The Mcfadden‘s

Created by Robyn Rudd The OUREAD Group

**Preamble**

###### This is a story created by Robyn Rudd, it’s based around a working class family in East London back in the 90s.

A Glaswegian strong steel worker farther and husband who works finishes off in the working man’s club and rules his family with a old fashioned iron rod yet family dynamics and arguments born from jealousy alcohol infused and family members with maybe his strong will makes it difficult for him to control perhaps how he wants

A hard working family, with little money, or material wealth, but an almost, envious, family connection of love,with just a different way ,of expressing it

With Billy, the baby ,introvert ,of the family, of mum, Betty, dad ,Angus and siblings , who are, Benji and Angel, yet Billy, has an, undiscovered voice, or maybe something he hid, until an opportunity arises and how the journey, takes the family, into a different world, for better and worse.

Where, no matter what material worlds, one in habits, no matter if your financial situation is strong or weak, with addiction, insecurity, then, talent which features, in all, yet through love and support ,with encouragement and an empowered push.

So, anything is possible, if you want it, sometimes nepotism , which can be much more qualifying, than the academic nature could be beneficial



### **By Robyn Rudd**

***Scene setting***

Set in the early 1990s a working class family living in social housing in the East End of London, Betty ,mother, who is, holding down three jobs, Dad, has a, full-time job, in the steel works , the three siblings, still living at home, or just leaving education, one of them, Benji, the eldest lad who was expelled from his last year of school, now has a job, working for the local milkman and round.

young Billy, who is still in education, Yet changes direction, leading,in pursuit of his dream, with humour, talents and tragedy collaborated with a deep family love, that no amount of money can buy.

.By Robyn Rudd

### **Scene Setting**

Set in the early 1990s, a working-class family living in social housing in the East End of London.

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### **Chapter One**

The sun hadn’t shown its face yet over the grey brick of the estate, but the day was already moving. A milk float rattled at the far end of the row, bottles clinking like a tune only morning workers knew.

Inside Number 23, the Glaswegian voice of Angus boomed from the kitchen.

“Benji! Shift yersel’—the milkman won’t wait all day!”

Benji thumped down the stairs, still pulling on his trainers. Big, broad for his sixteen years, shirt half-untucked, he shoved the hood of his bomber jacket over his head.

“I’m goin’, Dad. Chill out.”

“Don’t tell me tae chill,” Angus snapped, his heavy frame planted at the kitchen table, hands wrapped around a chipped mug of strong tea. He’d already been up an hour, ready for another day at the steel factory. His eyes, sharp under thick brows, followed his son until the door slammed.

Upstairs, Angel sat cross-legged on her bed, rollers tugging at her scalp, pen scratching across a revision book. Betty leaned in the doorway, hair tied back, apron already dusted with yesterday’s flour from the chip shop.

“You’re workin’ too hard, love. You’ll do fine.”

Angel looked up, lips curled in a half-smile.

“I’ve got to, Mum. Don’t wanna end up behind that fryer with you.”

Betty chuckled, proud more than offended.

“Oi, cheeky cow. That fryer paid for them shoes on your feet.” She blew her daughter a kiss before stomping off to check on Billy.

Billy was in the corner of the bedroom he shared with Benji, knees pulled to his chest, hood up though the room was warm. Ear pressed to a battered cassette player, he hummed along so quietly only the wallpaper could hear. The tape hissed between tracks, some old soul song borrowed from the music teacher.

“Billy!” Betty’s voice softened when she saw him. “You’ll make yourself invisible one of these days. Breakfast’s ready.”

He pulled the hood lower, mumbling, “Not hungry.”

From downstairs, Angus roared again:

“He bloody is hungry—get him down here!”

Betty sighed. She reached over, pressed pause on the cassette.

“Come on, love. You don’t want your dad stormin’ up here.”

Reluctantly, Billy shuffled to his feet. He liked the music, the way it made him feel taller inside, but he knew better than to let it spill out where Benji’s mates or the estate kids could hear.

At the table, Angus tucked into fried bread and sausages, the smell filling the cramped kitchen. Billy slid onto the bench, eyes down. Angel breezed in, still scribbling notes, rollers bobbing as she spoke.

“Mum, can I go see Jason after school?”

Betty raised her brows.

“Jason, eh? Thought you had exams.”

“Only a bit,” Angel shrugged, hiding the smile in her book.

Angus grunted, eyes narrowing.

“No boyfriends till you’ve got your results. Books first, boys later.”

Angel bit her tongue, though her cheeks burned. Billy peeked at her and gave the tiniest grin—he liked when Angel stood her ground.

Betty clattered plates down, her voice sharp but kind.

“Angus, let the girl breathe. She’s not joinin’ a convent.”

The room filled with the noise of cutlery and chatter, the hum of the estate waking outside. Life at Number 23 wasn’t easy, but it was loud, strong, and stitched together with the kind of love that never had to be spoken out loud.



**Chapter 2**

**(Billy only been 11, like most of his age, didn’t like school, he would look up to Benji, his 17 year old , expelled from school and working early mornings for the local milkman.)**

### **Chapter Two**

**The bedroom always smelled of damp socks and the faint tang of hair gel Benji slapped on before work. Two single beds, shoved against opposite walls, left just enough space for a battered cassette player and a pile of clothes that never seemed to find the wash basket.**

**Billy sat hunched at the end of his bed, scribbling nothing into an old maths book. The door banged open and Benji stormed in, boots heavy on the floorboards.**

**“You’ve been at my tapes again,” Benji barked, snatching up the cassette player. “Listenin’ to your boy bands, eh? Little puff.”**

**Billy’s head shot up, hood shadowing his face. “I haven’t, you dick.”**

**Benji narrowed his eyes, stepping closer. “What did you just call me?”**

**Billy swallowed. “N-nothing.”**

**Benji’s mouth twisted into a grin. “Careful, lad. You’re goin’ the right way for some Scotch.”**

**Billy knew what that meant—Scotch mist, Dad’s word for a fist. His chest tightened, but he stayed quiet. Benji ruffled his hair with a rough shove before throwing himself onto his own bed, laughing. It was love, in Benji’s way, though Billy never quite knew how to take it.**

**At school that week, Billy hung back as the other kids piled out of music. Mr. Clarke, the new teacher with long hair tied back in a ponytail, leaned against the piano.**

**“Billy, stay behind a minute, would you?”**

**Billy froze. Teachers rarely spoke to him, unless it was to ask where his homework was.**

**“I’ve been listening,” Mr. Clarke said gently. “You’ve got a voice, son. A proper voice. Ever thought about joining the choir?”**

**Billy’s stomach flipped. Choir. Nothing less cool existed on the estate. “Dunno, sir. Not really my thing.”**

**Clarke tilted his head. “Think about it. Don’t waste a gift.”**

**Billy nodded, eyes fixed on the scuffed floor tiles. He wanted to sing—God, he wanted to—but he could already hear the lads at the bus stop if they found out.**

**Angel was the first to discover him. She barged into the boys’ room one evening, rifling through tapes, rollers bobbing in her hair.**

**“Where’s me Madonna tape, you pair of mugs?”**

**She yanked one out of Benji’s pile, unspooling it half by accident. Muttering, she stomped back to her room, shoved it into her player—only to hear a hiss of static, then the beat of the Top 40. And then—Billy’s voice. Clear, rich, strong, singing into the cheap microphone he’d nicked from Dad’s sound system.**

**Angel froze, hand hovering over the stop button. This wasn’t her shy little brother who lived under a hood. This was something else—something that made her throat tighten.**

**She slammed the door behind her, stormed back into the boys’ room, waving the cassette. “Billy! You bloody taped over my music!”**

**Billy went scarlet, tugging the hood lower. “Sorry. Didn’t mean—”**

**“Didn’t mean?” Angel cut him off, lowering her voice. “Why didn’t you tell me you could sing like that?”**

**Benji sat up, smirking. “Sing? Him? Don’t take the piss.”**

**But Angel ignored her older brother. She crouched in front of Billy, eyes blazing. “You’ve got somethin’, our kid. Proper somethin’. Don’t you dare hide it.”**

**Billy looked away, mumbling, “It’s nothing.” But inside, his chest swelled. Somebody had heard him.**

**That night, as Dad downed pints at the working men’s club and Mum pulled on her Saturday-night blouse for bar work, Billy lay awake. He hated school, hated the teachers who droned on, but in his head the crowd was screaming his name, lights flashing, music pounding. He didn’t want steel or shifts or Scotch mist. He wanted out.**

**And for the first time, he let himself imagine it—just for a minute—that maybe, somehow, his voice could take him further than the estate ever would.**

### **Chapter Three**

**Saturday night in the three Hullets always carried a hum. Betty brushed her hair out in front of the cracked hallway mirror, rollers out, a splash of red lipstick brightening her tired face. She’d swapped her apron for a fitted blouse, the kind that made her stand straighter.**

**“You don’t need all that slap,” Angus muttered from the armchair, pint already poured from the fridge. “You’re only pullin’ pints.”**

**Betty rolled her eyes. “It’s called lookin’ presentable, Angus. Folk like their barmaid tidy, not lookin’ like she’s come straight out the chip shop.”**

**Angus grunted, but his gaze stayed fixed on her reflection. “You enjoy it too much, all them men starin’.”**

**“Don’t start,” she said firmly, grabbing her bag. “It’s money in the house, same as your factory.” She kissed the top of Billy’s hood as she passed. “You be good, love.”**

**Billy barely nodded, staring at the telly but not watching it.**

**At school that week, Mr. Clarke was relentless.**

**“Billy, you can’t keep wastin’ this,” he said after class, sheet music spread across the piano. “I’m not askin’ you to sing in front of your mates. Just try choir. See where it takes you.”**

**Billy shifted, trainers squeaking on the floor. “If people find out, I’m dead.”**

**“Talent’s worth risk,” Clarke said. “Think about it.”**

**Billy did think about it—every night. He’d hum under his breath when no one listened, imagine the stage lights instead of strip lights. But on the estate, boys didn’t sing. They fought, they played football, they worked. Anything else was trouble.**

**Angel had her own worries. Jason had been talking about applying to uni up north, studying law, making plans that didn’t have her in them.**

