

## Chapter 2

### Billy Bob's Bar

Billy Bob's Bar used to be an Irish pub, and before that it was a sports bar, now it was a mix of the two. Located on Mass Ave across from the Charles River going into Cambridge, situated between a bank and ice cream parlor. Billy's had a good sound system making it a desirable place to play. Not much thought had gone into the artwork on the brick walls, old photos of Hollywood movie stars centered around an American flag. The new wooden floors had been waxed to shine and Johnny thought whoever cleaned them did a good job. The stage was three feet off the ground with enough room for three people and a good view of the bar. At full capacity the bar could hold around 200 people and Johnny expected it to be half that tonight. For Johnny this was a good audience, normally he played for small venues of 20 to 50 people. The most people he had ever played for was 1,500 at a summer folk festival.

Billy's Bar had its regular crowd, basic Bostonians who were all diehard loyal fans of either the Bruins hockey team, the Red Sox baseball team, the Celtics basketball team, and the New England Patriots football team. Bostonians are fanatical in their devotion for their teams and have a heavy New England accent when they speak. The accent dropped the R from their speech. Parking the cars sounded like 'pahking the cahs'. Johnny didn't really have the Boston accent, he'd kept the west coast accent, which emphasized the Rs. This always made Johnny somewhat suspect of being an outsider, and to top it off, Johnny didn't really care for sports. He had seen the Red Sox play at Fenway Park but had no interest in the game, however he was in awe of being united with 50,000 people. The grandeur of the Fenway Park was fascinating; it's the oldest ballpark in the country. If Johnny went to a game and it wasn't often, it was to sit in the bleachers, marvel at the lights, green field and organ music that cheered the fans on.

Billy Bar was owned by Billy, a retired policeman, who looked like any ordinary 65 year-old Irish Catholic man, who could pass for an accountant. Billy was 5'10, medium build, alert and sportive. He had reading glasses hanging around his neck, and when he put them on and looked up at you from over the top of them, his ordinariness disappeared. You got the feeling that he'd probably planted a weapon or two. There was an aura to him that gave the impression he felt immune to the law, and the last person you'd want to mess with.

To bring more business to the bar, Billy started now hosting live music events. This was the second time Johnny played there, and he was nervous. Billy had worked out a deal with Johnny where he would play for two hours, and get a free dinner of fish and chips, three drinks, and \$50. This worked for Johnny as he needs three gigs a week to survive as a singer-songwriter.

He was happy with the gig at Billy Bob's Bar but he didn't like playing cover songs, he only played them to survive. Outside of open mic nights where original music was appreciated, Johnny knew it was commonly understood that you have to perform cover songs, unless your own songs were so good that they'd take off right away. Even the best of songs had to mature and age like a good wine, they needed to be road worn, played and played and sung to gain the power needed to take wings and fly. Building your own audience was vital for this to happen, and Johnny was still struggling. Last week he played some Chuck Berry, Beatles, and Van Morrison covers. To make the show more fun he slipped in one of his original songs every third song or so. Tonight he wanted to try his new song, "A Lot Like You". The song was about

immigration and racism, and poked fun at the polarization taking part in the world today. Johnny felt good about this new song and had high hopes for it. He was convinced it would be a huge seller if he had the right connections in the music business. He took every gig seriously, no matter if it was a hundred people or three, you never knew who could be in the audience.

Johnny finished his fish and chips and drank down the rest of his beer. Burped, licked his lips, wiped his face with a napkin, grabbed his guitar, and approached the stage. A group of six people sat at the table in front of the stage, three guys and three girls. They were all in their early 40s and worked for the city as civil servants. Johnny wouldn't call them rude, but they weren't the type of people he'd hang out with. They were the type people he'd never felt comfortable around. They followed the rules, they did as they were told, they wouldn't think twice of locking you up if ordered. These were the type of people who did well in school, furthered their education, and had rigid parents. They were the quiet and obedient types, which could be dangerous.

It was now nine P.M. and Johnny had agreed to play until 11 P.M. On his setlist for tonight, he included his own song "No More Room To Be Weird". He purposely chose it for the ordinary people in front of him, he knew ordinary people made the best Nazis. Earlier in the day, Johnny had changed the strings on his 1969 Gibson J200 folk guitar. The new strings gave the guitar a full, rich and crisp sound, making it a pleasure to play. For a good luck mojo, Johnny used a Pink Floyd guitar pick and flowered guitar strap, a Christmas gift from Candy. He wore his usual performance attire: a white tuxedo jacket, jeans, and loafers. He had bought the tuxedo jacket at the Salvation Army; it's been his favorite jacket since and he wears it all the time. Johnny has 25 songs on his setlist tonight, and a note that read 'be calm and cool like Neil Young', even though he didn't really like Neil, but he admired his confidence on stage.

Johnny took to the stage, feeling cool, calm, and smooth as he delivered each song with elegance. He wasn't nervous anymore, and this excited him. Everyone appeared to be having a good evening as they ate, drank and laughed. He noticed most of the people listened to him and clapped after each song, except the table of civil servants; they didn't acknowledge him at all and talked while he played. Normally this would have been ok, but since they were so close to the stage, it annoyed Johnny. Around the fifth cover song, Johnny decided it was time for one of his originals.

"I would like to thank everyone for coming out tonight. Please remember to tip the bartenders and servers. Thank you, Billy, for having me, I really appreciate it. My name is Johnny Vincent. I have CDs for sale if anyone is interested. Here's a new song I wrote called "A lot Like You," He said into the microphone and started to play a simple G chord and his teeth started clicking to the beat, he began to sing...

