic keyboard line. James returns with his shrill slide guitar lines. Will he ever make it back?

“Out of the Wild” is a song which portrays the deep roots of the band. It betrays a depth in their material which first might be dismissed as party music. These guys are serious. Even if they seem a little distracted by the good time, there is something else in their pursuit. That vision might prevent them from being derailed by the journey.

The last song that I hear them track is “The Narrows.” It tells the story of an explorer who gets lost in his search. Once he realizes that he is at the point of no return, he refuses to turn back. He is leaving behind his dream of comfort. He wants to soar like the eagle. This is his

final stand. “The Narrows” leads to a tension-filled break. Then everything just explodes. Both Cam and James are banging their guitars. The drums are intense. The bass is unforgiving.

All their efforts culminate in this monster of a tune. They realize the risk that faces them in the studio in Chicago. They have come so close to wasting it all. But they are still in the game. That is their persistence.

I am glad to be a part of their art. I have felt so useless recently. Just to be along for the ride, what a sensation. They have more work and a few more days in the studio. But they have framed their stab at greatness. It is intense when you hear music that touches the soul. These guys are amazing to the degree that they feel something so profoundly and are able to translate it into their music. You notice their influences. But they are not lost in tribute. They offer an original take. I wonder what obstacle might stand in their way. Particularly, Cam has a voice of genius. But success is the very thing that can eat away at their talent. Even he recognizes this in his songs. I watch the phantom as it slips away.

I really doubted if we made the right choice in bringing these guys here. But now it seems to have all paid off.

Jimmy comes along to hear the tracks as they near completion. When we leave together, he turns to me, “You were right. I’m not ready yet. What a session.”

I am truly flattered by his humility. For all the time that I’ve known him, he’s been putting up a front. But music makes him honest. And now he faces this side of himself. I want to go with him to the Pyramid Lounge. Nowhere has had the same liveliness since I returned to the city. I can’t worry if Brenda is going to be there.

We are both sitting in a booth. He notices that I am a little jumpy.

“She’s not making you nervous? She may not even come in here.”

I can’t be sure how I am going to take it when she walks in the door. I hope that it’s not tonight. It has been so good watching the guys coalesce with the album. I am surprised that we’ve gotten it done so quickly. Luke really worked them hard in Atlanta. I owe him a debt of gratitude.

“Jimmy, it’s freaking me a little how close the Sun Runners are to finishing. For a while, I never thought that they were going to come together.”

“It was pretty crazy when they got arrested.”

I tell him, “No, it’s more than that. I felt that I was deferring to Luke’s judgement. I just never saw the maturity in their sound. They seemed to be a bunch of jack offs. Guys who wanted to party and were hiding behind the idea of being in a band.”

“Where are the party-goers tonight?”

“I think that they want to rest up for the last few days. The album is a real thing for all of them now. They realize that this is pPaulably their only chance to get it right. If they fuck it up, then that’s it.”

“There aren’t many people in her tonight,” Jimmy observes.

“It is a Tuesday.”

Jimmy adds, “I don’t think that she’s going to be in here.”

I look up, “I guess that you’re right.”

We call it an early night. No 4 PM bars tonight.

I realize that the studio sessions are close to completion. I think that I had something to



work out by coming back here. I needed to put my feelings to rest. But there has been none of the resolution that I've hoped for. I let my nostalgia take me over. I had fallen deep for Hattie. I wanted something to fill that hollow.

I wish that I had the skill that Cam has to weave his own experience into a story. It just seems that he can sing himself out of any heartache.

Cam shares his perspective with me. He is again curled up on the couch in the studio, "Sometimes it works the opposite way. You magnify every detail of your time together. And it is this monster that is so big that there is no escape. I think that I come face to face with my own demons all the time. I know some people experience it as addiction. For me, it's just the struggle of being Cam Pearson." He turns on that familiar grin as if he is up to some kind of mischief.

We celebrate the final night in town, Friday. I expect Lee and Jay to get really rowdy. But the experience in the studio has mellowed them. I think that the focus became heavy on them. If they screwed up, the guys would be down on them major time.

We've arranged them to play a couple of gigs on the way back. This includes Louisville and Nashville. I'm not going to be able to see them in Nashville. But I plan to meet up with Jason next week. None of this would be possible without his support.

The next night is the last of real partying for Jimmy and me. Jimmy really wants to get it on. We make the rounds on foot. In out progress, the natural step is to go to Pyramid. I don't hesitate. This is my fate come hell or high water.

Sure enough Brenda is there. She is at a booth with Paul. Jimmy and I stay by the bar. We are going to make her commit herself first.

