

PIANO MAN

an original screenplay

by Rick Whelan

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FADE IN:

INT. PIANO BAR -- NIGHT

An upscale bistro in a five-star hotel. A distinguished looking gentleman - in his early 60s - sits at the keyboard. He wears a tuxedo.

A small group of beautiful night owls sits around the piano sipping their libations.

The piano player has just concluded a spirited version of Honeysuckle Rose. Enthusiastic applause.

PATRON #1

When did we stop listening to music
like that?

The piano player continues to "noodle" at the keyboard.

PATRON #2

Why did we stop listening to music
like that?

PATRON #1

Boogie-woogie's the music that made
America great!

PATRON #3

I couldn't agree more. Except it's
not called "boogie-woogie."

PATRON #1

Sure it is!

PATRON #2

My father had a stack of those old
records. I wonder whatever happened
to them . . .

PATRON #3

Boogie-woogie is totally different.

PATRON #2

Then it's ... you know ... bee bop!

PATRON #3

No. Bee bop came later.

PATRON #1

Well - I mean - no matter what they
call it ... it's all just the blues.
Everything started with the blues.
Jazz ... bee-bop ... rock and roll
...

PATRON #2

What's the name of that guy ...

(CONTINUED)

PATRON # 3
Here we go again!

PATRON #1
... that guy who invented jazz ...

PATRON # 3
Louis Armstrong invented jazz.

PATRON #2
He was a trumpet player. We're
talking about the piano. Good old-
fashioned boogie-woogie piano music.

PATRON #3
Oh God...

The piano player has begun playing - very softly - Jelly
Roll Morton's Deep Creek.

PATRON #1
(jabs his finger toward
the piano player)
That's it! That's the ticket! That's
exactly what we're talking about!

PATRON #2
Yessir! The great American songbook!

PATRON # 3
That's where it all started. Right
there!

The piano player smiles to himself. The piano bar patrons
are hypnotized by this music's gentle, insistent rhythm.
The music's fervor pours over us for a moment.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON PIANO PLAYER

PIANO PLAYER (V.O.)

It's called stride. That's the name they were trying to come up with. New Orleans barrel-rollers were pounding it out before America knew it had a songbook.

(pause)

I've been playing stride most of my life. A friend taught me a long time ago.

(pause)

Stride's the kind of music that can really get its hooks into you. Left hand's the heartbeat. But the right hand's where the fervor is. Like my friend used to say ... "Got to hang onto the fervor Frankie ... and never let it get boresome."

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

"FAIRCHILD, ILLINOIS - 1954"

A bustling little avenue of commerce. We are in The Heartland. Tidy storefronts line either side of the street in the late afternoon sun.

WE LINGER AS WE PASS the Elmwood movie theater. A banner of cut-out icicles and scarf-wearing penguins rims the marquee, announcing "We're REAL COOL inside!"

CONTINUING TO MOVE down the street. We pass The Palace of Sweets, a quaint soda shop where youngsters congregate to moon over ice cream concoctions and also one another.

BEGIN CREDITS

We next pass Trumbull's Hardware ... one of those old fashioned institutions that used to anchor every American small town from the late 19th century onward.

A group of men are outside talking. An elderly black man named GEORGE comes walking out of the store. He has a newspaper tucked under his arm.

GEORGE

(to one of the men
outside the store)

Good-night now, Mr. Trumbull.

JACK

Did you finish stacking those paint cans, George?

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE
All done, Mr. Trumbull.

JACK
The job's all done or you're all
done?

The others chuckle at George's expense.

GEORGE
(ignoring the insult)
Job's all done, Mr. Trumbull -- done
like a dinner!
(pause)
See you gentlemen tomorrow then.

JACK
Bright and early George!

GEORGE
Yessir!

Jack watches as George crosses the street and heads for the bus stop. He joins a group of younger black men. They greet George enthusiastically. George says something. The men roar with laughter. Two or three of them look over toward Jack.

ANGLE ON JACK

He reacts, suspecting perhaps that he is the butt of their joke.

Jack turns - catching the eye of one of the other men - a police officer - who has also witness this little scene.

ANGLE ON BUS STOP

Several buses are already parked at the curb, taking on passengers. George and the others ignore these buses.

After a moment WE HEAR the wheezing gasp of an over-worked bus engine on its last legs. The bus - markedly older and more dilapidated than the other buses - rounds the corner. Its destination sign reads "SHORT CREEK."

George and the other men get on the Short Creek bus.

The bus pulls out. WE FOLLOW IT for several blocks. Soon, a boy on a bicycle pulls onto the street and pedals alongside the bus.

The bicyclist, chubby JERRY BROMELL, is only fourteen but he has the sober demeanor of an adult.

WE WATCH as Jerry's ample derriere rocks back and forth on the bicycle seat.

(CONTINUED)

The bus pulls off onto a side street. We keep following Jerry, soon finding ourselves on a quiet, picturesque boulevard, lined with tidy brick or clapboard homes.

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Jerry pedals up the driveway of a small two-storey bungalow. He dismounts awkwardly, letting his bicycle roll and topple.

THE SOUND OF A PIANO comes drifting out of one of the house's open ground-floor windows. It's a kid's version of the "boogie-woogie."

Jerry crosses to the window and shouts inside.

JERRY

Hey Frankie! Let's go! We're gonna be late!

INT. TRUMBULL FRONT PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

FRANKIE TRUMBULL, also fourteen, sits at an old upright. He is a handsome boy, in a slightly brooding way.

Frankie's playing style is studied and a bit halting, but shows some promise.

Frankie hunches over the keyboard, ignoring Jerry. A shock of dark hair falls over his face.

JERRY

Hey Liberace!

Frankie stops playing. He turns and sees Jerry.

JERRY (CONT'D)

(singing)

"Take me out to the ball game ..."

Suddenly remembering, Frankie quickly slams the keyboard cover shut and leaps off the bench.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie and Jerry, both on bicycles, make their way down the driveway.

JERRY

If we step on it we'll still catch Fairchild's first ups.

FRANKIE

What was that you just called me?

(CONTINUED)

JERRY
 Liberace. He's on the television.
 I think my mother's in love with
 him.

They pedal down the street.

END CREDITS

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC FIELD -- DAY

A baseball game is in progress. Young nubile coeds, in front rows of the bleachers, jump and shout with wild abandon, cheering the Fairchild Falcons on.

CAMERA FAVORS a luscious blonde girl in this crowd. She's the kind of creature who smiles and raises the temperature of the Universe several degrees.

CAMERA FINDS Frankie and Jerry higher up in the bleachers. Jerry catches Frankie watching the blonde.

JERRY
 In your dreams, Trumbull. Girls
 like her don't even know guys like
 us exist.

FRANKIE
 A cat can look at a queen, can't he?

JERRY
 Sure ... just as long as he doesn't
 try to lap up some of the milk.

Jerry continues to watch Frankie carefully.

FRANKIE
 (feeling Jerry's eyes
 on him)
 Just watch the game, will you, Jerry!

JERRY
 (continuing to study
 Frankie)
 You're destined for greatness,
 Frankie. And I'm gonna write your
 life story. That'll be my meal
 ticket.

FRANKIE
 It better be a best-seller 'cause
 you're gonna need quite a lunch
 bucket!
 (Jerry laughs - Frankie
 is the only one from
 whom he'll tolerate
 fat jokes)

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE ON: The scoreboard: "Springfield 5 - Fairchild 4." One out in the bottom of the ninth inning.

The Fairchild Falcons are having their last at-bat. The Springfield pitcher burns one across the plate.

UMPIRE

Steeee-rike three! You're out!

The batter stages a mild protest before retiring. Two outs. CAL TRUMBULL, Frankie's older brother, steps up to the plate.

At eighteen, Cal is a handsome, athletic young man. We can see in an instant, by the way Cal handles himself, that he is a natural-born hero - wildly popular with the girls and well respected by his peers - everything, in fact, that Frankie is not.

JERRY (O.S.)

Don't worry, Frankie. Your big brother will show 'em who's boss.

Spitting on his hands, Cal bends down to scoop up some dirt, rubbing the spit-and-dirt mixture into the bat handle...

A CHEER rises up from the bleachers. The group of girls, led by the blonde, go wild, exhorting Cal to heroic feats.

CLOSE ON a Fairchild base-runner parked on first.

BASE-RUNNER

C'mon Cal baby! C'mon kid! Let's go kid! ...

Cal positions himself at home plate, adjusting his footing, digging in ... laying the bat out over the plate in intense concentration ...

ANGLE ON FRANKIE AND JERRY

Both of them are suddenly swept up in the game's drama.

JERRY

Relax. It's in the bag.

ANGLE BACK ON CAL

The picture of concentration.

FRANKIE (O.S.)

How do you mean?

The pitcher reaches back and hurls an "Aspirin tablet" across the plate.

UMPIRE

Strike one!

(CONTINUED)

JERRY (O.S.)
It's so obvious.

Cal does some more adjusting at the plate.

JERRY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
The Fates ... or God ... or The Tooth
Fairy - whoever runs the show up
there ... they don't set up guys
like your brother to lose.

The pitcher again delivers heat. Cal takes a monster cut - and misses.

UMPIRE
Stee-rike two!!

Cal, just a bit flustered, steps away from the plate to collect his composure. More spit, more dirt, etc.

FRANKIE (O.S.)
You sure about that?

JERRY (O.S.)
Positive. It's Jerry Bromell's Third
Rule of the Universe. Winners win.
The rest of us slobs lose.

Cal steps back up to the plate, his face tight with resolve.

A SERIES OF SHOTS:

The cheering girls, silent at last, watch in great anticipation.

Cal's teammates watch, transfixed, from the dugout.

Frankie and Jerry, afraid to move a muscle, their wide-eyed stares bearing witness to the drama unfolding before them.

The Springfield pitcher reaches back for all he's worth. The ball leaves his hand. Everything stops as the tiny white orb makes its journey to the plate. Cal tenses his jaw muscle. A tiny bead of sweat drops from his brow.

CLACK! The bat connects. The ball soars over the infield ... over the outfield ... over the neighboring houses. It's gone! The Falcons pour out onto the field as Cal makes his way around the bases. As he reaches home plate, he is mobbed by his teammates.

ANGLE ON FRANKIE AND JERRY

Watching all this from the stands. Jerry turns and gives Frankie an 'I told you so' grin.

EXT. SUBURBAN FAIRCHILD STREET -- DAY

Frankie and Jerry, walking their bikes, amble along, on their way home from school after the game.

JERRY

The perfect ending! Homer could've written it. Shakespeare even.

FRANKIE

That's always the way it's been with Cal.

JERRY

Must be tough being his brother.

FRANKIE

Tough?

JERRY

Competition-wise. There's Cal the Amazing ... and then ... there's you.

FRANKIE

Gee Jerry, I never thought of it quite like that.

JERRY

I don't mean it like that. You know I'm expecting big things from you, Frankie. I'm just curious about junk like that.

The two walk along in silence for a moment. Jerry bends over to pick up a stone. He tosses it down the street.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Any big plans this summer?

FRANKIE

Like always ... mow some lawns ... shag some golf balls. I need something that pays better.

(pause)

What about you? Summer school again?

JERRY

(nods)

My old man won't be satisfied 'til I have an element named after me.

FRANKIE

Jerrium! I like it!

Cal comes running up from behind. He puts his hands on both their shoulders and vaults between them.

(CONTINUED)

CAL

Hey worms!

JERRY

Well well well ... if it isn't our
Golden Boy!

Cal tussles Frankie's hair. There is affection in the
gesture.

CAL

What are you two clowns up to?

JERRY

Just basking in the glow of your
super-human achievements!

CAL

(modestly)
No big deal.

JERRY

Maybe not to you guys on Mount
Olympus. But to us slobs here on
planet Earth ... a very big deal
indeed!

A car passes - a souped-up Ford roadster full of teenagers.
Its horn blows. Then it stops. A girl sticks her head out
the window. It's the blonde from the cheering section.

ANGLE ON CAR:

BLONDE

Hey Cal! C'mon! We'll give you a
lift!

BACK ON Cal, Jerry and Frankie.

JERRY

Go to them, Cal! Dazzle them with
your aura!

Cal takes off for the car.

CAL

OK! ... wait up!

FRANKIE

Hey Cal!

Cal stops ... turns ...

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Nice goin'.

CAR HORN SOUNDS

(CONTINUED)

CAL
(a million-dollar
smile)
Thanks Frankie. See you at supper.

Cal tears off to join his adoring fans. As he reaches the car, a door flies open and he is drawn into the warm vortex of his admiring fans.

ANGLE BACK ON FRANKIE AND JERRY

JERRY
Yessir! Pure gold!

CLOSE ON Frankie as he watches Cal being swept down the street in the triumphal chariot.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUMBULL FRONT PARLOR -- LATE AFTERNOON

Frankie is seated at the piano. He plays a chord with his left hand. Then with his right hand he plunks out a rudimentary version of St. Louis Blues.

After the initial three bars he goes back and repeats the phrase. Then he plays it a third time. With each repetition Frankie adds a few flourishes.

He then plays the next three bars. The piece is definitely progressing. Frankie smiles.

As a kind of celebration, he launches into his boogie-woogie.

HELEN (O.S.)
Frankie! Supper!

CUT TO:

INT. TRUMBULL DINING ROOM -- EVENING

The Trumbulls are seated at the dining room table, consuming the evening meal. Cal and Frankie are flanked by their father JACK TRUMBULL (one of the men from the hardware store), a physically fit, spare man in formal shirt and tie and wire-rimmed eye glasses; and their mother HELEN TRUMBULL, an attractive, subdued woman with a generous face and a touch of sadness around the eyes.

JACK
I understand we had some heroics on
the baseball diamond this afternoon.

FRANKIE
Cal really tagged that ball! You
should have seen it!

(CONTINUED)

JACK
Tell us about it, Cal! Frankie ...
pass the butter, please?

Frankie passes the butter.

CAL
(in a bid to play
things down)
I got lucky with a fast ball.

FRANKIE
Everyone went nuts!

JACK
Great players make their own luck!
Isn't that right Frankie?

FRANKIE
Yessir.

CAL
Dad ... I need you to call Uncle
Billy for me. Ask him when he needs
me to start.

HELEN
He's busy planting now. You could
probably start in a couple of weeks...

CAL
Could you call him for me?

Jack nods.

HELEN
(to Frankie)
What was your day like, dear?

Frankie shrugs - a bit embarrassed at the sudden attention.

FRANKIE
OK I guess.

HELEN
I heard you practicing. That piece
is coming along nicely.

JACK
(to Cal)
You were born with a gift, son. A
God-given athletic gift. Now it's
up to you to make it pay off ...

(CONTINUED)

CAL
(with a glance at
Frankie - he's heard
this before)
Yessir.

JACK
With your natural athletic abilities
... if you keep your grades up you'll
be able to write your own ticket to
just about any school in the country.
Yessir! Any school!

They continue to eat in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUMBULL KITCHEN -- EVENING

Helen is at the sink doing the dishes. Frankie is drying.

HELEN
I'm OK here if you have some
practicing you want to do, Frankie.

Frankie shakes his head. They work in silence for a moment.

FRANKIE
Do you think Dad would ask Uncle
Billy if I could have a job this
summer too?

HELEN
You mean on the farm?
(Frankie nods)
What about your yard work? And your
job at the country club?

FRANKIE
I want a real job.

HELEN
Aren't those real jobs?

FRANKIE
No! They're 'kid' jobs!

HELEN
Oh.

FRANKIE
Cal was about my age when he started
at Uncle Billy's ...

HELEN
It's farm work, Frankie. Back-
breaking work ... and long hours.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

So?

The front door bell rings.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

I never seem to be able to save up
enough money from those crummy jobs
of mine.

HELEN

Go see who's at the door, dear.

INT. TRUMBULL FRONT HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

The door bell rings once more. Frankie crosses in and opens
the door.

SHERIFF GRAHAM BIGELOW is standing on the front step. He is
a man in his mid- to late-40s. He has the creased, flushed
face of a drinker.

BIGELOW

Evening Frankie. Your dad home?

FRANKIE

Sure, Sheriff. C'mon in.

Sheriff Bigelow steps in to the front hall. Frankie turns
and shouts in no particular direction.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Dad?!!! Someone to see you!

JACK (O.S.)

I'm in the den.

FRANKIE

(to the Sheriff)

He's in the den.

JACK (O.S.)

Show him in, Frankie!

BIGELOW

(winks at Frankie)

Sorry for the trouble, son.

FRANKIE

Oh ... no trouble. Follow me...

Frankie starts off toward the den, followed by the Sheriff.

INT. TRUMBULL KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Helen is still at the sink. Frankie re-enters.

(CONTINUED)

HELEN
Who was it, dear?

FRANKIE
Sheriff Bigelow. For Dad.

HELEN
(a slight look of
concern)
Did he say what he wanted?

Frankie shakes his head.

FRANKIE
So will you talk to Dad? About my
working for Uncle Billy?

HELEN
Oh Frankie ... I don't know. I don't
know how much help Uncle Billy really
needs ...

FRANKIE
(frustrated)
I can see me when I'm forty! Still
mowing lawns and shagging golf balls!

HELEN
But you're different than Cal,
sweetie.

FRANKIE
(defensive)
What's that supposed to mean?

HELEN
It means God didn't make two things
the same on this whole earth! You
have your piano. That's your gift.
That's the one thing that makes you
different from everyone else.

FRANKIE
That -- and those lousy nickle-and-
dime jobs!

CLOSE ON Helen as she wrestles with this conundrum. She recognizes Frankie's need to grow up, but he is her youngest and she has always indulged herself in babying him just a little bit.

INT. TRUMBULL DEN -- CONTINUOUS

Jack and Sheriff Bigelow.

