

## THE LIBRARY

For Alida, the fundamental aspect of her humanity was her will to survive. Through every obstacle, through every blow to her body, she would not yield. She found a deep strength within herself, and she persevered. The burns and the bruises were the signs of her resilience. Beyond these traces of her struggle, there was a deeper force which offered her inspiration.

The washing machine would flood. Alida would be down in the basement bailing water. It was as if she needed to swim underwater to complete her task. The output hose had become loose. She reattached it. Then she used some pliers to tighten it up. Finally she cleaned up the room. After it had been aired, it seemed nothing had happened. Alida could continue on with her routine.

The library was Alida's stepping stone to the heavens. She could open the door and a whole world would open up for her. There was so much magic at her fingertips. She could browse the journeys of her predecessors. And she could plot her own adventures.

She was most in touch with a folk art rendered by songwriters and storytellers. They helped her to listen to the stories of the dirt poor walking the coal yards. These were a fine people who worked to define themselves to their eager audiences. It was land connected by the rails to an everlasting quest for serenity. There was deep inspiration in these words that echoed off the mountain walls and bellowed in the valleys.

The library enabled Alida to live beyond herself. She was not limited to space or time. She could float upon the lively descriptions of these wordsmiths. She was exploring the unusual. She was hopping on board the next boat to China. She was losing herself deep in the wilderness.

Diamond Billy Rose grew up in the heart of coal country in Harlan County, Kentucky. He swore he would never go down in those mines. He was an expert at cards, and he made a reputation on the Mississippi as the very best. He blessed all the women with his winnings, and he fed all the excesses of his wild life. He had no comers. He was unique. One day he was dealt the dead man's hand, and that ended his run. He was no longer the king of hearts that he had been in the day. He felt that he was carrying a curse. He c.

aught up with a conjuring woman who lived deep in the mountains.

"Billy, you've got it bad."

"My luck at hards has run out? Is there anything that I can do about it?"

"It's not just the cards. You've been dealt the dead man's hand. You don't have long to live."

"Not long to live? How long? Months? Weeks?"

"You may not even have that long."

"I'm a young man. I don't want to die."

"Billy, you tempted the fates with your wild life. Now, they are having their revenge."

Billy hated what he was hearing. He had no idea what he done wrong. He just never wanted to end up like his father dying in one of those mines.

"Is there any way that I can stay alive longer?"

"I will tell you a secret. But you have to do what I say. Billy, can you sing?"

"I always blasted those hymns on Sunday. I have a fine voice."

"I'm sure that you haven't been in a church in many a day."

‘Yes, mam. But I still have a wonderful voice. That is what all the ladies told me up and down the river.’

‘Here, take this guitar. You have to travel all around the country singing the songs of old. But if you ever take up your old life, the disease will catch up to you and you will die.’

‘All that I have to do is sing some songs.’

‘You have to find something deep in yourself. You have to be the best.’

Billy always prided himself on being the best. He knew how to work an angle. This was no different.

He wasn’t feeling all that good. But he took that wooden guitar and started to make music. And his woes were chased away.

He would travel all around and sing the songs of the people. He was non longer caught up in the wild life. He praised the new heroes who created themselves out of rock and steel. These were the hard men who built the railroads. They were the tireless souls who built the great new cities.

You no longer saw Billy at the head of the poker table. He wasn’t buying women drinks. He lived the simple life.

Many times, Billy would hop the rails. He would find a freight car where he could practice his repertoire. He was becoming an accomplished performer.

‘Billy, you are one great singer. And you have wonderful songs. But there is a singer, Delta Johnny who is like no other. You are not worthy to carry his guitar.’

‘Are you kidding me?’

‘His voice is pure honey. He makes women swoon.’

Billy had never thought of his music that way. He was not here to live the party life. He was doing penance for his past sins.

‘Billy, don’t be afraid. You have to meet Johnny.’

Everyone was encouraging Billy to find Delta Johnny. This had to be the last thing on his mind. He had faced off with death. He wasn’t about to chase another dream.