I know that she wants to blame me for everything that has happened. And I admit that I let the idea of love stand in the way of actually following through with her. I am still immersed in the nostalgia. The soundtrack even plays at this moment. But I feel that she owed me more. She needed to explain to me what was happening. Then I remember Lana. I don't know why I've let her slip my mind. I also remember how Jimmy had pushed me to follow through with Brenda.

"Jimmy, I always thought that she wanted you more than me. I didn't want to risk my heart."

"You still haven't learned that the heart can be shaped. It just does what you tell it to do."

After working with the guys, I realize that is true." I notice that Paul is leaving. I am surprised that Brenda remains behind in the booth. Maybe she is waiting for him to get something.

After ten minutes, Paul doesn't come back. I go over to her booth. "We need to talk." She looks up at me. She smiles. "I'm really surprised that you took so long to come over here."

"I had the impression that Paul was coming back."

"I'm not sure if he's ever coming back. I'm just saying that. We haven't broken up or anything official."

I work to express my feelings. It burns inside. "I think that I was afraid about what I felt for you. I needed to see it in perspective to really see how much it meant for me."

She is hesitant, "You don't always have time to wait. Love means letting the other

person know what you're going through. It's not like a math problem that you figure out on your own and bring back to the teacher with the answer. The answer is a give and take thing."

I feel as if she is opening me to something new. At the same time, it is too late. Why did I let it drop? What was I doing with Lana?

I feel that I can barely be part of my own life. I need to see it in a song, and then it will all make sense. It is worse than that. I don't want to get too comfortable. That's what I'm really afraid of. I'm going to lose my edge. I'll be one of those couples sitting in the lawn chairs. I won't know what to do when real drama happens around me.

"I hate to say it. But I figured out the answer to the question."

She has tears in her eyes, "I haven't. Even if I have doubts about Paul, I'm still with him. I made a commitment. And if I break with him, I'm not going to run to you. I don't know what I'll do. But I'll need some time alone. I don't live in song lyrics. They just approximate feeling that I already have. Real feelings."

It seems as if she is accusing me of being a child. I don't want to accept her characterization. It's not as if we are meant to be together.

She unfolds her hands and looks ready to stand up.

"I'm going to leave. I wanted you to come over and talk. Now we talked. I said what I had to say."

I feel that she is the one who is springing *her* solution on me. She has hurt me, but she doesn't want to hang around for my reaction. I don't want to say that I am stunned. I can't admit that she means that much to me. I know that I sound like a real dick. What can I do?

"You could have taken her home," Jimmy criticizes me. "I watched you. You never made any effort at touching her. You think that I'm a cold fish. You had the chance."

I disagree, "Girls are looking for more than just being boned."

Jimmy defends himself, "I didn't say that. But you showed no affection. You had your soliloquy ready and you delivered it."

"A soliloquy is when you're by yourself."

He comes back immediately, "Exactly!"

"She caught me by surprise."

"You've been going over this conversation for weeks. And she surprised you. What did she say? I love you."

I let her get the best of me. I wouldn't let down my guard. And I blamed her for doing the same. It is all swirling around me. I need another drink. I want to pretend that none of this has happened. In a way, it hasn't.

A couple of days later, I pack the car and again leave Chicago. When I get to Nashville, I stay with Jason. He has just got back from the tour. He is with his manager.

"I saw your boys the other day. They were great."

I thank him, "Jason, I'm glad that you took the time."

"It was an honor. They've got big things ahead of them."

I sit back in his couch. "They've come a long way since they went to Chicago. They found something in themselves. Now, they're a real band."

His manager's name is Lou. "I've got some things that can do for them when the album comes out. We can get them a distribution deal. I don't want to infringe on your territory."

Jason adds, "I just want to help out. Anything that we can do to get their career going."

I realize that I am along with the Sun Runners for the ride.

I ask Jason, "Have you seen Lana?"

"She's still around. She wants to go to Europe to study. I think that she wanted to go on tour with us. But she won't be over there in time."

I ask him, "You're going to Europe?"

"Of course, we are. And you're coming to."

Lou tells me, "We're playing the festivals."

Jason pipes in, "It's research."

"I can't afford it. I'm going to be strapped just to get the album done."

Jason interjects, "Lou can get you in as one of our crew. I know that he needs an assistant. You can do phones. You can meet people. You're our guy!"

I am overjoyed. This is a whirl. I was feeling sorry for myself about Brenda. Now I am not looking back. Festivals in Europe with Jason and the guys. This is going to be totally crazy.

Jason reminds me, "You'll only be gone a week or so. You can get back to your stuff before you know it."

Jason's news changes everything. I tell the guys when I get back to Atlanta. I meet them at the practice space.

James offers his view, "Don't forget about us."

Lee has his take, "You're going to dance with the one that brung you."

Cam has the last word, "He's going to look pretty good in a dress."

We all break out laughing.