(CONTINUED)

BIGELOW
 (conspiratorial)
 Fairchild's a beautiful little town,
 Jack. A town that works, by God.
 (Jack nods)
 A town like ours doesn't just happen.
 It takes a lot of work -- and co-
 operation . . .
 (pause)
 A democracy only works when everyone
 co-operates.

JACK
 What's this got to do with me?

BIGELOW
 You ever wonder what would happen if
 our friends down in Short Creek all
 of a sudden decide they don't want
 to co-operate anymore?
 (pause)
 Things are changing in this country.
 Sometimes there's no good reason for
 change. There are some men in this
 town who like things the way they
 are. They think too much change can
 be a dangerous thing ...

CLOSE ON JACK -as it sinks in what Sheriff Bigelow has come
 to talk about.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Frankie is in bed listening to the radio.

FM ANNOUNCER
 ... one of the technically dazzling
 piano soloists of the late ragtime
 era, Honeybear Powell was reportedly
 a massive man whose hand could span
 an incredible fourteen keys! Sadly,
 he recorded only sporadically before
 dropping out of sight sometime in
 the mid-1930s. We'll never know for
 sure. All we have are the few
 recordings this largely unheralded
 giant of the stride piano left behind.
 Here's Powell now - recorded in
 Chicago in 1933 - with Junk Man Rag.

WE HEAR a very scratchy recording of Honeybear Powell pounding
 out Junk Man Rag. Frankie's eyes are wide with wonder as he
 listens.

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

CLOSE ON Frankie's hands as he places an old 78-rpm record on his portable player. Then he swings the arm over and drops the needle into the groove.

WE HEAR Meade "Lux" Lewis's rendition of Honky Tonk Train Blues. The boys listen for a moment.

JERRY
(unimpressed)
Sounds like he lost the melody.

FRANKIE
He hasn't lost it. He just doesn't
care too much about it.

JERRY
Pretty strange . . .

CLOSE ON Frankie

FRANKIE
This guy on the radio last night -
he had an fourteen-note span!

JERRY
What's that?

Frankie indicates a distance with both hands.

FRANKIE
That's how much keyboard that guy
could cover with one hand!

JERRY
What guy?

FRANKIE
This guy on the radio last night.
Honeybear somebody ...

Jerry listens to the music for a moment.

JERRY
Anyone ever tell you you've got weird
taste when it comes to music?

FRANKIE
I got a whole bunch of these records.

JERRY
Same weird stuff?

FRANKIE
Old-time stuff. I sort of collect
them. Old man Burgess saves 'em for
me.

(CONTINUED)

Frankie gets a small stack of 78s from the bureau's bottom drawer.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
... he doesn't put them out on
display. You got to ask for them
special.

Jerry takes the top record ... examines it.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
They call them "race records." Most
white people don't even know about
them.

They listen for a moment.

JERRY
So what's the big deal?

FRANKIE
Well ... how does it make you feel?

JERRY
Hungry. How about you?

FRANKIE
(thoughtful)
It's hard to explain. It sort of
takes you outside yourself.

JERRY
Never been there.

FRANKIE
Like it's saying ... no matter what
happens ... no matter how bad you
feel ... it's Ok. 'Cause everything's
gonna be all right in the end.

JERRY
You hearing all that?

Jerry shrugs. Frankie stops the record and takes it from the turntable. Then he takes the record Jerry is holding and carefully puts it on the turntable.

FRANKIE
That's just for starters
... listen ...

A chord is blasted out by a trumpet and a pump organ. Then Bessie Smith launches into her 1925 version of St. Louis Blues.

JERRY
Who's that?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

Bessie Smith. She recorded that in 1925.

(they listen)

She was in a car crash. They wouldn't let he into the white hospital. While they were driving around looking for the colored one ... she bled to death.

CLOSE ON Frankie and Jerry as Bessie's haunting sounds continue. Frankie smiles at the potency of his secret.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUMBULL DINING ROOM -- EVENING

The family consumes the evening meal in silence for a moment.

ANGLE ON

Jack, as he stops eating and looks around the table. He seems to be looking for an opportunity to speak. Finally...

JACK

I ... I need everyone's attention for a moment?

HELEN

(a look of concern)
What is it, Jack?

Cal and Frankie look up from their plates.

JACK

Something has come up.

HELEN

Is there trouble at the store?

JACK

No ... It's what Graham Bigelow came to see me about the other night.

Helen, Cal and Frankie have put down their forks. Jack has their full attention.

JACK (CONT'D)

Seems like there's this committee. Ed Scovill's on it ... and Jim Gilbert...

CAL

(a touch of sarcasm)
Wow! Fairchild's movers and shakers ...

(CONTINUED)

JACK

They're just good hard-working men
Cal.

(pause)

This committee's looking for someone
they can support for mayor ...

The others react.

JACK (CONT'D)

Graham asked if I might be interested.

HELEN

Oh Jack ... that's wonderful!

CAL

Way to go, Dad!

FRANKIE

Republican or Democrat?

JACK

Well ... neither really. It's just
that this committee -- they see some
disturbing signs in Fairchild ... in
the whole country, really. Signs
that we're getting away from the
principles that made us great.

FRANKIE

What kind of signs, Dad?

CLOSE ON CAL as he listens to his father.

JACK (O.S.)

Just ... change for the sake of
change. "Progress" that's really
not progress at all ...

CAL

Who else is on this committee?

JACK

Ken Sherman ... Tate Washburn ...
Vern Sellers ... why?

CAL

I thought so.

JACK

Something wrong with these men, Cal?

CAL

Well ... Vern Sellers won't let
Negroes eat at The Sweets. Is that
the kind of change they're talking
about?

(CONTINUED)

JACK

I don't think you've got your facts straight, son.

CAL

Bernice Willmore told me she and her little sister sat there once for almost an hour. Nobody would wait on them. She finally got up and left.

JACK

(a flash of anger)

You'd better be damn sure Bernice Willmore isn't making up stories before you go spreading them around!

FRANKIE

Why would she lie, dad?

JACK

I don't know ... you tell me.

CAL

I just think you should find out what kind of changes these guys are talking about before you agree to be their candidate.

JACK

And I think you should understand that this country was built on certain standards ... certain traditions ...

FRANKIE

Like not letting Negroes eat ice cream?

HELEN

Frankie ...

JACK

(trying to control
his anger)

These men worked their fingers to the bone making this town what it is today. And I won't have their integrity questioned while I'm the head of this household!

An uneasy silence settles. Everyone resumes eating.

INT. TRUMBULL'S HARDWARE -- DAY

Frankie enters carrying his piano books. There are no customers at the moment. GEORGE is sweeping the floor. Jack Trumbull approaches and interrupts his work.

(CONTINUED)

JACK
I hope you put something down for
the dust, George.

GEORGE
Yessir.

JACK
When are you gonna get to the seed
room? The place is a disgrace.

GEORGE
Soon as I finish up here.

JACK
What's gotten into you lately, George?

GEORGE
Sir?

JACK
Don't give me that "sir" crap. I
haven't got a decent day's work out
of you in months. Is there some
sort of problem?

GEORGE
No Mr. Trumbull. No problems.

JACK
I'll give you five minutes to finish
up here and then I want you to get
back to that seed room. Do you
understand?

GEORGE
Yessir.

Jack turns -- sees Frankie.

JACK
Be with you in a minute, Frankie.

Jack crosses the length of the store and climbs the stairs
to his office. An awkward pause.

GEORGE
Hello there Frankie. How are you
keeping yourself?

Frankie takes a candy from the big jar on the counter.

FRANKIE
Hiya George.

GEORGE
Still partial to butterscotch?

(CONTINUED)

Frankie looks at the candy wrapper. He smiles at George.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Anything I can help you with, son?

FRANKIE

I just came for some money ... for my piano lesson.

GEORGE

Oh yes ... and how is that playing comin' along?

FRANKIE

OK ... I guess.

GEORGE

Well son ... you just keep at it. It's a wonderful thing to be able to sit down at a party or a dance and play a few tunes.

(he winks)

The young ladies just love it.

FRANKIE

I don't know if I'll ever be that good, George.

GEORGE

Just keep practicing. Keep pounding those keys, Frankie. Before long you'll be playing like the Honeybear himself.

FRANKIE

(a flash of recognition)

Who?

GEORGE

Mister Honeybear Powell! I tell you Frankie, he's one of the greatest piano men ever!

FRANKIE

You've heard him play!?

GEORGE

He's down at Fool's right now. He darn near tore the roof off that place last night!

FRANKIE

Fool's?

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

Fool's Paradise. That's a nightspot
we got down in Short Creek.

(he resumes sweeping)

Yessir, Frankie ... you got to get
yourself down to Fool's one of these
nights. Let Mr. Honeybear lay some
serious keyboard on you! That man
is one big bunch of something comin'
along, I can tell ya ...!

INT. GRACE HIGGINS' FRONT PARLOR -- DAY

Frankie sits at Grace's ornate old upright, his hands on the
keyboard, large silver dollars balanced on the backs of his
hands.

GRACE HIGGINS, Frankie's Victorianesque piano teacher, paces
behind Frankie as he executes a series of increasingly
difficult scales. Grace's patter is sung as vocal
accompaniment to the scales.

GRACE

Keep your hands perfectly poised
over the keyboard ... back straight
and feet planted firmly on the floor
... eyes straight ahead Frankie ...
even notes and don't forget to breath
three four - and now we come back
down...

CLOSE ON Frankie ... his eyes slightly glazed over as he
executes the scales. He's a thousand miles away as Grace
Higgins drones on...

CUT TO

EXT. A STREET IN FAIRCHILD -- ABOUT AN HOUR LATER

Frankie slowly ambles along the street. His piano music is
tucked under his arm. He stops in the middle of a small
bridge. The bridge is slightly elevated, giving Frankie a
vantage point from which to glimpse a section of town below
him - Short Creek.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.:

Across a clearing, tiny houses line an intersecting network
of mostly gravel roads. Smoke climbs from the houses' stove-
pipe chimneys. A train whistle sounds its mournful cry as a
freight crawls slowly along Short Creek's raggedy outskirts.
Frankie's gaze sweeps the area, finally coming upon a squat,
slightly dilapidated building with a tarpaper roof. A hand-
lettered sign nailed over the front entrance announces that
this is "Fool's Paradise."

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON FRANKIE:

As he stares at this foreign (and to him, slightly exotic) landscape. He's wondering if, at this very moment, Honeybear Powell may be guarding his treasure trove of musical secrets down inside this inconsequential little shack.

JACK (O.S.)

Frankie!!

ANOTHER ANGLE. Frankie is snapped out of his reverie. He turns and sees his father parked on the side of the road in his Trumbull Hardware delivery van.

JACK (CONT'D)

What in God's name are you doing
over on this side of town, son?

FRANKIE

Oh ... just ... I was just taking a
walk ...

JACK

Way over here?
(Frankie shrugs)
Get in. I'll drive you home.

Frankie slowly crosses to his father's van and gets in. He closes the door. The van drives off.

INT. TRUMBULL HARDWARE VAN -- CONTINUOUS

Jack driving. Frankie watching the scenery pass.

JACK

That's a pretty rough part of town.
No place to be caught on your own.

FRANKIE

You ever hear of Fool's Paradise?
It's a nightclub or something.

JACK

It's no nightclub. It's a two-bit
gin mill.

FRANKIE

George was telling me about it.

JACK

You mean my George?

FRANKIE

He said they've got this really great
piano player down there.

JACK

Oh yeah ...?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

I was wondering ... could we maybe
go down there sometime?

JACK

(distracted)

Hmm?

FRANKIE

Down to Short Creek. To listen to
this guy. They call him
Honeybear ...

JACK

Down to niggertown? We'll have to
work on our tans first.

FRANKIE

I mean if we went there just to
listen ...?

JACK

You can't be serious, Frankie!

FRANKIE

Why not?

JACK

Because it's a different world down
there. There's a thousand things
going on down there -- and they're
all bad.

FRANKIE

But ...

JACK

You stay in your own part of town.
Do you hear me?
(pause)
Frankie?!

FRANKIE

Yessir.

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- MORNING

Uncle Billy's truck pulls up in front of the house. HE SOUNDS
THE HORN. Cal comes running out of the house, a piece of
toast stuck between his teeth, dressed for farm work.

IN LONG SHOT we see Cal approach the truck. He is about to
get in. Billy says something to Cal.

After a moment, Cal turns and charges back in the house.

INT. TRUMBULL FRONT HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Cal comes running in the front door. He crosses to the bottom of the staircase.

CAL
(shouting upstairs)
Frankie! Rise and shine!!

Helen enters from the kitchen.

HELEN
What's the matter?

CAL
Uncle Billy says he could use another weeder.
(again shouting)
Let's go Frankie! You're a farm boy now!

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Once more, Cal comes charging out of the house. He gets into Uncle Billy's truck. Pause. Uncle Billy SOUNDS THE HORN several times.

Finally, Frankie comes stumbling out of the house. Helen hands him a lunch bag of hurriedly made sandwiches as he departs. He clearly is still half asleep. His shirttail is out. He's in his stocking feet, carrying his shoes ... a terminal case of bed-head.

Frankie somehow navigates his way to the truck. Cal motions toward the rear and Frankie climbs into the truck bed and collapses just as Uncle Billy drives away.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM FIELD -- DAY

Rows upon rows of sprouting corn stretch to the horizon.

CLOSE ON Cal and a wilting Frankie, hoes in hand, as they slowly weed their way down a row.

CAL
How're you coming?

FRANKIE
(every muscle aches)
Great!

CAL
You might be a little sore tomorrow.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

I won't feel a thing -- 'cause I'll
be dead!

Cal smiles.

CAL

It's gonna feel a whole lot worse
before it starts to feel better.

FRANKIE

That's OK ... I've been wanting to
get into shape.

CAL

Really?

FRANKIE

Sure. That way maybe I could be a
two-scholarship man too!

CAL

(smiles)

Oh yeah ... Big Jack gets a little
carried away sometimes, doesn't he?

FRANKIE

(imitating his father)

"Great players make their own luck,
isn't that right, Frankie?"

Cal shakes his head - just a little embarrassed.

CAL

Hizzoner the mayor!

FRANKIE

You think?

CAL

I don't know.

FRANKIE

He's got some pretty big wheels behind
him.

CAL

Yeah ... some of those wheels may be
a little wobbly.

FRANKIE

Like who?

(CONTINUED)

CAL

Well - Sheriff Bigelow's a real storm trooper. I've seen him in action. First sign of trouble - he's got his billy club out looking for a head to smash.

(Frankie reacts)

And I don't care what Dad says ... Vern Sellers won't serve Negroes at the Sweets. Like Bernice Willmore said -- he just lets them sit there 'til they get tired of waiting.

Pause. The boys continue hoeing.

FRANKIE

Dad goes ape whenever I talk about Short Creek. You'd think it was Red China or something.

CAL

All I'm saying is if he's gonna run for mayor he shouldn't let a lot of creeps try to tell him how to think.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- EVENING

Uncle Billy's truck pulls up in front. The door opens. Cal hops out and starts up the sidewalk. He stops ... turns to look back over his shoulder. He crosses back to the truck, leans over the back and rustles what looks like a pile of rags. Suddenly, the "rags" jump to life. It's Frankie ... every last ounce of energy having been spent.

With supreme effort, Frankie rolls out of the truck and starts the long trek up the sidewalk and into the house.

As Uncle Billy pulls away ...

UNCLE BILLY

See you tomorrow, boys!

INT. TRUMBULL FRONT HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Cal appears, followed by Frankie. Without stopping, Frankie heads up the stairs. Helen enters, having heard them enter.

HELEN

I've kept supper warm. You boys can wash up in the kitchen if you'd like.

Frankie just keeps walking ... up the stairs, down the hall. WE HEAR the bedroom door slam shut.

(CONTINUED)

CAL
He's kinda beat. We may not see him
for a week or two ...

EXT. A STREET IN FAIRCHILD -- NIGHT

A somewhat recovered Frankie walks with Jerry on one of their evening prowls - forays into the night where they wander and reflect on the unspeakable mysteries of life.

JERRY
Farm work tough?

FRANKIE
It's a killer!

JERRY
You gonna become one of those button-eared no-neck farm geeks?

FRANKIE
You bet! Then I'm gonna come lookin' for you, lard ass!

They walk on in silence for a moment.

EXT. SHORT CREEK BRIDGE -- CONTINUOUS

FROM A DISTANCE

Frankie and Jerry stop in the middle of the bridge.

FRANKIE
You ever wonder if you'll make it out of Fairchild alive?

JERRY
I've been out plenty of times.

FRANKIE
I mean out - like permanently. Different faces ... different air to breathe ...

Frankie gazes out over Short Creek.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Like over there for instance.

JERRY
Short Creek?

FRANKIE
You ever been there?

JERRY
Sure. Lots of times. It's on the way to my grandma's house.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

You ever walk around over there?

(Jerry smiles and
shakes his head)

My father caught me standing on this
bridge a couple of days ago. He
just about had a kitten!

JERRY

Love thy neighbor, Frankie ... as
long as he's the same color as thou
is.

FRANKIE AND JERRY'S P.O.V.:

The dilapidated structure known as Fool's Paradise comes
into focus. But at this hour, it seems to be the center of
a great deal of activity. Crowds of black people dressed in
their finest clothes make their way toward the front door.

JERRY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Looks like there's gonna be a party!

FRANKIE (V.O.)

They're coming to hear the music.
That guy's supposed to be over there.

JERRY

What guy?

FRANKIE

You remember - that guy I told you
about ...
(holds up his hand)
... fourteen notes?

JERRY

Oh yeah ... what's he doing playing
in that dump?

WE HEAR FOOTSTEPS

ANOTHER ANGLE

Tracking a man walking along the bridge. The angle is such
that we only see the man from the waist down. He is bigger
than life, with a checkered sports jacket, dark trousers and
white spats. He walks jauntily with a cane.

As he crosses the bridge, his great black hand swings into
view. He wears a flashy diamond ring on his little finger.

