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Satchmo

Callie M. Solano
Callie Solano, callisol@gmail.com

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A Thesis

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by
Callie Solano
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Acknowledgments

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Then there is my mom, who told me often, “Whatever the mind can conceive, the mind can achieve.” And for that, I'd like to thank Napoleon Hill for reaching into the vastness of the universe to grasp that thought and then send it spiraling into the consciousness of humanity.

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FADE IN:

1945

(All characters of African-American descent unless otherwise specified)

INT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

In a 1940s decorated bedroom, LUCILLE, 30, dressed in a nice travel skirt suit, places a folded shirt in an open suitcase containing perfectly folded clothes. LOUIS, 45, a man who smiles big and laughs with gusto, wears bifocals on the edge of his nose, sits at a desk writing a letter.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    I thank you so much for taking care of a few personal things for me while I’m away. Please pay the monthly bill for that Cadillac and send my nephew Clarence his money too. “Cotton Club” is sure to be a fine movie.

    LUCILLE
    Louis, you ready?

Louis seals the envelope.

EXT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

A group of KIDS play ball on the street. A black car parks careful to avoid the ball and the kids. The DRIVER exits and knocks on the door. Louis and Lucille exit the home. The driver carries the bags. The ball hits the cab.

    DRIVER
    Hey, kids, watch it! Will ya? You’ll have to pay for the damages.

Louis pulls some cash out of his pocket.

    LOUIS
    Those kids don’t mean no harm.

The driver declines his offer.

    DRIVER
    I was just giving them a hard time.
LOUIS
Same with me.

He quickly puts his wallet back.

The kids run up to Louis.

KID 1
Mr. Armstrong, where you going?

LOUIS
Hollywood.

KID 2
Are you going to be in a movie again?

LOUIS
I just might.

KID 2
Can you take us to see the movie, Mr. Armstrong?

LOUIS
Sure, Uncle Louis’ll make sure you see the movie.

LUCILLE
Now, kids, you be good while we’re gone and mind your mamas.

LOUIS
Dat’s right.

KID 1
Will you play for us before you go?

LOUIS
I’ll playa something when I get back.

He pats them on the head. The kids run off. The driver closes the door behind Lucille then hops in the driver’s seat, puts the car in gear and begins to maneuver around the kids.

KID 1
Bye Mr. Armstrong. Bye Mrs. Armstrong.

The kids run behind the car waving and yelling “Bye.” Louis and Lucille wave.
INT. CAR - DAY

Lucille places her gloved hands over a small handbag on her lap. Louis reaches over to hold her hand.

LUCILLE
Those kids love you. I’ll never forget what you told the pope about us having kids.

LOUIS
I know he got a big chuckle out of it too.

LUCILLE
Louis.

LOUIS
I just told him the truth, we were having fun trying.

He kisses her. She chuckles.

The city passes by...(old film stock of New York in 1945?)

INT. MANHATTAN APARTMENT - DAY

JOE GLASER, 55, white, pristinely dressed, reads a letter at his roll-top desk.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I want to think of her big fine ass sitting in that Cadillac while I’m on the road.

The letter is signed in purple ink, “Red Bean’s and Ricely Yours, Louis Armstrong”

Joe laughs, reaches for a check ledger, opens it and begins to write a check.

INT. HOLLYWOOD DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Louis, dressed in a tuxedo, reads a letter.

JOE GLASER (V.O.)
I took care of everything. How’s your book coming? I saw Lil; she asked about it.
INT. STAGE - DAY

Louis sits at a desk typing with musicians and a bandstand behind him. The drummer begins tapping to the rhythm of him typing and the rest of the band joins in.

INT. HOLLYWOOD DRESSING ROOM - DAY

A STAGE MANAGER enters.

STAGE MANAGER
Five minutes, Mr. Armstrong.

As he leaves, Lucille enters behind him. She affectionately fixes Louis’s tie. He smiles.

LOUIS (V.O.)
After three fine wives and many years, I finally found the wife of my dreams.

He affectionately touches the typewriter on a table. Lucille smiles.

1901

EXT. JAMES ALLEY - NIGHT

The sound of TYPING fades to rain. A garbage can blows around CLINKING and BANGING against the street and houses. Louis still in a tuxedo watches the scene like a ghost standing in a bar doorway. He begins to PLAY his trumpet.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I was born on the Fourth of July in the city of New Orleans in one of the toughest neighborhoods, in the back-of-town, called James Alley. They say the night was full of mischief.

INT. JOSEPHINE’S HOME - NIGHT

MAYANNE, 16, lies tangled in sheets, sweating and moaning. JOSEPHINE, 45, boils a pot of water. Wind HOWLS outside with the pouring RAIN.

JOSEPHINE
The baby will be here any time now.

MAYANNE
Where is he?
JOSEPHINE
You know he don’t need to be around here for this.

Mayanne cries out.

EXT. JAMES ALLEY - NIGHT

A GUNMAN tries to aim blinking through the rain. Another GUNMAN hides under a porch and shoots hitting the other one in the arm. ONLOOKERS watch the men in horror as they both shoot at each other, hitting arms and legs and going down. Louis, standing under an awning, plays an accompanying riff to the fallen gunmen.

ONLOOKER
They’re going to kill each other.

LOUIS (V.O.)
At some of the bars in New Orleans there was a gunfight or a stabbing almost every night.

INT. JOSEPHINE’S HOME - NIGHT

Josephine places a towel on Mayanne’s forehead.

JOSEPHINE
Just keep breathing, girl. You’re going to be alright.

EXT. JAMES ALLEY - NIGHT

POLICE load handcuffed, rain drenched men into a truck. The trash can BANGS into the side of the truck. Louis plays a RIFF on the trumpet and stops. A baby CRIES in the distance.

INT. JOSEPHINE’S HOME - NIGHT

Josephine hands a BABY wrapped in a blanket to Mayanne, who is now crying.

Louis stands in the corner and finishes his song.

MAYANNE
It’s over.

Josephine looks at the baby and to Mayanne in disbelief. Louis watches the scene and smiles.
JOSEPHINE
Over? It’s just beginning.

MAYANNE
I’m not talking about him.

She gestures to the baby.

WILLIAM ARMSTRONG, 21, pushes through the door against the wind, drunk and excited.

WILLIAM
I been getting drunk, so I’d be ready for this occasion.

The Baby cries.

JOSEPHINE
We can see that. Now sit down before you upset the baby and get your wife riled up.

William takes his hat off and sits down.

MAYANNE
Where have you been?

WILLIAM
I told you, getting drunk. Isn’t that what grown men do on these occasions?

JOSEPHINE
Son, stop talking. You’re just digging yourself deeper.

Josephine picks up the baby to show to him.

MAYANNE
He’s a boy.

WILLIAM
He’s a cute little fellow.

MAYANNE
And he’s not going to end up like you, never around, always running round town.

Josephine rolls her eyes.

JOSEPHINE
Lord help me.

William lies on a blanket on the floor.
WILLIAM
I’m done with you woman. Done.

He closes his eyes and begins snoring immediately. Rain falls harder.

MAYANNE
Damn him. He could sleep at a time like this.

Josephine gives Louis back to her. She examines his face.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
Little Louis, you’re going to go to school. You’re going to do good things in the world. You’re going to do something good with all this mess. My angel.

MONTAGE


LOUIS (V.O.)
Mayanne and my father fought like cats and dogs when I was a baby, until, finally Mayanne left me in the care of my grandmother.

END MONTAGE

EXT. UPTOWN HOUSE - DAY

LOUIS, 5, wide-eyed with a big smile he uses like a weapon, runs in an uptown yard. A WHITE BOY, 4, runs behind him. Clothes on a line blow in the breeze while Josephine folds sheets in a basket.

LOUIS (V.O.)
She taught me to respect myself, to be a little man, a little responsibility.

A WHITE MAN, 30, carrying a briefcase and wearing a suit, walks through the yard. Louis runs under a sheet on the line right into a the man’s leg.

Louis looks surprised then smiles and laughs.
JOSEPHINE
Louis, what do you say to Mr. Breaux?

LOUIS
I’m sorry, sir.

WHITE MAN
It’s okay, Louis.

He pats him on the head.

The other little boy runs up to him.

BOY
Daddy!

He hugs the little boy.

WHITE MAN
They play nice together during the day.

JOSEPHINE
Only a little bit, sir.

The man picks up his little boy and carries him inside.

LOUIS (V.O.)
That’s just how things were for black folks, and I didn’t see things changing anytime soon. Still, later in life, my best friend would be a white man.

EXT. JOSEPHINE’S HOME – DAY

Louis skips happily next to Josephine as they arrive at her apartment in an uptown home. A WOMAN, 22, conservatively dressed waits on the porch outside. When she sees them arriving she stands up watching.

WOMAN
Mrs. Armstrong, you may not remember me, but I’m a friend of Mayanne’s.

JOSEPHINE
Yes.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I watched them talking and got a strange feeling from this woman. I didn’t like her. She was like a bad omen.
WOMAN
She wants him to take all of his stuff and come to live with her for good.

JOSEPHINE
I see. What on earth?

She plops on a step on the porch.

JOSEPHINE (CONT’D)
Louis, you want to go to live with your Mama?

Louis looks at her bewildered.

WOMAN
She really needs him to help her out right now.

JOSEPHINE
I don’t know how much help he’s going to be, but he’s well-behaved and very resourceful, the way I taught him to be.

INT. JOSEPHINE’S HOME – DAY

Josephine packs Louis’s clothing into a bag.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Now, I knew I’d miss my grandmother, and I had no problem visiting my mother and my baby sister, who lived with us sometimes too, but I had become terribly afraid of this woman.

Josephine dresses him in a nice suit buttoning the top button.

LOUIS
Grandma, I don’t think I should go. Who’s going to take care of you?

She hugs him.

JOSEPHINE
That’s my boy.

EXT. JOSEPHINE’S HOME – DAY

Josephine hands Louis’s bag to the woman who takes Louis’s hand. He pulls away and hurries to his Grandmother.
LOUIS
I don’t want to go.

Josephine grabs him abruptly.

JOSEPHINE
Louis, stop that crying right here and now or I will give you something to cry about. Don’t make me do that. Listen, you have got to be a big boy now.

She hugs him. As the woman pulls him away, he looks behind him to see Josephine. She waves holding back tears.

JOSEPHINE (CONT’D)
I’ll visit as soon as I can.

EXT. STREET – DAY

PEOPLE fill water jugs at a cistern. Louis and the Woman walk past them.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I remember that year, there was such a drought that people resorted to using cisterns set up by the fire department and other sorts of businesses.

Louis (of 1945) walks through the scene playing his trumpet. Little Louis watch the people thirstily filling jugs, some sipping from them immediately. The woman brusquely drags Louis away.

WOMAN
Boy, what are you doing? You got no sense.

She drags him to the back of the car. The streetcar jumps to a start.
LOUIS (V.O.)
I had never ridden a streetcar before so I did not know the rules. In the melting pot of New Orleans, the streetcars had only been segregated since 1901, a few years before.

Louis watches the city through the small window of the street car. PEOPLE walk together on the sidewalks. A COUPLE holds hands.

LOUIS (V.O.)
But I knew it wasn’t always like that. People used to get along fine before the days of Jim Crow.

As the car screeches to a halt, a TRUMPET is heard.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The woman drags Louis off the car and pulls him away. He looks around in wonder at the sound.

As they pass an open bar door, the sound gets louder and Louis sees a glimpse of JOE “KING” OLIVER, 25, a dapper, Creole looking fellow, playing the trumpet with his BAND.

Louis attempts to pull back to the open door but she holds him tighter.

WOMAN
Stop your squirming.

LOUIS
Please lady.

Farther down the street, he finally manages to pull away from the woman and runs back to the open door.

He stands in the door. Joe Oliver notices him and smiles then salutes him with his horn. Louis notices everything about this man, his clothes, his nice shoes, and the horn. The world fades away to the sound of the trumpet.

The woman grabs him.

WOMAN
How are you going to help your sick mother acting like this?

Louis looks up for a last minute glance at Oliver who has just finished his number.
OLIVER

Did you see that kid?

Louis pretends to have a horn in his hand as he walks with the woman.

WOMAN

Stop that!

When the woman is not looking, Louis returns to pretending he is playing a trumpet.

When she looks back at him, he stops.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME — DAY

In a one room shanty with a bed divided by a curtain and a cot in the corner, Mayanne lies in bed very ill. She pushes herself up in bed as Louis enters with the woman.

MAYANNE

My boy, let me see you.

He walks cautiously closer to the bed. MAMA LUCY, 3, plays with a rag doll in the corner then notices Louis and hides behind a chair peeping up at him.

LOUIS

Hey, Mama Lucy.

MAYANNE

You’re such a good boy, ain’t he?

WOMAN

He’ll do just fine.

MAYANNE

Thank you for bringing him.

WOMAN

I have other work to do today, I’m glad I could help.

MAYANNE

And thank you for taking care of me.

The woman leaves.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
She suggested I call on you to help me. I need a little help keeping an eye on your sister and running errands and such.
LOUIS
I can help, Mama.

MAYANNE
Okay, hand me that list over there, that piece of paper.

Louis retrieves a torn paper from a counter.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
This is everything I need you to buy today. I’m going to make you some of your favorite red beans and rice for your coming home.

Louis looks bewildered at the list.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
You just give that to Mr. Joe. He’s the grocer we shop with on this side of town. He’ll know what’s on that list.

She reaches in a tin can by the bed.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
And here’s some money. This should cover it.

Louis still looks confused.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
You never been on your own, have you?

LOUIS
No, Ma’am.

Mama Lucy pulls him.

MAMA LUCY
Play, play.

MAYANNE
You have a little sister now, and you have to be a big boy.

He looks at her shaky hand.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
Don’t you worry, I’m not going to die on you. Your Mayanne will come out okay. You get going now. Take that sack in the corner for the groceries and medicines.
LOUIS
I don’t know if I can do it.

MAYANNE
Sure you can. We’re all depending on you, me and Mama Lucy and you are a good boy. You go down James Alley turn left, go toward the big red building and walk one more block to the corner and look around till you see Joe’s Grocery.

Louis reluctantly picks up the sack and closes the door before Mama Lucy can follow him.

EXT. STREET – DAY

Louis exits Mayanne’s and takes in his surroundings, buggies going down the street. The PIE MAN, 45, and mostly toothless, waves to Louis.

PIE MAN
(singing) Pies, my man, pies, all kinds of pies, apple for you, lemon for your Mayanne, custard for your neighbor and all kinds of pies under the sun.

Louis looks at the change in his hand and back to the house and shakes his head, “No.”

The Pie Man continues down the street. Louis follows making his way around the ADULTS that traverse the sidewalks and streets.

He sees the red building and has to cross the street. He looks both ways but hesitates, and a buggy rides by. Then he runs across dodging the walkers. Moving quickly, next to the grocery store, he runs right into BUDD, 8, barefoot and dirty with his two friends, SMILEY, 7, and FRED, 8. Budd grabs him by the shoulders hard.

BUDD
What do we have here?

LOUIS
Let go of me.

Budd pushes him away into Fred.

FRED
Look Budd, he’s scared.

LOUIS
I ain’t scared.
SMILEY
Sure he is. Look at him. Looks like an Ethel to me, all dolled up.

BUDD
Whatcha gone do, punch us?

Louis tries to get around the boys, but they block his moves.

SMILEY
Got ya.

BUDD
No, you’re not getting away.

LOUIS
What do you want?

BUDD
What you got in your hands?

LOUIS
Nothing.

BUDD
Why you got that sack? You going to buy groceries for your mama? Ain’t ya?

LOUIS
No.

The boys start pushing him to open his hands. He resists. MORRIS, 25, a clean-cut, straightforward, white guy, jumps off a wagon.

MORRIS
Shoo! Leave him alone.

Budd punches Louis in the face. Louis drops all the coins on the ground and holds his face. The boys grab the coins and run.

