

## Chapter 5

Jimmy's digs were a little nicer than they used to be. To start with, no more engine blocks or beer cans in the front yard anymore. The roof looked like it had recently been repaired (which probably meant his indoor water feature was gone), and the siding was completely free of mold.

And not only were there no waist-high weeds in the yard anymore, the grass was actually *cut*, though certainly not by him I was sure. Jimmy didn't even know what a lawnmower was, much less how to operate one. But *somebody* did, and that somebody had been busy.

In fact, if respectability was based solely on visuals, Jimmy's house would be sitting firmly in the upper lower part of middle-class suburban standards. Jimmy, however, had a few other adjustments to make if that particular objective was in fact his goal, because regardless of how good it may have *looked*, it *sounded* like a cat in heat.

Which meant that Jimmy and his buds were jamming.

I stuffed cotton balls into my ears and walked through the front door. No sense knocking; nobody was going to hear.

The noise inside was so loud it was a living thing. It crawled across my skin and blew my hair back like an angry wind. I actually had to lean into it in order to move.

I didn't bother trying to call out (clearly useless), nor did I actually try to make it into the room where they were playing (possibly fatal). Instead, I headed straight to the breaker box.

Found the main.

Flipped it open.

Aaaaand . . . we were acoustic. Which meant we were basically silent. Except for the drums, which mercifully petered out as the drummer realized that he was the only one making significant contributions to the decibel level.

I walked into the living room and dropped down on the couch. Jimmy and his crew were still in a slight state of confusion, turning dials and flipping switches and stepping on pedals and not quite understanding why none of them were working.

Eventually Jimmy noticed me.

"Hey, Dick!" he said, his face breaking out into a roguish grin. "Still rockin' the trench & fedora. Sweetness."

"Jimmy," I acknowledged.

"What?" he said, no doubt dealing with a pronounced ringing in his ears similar to what I had recently experienced, though arguably far worse. I'd only suffered through a single near-miss house explosion, not prolonged exposure to Jimmy's electric guitar cranked up to "bleed" volume.

I gave him a thumbs up. He nodded. I pulled the cotton balls out of my ears and gave everyone a few moments to let their bodies heal.

Jimmy Bondo was a friend and partner of mine. Tall, beach bum physique, and still sporting 80's prime David Lee Roth hair. He didn't help much when it came to figuring things out, but he was cool, and he surfed, so those things alone made him a valuable part of my team. Throw in the fact that he could be used with equal success as movable ballast

or as a human shield and you can see why he was a keeper. Didn't ask a shitload of questions either, which was nice. Especially when it came to that human shield part.

Other than surfing, the other thing Jimmy excelled at was making noise with his 1959 Gibson Explorer, slightly altered with a few of his own custom modifications. He'd been sawing on this same guitar for years, going all the way back to his glory days playing lead for *Smash The Infants*, a slightly alternative band that combined punk, heavy metal, and a whole lot of fucking noise.

They recorded a total of 5 albums back in their day, and every one of them sounded exactly the same; like when you find a nice spot of static on the radio and then turn it up until you literally cannot see anymore, but with someone screaming unintelligible lyrics over the top of it. If you ever hear something like that when you're scanning through radio stations? That's them.

Also in the room with us were two of his old STI bandmates, Pluto Neum and Poopstain McBride.

Pluto was sitting behind his drum kit, a mismatch of Yamaha, Pearl, Zildjian, and Fisher-Price components. He was a quiet, brooding guy that had spent most of his formative teen years in juvy. He didn't say a whole lot, and in addition to his penchant for destroying percussion instruments, was primarily known for his unpredictable, hair-trigger temper.

We got along well.

Pluto wasn't a very good drummer, but he liked to beat the shit out of things, so drums were a viable legal option that kept him out of jail and everybody else out of the hospital.

Poopstain played bass. I don't even know what the hell else to say about that because I honestly couldn't tell a good bass player from a shitty one, though if I were a betting man I'd probably put my money on the latter.

And no, Poopstain isn't a nick-name. That's what his momma named him. He showed us his birth certificate once to prove it (we all lost a lot of money on that) which is also one of the reasons why I'm not a betting man anymore.