TRACKING THE WALKING MAN

We see Frankie and Jerry come into view IN THE BACKGROUND.
They watch, somewhat stymied, as the WALKING MAN passes.

(CONTINUED)

WALKING MAN
(a deep baritone)
Gentlemen ... effervescent evenin',
ain't it?

TIGHT ON Frankie and Jerry, mesmerized, as they watch the
WALKING MAN pass by...

JERRY
Who do you suppose that was?

FRANKIE
(whispering)
I'll bet you all the money in the
world that was Mister Honeybear
Powell.

CUT TO:

EXT. FARM FIELD -- DAY

Cal is driving an old tractor, pulling a disk cultivator
behind him. Frankie strings along behind, picking up any
stray rocks that happen to be kicked up.

Cal carefully navigates the tractor along the rows.

WE HEAR a loud CLUNK. Cal stops the tractor and looks around

CAL'S P.O.V.:

The disk blades. There is a large rock wedged between the
metal plates.

Cal whistles to Frankie - pointing to the lodged boulder.
Frankie hurries over. He tries kicking the boulder free,
with no success.

CAL
(shouting over the
tractor motor)
Try lifting the disk!

FRANKIE
Huh?

CAL
(making a lifting
motion)
The disk - lift it up!

Frankie tries. The disk won't budge.

FRANKIE
It's jammed!

Cal puts the tractor in neutral and hops off. He kicks at
the jammed rock. Nothing.

(CONTINUED)

Cal scans the immediate area for another rock to perhaps smash the first one free. Frankie soon loses interest in the task at hand. He climbs up onto the tractor seat for a rest.

Frankie is now leaning back in the tractor seat, his legs propped up on the steering wheel, trying to make himself as comfortable as possible.

Cal is jumping up and down on the lodged rock. It seems to be loosening. A few more jumps ... finally the rock is freed. Cal slips as the rock he is standing on becomes unlodged. He scrapes his shin against one of the disks.

CAL

Ow! Goddammit!!!

Cal's shout startles Frankie. He bolts upright. One of his legs brushes against the gear shift, engaging the gears with a ferocious grinding. The tractor lurches forward violently, then stalls.

ANGLE ON :

Cal, as he falls forward - the giant disk cultivator rolling over top of him, grinding his face and body into the ground.

ANGLE ON :

Frankie - in slow motion - turning. He sees Cal falling under the disk blades. He tries desperately to slam on the brakes ... disengage the gear shift ... throw it into reverse. Anything! But even though everything is moving very slowly, Frankie is paralyzed.

CAL SCREAMS. Frankie's mouth opens but what WE HEAR is Cal's distorted cry, mixed with a terrible gnashing of the tractor's gears.

The screen goes black.

INT. FAIRCHILD HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM -- DAY

This normally quiet, small-town hospital is now a maelstrom of activity. Medical staff bustle here and there with bags of blood and medicine and emergency gear. Uncle Billy, still in his farm overalls, stands talking to two police officers.

Frankie, covered in mud and blood and tears, sits alone in the waiting area, his eyes blank ... head lowered.

Suddenly Helen and Jack come rushing into the emergency room. They are momentarily lost in this sea of horror. Then Helen sees Frankie. She rushes to his side. Jack follows.

HELEN

Frankie! Thank God!

(CONTINUED)

JACK
Where's Cal?!!

Frankie's in shock.

JACK (CONT'D)
(shouting to anyone
who will listen)
Where's my Cal?!!!

A doctor still in his surgical scrubs approaches. He slowly reaches out and puts his hand on Jack's shoulder.

DOCTOR
I'm sorry Jack ...

Helen collapses in a chair, overcome with tears.

Jack puts his hands on the doctor's chest.

JACK
No! ... my God! No ...!!

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. FAIRCHILD CEMETERY -- DAY

Cal's funeral. The coffin rests on the supporting structure just prior to its being lowered into the grave. The mound of dirt beside the grave is covered by a section of artificial turf. A group of mourners stands motionless under a canopy, ready for the interment. A minister drones on but no one is really listening.

CLOSE ON: The front line of mourners.

Jack stares at Cal's coffin. Helen's eyes are closed. Frankie's face - a blank stare into some unknown middle distance.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The house is tomb-like in its silence. Frankie, still wearing the dark suit he wore at his brother's funeral, sits on the edge of the bed, staring at nothing more than the blank wall opposite him.

INT. TRUMBULL UPSTAIRS HALL -- NIGHT

Frankie pads gently down the hall. He stops before his mother's closed bedroom door. He hears silent sobbing coming from within. He moves on ...

INT. TRUMBULL DOWNSTAIRS HALL -- NIGHT

Frankie slowly reaches the bottom of the stairs. He crosses into the den. A clock ticks. The silence is palpable.

INT. TRUMBULL DEN -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie stops at the door. Jack is sitting motionless on the couch.

FRANKIE

Dad?

Jack looks up. Then he rises and takes a few steps toward Frankie.

JACK

(flat)

Make sure the lights are out when you're through down here.

Jack passes Frankie on his way out of the room.

JACK (CONT'D)

Just can't seem to get enough sleep lately. Maybe I'm coming down with something ...

He is gone.

INT. TRUMBULL FRONT HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie crosses to the coat hooks that are located beside the front door. Cal's high school varsity baseball jacket is hanging on one of the hooks. He reaches out and touches the jacket ... a kind of terrible talisman to a life that is no more ...

CUT TO:

EXT. STREETS OF FAIRCHILD -- A FEW EVENINGS LATER

Frankie and Jerry amble along.

JERRY

I hear they're gonna rename the stadium ... Cal Trumbull Field. That'd be cool ...

Frankie nods. The boys walk on.

JERRY (CONT'D)

How're your parents doing?

FRANKIE

They don't say much.

(CONTINUED)

JERRY
I guess that's natural.

FRANKIE
(he shrugs)
I guess...

JERRY
They say it takes time.

FRANKIE
Before what?

Jerry looks at Frankie. He starts to say something, but he can think of no answer. They move on.

INT. FAIRCHILD METHODIST CHURCH -- MORNING

"Two months later"

Sunday service. The minister drones on.

MINISTER
There will be a meeting of the
Fellowship Club next Thursday evening
in the church basement. And
immediately following the service
this morning, the Altar Guild will
meet ...

WE SLOWLY TRACK down a row of somber faces ... finally coming to Jack, Helen and Frankie.

EXT. FAIRCHILD METHODIST CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

A suddenly enlivened congregation exits the church, shaking hands with the preacher as they pass. Jack, Helen and finally Frankie slowly descend the church steps.

FRANKIE
I think I'll walk home.

HELEN
Are you sure. We were thinking of
stopping somewhere for breakfast.

FRANKIE
(moving away)
I'm not all that hungry.

HELEN
Will you be warm enough?

Frankie nods.

JACK
Don't be too long.

(CONTINUED)

Frankie moves off. A worried Helen watches him go.

EXT. FAIRCHILD STREET -- MORNING

The bridge overlooking Short Creek. Frankie again is staring out over the neighborhood -- concentrating on Fool's Paradise. His reverie is interrupted ...

GEORGE (O.S.)

Frankie?

Frankie snaps to. He turns and sees George approaching.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Beautiful morning, isn't it son?

(Frankie nods)

You out for a little stroll?

(again Frankie nods)

How you been doin' son?

FRANKIE

(automatic)

Just fine thank you.

GEORGE

I miss seeing you around the store.

FRANKIE

I've been ... kind of busy.

GEORGE

Oh yes -- I can understand that.

Busy.

(pause)

Well ... I best be on my way. You take care of yourself now, Frankie.

Frankie nods. George takes a few steps ... stops.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Say Frankie ... you headed in any particular direction?

FRANKIE

I was just ...

GEORGE

Reason is -- if you got some free time -- I'd like to take you some place.

FRANKIE

Where?

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE
(smiling)
Place where they can shoot you into
heaven without you even leavin' your
seat!

EXT. SHORT CREEK STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

George and Frankie walking along.

ANOTHER ANGLE - a police car is patrolling the neighborhood.

INT. PATROL CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Bigelow is behind the wheel

BIGELOW'S P.O.V.

George and Frankie approaching A.M.E. Hebron Baptist Church

CLOSE ON Bigelow. He stops the car and watches

EXT. A.M.E. HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH -- CONTINUOUS

A tidy white clapboard structure in the middle of Short Creek.
George and Frankie enter the church. Bigelow pulls up in
front and parks.

INT. A.M.E. HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH -- CONTINUOUS

Reverend Mason approaches George and Frankie

REV. MASON
Good morning gentlemen ...

GEORGE
Good morning Reverend. I brought a
guest with me this morning. This
here's Frankie Trumbull -- Jack
Trumbull's boy.

A hearty handshake

REV. MASON
Oh yes ... good morning to you,
Frankie Trumbull! Welcome to God's
house!

Rev. Mason escorts George and Frankie down the church's
center aisle. People in the front row scoot over to make
room.

The choir is in full swing -- My Lord What A Morning!

EXT. A.M.E. HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH -- CONTINUOUS

Bigelow still parked in front of the church.

INT. A.M.E. HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH -- MOMENTS LATER

Rev. Mason, now in his pulpit, looks down at George and Frankie in the front row.

REV. MASON

(a deep baritone)

This is indeed a morning for celebration! For the Lord has led a guest to us. Please join me in welcoming Mr. Frankie Trumbull ...

CONGREGATION

Welcome Frankie ... etc.

REV. MASON

And when God sees fit to send us a guest, what can we do but share our joy? Are you lonely, oh my brother? Then share thy little with another!

CONGREGATION

Amen, Reverend! Share ...

REV. MASON

Every so often ... and this morning is one of those "oftens," we have to change our plans a little and speak of something that's just flown into our hearts.

ANGLE ON the faces in the congregation

REV. MASON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

We all know that life is often hard ... harder for some than for others. And the ways of the Lord are sometimes puzzling.

CONGREGATION

Yes, brother ...

REV. MASON

And the Lord only tests those he knows can bear the load! The pure in spirit! It's all part of the plan. His Divine Plan! And so we got to remember ... that sometimes ... when things turn bad ... it's just not our fault!

CONGREGATION

No no! Praise God!

(CONTINUED)

REV. MASON

And yet - why is it - we want to
take credit for all the world's
heartache? We are not that powerful,
children. We're just one of the
flock.

(pause)

Join me in prayer, brothers and
sisters ... O heavenly Father ...
Where there is sadness, let us find
joy! Where there is despair ...
hope! Let us learn to console
ourselves with love ... let us learn
to forgive ourselves, O Lord ... for
it is in that sweet forgiveness that
we shall find everlasting peace,
amen.

CONGREGATION

Amen.

The choir begins to hum softly.

EXT. A.M.E. HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH -- CONTINUOUS

MUSIC CONTINUES, but heard from a distance, emanating from
inside the church.

Sheriff Bigelow is still parked on the road in front of the
church.

INT. A.M.E. HEBRON BAPTIST CHURCH -- CONTINUOUS

The soloist is leading the choir in Oh Glory ...

SOLOIST

(singing)

... and there is room enough in
Paradise
To have a home in Glory
Jesus, my all to Heaven is gone
To have a home in Glory
He whom I fix my hopes upon
To have a home in glory ...

The spiritual continues

CLOSE ON Frankie -- he is consoled.

INT. CAL'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

It is being kept like a shrine ... bed made, schoolbooks and
papers still neatly arranged on the desk - as if Cal had
just stepped out of the room for a moment.

Frankie enters. He wears pajamas and a robe. He stops,
slowly absorbing the strong sense of his brother which this
room still exudes.

(CONTINUED)

Frankie crosses to the bookcase above the desk. He runs his fingers along the spine of some of Cal's schoolbooks.

He comes to a framed picture, from some years before. It could have been taken on a Sunday morning after church. Cal and Frankie stand side-by-side, smiling out at the camera. Cal, around eleven, wears a short-sleeved white shirt and bow-tie. Frankie, around seven, is dressed in a shirt and a sweater vest. Cal has his arm protectively draped around Frankie's shoulder.

Frankie drinks in the picture's heartbreak.

INT. TRUMBULL KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Helen is sitting at the small kitchen table drinking a cup of tea. Frankie enters. He sits at the table.

FRANKIE

Sometimes ... at night ... I can
sort of feel him ... like he can't
bear to leave ...

HELEN

(smiling)

He was never a quiet child. Always
on the phone ... he had to keep in
touch...

(Frankie smiles)

You were the solitary one. With
your nose in a book or spending hours
at the piano.

FRANKIE

Jerry said he heard they were thinking
of naming the baseball field after
him.

HELEN

That would be nice.

EXT. SHORT CREEK BRIDGE -- EVENING

Frankie stands overlooking the neighborhood.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.:

Once again Fool's Paradise is a blazing hub of activity, as groups of people are seen streaming along the streets on the way to the club.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie stealthily makes his way around to the back, WE HEAR from inside the club wild shouts of joy, the tinkle of a thousand glasses and, most prominently, the wild, joyous

(CONTINUED)

articulation of a stride piano playing James P. Johnson's Carolina Shout.

Frankie is close up to the building now, just under the window. He pulls an old wooden crate over to the window, stands up on it and peers inside Fool's Paradise.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

The steamy, sweaty throng crowds the tiny dance floor.

And sitting at the upright is the man himself - James "Honeybear" Powell. Honeybear, a derby hat perched jauntily atop his head, is a massive presence. He doesn't so much play the piano as pound it into submission. Honeybear is probably somewhere in his early 60s. His girth has settled some. The temples are graying a bit. But he still is a force to be reckoned with.

His great round, brown face smiles down on the adoring crowd. He rocks the room with his rhythm ... his elemental life force ... and one of the greatest left hands in all piano-dom.

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

Close to the window now, peering in ... his face illuminated by the ambient, rosy glow streaming out of Fool's Paradise. Frankie is quite transfixed as he watches this human volcano of energy weave his spell over those gathered.

DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Frankie is seated at his desk. He is just finishing up a letter. He folds the letter and puts it in the envelope.

CLOSE ON the envelope as Frankie addresses it:

"Mr. Honeybear Powell
Fool's Paradise
(In Short Creek)
Fairchild, Illinois"

CUT TO:

INT. FAIRCHILD HIGH SCHOOL CAFETERIA -- THE NEXT DAY

Lunch. The walls of the crowded cafeteria echo with the energy of several hundred teenagers.

Frankie sits at a table by himself, trying to work up some enthusiasm for the ham sandwich in front of him.

Three girls are seated at an adjacent table. Cal's blonde friend is one of them.

(CONTINUED)

As they talk, they occasionally look over to Frankie, as if he might be the topic of their conversation.

CLOSE ON Frankie, feeling very alone in this teeming sea of energy and enthusiasm.

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

CLOSE ON Frankie. He is asleep. There is a knock at the door. Frankie's eyes snap open. Another knock ... softer.

HELEN (O.S.)
Frankie...?

FRANKIE
Mmm?

The bedroom door opens. Helen sticks her head in.

HELEN
Good morning...

FRANKIE
(rubbing his face -
embarrassed)
Morning.

HELEN
Better get a move on, Frankie. Church
is in half an hour.

Frankie moans ever so feebly. Helen crosses into the room.

HELEN (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

FRANKIE
I don't feel that good.

HELEN
Frankie...

FRANKIE
No honest!

Helen feels her son's forehead.

HELEN
You look fine to me.

FRANKIE
Well I don't feel fine.

CLOSE ON Helen, as she ponders Frankie's condition.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- A FEW MINUTES LATER

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Through the bedroom window, Frankie watches as Helen and Jack get in the car and drive away to church.

Frankie crosses from the window and hurriedly pulls on his pants.

CUT TO:

EXT. A STREET IN SHORT CREEK -- MORNING

Frankie approaches a seemingly deserted Fool's Paradise.

INT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie enters cautiously, carrying the letter he wrote.

A harsh morning light cuts through the room. Chairs are stacked on top of tables. A blue haze hangs in the stale air.

A man in a white shirt and apron is behind the bar mopping the floor. He sees Frankie.

BARTENDER

What you want, boy?

FRANKIE

Is ... Mister Powell here? Mister James Powell?

BARTENDER

What you want with Honeybear?

FRANKIE

I'd like to talk to him please.

BARTENDER

He ain't here.

FRANKIE

I ... I've got a letter for him ...

The Bartender shakes his head and resumes mopping. After a moment he stops, looks up - sees Frankie still standing there.

BARTENDER

He'll be here tonight. But he'll be busy playin'. You best not bother him then.

Frankie holds his ground.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)

You go on home boy.

(CONTINUED)

Beat. Frankie crosses to the piano. He props the letter on the keyboard and then exits.

After a moment, Honeybear enters the bar from a back room.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)
White boy says that letter's for
you.

Honeybear crosses to the piano. He picks up the envelope and studies it.

EXT. SHORT CREEK STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie makes his way down this mean street, away from Fool's Paradise. His head is lowered. He's not paying attention to where he is going.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

COMING UP on a pair of legs, blocking his path.

SLOW PAN up the legs, finally revealing the imposing presence of DOUBLE T, a young black street thug.

DOUBLE T
You lost, Charlie?

FRANKIE
(confused)
Huh?

DOUBLE T
I asked you a question. Want to
know if you're lost!

FRANKIE
No ...

DOUBLE T
Then where you think you goin' if
you ain't lost?

FRANKIE
Home ... I guess.

Double T widens his stance and crosses his arms belligerently

DOUBLE T
This here road's closed. You got to
find yourself a detour.

Frankie looks at Double T for a moment, trying to comprehend what he is saying. Finally he turns and begins walking in the opposite direction.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

(CONTINUED)

TRACKING THE GROUND - after a few steps, WE DISCOVER TWO MORE PAIRS OF LEGS blocking the way.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Discovering BIG TRUCK and SPIDER, two more black street toughs, also blocking Frankie's way.