He found a meadow and a shade tree. He had a place to practice his songs. He was bringing to life the truly brilliant. The great unsung heroes. The giant men who could wield a great hammer. The people who battled the machine inside their soul. The men and women who sought redemption in the coal fires and the steel plants. The food workers. The maids and the bell hops. Billy was learning to give a face to all these relentless workers. There was a marvelous urgency to his song.

He left his refuge in the field. He went off to sing for his audience. Young and old, they were all attracted to the truths which he told. His vision shone deep into the night.

‘I’m sure that you have heard of Delta Johnny. He weaves a wonderful tale.’

Billy couldn’t let his pride take over. This was all part of his gift. He needed to pursue his art. People were depending on him. He hardly sought the limelight. He went where the people were.

The public were telling a different story. They wanted to hear the two singer in competition. Delta Johnny was marvelous. But Billy was getting better.

Billy had been trained at the tables. He knew all about betting and bluffing. He learned how to win on a shoe string. He was a natural competitor. He needed to fight that urge. If Delta

Johnnie was heading West, he was heading East. He did not want to come face to face with his shadow. He was not looking for a rival.

“Billy, you can’t hide from Johnny forever. You have to meet the man. You are both sharing your dreams with the world. Think about the wonder if the two of you met.”

Johnny now seemed to follow Billy around. They were already setting up the duel between the two men. Billy refused to play. He did not want to go back to the days of the card table.

“Billy, you have one of the most soothing voices that I have ever heard. I love your style. Your music is food for the soul. You are everything!”

Sweet Kate praised Billy to the hilt. He was developing a soft spot for her.

“I have to head back on the road. I will be back here soon.”

“Remember, you are my man!”

Billy had heard these words before, but not in this way. She was scaring him a little. He hardly knew how to be true to a woman. But Kate was there to teach him.

It took Billy a while to make his way back to Kansas City. By the time that he got back, Kate seemed to be distracted.

“Delta Johnny stopped by while you were gone. That man can sing.”

“That is good. I am not the only one who tells a tale.”

“He is brilliant.”

“That is all well and good.”

“I want to believe that you are the best. And I really love you. But I am not sure. Delta Johnny has a special place in my heart.”

“How does he merit that special place in your heart?”

“He is a sensitive man. He understands about sadness and longing. He is not all wrapped up in himself.”

Billy was taken aback. He was singing the songs of the people. How much more would he have to do to share his soul?

His heart ached. He was so attracted to sweet Kate. And she was already slipping away from him. He needed to do the write thing.

Billy sang her his best songs. He shared his dreams with her. He gave her all that he had. It didn’t seem to be enough.

Billy was only in Kansas City for a little while longer. Then he had to hit the road again. On the road, he dreamed about Kate. She became part of his music. She was his inspiration. This was the image which kept the miner strong during his worst days down below.

He was getting better. There was no one who had what he had. He had a life. He had real songs. It didn’t matter that Kate didn’t understand. But Billy lived for her. And he needed her adulation.

A record producer was collecting songs. He wanted to record Diamond Billy Rose. Diamond Billy gave him a great performance. His power came from way down within. He had so much on his side.

The songs were played on the radio. People would listen close to that voice. He was so soothing. Everyone was now comparing him to Delta Johnny. The master wanted to have it out. He was ready for his duel.

“If you can beat him, I will love you.”

The words echoed in his mind.

“I can give you lot of money if you win!”

Billy was hearing promises everywhere.

“Billy, you’re so cute. Maybe you could come up to my room and keep me warm.”

He tried to resist all these advances. But the game started to feel the same as the one on the Mississippi Queen.

“I am feeling a little under the weather.”

He was no longer the same man. He didn’t have the energy for carousing.

“Are you going to spend time with me in Kansas City?”

“I am going to try. I have so many fans. And so many obligations.”

He was not trying to put off Kate. He was feeling the distractions. He had what he wanted. He was his own man. But he was again getting lost.

“Are you a man of your word, Billy Rose?”

Diamond Billy Rose wanted to please everyone!

