

# Death Gig

by Peggy Ehrhart

**“Brownie got it last night.”** Cal has a head start on me. Three empty Lone Star bottles line the edge of the table.

“Same deal as the other guys?” I lean my gig bag against the wall and signal the barmaid to bring me a beer.

Cal nods and stiffens a finger to mime slitting his throat. “Left-handed job.”

“How do they know?” I say.

“Lefties slice from the other direction.”

“More gigs for the rest of us,” I say.

“More gigs for you,” Cal says. “The dead guys were all guitar players, remember?”

“True.”

He shakes his head. “Sheesh,” he says. “Creepy. The guy just comes out of nowhere.” Cal does the throat-slitting thing again and makes a choking sound. “Zip. You’re gone.” He climbs to his feet. “Drink up fast,” he says. “It’s time to hit.”

Blues jam night at Antone’s. Me and Cal and a pickup drummer, usually Denny--we’re the house band. Oh, and Linda Lacey, the chick singer. Business is a little slow tonight though. The thing is, lots of guys are afraid to play. Everybody that got it so far got it coming from a gig. All great players. Like the throat-slit guy is picking off the best.

Denny calls “Mustang Sally,” taps his sticks together to count off, and Linda sings a few verses. When she steps back from the mike and gives me a nod, I scoot my fingers down the fretboard for a quick run, then jerk the B-string up in a long trembling moan. The stage floor throbs with Cal’s bass

and Denny ticks out triplets on the high hat. I take a deep breath, hunch over the Strat, and tug notes out of the strings by the handful.

When I look up, I see--even with the lights in my face--that I've got their attention.

After a couple more choruses, Linda takes over. Cal slips up next to me, talking while his fingers pluck a steady thumping line. "Cool it, man," he says. "This ain't the night to be showin' off. That guy could be out there."

Jam night, you're on awhile then somebody else wants his turn. Too many good guitar players in the world. That's what's eating the throat-slit guy, no question.

Dave of course has to get up and do his usual frantic-finger thing. Lots of applause because the place has filled up a little, like they think every freaking note is gold. I can't wait to get back up there.

I call "Red House" and out-Hendrix Hendrix, shivering the strings like a madman. Beyond the lights, the audience is into it--except for Dave, who's looking a little sick. But he started it, so I throw in some double stops and tug the B string up till it screams and I'm surprised it doesn't break.

But why stop now? I bend my face into the Strat and play a chorus with my teeth, wind up slinging it behind my head while I do a note-for-note Hendrix ripoff.

We take a break then.

**"You sound good, man."** He's a little guy, slides up next to me at the bar. "Played around Austin long?"

"Twenty years. You?"

"Just got here last week." He seems friendly enough. We talk about one thing or another till his eyes, already scanning the room in a way that's making me jumpy, get real nervous and next thing I know he's gone.

A couple of cops haul themselves onto bar stools and order cokes.

“Up for another set?” Cal’s torn himself away from Linda and strolled over.

“Sure.” I slip off the bar stool. “Hey,” I say. “That guy left his guitar, that little guy I was talking to.” I can’t resist unzipping the gig bag, pull out a Sunburst Strat, worth a thousand bucks if it’s worth a penny. Something weird about it though.

“Cool axe,” Cal says.

“Finders keepers,” I say.

“Not for you, bud. Take a close look. It’s strung for a lefty.”

Peggy Ehrhart is the author of *Sweet Man Is Gone* (Five Star, July 2008), a mystery set in the world of blues and bar bands. Visit her online at [www.PeggyEhrhart.com](http://www.PeggyEhrhart.com).