BIG TRUCK
 Luck's just run out, Jack. This
 here road's closed too.

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

He turns to look at Double T. then turns back again to the other two thugs. The three young men slowly close in on Frankie.

DOUBLE T
 Matter of fact ... this whole
 neighborhood's closed!

BIG TRUCK
 That's right. Closed tighter than a
 duck's ass! That's water-tight!

SPIDER
 What you think of these white boys,
 Truck?! Think so damn much of
 themselves ... they think they can
 walk down any damn street they've a
 mind to!

BIG TRUCK
 (closing in)
 My, my, my ...

DOUBLE T
 (toe-to-toe with
 Frankie, who is now
 completely surrounded)
 Looks like we gonna have to teach
 this little cracker a lesson.

SPIDER
 School of hard knocks is now in
 session, Charlie.

The three thugs slowly move toward an adjacent alley, forcing Frankie to move with them.

DOUBLE T
 You been found guilty of bein' white
 in a "No Whitey Zone!"

Laughter.

(CONTINUED)

SPIDER
That's right!

Suddenly ...

HONEYBEAR (O.S.)
Boy come to see me.

The thugs turn - see Honeybear standing at the entrance to the alley.

DOUBLE T
Say what brother?

HONEYBEAR
I say the boy come to see me.

DOUBLE T
Don't matter if he came to see Santa Claus! He's seein' us now.

BIG TRUCK
We in the middle of obedience school, Jack.

HONEYBEAR
(to Double T)
Don't want no trouble. I'm just fixin' to tell the boy to go on home and that'll be the end of it.

DOUBLE T
That ain't gonna be the end of nothin'!

SPIDER
Hey Truck! This here's the piano man from Fool's!

DOUBLE T
(recognizing Honeybear)
You best stay out of our business, piano man.

HONEYBEAR
That a fact?

DOUBLE T
Oh that's a fact all right. Now get your fat ass back to Fool's before I get tired of messin' with y'all.

SPIDER
(moving on Honeybear)
Else you want a taste your own damn self?

Honeybear doesn't move.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

I'll take a taste, boy. If you think
you're man enough to feed it to me.

Something about the way Honeybear stands his ground that
freezes Spider.

SPIDER

You reckon he's bluffing, T?

DOUBLE T

Yeah ... I reckon he's bluffin'.

HONEYBEAR

Which one of you boys gonna be the
first sorry fool to find out?

A brief stand-off. The thugs stare at Honeybear, weighing a
confrontation. Finally ...

DOUBLE T

(starting to move
away)

Shit Jack ... old fat man and some
jive-ass white boy ain't worth no
skin off my ass ...

Big Truck and Spider slowly retreat with their leader.

BIG TRUCK

Adios chumps.

Honeybear feints a move toward the thugs. They are
momentarily startled ... but quickly regain their composure.

HONEYBEAR

(smiling)

Pretty fast for a fat man, wouldn't
you say boys?

The thugs disappear down the street, leaving Frankie and
Honeybear alone. Beat. Then Honeybear turns and begins to
walk away.

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

He waits for a moment. Then he turns and begins his journey
home.

HONEYBEAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Hey boy.

Frankie stops ... turns.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON HONEYBEAR

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Don't you come back. Ain't nothin'
here for you.

EXT. FAIRCHILD CEMETERY -- LATE AFTERNOON

Frankie and Jerry walk along a row of gravestones.

They stop at a grave.

CLOSE ON THE MARKER

"Calvin John Trumbull"

-Cal-

Sept. 26, 1937 - June 17, 1954"

JERRY

It's a real nice spot, Frankie.

FRANKIE

Not much of a view if you're a
resident.

(pause)

I keep waiting for the one time that
day turns out different ...

JERRY

Only thing that's gonna do is make
you go crazy.

FRANKIE

You'd think out of all those times
... you'd think just once I could
find the damn brakes on that
tractor...

JERRY

C'mon Frankie ... cut it out!

FRANKIE

Just once ... you'd think I could
have slammed that freakin' gear shift
into reverse ...

JERRY

You didn't have time. It all happened
so fast!

FRANKIE

A million times ...over and over ...

(pause)

It should have been so easy. I
must've done it a million times in
my dreams.

(CONTINUED)

JERRY
So OK ... you killed your brother on
purpose!

FRANKIE
(haunted eyes)
I don't know anymore...

EXT. A STREET IN FAIRCHILD -- EARLY EVENING

Frankie and Jerry amble along.

JERRY
You're feeling guilty 'cause you
survived. You see it in all those
war movies.

FRANKIE
What are you ... an expert?

JERRY
They say it's pretty common, actually.

They are passing The Palace of Sweets ice cream shop.

JERRY (CONT'D)
You hungry?

FRANKIE
Not particularly.

JERRY
Good. Me too!

Jerry veers off toward the ice cream parlor. Frankie follows.

INT. PALACE OF SWEETS -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie and Jerry sit at a booth. VERN SELLERS, The Sweets' proprietor, is placing a huge ice cream concoction in front of Jerry. Frankie is sipping a glass of water.

SELLERS
There you go young man.

JERRY
Thanks.

SELLERS
You're sure I can't get you anything,
Frankie?

FRANKIE
No thank you, Mr. Sellers.

Sellers leaves. Frankie takes a long look around the restaurant, which is now quite crowded.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Hey Jerry ... you ever see any Negroes
in here?

JERRY

(he thinks)

Can't remember. Why?

FRANKIE

Just wondering.

JERRY

(eyeing his sundae)

The fat man's curse ... in times of
emotional crisis we try to eat our
pain away.

FRANKIE

What's your emotional crisis?

JERRY

(taking a huge spoonful)

I'll think of something ...

(pause)

This thing I was reading ... it said
a lot of the soldiers from the war
went nuts tryin' to figure out how
come they were the ones who came
back.

FRANKIE

They were wasting their time ...
'cause all they're ever gonna end up
with is the wish it had been them
that croaked.

Jerry stops eating - gives Frankie a worried look.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUMBULL FRONT YARD -- DAY

Jack comes walking up the street. He turns in at the sidewalk
and heads for the front steps.

WE HEAR a rhythmic thumping of a ball being tossed up onto a
roof ... and then slowly bouncing back down. Then silence
until we hear the ball being caught in a glove. Thuck!
This cadence is repeated several times.

A weary, beaten-down Jack is about to climb the steps to his
house. The noise of the ball stops him. Slowly, cautiously,
he follows the noise around to the side of the house.

JACK'S P.O.V.:

(CONTINUED)

Cal, wearing his high school varsity baseball jacket, his back to Jack, is tossing a ball onto the side roof, waiting for it to bounce back down ... and then catching it.

CLOSE ON JACK

As he reacts to this sight. His expression is a mixture of disbelief and unbridled joy.

Jack slowly begins moving toward Cal.

JACK'S P.O.V.:

Cal draws closer and closer. Jack is upon him now. He reaches out ... touches Cal's shoulder.

The young boy is startled. He turns. It's Frankie, wearing Cal's jacket. He looks at his father in a panic.

CLOSE ON JACK

He has been brutally snapped back to reality. He blinks. Looks hard at Frankie. Disbelieving at first. Then with a resignation. He looks away. His hand falls off Frankie's shoulder. He slowly walks back toward the house.

Frankie watches his father go.

DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The room is dark. Frankie is asleep. WE HEAR a violent gasp. Frankie sits bolt upright. A nightmare.

INT. TRUMBULL STAIRWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie, wearing a bathrobe, pads down the stairs. He crosses to the kitchen.

INT. TRUMBULL KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie pours himself a glass of milk. He turns to exit - sees a light on in the den.

INT. TRUMBULL DEN -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie enters. Jack is sitting on the couch. He holds a glass of whisky. The bottle sits on the floor beside him. He is drunk.

FRANKIE

Hi.

Jack looks up, taking a moment to focus on Frankie.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
What time is it?

JACK
Time for a drink.

Jack leans down, grabs the bottle and refills his glass.

FRANKIE
Mom asleep?
(silence)
Can I fix you something to eat?

Jack is burning Frankie with a look.

JACK
Uncle Billy said Cal was supposed to
be driving that tractor.

FRANKIE
He was driving ...

JACK
What the hell happened out there?
What the hell happened?! How did
you end up driving?

FRANKIE
I wasn't. There was ... this rock
... a big rock see ...

JACK
Goddammit ... it should have been
Cal driving ...

FRANKIE
He had to get off for a minute ...

JACK
He would have stopped that tractor.
Cal would have known how to stop.

FRANKIE
It was an accident! It was ...

JACK
How did it happen ...? I just can't
figure out how the hell it
happened ...

FRANKIE
I don't know ... my foot slipped. I
couldn't move fast enough ...

(CONTINUED)

JACK

It should have been Cal driving ...
it should have been Cal ... Cal would
have stopped ... he would have moved
fast enough ...

(through tears)

It should have been you on the ground!

Jack looks at Frankie. Even in his stupor, he realizes he has gone too far. Frankie drops the glass of milk. He turns and runs out of the room.

JACK (CONT'D)

Frankie!

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie has changed into a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. He crashes frantically about the room. Something he thought was locked safely inside has broken loose ...

He mutters to himself, trying to choke back the thoughts ... the tears ...

FRANKIE

It was an accident ... I couldn't
... I tried but I couldn't ...

Finally Frankie rushes to the bureau, pulls open the bottom drawer and grabs a stack of his beloved records. He stuffs the records in a pillow case, grabs a sweatshirt from the hook in the closet and quickly exits.

INT. TRUMBULL STAIRWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie charges down the stairs and exits out the front door.

JACK (O.S.)

Frankie!

EXT. TRUMBULL FRONT YARD -- CONTINUOUS

Holding onto the pillowcase as one would a life preserver, Frankie hurries down the sidewalk and onto the street. The wind is picking up.

EXT. A STREET IN FAIRCHILD -- LATER

CLOSE ON Frankie. Wind has picked up even more. Frankie continues down the street. Small drops of rain have started to fall.

EXT. ANOTHER STREET -- LATER

Frankie pushes himself against the wind and rain. He is sobbing.

EXT. SHORT CREEK BRIDGE -- LATER

Frankie stops on the bridge.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Fool's Paradise, a bright and inviting warmth in this inhospitably dark and rainy night.

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

We hear, from inside, Honeybear holding forth and a crowd of revelers voicing their appreciation.

Frankie quickly crosses to the rear of the building.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Frankie ducks under the eave at the back to get out of the rain. He hunkers down, cradling his records and pulling his sweatshirt up over his head to keep dry.

Honeybear's music and Fool's fervor come spilling out a nearby window. Frankie closes his eyes and listens.

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- MORNING

Frankie - in roughly the same position. From inside Fool's now comes the big, embracing sound of gospel piano.

Frankie's eyes snap open. He looks around, surprised that he has weathered the storm.

He gets up. He's wet and there's a morning chill in the air. Still clutching his sackful of records, Frankie crosses around to the front of the building and enters.

INT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

The place is deserted except for Honeybear, who is at the piano. Frankie waits. Honeybear finishes the gospel tune. The final chord is still reverberating ...

FRANKIE

Excuse me ...

HONEYBEAR

Shh!

(the final tones slowly
fade)

Ain't over 'til the echo's gone.

Honeybear takes a sip of whisky from a glass resting on top of the piano. Pause ...

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
Say "Amen" boy.

FRANKIE
Amen.

HONEYBEAR
Somep'n about a gospel tune gets the
blood to boiling on a Sunday morning.
(pause)
You the boy they hired to clean up
in here?

FRANKIE
No sir. I'm Frankie Trumbull. I
left you a letter ...

Honeybear turns and looks at him.

HONEYBEAR
You the one wants to steal all my
secrets?

FRANKIE
Oh no ... I ... I just want some
lessons.

HONEYBEAR
(the idea is
preposterous)
Some what?

FRANKIE
Piano lessons.

HONEYBEAR (V.O.)
(turning back to the
piano)
Piano teachers're a dime a dozen.
What you messin' with me for?

FRANKIE
I want to learn stride.

HONEYBEAR
Where'd you hear about stride?

FRANKIE
Lots of places. On the radio ...
sometimes they even play your old
records.
(Honeybear reacts)
And outside that window. Couple of
nights I just stood out there and
listened.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

Eavesdropper, huh? Thief in the night?

(he rises and crosses
to Frankie)

What you got in the bag? You runnin' away from home? You maybe got some nice hot biscuits tucked away in that bag?

FRANKIE

No sir ... just some records. Fats Waller ... James P. Johnson ...

Honeybear grabs the pillowcase and pulls out a handful of Frankie's records. He examines them.

HONEYBEAR

You keepin' some powerful company, boy. Where'd you get these?

FRANKIE

This place in town. Burgess Music. You got to ask for them special. They keep them hidden under the counter.

HONEYBEAR

'Course they do. This here's dangerous stuff!

(pause)

You ever see any of my trash down there?

Frankie shakes his head.

FRANKIE

... but Mr. Burgess gets new ones in just about every week.

Honeybear crosses back to the piano -- takes another sip of whisky.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

About those lessons ...?

HONEYBEAR

What about them?

FRANKIE

I already play a little ...

HONEYBEAR

But you want to sound like they do on them records?

(Frankie nods)

And you want me to just hand it right over? No muss ... no fuss?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE
Just the basics.

HONEYBEAR
Oh! Why didn't you say that in the
first place?! You're lookin' for
just the basics!
(he smiles wickedly)
Why don't you "just the basics" your
ass on outa here?!!

Honeybear moves toward the door behind the bar. He begins
to laugh -- deep, raucous gales of laughter ring out in the
otherwise silent barroom.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
Boy wants just the basics from
Honeybear. Boy thinks he can learn
what I got!

He is gone -- but we still hear his laughter echoing in the
rooms behind the bar.

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie stands in front of the nightclub. He looks as if he
has been slapped in the face. Beat

Sheriff Bigelow drives past. He stops when he sees Frankie.

BIGELOW
Hey Frankie!
(pause)
What're you doing down here, son?

FRANKIE
I had to see someone ...

BIGELOW
In Short Creek?

Frankie nods.

BIGELOW (CONT'D)
Your father know you're here?

Frankie starts to walk away.

FRANKIE
I'd better get going Sheriff -- I'm
in kind of a hurry ...

BIGELOW
You want a ride home?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE
(still walking)
That's OK -- I know a shortcut.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET OF FAIRCHILD -- DAY

Honeybear strolls down the street, looking up now and again to check the storefronts.

As he passes Burgess Music, he stops, peers through the front window and then enters.

INT. BURGESS MUSIC -- CONTINUOUS

A typical music store of the period - sheet music along one wall, several bins of records at center and musical instruments in display cases.

Honeybear approaches Mr. Burgess, who is standing behind the counter.

HONEYBEAR
Good afternoon.
(Burgess nods)
I understand you have an excellent
selection of certain ... specialty
labels.

BURGESS
Such as?

HONEYBEAR
Black Swan ... Brunswick ...
Okeh ...?

Burgess bends over and lifts up a box of records and drops it onto the counter. Honeybear quickly pores over the box's contents.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
You wouldn't happen to have any
recordings by Mr. James Powell ...
Honeybear to his fans?

BURGESS
Who?

HONEYBEAR
Mr. Honeybear Powell. Boy plays
some serious piano. Didn't record
many tunes but those he did were all
hits.

BURGESS
Never heard of him.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR
Any chance of you putting some on
special order?

BURGESS
What was the name again?

HONEYBEAR
James 'Honeybear' Powell.
(Burgess shakes his
head)
Thank you so much for your trouble.

Honeybear turns and exits.

EXT. FAIRCHILD STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Honeybear walking along. He passes the Palace of Sweets.
He looks in the window.

HONEYBEAR'S P.O.V.

A patron devouring a giant ice cream sundae.

ANGLE ON HONEYBEAR

The man loves to eat! He bounds up the steps and enters the
ice cream shop.

INT. PALACE OF SWEETS -- LATER

Honeybear is seated at a booth. He is being scrupulously
ignored by the staff. Dirty dishes from previous customers
still litter his table. A waitress passes ...

HONEYBEAR
Excuse me ... I wonder if you'd be
so kind as to ...

She keeps on going. Another waitress approaches.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
Miss ... I wonder if I could have a
...

WAITRESS
Sorry ... this section is closed.

HONEYBEAR
(to himself)
Closed, huh? Well let's see if we
can open it ...

He very slowly sweeps his arm across the table. The dirty
dishes go crashing to the floor. A TERRIBLE RACKET.

(CONTINUED)

WAITRESS
 (approaching)
 Hey I saw that! What's the idea
 ...!

HONEYBEAR
 Hallelujah! I has just risen from
 the dead!!

Vern Sellers appears.

SELLERS
 What's the trouble?

HONEYBEAR
 No trouble ... now! Just bring me
 some ice cream and we'll call it
 even.

WAITRESS
 This guy trashed those dishes on
 purpose!

HONEYBEAR
 Hush yo' mouth! A draft come up and
 knocked 'em off. Y'all oughta do
 somep'n about the chill in here!

SELLERS
 OK pal ... you're outa here. And I
 don't want to see you come back.

HONEYBEAR
 Just one little ol' minute ...

SELLERS
 You heard me ...
 (Honeybear doesn't
 move)
 I'm warning you pal ...

HONEYBEAR
 (leaning in close to
 Sellers)
 Way I see it ... we got two choices.
 We can either handle this smooth
 with some ice cream ... or rough --
 with somep'n else. Which way you
 want to go ... pal?

CUT TO:

INT. FAIRCHILD CITY JAIL -- DAY

Two burly deputies are tossing a disheveled and roughed-up
 Honeybear into a jail cell.

Sheriff Bigelow crosses in.

(CONTINUED)

BIGELOW

Maybe this'll cool you down some,
amigo.

HONEYBEAR

You sure got a friendly little town
here, sheriff ... with "pal" this
and "amigo" that.