I am watching an uprising, it's live on TV  
Should not be surprising people in misery  
We all want a second chance a better tomorrow  
Maybe we can dance get money to borrow

I am just like you oh no no I am not like you  
Oh yeah I am just like you

We all have our hope and dreams and desire  
To find a wife a kid and one day to retire  
To hang out with best friends laugh at jokes told  
Go home to someone special to hold

I am just like you oh no no, I am not like you  
Oh yeah yeah I am just like you

You may be from Canada Australia Brazil too  
Hawaii Africa USA or the zoo, I am just like you  
Now I'm afraid of the dark, you'll never see me cry  
I go jogging in the park I don't know why

But that ain't true no no no I am not like you  
Yeah yeah yeah I am just like you

You maybe be a Muslim, Catholic or a Jew  
I'm not like you, yeah yeah yeah I'm just like you

No no no I am not like you  
Yeah yeah yeah I'm just like you

“That was a song I wrote about racism and the immigration problem, I hope you liked it,”  
He told the crowd. There was no answer and hardly anyone clapped, but more noticeable was  
the group of civil workers who didn't stop talking.

“Play something we know!” shouted a woman at the civil servant table.

“Yeah!” said the guy across from her.

“Hotel California!” yelled another woman at the same table.

Johnny looked over at Billy, who gave him the evil eye, motioning to do another cover song.  
What the fuck, I just played five cover songs, I do one original and they get on my case, He  
thought. He took a deep breath, dismissed the negative thoughts, and strummed a few chords  
and decided to give them what they wanted. He started playing...

On a dark desert highway cool wind in my hair  
The smell of colitas rising up in the air  
Up ahead in the distance I saw a shimmering light  
My head grew heavy my sight grew dim  
I had to stop for the night

There she stood in the doorway  
I heard the mission bell  
I was thinking to myself this could be heaven or hell  
Then she lit up a candle and showed me the way  
There were voices down the corridor I heard them say

Welcome to the Hotel California...

As the song hit the chorus, a handful of people started singing and clapping. Johnny couldn't go on with it anymore. He bursted out in anger and started yelling at the people at the front table as his teeth continue to chatter, "Fuck you, people, you all suck! I'm out of here!" Johnny kicked the mic over, causing the PA to create a rumbling of booming feedback. "I can't take another minute of this," he said, shaking as he walked off stage. Johnny left through the side door and went out onto the street into the warm late summer air.

"Oh shit," he murmured to himself walking along the side of the building. "Why, why did I do that? Oh fuck, fuck, fuck." With his chattering, he realized he'd ruined another gig because of his temper on stage. He stopped and went back inside to see if he could save the gig. He saw Billy and approached him, ready to apologize.

"Get your shit and get out of here now and never come back," demanded Billy.

"But but, please, I am sorry," begged Johnny.

"No," said Billy, "get out now."

The six civil servants at the table looked on in surprise. They couldn't understand why Johnny had become so enraged and stormed off. Johnny got his guitar and approached the people at the table.

"I'm sorry, I need to sing my songs. I'm trying to create new music and you people are so empty and meaningless, glib and just dumb. Goodnight," Johnny told them as he was leaving.

"Out!" yelled Billy.

As Johnny was leaving, a cute girl wearing old jeans, who looked like Liza Minelli with short black hair approached him.

"That was great!" she said to him.

"Great?" Johnny gasped.

"It was so raw and real. I thought it was a performance, like part of your act."

"No, I'm afraid it wasn't an act. I was really upset," Johnny sighed.

"I can understand. Your song "A Lot Like You" was good. I don't want to hear songs that are 20 years old."

"Gee, thank you. That's really nice of you to say so." This excited Johnny and gave justice to the evening, here was his chance. "You wanna join me for a drink somewhere else?"

"No, next time. I'm with my girlfriend tonight."

"Girlfriend?" Said Johnny hiding the disappointment.

"Yes, she's sitting over there," she said, pointing to her girlfriend.

"Ok, thanks for the nice words, see you around," He said.

Johnny packed up his guitar and CDs and left the bar. Enough of that place, he thought. He began walking home towards the Charles River on Mass Ave. He felt good to be out of Billy's even though he knew his temper got the best of him. It's against the rules to lose your cool on stage. He knew it was wrong but still, he had a perverse pleasure from speaking his mind. The compliment from the Liza Minelli looking girl boosted his spirits and made him feel proud. He thought about her as he walked, she was attractive, he desired her and liked her look: big brown dark eyes, white rosy cheeks, and cherry red lips, and not too tall with a full body.

Gazing into the stars glowing in the galaxy above, he heard a new song. A song about the girl and the six civil servants, he began to sing to himself.

Vampires steal your purpose  
I could get it back  
Negotiate a deal  
Turn fiction into fact  
You plant your flowers on Venus  
Glued to the TV set  
Looking for some kind of meaning  
You haven't found it  
All the stars shine up above  
Two girls in love

Leaving the grief behind him and happy to discover a new song, he forgave himself for losing temper on stage. After a minute of walking he came upon a bar with a luminous blue neon sign that beamed Arrowhead Bar. The bar looked like it belonged in a junkyard. It had one window with a rickety monster air conditioner hanging out of it working at full load buzzing away. The bar was made of clapboard and tin with weeds growing up the sides of it. Thank God those oppressive heat waves of August are gone, Johnny thought.