LOUIS
Wait, you rascals. That’s for my mama.

Tears stream down his face. He opens his hand and only two coins remain.

MORRIS
Who’s your mama, kid?

LOUIS
Mayanne.
MORRIS
I know Mayanne. Let me see what you got there.

Louis opens his hand to reveal two pennies.

LOUIS
My mama’s sick. I told her I couldn’t do this.

MORRIS
It’s okay. Look, she’s my neighbor, and neighbors take care of each other, right? You were going to Joe’s Grocery?

Louis nods.

MORRIS (CONT’D)
Me too. Come on, I’ll walk you there. What’s your name?

LOUIS
Louis.

MORRIS
Louis, I’m Morris, Mr. Kornofsky.

LOUIS
Mr. Korn...

MORRIS
Oh, Mr. Morris. It’s okay, you can call me Mr. Morris.

INT. JOE’S GROCERY STORE - DAY

Morris, JOE, 50, energetic Italian accent, and BLACK BENNY, 32, tall, smooth guy, with a drum stick in his back pocket, all have a good laugh.

MORRIS
So when the fight was over, did she get her man back?

BLACK BENNY
It was ugly, Mr. Morris. Ugly.

GROCER JOE
All right, enough of that. Mayanne’s kid is waiting to get back to his mama.

Joe places a loaf of bread in the bag.
GROCER JOE (CONT’D)
The bread is on me.

MORRIS
I got the rest.

Morris takes some coins out of his pocket.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Later in life I learned that people said Mayanne did some hustling to earn money. I never saw it; and she was respected by everyone in the community.

Louis notices the sticks in Black Benny’s pocket.

LOUIS
What are those?

He takes the sticks out.

BLACK BENNY
What, these?

Louis nods.

BLACK BENNY (CONT’D)
Drum sticks.

GROCER JOE
He’s one of those musicians you should beware of.

BLACK BENNY
Now, Mr. Joe.

LOUIS
You’re a musician? You know that guy who plays trumpet. He’s real good.

BLACK BENNY
Kid, I know a lot of guys who play trumpet and think they real good.

Black Benny exits.

Joe hands Louis the bags.

MORRIS
You got that?

LOUIS
Yes, sir.
GROCER JOE
Listen, kid, don’t forget what I told you. You’ll be okay in this world if you steer clear of the bar and musician crowd. Keep your nose clean.

He holds the door for Louis to leave. Another CUSTOMER enters. They continue their banter.

EXT. STREET - DAY
Louis sees Oliver walking down the street. He turns to head back home, then runs as fast as he can, dropping a bag of groceries in the process, which he scrambles to pick up before Oliver turns the corner and is gone. Louis runs after him, turns the corner and runs into Oliver talking to Black Benny. Louis drops the bag of groceries again, but this time, just stands there mesmerized.

BLACK BENNY
Oh, it’s you, Joe.

Oliver helps Louis pick up the groceries.

LOUIS
I’m sorry Mister.

Louis flashes a smile.

OLIVER
Where you going to so fast? What happened to you; you run into a wall of dirt?

BLACK BENNY
Kid got into his first bar room brawl. Now, he’s going home to his sick Mama, that he’s going to single-handedly take care of.

OLIVER
You can do all that, huh, kid?

He hands Louis the grocery bag back.

BLACK BENNY
Now, you run along now.

Louis begins to walk away, then abruptly turns.

LOUIS
Mister, how do you play like that?
Oliver and Benny have a good laugh.

OLIVER
So, you want to play the trumpet?

He nods.

OLIVER (CONT’D)
You want to learn?

LOUIS
Yes, yes, that was the best thing I ever heard in my whole life.

BLACK BENNY
You hear that, Joe, in his whole life? You never heard me play drums, kid.

Oliver bends down close to Louis.

OLIVER
You blow from here.

He holds his stomach.

OLIVER (CONT’D)
And you control the sound from here.

He holds puckered cheeks.

OLIVER (CONT’D)
And you create the sound from here.

He holds his chest.

OLIVER (CONT’D)
That’s your first lesson. Music comes from your chest, where your heart and soul live.

BLACK BENNY
That may be where your heart and soul live. Did you hear what happened at Henry’s last night? Run along now, kid. Your sick mother is waiting for you.

Louis pauses for a moment uncertain, smiles up at Oliver, who knods.

BLACK BENNY (CONT’D)
She might die while you learn to play trumpet from this cat.
Louis gives him a piercing look then softens to focus on Oliver.

    LOUIS
    Thank you. My name is Louis, Louis Armstrong.

    OLIVER
    Joe Oliver.

    BLACK BENNY
    Don’t let him fool ya; he’s King Oliver around here.

    OLIVER
    You can call me Uncle Joe.

Louis smiles and turns away.

    LOUIS
    (Softly) Uncle Joe. Thanks Uncle Joe.

As Louis walks away he hears.

    BLACK BENNY
    That poor kid. He lives on James Alley, he won’t ever be able to buy no horn. You’re just giving him pipe dreams.

Oliver motions for him to shush.

    OLIVER
    What happened at Henry’s?

Whispering.

    OLIVER (CONT’D)
    You don’t want the kid to hear that. He’s finding the beautiful music in this dirty world.

He laughs.

    BLACK BENNY
    You’re right. I play drums and all I got is drum sticks and borrowed drums half the time and don’t even have a decent suit.

He looks at Oliver’s decent day clothes.
OLIVER
If you stayed away from gambling and women, you might just have some nice threads.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME – DAY

An out-of-breath Louis runs inside. The door slams. Mayanne, at the stove, is stirring a pot of stock.

MAYANNE
Wait a second, young man. You do not run inside my home like a cannonball blasting through. Where do you think you are? Now give me those groceries.

LOUIS
Yes ma’am.

She pours some soup in a bowl and places it on the table. Mama Lucy is already covered in a bib and spilling soup all over her.

MAYANNE
Sit down and eat something.

LOUIS
But you’re the one who’s sick.

MAYANNE
That’s right, but some soup will make me better, with that medicine you got me.

She looks at him more carefully.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
How’d you get that bump on your eye? Your first time out. And look at your nice clothes, all dirty, and your nice Sunday shoes, all scuffed up.

Louis takes stock of his clothes.

LOUIS
Yes, ma’am.

MAYANNE
Now what are we going to do with you? Sit down. Eat.

Louis obeys.
MAYANNE (CONT’D)
What happened?

LOUIS
I met King Oliver.

MAYANNE
I mean to your eye. Don’t tell me King Oliver did that.

LOUIS
No, ma’am. Some boys. And I met Black Benny.

MAYANNE
I don’t want you hanging around his kind. You hear me. King is okay, but you can stay clear of musicians.

LOUIS
That’s what Mr. Joe at the grocery store told me. Oh, and Mr. Morris gave me some money to pay for the groceries.

MAYANNE
What happened to the money?

LOUIS
The boys took it. When he punched me, I dropped it. I’m sorry, mama.

She consoles him, hugging him.

MAYANNE
It’s okay, Louis. You did good. You’re a good boy. Now take those clothes off, so I can clean them up for you.

She begins to take his jacket off.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
And tomorrow you’re going to go to school.

LOUIS
School?

MAYANNE
You have to learn to read.

LOUIS
Yes ma’am.
EXT. STREET - MORNING

The Pie Man rides by.

    PIE MAN
       Pies, all the pies you want. Pies.

Louis steps into the street, a little more sure of himself now carrying a small satchel for school. Stepping around puddles and maneuvering around pedestrians with ease. He sees Morris coming down the road and waves. Morris pulls the wagon over.

    MORRIS
       How’s your mama?

Louis reaches up to hand Morris some coins. Morris pulls him up on the wagon.

    LOUIS
       My Mayanne said to give you this. Wow, I’m on a wagon.

Morris takes the change. Louis eyes the tin horn hanging on Morris’s wagon.

    MORRIS
       Can you play?

He takes it off the hook.

    MORRIS (CONT’D)
       I can’t make it sound like anything but a screeching bird.

Morris hands the horn to Louis. He calculates, thinking for a moment, then places his lips on the horn, puts his fingers over the tabs and inhales deeply and then blows through the horn. At the end of a nice sound the horn makes a squeak that annoys Louis.

    MORRIS (CONT’D)
       Try again. Not bad for your first try.

He holds one tab then another and to his surprise and Morris’s, actually makes pleasing sounds.

Louis continues to play while Morris drives the wagon. A LADY waves. Louis stops playing.

    LADY
       I’ll take that pot you have there. How much?
MORRIS
Two cents.

They exchange the money and the wagon pulls away.

MORRIS (CONT’D)
Keep playing.

Louis continues for a moment.

LOUIS
Mr. Morris, I have to go to school today.

MORRIS
I saw the book satchel. I’m taking you to the school.

Louis keeps playing. PEDESTRIANS hear him and turn to wave.

EXT. SCHOOL - MORNING

The wagon pulls up as Louis finishes playing a simple TUNE. Louis goes to hand the horn back to Morris.

LOUIS
Mr. Morris.

MORRIS
Yes, Louis.

LOUIS
Maybe I can work for you riding on the wagon, and you can let me play the horn?

MORRIS
How bout you work for me playing the horn, and I’ll let you ride on the wagon?

Louis shakes his hand.

LOUIS
Thank you, Mr. Morris. Can I start after school today?

MORRIS
I don’t see why not. And after today, you need to ask your mama if it’s okay if you work for me.

Louis waves and hurries into the school.
LOUIS
I will, Mr. Morris.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

Louis sits next to ISAAC, 5, and passes Isaac a piece of his sandwich.

ISAAC
Your mama sure gave you some good lunch.

LOUIS
Yeah.

Budd and the boys walk across the school yard like a gang headed right for Louis and Isaac. Isaac packs his lunch up to run away. Louis stops him.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Mr. Morris said you can’t act scared with these kinds of boys. They’ll just keep coming back harder than before.

Louis stays put.

ISAAC
But he did that to your eye.

LOUIS
I’ll be all right.

ISAAC
What if he does it again?

The boys are now right in front of them.

BUDD
Look what we got here. A mama’s boy, all he does is cry.

Louis tries to ignore them and keep eating his lunch, but Budd snatches his lunch away and Fred grabs Isaac’s lunch.

ISAAC
Hey.

Budd starts devouring the sandwich. Fred looks through a mostly empty bag.

FRED
He ain’t got nothing.
Louis stands up but says nothing.

    BUDD
    What you gonna do?

Smiley tries to grab some of the sandwich. Budd pushes him away.

    BUDD (CONT’D)
    Hey, wait a second.

He tears a piece off for Smiley and for Fred. They run off laughing. Louis smiles.

    ISAAC
    How can you smile at a time like this?
    I’m still hungry.

Louis looks off dreamily.

    LOUIS
    I get to play a tin horn.

EXT. WAGON – DAY

Louis plays the tin horn while Morris drives the wagon along the streets of Storyville. Scantily clad WOMEN stand outside in doorways waving. Morris pulls the wagon over and grabs a bag of coal to deliver to a GIRL, 13.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    Some of them women looked like kids to me and shouldn’t been working in Storyville.

Morris returns and the wagon pulls away past more women in windows.

Morris turns a corner and pulls up next to a pawnshop.

    MORRIS
    You want to come with me? I have to go in there for some business.

    LOUIS
    Yes sir.

Morris helps Louis down off the wagon.

INT. PAWNSHOP – DAY

Black Benny examines a tuxedo at the counter with MR. BABIN, 50, a scruffy, intense man.
BLACK BENNY
Mr. Babin, I just want to borrow it for my next gig.

The bells on the door JINGLE as Morris and Louis enter.

MR. BABIN
Mr. Kornofsky.

Mr. Babin walks around the counter.

MR. BABIN (CONT’D)
(To Black Benny) You can’t have the suit until you pay me what you owe me. (To Morris) What can we do for you today?

MORRIS
You can help Benny.

MR. BABIN
(To Benny) We’re done, right?

Black Benny takes all of his money out of his wallet.

BLACK BENNY
Mr. Babin, here is most of what I owe you to borrow the suit. I’ll pay the rest and bring the suit back. You know I’ll be back.

Mr. Babin takes the money.

MR. BABIN
You better be back. I know where you live.

Black Benny takes the suit and hurry out. He nods to Louis who stands in the corner just mesmerized by all the stuff and trying to stay out of the way.

Morris brings a bag up to the counter.

MORRIS
I have some stuff for sale or trade.

MR. BABIN
What’s the kid doing with you?

MORRIS
Plays the tin horn swell.

MR. BABIN
Hey kid, don’t touch anything. You hear?
Louis

Yes Sir.

Morris and Mr. Babin go to the counter to look over items. Louis slowly meanders through the store, noticing suits of clothes and nice dishes and cracked dishes and old pots and new pots. The place is full of stuff from floor to ceiling.

Finally Louis sees an old, rusted cornet in the window. The sun hits its rim and makes it shine brighter when Louis looks at it. Louis is spellbound when Morris touches his shoulder.

MORRIS
Come on, Louis. We’re done here.

MR. BABIN
You’re not going to get a better deal than that.

MORRIS
Thank you for your time, Mr. Babin. I’ll be back. Come on, Louis.

Morris finally notices what Louis is looking at.

MORRIS (CONT’D)
You like that horn, huh, kid?

MR. BABIN
Take that pesky kid with you. Don’t need kids around here. I got enough trouble.

MORRIS
How much for the horn?

MR. BABIN
That kid can’t buy that horn. Forget it.

MORRIS
How much?

Mr. Babin reluctantly goes over to the window and lifts the tag, which says thirty cents. Then looks at both of them.

MR. BABIN
Thirty-five cents.

LOUIS
I can’t pay that.
MR. BABIN
No, I told you that. What’s he, a kid from the alley? You sure you won’t change your mind?

MORRIS
No, I don’t believe so.

MR. BABIN
Keep your stuff, I’ll keep my rubes, you Reuben.

MORRIS
Excuse me, what did you say?

MR. BABIN
Nothing.

He slams the door.

EXT. PAWNSHOP – DAY

Wagons pass on the street. Louis notices a nice car drive by.

MORRIS
You want that horn, don’t ya kid?

LOUIS
I wish I could have that horn, Mr. Morris. I sure do.

MORRIS
Why don’t you play real good on the tin horn and then maybe you can buy that cornet.

LOUIS
I don’t think I like that man.

MORRIS
He’s not a nice man, that you could bet on, but not everyone can be nice. What kind of world would that be?

He puts Louis on the wagon.

MORRIS (CONT’D)
Let me hear you play that tin horn. Show that country bumpkin what you got.
EXT. STREET - DAY

MONTAGE

Louis plays the tin horn on the wagon. Louis plays the tin horn on the street while Isaac collects coins. Louis listens to a trumpeter on the street and mimics his sounds on the tin horn. Louis plays on the wagon with Morris. Louis plays on the street with Isaac.

END MONTAGE

Louis finishes a song. Isaac collects the money and gives Louis his share.

ISAAC
Your Mama’s going to let you buy that horn?

LOUIS
I got a plan. I’m giving her all this money, so she can see that I can help. Then she’ll let me buy that cornet. If it’s still there.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - DAY

Mayanne pours a plate of pasta into a big bowl and places it in front of Louis. Louis begins to devour the pasta.

MAYANNE
Slow down, son. You’re not in a race. Where’s the horses? Remember food is made to be enjoyed. You got to take time to do that. And you got to enjoy what you got, cause you never know when it might be tough times.

LOUIS
Yes, Ma’am.

MAYANNE
Now, I’m going out with your Papa Gabe now. He’s going to be a real good Papa.

Louis reaches in his pocket.

LOUIS
Mama, I got something for you.

He hands her the change.
MAYANNE
Boy, where did you get this kind of money? Lord, please tell me you didn’t steal it.

LOUIS
No, Mama.

MAYANNE
Like those boys stole your lunch. Please, Lord, Jesus.