His agent arranged for the big match. He was going to challenge Delta Johnny in a super concert in Memphis. Kate was coming down. Everyone would be there.

As the event came closer, Billy was feeling weaker. He no longer had the power to stay on the road. He had been through a lot.

He thought about canceling the performance. He was in this one until the end.

Delta Johnny was brilliant. He lulled everyone. He showed them something deep about their souls.

When Billy started, you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone had such reverence for the man. Johnny felt afraid. He had never seen anything like this before.

“What is happening to me?”

“Johnny, you are becoming human.”

There was not a dry eye in the house. He won all the prizes. People had made massive bets. There was so much money moving around. Billy would see his share. This was way more than what he could have earned gambling.

After the performance was over, Billy collapsed. He was carried from his dressing room to the hospital.

“I am very sick!”

The news had traveled fast.

The doctor told him that he didn’t look good.

“I want to give you a reason. I want to give you life.”

“Tell it to me plain.”

“I don’t want to give you a false hope.

It was looking worse than bad.

“I don’t want to die.”

He felt only shame when Kate came to see him.

“I stopped trusting you. It was that simple.”

She had the strangest feeling.

“I wanted you to be someone else. I couldn’t accept you for who you were.”

At that moment, he knew exactly what he wanted.

Billy was lucky. He got to write that one last song. The disease had been living inside of him. He had put it off all these years. Now it was up close. And there was little that he could do.

Kate held his hand tightly. She loved the fact that she had been able to help make this man great. She loved his music. She loved the man. She didn't want to let him go.

Diamond Billy Rose was the real thing. On the roads of America, you could still hear his songs. His music sung on the rails. It whistled in the wind.

Sometimes at night, you could hear him whispering to his great love Kate.

"Good bye, my dear. Good bye."

Alida loved that tale. She had grown up with these songs. She had watched the men ride the rails. Sure, part of the story was a legend. That only made it more appealing.

Buffalo Jim and Wayne Sanders were two down on their luck song writers who took their fortunes to Nashville. Jim got money from his mother's inheritance. He was still breaking into the business. And his fortunes were not so great. Wayne was a wiz. He didn't have the voice to pull off his own songs. But he sold a bunch to other artists. He had some skills. He made Jim envious. That only made him work harder. But it was to little avail.

Wayne had his own version of success. This meant that he could spend his time hanging out at the bars and making passes at the women. The women usually deflected the passes. That only got him drinking more.

Wayne could be a nasty drunk as Jim would learn on some nights. He had to fight his friend just to get him to bed. It only made Jim angrier. Here was this guy who was making something of his talent. But he was a total monster to his friends. Jim didn't want to let it be. However, he was the one who was caring for Wayne.

One night, Wayne was really over the edge. He was threatening Jim with a knife. Jim thought about calling the police.

Despite Wayne's madness, he wanted to have mercy on him.

"You don't have to be so mean. There is hope in your face."

That changed little. He was dealing with a crazy man.

Wayne took his knife and lunged at Jim. Jim was lucky to have dodged them. Jim was fighting to get the knife away from Wayne. Wayne wouldn't stop coming. Jim needed to protect himself. He put his hands up to protect himself. It was no good. Wayne slipped off him, and he fell on his knife.

Jim did what he could to help. The gouge was deep. He called an ambulance. He got the police. Everyone understood. There had been other incidents like this. Jim was simply lucky to have lived.

Unfortunately, Wayne didn't pull through. There were no charges against Jim. It was ruled an accident.

Anything of value, Jim sold to pay the back rent. It had been bad with Wayne. He sent most of the personal effects back to Wayne's family in Indiana.

There was just a box of songs. All unpublished stuff. On top of pile was the song, "Island Lover," Jim had heard Wayne do the song on the piano. It was brilliant. When Jim sang it, it brought out something special in his voice. The next day, he recorded the song. It was

clearly something special.

Someone heard the song down at the studio.

“Can I take this to some people that I know?”

The song was already going places. Jim was going to get big.