**“You’ll come with me, won’t you?” he asked one evening, walking her past the corner shop.**

**Angel snorted, chewing her gum. “What, leave me mum and Billy and this lot? Nah. I’m not built for that.”**

**Jason frowned. “You’re clever enough, Angel. You don’t have to end up here forever.”**

**She shoved his arm, play-fighting but hiding her sting. “This is me, Jason. This estate, this family. I’m not you.”**

**Still, when she went home and saw Billy scribbling lyrics into his maths book instead of homework, something inside her twisted. Maybe one of them could get out. Maybe her brother’s voice was bigger than these walls.**

**That night, in the boys’ bedroom, Benji flicked his lighter open and shut, restless. “Dad’s gonna go spare if Mum’s late again,” he muttered. “He don’t like her workin’ that bar.”**

**Billy kept his head down, humming into his pillow.**

**Benji smirked. “Oi, choirboy. You hummin’ Spice Girls under there?”**

**Billy’s face burned. He didn’t answer.**

**Benji chuckled, leaning back. “Don’t worry. Your secret’s safe. Long as you don’t tape over my songs again.” He tossed the lighter from hand to hand. “But one day, you’re gonna have to sing proper. Can’t hide forever, bro.”**

**Billy turned away, pulling the hood tight. He wished he could believe that.**

### **Chapter Four**

**The row started the way it always did — Angus home late, the tang of ale on his breath, Betty already in her dressing gown, arms folded.**

**“You think I don’t know what folk say, you standin’ there all dolled up behind that bar?” Angus barked, slamming the door so hard the frame rattled.**

**Betty fired back, eyes blazing. “And you think your pints at the club don’t make folk talk? Least I’m bringin’ money in, Angus! Least I’m bloody useful!”**

**Their voices rose, filling the three-bed terrace, bouncing off wallpaper already peeling from damp. Angel rolled her eyes from her room, used to it by now. Benji stuffed his pillow over his head.**

**But Billy — Billy sat small in the corner of the boys’ bedroom, hood up as always, staring at his trainers. The shouts sank into his chest like stones. If I could just sing, if I could just make it… I could get out. I could escape this.**

**Later that week, music was his only breath of fresh air. The piano’s warm hum, Mr. Clarke’s voice, the echo in the classroom. Billy sat at the back, pretending not to care, but inside he liked it. Liked it more than anything.**

**As the class ended, Clarke’s voice cut through again.**

**“Billy — stay behind, please.”**

**A few heads turned. Billy’s stomach knotted. He’d been kept back last time too. They’d notice. He shuffled to the front, hood still shadowing his face.**

**Clarke leaned on the piano, smiling gently. “I’m going to ask you a favour.”**

**Billy blinked. “A favour? You’re the teacher.”**

**Clarke chuckled. “This Saturday, the school choir is performing at Westminster Church. Big event. Multiple choirs from across London. We’re short one more singer, and your voice—” he tapped the piano lid “—your voice could hold its own there. This could be the start of something for you.”**

**Billy’s face burned. “I dunno, sir… I mean—”**

**“Nothing but beneficial,” Clarke pressed. “If we organise it with your mum, will you do it?”**

**Billy rubbed the cuff of his hoodie between his fingers. “…Suppose so.”**

**“Right, great.” Clarke clapped his hands, already reaching for paper. “I’ll print the details for you to take home. Don’t let me down, okay?”**

**Billy turned to leave, awkward, head ducked. “Yeah.”**

**“And Billy?” Clarke called as he reached the door.**

**“Yes, sir?”**

**“More important — don’t let yourself down.”**

**Billy lowered his head further, hood almost covering his eyes. “Right.”**

**“And get that hood down!” Clarke barked suddenly, but not unkindly. Billy slipped out, heart racing.**

**Sure enough, Clarke kept his word. Midway through maths the next day, he strode in, handed Billy an envelope, and gave him a cheeky wink.**

**Billy stuffed it in his bag, ears hot as a couple of classmates sniggered. “Oh yeah, okay,” he muttered, trying to sound casual.**

**But inside, his nerves and excitement tangled together. Westminster. A proper church. A proper stage. Maybe… just maybe… this is the chance**

### **Chapter Five**

Billy sat on the edge of his bed that night, envelope still sealed in his pocket. He could hear Angus and Betty downstairs, their voices already raised again — arguments always sharper when the drink flowed. Benji sprawled across his own bed, flicking through tapes, humming along to Oasis.

“What’s that you got?” Benji asked suddenly, nodding at Billy’s pocket.

“Nothing.” Billy shoved it deeper.

“Don’t look like nothing.” Benji smirked. “You ain’t been writin’ love letters, have you?”

Billy kept quiet, praying his brother would drop it. But his fingers itched over the envelope. The words inside felt heavy, dangerous. Westminster Church. Choir. Saturday. If Benji knew, the whole estate would know by tea time.

Across the hall, Angel was curled on her bed, phone pressed between shoulder and ear. Jason’s voice buzzed down the crackly line.

“They’ve got open days next month. Manchester, Newcastle… I’ve even been lookin’ at Leeds, Angel. Imagine it — me, you, a proper place away from all this.”

Angel bit her lip. She could hear Billy’s muffled voice through the wall, Benji’s laugh, Mum’s clatter in the kitchen. Her life, loud and messy and close.

“Jay, I can’t just run off like that,” she said. “This is my home. My family. You don’t get it.”

Jason sighed. “I don’t want to lose you, Angel. But I can’t stay stuck.”

She swallowed hard, forcing a laugh. “We’ll figure it out. We always do.” But when the line went dead, her chest felt tight, as if the estate walls had closed in another inch.

### **Chapter Six**

Saturday crept closer like a secret. Billy kept the envelope tucked under his mattress, pulling it out at night to read the words again. Each time, the church felt closer, louder.

But at home, the air was sharp.

Friday night, Angus came back later than usual, the stink of bitter rolling in with him. Betty was already tense, scrubbing the counter for the third time though it was clean.

“Where’ve you been?” she demanded.

“Where d’you think? Workin’ all bloody week, I earn my pint.” Angus dropped heavy into the chair, boots still on, mud flaking onto the carpet.

Betty snapped. “It’s not the pint, Angus. It’s ten of ‘em. It’s the way you look at me when I’m dressed for work, like I’m some tart. I’m bringin’ money in same as you!”

Angus slammed his fist on the table, rattling the cutlery. “I don’t like the way them men look at ye, that’s all!”

Angel stormed in then, chin high, eyes blazing. “It’s not Mum you should be worried about, Dad, it’s you! You’re the one who comes home stinkin’ like a brewery every night!”

The room froze. Angus stared at her, jaw tightening. But Angel didn’t flinch. Billy, crouched on the stairs, held his breath.

Benji broke the silence with a laugh, trying to cut the tension. “Oi, Angel, don’t get yourself a Scotch.”

But Billy didn’t laugh. He thought: If I could just make it, I’d never end up like this. Never.

The next morning, Mr. Clarke caught him again after class.

“You’ve not told your mum, have you?” Clarke asked, arms folded.

Billy shifted, eyes on the floor. “She’s got enough goin’ on.”

Clarke sighed. “Billy, this isn’t just a school trip. This is Westminster. This is a stage where people will hear you. Where someone might notice.”

Billy’s stomach twisted. Notice. The word scared him as much as it thrilled him.

Clarke placed the train ticket in his hand. “Be here 8 a.m. sharp tomorrow. Don’t be late. Don’t talk yourself out of it.”

Billy slid the ticket into his pocket, nodding once. Hood up, head down, he left the room.

But inside, his heart was pounding. Tomorrow, if he dared, the whole world could change.

### **Chapter Seven**

The morning felt unreal. Billy’s alarm went off before the sun had risen, the estate still dark and quiet. He dressed in silence, trainers scuffed but clean, his hood pulled tight as always. The letter and the ticket weighed heavy in his pocket.

He crept down the stairs, careful to miss the creaky step. Angus was snoring in the armchair, empty cans by his side. Betty had worked late at the bar; her handbag was slumped on the counter. For a moment, Billy thought of waking her, showing her the ticket, telling her everything. But then he pictured her arguing with Dad, the shouting, the fists on the table. He slipped out instead.

The train to central London rattled beneath him, windows blurred with drizzle. His hands shook as he unfolded the letter again — Westminster Church, Saturday, 10 a.m. His name scribbled onto the choir list in Clarke’s tidy handwriting.

When he arrived, the church stole his breath. Arches soared into the sky, light pouring through stained glass. The sound of voices warming up filled the air, echoing like it belonged to another world. Billy’s heart thudded. He didn’t belong here. Not in his scuffed trainers, not with his hood up.

“Billy,” Clarke’s voice broke through, steady and reassuring. “You’ll be fine. Just stand tall. Let the voice do the rest.”

Billy nodded, throat dry.

When it was time, he stood among the others, staring at the sea of faces filling the pews. His stomach twisted so hard he thought he might be sick. But then the music rose — piano, strings, voices weaving together. And when his turn came, when the choir swelled and his note soared above the rest, something shifted.

His voice, clear and strong, filled the cavernous space. It rang out, no hood, no estate, no shouting parents — just Billy. Just the music. For the first time, he felt seen.

At the end, as the audience applauded, Clarke clapped him on the back. “Told you,” he grinned.

Billy ducked his head, embarrassed, but a flicker of pride warmed his chest.

That’s when a man in a sharp suit stepped forward, speaking quietly to Clarke. His hair slicked back, a notebook in his hand. Clarke nodded, then called Billy over.

“Billy, this is Mr. Harris,” Clarke said. “He scouts for youth talent programmes. He heard you today.”

Billy’s mouth went dry. Mr. Harris smiled, extending a hand.

“You’ve got something special, lad. A voice like that — it deserves to go further than a classroom. Ever thought about music as more than a hobby?”

Billy stared, words caught in his throat. All he could think of was his bedroom, the cassette tapes, the hood pulled tight. And then — the dream he never dared to say aloud: escape.

“I… I think about it,” Billy whispered.

“Good,” Harris said. “Because I’d like to hear you again.” He slipped a card into Billy’s hand. “Talk to your teacher. We’ll arrange something.”

On the train back, the card burned against Billy’s palm. He watched the estates flash past the window, grey blocks stacked against the sky. For the first time, he felt they weren’t walls around him — just the place he was leaving behind.

Maybe, he thought, clutching the card tighter, this is it. The start. The way out.