The only original member of the band not in attendance today was their old frontman, Crazy Eddie the Leper, but that was completely understandable. Eddie had been known - in addition to being literally insane - for thumping fingers, toes, and other expendable pieces of his deteriorating body into the mosh pit whenever they played live. I'll give him credit; the man knew how to party.

The problem was he never stopped, and eventually wound up whittling himself down to nothing, which is what happens when an infinite game is played on a finite game board.

So his absence was basically due to the lack of his existence.

All of this got me to wondering, though, why 3/4 of STI were all in the same room together; something that, to my knowledge, had not happened in over a decade. And their instruments were here also. And they were playing them. After a fashion.

"Jimmy?" I asked, testing the waters to see if his hearing had returned yet.

"Yeah, dog?"

Test complete.

"You're not thinking about getting the band back together, are you?"

"Whoa, Dude!" he said, eyes suddenly wide open. "You are like, Clairol Herbal Essence."

Pretty sure he meant clairvoyant.

"Yeah man, you must be absolutely *psychotic*," Poopstain added. Probably not what he had meant to say either, but also much closer to being correct than if he had.

Pluto nodded. No issues there.

Since everyone seemed to be duly impressed with mind reading abilities that I didn't possess, I decided to let them continue to believe it. Never know when something like that might come in handy.

I inquired further:

"Who are you considering to bring in for vocals?" Notice I didn't say "for singing".

"Whoa! You mean you don't already know?" Jimmy asked in genuine, wide-eyed amazement.

I forgot. I read minds.

"Well, yes," I said, "of course I do. But I thought I'd let you tell me. Otherwise it tends to be a very one-sided conversation. And you know me; I care deeply about other people's feelings."

That last part was a lie, of course, but I've found it makes people feel better when I say it.

Jimmy and Poopstain nodded. This made sense to them. Pluto was staring at one of his snare drums with undisguised malice. So it made sense to him too.

"Whoa. That is so deep," Jimmy said.

"He gets it, man," Poopstain said, looking at Jimmy while jabbing his finger toward me. "This dude gets it."

"Yeah, he does," Jimmy responded. "Dude, you - "

"Get it," I finished. "Got it. So, who are you looking at for a frontman?"

"Oh, yeah. Well, we were thing about Johnny Forehead, but we don't really like him."

"He's an asshole," Poopstain added.

Pluto smashed a beer bottle over his head in concurrence.

"So," Jimmy continued, "then we were like, well, how about Mick Jagger, right?"

"How about him?" I chimed.

"Yeah, he'd be good and all, but I don't think we'd get him."

"It would be a longshot," I agreed.

"So right now we're king of looking at Fred," Jimmy said.

"Fred who?" I asked.

"Just Fred," Jimmy said.

"He's from Vero Beach," Poopstain added, as if that explained everything.

"Yeah, he just goes by Fred. Just the one name, you know? Kind of like Cher, except he's a dude."

"It's magical," I said.

"Or Beyonce," Poopstain added. Again. An adding little machine this guy. "She's only got one name too. Or Bono. Or The Edge. Or Tiffany. Or - "

"The Edge is two names, dude," Jimmy corrected.

"Yeah, but it's only one thing, so it counts as one name."

"No it doesn't. It's not 'Edge', it's '*The Edge*', man."

"It doesn't matter," Poopstain shot back.

"It does too," Jimmy said.

“Unh-uh.”

“Yea-huh.”

“Unh-uh”

“Yea-huh.”

“Unh-uh”

I felt like I was at the U.N.

Figuring that a global debate of this importance might continue for awhile, I got up and went to the kitchen for a beer.

"Pluto, you want a brew?" I asked as I passed by, carefully side-stepping around the larger pieces of broken glass on the floor.

He glowered at me. So, yes.

I walked through the door and stopped short.

Jimmy's kitchen used to be a study in surfer bachelorhood, but something unprecedented had occurred here. There was no trash anywhere. Not on the floor, not on the counters, not stuck to the walls. No beer cans, no pizza boxes, no surfboards, no TV's in the sink - the countertops had actually been *wiped down*. I mean, this place was *clean*.

