

# Round Trip

by David James

After my failed marriage, I quit my boring-assed insurance sales job and decided to make a big change.

Based on a Chicago Tribune article that appeared in my hometown, Jackson, newspaper, things up in Chi-Town looked promising. Plenty of jobs. Maybe find friendly women up there, too. My brother works for Amtrak, so I boarded and took “the City of New Orleans” train up there on a free pass.

When I de-trained and stepped out on the street at Union station the freezing February wind hit me. Jesus Christ !!! Lou Rawls called the Chicago wind, “The Mighty Hawk”. Now I knew why. I'd never been so cold. I spent two days holed up in my cheap hotel reading, propped up on a pillow, trying to squeeze out the courage I needed to go out, find a job, maybe find a pretty girl and maybe find some fun.

Trussing up my courage, I bundled up with several sweatshirts under my pea coat to go out and get the lay of the land...so to speak. As I passed through the tired and shabby lobby, one fellow turned to another and said I looked like a robot. Stuffed up like I was I probably did.

Son of a bitch! As soon as I walked out I was freezing again so I ducked into the first decent-looking bar I came to and plopped down at the bar and ordered up two brandies. I read that's what they drank up there in the winter time. I looked around and saw the cutest damn girl feeding quarters in the jukebox. The first song that came up was Lucinda Williams's “Drunken Angel”.

She looked over, smiled, came over to me and said, “All bundled up

like that you must be from the South. I said, "Yep, Mississippi". She said, "It's Arkansas for me. I came up to interview for a stewardess job at United Airlines, but they aren't hiring for a while. So-o-o, what about you?" I told her my story, but that this freezing weather has killed my Chicago plan and I now need a plan "B". She said, "Then what the fuck are we doing up here? I'm freezing my tits off, too."

Our mutual Southern roots led us to telling a long string of stories, with some lies mixed in, I'm sure. We both agreed we had made a big mistake by coming to Chicago and when she said, "Let's go back home", I walked over to the pay phone and called to get the southbound City of New Orleans schedule.

We checked out of our hotels and had our cabs drop us off at the train station. We both felt going back down where the gummy, summer's heat has always hung heavy was where we belonged.

We decided to give New Orleans a shot