### **Chapter 8 – Moving Forward**

**Scholarship**

Billy grabbed the chance of a lifetime when he was offered a place at the London School of Youth Music. It meant leaving home, leaving the estate, and stepping into a world bigger than anything he’d imagined. For the first time, his talent carried him further than his feet ever could. A scholarship in his hand, his whole future seemed to be opening up.

But the further he went, the more he felt the pull of home. He missed his mum’s voice, the streets of East London, and even Benji — who would never openly admit he missed Billy, but who carried the silence like a weight.

Betty watched her youngest son soar with pride and heartbreak all at once. She had once dreamed of ballet, her body built for dance, but her mother had crushed the dream before it began. She often wondered how her life might have unfolded if she’d been allowed to follow her passion. Now, she poured all that lost longing into Billy, determined that he wouldn’t be held back the way she had been.

Meanwhile, Angel’s life was unravelling. She had moved to Derby with Jason, chasing freedom, but the reality was a scratchy bedsit with, thin walls and colder nights. When she found out she was pregnant, joy never came — only the tightening knot of feeling trapped. Jason’s words, once sweet, grew sharp and twisted. He gaslighted her, leaving her doubting her own mind, hiding her bruises of the soul from her family back home.

Billy, busy with rehearsals and lessons, still sensed something wasn’t right whenever he spoke to his sister. He was growing fast, learning the confidence of the stage, chasing the rhythm of his own dreams. But the unease lingered.

Back home, the weight grew heavier. Angus, their father, was struck by a stroke that left him half the man he had been. Betty shouldered the burden without complaint — nursing him, working three jobs, carrying the household on her back.

And though Billy was now in the big world, far from home, the ties of family still tugged at him, louder than any song he sang.

Excitement thudded in his chest, but homesickness tugged at him like a stubborn thread. He thought of his mum’s laugh, the smell of Betty’s cooking, even Benji’s constant ribbing. Bet he misses me, though he’d never say it. The thought made Billy smile, though it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

Back home , Betty watched him go with pride and quiet sorrow. Standing at the sink, she traced her finger around the rim of her teacup, thinking of what might have been. Once, she had dreamed of the stage herself — pirouettes and satin shoes, applause that would never come. Her mother’s sharp “Don’t be daft, Betty” had shut that door forever. She often wondered how her life might have unfolded if she’d been allowed to dance. Now, Billy carried that lost possibility in his own two hands, and she swore she would never stand in his way.

Angel’s path was nothing like her brother’s.

The bedsit in Derby was damp and narrow, the wallpaper peeling in strips, the floorboards creaking with every step. Jason had promised her freedom, excitement, something better than the suffocating routines of home. Instead, she found herself staring at a cracked ceiling, pregnant and terrified.

“You’re overreacting,” Jason muttered one night as she tried to explain the dread that never left her. “You’ve always been too sensitive.”

Angel hugged her belly, biting back tears. His words twisted inside her until she wasn’t sure what was real anymore. To her parents, she lied. On the phone to Betty, her voice was light, cheerful, as though nothing were wrong. “Yeah, Mum, we’re fine. Jason’s looking after me. Don’t worry.”

But when the line went dead, the silence pressed in heavy and cruel.

In London, Billy grew taller in spirit. The school gave him confidence, and the stage became a second home. Music wrapped around him like armour, each note a shield against the doubts that whispered in the dark. Still, he couldn’t ignore the unease whenever Angel’s voice sounded too bright, too careful.

Something’s not right, he thought, and the feeling followed him like a shadow.

Back home, another shadow fell over the family. Angus collapsed one morning, his face drooping, his words slurred. A stroke, the doctor said. Betty barely had time to breathe as she took on the role of nurse, carer, and breadwinner all at once.

Three jobs kept the lights on. Nights blurred into mornings. She washed Angus, dressed him, helped him shuffle to his chair, all while swallowing her own exhaustion. Her back ached, her hands cracked, but she would not complain.

Sometimes, in the quiet moments, she thought of Billy on a stage somewhere in London, chasing the life she had once dreamed of. That thought alone kept her moving, even as the weight grew heavier each day.

And though miles apart, Billy felt it too — the pull of home, the ties of family that no distance could ever cut.

## Chapter 9– Moving Forward (Billy’s World)

The first morning at the London School of Youth Music smelled of polish and possibility. Billy stood in the courtyard, some songs he had scribbled in his case in hand, surrounded by strangers who all seemed taller, sharper, more certain of themselves. Their laughter rang out, quick and easy, while he kept his hands jammed in his pockets, shoulders tight.

Then the tutor clapped her hands.

“Welcome, everyone. You’re here because you have something rare. Don’t waste it.”

Her words struck him deeper than he expected. For the first time in his life, he felt as if someone was talking to him not like a lad from home , but like a musician.

Classes became a blur of scales, rehearsals, and theory lessons that stretched his brain until it ached. His fingers toughened on the his cuffs of his jacket , and the first time he sung in front of the full ensemble, nerves melted into exhilaration. The music rose, and with it, Billy rose too — taller, bolder, as though the boy he’d been was giving way to the man he was becoming.

Yet in the quiet evenings, when the city’s hum seeped through the window of his cramped student room, the homesickness would creep in. He would take out his phone, scroll past messages, and hover over Angel’s number. When they did speak, her voice was bright, too bright. Forced laughter, words that didn’t ring true.

“You sound… different,” he said once.

“Do I? Nah, just tired,” Angel replied quickly. “Jason’s been… you know, keeping me busy.”

Her chuckle was thin, breaking at the edges. Billy frowned, the unease tugging at him, but she changed the subject before he could press.

At school, confidence grew in unexpected ways. He caught himself raising his hand in class, offering ideas, sometimes even leading rehearsals. The teachers noticed. “Good instinct, Billy,” one said. “Don’t be afraid to take up space.”

The words stuck with him. He walked differently after that, shoulders looser, chin higher.

On weekends, he explored the city — the bustle of Camden Market, the echo of street musicians in the Underground, the grey sprawl of estates that reminded him of home. He wrote tunes in a battered notebook, scribbling bars between shifts at a café where he washed dishes to cover what the scholarship didn’t.

But always, when he played, it was the estate he heard. His mum’s voice calling him for tea, Benji’s smart remarks, even the silence that had crept into Angel’s words. Each note was tied to them. Each melody carried him back.

One evening, after a particularly demanding rehearsal, he sat alone in the practice room long after the others had gone. His pencil doodaling on his book , but no words wrote down. He stared at the sheet and thought of Angel’s voice again, the way it didn’t quite match her words.

Something’s wrong. I can feel it, he told himself.

And for the first time, the music didn’t soothe him. It sharpened the ache of distance.

## Chapter 8 – Billy in the Big World

The letter from his new agent lay heavy in his hands, though it only contained a few short lines. Audition: Dublin. Backing role. Singer.

Not even a lead, not even close — yet it felt enormous. Another step away from home, another demand on his nerves. The school was changing now that he was in the advanced year: work and education combined, a kind of apprenticeship in the world he once only dreamed about.

But the excitement didn’t quite take root. Instead, anxiety gnawed. He thought of Angel, her voice too bright, hiding something. He thought of Dad, struck down, and Mum burning herself out in silence. He thought of Benji, pretending not to miss him.

And he thought of Mr. Clark, the old music teacher back home who had first placed the whole idea of this in his hands. If I ever make it, I’ll buy him a guitar, Billy promised himself, a smile flickering. Maybe something classic, the kind you hang on a wall.

The daydream steadied him for a moment — until the doubts flooded back. Maybe I’m not ready. Maybe it’s too much.

“Come on, you’re coming.” Tom clapped him on the shoulder.

“I’m not in the mood.”

“Birthday drinks, mate. No one says no. Besides, it’ll do you good.”

And so he found himself, reluctantly, swept along with ten others into the heart of the West End.

The club was called Charlie’s, though it looked like something from another century. Or a 1920s-style Ronnie Scott’s where lamps glowed on each table. The stage, red velvet curtains drawn, promised music. Women with blond set Elagant hair and gowns cut to shimmer in the low light drifted past like ghosts of Marilyn Monroe.

Billy shrank into himself, tugging at his jacket, wishing he could pull his hood up. Social scenes weren’t his thing; he preferred to watch from the edges, where no one asked too many questions.

From a corner table came raucous laughter. Men in sharp suits, glasses of champagne raised high, women glittering beside them. They looked like they’d walked out of a film set

When one of the suited men caught Billy’s eye and waved him over, he glanced behind, unsure. Me? He mouthed.

The man with slicked-back hair nodded.

Billy hesitated, then crossed the floor.

“Sit, lad,” the man said, patting the empty chair. A glass of champagne slid towards him. “You’re in the business, aren’t you?”

Billy blinked. “Erm… music school.”

“That’s a start,” the man said with a grin, his voice carrying the smoothness of someone used to being listened to.

The group leaned in with interest, questions spilling: what he played, where he studied, who his agent was. The atmosphere was intoxicating — not just the champagne, but the attention. For once, people wanted to hear his story.

It soon became clear: these weren’t just rich revellers. They were film people. Directors, producers, names he half-recognised from posters.

Billy laughed more than he meant to, carried by their energy, but deep inside a tremor lingered. This is a different world altogether, he thought, as the stage lights dimmed and a woman stepped up to sing

### **Chapter 9 – The Conversation**

The lights were low and golden, the kind of haze that made everything look half like a dream. The band swung into another number like the image of Ronnie Scott’s, and Billy sat back, letting the brass wash over him. It was 1920s Rat Pack all over again, slick suits and smoky laughter, like he’d stepped out of his own life and into someone else’s.

For a moment, as the applause rattled like hail on a tin caravan roof, he felt it — that sudden pull of doubt. Why me? The question slipped through his mind like a shadow. Why him, when back home Benji was probably lying in their bedroom, tossing that battered lighter from hand to hand, stuck in the loop of another restless night?

He felt guilty. He felt unworthy. Yet, at the same time, utterly alive. The music made sense to him in a way nothing else ever had. It was a language, a code, and he had the answer book tucked inside him. He knew he should be more grateful, but it wasn’t complacency that held him back — it was the strangeness of being here, in these gilded spaces, feeling almost inferior to the company he kept.

Billy realised he’d been staring off, lost in thought.

“Billy… Billy… Billy!”

“Oh—sorry,” he said, blinking back. “I was miles away.”

His companion leaned closer. “Tell me more about you, then. What’s going on?”