Jim could have gotten someone else to record it. Wayne had enough clients. But he wanted this one for himself. No one seemed to know that it was Wayne’s song. It became Jim’s

Jim told himself that he was only borrowing that one song. But the one song was pure gold. Buffalo Jim was suddenly the toast of Nashville. Everyone wondered where this wondrous talent had been hiding.

Jim may not have had the smoothest voice. But he was an expressive singer and Wayne’s song exploited his skills. It was the perfect combination.

The first time that Jim heard the song on the radio, he was elated. He hardly thought about the fact that this was not his composition. He was hearing himself on the radio. The song was climbing the charts. There was pressure to do an album.

“I’m surprised that they released the single by itself.”

“My manager told me that it was that good. We needed to get it out there.”

“We’ve made arrangements for a studio.”

Jim went to the studio and started to work on his songs. He had a band and a producer. He pulled out some of the songs which he had been working on for the past year.

His manager listened to the tapes.

“Jimbo, this isn’t going to cut it. These songs don’t have the same drive that “These Walls” have. What happened to your heart?”

Jim went back to his place and started to wonder what he should do now. He was the golden boy of Nashville, but the sparkle was coming off of that gold.

He surveyed the room. There was still the box of Wayne’s songs. And he took the nine best songs and went down to the studio with them. He had his hit album.

The critics marveled. They asked each other how one artist could come up with such great material.

Jim started to move among the A list. He was no a wild party guy like Wayne. But he loved hanging out with royalty. And they welcomed him as one of their own. He was Tennessee’s favorite son.

Jenny Owens was a sweetheart from rural Arkansas. She was also up and coming. It didn’t take long to crown the two of them as the perfect couple. They did duets together. They both observed the rise of their careers.

Jim’s songs were so stellar that his star rose faster than anyone. He was touring the country. He was making loads of money. He could have anything that he wanted.

Women were throwing themselves at Jim. Even though he was stringing along Jenny, he was also playing around on the side. He thought that this was one of the benefits of his new-found fame. He was on the top of the world.

When he was in Seattle, a stunning girl made it to his dressing room. She evaded security and was face to face with the great Buffalo Jim.

Jim was dazzled. He brought Alma back to his hotel room. They were holding hands and staring into each other’s eyes.

“Jim, honey, when are you going to cut me into your money?”

Jim turned pale. What was she asking him? Who was this girl?

“I think that I deserve at least half.”

What was she thinking? He had never seen this girl before in his life.

“Jim, you may not know me. But I know you very well.”

Jim stared at the dazzling Alma. How did she get off saying stuff like this to men?

“Alma, you are one amazing girl, but I have no idea why you think that you’re worth that much.”

She stared in his face. They were eye to eye.

“You have no idea who I am.”

He tried to figure it out. There was something familiar. But he couldn’t place it.

“If I wanted to, I could destroy your career. But I would get nothing. This is the only way that is fair to the both of us.”

“Are you some old-fashioned girl? You expect that I’m going to marry you just because of one kiss.”

“It was a pretty potent kiss.”

He laughed.

“This is a joke. Who put you up to this?”

“Wayne Sanders.”

“Wayne what?”

All the blood left Jim’s body. The specter of death passed over him.

He got up his courage: “Who are you, lady?”

“I am Alma Sanders.”

“His wife?”

“His sister.”

“Wayne was a nice guy. We were friends. But what makes you think that I’m going to give anything to you?”

“You stole my brother’s songs. And you never said a thing. There is a lot that you need to be sorry about.”

“And you are going to grant me mercy. They are my songs. No one is going to believe you.”

Jim started to wonder if Wayne had written his sister about the songs that he was writing. Maybe he left copies with her for safe-keeping. He had to know what she knew.

“Your songs. You couldn’t write a song if the angels from heaven tried to help you.”

“What are you talking about?”

“My brother told me that you were sort of a nuisance. Your mama paid so that you could stay in Nashville. And you’d get on Wayne for boozing up all the time. I know your type.”

“What do you want from me?”

“Half of what you have.”

“Just because I was friends with your brother.”

“Because you stole his songs.”

“I told you that you can’t prove any of that.”

“What if I told you that I had copies of all my brother’s songs?”

