



## A GUITAR AND A PEN

Foreword by Vince Gill

Like so many folks my age, I grew up on story songs. Those unforgettable tales always cut me to the quick whether they were heartbreaking or sidesplitting. I carried them with me, humming their melodies while I lived my young years through their stories. They taught me a thing or two about what life was like before mine had even really begun. They're a real part of what first drew me to country music. I guess I'm not alone in that way. And as they're at the core of why so many of us were first drawn to the music, they remain at the core – at the heart – of why we've never forsaken our first love for it.

When I finally came to Nashville, I had the privilege to meet and, in time, befriend some of the finest songwriters to ever put words to paper. I count it as one of the greatest honors and privileges ever bestowed on me, to live and work among them. Over the years, after countless songwriting sessions, you realize that some of the greatest songwriters around are also some of the best storytellers. You learn pretty quickly that a beautiful voice will never grab you as tightly if the words aren't right.

As one who's been plugging away at songwriting for a while now, I know for sure when I'm in the company of the 'greats.' These songwriters know their craft back to front. They know how to pull a line out of the air that a young child and a grown man can both understand. In less than three minutes, they manage to create a lifetime of emotion. Now some of them have broken loose with these beautifully written short stories for all of us.

Just as Marty Robbins once told us the epic tale of a cowboy who meets a beautiful girl, kills the rival for her hand in a gun fight, steals a horse, runs away, returns to the girl, takes a bullet, kisses the girl and dies in two minutes and fifty-eight seconds, these men and women are spinning their tales a little longer this time. If the story-songwriter is the ultimate short, short story writer, then what can they do when they have a bit more time and paper? That question remains at the center of this collection.

*A Guitar and a Pen* is a long-overdue celebration of the talent of not just these writers, but of all of country music's storytellers. Like songs, some of the stories are true, others are fiction, and a few are a bit of both. Looking through these pages you'll find the work of many of the artists who made country music what it is. The history of great country songs goes back before any of us were around and will be here long after we're gone.

Just like a good country song, *A Guitar and a Pen* will prove to be the perfect companion for a long winter evening by a fire or a lazy summer afternoon in a hammock. So there you have it, right there in your hands, the words and stories of some of my all-time favorites. Dig in and enjoy!

--Vince Gill