Billy hesitated, then smiled faintly. “Well, actually… I’ve got an audition in Dublin coming up.”

“Tell me more,” the man said, intrigued.

Billy began to explain, but the man interrupted, almost conspiratorial.

“You know, you could kill two birds with one stone if you like. My wife and I are filming on location next week in a Dublin . If you’ve got any free time in between, come along, see how we do things. only if your interested or keen seems silly in the arts in Dublin make the most young man it will all add to your cv in this game son Might give you a bit of experience —with the old screen as opposed to stage.” Your shout young man your very welcome if so

Billy stared, stunned. “Are you sure, sir?”

“Of course.”

Billy felt his chest tighten with excitement. “I’d love that,” he said, almost tripping over his words.

“Good,” the man smiled.

And just like that, another door opened

.

Billy noticed the flute in his hand never seemed to empty; no sooner had he taken a sip than a waiter slipped in from nowhere, topping it up with a grin and a nod. The bubbles fizzed in his head, and he realised — with some surprise — that the awkwardness had drained out of him.

Normally he’d be second-guessing every word, worrying about pauses in the conversation. But now? He was the one leading it. Stories, little jokes , even daring questions — they spilled out of him as though the music itself were carrying his voice.

So this is what they mean by social lubricant, he thought. Strange that something he’d always kept at arm’s length, something he’d learned to mistrust from years of drunken rows at home, could feel like a friend now. All those nights watching his dad stumble, rage, collapse — Billy had sworn against the stuff. And yet, here he was, laughing too loud, feeling lighter than air, beginning to understand in some way the spell his old man had been under.

The night glowed. The crowd seemed to lean closer to him, listening, and he felt — for once — entirely in step with the world. It was his birthday, though he hadn’t even bothered with his friends. Normally that thought would gnaw at him, but tonight there was no guilt. Tonight, he felt like a film star, champagne in hand, conversation flowing, the scene glittering around him like it was his by right.

Alcohol, the enemy he’d always feared, had turned — impossibly — into an ally. For once in his life it seemed like a solution. A key that unlocked the doors of belonging.

But as the band played on and the night blurred brighter, a question lingered, fragile as the rim of his glass: could things really be this good? And, more dangerously: was that a good thing at all?

Chapter 10

The sun beaming into Billy’s face as he opens one eye like it’s super glued together and his head feels like a sack of spuds are sat on his head, fucking hell he frowns as coming to stir.

He looks down and still wearing last nights clothes wait a minute, iv even got my shoes on , things come flooding back, ah yeah! The club ,champagne, film people, Dublin, home and Angel, with his head like a rollercoaster of emotional ups and downs, all with his first hang over ,he threw his head back in the pillow ,with a sigh, almost not knowing what to feel, or do.

One thing he reflected back over though, was how that drink did takeaway all that, well all that difficult stuff he thinks pondering.

His phone rings, it’s mum,” hi mum” he croaks,” Billy “? “Yeah mum..” ”can you hear me?”

I can love, but you sound like you full of cold? son are you ok? J

Im hung over mum?

,u are what?

It was a student’s birthday, so I went for drinks, well, I sort of lost them

Lost them she replied

Well we went to a club in the west end like summat from a movie mum, the music was well it was electrifying what I heard

so how did u lose the group well how come you only herd some of the music Im confused Betty said

Trying to tell you mum snaps billy

Alright alright go on Betty said

. So I met these film crew In there no Stu ally filming but celebrating with champagne a nod they invited me to their table so I was chatting with them all night

You billy chatting, drinking , film crew , my little billy , Im so proud if you son you know ? I do worry though, same as our Angel, there is only our Benji I can put my bottom dollar in what his next move is as for u2 is so well just so happy and sad what my kid are up to I do kiss you billy look son as long as your happy that’s all that matters in life son follow your dreams you only have one shot at this life

Mum mum are u listening ?

Course I am Iove are you me ?

Yeah yeah

So anyway, I got invited to these posh peoples table, they fed me champagne, which I actually enjoyed and the best bit mum, I forgot to tell you, I have an audition next week, its in Dublin, for vocals, I don’t know the full role yet, but sounds good mum”

“That’s great love”, said Betty

“Yeah hang on, so mum “

“So these people in the club, they are only in Dublin, filming next week and they have invited me to meet up and see how they do things, what do you think mum ?”

“Billy son, fill your boots, do not regret anything ,like me”

“Son you have a voice, that’s taking you to the top , look where you are, look who your meeting, look who’s inviting you ,and look son ,it’s not like dad, getting invited to the club darts, is it love”

Billy chuckled almost proud as he thinks, I suppose so mum

Suppose so she says their is no suppose in it Billy so change that attitude you’ve got it Billy go with it don’t dought it

“True ok thanks mum ,I love and miss u ”

“No you don’t ,”Betty jokes

“I do said billy “

“I know son and we miss you, but ,your not coming back in this house ,until you turn up in a Bentley and take your old mum for a dinner in the Queens hotel ,like the royals do ,”haha only joking son,

“ just go get them and show them how it’s done, my boy your a McFadden, who will turn the light 💡 n our name not out “

**Chapter 10**

### **Chapter 10**

After chatting with his mum, Billy felt lucky. With Betty’s words still in his head, his confidence soared. Of course I can do the audition.

He pulled a torn business card from his pocket—the one from the man at the club—and quickly typed the details into his phone.

Then he called his agent.

“I’m in. One hundred percent up for the audition in Dublin.”

“Great, Billy,” she said. “I had an email this morning with more info.”

“Do you?” He leaned forward, eager.

“Hold on…” She hummed while scrolling. “Ah—here. The audition’s on the 22nd, one o’clock. Backing vocals for The X Factor. They’re picking based on voice, age, and gender.”

“Got it.”

“I’ll email you the form. Sign it and send it back with your school contract. That way you’re covered under insurance.”

“Yeah, no problem. Let me just confirm the date. I might see someone else while I’m there.”

“Oh? Family?”

“Sort of,” Billy said quickly. “Yeah, family.”

“Alright. Everything’s in the email.”

“Cool. Thanks. Speak soon.”

“You will. And Billy—well done. I’m backing you.”

“Cheers. Hope so.”

“Oh, one more thing—it’s well paid.”

Billy’s ears pricked up. “Is it?”

**“£10,900**.”

“What?!” His jaw dropped.

“Just over ten grand,” she repeated.

“Now we’re talking!” he shouted, grinning.

He hung up and stared at himself in the mirror. Film pays better, he thought, but this… this was real money.

He grabbed his phone like a mic and spun around the room.

“Now we have Billy Big Shot, lead vocals!” he announced in his best Simon Cowell voice, laughing at himself. Then he leapt back onto his bed, buzzing with daydreams of what was coming next.

### **Chapter 11**

Billy was ready. The flight to Dublin was booked, and he’d planned a three-day stay. As soon as he touched down, he called the movie guy to confirm their meeting. The man sounded pleased to hear from him, and together they arranged a time and directions to the set. Billy hung up with a grin—he had a good feeling about all of it.

The hotel was a small, traditional Irish place. Quaint, homely. From his window, the scenery stretched green and endless. Billy dropped his bag, stood in the middle of the room, and began running through scales. His voice warmed quickly, the notes crisp and confident. Sounding great, he thought, pacing like he was already on stage.

Later, he headed to a shop for a few essentials. At the back, chilled in the fridge, sat rows of Guinness. He stared at the black-and-white cans and smirked. This is what Ireland’s about, he told himself, almost justifying the four he carried to the till.

Back at the hotel, he cracked one open, then dialed his agent.

“Hey, I’ve arrived safely,” he said, settling onto the bed. “Any advice before tomorrow?”

### **Chapter 11 (continued)**

“Good to hear, Billy,” his agent said warmly. “First things first—rest. Don’t wear yourself out. You’ll need your voice fresh, so no shouting, no late-night partying, and definitely no too-many pints of Guinness.”

Billy chuckled, eyeing the can in his hand. “Right. Got it.”

“And second,” she went on, “don’t overthink it. They’re not looking for perfect—they’re looking for presence. Confidence. You walk in there, you sing like you’ve already got the job, and they’ll believe you.”

“Yeah,” Billy said, nodding. “Confidence. Presence. I can do that.”

“I know you can. That’s why I put you forward.” She paused, then added, “Oh—and keep me updated Billy. It could be big, Billy. Really big.”

He hung up a few minutes later, her words buzzing in his head. Standing by the window, he looked out across Dublin, the city lights glowing against the night sky. Everything felt within reach now—music, film, money, maybe even stardom.

This is it, he thought. My chance.

**Chapter 12**

**The audit and mess to follow**

### **Chapter 11**

**Billy sat waiting for over an hour, surrounded by dozens of hopeful singers. The atmosphere was thick with nerves—some whispered warm-ups, others sat in silence. When his name was finally called, his heart thudded.**

**He stepped into the audition room, took a breath, and launched into his song. His voice soared—steady, rich, full of emotion. To him, it felt shaky, not good enough. But the judges’ quick glances at each other told a different story.**

**“Thanks. Next!” one of them called, already moving the chain of auditions along.**

**All that for five minutes, Billy thought. Still, he smiled. Good job I can meet the film people while I’m here.**

**Outside, he called his agent. “Audition went okay,” he said, keeping his tone casual.**

**“Well done, Billy. That’s all you can do,” she encouraged.**

**Later, he tried ringing Angel. No answer. Straight to voicemail—again.**

**“Call me, sis,” he said softly. “Miss you loads. Got so much to tell you. Hope you’re okay.”**

**He sighed, then dialed the movie guy. The man’s voice was warm, pleased. They set a time and location for the next day.**

**With nothing else to do, Billy wandered the streets until he passed an old Irish pub. Music spilled out—singing, laughter, the sound of life. He couldn’t resist.**

**Inside, he joined the fun, singing along, soaking up the atmosphere. But one pint became two, then four. His voice grew louder, his steps clumsier. Soon he was the fool of the bar, laughter now aimed at him.**

**The drink was creeping in, becoming a problem he didn’t want to face. It’s just the booze, he told himself. Nothing to worry about.**

**Chapter 13 morning after**

### **Chapter 13**

Billy woke with a pounding head and a mouth like sandpaper. The room spun as he sat up, clothes from last night still on, Guinness cans lined up like trophies on the dresser.

Idiot, he thought, clutching his head. Why did I let it get that far?