LOUIS
No, Mama.

MAYANNE
Your grandmother will be so disappointed.

LOUIS
No Mama, I played this tin horn Morris gave me.

He reaches behind him to grab the horn out of a sack. Mayanne examines it.

MAYANNE
He gave this to you?

LOUIS
Mama, you said I could ride the wagon with him as long as he wanted and I wasn’t any trouble.

MAYANNE
Yes, I did, didn’t I? And that’s just an old tin horn. You can’t get into any trouble playing a thing like that.

She pockets the money.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
All right, as long as you stay out of trouble, you can keep playing.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Morris pulls the wagon to the side of the road to sell items to a LADY. When he finishes with the lady, Morris hands Louis the cornet that was in the window. Louis’s eyes almost pop out.

LOUIS
Mr. Morris.
MORRIS
What do you, think?

LOUIS
This is my horn?

Yes.

LOUIS
Wow.

MORRIS
Now, you are going to pay me back every penny.

LOUIS
yes sir.

Louis tries a few notes and manages to make a clean sound. Morris leans over to help another CUSTOMER. Louis sees King Oliver leaving a store down the street and runs over to him.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Uncle Joe.

OLIVER
Is that Little Louis?

LOUIS
Yeah.

OLIVER
What you got there?

LOUIS
My own horn.

OLIVER
Can you play it?

Louis begins to play. Oliver is surprised to hear how good he sounds. Morris drives the wagon over to him.

OLIVER (CONT’D)
Kid’s got chops.

MORRIS
Hey, he’s working for me; you can’t have him.
OLIVER
Oh you just wait, a talent like this won’t be riding on a junk wagon for long.

Louis can’t keep the grin off his face. This grin fades when he sees Budd and the boys across the street. Oliver follows his gaze to the kids and so does Morris.

MORRIS
That’s the ones that stole your lunch, huh?

OLIVER
Probably just hungry and have no food at home.

MORRIS
It’s a shame.

LOUIS
I have an idea.

He waves the boys over.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Hey, Budd. Hey, Smiley.

They cautiously walk over.

After an awkward pause.

BUDD
What you want, Louis?

LOUIS
Mr. King Oliver, meet my new friends, Budd, Smiley and Fred.

OLIVER
Hey, boys.

The boys lighten up instantly.

BUDD
Hey, Mr. Oliver.

SMILEY
King Oliver, wow. My dad talks about you all the time.

OLIVER
All the time, huh? Hey kids, I’m on my way to a gig.
He shakes their hands. And salutes Morris. Louis climbs up on Morris’s wagon.

FRED
You get to ride on that wagon?

LOUIS
Yep, sure do. I’ll see you at school tomorrow, fellows.

The boys run down the street skipping and playing. Louis continues to play the cornet as they proceed down the street.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD – DAY

Louis hands extra sandwiches to Budd, Smiley and Fred.

SMILEY
Thanks, Louis.

They all wave and Louis and Isaac sit enjoying lunch.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I had solved that problem. Uncle Joe was right. Those kids were just hungry. And me sharing my delicious lunch, scraps from the restaurant my new Papa Gabe sometimes worked at and that fresh bread called hallah, Mr. Morris’s mom made; we never had any scuffs again.

They eat their sandwiches in bliss.

EXT. STREET – DAY

Louis plays the cornet with Morris on the wagon riding around the city.

1910

LOUIS, 9, finishes with an impressive riff before hopping off the wagon.

LOUIS
Bye, Mr. Morris.

MORRIS
We did good today, Louis. Say hi to Mayanne.
INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - DAY

Louis, Mayanne, MAMA LUCY, 7, and GABE, 35, sit at the table finishing dinner. Louis and Mama Lucy remove the dishes.

MAMA LUCY
Mama, can we play a game of cards tonight?

MAYANNE
No, now you know it’s a school night.

She takes a bottle off the counter and pours a drink, then hands it to Gabe, then pours one for herself.

MAMA LUCY
Now you kids go get in the bed.

As Louis goes to bed, he sees Gabe put a gun on a shelf. Mayanne sees that Louis has seen this.

MAYANNE
(Whispering) Don’t you ever touch that gun. Do you hear me?

Louis shakes his head.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
You forget you saw that.

LOUIS
I will, Mama.

She tucks him under the covers.

MAYANNE
That’s my boy. I never have to worry about you.

When she turns away her expression says something else. She grabs her purse and heads out with Gabe for the evening.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Isaac plays a marching drum while Louis plays his cornet. Isaac sings a little section. A MAN drops a coin in their bucket. When they finish the song, Isaac collects coins and gives Louis his share.

ISAAC
I’ll see you tonight at the fireworks.
Louis continues to play and nods. Oliver and Black Benny listen from across the street. Pedestrians drop coins while he plays.

Oliver joins in a riff from across the street – to which Louis replies, the two of them continue like this call and response until the song is over. Louis runs across the street to greet him.

BLACK BENNY
Go back and collect your money, kid.

Louis runs back to his bucket and pockets the change then hurries back.

LOUIS
Uncle Joe! Black Benny.

OLIVER
That’s some chops you got there, kid.

BLACK BENNY
He’s alright.

LOUIS
Teach me that song that goes (he hums a song.)

BLACK BENNY
Oh, I got to see this.

OLIVER
What, you think I don’t know it?

Oliver begins to play the tune. Louis listens and watches Oliver’s fingers, then plays a few notes before jumping into a duo.

BLACK BENNY
Yeah, he got it. Yes indeed.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME – EVENING

Gabe helps Mayanne, dressed for an evening out, with her coat.

MAYANNE
You kids stay in tonight. You hear me? People going to be all high on tea and juice and all them fireworks.

They exit. Louis begins to clean up the dishes. He hears a tapping at the door and opens it for Isaac.
ISAAC
You coming, right?

MAMA LUCY
I’m telling Mayanne on you if you go.

ISAAC
Oh, can I have some of that gumbo first?

Louis pours him a bowl of gumbo.

MAMA LUCY
Don’t they feed you?  You dew-dropper.

He ignores her, too focused on scooping gumbo into his mouth.

MAMA LUCY (CONT’D)
Louis, please take me with you.

LOUIS
I can’t. You know that.

MAMA LUCY
I won’t be no trouble.

ISAAC
Trouble is her middle name.

MAMA LUCY
No, it’s not.

Isaac whispers something to Louis.

ISAAC
Mama Lucy, look over here.

He points outside a window. Louis retrieves the gun from a shelf then hides it in his jacket.

LOUIS
Got it.

ISAAC
Good let’s go.

MAMA LUCY
I didn’t see anything. What?

Louis goes to leave.

MAMA LUCY (CONT’D)
Louis, please.
He closes the door.

Mama Lucy watches through the window as Louis and Isaac disappear into a crowd.

**EXT. STREET - NIGHT**

Louis shows Isaac the gun then hides it.

They continue walking and hear MUSIC coming from a bar.

Louis hovers by a doorway listening to jazz music.

**EXT. CROWDED STREET - NIGHT**

There is barely elbow-room to move. Louis and Isaac make their way through COUPLES and drunk GUYS and the REVELERS. FIREWORKS go off in the sky; both look up to see the colors in the night sky. Isaac points out Budd and the gang a few feet away in the crowd. Budd notices and heads over.

**BUDD**

Hey, it’s that horn playing satchel mouth.

Louis smiles. The fireworks begin. Budd shoots a bullet in the air making a little bang. Louis takes out the bigger gun and shoots, startling all of them.

**ISAAC**

Can I try, Louis?

**LOUIS**

No, Isaac, this is my papa Gabe’s.

Louis shoots the gun again in response to Budd’s shot. A POLICE OFFICER grabs Louis’s shoulders.

**ISAAC**

Oh, man.

Isaac takes off through the crowd. The officer holds Louis tighter.

**POLICE OFFICER**

Hand over the gun, kid.

Louis hands him the gun.

**POLICE OFFICER (CONT’D)**

Who else was shooting?
Budd and the boys watch from a little distance. Louis looks at them.

    LOUIS
    No one, sir.

The boys run off.

    POLICE OFFICER
    I know someone else was shooting. If you tell me, I’ll make it easier for you.

    LOUIS
    No one, sir. Please, I won’t do it again.

Another POLICE OFFICER joins them. He guides Louis away.

    POLICE OFFICER
    Let’s go. Stupid kid.

INT. POLICE TRUCK - NIGHT

Louis looks through the bars on the windows as the city passes by.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    Mayanne was sure not going to like this.
    I let everyone down.

The car stops in front of a club where King Oliver is on stage. Louis peeps through the bars trying to see and hear better. Oliver looks up as the car rolls away.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    I thought my life was over.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

A JUDGE looks over to a stoic Louis.

    JUDGE
    Are you certain you do not want to tell me who the other boys were? I may just decide to be lenient on your sentence.

    LOUIS
    No sir, I do not know, sir.

    JUDGE
    Louis Armstrong you give me no choice but to sentence you to serve the maximum, five years at the Waif’s Home for Boys.
A gavel SLAMS down.

Mayanne’s face drops. Josephine, next to her in the corner, rises to hug Louis as an officer leads him away.

    JOSEPHINE
    You be good now, and they’ll let you out.
    You be good like I taught you to be.

Mayanne stays seated looking in the other direction.

    LOUIS
    Mayanne. Mama.

Mayanne approaches.

    MAYANNE
    I’m proud of you for not ratting, but
damn you for not listening to me.

Mayanne holds her heart and walks away.

    LOUIS
    I won’t see Mayanne again anymore? I
    tried to help out. I did.

    JOSEPHINE
    I know you did. I know.

The officer pulls him away.

    OFFICER
    Come on now. Time to go.

    JOSEPHINE
    If you just wouldn’t taken that gun.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Mayanne and Josephine walk together.

    MAYANNE
    I knew something dreadful would come of
Louis like this, being that he was born
on that night with all the killings and
the storm.

    JOSEPHINE
    Don’t you think the boy’s suffered
enough?
MAYANNE
He’s going to end up just like his father. I don’t think I can take that.

JOSEPHINE
Mothers can handle a lot more than they think. And his father’s not so bad.

MAYANNE
Yeah, and he’s got another bunch of kids with another woman. My baby is in jail. He’s going to end up...

JOSEPHINE
No, Mayanne, you got to keep the faith, child. Go to church and pray. Louis is going to be okay and so are you.

INT. WAIF’S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Louis stands in line with three BOYS in a sparsely decorated cold room converted to accommodate doctors. A DOCTOR inspects one boy’s ear. Louis steps up.

LOUIS (V.O.)
They had to inspect all the kids before sending them into the home.

The doctor listens to Louis’s heart.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I felt like a bug.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The three boys and Louis sit with a small bag of new belongings (toothbrush etc.), while MR. DAVIS, 30, paces behind a desk.

MR. DAVIS
Here at the Waif’s Home you will learn and you will work. You can learn woodworking. You will learn sports, and you will learn to read and write.

Louis sits looking down at the ground, somber. Mr. Davis looks straight at Louis.
MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
And I am all too familiar with the hooligans from James Alley, and I will not tolerate that kind here. Do you hear me?

Louis looks at the boy next to him.

MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
You.

He looks at a paper.

MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
Louis, do you hear me?

LOUIS
Yes sir.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

In a crowded room of boys, Louis passes a bowl of red beans and rice to TINY, 12, a tall, big kid, sitting next to him.

TINY
How come you not eating the beans and rice. This is the good stuff.

LOUIS
It’s not like my Mayanne’s.

TINY
You’re new, huh? I’m Tiny, that’s what they call me.

LOUIS

TINY
That’s funny. Tiny and Little Louis.

LOUIS
Yeah, and neither one of us is really small.

Mr. Davis enters and passes through the room. Louis watches him.

TINY
That’s the guy who runs this place. He’s as tough as steal.
LOUIS
Yeah.

TINY
The only kids he really likes are in the band. They get to go on the outside sometimes.

LOUIS
Band?

TINY
Yeah, he’s got tryouts for new recruits today. You play?

LOUIS
Yeah, I do.

TINY
Well maybe it’s your lucky day then, huh?

Tiny returns his plate to a bin near the kitchen.

EXT. STANDS - DAY
Louis and Tiny wait with the other potential RECRUITS. The other MUSICIANS take their places in the stands with drums and flutes and tubas and finally a boy plays a rudimentary practice riff on a cornet. Now this perks Louis up.

LOUIS
That’s what I play, the cornet.

TINY
Wow, you can really play that?

Mr. Davis shoots both of them a look.

MR. DAVIS
What are you doing here?

LOUIS
I’m here as a new recruit.

TINY
And I’m here to watch.
MR. DAVIS
I’m not talking to you. You, the kids from James Alley grow up to be criminals. Now get out of my sight.

LOUIS
But Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS
You want to question me?

Tiny pulls Louis away.

TINY
No, Mr. Davis. He knows his place. Come on.

Mr. Davis returns to organizing the boys.

Louis and Tiny head to a field. Kids are playing baseball in the distance.

TINY (CONT’D)
Man, he’s got it out for you. I saved your tail.

LOUIS
You mean?

TINY
Oh, yeah, you don’t want that. I can’t wait to get out of here. Hey, let’s go play baseball?

LOUIS
Na, I never played.

TINY
I can play. I’ll teach you.

Louis watches the band from a distance dreamily.

TINY (CONT’D)
Can you really play that thing?

Louis nods.

TINY (CONT’D)
Just give it up.

Louis looks at him defeated.
INT. WOOD SHOP - DAY

MR. JONES, 35, demonstrates the proper sawing of a piece of wood.

    MR. JONES
    Place a hand here. Hold the other side tight. And try not to cut off a finger.

Louis looks horrified.

    MR. JONES (CONT’D)
    Who wants to be the first to try? You.

He points to Tiny. Tiny encourages Louis to volunteer with him.

    MR. JONES (CONT’D)
    Come on. What’s your name?

    LOUIS
    Louis.

    MR. JONES
    Okay, Louis, you hold the board over here.

Louis awkwardly holds a piece of wood down for Tiny, who attempts to saw the wood.

    MR. JONES (CONT’D)
    A lot harder than it looks, huh?

Tiny saws harder.

    MR. JONES (CONT’D)
    There you go. Now you got it.

Louis almost lets go of the wood. Mr. Jones grabs the board before it flies up.

    MR. JONES (CONT’D)
    What the? I told you to hold it. See what happens.

    LOUIS
    yes sir.

    MR. JONES
    You don’t listen do you?

    LOUIS
    yes sir.
MR. JONES
You listen or you don’t?

LOUIS
No, sir.

MR. JONES
Well you better start.

LOUIS
yes sir.

EXT. FIELD - DAY
Louis and other BOYS march with wooden rifles in formation. Louis can’t keep up and has no idea what to do. Mr. Davis pulls Louis out of formation.

MR. DAVIS
You will learn this. I’ll march the evil right out of you.

LOUIS
yes sir.

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT
The BOYS sit in chairs in rows watching a silent film with “Black-faced” minstrel performers accompanied by a PIANO PLAYER. Louis laughs at the shenanigans on the screen. Now the CHARACTER tries to catch a train.

TINY
(Whispering) Maybe we can escape from here, Louis?

LOUIS
Shh, I thought you said they beat you to a pulp if you get caught.

Mr. Davis looks in the room.

TINY
What are you...

LOUIS
Shhh.

INT. WOOD SHOP - DAY
Louis, Tiny and the other boys stack wood in a pile.
TINY
What you gonna do?

LOUIS
I know what I’m going to do. I know.

TINY
The only thing you can do is escape.

Mr. Jones holds up a broom.

MR. JONES
I need a volunteer.

Louis’s hand shoots up. He begins sweeping with a smile imitating the minstrel character in his expressiveness.

MR. JONES (CONT’D)
Another.

Tiny reluctantly volunteers. Louis sweeps with such purpose, making sure all the dust has been removed before he moves on.