“I’d tell you that you were lying. You wouldn’t have waited for a moment like this. You would have gone public with your evidence. They are my songs. I wrote them, and no one will ever prove me different.”

“Your so-called songs are written just like my brother wrote them. Down to the chord progressions. The way he would use major sevenths. That just isn’t you Jim.”

“You’re not going to break me down that easily. You can take that devil of a body of yours and head back into the night where you came from.”

“You’re not going to get rid of me that easily.”

Just like that she was gone. It was so much more simple than he could have imagined. None of it made sense. In the back of his mind, he wondered if Wayne even had a sister.

Jim did some detective work. He found Wayne’s parents.

Wayne’s dad seemed sympathetic.

“We did what we could for Wayne. When we heard what had happened to him, we weren’t surprised. He was heading that way all the time.”

“I am sorry that I didn’t reach out to you when it happened. It was all so overwhelming. He wanted to kill me.”

“He was an angry drunk. He came at me once. He tried to fight me. I was lucky to get out of that scrape.”

“Your daughter came to one of my shows. I wish that I could have been a little more hospitable.”

“My daughter? I don’t have no daughter.”

“Wayne didn’t have a sister.”

“He had some cousins. And a brother Charles. But Charles is over in Germany.”

“Someone came to visit me and claimed to be his sister. That is a strange one.”

Wayne never had any sister. The idea started to take hold. What had been going on? Who was this girl?

There wasn’t much more that Jim could do at this point. He kept giving his fans what they wanted. And he did his best to satisfy dear Jenny.

He hardly planned to change his ways. But he asked Jenny to marry him. And she felt that it was the right thing to do.

Jim Porter and Jenny Owens were married. All of Nashville went wild. This was a marriage for the ages. That didn’t stop Jim from his womanizing ways. And Jenny knew nothing of what he was really like.

Buffalo Jim had quite a run. He was the hit maker of Nashville. He had a lovely wife. And there were loads of adoring fans.

“Too bad that you don’t have much of conscience.”

“Wayne’s long lost sister. Fancy seeing you in New Orleans. What brings you all the way to Louisiana? I thought that you were living in Seattle.”

“When you have a lot of money, you can live pretty well where you want.”

“Family money? Whatever family you’re from.”

“No, I’ve got a lover who sets me up. He’s a famous country singer.”

“You don’t say. Now, who the hell are you?”

“My name really is Alma. And Wayne and I used to hang out. He loved to drink, and I



loved to keep him company. I knew Wayne as if he was my own flesh. He would sing me his songs. He didn't have a great voice. But he could write some wonderful songs."

"That is a pretty story. What do I have to do with it?"

"You have everything to do with it. I know Wayne Sanders's music. And I can tell when a song has been written by him."

"Influenced. Wayne taught me a thing or two about music."

"What are you going to do when the hit machine runs out?"

"I can write with the best of them."

"Jim, you are a liar. I think that the devil has a special place in hell for men like you. Guys who live off the talent of others."

"Alma, you are a talented woman in a whole lot of ways. Let me order some champagne for us, and we can make some beautiful music together."

"Jim, is there anything that you think that you can't steal?"

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm Wayne's ex. I have the papers to prove that."

"Great! You were married to a deceased song writer."

"I know Wayne's songs."

"We've been through this Alma Sanders. There is really nothing that you can prove except that you were married to my former roommate."

"I can prove that you're a two-timing, double-dealing liar and a cheat."

"You are long on the accusations and short of the proof."

"I told you what the deal was. Otherwise, I am going to expose you."

"How? Go ahead? I could welcome some honesty from you."

Jim was again at a crossroad. He needed a new album. And he looked into that big box. There were ten songs that no one had ever heard. He considered using them for his new album. But he wanted to make it in his own right. He wanted to write his own songs.

He spent the weekend working on some new material. He felt quite accomplished. He took them to his wife.

She told him, "Honey, I don't know what is bothering you. Something preventing you from writing like you used to. You need a rest. All that touring has got you down."