He dragged himself into the bathroom, splashing water on his face, trying to wash away the memory of the pub. The laughter, the way people stared—it came back in fragments. He cringed.

By mid-morning, the hangover had settled into a dull ache. He forced himself to run through vocal scales, but his voice cracked. “Brilliant,” he muttered, frustrated. “Just brilliant, Billy.”

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He looked out of the hotel window, Dublin alive beneath him, and clenched his fists. This is my shot. I can’t blow it. Not for drink. Not for anything.

Still, the doubt lingered—what if the film people saw right through him? What if he was already sabotaging himself?

Billy grabbed his jacket, determined. Whatever the state of his head, he wasn’t going to miss this meeting.

### **Chapter 13**

The film set was nothing like anything Billy had seen—huge lights, cables snaking like metal vines, people moving with purpose, cameras that looked more like spacecraft than equipment. He walked in with his mouth open, every sense buzzing.

They welcomed him—warm but busy. A production assistant apologised for the rush and pointed him toward the food wagon. “Grab something — we’ll slot you in when we can.”

He ate standing up, eyes glued to the action. A director barked instructions; extras took their marks; someone ran past with a prop as if late for a train. Billy felt small and electric at once, a gorgeous ache of envy and possibility as a scene unfolded in front of him. He fixed himself to the filming like a hawk, trying to drink it all in. This is where it happens, he thought. This is the life.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. He pulled it out—Mum. He answered with a grin, ready to spill his excitement. “Hi, Mum—”

On the other end, Betty’s voice was thin, urgent. “Billy, Billy,” she called, trying to get him to listen.

“Yeah? You okay?” His grin stayed, but the background noise of the set made him lean closer to the phone.

There was a shaky breath, then a sob. “It’s Angel.”

“What?” The word sliced through the buzz of the crew.

“She’s in hospital, love… she’s taken an overdose.”

Billy’s fork clattered against the paper plate. The world narrowed; the lights and cameras blurred. “Overdose?” he repeated, as if the syllables might change the meaning. “But—why? How?”

“I don’t know,” Betty cried. “They’re treating her now. I’m heading to the station to travel there. I’ll call you as soon as I know anything. Stay focused, Billy—stay where you are for now.”

“Is she—will she be okay?” His voice broke.

“You’ll hear from me soon. I’ve got to go.” The line went dead.

Billy stood rooted, the bite of food forgotten in his mouth. Memories flooded: Angel’s laugh, scraped knees, nights they’d stayed up whispering secrets. A single tear slipped down his cheek and instantly the sadness hardened into something hotter.

“That fucking Jason,” he hissed under his breath, the name tasting like bile. If he’s to blame… The thought burned through him, sharp and dangerous.

He shoved the plate aside, grabbed his jacket, and moved before he could talk himself out of it.

### **Cahapter 14 Angel in coma**

The hospital smelled of disinfectant and quiet despair. Betty’s steps slowed as a nurse appeared, her face soft with compassion.

“Mrs. McFadden?” the nurse asked gently.

Betty nodded, her throat too tight for words.

“Come with me.”

They walked together down the ward until they reached a small room. The nurse pushed the door open, and Betty froze.

There was her Angel—her baby girl—lying pale against the white sheets. Tubes and wires tethered her body to machines, monitors flickering with each fragile rise and fall of her chest.

Betty rushed forward, dropping to her knees beside the bed. “Angel… Angel, Angel,” she sobbed, clutching her daughter’s cold hand. “I’ve let you down.” Guilt cracked her voice, the words spilling out as if they might carry the blame away.

The nurse stepped back in a moment later, holding a folder. She lowered her voice. “Mrs. McFadden,” she said, leaning closer. “She’s stable. She’s lucky.”

Betty looked up, eyes wide and wet.

“I’m so sorry about your grandson,” the nurse continued softly. “But we have Angel, and she’s living up to her name. We’re doing everything to detoxify her system and bring her back. But…” The nurse paused, steady and honest. “It will take time. It will take time, okay?”

Betty clutched her daughter’s hand tighter and nodded, words failing her. Tears streamed down her face as she whispered, “Thank you. Thank you.”

The machines beeped steadily, a rhythm of hope in the silence.

Billy feels powerless, he is trying to now use what was jaw dropping in amazement before the call , to now, trying to use the magic of the set, as a distraction from Angel and mum.

“Billy, be with you in a moment, float around, ask questions, take notes, this is the movie business Billy, do you fancy it?”

“Umm! Yeah, I will, umm thanks, yeah, just taking it in sir,”” Freddie, he shouts rushing off, call me Freddie, not in school now my boy,”

Aww Freddie, that’s it new it began with F, Billy thought.

Billy’s emotions were once again like a rollercoaster, he saw an off License, out of the corner of his eye, a drink, I need a drink he muttered, almost like he deserved it and thought nobody can tell me , my sister nearly died he muttered as he ran over.

Have you got any miniatures ,or he thinks as he scans the shelf, umm…. Remembering what Benji gets, Brandy, yeah any Brandy please, the shop keeper, looked like he had been sat behind the counter, for 50 years, he looked over the top of his glasses, with the string on them to go round his neck, billy glances like, the shop keeper the strangest thing Billy’s seen in a long time.

“As the keeper looks Billy up down before turning to his shelf, then a hard Irish accent said,@ onne awe! toow,”

“pardon“

Billy replied “one or two“ ? “Aww! Sorry one please and this bottle of coke please “

“Five n two”, sorry leaning towards him, turning his head, “five euros and two pence boy “ the keeper spoke in a loud. Frustrated voice.

“Sorry “ Billy said handing him the money, “ Im not from here” he says.

“Y not jesting” the keeper mutters

Billy runs out then as he glanced over at the set, he turns his back as he adds the brandy to the Coca Cola nervously, checking nobody saw him then he guzzles a good swig and almost a relief like it’s solved a problem before running back on set.

Billy’s phone buzzes again, he reaches into his pocket, with a hastily inquisitive snatch, home it sad, frowning, he answers Benji, “are u listening our kid,”?

“What?” Billy said,

“ I need that jasons number, have u got one for him Bill?”

“Jason, have I fuck Benji ,”

Benji interrupted like he not in the phone to anyone really, “ Im going to make that no good bastard pay for what he has done to our Angel,”

“Do you know their address bill”?

Umm, I think ,I think it might be in my book actually Benji, but I’m in Dublin and not at the hotel, but, when I get back, I will check and give you a bell back.”ok? Billy said.

“Hotel, “? A pause ?Benji replied

“Dublin?”Benji said

I thought you were in the west end Bill? Asks Benji , confused,

“Yeah, I am, u nob, ed ,Im in Dublin, on a film set, billy said, all proud,

“Fucking hell! A film set bill?”said Benji

“You don’t mess about our kid”, look I can’t think straight at the min, look our kid, try get me that address please , right?

Defo Benji defo, ok love ya Benji,

Leave it off !, Benji said, followed by a and u, then, the phone goes dead, billy smiled, glad he has his big brother, he thought , who , just nearly, showed some emotion, for a second, but more importantly, Im glad he is on that bastard jason , as he reflects on his sister, while swigging a big swallow of pop n brandy , ahh he lets out, wiping his mouth with his sleeve, to dribbling cola.

Billy evaluates things, with a relief that , Benji is home and dealing with things, gives him faith, as Benji is hard and jason has had it now billy thinks , with a sense of proud that and lucky that Benji comes in use for somethings he thinks.

I’m here, I can’t do anything while here, let’s get as much as I can from this trip, for angel he thinks, yeah for angel, getting strength from her and now the brandy has gone straight to his head and almost like, confidence in a bottle, as he marched closer to the scene they are filming, observing with a interested teen.

**Chapter 15 landed the job**

Billy’s phone buzzes again, it’s his agent,

“Billy, can you talk? Sure he said sure.

Well Im sorry to say tgen a pause, billy hangs on to her words , his jaw open,

“You got the X factor you got the job billy, well bloody done, she said with great joy.

Billy’s jaw clenched, into a smile,a smile of relief,

Really? He asks

Really billy, now listen to me, can you extend your stay she asks?

Well yeah, till when exactly? Billy asks

Tomorrow, you see Billy it makes sense , rather than coming back to London to return back to Dublin , if you can , as they are keen on moving straight in with a pilot, a pilot, billy asks?

It’s filming talk billy, it’s the first takes the performance as it’s pre recorded this Billy tgen you will do the live shows.

Live in tv , me, shit, he said

Live on tv Billy and £11:000 will be going into your bank, I need you to sign the contract and email it back asap ok billy?

Yeah ok billy said, a little shocked , it’s been a rollercoaster of a day.

Billy comes ff the phone and Freddie his heading over, he has a mega phone in his hand, he pulls his headset down, “Billy”

Come take a look at some directors camera angels, under the sheet, as he points over to the big main camera, perched on a rail like a train.

Cool, yeah! Said billy as he hurries over.

So, how did your job go? Asked Freddie?

I actually just got off the phone with my agent, yeah iv got the job.

Got the job, Freddie turns with a glance of pride, good for you Billy, you really are on the ball he said

Tell me more?

Yeah it’s the X factor, billy with great excitement, yet down playing it in embarrassment, The X factor?

As in a competitor? Asks Freddie

No no, Im going to be a backing singer as far as I know, you know part of the music team, the production sides.

Ok, ok, now that’s a big gig you know, for a young man of your age, one thing I do know, cowells teams pay big bucks,I understand also that, he is a fair guy underneath all of that bravado and if you show talent and hard work billy, he is the nan to know .

Yeah, I mean is he ,Billy replied, a grin of proud excitement radiates from his face.

Freddie announced over his mega phone, crew, we have Simon Cowells protégé here.

Everyone turns and give thumbs up, billy blushes with a proud yet shyness’s

ok billy, look through here, so this is where all the film shots are decided and this is where the orchestral final say is made, providing raw photography to Then, have the editors cut it up so some remains and some ends up on the cut room floor says Freddie

### **Chapter 16 – The Big Day**

The big day had arrived.

The X Factor job.

The studio had even put on a taxi to collect him from the hotel and bring him straight to the BBC Studios in Dublin. Billy sat in the backseat, his leg bouncing with nerves, proud as punch, yet jittery with excitement. His thoughts kept circling back to one name: Simon Cowell.

I’m actually here because of him. Simon bloody Cowell.