TINY
There’s a lot of dust here.

LOUIS
Yep.

MR. JONES
Okay, the rest of you help me move the table over here and pick up all the dust cloths.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY
Louis finishes eating.

LOUIS
(To Tiny) Watch this.

He rushes over to Mr. Davis who has just entered. Tiny’s jaw drops.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Mr. Davis, I would like to volunteer to sweep the mess hall.

MR. DAVIS
What are you up to, kid?
LOUIS
I would like to pull my weight, sir.

MR. DAVIS
You want to mop the floor too?

LOUIS
yes sir.

MR. DAVIS
Give him a broom and mop.

A BOY hands a broom to Louis.

LOUIS
Thanks.

Tiny looks at Louis, exasperated with his plan and tries to sneak away. Louis smiles up at him.

LATER

The mess hall is quiet, except for the occasional sound of a chair being moved so the mop can slide under it. Tiny peeks in the doorway.

TINY
Hey, you finished yet?

LOUIS
This was a bigger job than I thought.

TINY
I could a told you that.

Tiny slides on the floor making a little streak. Louis cracks up and then tries to imitate him. Louis playfully dances with the mop and slides.

Louis mops up the smudge from Tiny’s shoes. Then purposefully makes another one and looks confused. Tiny cracks up.

Mr. Davis stands in the doorway.

MR. DAVIS
Tiny, you want to pick up a mop and stop your chattering.

TINY
yes sir.

MR. DAVIS
That’s what I thought.
Tiny picks up another mop in the corner.

    TINY
    I just came to tell you there was a movie tonight. It’s movie night. Now, I’m working. See what you got me into. Louis, this is not going work.

    LOUIS
    But I have to try. Otherwise, I’ll never get to play cornet in the band.

    TINY
    Oh, that again. Can you really play?

Louis just gives him a “really” look. And emulates playing as he dances around with the mop.

    TINY (CONT’D)
    All right, so you can play. I don’t know if this scheme’s going work.

    LOUIS
    Why? Don’t have no faith, boy, I’ll tell you that.

    TINY
    He has it out for you.

    LOUIS
    I already know that.

    TINY
    There was this kid, but he really was a bad ass. You, I couldn’t say that about you.

MONTAGE
Louis carries wood.
Louis mops the hallway.
Louis sweeps the wood shop.
Tiny holds the dustpan.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    I started volunteering to help as much as I could, hoping to get noticed by Mr. Davis.

END MONTAGE
INT. SLEEPING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Louis closes his eyes to sleep. In the next bed Tiny stares at the ceiling. Several other BOYS quietly chatter.

    TINY
    (Whispering) It’ll never work. He doesn’t like people from James Alley.

Louis turns away.

    LOUIS
    Well then I’ll be the first. Leave me alone.

Mr. Davis enters the room.

    MR. DAVIS
    Who’s doing all that talking?

The room is completely quiet. Louis holds his breath.

    MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
    I thought so.

INT. WOOD SHOP - DAY

Louis and Tiny work on screwing a leg on a nearly completed table. Mr. Jones flips the table over.

    MR. JONES
    Not bad. It actually stands up. I guess I did an okay job teaching you.

Louis turns towards the band preparing to practice in the distance. Mr. Jones goes over to other BOYS. Mr. Davis enters the shop.

    MR. DAVIS
    Where’s the kid from James Alley?

Louis quickly hides and Tiny follows. Mr. Davis quietly speaks to Mr. Jones who points in Louis’s direction. Mr. Davis walks towards them.

    MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
    I guess I heard wrong; he really doesn’t want to play in our band.

Now Louis looks panicked. He and Tiny try to affect that they’ve just walked up when Mr. Davis’s turns.
MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
There you are? Louis, right?

LOUIS
Yes sir.

MR. DAVIS
So you want to play in the band?

LOUIS
Yes sir.

MR. DAVIS
I’m going to give you a chance. Get to band practice. Two-o’clock everyday, and don’t be late.

LOUIS
Yes sir.

A eager, triumphant Louis runs off towards the band, leaving a sullen Tiny.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Mr. Davis hands Louis a triangle. Louis awkwardly takes the instrument. Mr. Davis shows Louis a page of music.

MR. DAVIS
When you see this marking, you cling the triangle. Let me hear you.

Louis clings the triangle.

MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
Like this. Do you read music? No. Well you’re going to learn. This isn’t a street brawl band; this is a real band. Okay, it goes like this.

He points and hums the piece showing Louis where his part is. He hands the triangle back to Louis.

LOUIS
Thank you, Mr. Davis.

Louis takes his place and the band begins to play. He waits for his part, carefully listening.

1945
EXT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

Louis sits on his stoop surrounded by KIDS in the neighborhood.

LOUIS
When life gives you a triangle, you play a triangle. (To one of the kids) So you can play that damn drum with everything you’ve got, and you’ll see.

He resumes playing the trumpet for the kids.

1910

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis hits the triangle at the appropriate time. Mr. Davis notices and smiles. The band continues and again Louis hits the triangle at the correct time. The song finishes. Mr. Davis gathers the music sheets.

MR. DAVIS
Practice is the key to perfection, something you can never reach, but there’s no harm in trying. You are released. Put your instruments away and hit the fields for baseball practice with Mr. Jones.

MONTAGE

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY

Louis, at home plate, swings and hits a baseball, runs and is tagged out at first base.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis plays triangle.

Louis speaks to Mr. Davis, who shakes his head and hands him a tambourine.

Louis plays the tambourine at first awkwardly.

Mr. Davis looks up disappointed.

Louis tries again this time with better success.

END MONTAGE
The song ends. Louis marches up to Mr. Davis.

LOUIS
Excuse me, Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS
Yes, Louis.

LOUIS
Have I been doing okay on the tambourine?

MR. DAVIS
Yes, another surprise from the kid from the alley. You’re doing just fine, son.

LOUIS
But Mr. Davis, I appreciate you letting me play in the band.

MR. DAVIS
You still hankering to play the cornet again, huh? How bout I let you play the snare drum soon. We’ll see how you do.

LOUIS
Yes, sir.

Louis walks away deep in thought and sullen.

MR. DAVIS
Hey, don’t look so happy.

LOUIS
No sir, yes sir. I’ll play that snare drum, you’ll see.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD – DAY

Louis and Tiny wait for a turn to bat. While another player bats and others play positions in the field.

LOUIS
I’m not sure if Mr. Davis is ever going to let me play cornet.

TINY
I know. I don’t think I’m ever getting out of here. Seems like I’ve been in here forever. Maybe we could get out of here together.

LOUIS
Stop talking nonsense.
TINY
You could play the cornet, and I could collect the money.

LOUIS
You’d collect the money, huh?

TINY
Yeah, and protect you, make sure no one took advantage, you know like a, what do you call them guys that do that.

LOUIS
I know you’re a baby grand, but you’re not hard boiled.

TINY
So you think I ain’t got what it takes, huh?

Tiny walks over to home plate preparing to swing. He swings and misses the ball.

LOUIS
Go Tiny, hit it out of the park. Show me what you got, slugger.

MONTAGE
Tiny hits a triple. Louis hits him home.

EXT. STANDS - DAY
Louis plays the snare drum.
Louis plays snare drum better.
Mr. Davis notices.
Louis speaks to Mr. Davis. Mr. Davis shakes his head, “no,” and hands him an alto horn.
Louis plays the alto horn.
Mr. Davis notices.
Louis plays the alto horn better.
Mr. Davis notices.
Mr. Davis hands Louis a bugle.
Louis plays a loud riff.
One of the kids looks over at him.
Mr. Davis smiles.
Louis plays the bugle another day.
The song finishes.
END MONTAGE
Louis walks away to meet Tiny.

MR. DAVIS
Louis!

Louis stops.

TINY
I think he’s calling you. Probably in trouble, man.

MR. DAVIS
Louis.

TINY
You better go see what he wants.

Louis returns to Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS
Little Louis with the big lungs. Is that you?

LOUIS
Yes sir.

Tiny waits in the distance.

MR. DAVIS
I thought you wanted to play the cornet?

LOUIS
Yes sir, I do. Yes, sir.

He reaches in a bag and takes out an old rusted cornet.

MR. DAVIS
I found this one. It’s all rusted and old, been locked away.

LOUIS
No, that’s fine.
He hands the cornet to Louis, who eyes it in amazement, examining it carefully. Where Tiny was standing, the older Louis in a suit stands there watching.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I never thought this day would come. I was determined to show Mr. Davis that I was not the snot nosed kid he thought I was but a real musician.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY
Louis scrubs the cornet under water at a large sink while Tiny watches.

TINY
How long you gotta clean that thing?

LOUIS
Until it’s clean. I can’t believe it finally happened.

TINY
Me, neither.

LOUIS
You don’t sound happy for me.

TINY
I’m happy. I’m so happy.

LOUIS
Don’t feed me that line.

TINY
It’s just that I’m leaving this joint soon.

LOUIS
Why are you not jumping out of your skin feeling like the cat’s meow?

TINY
You want to go with me?

LOUIS
Sure, when they let me out.

TINY
Sometimes you gotta make things happen yourself. You can’t wait for someone to unlock the door. You gotta make your own key.
Tiny leaves Louis deep in concentration washing each piece of the horn.

LOUIS
Yeah, you gotta make your own way, make your own luck. Hey, hand me that towel. Tiny? Tiny, where’d you go?

He grabs a towel from a shelf and sets the horn down to dry.

EXT. FIELD - DAY
Louis and Tiny work in a nearby field picking up debris.

TINY
Louis, I know you finally got that horn you been pining over. You know they never going to let you out of here.

LOUIS
Why you say things like that, Tiny?

TINY
Cause it’s true.

LOUIS
I’m going to be so good, they have to let me out of here.

TINY
Maybe you’ll be so good Mr. Davis will want you to play in the band forever, and you’ll never see your Mayanne again.

LOUIS
Tiny, that is not the way it is, and you know it.

TINY
Louis, look.

He points to a large segment of field.

TINY (CONT’D)
If we both ran out into that field, we could get away. We could disappear and go back home.

LOUIS
And then they’d come and find us. Then what?
TINY
No, they wouldn’t care about no couple of James Alley kids.

A bell rings. BOYS walk over to a bench where Mr. Jones has brought some sandwiches.

LOUIS
Come on, let’s eat. You’ll feel better.

Louis begins heartily eating. Tiny pockets his sandwich and grabs another. He pockets that one too.

TINY
Hey, let’s go sit under that tree.

LOUIS
Mr. Jones, can we sit over, under the tree?

MR. JONES
Help yourself.

Under the tree, Louis sits down. Tiny surveys the horizon.

LOUIS
Get that out of your mind.

TINY
You sure you’re not coming. I could help you out there.

Tiny drops his sandwich and runs off as fast as he can. Louis hops up.

LOUIS
Tiny, no.

Mr. Davis is talking to Mr. Jones, both see Tiny.

MR. DAVIS
Who’s the fastest? Johnson, go get him. I’m right behind you.

JOHNSON, a tall, built boy takes off fast. Both men and the other boys follow. Louis reluctantly follows in the rear.

Johnson, catches Tiny and pulls him down. Tiny punches Johnson and continues to run. Johnson catches him easy, runs in front of him, this time holding a fallen tree branch as a bat.
JOHNSON
I will whip you with this, stop!

MR. DAVIS
Stop!

Mr. Davis grabs Tiny.

MR. DAVIS (CONT’D)
You want to run? I’ll show you. Come with me.

He and Mr. Jones pull Tiny away.

INT. OFFICE - DAY
Louis sits looking at his untied shoelaces. Mr. Davis sits across from him.

MR. DAVIS
Louis, I’m so disappointed in you.

LOUIS
But Mr. Davis.

MR. DAVIS
Let me finish. The two of you have been like hanging together like beans and rice. You knew what he was going to do, and you did nothing to stop him.

LOUIS
Mr. Davis, please, I tried to talks sense into him.

MR. DAVIS
Louis, you are going to pay for this too.

LOUIS
Yes sir.

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT
Tiny is tied to a table. All the BOYS at the home are gathered around. Mr. Davis pulls Louis forward.

MR. DAVIS
You’re going to watch this right here up front. See what you could have prevented. There’s extra for him, since you didn’t say anything. Is that okay, Louis? I didn’t hear you.
LOUIS
Yes sir.

Mr. Davis begins whipping Tiny with a strap. Louis looks on in horror.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

The sound of the WHIPPING and Tiny’s gasp and screams fades to Louis playing the cornet with the band.

Mr. Davis smiles uncontrollably hearing Louis play.

MR. DAVIS
(to himself) Shit.

1945

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Louis types strategically on his typewriter while hills roll by outside the window of the train.

LOUIS (V.O.)
That beating worked its magic even though I was scared out of my mind. All I wanted to do was get out of there as soon as I could. Because we were on our best behavior, Mr. Davis let us play the outside gigs.

1910

EXT. STREET - DAY

The Waif’s band plays and marches in a parade. The streets are lined with PEOPLE dancing and clapping. Louis plays beautifully.

Oliver watches from the sidelines. Louis salutes him with his horn playing.

Oliver bows and tips his hat.

1915

LOUIS, 15, still raggedy but more confident, continues playing. Mayanne watches Louis. Gabe claps and shouts.

GABE
That’s Mayanne’s boy.
Louis sees her and smiles and waves. Mayanne just watches him, not moving, stoic. Gabe waves back at him.

Louis pauses in playing.

    LOUIS
    Mayanne! It’s me.

Mr. Davis gives him a look that says he’d better play or his head will be on a block. Louis halfheartedly plays, pausing to look over at Mayanne.

    GABE
    When you going to forgive that boy?

    MAYANNE
    When I’m good and ready. Taking things that don’t belong to him. I taught him better than that.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    I knew Mayanne was angry at me. It broke my heart. I hoped time would heal what ailed her.

EXT. STANDS - DAY

Louis rehearses with the band. Mr. Davis is pleased.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    I was doing a darn fine job, Mr. Davis said and getting used to the Waif’s home. But I was more homesick than ever after seeing Mayanne.

INT. WAIF’S HOME OFFICE - DAY

Louis knocks on the door. Mr. Davis sits reading over papers.

    MR. DAVIS
    Come in. Sit down.

    LOUIS
    Mr. Davis, I wanted to ask you if I could learn more about reading music.

    MR. DAVIS
    Louis, you’ve been reading music now for a few years and doing fine.
LOUIS
I know, but I could be better.

MR. DAVIS
You have a natural style that more reading won’t help. I don’t say that lightly. You miss home, huh?

LOUIS
I been missing my Mayanne’s cooking, not that the cooking here isn’t good.

MR. DAVIS
Thank you. Here.

He passes the papers over to Louis.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - DAY

William sits at the table. Mayanne is chopping an onion.

WILLIAM
You know he’s going to want to live with you. He’s never lived with me.

MAYANNE
I can’t control him. It’s my fault he got into this mess.

WILLIAM
I have four other mouths to feed.

She shoots him a look.

MAYANNE
I been taking care of him all that time, and you can’t do nothing?

She stops and throws an envelope at him.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
Take him.

WILLIAM
He should stay with you, Mayanne. Look.

MAYANNE
No, he should stay with his father for a change. Maybe things will be different.

WILLIAM
Are you crying?
MAYANNE
I’m cutting an onion, damn it!

WILLIAM
I never saw you cry when you cut an onion before.

MAYANNE
That’s cause you weren’t around enough to see me crying. Now go get your kid from the courthouse, tomorrow, and don’t be late.

Before closing the door on his way out.

WILLIAM
You can have him back if you change your mind.

MAYANNE
I won’t change my mind. Now get out.

He closes the door and exits. Mayanne has to sit down; she is sobbing uncontrollably.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Louis carries a small bag and casually chats with a few of the boys.

TINY
I get out next week.

LOUIS
Don’t do anything stupid.