BIGELOW

That's right -- and quiet too! And
it's gonna stay that way.

HONEYBEAR

Didn't seem so quiet about ten minutes
ago.

BIGELOW

Well ... you keep your black ass
back down in Short Creek and things'll
settle down in one hell of a hurry.

Bigelow walks away.

CLOSE ON HONEYBEAR as he watches him go.

INT. TRUMBULL LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

Jack paces. Helen sits.

JACK

I won't have that boy sneaking around
behind my back!

HELEN

I doubt if he was "sneaking," Jack.

JACK

Graham Bigelow saw him with his own
eyes! Down in niggertown!

HELEN

Please don't use that word.

(pause)

Have you asked Frankie what he was
doing down there?

JACK

No - but I sure as hell plan to!

HELEN

Don't be too hard on him, Jack.

JACK

If the boy's looking for
trouble ...!

(CONTINUED)

HELEN
This isn't trouble. Not real trouble.

JACK
Disobedience was real trouble when I
was growing up!

HELEN
He's just trying to find a way to
the other side.

JACK
What the hell is that supposed to
mean?

HELEN
It means ... he's had a lot to deal
with these past few months.

JACK
We all have!

HELEN
He's just trying to keep his head
above water.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUMBULL'S HARDWARE -- DAY

George is quietly stocking a shelf with cans of paint.

WE HEAR the front door bell ring. Frankie enters.

FRANKIE
Hi George.

GEORGE
(chastened)
I best not talk to you now, Frankie.
I got work to do.

FRANKIE
Is something the matter, George?

George shakes his head.

JACK (O.S.)
Frankie!

Frankie turns.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Jack standing at the back of the store.

(CONTINUED)

JACK (CONT'D)
 You leave George be. He's got work
 to do.

Jack climbs the stairs to his office. George turns away to
 concentrate on his work.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUMBULL'S HARDWARE -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie exits the hardware store and begins walking down the
 street.

GEORGE (O.S.)
 Frankie ...

Frankie turns.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

George standing in the alley beside the hardware store
 building. George motions Frankie to come closer.

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

He approaches George, who stays well out of sight.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 Your daddy's mad. Guess he doesn't
 want you goin' down to Short Creek.

Frankie reacts.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 I'm sure he only wants what's best
 for you , son.
 (pause)
 I'm sorry if I got you into any
 trouble.

FRANKIE
 That's OK George -- Looks like I'm
 the one who got you into trouble ...

GEORGE
 I was just wondering ... if you heard
 anything about Mr. Honeybear ... the
 piano man I was telling you about?
 (Frankie shakes his
 head)
 Reason is ... he got tossed in jail
 the other day.

FRANKIE
 Jail?

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE

Seems like the fool raised some Cain
downtown. Man's got a mean temper
when he feels he's bein' messed with.

(pause)

I was just wondering if maybe you
knew what happened.

Pause.

FRANKIE

Yeah ... I think I probably know
what happened ...

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- MORNING

Frankie enters the deserted nightclub. He slowly crosses to
Honeybear's piano. He touches the keyboard -- a talisman.

Frankie notices something propped up above the keyboard.

INSERT: A faded, dog-eared photograph of two people. One of
them is a young black woman and the other is what could be a
younger Honeybear Powell.

The two are embracing. Written across the bottom of the
photo is : "Chicago - 1935. Happy days!"

WE HEAR someone enter from the door behind the bar. Frankie
turns to look.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Honeybear is standing behind the bar pouring himself a glass
of water.

HONEYBEAR

What you want now?

FRANKIE

They ... I heard you were in jail.

HONEYBEAR

Good news travels fast.

FRANKIE

What did you do?

HONEYBEAR

Same thing you did a while back.
Got caught crossing the line. 'Cept
I didn't have old Honeybear to save
my bacon.

Frankie nods. Pause.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE
This picture ...

HONEYBEAR
Don't you go messin' with my things!

FRANKIE
I didn't even touch it for crying
out loud!
(pause)
Is that you?

HONEYBEAR
Look like me?

FRANKIE
Sort of ...

HONEYBEAR
That's another me. In another world!
Don't have nothin' to do with the
here and now!

Very gently, Frankie plays one note on the piano.

FRANKIE
Nice tone.

HONEYBEAR
I played better.

Frankie begins playing his boogie-woogie.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
Hey boy!
(Frankie stops playing)
We don't allow no "boogie-woogie"
playin' in here ..."

FRANKIE
How come?

HONEYBEAR
(dripping with disdain)
If you want to beat your brains out
for five minutes -- use a baseball
bat. It's a lot quieter.

FRANKIE
I tried to copy some of the stuff I
heard on those records ... but I
can't ever seem to get it right.

HONEYBEAR
Can't you now?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

That's why ... if you could maybe
show me ...

HONEYBEAR

I already gave you my answer.

FRANKIE

But I love that music.

HONEYBEAR

Why?

FRANKIE

(he thinks)

I don't know. Maybe ... it seems to
come so natural.

HONEYBEAR

'Cept to some white boys lookin' for
an easy way out. Maybe then it don't
come so natural!

FRANKIE

What do you mean?

HONEYBEAR

(a touch of anger)

Nothin' comes natural in this world
but trouble. Reason you can't lift
any of that music off them records
is because you ain't earned the right
to play what them boys is playin'!

(Frankie is stung by
these words)

You got to feel the need before you
can play that trash!

(he crosses to the
piano)

Here ... you want me to show you a
little something?

FRANKIE

Sure. I mean ... that'd be great!

Honeybear pushes Frankie away from the piano. He then sits
and quickly launches into Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C# minor.

Frankie reacts. Honeybear stops for a moment and turns to
Frankie.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

Surprised? Conservatory wouldn't even look at you 'til you could play this stuff backwards and forwards!

(pause)

I was gonna become rich and famous playin' this music. Stupid me! How was I s'pose to know colored people wasn't supposed to play this trash!

(pause)

Now you want to play like me! Ain't that funny?! I wanted to be you and now you want to be me! But I think the only reason you want to play my trash is 'cause you think it don't cost nothin'! You think you'll sit down and the notes will just come out the tips of your fingers like crap out of a goose!

FRANKIE

No! That's not ...

HONEYBEAR

Hell boy! Why ain't you home practicing? When I was your age I did three things -- ate, slept and played piano! Come back and see Honey when you can lay some of this trash down!

Honeybear resumes playing the Rachmaninoff.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

(shouting over his playing)

What you waitin' for boy?! You wait for this stuff to come natural -- you'll be an old man still playin' that "boogie-woogie" crap!

Frankie suddenly turns and runs out the door. Honeybear continues playing with an almost deranged ferocity.

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie comes charging out the door.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Parked a few blocks away is Sheriff Bigelow's patrol car.

SHERIFF BIGELOW'S P.O.V.

Frankie stops and stares at Bigelow for a moment. Then he disappears around the corner.

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- EVENING

Frankie sits on the edge of his bed.

A NOISE OUTSIDE

Frankie crosses to the window and looks out.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Sheriff Bigelow's patrol car is just pulling into the driveway.

BACK ON FRANKIE as he moves away from the window, then he sneaks a peek through the curtains.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.:

Sheriff Bigelow car is parked in the driveway. Frankie just catches a glimpse of the Sheriff in the moonlight as he makes his way up the sidewalk.

FRONT DOOR BELL RINGS.

CUT TO:

INT. TRUMBULL STAIRWAY -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Frankie is quietly coming down the stairs. WE HEAR muffled voices coming from the den.

FOLLOWING FRANKIE as he quietly moves to just outside the entrance to the den.

BIGELOW (O.S.)

Of course he saw me. He looked right at me and didn't bat an eye!

JACK (O.S.)

It's clear I've lost control of the boy ...

INT. TRUMBULL DEN -- CONTINUOUS

BIGELOW

Have you considered ... what we talked about?

JACK

I don't want to do anything illegal. Anything that could be perceived as...

BIGELOW

I've got enough on those jungle bunnies to close the place down anytime I want.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE ON FRANKIE as he reacts to the hatching of this plot.

BIGELOW (O.S.) (CONT'D)
And what I don't have - I can always
make up.

JACK (O.S.)
How soon?

BIGELOW (O.S.)
It's your call, Jack. Just say the
word and Fool's Paradise is out of
business.

Frankie reacts.

BACK ON Jack and Sheriff Bigelow.

JACK
I suppose the sooner the better.

BIGELOW
(he nods)
Especially with Frankie snooping
around down there. That could kill
your chances quicker than ...

Bigelow turns to see Frankie standing in the doorway.

FRANKIE
(quiet outrage)
You don't have any right to do this!

BIGELOW
This is none of your business,
Frankie.

FRANKIE
It is too my business!

JACK
You wouldn't listen to me! I asked
you to stay away from that place ...
away from those people.

FRANKIE
You talk like they're ... like they're
a whole different breed! Like they
have nothing to do with us.

JACK
They don't! And they never will!
And the sooner you understand that
the better off you'll be!

FRANKIE
Why do you hate them so much?

(CONTINUED)

JACK
I don't hate them!

FRANKIE
Just because they're not white their
whole life is just ... nothing!
Just a big joke!

JACK
You don't hate a fox for killing
chickens. It's just their nature.
You just have to make sure you protect
yourself.

BIGELOW
These are things you don't understand
about yet Frankie ...

FRANKIE
I hope I never do! Because then I'd
be just like you!

JACK
That's just about enough out of you!

FRANKIE
Just like you and Mr. Sellers and
all the others!

JACK
I said that's enough!

FRANKIE
Cal was right!

JACK
(rising and crossing
to Frankie)
Don't you dare mention your brother's
name in the middle of all this!

FRANKIE
He knew what you were up to!

JACK
Cal understood how things were!

FRANKIE
He sure did!

JACK
You don't know the first thing about
what Cal understood.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE
He was my brother.

JACK
Not the first thing! Cal was like
me. He saw the world just like me!

FRANKIE
Cal knew you were getting mixed up
in stuff ... and he was ashamed you
were letting a bunch of creeps tell
you what to think!

JACK
(a threat)
You watch yourself!

FRANKIE
Either that ... or maybe you feel
the same way they do. And that would
make you as stupid as them.

Jack slaps Frankie. Frankie doesn't move. Jack goes to
slap him again.

BIGELOW
Jack!

Frankie turns and runs out of the room.

BIGELOW (CONT'D)
We'd better go after him, Jack.

FRONT DOOR SLAMS.

CUT TO:

EXT. A STREET IN FAIRCHILD -- NIGHT

Frankie running fast - on his way to Short Creek.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Sheriff Bigelow rushes out of the front door and down the
steps. He crosses to his patrol car, gets in and speeds
away.

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- NIGHT

A boisterous crowd CAN BE HEARD inside, with Honeybear's
piano playing rising above the din.

Frankie comes running up. He rushes toward the club's front
entrance.

INT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie struggles his way through the crowded nightclub. He makes his way toward Honeybear.

Honeybear turns -- sees Frankie. He reacts.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

Police cars come to a screeching halt outside the nightclub. Their doors fly open and Sheriff Bigelow and his deputies rush the building, spreading out in order to enter the club from all directions.

INT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie is up by the bandstand now.

FRANKIE
(shouting)
Listen to me! You've got to get out
of here!

Honeybear puzzles over Frankie's urgency.

A WOMAN SCREAMS. This immediately gets Honeybear's attention.

HONEYBEAR'S P.O.V.:

At the back of the club, pandemonium. People are scurrying every which way. Several uniformed policemen are wading through the crowd in an attempt to get a handle on things.

Honeybear sees them. He stops playing, calmly closes the lid on the keyboard. He takes the dog-eared photo from the piano and puts it in his breast pocket. Then he puts his derby hat on top of his head and readies for flight.

HONEYBEAR
'Das all there is folks. There ain't
no mo'!

Honeybear jumps off the bandstand. And quickly heads for the back of the hall. Frankie follows.

ANOTHER PART OF THE NIGHTCLUB

Honeybear makes his way across the dance floor. Frankie is right behind him.

COP (O.S.)
HEY YOU!

Honeybear stops. A burly police officer approaches.

(CONTINUED)

COP (CONT'D)
What's the big hurry?

HONEYBEAR
(the old Steppin'
Fetchit act)
Way past my bedtime, officer.
See...last night I overslept
somewheres and now I got to find my
way back there ...

COP
You the guy they call Honeybear?

HONEYBEAR
(now quasi-Jamaican)
Me?! Why goodness no! I ain't him!!

COP
(examining Honeybear)
You sure about that? He's the piano
player ... big fat guy ...

HONEYBEAR
(indignant)
How dare you refer to my velocity?!

COP
Let's see some I.D.

Honeybear makes a slow move for his wallet, obviously stalling
for time.

HONEYBEAR
That's funny! It really is! See
... Honeybear's bigger ... much bigger
than me.

COP
That a fact?

HONEYBEAR
Oh my yes! I'm not fat. Just big-
boned. Like my Mama. Roly-ploy...

The cop stares at Honeybear for a moment. Then Frankie points
off in the opposite direction.

FRANKIE
(shouting)
There he goes!!

The cop looks. Honeybear rushes off in the opposite
direction. Frankie follows.

INT. FOOL'S PARADISE STAIRCASE -- CONTINUOUS

Honeybear and Frankie come barreling down the stairs. They reach the basement - a dark, dank place with cases of empty beer and liquor bottles stacked along one wall.

Honeybear crosses to the opposite wall, gently tapping it as if feeling for something.

FRANKIE

What are you doing?

HONEYBEAR

Supposed to be a secret door here
someplace.

Frankie joins him in the search. Honeybear's fingers discover the secret panel. He slides open a small section of the wall ...

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Ala-Ka-Zam!

Honeybear and Frankie both make a move for the open passage at the same time. Log jam!

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Where you think you're goin'?

FRANKIE

They're after me too, you know!

HONEYBEAR

Not for the same reason they're
after me!

FRANKIE

What difference does it make?

ANGLE ON THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

The burly cop, now joined by several of his colleagues, comes crashing down the staircase in hot pursuit.

BACK ON HONEYBEAR

He gives a quick look toward his pursuers and he is gone. Frankie follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. A FIELD BESIDE FOOL'S PARADISE -- CONTINUOUS

Honeybear and Frankie are running across the field away from Fool's Paradise.

After reaching the other side of the field, they stop and look back.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR'S AND FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

In the distance, the brightly lit club glows in the night sky. Sounds echo across the field. Screams ... shouts from the police ... more sirens. Three or four police cars, their red lights pulsating, surround the place.

HONEYBEAR

All hell's breakin' loose over there!

FRANKIE

What happens now?

HONEYBEAR

When Charlie shows up with the papers, it's time to move on.

FRANKIE

Where are you going to go?

HONEYBEAR

Just move on. It's the thing I do best.

FRANKIE

What about me?

HONEYBEAR

(puzzled)

What about you?

FRANKIE

Where will I go?

HONEYBEAR

Hell boy ... just go home. Almost past your bedtime!.

FRANKIE

(another look at Fool's)

I can't go home. Not now ...

HONEYBEAR

Why not?

FRANKIE

I just can't ...

HONEYBEAR

Well you sure as hell can't tag along with me!

FRANKIE

Don't worry ... I can take care of myself!

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR
Happy to hear it 'cause this is where
you and me part company!

FRANKIE
I just thought ...

HONEYBEAR
What you think?

FRANKIE
You might need my help.

HONEYBEAR
That'll be the day!

WE HEAR MEN'S VOICES shouting at the far edge of the field.
Honeybear takes off.

MORE VOICES. Getting close.

Frankie takes off.

INT. FOOL'S PARADISE -- NIGHT

The nightclub is now mostly evacuated. A handful of police officers question a number of detainees. The burly cop who had been chasing Honeybear and Frankie is being grilled by Sheriff Bigelow.

EXT. DENSE SCRUB BY THE RAILROAD TRACKS -- CONTINUOUS

Honeybear comes running along -- then slips and falls. He hunkers down in the undergrowth, holding his ankle.

After a moment Frankie crashes down beside him.

FRANKIE
I don't think they saw us!
(pause)
You OK?

Honeybear rubs his ankle.

HONEYBEAR
I'm fine. Just working on a powerful
hunger is all.

FRANKIE
Those freights -- right down there
where the tracks curve -- that's
where they have to slow down.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

The curved section of track.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR (O.S.)
How often they come along?

FRANKIE (O.S.)
Pretty often.

HONEYBEAR (O.S.)
Where they goin'?

FRANKIE (O.S.)
Most of 'em go to Chicago.

ANGLE ON HONEYBEAR

He reacts.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
That woman in the picture ... she
still in Chicago?
(pause)
If we could make it that far ... she
could maybe help us.

HONEYBEAR
She ain't helpin' us 'cause WE ain't
goin' nowhere! I'm goin' and you're
stayin'!

FRANKIE
It's a free country you know.

Honeybear grabs Frankie.

HONEYBEAR
Not if you're plannin' to ride my
coattails it ain't!
(Frankie reacts)
Now how many times do I have to tell
you, boy ... get yourself gone!

Frankie stares at Honeybear a moment.

FRANKIE
Which direction?

HONEYBEAR
Any one but mine!

FRANKIE
I don't have any other direction to
go.

HONEYBEAR
You better find one fast.

FRANKIE
But ...

(CONTINUED)

Honeybear pulls Frankie in close. This is a real threat.

HONEYBEAR

Let me explain somep'n you . Time
to quit all this jive! I've got to
scarce myself from this place, see?
Done it plenty of times before.
Some railroad bull will probably
catch up with me ... maybe give me a
crack up side the head and toss me
in jail for a couple of days. That's
OK. I'm used to that.

(pause)

But I got a white boy with me and
it's a whole different story. Gonna
ask me a whole bunch of questions I
ain't got answers for. Then maybe
he cracks me a whole lot and throws
me in jail and forgets where the key
is.