Before he knew it, the taxi had pulled up, and he was ushered through security.

The atmosphere inside was electric. Familiar faces from television brushed past him in the corridors. People with clipboards hurried by, headsets crackled with orders, the hum of lights and cameras filled the air. Billy tried to take it all in, his chest swelling with pride.

Yet, every so often, his mind slipped. Slipped back to Angel—pale in that hospital bed, her life tethered to machines. The image stabbed at him, but he refused to let it crush him. Instead, he used it as fuel. Do this for her. For Angel. He carried her with him in his heart, letting her be the strength that drove him forward.

The day stretched long—hours of waiting around, watching retakes, sets being adjusted, camera angles reset. He saw how much work went into every second of what appeared seamless on television.

Then, finally, his name was called.

Billy was escorted to a side room where four other singers waited. They were flamboyant, stylish, and older than him. At first, he felt out of place, the youngest in the room, but soon the ice broke. One laughed, another cracked a joke, and before long they were warming up together, voices rising and falling in scales, filling the space with harmonies.

Today was about learning the songs, getting into sync. Their voices blended, collided, then smoothed out again as they repeated lines over and over. Billy felt the vibration in his chest as they reached higher notes, his confidence building with each run-through.

For the first time that day, he stopped thinking of Angel’s hospital bed and started believing in himself.

### **Chapter 16 – The Big Day (continued)**

The call came quicker than Billy expected.

“Group B, let’s go. You’re up.”

His stomach clenched, but his legs moved anyway, following the others down a long corridor that buzzed with the hum of generators and chatter from crew. They passed racks of costumes, makeup artists hurrying with brushes and powder, and then—suddenly—the space opened up.

The stage.

Bright, unforgiving lights beamed down, rows of empty seats stretched into the shadows, and a huge black camera glided silently along its rail. Billy froze for half a second, struck by the size of it all.

This is it. This is real.

“Come on, lad,” one of the older singers nudged him. “Eyes up, not down.”

Billy nodded, swallowing hard.

The director’s voice cut through the air.

“Positions please! Let’s have the track. Rolling in five, four, three—”

Music thundered from the speakers. Billy’s heart hammered in time, his palms slick with sweat. Then his voice came—soft at first, shaky—but quickly finding its place among the others.

The harmonies built, overlapping, weaving together. The four older singers lifted him, carried him, and Billy rose to the challenge, matching them note for note.

He closed his eyes for a moment, and in the darkness behind his lids he saw Angel. Tubes, wires, her pale hand in their mother’s. But instead of drowning him, the image steadied him. Sing for her. For Angel. For Mum. For all of us.

The song soared to its climax, and Billy’s voice—stronger than he’d ever heard it—rang out.

When the last note faded, there was a beat of silence. Then applause. Crew clapped, a couple of producers gave thumbs-up, even the sound engineer leaned out of his booth and called, “Nice job, lads.”

Billy felt his knees weaken, not from nerves but from relief. A grin split his face as he looked at his group. They were all smiling too—flamboyant, confident, but welcoming him in as one of their own.

“Not bad for your first time, kid,” one said, clapping him on the back.

Billy laughed, breathless. “Thanks.”

As they left the stage, he caught sight of the cameras resetting, lenses shifting. He realized this wasn’t just a rehearsal. This was the beginning of something far bigger than he’d ever imagined.

And deep down, he promised himself: I’ll make Angel proud. I’ll make them all proud.

**Chapter 17**

Chapter 17

The gig was done. The live shows were behind him, and the money was now safely in the bank.

“I can actually say I work for Simon Cowell,” Billy thought to himself with a half-smile.

As he sat reflecting on the Dublin trip, he couldn’t help but feel lucky. Simon Cowell. The X Factor. The money. The movies with Freddie. It all seemed unreal.

But now a question lingered: did he want to push further with the singing, or chase film instead? The thought tugged at him, unresolved.

More than anything, though, his mind was on Angel—and on getting back to London.

He pulled out his phone and tried calling his mum. No answer. So he tried the home.

The phone rang twice before a voice finally came through.

“Hello?”

It was Banji.

Billy felt a wave of relief. “Banji! It’s me.”

“Bruv, I thought you’d gone and forgotten us already,” Banji laughed down the line. “How’s Dublin? You living it up with the big shots now?”

Billy leaned back, closing his eyes for a moment. “It’s mad, Banji. Proper mad. The gig’s done, money’s sorted… I can actually say I’ve been working with Simon Cowell.”

There was a pause, then Banji’s tone softened. “Serious? That’s huge, man. I’m proud of you. Mum’s been asking after you, you know.”

“I tried her just now—no answer.”

“She’s fine, don’t worry. Just resting. You know how it is. She’ll buzz when she hears you called.”

Billy nodded, even though Banji couldn’t see him. His chest felt tight. He wanted to tell him about Angel, about the confusion over music and film, but for now he just said:

“Can’t wait to get back, bro. Dublin’s been mad, but London’s where I need to be.”

Banji chuckled. “London, and Angel, you mean.”

Billy felt his throat tighten. Banji always saw straight through him. He let the silence hang a moment, staring at the city lights beyond the hotel glass.

His mind drifted back to the past few nights.

Dublin had been a blur—bright lights, loud crowds, and the kind of chaos that only came with live shows. He could still hear the roar of the audience, the way it shook through his chest when the band kicked in. The adrenaline had been like fire in his blood, burning hotter with every cheer.

Then the after-parties—faces he half-recognised from TV, strangers suddenly treating him like an old friend. Laughter, drinks clinking, cameras flashing. Freddie pulling him into the centre of it all, larger than life, while Billy tried to pretend he wasn’t completely out of his depth.

For a moment he saw it again—the way Simon had clapped him on the shoulder, firm, almost fatherly. You’ve got something, Billy. Don’t waste it.

The words replayed in his head like a hook he couldn’t shake.

“Billy? You still there?” Banji’s voice crackled down the line.

“Yeah, yeah. Just… thinking back,” Billy said quietly.

“Thinking about what?”

“Dublin. The shows. The people. Simon… everything.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “It was unreal, Banji. But you know what? With all of it going on, the only thing I kept thinking was how much I wanted to be back home. Back in London. Back with Angel.”

Banji let out a low whistle. “That girl’s got you, fam. Proper got you.”

Billy didn’t answer. He just kept staring out at the Dublin skyline, where the neon lights blurred into the night.

Billy thinks, shit, I better call my agent, his rollercoaster ride, emotionally and professionally, with all these big shots, then of course, Angel, his sister he loves.

After day dreaming looking out the car window back to the hotel.

As he takes his phone to dial, it buzzes, “ah!” He mutters, it’s the Agency.

“Was just about to call you” said Billy.

“Oh yeah!” She said

“Too busy with the celbs “ she jokes

Billy smiles, “something like that “ he said they chuckle

“Well? Tell me “? She said

”Yeah!, yeah!, it was good “

“Not bad for a first job, Billy” she said.

“Not many can say that, at your age , Billy”

“I know”, Billy said

“Well, listen to me Billy”

“We have had, a corporate media, film group send through a reference, “ she paused a moment, Billy can hear papers russling down the line,

“Sorry Billy, yeah, a reference, a glowing one at that, for you, from a film company director, a Mr Freddie Barber”? “Yeah a Freddie Barber, “

“Saying, that we understand, that you represent Mr Billy McFadden and we on a personal level, are very impressed, with a young man’s, keen, polite, manner, in which his appetite , yearn and energy for the business, is something that we would like to acknowledge.”

“ further to this, we understand that the process of , that you represent him as a client, we would like to move forward with sending through a upcoming, musical film, that we are perusing, I personally, would like to , through yourself, hire Billy as a leading role for this.”

Billy know myself on a personal level and I have not discussed this with him as yet, I wanted to go through the proper channels , hence this letter and reference, your sincerely Freddie Barber .”

“Billy” the age said, your turning heads, who is this, more, how do you know Freddie?, iv googled them, they are huge, Billy, your been headhunted.”

Billy’s, gobsmacked,

“Erm, “ billy gasps

“Yeah, it’s, I mean, yeah, I know Freddie “ he mutters.

”Clearly“ she says

Billy lied about the film meeting and said it was family, I hope they haven’t mentioned this he panics and thinks.

“yeah, it’s, umm, through a family member”, he said,

“Yeah, family member, my uncle Bob, he knows Freddie well, iv met him once when I was young he took me on a set, that was in Ireland 🇮🇪 I think also “

“Wow” she said, ok get back Billy and let’s see and speak ok?”

“Ok “

The call ends Billy a gasps, again happy yet a bit worried , he thinks why didn’t I tell the truth?

Chapter 18

The phone at the McFaddens’ rang sharp against the quiet of the house. Angus stirred in his chair, his arm jerking slightly as he tried to call out, the words tangled by the stroke. His voice was broken, urgent but slurred.

Bengi heard and came thundering down the stairs, two at a time. He grabbed the receiver.

“Hello?”

“Mr McFadden?”

“Yeah, speaking.”

“Oh hi, it’s the West Midlands Hospital here.”

Bengi’s throat tightened. He swallowed hard. “Yeah, okay.”

“It’s good news,” the nurse said warmly.

His shoulders dropped with relief. “Ah, good. Is it… our Angel?”

“It is. She’s ready for home. But she will need her family. We strongly recommend she stays with family—actually, we wouldn’t be happy discharging her otherwise. Is this something you can organise, Mr McFadden?”

“Yeah, of course. She lives here. We all live here. She’s not going off to stay with whoever, her friend, or anyone else. She’s with us. With family. Again.” His voice was firm, almost defiant.

After the call ended, Bengi rushed to Mum, who was sitting in the front room knitting half-heartedly, her eyes glazed with worry.

“Mum—good news,” he said, breathless. “Angel’s ready to come home. They want her with family. We’ll bring her back here.”

Mum’s eyes filled with sudden tears, the needles slipping from her hands. “Oh thank God. I thought…” She couldn’t finish the sentence.

Bengi knelt in front of her. “I’ll ring Billy. He’ll sort it. You know he will.”

The next afternoon, a black chauffeur car pulled up outside the hospital. Polished, gleaming, the kind of car that made passers-by turn their heads.

Mum clutched a bouquet of flowers and a soft teddy, her best coat buttoned up, while Bengi stood beside her with another teddy tucked under his arm. Both looked slightly out of place in such a sleek machine, but proud all the same.