TINY
Ah, no, I think I learned that lesson. You think we’ll see each other on the outside.

LOUIS
Sure we will.

TINY
So, you going to get some of the fine cooking from Mayanne you been dreaming about.

LOUIS
For sure, I can’t wait to see her. She has got to have forgiven me by now.
Gesturing to Louis’s horn case.

TINY
Davis letting you keep the horn?

LOUIS
Yeah.

They hug good-bye, and Tiny carries his bag.

INT. COURT ROOM - DAY

An OFFICER walks Louis in front of the judge, where William waits. A JUDGE looks over some papers.

LOUIS
(Whispers) Where’s Mayanne?

WILLIAM
She’s not coming.

INT. WILLIAMS HOME - DAY

MONTAGE

Louis practices the cornet in the kitchen while CHILDREN run through chasing each other.

MRS. ARMSTRONG, 30, worn-out and tired stirs a pot on the stove.

Louis politely passes a half-eaten bowl of gumbo to the dog.

A baby screams as Mrs. Armstrong tries to feed it.

William runs out in the morning dressed for work at a lumber yard.

Mrs. Armstrong hands the baby to Louis and follows William outside.

END MONTAGE

EXT. WILLIAM’S HOME - MORNING

Mrs. Armstrong follows William. A ball rolls in her path, she kicks it away.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
William Armstrong!
WILLIAM
Yes, that’s still my name.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
He is eating us out of house and home.

WILLIAM
He doesn’t even like your cooking.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
What? That’s it.

He grabs her arm.

WILLIAM
Wait a second. What are you going to do?

INT. WILLIAMS HOME – MORNING

Louis precariously holds the baby who has begun to cry and tries to hear the conversation happening outside the screen door.

Mrs. Armstrong enters slamming the door. She hands Louis a mop.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
You are going to have to earn your keep from now on. I want you to mop the floor. You know how to mop a floor?

LOUIS
I know how to mop a floor.

He hands the baby to her and takes the mop.

MONTAGE
Louis mop the kitchen floor.
Kids running through the kitchen, while Louis attempts to avoid being trampled.
Louis putting the mop away.
Louis helps with the cooking, chopping, adding salt.

END MONTAGE
Mrs. Armstrong looking at him angrily.
MRS. ARMSTRONG
Why you adding more salt to that? You trying to kill us?

Louis holds his neck and pretends to fall before collapsing into a chair.

LOUIS
No.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
Something wrong with you, boy? I know you think I can’t cook.

Louis goes for the door.

LOUIS
No, that’s not true.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
Now you’re a liar. That’s right, get out, run off like your father. He’s never around, like an old tom cat. I bet you’re just like him.

LOUIS
No.

She sees the horn hidden behind his back.

MRS. ARMSTRONG
Get out! And take that damn thing with you.

EXT. WILLIAM’S HOME - EVENING

Louis makes his way around running kids and breathes as if he’s out of prison. He looks behind him as if someone might chase him down and trots down the street.

EXT. STREET - EVENING

Louis, Isaac and Black Benny finish playing a song, Benny tapping on a garbage can and Isaac passing a hat with Louis belting out the cornet.

LOUIS
Isaac, man it’s good to see you again.

Benny passes him a giant beer they are sharing.
LOUIS (CONT’D)
And you too Black Benny.

ISAAC
You better drink a big gulp; that thing will be gone after Black Benny chugs it down.

Louis takes a bigger sip and almost spits it out as he sees Mayanne across the street staring straight at him.

LOUIS
Take this, boys.

He hands them the beer and crosses the street. Mayanne turns away and continues on her way. He catches up to her.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Mayanne, wait.

MAYANNE
You’re a disappointment. You play music and run around just like your father. You don’t listen when I told you not to touch your Papa Gabe’s gun.

LOUIS
I’ll never do it again.

MAYANNE
You better never do it again. You get out and go right back to hanging with Black Benny. (Yelling) Benny, you better not lead my son astray.

She turns away again, leaving Louis standing on the street watching her. Isaac joins him.

ISAAC
She’ll be all right. She’ll get over it.

LOUIS
No, she won’t. I’ll never have that kind of fine cooking again.

ISAAC
Is that all you think about.

Louis holds up his horn and smiles.

LOUIS
Yes, and music.
INT. WILLIAM’S HOME - DAY

William sits at the table handing Louis a suitcase.

    WILLIAM
    She packed your things up. See, we can’t afford to feed you, not with all the mouths I’m feeding round here.

    LOUIS
    Where are you sending me? Do I have to go back to the Waif’s home?

    WILLIAM
    No, you don’t go to places like that because your father can’t afford to feed you.

Louis relaxes in his chair like a weight has been lifted.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    I love my papa, but I couldn’t have been happier.

William picks up his bag. One of the boys grabs his leg.

    BOY
    Louis, where you going?

    WILLIAM
    Let him go. He’s going to his mama’s.

    BOY
    Okay. Why?

    WILLIAM
    Because he is.

The boy runs off after another sibling.

    WILLIAM (CONT’D)
    I know I haven’t been much for you.

He hands him a few dollars.

    WILLIAM (CONT’D)
    Take care of your mama.

Louis looks at the dollars.

    WILLIAM (CONT’D)
    Put that away fore she sees it. I’ll never hear the end of it.
Louis pockets the cash.

    LOUIS
    Thanks Papa.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - DAY

Mayanne watches Louis shovel spoons of red beans and rice in his mouth.

    MAMA LUCY
    He can still eat.

    MAYANNE
    Sh, what happened after that?

    LOUIS
    Tiny? He got whipped, worsed whipping I ever seen in my life.

    MAYANNE
    I seen some bad whippings.

    MAMA LUCY
    Me too.

    MAYANNE
    Girl, you have not seen a bad whipping in your life.

Mayanne picks up her purse and puts on lipstick.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    Things went back to usual with me and Mayanne and Mama Lucy.

    MAYANNE
    I’m going to meet your Papa Gabe out tonight. You both stay home.

She hugs Louis.

    MAYANNE (CONT’D)
    I’m so glad to have you back, son.

    LOUIS
    Me too. I know.

Mayanne heads out. As soon as she leaves, Louis grabs his horn and goes for the door. Mama Lucy grabs his arm.

    MAMA LUCY
    You’re not going anywhere.
LOUIS
I can play on the street at least and make some change, maybe help out around here.

MAMA LUCY
That’s what got you into all that trouble in the first place. You beat me at cards, you can go out.

She shuffles the deck like a pro.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I knew I was staying home that night.

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

King Oliver and his BAND play to a packed audience. HENRY PONCE, 50, a robust Frenchman, looks at his watch.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - NIGHT

Mayanne, Isaac, Mama Lucy and Louis enjoy a pasta dinner.

MAYANNE
Louis, I saw Morris today; he said you can work with him again.

LOUIS
Oh, man, Morris, he was a great cat.

MAYANNE
He’s been asking about you since you got home.

Isaac looks around urgently.

ISAAC
Louis, what time did...

LOUIS
Isaac, Mayanne’s got dessert for us; I almost forgot.

MAYANNE
What dessert?

MAMA LUCY
Mayanne, are you holding out on us. Are you bringing the cake to Papa Gabe?
MAYANNE
Mama Lucy, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Mayanne grabs her purse.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
I’m going out. Isaac, you play cards with Mama Lucy. Gabe’s not allowed. She takes all his money.

MAMA LUCY
And Louis’s too.

LOUIS
You’re not taking all my money.

MAYANNE
Isaac, you’ve been quiet all night. Don’t you go getting my son arrested again, do you hear me?

ISAAC
Yes ma’am.

Mayanne leaves. Isaac peeks through the window watching Mayanne walk farther down the road.

ISAAC (CONT’D)
She’s gone.

Louis grabs his horn.

LOUIS
You think I’ll be too late?

ISAAC
No way, man they’ll play till sun up.

MAMA LUCY
No, you’re not going.

LOUIS
It’s Papa Joe King Oliver. I need to see him. Maybe he can get me a real gig and I can make real money.

ISAAC
Then he can give you money to buy a new dress.

She looks at her dress.
MAMA LUCY
All right. I won’t tell. But if you get into trouble...

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis and Isaac weave through the mesh of dancing COUPLES. Oliver nods at Louis. Louis heads for the stage. A WOMAN, 18, stops Louis in his tracks. She dances in front of him not letting him pass. She grabs his hands to make him dance with her. He tries to be polite and escape at the same time.

LOUIS
You are real pretty and all, but I need to get to the stage.

WOMAN
You play?

He holds up his horn.

LOUIS
I guess you didn’t see this.

WOMAN
Oh, I guess you do.

She helps him to the stage.

WOMAN (CONT’D)
You have to promise when you finish playing to buy me a drink.

LOUIS
Ah, I’m not sure I can do that.

WOMAN
No money, huh? Look kid, I’ll buy you a drink.

LOUIS
Okay.

Louis goes over to the stage. Oliver gestures for him to join him. Louis begins playing his horn in accompanied to Oliver as he enters the stage area. Oliver turns to hear how good he sounds.

OLIVER
Folks this is Little Louis.
The woman watches from the side. The band continues to play. Isaac schmoozes some women at the bar. Henry notices Louis’s playing and motions to the BARTENDER.

PONCE
(To the bartender) Kid’s alright.

The bartender mechanically hands Ponce another shot.

BARTENDER
Yeah, he’s alright.

The band finishes the song. Isaac motions for Louis.

OLIVER
Little Louis, folks, kid from the neighborhood.

BARTENDER
How’d you get Oliver to play this joint?

Ponce rubs his fingers together.

Louis is again confronted by the woman who is now very drunk.

WOMAN
Come on, I said I’d buy you a drink.

BARTENDER
What’ll it be, pal?

Louis looks uncertain.

WOMAN
He’ll have a brown straight up, same as me.

The bartender pours the drink. Louis takes it and smells it.

WOMAN (CONT’D)
You gonna belt it down or sip it?

Louis shoots the drink.

LOUIS
(Gasping) I know how to drink whiskey.

WOMAN
You do, huh? How’d you learn a thing like that?
LOUIS
My Mayanne.

WOMAN
Mayanne’s your girl?

LOUIS
No, she’s my mama.
The woman laughs.

WOMAN
Figures. Come on, dance with me.

They move into the crowd. Louis passes near Isaac who is also dancing and is a much smoother dancer.

ISAAC
Looks like you got your hands full.

Isaac moves his hands down his partner’s back.

ISAAC (CONT’D)
Nice cake.

Louis smiles. As they dance, the woman spills her drink all over Louis.

LOUIS
Ah, Lady, this is my only nice clothes I got.

She dabs the mess with her hands.

WOMAN
Come on sugar, you gonna be okay.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - NIGHT

Mayanne lies wide awake. Louis sneaks in and gently closes the door. He turns to see Mayanne quietly staring right at him. He stands still.

MAYANNE
You reek.

She quietly gets out of bed, moves closer to him and slams a chair down. Mama Lucy stirs in her sleep.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
Come here.

He cautiously walks over. She slaps him on the head.
MAYANNE (CONT'D)
If you would have come home earlier, I would never know, but not for your clothes. What’d you do go swimming in it?

LOUIS
Now, Mayanne, why would I go swimming in...

He does a light dance step around Mayanne.

MAYANNE
Don’t you Mayanne me.

LOUIS
Uncle Joe was playing.

MAYANNE
Music, I should have known. What you doing in that place?

LOUIS
Mr. Ponce gave me a gig. Mama, I can make some money.

MAYANNE
One gig ain’t going to make you no money. You want to drink?

LOUIS (V.O.)
I thought she was going to pound the living daylights out of me. Instead she decided to teach me a lesson.

MAYANNE
I know it’s whisky you been drinking.

LOUIS
I had one shot.

MAYANNE
I know what whisky smells like, and that’s more than one drink.

LOUIS
A woman...

MAYANNE
Now you going get messed up with some woman. Who is she? I’ll find her and I’ll, I’ll...
LOUIS
It’s not like that, Mama.

MAYANNE
It’s not? Well, I’ll tell you what, it’s bout time I took you out to learn you a few things about drinking. Now go to bed. You going to need your sleep when I get through with you.

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis and Mayanne enter together. It’s early so there’s just a few REGULARS sitting around.

LOUIS
Let me introduce you to Henry. He’s going to be my boss.

MAYANNE
Oh, you do that.

HENRY
Mayanne, so this is your son. I should have known. Kid came in here playing up a storm.

MAYANNE
And reeking is what I smelled. I’m going to teach my kid here how to handle himself, Henry.

HENRY
Mayanne can show you that.

MAYANNE
He’s got to learn to drink, and I’m going to teach him so he doesn’t come home smelling like a brewery like he did last night. Is it true you hiring Louis to work for you?

HENRY
I gave him one gig this week, just to see how he does.

MAYANNE
He’s going do what he is made to do I guess.

MONTAGE
Mayanne hands Louis a shot. They both shoot shots.
Int. Various Bars - night
Mayanne and Louis attempt dancing together.
Mayanne drinks another drink.
Mayanne shoots another shot.
A BARTENDER hands Louis a beer.
Isaac drinks with them.
Louis finishes a beer.
Mayanne downs another shot.
END MONTAGE

INT. HENRY’S BAR – NIGHT

The place is packed. Louis, Isaac and Mayanne stumble in the door. A MAN drags Mayanne away to dance. Louis and Isaac head for the bar.

ISAAC
Man, your mama can dance.

Louis hits him.

LOUIS
That’s my mama.

ISAAC
Sorry.

DAISY, 18, a waif of a woman, prances by and catches Louis’s eye.

ISAAC (CONT’D)
She ain’t got no meat on her bones.

LOUIS
She’s still a pretty thing.

ISAAC
She could be somebody’s Mama.

LOUIS
She ain’t nobody’s Mama.

Isaac goes off to another girl. Daisy walks up to Louis and takes the seat next to him.
DAISY
I seen you play.

LOUIS
When? What was I playing?

DAISY
Last night. You know what you was playing. Why you asking me? Anyways, you played good.

LOUIS
Thank you. You hungry?

DAISY
Sure.

Louis takes a sandwich wrapped in paper out of his pocket. Mayanne pulls him away to introduce him to her FRIENDS and the man she is dancing with. He looks back at Daisy who looks at him longingly. He quickly puts the sandwich back in his pocket.

MAYANNE
This is my son, Louis. Look at him.

MAN
Fine boy you got there, Mayanne.

Louis looks back at Daisy. People walk around her as if she is invisible. She also looks for Louis through the crowd.

MAYANNE
He plays the horn like you never heard too. I'm telling you. Louis, you got to show them.

LOUIS
I didn't bring my pipe with me tonight.

MAYANNE
He's working here now; Ponce himself gave him a gig.

FRIEND
That is something, Mayanne.

MAYANNE
(To Louis) You drunk yet?

Mayanne goes off to dance with the man who holds her up properly. Louis looks worried.
FRIEND
Don’t you worry, your mama can hold her liquor.

EXT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis holds up Mayanne while Ponce holds the door for them.

PONCE
She sure showed you, didn’t she?

MAYANNE
I sure did. Boy’s got to be able to hold his liquor like his mama.

PONCE
You get home safely now. Louis, you playing this Wednesday night?

Louis nods.

LOUIS
Thanks, Mr. Ponce.

Daisy leans against a light pole outside. Louis sees her. He directs Mayanne towards her and discretely hands the sandwich in his pocket to her. He walks away but turns around to see Daisy walking away with a MAN.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - NIGHT

Louis tucks his mother in bed. He watches her for a moment.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I’ll never forget how Mayanne showed me how to hold my liquor. That’s one of them lessons in life that stays with you. And I could not forget that little, hungry pixie either.

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis finishes his solo. The DANCERS on the packed floor finish and clap. Isaac whispers to IRENE, 20, pointing to Louis.

ISAAC
You want to work for him? I can arrange it.