(Frankie starts to
say something but
Honeybear cuts him
off)

Skin changes everything. That's the
only thing you and me have to know
right now.

(pushing Frankie away)

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. SCRUB BY THE RAILROAD TRACKS -- A HALF-HOUR LATER

Alone now, Honeybear is still crouched down in the bushes.

ANGLE ON THE TRAIN TRACKS

A slow-moving freight approaches the curve. Honeybear jumps
up and begins running toward the train.

ANOTHER ANGLE

About twenty yards away, Frankie pops up from his hiding
place. He watches Honeybear.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Honeybear is running alongside one of the boxcars. He still
moves well for a fat man.

He pulls up close to one of the open doors. He grabs onto
wooden slat and leaps.

INT. FREIGHT CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Half in and half out of the car, Honeybear struggles to keep from rolling back out of the gaping door.

Suddenly, a pair of big, powerful hands grabs Honeybear by the jacket and hauls him the rest of the way into the car.

Honeybear turns and looks up. A tremendous, bearded hobo stands over him.

HOBO
Where ya headed?

HONEYBEAR
Suppose you tell me.

HOBO
(a toothless smile)
Next stop ... Shee-Caw-Go!
(tugs an imaginary
whistle)
Whoo-woo!

Honeybear reacts.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS -- CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON FRANKIE as he watches the freight train slowly pull away.

WE HEAR THE SUDDEN SQUEAL OF METAL AGAINST METAL

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

The train stops. Dead silence for a moment. Then the engines jump forward, causing a chain reaction of lurching cars.

CLOSE ON FRANKIE

He watches as the train once again begins to move forward.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Frankie breaks for the train. As he reaches it, his hand goes out. He grabs a metal bar -- part of an exterior superstructure on the car.

He runs alongside the train for a moment before leaping up and onto the train as it picks up speed.

WE SEE Frankie slowly climbing up the boxcar's exterior as the train rounds the corner.

LONG SHOT

The Illinois Central freight train -- with Honeybear and Frankie on board -- speeds toward the Windy City.

EXT. TRUMBULL HOUSE -- EARLY MORNING

Sheriff Bigelow is coming down the front steps. He gets in his car and drives off.

INT. TRUMBULL DEN -- CONTINUOUS

Jack sits, contemplating the occurrences of the last few hours. After a moment, Helen enters.

HELEN

Any news?

JACK

(distractedly)

About what?

HELEN

About our son?! Has anyone seen Frankie?

JACK

One of the deputies thinks he saw him with the piano player.

HELEN

What piano player?

JACK

There's this piano player ... at one of the joints down in Short Creek ... Frankie wanted me to take him down there to listen to the guy.

HELEN

Oh God ...

JACK

We should have closed that place down a long time ago.

HELEN

You think that would have made any difference?

JACK

Well it would have been something!

HELEN

Oh yes Jack ... it would have been something all right!

JACK

What's that supposed to mean?

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

We've already had one son taken away from us. Do we have to drive the other one away as well?

JACK

It seems to me Frankie went running out of here of his own free will.

HELEN

For God's sake Jack ... can't you see Frankie's trying to find something -- something to make the pain go away!?

JACK

What? Some broken-down jig piano player in a Short Creek dump?!!

HELEN

Yes!

(pause)

And it made him think he might have found something that was worth all the pain!

(pause)

And your only thought was to make it seem ... wrong!

JACK

I did what I thought was best.

HELEN

He's fourteen-years-old, Jack! His only brother was killed and he feels he was responsible.

JACK

No one made him feel that way! No one ever blamed him.

HELEN

He blamed himself. And he was just looking for something that took that feeling away!

JACK

Well I hope he's found it. And I hope he realizes what he's done to this family.

HELEN

What has he done, Jack? What has Frankie done except try to find a way to hang on?

Jack considers a response. But in the end he says nothing. He rises and exits.

INT. RAILWAY BOXCAR -- NIGHT

Train is moving at quite a clip. Frankie is sitting on one side of the car. Opposite him sits an older man. A large napkin is unfolded on his lap with about a half-dozen pieces of fried chicken. The old man is gnawing on a piece of chicken.

FRANKIE

Where'd you get the chicken?

OLD HOBO

Found it.

(a toothless grin)

Bet that's the last time the misses
will put it out on the window sill
to cool off! Want some?

CUT TO:

INT. ANOTHER BOXCAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie, holding several pieces of chicken, walks down the length of the boxcar.

ANGLE ON HONEYBEAR

He cocks his head -- something smells good! He looks up -- sees Frankie standing before him.

HONEYBEAR

You don't listen too good, do you
boy?

FRANKIE

Still working on a powerful hunger?

CUT TO:

INT. BOXCAR -- MOMENTS LATER

Honeybear is inhaling his piece of chicken.

HONEYBEAR

You best keep feedin' me chicken
'cause soon as I finish here I'm
gonna toss yo' ass of this train!

Frankie offers him another piece. Honeybear takes it. Then like lightning he grabs Frankie's wrist.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

You fixin' to be a piano man -- that
hand of yours has some growin' up to
do.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

Is it true you can really cover
fourteen notes with yours?

HONEYBEAR

(proud)

Where'd you hear that?

FRANKIE

That guy on the radio said so.

Honeybear spreads his gigantic hand.

HONEYBEAR

That's just flash. Don't mean a
thing if it ain't got that swing!

Honeybear chomps down on another piece of chicken. Frankie
spreads his hand out and studies it.

DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. BOXCAR -- A HALF-HOUR LATER

Honeybear, his hunger pangs quieted, drowsily listens to the
rhythmic clack of the train wheels on the track. Frankie
sits close by.

HONEYBEAR

Ain't your mama gonna be worried?
(Frankie shrugs)
Whole family's probably out lookin'
for you right now.

FRANKIE

I doubt it.

HONEYBEAR

You got some brothers and sisters?

FRANKIE

Had a brother. But he ... died.
(pause)
Got killed on my uncle's farm.

Honeybear reacts. Frankie rises and crosses to the boxcar's
open door. He looks out as the lights from an occasional
house go flashing by.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Should be comin' up to Chicago pretty
soon.

HONEYBEAR

(singing)

Bet your bottom dollar
You lose your blues in Chicago ...

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE
I know that song.

HONEYBEAR
What you think about when you hear
the music, Frankie?

FRANKIE
Think about?

HONEYBEAR
What goes through your mind?

FRANKIE
(thinking)
I don't know ... it's a feeling more
than anything else.

HONEYBEAR
Ain't it though.

FRANKIE
What do you think about?

HONEYBEAR
A woman.

FRANKIE
Which one?

HONEYBEAR
You mean there's more than one?

FRANKIE
That woman in the picture?
(Honeybear smiles)
What was her name?

Honeybear takes the picture out of his pocket.
He studies it.

HONEYBEAR
Esther Mae Pidgeon. I used to call
her "Pidgie."

FRANKIE
Were you ... in love with her?

HONEYBEAR
Back in those days, son ... I was in
love with everybody! Had me some
girlfriends who just wouldn't wait!
(Frankie smiles)
But I had real feelings for Pidgie.
Feelings that Buster Jackson didn't
appreciate.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE

Who?

HONEYBEAR

White mob cracker who ran the
jumpin'est juke joint in Chicago.

FRANKIE

That's where you met Pidgie?

HONEYBEAR

That's where I met Pidgie. Happy
days, Frankie ... happy days!

WE BEGIN TO HEAR THE STRAINS OF a bouncy 1930s-era version
of Moten Swing -- a piano backed up by a red-hot house band.

DISSOLVE
TO:

"SOUTHSIDE CHICAGO - 1934"

EXT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- NIGHT

A rollicking night spot, its bright, flashing lights burning
a hole in the urban night, signaling the intense revelry
inside. The music continues.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- NIGHT

The place is jumping! There's music, recently legalized
liquor and high spirits. Most of the faces are black.

On the bandstand, Honeybear Powell - twenty years younger -
is fronting the band.

CLOSE ON Honeybear ... his hands pound the keyboard.

ANOTHER ANGLE:

A table of patrons. Seated at the head of the table is BUSTER
JACKSON - the white proprietor of Buster's Jam Joint - and
his girlfriend, ESTHER MAE PIDGEON, called "Pidgie." Pidgie
is a beautiful young black woman whose eyes sparkle as she
listens to Honeybear's music.

Buster notices Pidgie's enthusiasm. They exchange "looks."

ANGLE BACK ON BANDSTAND:

The song is over -- wild applause. Honeybear mops his face.

HONEYBEAR

Thank you boys and girls! We're
gonna take a breather right now. So
empty your tanks and get your refills
and we'll see ya'll back here in
about fifteen!

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON Honeybear as he crosses the tiny dance floor to get a drink.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
(knocks on the bar)
If you please, Jackson!

MITCH
Yessir, Mister Honeybear.

Pidgie crosses the room to join Honeybear at the bar.

PIDGIE
(flirting)
Hey Honey...

HONEYBEAR
Evenin', Miss Pidgie. Electrifyin'
as ever, I see ...

PIDGIE
You doin' some fine playin' tonight,
sugar.

HONEYBEAR
We're gettin' into it.

Pidgie sidles up to the bar, with a furtive glance back at Buster, who is still at the table.

PIDGIE
(under her breath)
I'd swear you were tickling all that
ivory just for little ol' me ...

HONEYBEAR
(suddenly serious)
Where'd you get to last night? I
waited 'til near sun-up.

PIDGIE
I couldn't shake Buster. He was
watchin' me like a hawk!

HONEYBEAR
I wanted you so bad ...!

PIDGIE
(moving closer)
Ooh baby ...

HONEYBEAR
(with a nervous glance
toward Buster)
Careful Pidge. Your gangster
boyfriend's watchin'.

(CONTINUED)

PIDGIE
Buster ain't my boyfriend. You're
my boyfriend.

HONEYBEAR
Who's gonna break the news to that
cracker?

Pidgie moves in even closer. Honeybear closes his eyes. He
breathes in her essence.

PIDGIE
You know how I feel about you, baby.

HONEYBEAR
Mmm ... what're we gonna do about
things?

PIDGIE
We go slow ... and we have patience.
(slightly wicked)
And we try again tonight. Got me
some sleeping powder I'm fixin' to
put into Buster's sauce.

HONEYBEAR
(laughing)
Pidgie ... you are so nasty!

Buster is still watching. Honeybear and Pidgie are quite
close now, giggling over their plot. Honeybear, no longer
able to help himself, leans over and whispers into Pidgie's
ear. She smiles and gives him a gentle - almost caressing -
slap across the face.

Buster turns just in time to see this. He reacts. He turns
and gives his no-neck henchmen a withering look.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- LATER THAT NIGHT

The club is mostly deserted. A few stragglers cross the
dance floor as they make their way toward the door.

Honeybear stands at the bar, nursing a nightcap.

SUDDENLY, the front doors fly open and Buster Jackson marches
in, followed by muscle. He confronts Honeybear at the bar.

BUSTER
Well well well - lover boy's still
here.

HONEYBEAR
(unimpressed)
Hey Buster. What's shakin'?

(CONTINUED)

BUSTER
You should be, Honey.

Pause. Honeybear finally faces Buster.

HONEYBEAR
I'm beat, Buster.

BUSTER
Hear that, fellas? Loverman's beat!

HONEYBEAR
(turning to face Buster)
Speak your mind. Or let me be.

Buster moves in. His face is very close to Honeybear's now.

BUSTER
You bet your nappy little head I'll
speak my mind, boy.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BUSTER'S -- MOMENTS LATER

Buster looks on as a couple of his colleagues - also white - give Honeybear a rather rough going-over.

BUSTER
Easy, gentlemen. No use bustin' up
a perfectly good piano man. Just a
little warning to keep his paws off
other people's property.

Honeybear, his arms pinned back, rolls away from a punch, breaking free of the grip. He falls. On the ground now, Honeybear sees a discarded bottle of bourbon. He furtively draws the bottle in close to his body.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
Plenty of trash in this town Honey
without you havin' to mess with my
high-yellow dolls.

Honeybear slowly gets to his feet. He breaks the bottle against the side of the building. He brandishes the bottle shard. Buster's thugs start to rush him.

HONEYBEAR
Hold it right there! No use you
boys gettin' sliced up. Let your
boss wade in ... if he's a mind to.

The goons stop in their tracks.

BUSTER
If there's one thing I can't stand
it's a thick-headed nigger!

(CONTINUED)

Buster pulls out a knife. The two men thrust and parry for a moment. Buster lunges, slashing Honeybear on the right forearm. Blood begins to seep through the coat. Buster moves in for the kill. Honeybear slashes in a defensive move, giving Buster a superficial slash on the cheek.

Buster rubs his face ... sees the blood.

BUSTER (CONT'D)

You cut me! You son of a ...! I'm
bleedin'! I'm bleedin'!!

Buster and his thugs slowly move in on Honeybear. Honeybear throws down the bottle shard, turns and runs back into the club.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- CONTINUOUS

Honeybear comes charging in, almost running down Mitch, who has been watching by the door.

MITCH

What the hell happened out there?!

HONEYBEAR

Buster's out of his mind!

MITCH'S P.O.V.

Through the open door, Mitch sees Buster's henchmen gathered around him ... trying to calm him down.

MITCH (O.S.)

You cut him?!!

ANGLE BACK ON Honeybear and Mitch.

HONEYBEAR

I didn't touch him. Old Granddad
did all the dirty work. Oh hell!
Here he comes!

MITCH

(looking around)
Quick! Out the front!

Honeybear beats a hasty retreat toward the front door, followed close behind by Mitch.

Buster, holding his cheek, comes charging in from the alley, in hot pursuit. He is followed closely by his bodyguards.

EXT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- NIGHT

Honeybear, a napkin wrapped around his wounded arm, comes storming out the front door, followed by Mitch.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR
I hate long good-byes, Mitch. So
I'll just say au revoir!

Honeybear takes off down the street at a break-neck clip.
Mitch watches him for a moment.

MITCH
Hey Honey!

Already half-way down the block, Honeybear turns around,
still running ...

MITCH (CONT'D)
You sure can move out for a fat man!

HONEYBEAR
(laughing)
Fast and loose and full of juice!

Honeybear turns and continues his flight down the street.
Beat.

Buster and his henchmen come charging up behind Mitch. Buster
spots Honeybear beating his retreat.

MITCH
He's long gone, Mr. Jackson.

Buster makes a move to go after Honeybear ... he falters.
Mitch puts a hand on his shoulder to help him. Buster watches
as Honeybear disappears around the corner.

BUSTER
(shouting after
Honeybear)
You better run, Honey! You better
keep on runnin'! 'Cause if I ever
catch up with your fat ass you're
gonna be pig meat! You hear me?!
Pig meat!!!

FRANKIE (V.O.)
Did you get away?

HONEYBEAR (V.O.)
I got away all right...got way away!

FRANKIE (V.O.)
So what happened?

INT. RAILWAY BOXCAR -- NIGHT

Back to 1954 -- the past recedes.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

What happened? This happened. Every juke joint and flophouse this side of the Mississippi happened. The mean and lean times happened ...

FRANKIE

What about Pidgie?

Pause. Honeybear shakes his head.

HONEYBEAR

Lots of things you can do about somep'n Frankie. Worse one is to run away.

A silence descends, broken only by the whir of train wheels.

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. CHICAGO RAIL YARD -- DAY

Honeybear and Frankie cross the seemingly endless lines of railroad tracks that stretch into infinity.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET -- DAY

They amble along a Southside street, where the blight of post-war decay is just beginning to manifest itself.

Storefronts are boarded up. There seems to be a threadbare quality to everything. The people they pass huddle against the chill morning air.

Honeybear stops and looks up at a street sign.

HONEYBEAR

South Calumet! The street! Music comin' out of every door and window -- all up and down this block. Bright lights and flash chicks twenty-four hours a day.

(Frankie examines the landscape)

'Course it's early yet! You just wait 'til sundown. That's when things'll get cranked up!

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. CHICAGO STREET -- MOMENTS LATER

Honeybear and Frankie approach a building.

HONEYBEAR

You see a number anywhere?

(CONTINUED)

Frankie looks above the door.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Faded, weather-beaten numbers.

FRANKIE (O.S.)
Looks like ... ten forty-four.

ANGLE ON HONEYBEAR

HONEYBEAR
(disbelieving)
Must be some mistake.

Honeybear studies the building's facade.

HONEYBEAR'S P.O.V.

Peeling paint and letters faded by the ravages of time.

"B_ST__'S _AM J__NT"

CUT TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- CONTINUOUS

Honeybear and Frankie enter. The room's physical dimensions are familiar but "the fervor" has definitely gone out of the place.

A few lost souls are scattered about -- nursing their beers and faded dreams with equal ambivalence.

Honeybear crosses slowly to the dilapidated band stand -- now used to store broken chairs and empty beer bottles.

He climbs up. Pushed over to one side is the old upright with which - in happier times - he ruled this room.

He crosses to the piano -- tries lifting the keyboard.
Locked!

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
We done lost the ley.

ANGLE ON THE WOMAN

She is standing behind the bar. In her late 40s - still attractive but now with a brittle veneer. Honeybear studies the woman's face.

HONEYBEAR
That ain't all you lost.

(CONTINUED)

PIDGIE
(for that's who this
woman is)
Shows you what twenty years of hard
times can do to a place.

Honeybear smiles. He slowly begins walking toward the woman.

HONEYBEAR
But it sho' nuff was something in
its prime!

PIDGIE
Just like some people I know.
(pause)
But that was a long time ago.

HONEYBEAR
Just wait 'til I start flashin' my
trash again!
(now standing close
to Pidgie)
Hello Pidgie.

Now it's a kind of game between these two.

PIDGIE
Who's that callin' by that
long-time-ago name?

HONEYBEAR
You bust open that piano. I'll show
you who's callin'!

PIDGIE
Man sounds like someone.