When Angel came out through the hospital doors, she looked pale, fragile even—but her eyes widened at the sight of the car waiting for her.

“Bloody hell,” she whispered, her lips twitching into the start of a smile. “How’d you get this?”

Bengi grinned. “Our 007 Billy. Hollywood himself.”

Angel turned to Billy, who was leaning against the car in his dark jacket, trying to look casual.

He smirked. “Yeah, your Billy. Only working for Simon Cowell, remember?”

Angel stopped dead, staring at him. “What? You’re joking.”

“No joke,” Bengi cut in proudly. “Our Billy. Proper making moves now.”

Angel shook her head slowly, overwhelmed, a laugh breaking out as she climbed into the car. She hugged the teddy to her chest and glanced at Billy with something between pride and disbelief.

“Our Billy,” she said softly, and for the first time in weeks, her face lit up.

Inside the car, the leather seats seemed to swallow them whole. The quiet hum of the engine and the soft scent of polish made it feel like another world compared to the hospital’s sharp disinfectant air.

Angel sat between Mum and Bengi in the back, the teddy still clutched to her chest, flowers balanced on her lap. She kept glancing around the car, running her fingers along the stitching, eyes sparkling with disbelief.

“This is mad,” she said, half whisper, half laugh. “Billy, seriously—how did you pull this off?”

Billy leaned forward from the passenger seat, twisting to look at her with a grin. “Connections, sis. You’d be surprised what a chauffeur owes you when you’ve been hanging around Simon Cowell’s lot.”

“Simon Cowell,” she repeated, shaking her head. “I still can’t get my head around it. You? Working with him?”

“Believe it,” Bengi said, puffing out his chest with pride. “Our Billy’s moving up in the world. Dublin gigs, TV people, the lot. Man’s practically Hollywood now.”

Billy rolled his eyes, though the smile on his face gave him away. “Don’t listen to him. It’s just work, same as anything else.”

“Work?” Angel laughed, her voice catching slightly with emotion. “You’re sat in a posh car, working for Simon Cowell, and you call it just work? You’ve done us proud, Billy. Proper proud.”

Mum reached over and squeezed his hand. She hadn’t said much, but the look in her eyes said everything—pride, relief, love all bound together.

Angel leaned back against the seat, her body still tired but her spirit lighter than it had been in weeks. For a moment, she simply closed her eyes and let the hum of the car and the warmth of family wrap around her.

“Feels good to be coming home,” she murmured.

Bengi smiled. “Home’s ready for you. Always was.”

Billy turned back to face the road, his grin fading into a thoughtful look. Dublin, Simon, the gigs—it all felt far away now. Right here, in this car, with his family, was what mattered most.

The chauffeur pulled smoothly into the estate, the glossy black car turning heads as it rolled down the street. Curtains twitched, neighbours peered out, and a group of kids on bikes slowed to stare. It wasn’t every day a car like that showed up outside the McFaddens’.

Inside, Angel shifted nervously, clutching her teddy tighter. “Everyone’s watching,” she whispered.

“Good,” Bengi said, grinning. “Let ’em see. Our Angel’s coming home in style.”

Billy leaned back in his seat, a flicker of pride crossing his face. He caught Angel’s eye in the mirror. “You deserve it,” he said simply.

The car eased to a stop outside the house. Mum was the first to step out, flowers in hand, holding her head high. Bengi hopped out next, rushing round to open the door for Angel like he was her personal butler.

Angel slid out slowly, still looking fragile, still shy—but when her feet touched the ground and she saw the familiar front step, a smile broke through.

“Home,” she breathed.

The street seemed to pause around them—neighbours nodding, some even clapping politely, others whispering. But Angel didn’t care. She had her family either side of her, and Billy standing tall by the car.

They went inside together, the house warm with the smell of Mum’s cooking and the comfort of things exactly where they’d always been. Angel sank into her chair in the front room, teddy still in her arms.

For the first time in what felt like forever, she let herself relax.

Billy stood in the doorway, watching her. Angel caught his eye and smiled. “Our Billy,” she said softly. “Proper Hollywood.”

And for once, Billy didn’t argue.

Chapter 19

Billy could hardly believe it when Freddie leaned across the café table, eyes glinting, and slid the folder toward him.

“The musical film’s locked in,” Freddie said, barely able to contain his grin. “And Billy—your contract’s here. We’re talking one point one million.”

Billy blinked, his mind spinning. “Wait—hold on. One point one million? That’s the film’s budget, right?”

Freddie laughed, slapping the table. “No, mate. That’s your fee.”

The words hit Billy like a punch to the chest. He sat back, gobsmacked, his mouth hanging open. For a moment he couldn’t even breathe, let alone speak.

“My… my fee?” he managed, his voice a whisper.

“Yours,” Freddie confirmed. “Signed, sealed, delivered. You’ve made it, Billy. Proper made it.”

Billy pressed his palms over his face, half laughing, half stunned. The weight of it all crashed over him—the gigs, Dublin, Simon, and now this. One point one million. Him. A lad who’d grown up watching his mum juggle three jobs just to keep the lights on.

He knew instantly what he wanted to do.

That evening, back at the McFaddens’, Mum was folding laundry when Billy walked in, the contract still burning in his pocket. He didn’t bother easing into it—he just blurted it out.

“Mum, I’m buying this house. I’m putting an extension on it. And from now on, we’re all going to live here. Together. No more three jobs for you.”

Mum froze, a pair of socks still in her hands. She looked at him, eyes wide, then slowly shook her head in disbelief. “Billy… don’t be daft.”

“I’m not daft,” he said firmly. “I’ve signed a contract. I’ve got more than enough. You don’t have to break your back anymore. Not for us. Not ever again.”

Her lips trembled as she tried to smile, her eyes already filling with tears. “Oh, Billy… I don’t know what to say.”

“Say you’ll let me do it,” he told her. “Say you’ll stop worrying about bills and shifts and keeping us all afloat. From now on, you do what you want, not what you have to do.”

Mum set the socks aside and went to him, her arms wrapping tight around his shoulders. “I’m so proud of you,” she whispered. “You’ve changed everything for us.”

Just then, Banji barged in, nearly tripping over the step. “What’s all this then? Mum crying? Billy, what’ve you done now?”

Mum turned, wiping her eyes with the corner of her sleeve. “Your brother’s just told me he’s buying the house.”

Banji’s jaw dropped. “Buying the… house? As in ours? As in no more landlord breathing down our necks?”

“As in ours,” Billy confirmed, grinning now. “And I’m building an extension. Everyone’s got space. Proper space.”

Banji whooped, punching the air. “My guy! Hollywood Billy! Man’s come home and dropped the golden ticket!”

Angel appeared at the doorway then, wrapped in her blanket, still pale but with a curious smile. “What’s going on?”

Banji spun toward her. “Sis, listen to this. Billy’s buying the house. Like, buying it, full stop.”

Angel blinked. “You’re joking.”

“No joke,” Billy said, his voice steady, full of quiet pride.

Her face lit up, fragile but radiant, and she pressed a hand to her mouth. “Billy… that’s incredible.”

Even Angus, in his chair by the fire, managed a low, strained sound—half cheer, half laugh—as if he understood every word.

The whole room seemed to glow with it: relief, pride, and the sudden dizzying realisation that everything was about to change.

For once, the McFaddens weren’t just surviving. They were moving forward—together

Chapter 20

That night, long after the laughter had faded and the others had gone to bed, Billy lay awake in his old room. The hum of the house felt different now—lighter, like the walls themselves knew the future had shifted.

He stared at the ceiling, his thoughts restless.

Simon’s voice echoed in his head: You’ve got something, Billy. Don’t waste it. Freddie’s grin, the word million, the contract—he kept replaying it all, as if trying to convince himself it was real.

A million. For him. For singing, acting, performing. For doing the one thing he’d always loved but never thought could feed them, never thought could fix their lives.

And yet, even as the figure lit him up inside, another picture kept rising in his mind: Angel, stepping out of the hospital looking fragile but smiling, hugging that teddy like it was the most precious thing in the world. Her voice, soft and proud: Our Billy. Proper Hollywood.

He closed his eyes, letting the weight of it sink in. He had choices now. More than he’d ever dreamed. He could chase the music harder, dive headlong into film, or do both. But the truth was, none of it meant anything if his family wasn’t secure—if Angel wasn’t safe, if Mum still worked herself into the ground, if Banji still felt like he had to fight the world alone.

Billy turned onto his side, looking at the old posters still pinned to his wall—faded band flyers, film stills, scraps of the dreams he’d carried since he was a kid. Now they weren’t just dreams anymore. They were here, in reach.

And yet, deep in his chest, he felt a tug. Angel. London. Simon’s world. His world. He wasn’t sure yet how they’d fit together.

But one thing he knew for certain: he wasn’t going back to how things were.

Tomorrow, everything began.

# 

# 

# (6 months later)

**Chapter 21**

Chapter 21

Six months later, life in the McFaddens’ world looked different. The walls of the house had fresh paint, the extension half-finished, and the hum of worry that used to hang in every corner had lifted.

At the pub, Betty wiped down the counter and pulled a fresh pint for one of the regulars. The telly in the corner flickered with adverts until she leaned across the bar.

“Push that button for me, love,” she asked a customer.

He clicked, and the screen came alive—The X Factor.

Betty’s eyes lit up. She snatched the remote from behind the bar and tuned it properly, craning her neck to watch as she worked.

“Oh, your lad’s in this, is he, Betty?” a woman called from down the bar.

“He sure is,” Betty answered proudly, pulling another pint without taking her eyes off the screen.

And there he was—Billy, the camera zooming in as he sang, his voice strong and beautiful, the kind that stopped conversations mid-sentence. Betty’s chest swelled with pride.

Across town, Billy was in a guitar shop, his fingers trailing lovingly over the polished curves of a Fender Stratocaster. He plucked a string, listening to the note ring out.

“How much for this one?” he asked the shop assistant.

“Just over a grand,” the lad said.

Billy nodded, already knowing. “I’ll take it. Can you wrap it, please?”

His phone buzzed in his pocket. He glanced at the screen: Freddie.

“Yeah?” Billy answered, tucking the phone to his ear.

“You ready for tonight?” Freddie’s voice was sharp, buzzing with excitement. “Better have your best suit, mate. We’re up for a nomination—Best Musical Film. Fingers crossed, eh?”