79
IRENE
I know I don’t want to work for the likes of you.

ISAAC
Now, sweetie, I got me a girl already.
I’m just trying to help out a friend.
Why you want to treat me like that? Here he comes. Let me break it to him first.

He pats her away. Louis weaves through the crowd. Isaac waves him over.

ISAAC (CONT’D)
Louis, my man, I have some good news for you. You know all the musicians got girls working for them.

LOUIS
Yeah, I know.

ISAAC
See that Jane over there. She’s pretty. Oh come on. I know you’ll like her.
What’s not to like?

LOUIS
How do you know?

ISAAC
Cause here she comes right over here.

Louis turns to see Irene smiling at him.

LOUIS
(To Isaac) She’s pretty, but no.

ISAAC
Irene, this is Louis, I been telling you about.

IRENE
I can see that. How you doing, sweetie?

She gives Isaac a look to scram.

ISAAC
Louis, Irene will take good care of you. I’ll let the two of you negotiate this. Unless you want me to do that for you.

LOUIS
Yes, I’m not sure what I’m negotiating.
IRENE
Don’t you go getting any ideas about trying the merchandise, either of you. You just my protection case I need it and you help send fellows over.

LOUIS
Oh, that’s what I do. I can do that.

ISAAC
I know what to do.

IRENE
You shut up. You don’t know nothing.

LOUIS
He really rubbed you the wrong way.

IRENE
But you not going to do that, are you honey.

ISAAC
No, he’s not. And with his help, you can make some heavy sugar.

MONTAGE
Louis plays with the band while Irene dances with various GUYS.

LOUIS directs a GUY to Irene.

She goes into a back room with the guy.

IRENE hands Louis money. Louis plays a solo. Irene dances with a GUY. Irene hands Louis money.

LOUIS (V.O.)
So, I got me a girl working for me. Seems Isaac was right, everyone had a girl at that time. Musicians made a little extra, and the girls had their claim on the shows.

END MONTAGE

In the middle of Louis’s song he sees Daisy sitting on a stool watching him. He smiles back. A few notes later he ends the song and hops of the stage. The band continues playing. He walks over to Daisy. Irene, dancing with a GUY, surveys the woman who has captured Louis’s attention.
LOUIS

Hi, Daisy.

Daisy turns her cheek, and Louis kisses it.

DAISY

Hi there, Louis. You sure can play that thing.

LOUIS

You got a guy?

A GUY throws a bottle and almost hits the BARTENDER before crashing on the floor. Daisy looks around uncomfortably. A few other GUYS throw the guy out.

DAISY

Boy, you don’t mess around. I work for Cheeky Black.

LOUIS

Why do you work for him? He’s always on the edge, and he thinks he’s a real egg. Now I know why he’s always in them glad rags; he don’t even leave you enough to eat on.

DAISY

That might be true, but if I had a real man, I’d cut him loose.

Irene grabs Louis’s arm and pulls him away.

IRENE

Louis, I want you to meet a friend of mine.

Louis turns to see Daisy accepting a dance from another GUY. Irene pulls him close to dance.

IRENE (CONT’D)

When you going to try out the merchandise you been selling?

LOUIS

I will. I promise.

He looks up at the stage of musicians.

LOUIS (CONT’D)

I have to go back to play my part in this number.
IRENE
That’s right, my man. That’s where you belong.

As Louis disappears into the crowd.

IRENE (CONT’D)
Not dancing with that ho.

When Louis passes Daisy sitting on a stool again. He hands her a sandwich in his pocket.

LOUIS
You come by every night if you want to. I’ll makes sure I have a sandwich for you.

She takes the sandwich and begins hungrily eating.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I didn’t care if I’d be hungry later, I couldn’t stand to see that poor girl starving.

EXT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Irene hands Louis some cash. He helps her put her coat on.

IRENE
Louis, why don’t you walk me home?

She seductively whispers in his ear and caresses him.

IRENE (CONT’D)
I think it’s time.

LOUIS
Irene, I’m tired tonight, but I will walk you home.

They walk down the street that is settling in for the night. A BARTENDER pours a pail of dirty water onto the curb. A MAN stumbles around them.

IRENE
Watch it, you zozzled-eyed fool.

She grabs Louis’s arm. He holds his case close.
LOUIS
Butt me.

She lights a cigarette and hands him one and lights one for herself.

IRENE
You going to have a big time with me tonight.

LOUIS
You’ve already had a big time.

IRENE
But not with you. What, you don’t like me? I’m not good enough for you?

LOUIS
No, that’s not it.

IRENE
I’m not skinny enough for you?

LOUIS
No, you’re the right kind of girl, a real piece of cake if you ask me.

IRENE
I saw you talking to that woman, Daisy.

LOUIS
It was nothing.

IRENE
You better come home with me if you know what’s good for you.

LOUIS
Look, Irene, we’re business partners.

IRENE
I never had no business partner that didn’t want to try out what he was selling.

LOUIS
Irene, what’s eating you?

IRENE
You think I’m not good enough for you.

LOUIS
Let’s get you home. I’ll bet you’re just dead tired. I know I am.
She turns and grabs him, hysterical.

IRENE
You take me home, Louis, you take me home and you have me, all of me. You think I”m not good enough for you?

Louis tries to push her away, but she holds on too tight.

LOUIS
Irene, stop this.

He pushes her away. As she loses her grasp on him, she stumbles back into a puddle and falls. Louis holds back a laugh and reaches a hand to pull her up. As he does, she screams and lunges at him with a switch blade, stabbing him in the shoulder. He pushes her away.

IRENE
Ain’t no body going to make a fool out of me. Do you hear me. Ain’t no body. I ain’t no body’s chunk of lead.

Louis stumbles back holding his shoulder.

LOUIS
I never said that. I never did.

He steps away from her. She shoos him away.

IRENE
Go chase yourself now.

Louis stumbles away, trying to run.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - NIGHT

Mayanne helps Louis take his jacket off. Mama Lucy almost faints as she sees the blood all over the jacket and now gushing out of the wound. Louis’s fades, his head dropping to the table.

MAYANNE
I’m ask you again, what alley cat did this to you?

Louis shakes his head. She begins wrapping a towel around his shoulder and pressing.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
You tell me or so help me god.
MAMA LUCY
Tell her, Louis. Tell her!

MAYANNE
And don’t you give me no line.

LOUIS
Irene.

MAYANNE
That’s what I thought; that girl been working for you?

LOUIS
How’d you know?

MAYANNE
I got my ways. Mama Lucy, come here.
Hold this down hard as you can.

She tears a piece of cloth and wraps it around the towel to keep it in place.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
I’ll be back. Help me put him in the bed.

They both help Louis stand, Mayanne under one arm and Mama Lucy guiding. Louis moans.

LOUIS
Mayanne, don’t go after her.

MAYANNE
Don’t you go telling your mama what to do and what not to do. I’m your mama, and ain’t no whore going to do this to my baby.

She slams the door.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Through the darkness and flickering street lights, Black Benny sees Mayanne, fist clenched, stomping down the street with a determined stride like a bull.

BLACK BENNY
(To himself) Oh shit! Now she’s done it.

He follows a safe distance behind.
EXT. IRENE’S APARTMENT - NIGHT
Mayanne pounds on the door.

    MAYANNE
    Open up!

Irene opens the door, drunk with a bottle in hand.

    IRENE
    What you want crazy bitch?
    MAYANNE
    You know who I am?
    IRENE
    Yeah, I know you, Mayanne.

INT. IRENE’S APARTMENT - NIGHT
Mayanne jumps on her, grabbing her neck, knocking her down, strangling Irene and banging her head on the floor.

    MAYANNE
    You never will forget me now.

Black Benny rushes in and tries to pull Mayanne off of Irene.

    BLACK BENNY
    You’ll kill her. Let go, Mayanne. Let go!

He manages to get her to stop. Irene holds her head and neck crying. Black Benny continues to pull Mayanne out the door.

    BLACK BENNY (CONT’D)
    Come on, Mayanne, come on now.
    MAYANNE
    You ever go anywhere near my son, I will kill you next time.

She slams the door.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - NIGHT
Louis sits at the table eating a giant bowl of pasta. One shoulder is noticeably bigger under his suit jacket. Mayanne picks up his plate to drop another giant helping of sauce in the bowl.
LOUIS (V.O.)
I never did see Irene again. My mama, Mayanne, was pretty convincing I’ve been told.

Louis finishes, grabs his horn and goes for the door.

MAYANNE
You be careful with that arm. It’s not healed proper.

LOUIS
I will.

MAYANNE
And come straight home after.

LOUIS
I’m playing with Papa Joe.

He quickly exits. She shakes her head in defeat and continues washing blood out of his shirt in the sink.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT
Louis and Oliver play a duet together. Louis notices Daisy sitting at a table with a MAN. As the song ends, the AUDIENCE CLAPS and the man leaves Daisy alone.

Louis walks over to her table.

LOUIS
This is a fancy place for a girl who can’t buy dinner.

DAISY
I’m not paying for your dinner.

LOUIS
Yeah, that would be a lot.

He rubs his belly.

DAISY
I can see that.

He sits down.

LOUIS
You alone?
DAISY
I was working earlier, been entertaining, kind of like you.

LOUIS
Really?

He rubs his shoulder.

DAISY
You hurting?

LOUIS
Happened a few days ago. I think Mayanne fixed me good as new. But I might need a little bit more fixing.

INT. DAISY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

In one room with just a bed, Daisy lifts her dress up and over her head revealing pads she wears on her sides. She tosses the dress to Louis, who sits on the bed watching. He catches the dress, uncertain, looking at the pads on her body.

DAISY
I wear these sides.

She pats the pad on her rear and removes it.

DAISY (CONT’D)
To make me look meatier.

She leans over to kiss Louis. He contentedly responds.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME - DAY

Mayanne removes the bandages from Louis’s shoulder.

LOUIS
Ouch.

MAYANNE
This is what happens when you don’t come home.

LOUIS
Mayanne?

MAYANNE
Ah hum.
LOUIS
I been invited by Papa Joe himself to play on the river boats with him.

MAYANNE
Good, that might keep you out of trouble with the law and the women.

EXT. RIVERBOAT DOCK - MORNING
Before boarding the riverboat docked near-by, carrying a small suitcase and his horn, Louis kisses Daisy.

LOUIS
Promise me, Daisy, promise me that you’ll stay away from Cheeky Black while I’m gone.

DAISY
I will Louis. I promise.

He boards the boat, skipping along.

MONTAGE
Louis and Oliver play a duo. WHITE PATRONS dance. A PHOTOGRAPHER shoots photos of the BAND. Louis and Oliver play another duo.

END MONTAGE

EXT. DOCK - DAY
Oliver hands Louis an envelope. The other MUSICIANS wave.

MUSICIAN
Good job, Little Louis.

OLIVER
Stick with me. You got a future ahead of you, kid.

LOUIS
I didn’t tell you, Uncle Joe, I got me a girl.

OLIVER
You do huh? Well that’s good. I’m glad to hear it.

Louis almost skips with joy down the street.
LOUIS
Thanks Uncle Joe, I can’t wait to see her. She’s a real piece of cake.

OLIVER
Look out, dames, Little Louis is in the game.

EXT. STREET - DAY
Louis stops next to a WOMAN pruning a rose bush.

LOUIS
Lady, can I buy a few of those flowers from you?

WOMAN
You got a girl?

LOUIS
Yes ma’am.

EXT. DAISY’S APARTMENT - DAY
Louis drops his small suitcase down and energetically knocks. Nothing. He knocks again. He hears VOICES, a woman and a man.

CHEEKY BLACK (O.S.)
Who the hell is that?

Daisy opens the door. Louis looks from her to CHEEKY BLACK, a large imposing man, then secures his hat, grabs his suitcase and runs as fast as he can.

Behind him the door SLAMS, and SLAPS and YELLING are heard.

CHEEKY BLACK (O.S.) (CONT’D)
I’ll show you, you bitch.

EXT. STREET - DAY
Louis runs so fast he almost runs into Josephine. She grabs him.

JOSEPHINE
You’re home?
LOUIS
Yes ma’am.

JOSEPHINE
Did you buy those flowers for your mama or for some special lady?

LOUIS
I bought them for a special lady, Grandma, I bought them for you.

He hands her the flowers. She hugs him.

JOSEPHINE
You always been my sweet boy.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I thought for sure that was the end of me and Daisy.

EXT. STREET – DAY
Louis, Isaac, Black Benny and FRIENDS hang on the street passing a giant bucket-sized mug of beer between them.

LOUIS
Anyone going to pass that to me?

FRIEND
Oh no, Black Benny’s got it now. That means there will be none for none of us.

ISAAC
Hey, save some for satchel mouth.

He playfully punches Louis.

Daisy dressed in her finest turns the corner.

LOUIS (V.O.)
One month later...

ISAAC
Heads or tails?

Isaac flips a coin.

LOUIS
Tails.

ISAAC
Heads that’s your old lady walking down the street.
All the guys turn, some WHISTLE. Louis looks down and tries to cover his face.

    LOUIS
    I’m done with her.

    ISAAC
    I can’t believe I’m saying this Louis, but if you’re done, then I guess you won’t mind if I go over there and try a piece of that cake.

Louis punches him in the arm.

    ISAAC (CONT’D)
    Ouch. I guess that’s a no.

Daisy stands a comfortable distance from them eyeing Louis. Louis goes over to her.

    LOUIS
    Daisy.

    DAISY
    Hey, Louis.

They casually walk down the street.

    LOUIS
    I’m sorry I ran. I didn’t know what else to do.

    DAISY
    You did the right thing, honey.

    LOUIS
    He didn’t hurt you?

    DAISY
    I’m all right.

    LOUIS
    Why did you go back to him?

    DAISY
    I didn’t know what else to do. I tried. I did, Louis.

    LOUIS
    Yeah, it’s not easy to get away from gangsters like him, I guess. You should stay away from him. He’s not good for you.
They walk on quietly. Louis slips his hand around her hand.

Louis (Cont’d)
Did you get all dolled-up for me?

Daisy
What you think?

She kisses him.

Daisy (Cont’d)
Oh, Louis, I missed you. I missed you so much.

Louis
I missed you too, Daisy.

They continue walking.

Louis (Cont’d)
We can’t have that happen again.

Daisy
What you mean, me missing you?

Louis
No, you falling for Cheeky Black’s lines again.

Daisy
I won’t. Louis?

She points to a giant war propaganda sign with an image of a soldier and text, “As American as apple pie, mom and baseball!” Next to that sign is another sign above a pawn shop, “Wedding rings, wedding gowns, ties, suits, all your wedding needs in one stop.”

Daisy (Cont’d)
What’s that sign mean?

Louis
It means let’s get married so he can’t bother you no more.

They look into the shop. A tuba is in the window, where his first cornet used to be.

Louis (V.O.)
I knew that would be one thing Mayanne would not like, that she could not read.

(More)
It seems Daisy’s parents spoiled her, letting her run around the farm, never going to school.

INT. PAWNSHOP - DAY
Louis buys cheap rings from Mr. Babin. Both happily looking at the wares in the shop.

INT. COURTHOUSE - DAY
In front of a JUDGE, the happy couple kiss. Louis shows Daisy where to sign.

EXT. COURT HOUSE - DAY
Black Benny is on his way into the courthouse when he spots Louis walking arm-in-arm with Daisy.

BLACK BENNY
(To himself) Now he went and done it.

Louis and Daisy smile and laugh.

LOUIS
Daisy, you’re not wearing your sides.

DAISY
I’m not trying to impress nobody but you, and you already know I don’t have no sides.

INT. MOTEL - EVENING
The ATTENDANT, big boxer guy, hands Louis a set of keys.

ATTENDANT
One week, got you for one week.

He looks at Daisy.

ATTENDANT (CONT’D)
Let me know if you need more time than that. And congratulations.