HONEYBEAR
I don't sound like no one, woman.
There's me ... and that's where it
ends.

PIDGIE
That someone you sound like ... I
bet he's sure enough dead and gone
by now!

HONEYBEAR
Don't you go puttin' down any serious
money on that bet!

PIDGIE
(a sudden smile)
Hello Sugar. How you been keepin'?

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

Had me some rough times, Pidge.
Been up and down every hard-scrabble
road between hell and breakfast.
But I'm home now.

Pidge looks at Frankie.

PIDGIE

Who's your sidekick?

HONEYBEAR

Don't know. But I can't seem to
shake him.

PIDGIE

You boys look like you could use
some breakfast.

HONEYBEAR

You fixin' to cook for me, baby?

PIDGIE

Well ...

HONEYBEAR

Don't play me, Pidge! I'm gettin'
weak in the knees just thinkin' about
the things you can do for a hungry
man!

PIDGIE

You a hungry man, Honeybear?

HONEYBEAR

Well ... now that you mention it ...
a cup of joe sure would hit the spot
right about now.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Helen enters. She crosses to the desk ... absent mindedly
wipes a bit of dust away with her hand. She picks up a book
that's been left on the desk. She starts to put it back in
the bookshelf above when a picture falls out.

CLOSE ON PHOTO

It's the same photo - minus the frame - that Frankie came
across in Cal's room. Cal and Frankie as very young boys,
posing for the camera in their Sunday best.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON HELEN

As she studies the photo. She smiles as the image brings back a flood of memories.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- LATE MORNING

Honeybear and Frankie are still seated at the bar. There is a vast array of empty platters sitting before them - the sole remaining evidence of the sumptuous breakfast which Pidgie has provided.

Honeybear drains the last dregs of his coffee cup then daintily dabs at the corner of his mouth with his napkin.

HONEYBEAR

Mmm-mmm! You always did push a mean crumb, Pidgie!

PIDGIE

See your appetite's still OK.

HONEYBEAR

What's old Buster up to now

PIDGIE

Buster's a long time dead, Honey.

(Honeybear reacts)

Got himself killed in the war?

HONEYBEAR

Buster's a war hero?

PIDGIE

(shakes her head)

Stabbed in a crap game at Fort Dix. They did send some medals home with him, though...

HONEYBEAR

Who owns the Joint now?

PIDGIE

You're lookin' at her. Coulda dropped me with a feather when I found out he left the place to me.

(pause)

Guess I haven't exactly been a flash runnin' things. But like I said ... times have changed

HONEYBEAR

Awful quiet in here, Pidge. Who you got for a piano man these days?

(CONTINUED)

PIDGIE

Ain't had a piano man in here since
before the war.

HONEYBEAR

You got to be foolin'!

PIDGIE

Times have changed, Honey.

HONEYBEAR

There's your trouble, Pidgie! If
you got that busted up old piano
churning again ... things might
brighten up some. Right Frankie?

PIDGIE

(suddenly suspicious)

You boys lookin' for a permanent
gig?

HONEYBEAR

Well I am at liberty at the moment.

PIDGIE

You don't say.

HONEYBEAR

Wouldn't cost you more than seven or
eight meals a day and a place where
I could rest my weary little head.

PIDGIE

(a look to Frankie)

What about him?

HONEYBEAR

Let him find his own gig!

Pidgie crosses to Frankie.

PIDGIE

You got some place to go, baby?

HONEYBEAR

He's got home to go to!

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

He shakes his head.

PIDGIE

So this is a room and board deal?

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

(smiling)

Room and board and Oh-my-Lord!

(pause)

What say, Pidgie ... we got a deal?

PIDGIE

Piano's been locked up tighter than
a widow's heart for a long time now.

HONEYBEAR

Well it's time to unlock that heart
and let in some love! The love of a
good man!

PIDGIE

You know any?

(Honeybear laughs)

How do I know you still got it?

HONEYBEAR

Oh I still got it! I got more than
I know what to do with! And damn if
I ain't spreadin' it around!

Honeybear roars with laughter. Pidgie can't help smiling as
well

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

HE enjoys the moment immensely.

SLOW
DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- LATER

Some of the debris on the bandstand has been cleared away.
The piano has been moved down front and center.

Honeybear kneels in front of the piano, trying to coax the
keyboard lid open. Frankie sits at the bar. Pidgie is
standing behind the bar, tending to the club's few regulars,
who all are curious and seem oddly energized.

PIDGIE

You're gonna have to bust it open.

HONEYBEAR

(picking gingerly at
the lock)

Uh-uh. Piano's like a huffy woman.
Can't force her to do nothin' she
don't have a mind to do.

(CONTINUED)

PIDGIE

Since when do you know the first
thing about a huffy woman ... or any
woman, far as that goes?

Honeybear has his pocket knife out. He is picking carefully
at the lock on the keyboard. After a few delicate
embellishments, he opens the lid with a triumphant flourish.

HONEYBEAR

(a big smile)

Sugar ... I was born knowin'!

Honeybear makes a big thing of dusting off the keyboard stool.
He sits down at the piano. He starts noodling ...

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

We had us some good times in here.
Remember them good ol' days, Pidgie?
(Pidgie nods)

OLDER PATRON

I remember them days, Honeybear!

HONEYBEAR

Some high old times! So crowded in
here some nights ... if you fainted,
you had to go outside to fall down.

OLDER PATRON

Man ain't lyin'.

PIDGIE

Play us a tune, Honey.

HONEYBEAR

What would you folks like to hear?

OLDER PATRON

Something happy! Been a long time
since I heard music made me want to
tap my toes.

Honeybear launches into a light and bouncy vamp.

PIDGIE

That's right! I remember that one!
Yes, yes ...

Honeybear modulates with great flourish to a singable key.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

(singing)

Oh it's time to dream
A thousand dreams of you
It's been so grand...together.

(spoken)

Yes...together again, Pidgie. You
and me sugar!

(singing again)

You thrilled me from the start
You brought the sweet spring rain
Your fingers touched the strings of
my heart
And made it sing again...

Pidgie smiles at the happy times this song elicits. The club's few customers turn their chairs toward Honeybear and smile as they quietly listen to the man's music.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Three men enter the bar. They bring a slight menace with them. They split up - two of the men cross to certain tables, lingering for several minutes. The third man - the leader - crosses to the bar.

POOCH

Evenin' Esther. Since when did you
add a floor show?

PIDGIE

(on her guard)

Thought the place needed a
pick-me-up.

POOCH

The boy's good. Must be costin' us
some serious money.

PIDGIE

Not costin' us a cent, Pooch. Some
people do what they do for love.

POOCH

Wish there was more o' them fools in
the world.

Pooch listens to Honeybear's music for a moment. He shakes his head.

POOCH (CONT'D)

That kinda music's not right for
this place. Way too bouncy. Tell
the boy to go find himself another
piano.

The other two men have completed their drug sales. They slowly cross over to Pooch at the bar.

(CONTINUED)

POOCH (CONT'D)
See you next time, Esther.

They slowly exit. As they depart, a palpable foreboding lifts. Honeybear stops playing.

HONEYBEAR
What's with them?

PIDGIE
(with bitterness)
Maggots can't stand to be in the
light too long. They much prefer
places that are dark and dead...

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- FIRST LIGHT

Frankie enters the deserted barroom. He crosses to the piano and sits. Beat. He looks around the room -- perhaps imagining for a moment what it must be like to play when this room is full of people.

He rises -- opens the lid of the piano bench.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Inside the bench are stacks of music -- popular sheet music, exercise books, classical compositions ...

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

He takes a piece of music, places it on the piano and again sits. He very tentatively begins playing the first few bars. It's the Rachmaninoff Prelude -- the piece that we heard Honeybear play earlier .

SLOW
DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- A HALF-HOUR LATER

Frankie is still working on the piece. He has by no means mastered the prelude, but progress is being made.

SLOW
DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- LATER STILL

Strains of Rachmaninoff come floating out into the cold Chicago morning ...

CUT TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- CONTINUOUS

Frankie finishes the piece. The final chord lingers in the air. He looks up.

FRANKIE'S P.O.V.

Honeybear is standing before him.

HONEYBEAR
Let's play some stride.

INT. TRUMBULL LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

Helen sits motionless, deep in thought. The mantel clock's ticking is relentless.

Jack enters, carrying a suitcase. He puts it down. They look at each other. Finally ...

JACK
I'll call when I get settled
somewhere.
(pause)
I just can't stand this house right
now.

HELEN
What should I tell people if they
call?

Jack shrugs.

JACK
Whatever you want.
(pause)
Frankie was always your baby. You
understood each other. But Cal ...
was mine.

HELEN
They were both ours.

JACK
We were like two peas in a pod. I
never got that feeling with Frankie.

HELEN
Did you try?

JACK
(a flash of anger)
Yes I tried! For Chrissake Helen
... isn't it a little late in the
day?

HELEN
A little late for what Jack?

(CONTINUED)

JACK
For judgments!

HELEN
No one's judging you.

JACK
Then what the hell are you getting
at? What is it you want?

HELEN
(a crying out)
I want my boys back! I want Frankie
to come walking through that door
without those haunted eyes ... without
the weight of a thousand years on
his soul ...

JACK
And I suppose I put that weight there?

CLOSE ON HELEN

It's clear she does. But this conversation is over, leaving
them staring at each other from their isolated mountains of
recreation.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- DAY

Frankie and Honeybear seated at the piano.

HONEYBEAR
Play somep'n for me.

FRANKIE
Like what?

HONEYBEAR
Anything but that boogie-woogie!

Frankie prepares to play -- hesitates.

FRANKIE
I'm not really very good.

HONEYBEAR
You want to be a piano player or a
music critic?

FRANKIE
Piano player.

HONEYBEAR
Then shut up and play somep'n.

Frankie bravely launches into the first few bars of St. Louis
Blues. But nerves take over and his playing breaks down.

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Once more. But this time put some
moan in the tone.

Frankie just stares.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Look sugar ... what's the name of
that thing?

FRANKIE

The St. Louis Blues.

HONEYBEAR

Blues?! You know about the blues?!!

FRANKIE

I ... think so ...

HONEYBEAR

Don't you be wastin' my time with
"you think so"!

(Frankie nods)

Blues is about feelin' somep'n and
then lettin' it out!

Honeybear suddenly launches into a mournful blues refrain.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

(singing)

When you lose yo' money ...
Please don't lose yo' mind.
When you lose yo' money, child ...
Please don't lose yo' mind.
And when you lose your woman ...
Please don't mess with mine!

(speaking)

That's the blues, Frankie. Nothin'
but trouble in mind!

(He stops playing)

But what's that you say? My baby's
back? And my horse just came in?!
And Mister Roosevelt just come back
from the dead?!!

(he launches into a
raucous version of
Jelly Roll Morton's
The Naked Dance)

Hallelujah! Happy days! Say
"Hallelujah" Frankie!

FRANKIE

Hallelujah!

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

See ... just like people ... music
can change its mind too! Trick is
... to get what's inside here ...
 (he points to his
 chest)
... so it comes out your finger tips!

FRANKIE

Just like crap out of a goose?

HONEYBEAR

Now you understand, boy!

FRANKIE

HALLELUJAH!

HONEYBEAR

That's how you find the fervor,
Frankie! You don't play nothin'
'til you can't stand not to! 'Til
you can feel the hunger right down
to your toenails! Then rush on over
and pour your soul all over the keys.
That's the fervor!

FRANKIE

The fervor!

HONEYBEAR

Got to hang onto the fervor, Frankie!
And never let it get boresome!

Honeybear finishes playing.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

That's enough for the first lesson.

Pause.

FRANKIE

I'd ... I'd like to pay you.

HONEYBEAR

Say what?

FRANKIE

I've got a little money. If it's OK
with you ... I'd like to pay you for
these lessons.

HONEYBEAR

Well then let's see ... fifty cents
is too much ... and a million dollars
ain't enough!

(CONTINUED)

Honeybear roars.

CUT TO:

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE -- DAY

A tidy, modest little home in one of the nicer sections of Short Creek.

Helen stands on the front steps and knocks. After a moment, George opens the door.

GEORGE
Hello Mrs. Trumbull ...

HELEN
I hope I'm not disturbing you George.

GEORGE
Not at all!

HELEN
I was wondering if you might be able to help me ...
(pause)
It's Frankie ... he hasn't come home. Somebody said they saw him with the piano player ...

GEORGE
With Honeybear?
(Helen nods)
Far as I know ... Honeybear's left town.

HELEN
Do you have any idea where he may have gone?

Pause. George is clearly uncomfortable talking to Helen about her son.

HELEN (CONT'D)
Don't worry George. Mr. Trumbull doesn't know I've come here.

GEORGE
Well ... there are some people I could call. Maybe you best come on in, Mrs. Trumbull.

Helen enters.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- DAY

CLOSE ON the chipped, well-worn keyboard of the house piano. Honeybear's huge hand comes crashing down and strikes just one note with his extended index finger.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON HONEYBEAR AND FRANKIE

As they sit side by side at the keyboard. The next lesson is in progress.

HONEYBEAR

That's just one lonely little ol' note. Got no mama ... no papa. Just alone. Doesn't even know how it feels about things yet. But you give him some friends ... some companionship ...

Honeybear plays a group of notes - a blues lick - among which is our original lonely note ...

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

... and all of a sudden he's got an attitude. And this attitude travels through the air and gets inside your ear ... and somehow it starts to get you riled up about things. And that's music! You understand what I'm sayin', Frankie?

FRANKIE

I guess ...

HONEYBEAR

Don't guess boy! This ain't guess work! Let's hear some of the stuff you been working on.

Very reluctantly, Frankie takes another stab at St. Louis Blues. Frankie's technical proficiency has perhaps improved, but his playing is still wooden and devoid of real feeling. After about five or six bars, he runs out of energy and stops.

FRANKIE

Sorry ... that wasn't very good.

HONEYBEAR

Mr. Critic's here again too ... sittin' on your shoulder ... darin' you to do somep'n good. Forget about him, Frankie!

FRANKIE

(hopefully)

You mean ... that was good?

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

Well ... sometimes that critic's dead right 'bout things. But that doesn't mean we have to pay him no never-mind.

(pause)

What you doin' here, Frankie? What you wastin' my time for?

FRANKIE

I want ... I want to learn to play like you.

HONEYBEAR

(a preposterous idea)

Play like me?! Hell, boy...

FRANKIE

Well ... as close as I can come.

HONEYBEAR

Lemme tell you something Frankie. In your whole life ... you ain't never gonna play piano like me.

(Frankie is deflated)

And I ain't ever gonna play like you.

Honeybear leans in close to Frankie and puts his gigantic hand on his shoulder.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

See ... music has to be your own life. Your own thing. If you haven't lived it ... breathed it ... cried your eyes out over it ... it ain't ever gonna come out your fingertips.

FRANKIE

(confused)

Then ... what should I do.

HONEYBEAR

You got to learn to play who you are.

(Frankie gives him a puzzled look)

If I was you, I'd figure out real quick how to get happy.

FRANKIE

You can't just do that, you know!

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR

My mama had five kids. Each one
with a different daddy. She used to
tell me that out of all her men ...
my daddy was the rottenest ... the
meanest ... the most miserable son
of a ... She said I was just like
him.

(pause)

But I had a surprise for her. Voice
inside me said "I'm gonna fool you,
woman! I'm gonna be happy!"

(pause)

You got to find that voice, Frankie.
Voice deep down that says "Keep goin'
brother! Keep climbin' up ... up
where the music is!"

EXT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- DAY

ANGLE ON FRONT WINDOW

Pidgie is propping a handmade sign in the window.

CLOSE ON SIGN

"HOMECOMING!
Join us in welcoming back
Mr. Honeybear Powell
Buster's original Piano Man
Thurs. Eve. 9 p.m.
- drinks half-price -"

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- CONTINUOUS

Pidgie turns away from the window and crosses to Honeybear,
who is sitting at the bar.

HONEYBEAR

S'pose no one shows up?

PIDGIE

Would you hush?! People are already
showin' up. If they don't remember
you, then they remember their folks
talkin' about you. I just thought
this would make it official!

HONEYBEAR

(clearly apprehensive)
Nothin' in my contract about
advertising.

PIDGIE

What contract?

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR
That's another thing I been meaning
to talk to you about.

Pidgie studies him for a moment.

PIDGIE
I do believe you're gettin' cold
feet.

HONEYBEAR
Ha! That'll be the day!

PIDGIE
Never thought I'd see the day ...

HONEYBEAR
Well hell girl ... playin' nickel-
and-dime dives is one thing. But I
don't know if I got it in me to be a
headliner no more.

PIDGIE
"No one else like me! There's just
me and that's where it ends!"
(pause)
What happened to all that brass, old
man?

HONEYBEAR
Well ...

PIDGIE
You ain't got nothin' to worry about,
Honey.

HONEYBEAR
You reckon I can still cut it?

PIDGIE
(suggestive)
Mmmm-mmm! And then some!

They both laugh at the double-entendre.

CUT TO:

INT. FAIRCHILD BUS STATION -- DAY

A bustling little terminal. Helen approaches the ticket
window.

HELEN
One round trip to Chicago, please.

The agent prepares her ticket - then slides it to her under
the grate.

(CONTINUED)

AGENT

That'll be seven dollars even.

Helen opens her purse and takes out the money.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- DAY

A few of the regulars are scattered throughout the room plus a handful of newcomers. There seems to be just a slight glint of optimism in the stale air.

Frankie is noodling a medium-slow "walking blues." His playing has progressed considerably. Honeybear and Pidgie sit nearby, listening.

PIDGIE

Boy's got a nice touch. He's beginning to sound a little like you, Honey.

HONEYBEAR

Hush yo' mouth!

PIDGIE

It's a fact.

They listen some more.

HONEYBEAR

You ever have any kids, Pidgie?

PIDGIE

How could I? I was waitin' for you to come back, lover!