Billy grinned. “Don’t worry. I’ve sorted it. Whole family’s kitted out—suits, bow ties, the lot.”

He ended the call and stood in the shop doorway, looking out at the street. Six months ago, he could never have imagined this—Grammy-level calls, film nominations, Fenders wrapped up under his arm.

And tonight? Tonight might change everything again.

Billy went past a good old fashioned pub, the type with beer lingering outside the door, the leaded window and the swinging sign Tetleys The King Billy, he laughed to himself, gotta get one in here he said, while carrying the new wrapped guitar carefully propping it up at the quiet bar, he looks up and said, a pint of Tetleys please.

He asked is anyone sitting there by the window?

“ feel free” the bar lady said, while her eyes fixed on him, with a puzzled look.

Billy sat down swigged about half the pint down, followed by a big sigh, as he wiped his mouth of froth.

He daydreamed , just thinking of how this fast paced mad life has unfolded, the Westminster, Dublin, that night meeting Freddie, Angel, home, Dad now half the man he was.

Now tonight, he finds himself not only attending a nomination award ceremony, but nominated and as he thinks of himself going n stage , with all sorts of speeches running through his head, well nine of this would be so if it wasn’t for Mr Clark, yeah I will dedicate this to Mr Clark, he thinks.

“Excuse me” the bar tender shouts across, “yeah” Billy looked over and replied

“ sorry, to ask are you off thee x factor ?” She asks

“ I am” billy said “I am “

I thought so, I was trying to think where I seen your face , your voice is amazing, I know your a pro but amazing “

“ thank you “ said Billy

He thinks bloody hell im even getting recognised now.

Chapter 22

Billy adjusted the bow tie one last time, fingers trembling slightly as he faced the mirror. The tuxedo fit perfectly, crisp and dark, but the reflection staring back at him still felt strange—like someone else’s life. He could hardly believe where he was going, yet excitement surged beneath the nerves. More than anything, he wanted this night to unfold without a hitch, for everything and everyone to be all right.

The phone buzzed. His agent’s voice came through, steady and reassuring, checking he was ready and wishing him luck. Billy murmured his thanks, heart thudding. The cars were already booked, lined up to carry them where they needed to be. All except one.

There was still a final call to make—for Mr. Clark. Only yesterday, Billy had reached out to him, sent him a suit, and extended the invitation. He hoped the man would come. He hoped he would stand with them tonight.

Billy’s hand lingered on the guitar case. He lifted it carefully, feeling the weight of the wood and strings as though it carried part of his own story. A smile touched his lips. If we win, he thought, this is going to Mr. Clark. I’ll place it in his hands on stage, where everyone can see

.Chapter 23

The Royal Albert Hall shimmered beneath a thousand lights, its grandeur alive with chatter and laughter. Tables of celebrities stretched across the floor, sequins glittering, tuxedos sharp, champagne flutes raised in toasts that caught the glow of chandeliers. The air was thick with expectation, the hum of power and glamour blending with the quiet rustle of gowns.

Billy sat at the film company’s table, the McFaddens gathered like a proud clan among stars. He lifted his glass, champagne cool against his fingertips, and let his eyes roam the room. For a moment his mind wandered back—to that dim club where he’d first met Freddie. How small the world had felt then. How impossible this moment had seemed. And now, here he was.

The house lights dimmed. The audience hushed. The second half of the awards began.

“For the Best in Musical Cinematic, 2025…” The voice echoed across the hall as names filled the screen above the stage. Billy’s chest tightened. His fingers drummed against his leg. The nominees were read out, each name followed by polite applause. And then—

“And the winner is… Billy McFadden, The Voice of the Boy.”

For a heartbeat, silence. Then an eruption—cheers, clapping, the swell of recognition crashing against him. Billy rose, almost stunned, and turned to Mr. Clark. Without thinking, he grabbed the old man, hugging him tight, and pulled him along as the rest of the table surged to their feet. Together they walked toward the stage, the spotlight opening to meet them.

On stage, Billy steadied himself at the microphone, his voice trembling but true.

“I’d like to dedicate this success,” he said, “to my music teacher, Mr. Clark—for believing in me when nobody else did.”

He turned, unwrapping the Fender guitar he had carried for this very moment. The polished wood gleamed beneath the lights as he placed it carefully in Mr. Clark’s hands.

The old man’s lips parted, eyes glistening. He shook his head slowly, overcome, and the hall seemed to hold its breath for him. Then he leaned into the microphone, voice cracking with emotion.

“I only ever wanted him to sing,” he said softly. “That’s all I wanted—to see him sing.”

The words rippled through the hall, followed by a wave of applause that shook the very walls. Mr. Clark clutched the guitar to his chest like a treasure, tears streaking his cheeks, and Billy slipped an arm around him, anchoring the moment forever.

The ovation rose higher, the sound of thousands standing, clapping, shouting his name—but for Billy, the only thing that mattered was the look in Mr. Clark’s eyes.

The afterparty spilled into a world of crystal lights and velvet ropes, champagne flowing as freely as the conversations. Laughter mingled with music, and the air was thick with the heady scent of perfume, cigars, and fresh opportunity.

Angel stood out among the glittering crowd. Her evening gown shimmered with every step, a vision that caught not only Billy’s breath but also the attention of the film producer she had been speaking with. Billy watched the man—a kind face behind the sharp suit, his eyes alive with genuine warmth rather than calculation. Of all people in this room, Billy thought, if Angel were to let someone in, this one might be worthy. He seemed to care. And if there was more between them than conversation, Billy could accept it. At least Angel would have the life she deserved, something secure beyond the chaos of his own world.

Across the room, Bengi was weaving through the guests like a man on a mission, his grin wide, his chest puffed with pride. Every handshake, every introduction began the same way: “That’s my little brother—yes, Billy McFadden! He used to pinch my old tape player, singing into it all night. And now look at him—on this stage, winning awards!”

His voice rose above the crowd at moments, his laughter carrying like a refrain. At one point, he even broke into a few bars of song, arms stretched wide, almost as though he, too, was basking in the spotlight. It wasn’t jealousy—it was joy, a brother’s pride spilling out into the night. But deep inside, Billy knew, Bengi wanted a piece of that magic for himself. Not to take it away, but to belong to it, to stand in its glow.

Billy watched them both—Angel, radiant and perhaps on the edge of a new beginning, and Bengi, louder than ever, carrying his memories like medals. He smiled faintly, glass in hand, wondering if this was what success really looked like: not just awards and applause, but the way it reshaped the people he loved most.

The night stretched on, the crowd thinning as stars slipped away into waiting cars and limousines. Music softened to a gentle hum in the background, and the afterparty began to lose its frantic glitter, leaving behind a softer glow.

Billy found himself on the balcony, the city lights of London twinkling below like scattered jewels. The cool air kissed his skin, a welcome relief after the heat and noise inside. He leaned against the stone railing, glass in hand, when a familiar voice floated behind him.

“You don’t look like a man who just won the biggest award of his life.”

He turned. Angel stepped into the moonlight, her gown shimmering silver, her hair loose around her shoulders. For a moment, Billy simply stared—caught between disbelief and the quiet beauty of the moment.

“I’m still trying to believe it,” he admitted. “Feels like I’m going to wake up and find it’s all been a dream.”

Angel smiled softly, stepping closer. “It’s real. You earned it. And you’ve got people here who’d give the world for you.”

Billy studied her face, then glanced back through the open doors. Inside, the producer was laughing with another group, his eyes still occasionally flicking toward Angel. Billy’s chest tightened with something unspoken—a mixture of protectiveness and reluctant acceptance.

“If he’s good to you,” Billy said quietly, “then maybe… maybe you should let him be.”

Angel tilted her head, studying him, but before she could answer, the sound of singing drifted through the doors. Bengi’s voice—loud, playful, but slightly slurred now—rose above the chatter. He was standing on a chair, arms outstretched, belting out a half-remembered tune from their childhood, the crowd around him laughing and clapping along.

Billy chuckled under his breath, but there was a pang beneath it. He could see the pride in Bengi’s eyes, but also the hunger—the need to belong, to shine, to be seen in this world that suddenly seemed within reach.

Angel touched Billy’s arm gently. “He just wants to share it with you. Don’t forget that.”

Billy nodded, though the thought lingered. The night had given him triumph, but it had also drawn new lines, shifting the world around him. And as he looked from Angel’s steady gaze to his brother’s reckless joy, he wondered how much would change before the dream turned into something harder to hold.

Chapter 24

Six months had passed, the whirlwind settling into something solid and real. The extension on the house was finally finished—bright walls, wide windows, and room enough for everyone to gather. Mum now worked only Saturday nights, the rest of her time spent in the comfort of home. Dad was getting stronger by the week, his laughter returning to the dinner table. And Bengi, proudly independent, had his own milk float and round—bought for him by Billy, who still smiled every time he saw it rattle past the house at dawn.

Billy’s world had shifted too. Not just awards and stages, but something deeper. He had poured himself into a documentary, one close to his heart—telling the stories of underprivileged children who dreamed of stepping into the business he had broken into. He had set up a charity to give them that chance, and Mr. Clark, steady and humble, had taken the role of treasurer. The old teacher wore the responsibility with quiet pride, his name now stitched into the future of every young voice that would be heard.

Tonight, it would all come together. The whole family crowded into the new extension, bowls of crisps and plates of snacks scattered across the polished table. The room buzzed with excitement as the television flickered to life, ready to broadcast Billy’s documentary to the nation.

“Right, everyone ready?” Mum called, though the grin on her face showed she already knew the answer.

But before anyone could settle, the doorbell rang. Bengi groaned dramatically, earning a laugh, and Billy went to answer it.

The producer stood there, smiling warmly. He was no longer just the man from the afterparty. Six months had woven him into the fabric of their lives. Angel was at his side, radiant, her hand slipping easily into his. Together they stepped into the glow of the house, welcomed as though they had always belonged.

Back in the extension, glasses were poured—wine for some, fizz for others. The family gathered close, the room alive with love and laughter. Billy stood for a moment, glass raised, and let his gaze sweep over them: Mum, Dad, Bengi, Angel, the producer, and Mr. Clark. The people who had carried him here.

“To family,” he said simply.

Glasses clinked. Voices joined.

“To the McFaddens. Love you all.”

The television flickered, the documentary began, and for the first time in a long time, everything felt exactly as it should be.

The End.