LOUIS
Thank you.
Louis takes the key and picks up a small suitcase and almost trips on the stairs in his excitement prompting a CHUCKLE from Daisy.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Louis opens the door and drops the suitcase on the floor in a small room with a double bed taking up most of it.

LOUIS
Not so bad.

DAISY
Louis, this is fine.

She plops on the bed.

LOUIS
This is our first home together.

She pulls his shirt pulling him closer.

DAISY
Louis, this just the honeymoon.

LOUIS
Oh, yeah.

She kisses him.

DAISY
Louis, I don’t want you leaving me no more. I want you with me always.

Louis looks up with a shock.

LOUIS
I have to tell Mayanne.

DAISY
I’ll go with you.

LOUIS
I think I better do this one alone.

She hugs him.

DAISY
I’m holding you tight.

LOUIS
But first things first.
He slams the door with his free foot.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME – MORNING

Mayanne pours Louis a cup of coffee. She sits down and sips her coffee casually.

MAYANNE
So you went and got yourself married?

LOUIS (V.O.)
Of course, she’d already gotten wind of the marriage.

MAYANNE
Do you love her?

LOUIS
Yes, I do.

MAYANNE
Bring her around so I can take a look at her.

EXT. HOUSE – DAY

Louis and Daisy, carrying suitcases, make their way to the bottom of a staircase leading up to a balcony. Some railing is torn away at the top. The house is large and worn and in need of repair. Louis shakes the railing.

LOUIS
It’ll do just fine. Just be careful not to go close to the edge.

He pretends to fall off the edge.

DAISY
Louis, stop that. You’ll fall off.

He grabs her arm as they rush up the stairs.

LOUIS
You’ll make sure I don’t fall off.

He takes a key out of his pocket and opens a door. The door CREAKS, revealing a small room covered in cobwebs that shimmer in the light.
INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - DAY

Louis sets a few suitcases on the dusty floor. Daisy pats a dusty chair. He wipes his finger on a small breakfast table.

DAISY
I can clean it up. I’ll make it nice. You’ll see.

Louis kisses her on the cheek.

LOUIS
I know you will, sugar.

DAISY
Oh, Louis, I just can’t believe I found me a guy like you. I love you, I do.

LOUIS
I love you too.

He pushes her on the bed, and dust flies up all over both of them. Both LAUGH and COUGH.

DAISY
I guess we better clean this mess up, fore we commence to making this place ours.

LOUIS
Say it ain’t so.

Dust flies up in the air again as they fall back onto the bed.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis and Daisy walk together holding hands talking.

DAISY
How long I have to take care of him? Why can’t the father’s family take him?

LOUIS
Some white man’s been getting lots a women pregnant.

DAISY
You mean just running around making babies like it ain’t no body’s business?
LOUIS
Yeah, something like that.

DAISY
How did your cousin get mixed up with him?

LOUIS
Same as all the others, I guess. She might have been cleaning his house.

DAISY
Poor thing.

DAISY (CONT’D)
I still don’t see why I got to do it?

LOUIS
Daisy, he’s part of our family.

DAISY
What about Mama Lucy?

LOUIS
You know Mama Lucy works cleaning houses too.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME – DAY

Mayanne gives CLARENCE, 2, dressed in a little baby suit, a cookie. He smiles. Louis and Daisy watch.

MAYANNE
He’s a sweet child, but he likes to climb and run around, so you have to watch him.

Daisy just shakes her head confused.

LOUIS (V.O.)
My cousin Clara died in child birth, and my mama had been taking care of Clarence, her baby boy, but now she needed some help.

Mayanne hands a small bag stuffed with baby items to Louis and then tries to get Clarence to take Daisy’s hand.

DAISY
He’s sticky.
MAYANNE
He’s two. He’s supposed to be sticky.
Life is messy.

Louis notices how inept Daisy seems with handling
Clarence. She holds him far away as if he has a disease.

LOUIS
Daisy, I’ll carry him.

Mayanne shakes her head, giving Louis a knowing look,
which he returns with a smile.

LOUIS (V.O.)
For a while, you might say, me, Daisy and
Clarence had a life together.

MONSTAGE

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis plays a gig.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - VARIOUS TIMES

Daisy cleans, making their home nice. Daisy hangs a sheet
as a curtain. Clarence plays with a rag doll. Louis
arrives home to Daisy’s open arms with Clarence tugging
at him. Louis picking up Clarence. All of them dancing.
Louis spoons food for Clarence. Laughter.

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis finishing a song.

END MONTAGE

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Daisy wearing an apron and looking very matronly, places
Clarence on a mat with his doll. She shakes a big sheet
out and drapes it over the small kitchen table. She
moves the sheet until it seems to fit perfectly. She
then places two candles on the table and is pleased.

Clarence is playing and watching her move about.

She stirs a pot on the stove, then carefully places two
bowls on the table.
She pours herself a drink, lights the candles and then lights a cigarette.

EXT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT – NIGHT

She walks out to the balcony to look up at the full-moon. Clarence follows her holding out his doll.

DAISY
Clarence, why you got to always be following me around. Can’t you just sit there like a good baby and play?

Clarence just smiles up at her.

INT. HENRY’S BAR – NIGHT

Louis and the BAND PLAY while COUPLES dance and swirl around the room. Louis finishes playing the tune. Isaac motions for him to take a break and join him. Louis ignores him, but Isaac is persistent and finally panicked. Louis puts his horn down and joins Isaac. The band continues playing.

LOUIS
Is Daisy okay?

ISAAC
I’m not talking about no Daisy, old man. King Oliver’s second horn pulled a Daniel Boone, sick as a dog and all hell broke loose. Joe wants you to finish the show.

Louis immediately goes to the stage to whisper this to one of the guys in the band.

INT. MUSIC HALL – NIGHT

Isaac and Louis weave through the crowd up to the stage, where the BAND PLAYS. A member motions for Louis to join them. As he approaches the stage, Louis begins playing with dramatic flair.

Couples dance. Isaac sips a drink. Louis plays a solo.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT – NIGHT

The Candles are now limp over a pool of wax dripping on the table. Daisy sits looking forlorn. Clarence, still in his day cloths, lies on a cot sleeping.
She looks over at him and takes another drag of a cigarette. She makes a fist and holds back the sound that might escape by going back on the balcony.

INT. MUSIC HALL - NIGHT

Louis finishes a more improved improvisational solo. The crowd cheers. Morris waves and claps. He whispers to his FRIEND.

MORRIS
You know, he used to work for me when he was a kid? Man, that kid’s got a future. I knew when I first heard him.

Joe Oliver walks past Morris.

MORRIS (CONT’D)
King. Your guy? He’s okay?

OLIVER
Oh yeah. Little Louis, he’s good.

MORRIS
Yeah, can you believe?

Louis joins Oliver and Morris.

OLIVER
Louis, man you knocked it out of the park.

LOUIS
Thanks, Uncle Joe. And Mr. Morris how you been?

MORRIS
We’re all well, Louis. And you, you’re on the trolley now kid. How’s Daisy?

Louis is suddenly shocked by this question.

LOUIS
Oh no, I’m late. I have to go, Papa Joe. I’m glad you’re back.

Louis tries to escape but Oliver stops him.

OLIVER
Not so fast, lover boy.
LOUIS
I promised Daisy I’d be home early. She said...

OLIVER
She’ll be all right. Listen, don’t stress yourself out over women, they go up and down sometimes. Listen, I’m going to Chicago, I had to meet with some fellows tonight. That’s why I sent for you. I’m going to send for you when I get settled in Chicago and need a second horn.

Suddenly more calm.

LOUIS
Papa Joe, I hope that’s soon.

EXT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis softly whistles up the steps then stops when he sees the door open and a demonic looking shadow on the wall created by a flickering candle light and a larger than life Daisy smoking.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis steps into the room. The table is still set perfectly. Daisy doesn’t look up; she just smokes. She pours another shot into the glass next to her. Louis realizes this is trouble.

LOUIS
Where’s Clarence?

DAISY
Is that all you can think about is Clarence?

LOUIS
Daisy, I can explain.

She picks up a plate menacingly.

DAISY
Well you better start explaining.

LOUIS
I got called by Papa Joe to play his set.
DAISY
What, you now his boy? All y’all the same. I know what you doing.

She stomps over to him like she’s carrying an ax not a plate.

LOUIS
No, Daisy.

She throws the plate at him. He dodges it.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Daisy, that was close.

DAISY
Not close enough.

She grabs another plate. Clarence wakes up and rubs his eyes.

LOUIS
Daisy, you don’t want to hurt me or anyone. Now come on.

DAISY
I don’t want you playing music if you can’t come home on time.

LOUIS
Now, you know I can’t do that. How will I make money?

DAISY
You can work on the coal wagon like the rest of them and ride the wagon like you used to do.

LOUIS
Now come on.

Clarence has toddled out to the balcony behind them.

Daisy punches Louis in the face when he turns to see Clarence on the balcony. He grabs her hands.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Daisy, you can’t be hitting me in the chops. Woman.

They hear a loud CRACK and THUMP and eerie QUIET then Clarence SCREAMING.
EXT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Louis runs to him. Clarence’s head is bleeding. He picks him up. Daisy staggers down.

DAISY
Damn kid.

LOUIS
Daisy! He’s bleeding. He’s hurt. I guess you had your tea now? I’m taking him to the hospital.

Louis gently scoops Clarence into his arms and carries him down the street. In a desperate attempt, he wraps a handkerchief on Clarence’s head to stop the bleeding.

Daisy stumbles on the steps and sits watching Louis leave.

DAISY
He did this to himself. Why he couldn’t listen when I tell him to be home?

INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

A white DOCTOR directs Louis to a gurney with a bandaged and sleeping Clarence.

DOCTOR
I need to tell you. There’s a possibility that he may not develop normally because of this fall.

Louis is shocked.

DOCTOR (CONT’D)
He has sustained a serious skull fracture. And there’s some swelling. You’ll have to watch him. You understand?

LOUIS
You mean he might be slow?

DOCTOR
Yes.

LOUIS
Thank you for helping us.

He looks at Clarence.
LOUIS (CONT’D)
Poor little guy.

Louis slides back into his chair as if he feels faint.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
He liked to climb, never bothered no body. He’s a good kid.

DOCTOR
He’s going to be alright. He may just need a little help.

LOUIS
And I will make sure he gets it. Don’t you worry doctor. I’m sorry.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT

The Louis (of 1945) watches the scene from the doorway in deep thought. Louis sets Clarence down on the cot to sleep. He pulls up a chair to sit. Daisy is curled into a ball in the bed. As she turns her tearful face towards Louis, he turns and covers his eyes holding back his own grief. She slowly goes to him.

DAISY
Is he going be alright?

LOUIS
Yeah, he’s going to be alright, except the doctor said he might be a little slow. If the worlds not hard enough, he has that shit too.

DAISY
It’s all my fault.

She’s crying uncontrollably.

LOUIS
No, Daisy, it’s my fault.

DAISY
No you said it, you said it was my fault fore you left.

LOUIS
Daisy, let’s not fight.

He slides his hand in hers.
LOUIS (CONT’D)
You’re my wife, we have to get along now. Right?

She goes back to mumbling.

DAISY
I’m sorry, Louis. I’m sorry.

She curls up in bed. He neatly places covers over her.

LOUIS
Go to sleep now. You’re just tired.

DAISY
You’re not coming to bed. You don’t want to sleep with me no more?

LOUIS
No, Daisy, I have to stay awake. The doctor said to keep an eye on Clarence while he sleeps. Make sure he’s alright. Just for tonight.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Uncle Joe was right. Some women can be up and down. I never knew what or who I was going to get when I got home.

MONTAGE

DAISY
Louis, if you can just come home on time, I can be nice, and we can stop all this fussing.

Louis looks at her unsure what to say.

EXT. STREET – DAY
The three of them walk hand-in-hand down the street, laughing and swinging arms.

END MONTAGE
INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - EVENING

Louis puts his performing suit and sits to tie his shoes. Daisy walks in wearing her finest dress with her hair done perfect and earrings.

    LOUIS
    Look at you. You look like the cat’s meow.

    DAISY
    Thank you, sugar.

    LOUIS
    Where you going?

Daisy turns on him.

    DAISY
    You didn’t forget?

    LOUIS
    What’s the trouble?

    DAISY
    Trouble? You haven’t seen trouble.

    LOUIS
    Oh, I’ve seen trouble.

    DAISY
    Tell me you didn’t forget. You’re bringing me to a picture show. You promised.

    LOUIS
    What about Clarence?

    DAISY
    He’s at your mother’s house. I done took him myself.

She begins to cry.

    LOUIS
    Daisy, please. Honey, I have to work. I can’t cancel a gig. You understand? Why don’t you come and hear me play tonight? Look, you’re going to mess up all that pretty face you put on.

    DAISY
    No, you go. I’ll stay here and cry like I always do.
Louis picks up his horn to leave.

    LOUIS
    I’d really like you to come. I think it
    would be good for you to have a big time
    like we used to do.

She doesn’t move. He closes the door. She picks up her purse to follow him.

EXT. STREET - DAY

They walk arm-in-arm.

    DAISY
    Louis, I’m a forgive you just this once.
    You know why?

    LOUIS
    No, sweetie, why?

    DAISY
    Cause I love you.

INT. HENRY’S BAR - NIGHT

Louis plays trumpet with the BAND. Daisy dances with a guy and looks up at Louis.

Later Isaac whispers in Louis’s ear.

EXT. JOE’S GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Joe is neatly placing apples on a stand when Louis arrives.

    LOUIS
    Mr. Joe.

    GROCER JOE
    Louis.

He wipes hands then pats Louis on the back.

    GROCER JOE (CONT’D)
    Good to see you, kid. Listen, I got a
    message for you.

    LOUIS
    Isaac told me to come by, you wanted to
    tell me yourself.
INT. JOE’S GROCERY STORE - MORNING

Joe fills a back with bread and red beans and rice.

GROCER JOE
Yeah, If it was anyone else, I wouldn’t be giving you this message. But you got a shot at something. Oliver wants you to catch the 10:30 train this Friday for Chicago. He said he’s got three months of gigs lined up for you.

Louis’s head is spinning. Joe hands him the bag.

GROCER JOE (CONT’D)
Take this to your mama.

Louis reaches in his pocket to pay.

GROCER JOE (CONT’D)
Take it; a going away present. You’re going, right?

LOUIS
Yeah. Yeah. Thanks.

He takes the bag.

GROCER JOE
Oliver’s calling back today. I almost forgot.

He reaches in his pocket and hands Louis an envelope. Louis opens it and pulls out a picture of LIL HARDING, 24, sophisticated, with her leg peeking through a slit in her skirt as she poses at a piano. He puts the envelope in his back pocket.

LOUIS
Tell him I’ll be there.

GROCER JOE
Don’t miss that train, Louis.

LOUIS
No, no sir.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Louis walks in a daze, noticing things. The Pie Man goes by.
PIE MAN
(Singing) Pies, pies for everyone, get your hot, sweet, pies, pies in the skies, a sun of pies, pies for everyone...

Mr. Babin wipes the window at the pawn shop. Louis takes in the sights as if he’s saying good-bye to the city.

INT. MAYANNE’S HOME – MORNING

Mayanne and Louis sit sipping coffee and eating biscuits and gravy.

MAYANNE
Son, this is what you’ve always dreamed of.

LOUIS
I know, but how am I going to tell Daisy?

MAYANNE
All I know is that you were excited until you started talking about Daisy.

LOUIS
Yeah.

MAYANNE
She hasn’t turned out too good huh?

LOUIS
I can’t say that.

MAYANNE
I knew from the day you were born that something big was going to happen to you. I just didn’t know what it was. I guess I tried to protect you.

She picks up the dishes.

MAYANNE (CONT’D)
They have some pretty bad ass gangsters in Chicago. You stay clear of that kind of mess.

LOUIS
Yes ma’am.
INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - DAY

Louis cautiously enters. Smoke rises from the stove. Daisy flips a pork chop in a pan.