HONEYBEAR

Waitin' my foot! Never knew you to wait for nothin'!

Pidgie laughs.

PIDGIE

What about you? Any fat little Honeybears out there raisin' Cain?
(Honeybear shakes his head)
Who's gonna keep you in sippin' whisky when you're too old to play piano?

HONEYBEAR

Don't you worry about me! I got it covered!

PIDGIE

I just bet you do!

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR
 (nods his head toward
 Frankie)
 But this here boy -- he's got me to
 thinkin' ...

PIDGIE
 I can see that.

HONEYBEAR
 Man gets to be my age ... he realizes
 it's all a big waste of time unless
 he can pass it on. Pass on what
 he's learned about things ... make
 it easier for the next man comin'
 along ...

Two men enter. The same two men who earlier were with Pooch.
 They are alone now. As they did before, they circulate among
 the Joint's patrons, conducting clandestine transactions.

Honeybear watches them carefully. Then he crosses to Frankie
 at the piano.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
 Do me a favor, Frankie ... go stretch
 your legs for five minutes.
 (Frankie looks at the
 men - then back at
 Honeybear)
 It's OK. I just need to talk to
 these gentlemen.

Frankie exits.

Honeybear crosses to Pidgie. They watch the men for a moment.

HONEYBEAR
 Looks like that's nasty stuff them
 boys are selling.

PIDGIE
 I tried roustin' them outa here a
 while back. Had three fires in two
 days and a brick came crashin' through
 the front window damn near killed
 somebody ...

The men have finished their business. They approach Honeybear
 and Pidgie.

DEALER #1
 I thought Pooch told you to lose the
 piano man, Esther?

PIDGIE
 It's just music. What's music got
 to do with you boys' business?

(CONTINUED)

DEALER #2

Pooch says that jump-up turn-around
stuff is bad for business. Says
it's nothin' but toe-tappin' jive..

Honeybear gets off the bar stool to confront these men.

HONEYBEAR

What you sayin' 'bout my music, boy?

PIDGIE

Lemme handle this.

DEALER #1

Your music don't belong in a place
like this. Belong in a circus ...
with monkeys and big fat elephants.

HONEYBEAR

My music was born in a place like
this. Born in a whisky barrel and
raised up on weed ...

DEALER #1

Well we're servin' up something else
now. And that means you gonna have
to take your old-timey nigger music
someplace else!

Honeybear takes a step toward him.

PIDGIE

You just keep outa this Honey.

DEALER #1

Yeah Honey ... you keep way outa
this or you be ticklin' the ivories
on that piano way up there in Fat
Boy heaven.

Honeybear smiles a deadly smile. He moves in so he is face-
to-face with Dealer #1.

HONEYBEAR

You listen here, Jackson. I was
crackin' chumps like you between my
teeth when you was nothin' but a
glint in yo' pappy's eye!

Dealer #1 goes to slug Honeybear. In a flash, Honeybear
ducks the punch and comes in with an uppercut, hitting the
man square in the solar plexus. Dealer #1 slowly sinks to
his knees, gasping for breath.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Don't want to be seein' you boys
around here no more ...

(CONTINUED)

PIDGIE
I said I'd handle this!

HONEYBEAR
(ignoring Pidgie)
New policy in force as of right now!
You go back and tell your Mr. Pooch
to go find himself another place to
do his business.

PIDGIE
Will you shut your damn mouth!

HONEYBEAR
'Cause the Jam Joint is now off limits
... you understand what I'm sayin'?

Dealer #2 contemplates making a move toward Honeybear.
Honeybear reacts. Honeybear's size and surprising agility
cause Dealer #2 to think better of it. He stops in his
tracks.

Dealer #1 gets up. The two men back up warily toward the
door.

DEALER #1
You ain't seen the last of us.

HONEYBEAR
Maybe not. But you fools are gonna
wish you seen the last of me!

The thugs exit. Honeybear turns toward Pidgie. She returns
a look of deep concern, for she knows what these men are capable
of doing.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- LATE NIGHT

Pidgie is behind the bar, just finishing cleaning up. She
deposits the last bit of trash in a large garbage can.
Frankie is sitting at the bar sipping a soda.

PIDGIE
You must be tired, Frankie. You're
doin' more playing these days than
Honey is.

FRANKIE
I've still got a lot to learn.

PIDGIE
You gonna be a real flash some day,
son. I guarantee it.
(Frankie smiles - a
bit pleased with
himself)
How about some breakfast?

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE
Is it morning already?

PIDGIE
I tell you what ... you haul this
garbage can out back for Pidgie and
I'll fix you one of my special sunrise
suppers!

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BUSTER'S -- MOMENTS LATER

Frankie wrestles the garbage can out the door. He turns and starts to head back inside.

WE HEAR A LOW MOAN. Frankie stops and turns. He listens for the sound to be repeated. After a moment, it is.

FRANKIE
Somebody out here?

Frankie searches around for the source of the sound. Once again, we hear the LOW GUTTURAL SIGH.

Frankie quickly hones in - rushing quickly down the alley toward the source of the sound.

He stops at a pile of boxes and old discarded furniture. He tears into the pile, throwing off the boxes and broken chairs ... soon revealing a badly beaten Honeybear.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
(a terrible cry)
Pidgie!!!

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND BUSTER'S -- MOMENTS LATER

Pidgie rushes down the alley, joining Frankie beside Honeybear.

PIDGIE
Oh Lord! Honey ... you OK sugar?

HONEYBEAR
Some fools ... they jumped me. Had
to be ... three or four of them.
Maybe more!

PIDGIE
You hurt bad? Should I call an
ambulance?

HONEYBEAR
Boys weren't that good.

PIDGIE
It was Pooch's boys, wasn't it?

(CONTINUED)

HONEYBEAR
Couldn't tell. It was too dark.

PIDGIE
(to Frankie)
Run out front, Frankie ... find
someone to help us get Honey back
inside.

Frankie runs off. Pidgie cradles Honeybear's head. She
unbuttons his top shirt button, loosens his tie and tries to
make him a little more comfortable.

PIDGIE (CONT'D)
You hurtin' bad?
(Honeybear winces)
Got a good mind to call the cops on
that Pooch.

HONEYBEAR
There'd just be three more goons to
take his place.
(pause - Honeybear
looks around)
You know Pidgie ... I been on my
fanny in this spot once before.
Long time ago ...

PIDGIE
Time you took the hint, old man.
Pidgie means bad news.

HONEYBEAR
(shaking his head)
You're the best news that's happened
to this old man in a long time.
(he looks around)
We're gettin' too old for this kinda
stuff, baby.

PIDGIE
Maybe it's time to move on. Sell
this old place and move to Florida
... you reckon you'd like Florida?

HONEYBEAR
I reckon I'd like any place as long
as you were there, Pidgie.

PIDGIE
You gettin' soft on me in your old
age, Honey?

HONEYBEAR
Soft as a baby's behind ...

(CONTINUED)

Pidgie smiles. She leans in and kisses Honeybear on the forehead. Honeybear gently caresses Pidgie's cheek.

DISSOLVE
TO:

EXT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- EVENING

The night of Honeybear's "homecoming." The sign is still in the window. A steady stream of patrons are entering the club.

A cab pulls up front.

INT. TAXI CAB -- CONTINUOUS

CAB DRIVER
This is it, lady.

HELEN
Are you sure?

CAB DRIVER
Yes ma'm. Ten forty-four.

Helen pays the driver and warily gets out of the car. She starts to walk toward the Jam Joint's front door.

CAB DRIVER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey lady?

ANGLE ON CABBIE

CAB DRIVER (CONT'D)
You want I should wait?

BACK ON HELEN She shakes her head. The cab pulls away.

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- CONTINUOUS

Pidgie is standing behind the bar. She is slightly panicked over the unaccustomed surge in patrons who now inhabit the place. Frankie is helping her stock the bar. Helen has entered.

PIDGIE
We're gonna need another case of
ginger ale, sugar. And some more
ice ...

Frankie turns, sees Helen. Beat.

HELEN
Hello Frankie.

CUT TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- A FEW MOMENTS LATER

Frankie and Helen seated at a table.

HELEN

I should be very angry with you.
But I just can't find the heart for
it.

(pause)

I missed you, Frankie.

FRANKIE

I'm sorry mom ... I was gonna call,
but ...

Helen nods. She looks around.

HELEN

What is this place, Frankie? A club
or something?

FRANKIE

It used to be a jam joint.
(Helen gives him a
puzzled look)
A place where people come to listen
to music.

HELEN

And this is where you've been staying?

FRANKIE

(he nods)
Pidgie ... she's the woman at the
bar ... she fixed me up a room in
back. It's really very comfortable.

HELEN

And the piano player ... from Short
Creek ... he's here too?

FRANKIE

He's giving me lessons.
(pause)
That's all I ever wanted, you know.
That's why I went down to Short Creek
in the first place. There was never
any reason to worry.

HELEN

I wasn't worried, Frankie. Not about
that.

FRANKIE

Does dad know you're here?

(CONTINUED)

HELEN

Your father has moved out. I haven't seen him in a while.

(Frankie reacts)

And there's something else -- the reason I'm here really ...

(pause)

There's some money. Cal's money that he was saving for college. I think he'd want you to have it.

(Frankie reacts)

It would make a nice start toward a music school. Cal would have liked that ...

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- A WHILE LATER

A fair crowd has assembled. A jolt of excitement energizes the room as the man of the hour appears. Honeybear slowly makes his way to the bandstand. He walks with a cane. His face is still marked from the attack. His right arm is in a sling. He stands by the piano -- a smattering of applause.

HONEYBEAR

Thank you boys and girls. Thank you very much ...

PATRON

What happened to your arm, Honey?

HONEYBEAR

What happened was I tripped over a coupla cockroaches. You sure do grow 'em big down here on South Calumet!

(laughter)

Temporarily put me out of commission.

(crowd reacts)

But I'll be back! Sure as there's a God in heaven, I'll be back!

(applause)

But in the meantime, my protege -- Mr. Frankie Trumbull's gonna flash some of his trash for y'all!

ANGLE ON FRANKIE

Sitting with Helen and Pidgie -- he reacts ... obviously not expecting this turn of events.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

C'mon up, Frankie. It's showtime!

The crowd begins to clap in unison. Frankie is momentarily unable to move.

(CONTINUED)

PIDGIE

Go ahead, baby! You worked hard for this!

FRANKIE

I ... I don't think ...

PIDGIE

Be a shame for your mama to come all this way and not get to hear you play!

HONEYBEAR

What you waitin' for boy!?

Frankie starts for the bandstand. The applause grows.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

And I just want you folks to know - if you love the boy ... and I know you will - I taught him everything he knows!

Laughter. Frankie climbs up on the bandstand.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Mister Frankie Trumbull, ladies and gentlemen!

(applause)

What you gonna play for us tonight, Frankie?

(Frankie shrugs his shoulders)

What's the matter? Cat got your tongue? How about layin' some of Mamie's Blues on us?

FRANKIE

Sure.

HONEYBEAR

Go ahead son. Show no mercy!

Frankie sits down at the piano.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

You want anything to drink?

Frankie smiles, shakes his head. He adjusts his stool to his liking ... rubs his hands together and flexes his fingers.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)

Prima donna, Huh?

Frankie is ready to play. He looks at Honeybear one last time. Honeybear nods.

(CONTINUED)

A millisecond before Frankie's fingers come in contact with the keyboard, the front door swings open. Pooch and his two henchmen enter.

The men make a show of swaggering over to the bar. Pooch sits. The others gather around him. The crowd grows quiet.

POOCH

See now ... I done told you to get rid of the piano man, Esther. And here you've gone and got A second one!

PIDGIE

You best be quiet and just let the boy play, Pooch.

POOCH

I s'pose if I come back here tomorrow night, they be four piano men sittin' up there ... multiplyin' like rabbits! (he shouts to Frankie)
Hey boy! You get down from there!

Frankie looks at Pooch. He doesn't know what to do. Then he looks over at Honeybear.

HONEYBEAR

(quietly)

You go ahead, Frankie. Don't pay those fools no mind. Old Honey's here. You just play your music.

After a moment, Frankie very tentatively launches into Jelly Roll Morton's arrangement of Mamie's Blues - a leisurely blues "walk" that slowly builds in intensity and depth of feeling.

Perhaps uncomfortable because of Pooch and his thugs, Frankie falters. One of the patrons shouts out ...

PATRON

C'mon son ... don't save any for later!

HONEYBEAR

Give us some of the Naked Dance Frankie! Let it smoke!

Honeybear winks. Frankie smiles. He launches into Jelly Roll Morton's The Naked Dance with a burst of energy.

With growing intensity, he proceeds to weave a spell over the room with his playing, which grows stronger and more confident with every passing note.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON THE CROWD

They close their eyes and drink in Frankie's song. Pooch reacts with a scowl. He realizes that Frankie's hold over the room is absolute. He turns and walks out. His thugs follow.

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
 (over Frankie's playing)
 Well lookee here ... watch out now
 ... watch out! My my ... where did
 a white boy ever learn to play piano
 like that?!!

DISSOLVE
 TO:

INT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The wee hours. The last stragglers have just departed. Helen is seated at the bar. Pidgie is pouring her a cup of tea. Frankie and Honeybear are seated at a table.

HONEYBEAR
 You got into it tonight, son.

FRANKIE
 It's a lot like you said.

HONEYBEAR
 How's that?

FRANKIE
 About hanging onto the fervor. It
 was like I could feel it!
 (pause)
 I mean -- I know this sounds crazy
 ... but tonight ... it was like the
 piano was playing me!
 (Honeybear smiles)
 ... and the people and the whole
 room ...!

HONEYBEAR
 Like the music was creating it all!
 And you were just gettin' swept up
 in it like everyone else!

Frankie smiles. A shared understanding of how music transforms ...

HONEYBEAR (CONT'D)
 Welcome to the club.

(CONTINUED)

ANGLE ON HELEN AND PIDGIE

PIDGIE

Look at those two! Smilin' like the
two cats that ate the canary!

HELEN

You turn away for just a moment ...
and your baby has grown up!

(pause)

I don't know what would have happened
if Mr. Powell hadn't come along.

PIDGIE

And the Lord shall provide.

ANGLE BACK ON FRANKIE AND HONEYBEAR

FRANKIE

She wants me to come home.

HONEYBEAR

'Course she does!

(Frankie nods)

Spent her whole life worryin' about
you. Don't take the moment away
when she sees how it all turns out.

FRANKIE

I was hoping I could maybe stay around
here for a little longer.

HONEYBEAR

Life gives you just one chance to
make things right ...

(a glance toward Pidgie)

... two if you're lucky. Just be
damn sure the choice you make is the
right one.

FRANKIE

How can you be sure?

HONEYBEAR

You can't. Just throw everything up
against the wall. See what sticks.

CAB DRIVER (O.S.)

(breaking the quiet)

Someone call a cab?

CUT TO:

EXT. BUSTER'S JAM JOINT -- MOMENTS LATER

The cab is parked at the curb. Honeybear helps Helen into
the back seat. Frankie and Pidgie stand up on the curb.

(CONTINUED)

CLOSE ON HELEN AND HONEYBEAR

HELEN

Thank you ... you've ... you've done
so much.

HONEYBEAR

Your boy did most of the doin'.

Pause. Helen takes a long look at Honeybear.

HELEN

He heard something in your music. I
think it had something to do with
Frankie seeing how far things really
are in this world from the way they
should be.

(pause)

And your music gave him a glimpse at
all the beautiful possibilities.
And it almost broke his heart ...

HONEYBEAR

Your boy's gonna be just fine.

Frankie crosses to Honeybear. The two exchange a look.
Beat.

FRANKIE

You still haven't told me how much
you charge for lessons. I guess
I'll have to owe it to you.

HONEYBEAR

Pass it on. Tell 'em it's from
Honeybear.

Frankie starts to get in the cab -- stops. Pidgie crosses
in with a bag of sandwiches.

PIDGIE

Here's a little something to tide
you over on the train ride home.

HONEYBEAR

Little something?! Good lord, woman!
... you leave any crumbs behind for
Honeybear?

PIDGIE

Frankie's a growing boy. You done
finished your growing.

FRANKIE

(to Honeybear)

I don't know what to say. I guess
... just ... thank you.

(CONTINUED)

Honeybear grabs Frankie and pulls him in close.

HONEYBEAR

Keep playing your song, boy. 'Cause
once you play the music - it's always
there. You understand what I'm
sayin'? Hangin' in the air ... on
your lips ... in your heart. That's
because it started out bein' a feeling
... started out being somebody's
life. And when that life's gone -
music's all that's left.

CLOSE ON HONEYBEAR

Still hugging Frankie. He closes his eyes tight against the
tears he hopes will not come.

Frankie breaks away, turns and joins his mother in the back
seat of the cab.

PIDGIE

Take care, baby ...

ANGLE ON TAXICAB as it drives off

WE LOOK DOWN on the cab - now a tiny speck - as it negotiates
the streets of Southside Chicago, on its way to Union Station.

(CONTINUED)

FRANKIE (V.O.)
(the voice we heard
at the very beginning -
which of course was
our Frankie all along)

I never saw Honeybear Powell again.
I wrote him a few letters but they
were sent back unopened. Then George
told me he'd heard that Honeybear
and Pidgie had finally moved to
Florida.

(pause)

The obituary in the paper was small -
just a few paragraphs.

"Pioneer Jazz Musician Dies."
There's not a day goes by when I
don't think about him. About what
he taught me. It was ... so much
more than music!

(pause)

I close my eyes and I see him -
rocking the room with his energy ...
his "velocity" ... and one of the
greatest left hands in all
Piano-dom.

(pause)

I think of him and I know - like
I've never known anything - that I
will love him for the rest of my
life ...

FADE UP Fats Waller singing I Believe in Miracles.

ROLL END CREDITS

THE END