It was a little unnerving, to say the least.

I opened the fridge to get a couple of brewskis knowing that, other than the phone, the only things I should find in there were a couple cases of Schlitz and some half eaten boxes of Chinese take-out, and what did I discover?

Food.

Like, a *lot* of food. And not expired, either.

*What the hell?*

I don't get puzzled often. Mainly because I don't like words containing the letter "z". I mean, seriously, "z" is a fucked up letter. Completely unnecessary. We don't need it at all. There is not a single letter "z" in existence that couldn't easily be replaced with an "s". We'd all be better off without them. And it would be easier for little kids to memorize the alphabet, too. A nice, even twenty-five letters.

And, yes, I know "25" is not an even number. You know what I mean. Twenty-five is a cool number. Twenty-six is fucked. Don't piss me off.

So.

Where the hell was I?

Oh, yeah.

Puzzled. (That's right, I did it. Sue me).

There was like a whole lot of really weird shit going on today. Bullets, explosions, mown grass, horrible band reunions, clean kitchens, stocked refrigerators, and that really disturbing dream about the mimes again.

Which reminded me about that whole France thing. Getting destroyed and all.

Which reminded me of why I came here in the first place. To the kitchen to get beer, yes, but more importantly to Jimmy's to get Jimmy.

I wasn't happy walking away from all this without an explanation, but it would have to wait. France beckoned, and the humanity involved gave it top billing. Plus, it was a paying gig. I took one last look around the kitchen and headed back into the other room.

“Unh-uh”

“Yea-huh.”

“Unh-uh”

“Yea-huh.”

“Unh-uh”

“It does too,” Jimmy said with finality. Finally. “And if you don't think so, then check this out.” He stood up straight, cleared his throat, and formally announced “Ladies and gentleman, please welcome, The Cher.”

“Oh,” Poopstain conceded. “Yeah, that does sound pretty stupid. But Beyonce was right.”

“Oh, yeah, she’s only got one name,” Jimmy agreed.

“And Tiffany.”

“Yup.”

“And Bono. Oh, and I almost forgot; Adele.”

“Both of them, definitely,” Jimmy said, nodding.

“And - ”

If this conversation continued much longer I was going to have an aneurysm.

“Hey,” I yelled, “both of you. Shut your pieholes for a minute, alright?”

I tossed Pluto his beer. Opened mine. Had very little foam run down the side. Because I'm a professional. You should know that.

“I need to borrow Jimmy,” I said.

“But,” Poopstain said, “he's in *our* band.”

“No, no, no.,” I said. “You don't understand.”

Understatement of the year.

“I don't want him in my band,” I continued. “Good Lord, no. That's just scary to think about. No, I have a *case*, and I need Jimmy to help me with it. We're going to New York City.”

“Wow, really dude?” Jimmy said. “That's awesome! Can we get some salsa?”

“That was a commercial, Jimmy. You've got to let it go.”

“I don't know man. There was a campfire, and some dudes. It looked pretty real to me.”

Sometimes surrender is the quickest way to victory.

“Okay, sure,” I said. “We'll get some salsa. But there's some other things that we need to do first.”

“What kind of things?” Poopstain asked.

“Important - but not band related - things,” I said.

Poopstain still looked a little skeptical, but eventually nodded.

“I guess it's okay,” he said. “We we're wrapping up anyway, and I've still got to take Pluto to his anger management class.”

Pluto punched the wall in agreement.

Jimmy walked the two of them to the door and let them out. After enough cool surfer/band secret handshakes, chestbumps, nods, and “Later, bro's” to choke a herd of cats, he shut the door and disappeared down the hall into his bedroom.

Five minutes later he walked back in with his surfboard and a suitcase.

“Packed,” he said.

I stared like a deer in the headlights, my jaw on the floor.

*A suitcase, I thought. I'm looking at it and I still can't believe it. Jimmy has a suitcase.*

It would have to wait. We had to go.

"Let's motor," I said.