LOUIS (V.O.)
Poor Daisy, she never could make food taste like Mayanne.

DAISY
Sit yourself down, I made you some lunch.

He sits next to Clarence, who is already finishing nibbling on a bone. She places a crispy pork chop on Louis’s plate and spoons some greens next to them.

LOUIS
This looks good, Daisy.

DAISY
I’m sorry I burnt the chops.

LOUIS
That’s alright. Clarence here likes them. Don’t you Clarence?

Clarence nods, focused on the task of getting every morsel of the bone.

DAISY
So how is Mayanne this morning?

LOUIS
She’s fine.

DAISY
What’s wrong? Cat got your tongue? That’s not like you Louis, not wanting to talk. Something’s eating you, and it’s not my pork chops.

LOUIS
No, Daisy, it’s not. They’re fine. Sit down.

DAISY
Oh no.

LOUIS
I got some good news and some bad news. I got a message from King Oliver to meet him in Chicago to play for the big time. The bad news is I have to leave for three months of gigs.
She starts cleaning up.

DAISY
That’s alright. I’ll be fine.

LOUIS
I’ll send money and letters. Mayanne can read them for you. And she said she’d take Clarence while I’m gone.

DAISY
Yes, I’ll be fine. When?

LOUIS
In a few days.

She is shaking now and sits down.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Daisy, this is good news.

DAISY
I know, I’m just afraid you going go to that big city and find some big time city girl.

Louis helps her clean up. They hug.

LOUIS (V.O.)
I thought Daisy was going to blow a gasket over me leaving, but I think she knew, there was no point in any more fussing.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Mayanne, Isaac, Mama Lucy, Clarence and Isaac stand at the platform next to the train. PASSENGERS walk around them and board the train.

Black Benny walks with Louis up to the platform. Daisy walks a few feet behind them.

BLACK BENNY
You find yourself a good white man, who’ll put his and on your shoulder and say, “That’s my nigger.” Then you going be good.

He pats him on the shoulder. Daisy kisses Louis.

DAISY
I’ll be here. I ain’t going no where’s.
MAMA LUCY
(To Louis) Try to stay out of trouble.

Louis shakes Isaac’s hand.

LOUIS
Try not to take too much care of things.

Isaac hugs him.

ISAAC
Oh man.

Mayanne gives him a big hug. Louis steps on to the train waving good-bye.

MAYANNE
Make your mama proud.

Daisy wipes away tears.

LOUIS
(To Daisy) I’ll send letters and money. Go to Mayanne’s to get her to read them for you.

Daisy waves. Louis disappears into the train.

INT. BACK STAGE - DAY

Louis carries his suitcases down a hallway. LIL, 23, well dressed, determined walks by. Louis recognizes her from the photo.

LOUIS
Hey.

She turns.

LOUIS (CONT’D)
Can you tell me where the band is rehearsing?

She looks at his bags.

LIL
Do I look like I carry bags.

Another band member, JIM, 27, a clean-cut guy interjects.

JIM
It’s this way. Follow me.
Lil stops before going into the ladies room watching Louis in his big soled shoes, CLUNKING along the hall. She shakes her head before closing the door.

LOUIS
What’s eating her?

JIM
Her, that’s the Lil Harding, college graduate, thinks she’s better than everyone.

LOUIS
Is that so? Still she’s pretty tight.

JIM
Don’t take that trip for biscuits.

INT. SHOW HALL - NIGHT

A WHITE AUDIENCE sits, dances and CLAPS in a large, fancy room with ornate lamps and decorated tables, WAITERS pour champaign and serve food from silver trays.

The BAND begins another song. Oliver stands center stage. Louis begins his section, clearly going off-book, because, Oliver looks over to him, but Louis’s eyes are closed. He only looks up to see Lil now looking at him. He finishes. This was clearly his way of saying “Take that,” to Lil.

A few MAFIA GUYS sitting at a table notice Louis and comment amongst themselves.

INT. BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Oliver stops Louis in the hall.

OLIVER
Little Louis, what happened with the first part.

LOUIS
Sorry Uncle Joe, I had to improvise a bit. Won’t happen again. I’ll remember my part.

MONTAGE
INT. SHOW HALL - NIGHT

Louis plays a short solo. PATRONS dance. Oliver plays his part. Louis plays small parts behind Joe. No one notices Louis anymore.

    LOUIS (V.O.)
    Uncle Joe kept giving me shorter and shorter solos and parts, I thought I must be playing badly. I wrote Mayanne and Daisy that I might be coming home sooner.

END MONTAGE

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Louis, Oliver and the band prepare to begin a recording. An ENGINEER sets levels and adjust the microphones.

    ENGINEER
    Okay, give me a little sound. Let’s see what we’ve got.

The band begins to play the song. Louis is clearly louder with clearer tone than Oliver.

    OLIVER
    Wait. Hold on.

The band stops. Oliver guides Louis to the back corner of the room. Louis looks disappointed.

    OLIVER (CONT’D)
    Okay, let’s try this thing again.

They play. Louis is still loud but not in the microphone. The Engineer gives Oliver the thumbs up. Lil plays her part while watching Louis play his.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Lil puts on lipstick and fluffs her hair. Then dusts some powder on her face. She examines herself in the mirror and smooths her skirt. She hears Louis’s CLUNKY shoes in the hallway and opens the door.

    LIL
    Hey there, Louis.

    LOUIS
    Hey, Lil.
He keeps walking. She follows.

**LIL**
Louis, don’t feel blue about the recording.

**LOUIS**
I had to play in the corner. I might as well just pack it in.

**LIL**
No, I’ve got a better idea. Why don’t you join me at one of Chicago’s cool cat joints.

**LOUIS**
I thought you were all high and mighty and educated and all.

**LIL**
You got one of those right.

**LOUIS**
Which one?

**LIL**
All.

**INT. CHICAGO BAR - NIGHT**

Everything is red; Louis and Lil sit sipping their cocktails listening to a jazz PIANIST. A few PATRONS move about in the late night hours, grabbing coats, sipping drinks, tapping their fingers.

**LIL**
Look, Louis, Oliver put you in the back because you play so well.

**LOUIS**
He told me just the other day that I still need some more lessons.

Lil laughs at this.

**LIL**
He’s just jealous if you want to know the truth. It’s true.

**LOUIS**
Lil, I think you’re pretty swell, as you Chicago folks say, but I don’t believe a word of it.
LIL
How long have you been here?

LOUIS
You mean in Chicago playing with Uncle Joe?

LIL
Yeah.

LOUIS
Coming on four months.

LIL
I think it’s about time.

She takes his hand and leads him away. He smiles a knowing smile.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT – MORNING

Daisy places an unopened letter in a drawer and closes it.

INT. DRESSING ROOM – NIGHT

Jim tunes his base. Louis polishes his trumpet. Daisy dabs powder on her face.

JIM
I’m telling you, it’s true. He’s keeping some of our take.

LIL
I told you, Louis.

LOUIS
Uncle Joe wouldn’t do that. And if he did maybe he deserves it. He got us all this gig.

JIM
Don’t go telling him I told you. I don’t want to end up in the can.

LOUIS
Hey lighten up, man.

INT. OLIVER’S DRESSING ROOM – NIGHT

Oliver hides a gun in his trumpet case.
INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The Mafia guys sit in the dimly lit room when Louis enters. He is startled and reflexively puts his hands up. The guys LAUGH.

MAFIA GUY 1
Sit down Mr. Armstrong. We’re not going to shoot you.

Louis hesitates.

MAFIA GUY 1 (CONT’D)
My boss owns this club and a couple more like it.

Louis finally goes to sit down.

MAFIA GUY 1 (CONT’D)
He liked your playing a while back.

MAFIA GUY 2
He still likes his playing, Joey. Let’s get to the point.

MAFIA GUY 1
He wants you to play at another club without Oliver. He stays here.

LOUIS
I appreciate your offer boys. You’re not the first trying to get me to leave Mr. Oliver.

MAFIA GUY 2
Is he playing hard ball or something. Joey? Richy?

MAFIA GUY 3
Yeah boss, looks that way.

MAFIA GUY 1
We can pay you well for your trouble. We know Oliver’s keeping some of your take.

LOUIS
I know that sir. Just figured it was his share since he got the job.

MAFIA GUY 2
You could do the same thing when you work directly for us.
LOUIS
Thank you again sir. But I can’t leave
King Oliver. I just can’t.

MAFIA GUY 1
This offer’s not coming around again.

MAFIA GUY 2
Come on boys. If you change your mind.

He drops a card on the table. Louis picks it up. Louis
sits mesmerized and stunned. Jim and Lil enter.

JIM
What did those guys want?

LIL
Kept you locked in here. My heart was
beating out of my chests.

LOUIS
So was mine. Lil, so was mine.

LIL
What? You still haven’t answered the
questions.

LOUIS
Nothing, I just.

Louis smiles.

JIM
Louis?

LOUIS
Oh, I told them no. They wanted me to
have my own show at one of them other
clubs, even told me about Joe on the
take.

JIM
I told you.

LOUIS
Joe’s not and like I said, if he is...

LIL
I’m glad you didn’t say yes.

LOUIS
I guess I did the right thing. I just
did what my mama would have told me to do
for once.
LIL
Well I’d like to meet her one day.

Jim exits.

LIL (CONT’D)
Louis, you’ve been playing second fiddle long enough. It’s time you moved on, but not like they want you to, on your own terms.

LOUIS
Lil, I’m not leaving Joe.

INT. LIL’S ROOM – NIGHT
In a dark bedroom, Lil kisses Louis. Their song of passion has just ended.

LIL
Why do they call you Little Louis?
Nothing little about you.

LOUIS
That’s what they called me when I was a kid running around after King Oliver. What did you study at college?

In between kisses.

LIL
I studied useful things like poetry, and geography so I know where things are, and mathematics so I can add things up and keep track of who’s taking what from whom. And I studied music of course.

LOUIS
I can feel that. Lil, I might have to marry you, you keep this up.

LIL
Louis I can’t marry you, a man who plays second.

He rolls on top of her.

LOUIS
Lil, I have to get a divorce first.

She pushes him off.
LIL
Well that should be at the top of your list.

INT. LOUIS AND DAISY’S APARTMENT - MORNING

Mayanne sips coffee at the little table. Daisy nervously takes a pan of biscuits out of the oven.

DAISY
I know I wasn’t much of a wife in the cooking.

MAYANNE
Well now you know how to make biscuits real good like a man will like them.

Daisy sits at the table and sips her coffee.

DAISY
It’s been so long. Seems like forever. He’s never coming home is he?

Mayanne passes the paper to her.

MAYANNE
He just wants you to sign the divorce papers and both of you can make your own ways.

DAISY
You want jam with your biscuits?

MAYANNE
I want you to make peace with my son, and yes, I’ll take some jam.

EXT. CHICAGO COURT HOUSE - DAY

Louis and Lil in a white suit dress walk hand-in-hand.

INT. CAB - DAY

Lil and Louis sit in the back of the cab. The cab driver notices them kissing.

CAB DRIVER
Hey, no necking in my cab.

LIL
Louis, I’m telling you, you will love it.
LOUIS
You want me to take a bite out of the big apple huh?

He bites her neck.

CAB DRIVER
Hey, I said no necking.

INT. OLIVER’S DRESSING ROOM – NIGHT
Lil and Louis sit casually while Oliver fastens his tie.

LIL
See Mr. Oliver, we’re married now, and I have family in New York.

OLIVER
Louis is from New Orleans. That’s where his family is.

LIL
He’s my family now. And Mayanne is coming to visit.

LOUIS
Maybe to live, if I can convince her that she can find cayenne pepper in the stores here too.

OLIVER
Lil, don’t you think you’d better get dressed for the show?

LIL
Yeah Joe, I’ll see you on stage. Louis?

OLIVER
He’ll be right there.

She leaves.

OLIVER (CONT’D)
Little Louis, not so good. I could see Lil leaving. I could see you taking a liking to her, but you? Can I be on the level?

LOUIS
Yeah.
OLIVER
I can replace Lil Harding with any damn piano player. She’s a dame with pretty legs, that’s why I kept her around, but you.

LOUIS
Uncle Joe, that’s my wife now.

OLIVER
Listen, think about staying, Louis. You’ve got a future here with me. We could do amazing things. Heck, we already have. I remember when you came by with that black-eye asking me how I played this thing. Don’t let some dame use you.

LOUIS
I’m going to clean-up for the show.

He goes to the door. Oliver stops him.

OLIVER
Just tell me you’ll think about it.

INT. SHOW HALL - NIGHT
Louis plays a his part behind Joe. The AUDIENCE CLAPS.

INT. BACK STAGE - NIGHT
Lil and Louis carry suitcases. Louis stops by Oliver’s door.

LOUIS
I have to say good-bye to my Uncle Joe.

LIL
He’s going to try to convince you to stay.

LOUIS
You trust me?

LIL
Why should I start trusting you now?

She playfully taps him. Louis knocks on the door then opens it. Lil continues down the hall then stops.
INT. OLIVER’S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Oliver is changing into a casual jacket when Louis enters.

    OLIVER
    So you’re leaving anyway? Couldn’t get you to change your mind?

    LOUIS
    No, Uncle Joe, you knew I’d like Lil.

    OLIVER
    I guess it is my fault. I deserve this. I’ll never forget seeing your face that day from the police car. It was the saddest thing.

    LOUIS
    I didn’t know you saw.

Oliver hugs him.

    OLIVER
    Go make New Orleans proud, kid.

INT. BACK STAGE - DAY

Lil and Louis prepare for a show. Louis tucks a star of David pendant into his shirt.

    LIL
    Louis, this is your first recording. You want it to highlight your playing not your singing.

    LOUIS
    Lil, I love ya.

He kisses her forehead.

    LOUIS (CONT’D)
    But I will do my own singing. I’m bringing a little bit of New Orleans to the world, and trust me, they will like it, like my Mayanne’s red beans and rice.

    LIL
    I hope you’re right, Louis.

    LOUIS
    Sure I’m right, sugar.
INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

Louis in a tuxedo and Lil and the BAND play to a packed white AUDIENCE.

1945

INT. QUEENS NEW YORK HOME - DAY

Louis sits at a desk typing. Lucille brings him a glass of lemonade. Louis takes a gulp.

    LOUIS
    Damn, that is good.

    LUCILLE
    You want to take a break, Louis? The kids are outside asking for you.

    LOUIS
    I’m nearly done now, Lucille. Just a little bit more.

Louis keeps typing.

1920

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

Louis takes a bow with an orchestra behind him. He begins to play “Heebie Jeebies”.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

In a recording room, the band plays, Louis is singing “Heebie Jeebies.” When he forgets the lyrics he begins to SCAT the words.

CREDITS ROLL between documentary photos and brief information about Louis and his visits to New Orleans and his amazing life.

“Louis Armstrong was the first performer to record “Scatting,” which years later would become a jazz standard. He evidently forgot the words and resorted to his innate improvisational style.”

“Lil Harding Armstrong died after playing a tribute to Louis Armstrong concert, one year to-the-day after his death.”
“Louis was such a fan of the health benefits of marijuana that he wrote a book about it. The book was not completed but is on display at Queens College where his archives are housed.”

“Louis was the first black performer to play some of the big white venues, breaking down doors he never intended to walk through, but he did - with inconspicuous grace.”

“He was also known as our “World Peace Ambassador.”

INT. BACK STAGE – EVENING
Louis reads the paper. Lil is applying lipstick.

LOUIS
Hey Lil, that reporter called me Satchmo. I told him some kids called me satchel mouth when I was a kid.

LIL
Satchmo.

LOUIS
Satchmo. I like it.

FADE OUT:
Vita

Callie Solano was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1967. She received her BA from the University of New Orleans in 1990. She hopes she is an inspiration to others to make it to the finish line no matter how long the journey.