He wondered what it would be like if he never wrote another song. He was a star. He could pay other songwriters to do material for him.

"You are asking me to sell you the rights to my song."

"I want to put my name on the songs. I want to tell people that I wrote them."

Jim made a deal for some new songs. But they weren't all that good. Jim had no choice. He had to go to that big box.

Jim signed that final deal with the devil. He took the songs that he needed, and he made another hit album.

With his further success, his head got bigger. More women were throwing themselves at him. And he was encouraging all of them.

When he was on the road in Iowa, Jenny surprised him in more ways than one. She showed up after one of his shows.

"I was in the audience watching. I thought that I'd surprise you."

She more than surprised him. He had a girl in his dressing room with him. And things had progressed pretty far. The sweetheart couple didn't last much longer. There had already been rumors. Jenny wasn't going to stand for his conniving.

"I can find a million Jennies. I am a star."

The power had gone to his head. And he made himself believe that he had a special talent.

"You have forgotten about me. But I remember you well."

"Alma, what do I have to do to get you out of my life?"

"You'd probably have to kill me. But you don't have that in you. Although you did kill my ex."

"That was an accident."

"You were there. You could have stopped it from happening."

"People keep expecting that I can change the situation. It ain't going to happen. I'm a great singer. And I am living at the top of the world."

"That was your last album."

"People love me so much now that I could sing pretty much anything."

"Who are you kidding?"

"I am living my dream!"

"Jim, you are on your last rope."

"No one can stop me! No one!"

With the news that Jenny had divorced Jim, there were a host of women who were vying for that top spot. Jim wasn't about to get married again, but Sammi Jones was the latest thing in Nashville. He swore that he was going to have Miss Sammi.

"Jim, what do you have that no one else has?"

"I am a poet!"

"Write me the greatest song that I have ever heard, and I will be yours for life."

Jim looked at Sammi. She sparkled like a rainbow. He wanted all those colors for his very own. What was he going to have to do to claim that prize?

Jim headed back to his place. He sat around with his guitar. For once in his life, he realized who he really was. Everything had been fake. But Jim couldn't give up now. He wanted Sammi. He would do anything that he could to have that angel.

Jim wasn't a drinker, but he really needed to tie one over. How could a real devil ever get an angel? He headed to a run down bar. And he drank himself into a frenzy. Afterwards, he was lucky to make it back to his place.

Jim was lying there dead drunk on his couch. He could feel the world come crashing around him.

When he woke up, there was a song lying next to him. He played it. It sounded great. He couldn't remember writing a thing. But there it was. He rushed off to record it. Then he played it for Miss Sammi Jones.

"This is brilliant."

She gave him the biggest kiss. Buffalo Jim was now in heaven. He didn't need Wayne. He didn't need Alma. He didn't need Jenny.

"Jim, there's a Mr. Smith at the door."

“I don’t know any Mr. Smith. Tell him to be on his way.”

“He know you. He says that he’s a friend of Alma Sanders.”

Jim thought that he had served Miss Alma. But he agreed to see Mr. Smith.

“I am glad that you made some time for me. I came to collect.”

“Collect?”

“The song. You need to pay me for your new song.”

“Who are you?”

“Mr. Smith. Your new collaborator.”

“I didn’t ask for a new collaborator.”

“You have been leading a life of sin. You robbed your best friend. You cheated on your wife. You have lived a lie. You have had my calling card all along.”

“I don’t know you Mr. Smith.”

“Why, yes you do. You probably know me by my other name. I am Lucifer. And I own your immortal soul.”

Mr. Smith roared with a wonderful belly laugh.

“Glad to be of service , Buffalo Jim.”

When Jim woke up, he was covered in sweat. That had been a terrible dream. He looked down. His song was still there. And he had his new hit. He had done this all himself.

Jim continued to write hits. And his new wife made him a proud man. But he had trouble sleeping. He would always be muttering about a Mr. Smith.

“If he comes looking for me, tell him that I’m not in.”

That was a wild tale. It made Alida happy.

“There was that wonderful twist at the end. Mr. Smith comes a calling!”

The library held many great treasures.