

BIRDLAND

an original screenplay by

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FADE IN:

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: "CHICAGO - PRESENT DAY"

Flowers, makeup, cards and gifts clutter a vanity's counter. A CIGARETTE burns in an ashtray next to a TRUMPET.

An OLD BLACK MAN in a pinstripe suit, and fedora, shines a pair of Stacy Adams. He's a hip old-timer who looks good for 65.

A YOUNG JOURNALIST with a rolling tape recorder, pen and note pad listens attentively to the Old Black Man.

OLD BLACK MAN

Now wait a minute. Don't get this thing twisted. I never said he was perfect. Hell, we all did some things we ain't proud of, but you wouldn't know nothin' 'bout that cause you just started livin' -- how old you is? Twenty?

The Young Journalist smirks, almost embarrassed.

YOUNG JOURNALIST

Twenty-five tomorrow.

The Old Black Man, returns a smile, nods.

OLD BLACK MAN

Yeah, see, you fresh meat for them cats over there at Rolling Stone, ain't you?

YOUNG JOURNALIST

It's not so bad.

OLD BLACK MAN

I remember twenty-five, that's when cats made music -- real music that told a story. Nowadays it ain't nothin' but a whole lotta noise sayin' a whole lotta nothin'. Ridin' down the street, volume on blast, shakin' windows...

He trails off.

OLD BLACK MAN (CONT'D)

If it's gotta be that loud to make you feel good, it ain't real.

YOUNG JOURNALIST

So you don't listen to any of the new artists? There's some kids from Harlem who sampled Bluebird's Midnight Sun on one of their records. It went Gold last week. That's gotta say something about what you and the band contributed to the music industry.

OLD BLACK MAN

That might be, but those kids gotta long way to go if they thinkin' 'bout makin' history.

CLICK!

The tape recorder stops.

The Young Journalist replaces the tape with a fresh one, presses the RECORD BUTTON.

YOUNG JOURNALIST

I've read stories about him, talked to other people, it's all the same, they say he's a musical genius. But what about the drugs? You know, heroin, cocaine?

OLD BLACK MAN

What about it?

YOUNG JOURNALIST

You were there, how bad did it get?

OLD BLACK MAN

Magazines and Reporters say a lotta things. Half that shit you see in black and white ain't true anyhow, so I can only tell you what I know, and one thing's for sure -- and this is the God's honest truth, he's the best goddamn trumpet player I know.

YOUNG JOURNALIST

You're saying despite his short comings --

OLD BLACK MAN

It ain't got nothin' to do with all that music he wrote.

Give him a moment while he takes a puff from the cigarette.

OLD BLACK MAN (CONT'D)

I see it like this, ain't no schoolin'
from no text books can teach a man a
gift like that, he gotta be born
with it, and Sonny? There's no doubt
in my mind, Sonny was born with it.

EXT. SHERIDAN AVENUE - DAY

SUPER: "CHICAGO - 1960's"

Here comes YOUNG SONNY, a skinny little White kid around 10,
in a beat-up jacket, with a paper bag loaded with groceries.

He passes a couple of shops, liquor stores, news paper stands.

EXT. LAKESIDE MUSIC SHOP - DAY

Young Sonny gawks at the display of brand new instruments in
the window. Guitars, drums, flutes. They don't mean anything
to him because he's got his sights on the glistening GOLD
TRUMPET.

INT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - DAY

THUGS shoot craps in the hallway, talk shit to each other.

FISH BONE, 30, African American, shakes dice, blows on them.

FISH BONE

Lemme school y'all young bucks on
somethin'. Put your money where
your mouth is, mothafucka.

He rolls the dice. Bam! Snake eyes.

FISH BONE (CONT'D)

Damn!

Young Sonny moves past the Thugs with his load of groceries.

FISH BONE (CONT'D)

Hey, hey, little Sonny. What it be
like?

YOUNG SONNY

Hi Mister Fish.

Fish Bone breaks from the game, tells Young Sonny a grandiose
story of yesteryear. He's the only one who likes his own
tales, that's because everybody else knows they're all lies.

FISH BONE

Did I ever tell you about the time I
stole my daddy's car?

Young Sonny listens.

FISH BONE (CONT'D)
 I wasn't no older than you, ten,
 eleven. I drove all the way down to
 Florida. You know how far away that
 is?

Young Sonny nods no.

FISH BONE (CONT'D)
 (lying)
 Five-thousand miles.

YOUNG SONNY
 What you do when you got there?

FISH BONE
 What you mean what I do? Cops was
 waitin' on me at the state line, all
 fifty of them with their dogs. Come
 to find out, my daddy put them after
 me. Can you believe that? My own
 daddy dropped a dime on me.

He says it like he's surprised by his own lie.

The Thugs have heard enough, tired of waiting.

THUG 1
 (to Fish Bone)
 Nigga, you playin' or what?

Fish Bone extends the dice to Young Sonny.

FISH BONE
 Come over here and blow on these,
 give Fish Bone some luck.

Young Sonny blows on the dice.

FISH BONE (CONT'D)
 (to thugs, shaking
 dice)
 Put your money where your mouth is
 mothafuckas.

He rolls the dice. Bam! Seven!

Fish Bone snatches up a pile of bills.

FISH BONE (CONT'D)
 That's what I'm talkin' 'bout. Gimme
 my money mothafuckas.
 (MORE)

FISH BONE (CONT'D)
(to Young Sonny)
Brought me some luck. Here, put
this in your pocket.

He stuffs a dollar in Young Sonny's pocket.

EXT. MS. HUMPHREY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Sonny hands over the grocery bag to MS. HUMPHREY, 50. She disappears inside the apartment, returns moments later, gives him a dollar.

MS. HUMPHREY
And tell your father my t.v.'s out
again. I'm gonna miss The Guiding
Light.

A mangy cat MEOWS at Ms. Humphrey's feet. She scoops him up in her arms, makes like she's talking to a real person.

MS. HUMPHREY (CONT'D)
Patches, there you are. Bad kitty,
staying out all night. You hungry?
I got some left over spaghetti on
the table for you.

She turns her attention back to Young Sonny.

MS. HUMPHREY (CONT'D)
You want some spaghetti too?

Young Sonny nods no.

MS. HUMPHREY (CONT'D)
Well, tell your father my t.v.'s out
again. I'm gonna miss the Guiding
Light.

Young Sonny smiles, he heard her the first time.

INT. YOUNG SONNY'S APARTMENT - DAY

LIVING ROOM

A raggedy sofa. Cracked and peeling paint on the ceiling. Sheets for curtains cover the windows.

Pictures of a YOUNGER SAM posing with a number of notable JAZZ MUSICIANS on the wall. Duke, Benny, Miles, Dizzy.

There's an old table top record player by the window, coupled with milk crates filled with LP's.

TRUMPET MUSIC. Not the average melody. It's rhythm is before it's time with layers of harmonic complexity. It's phenomenal.

SAM'S BEDROOM

TRUMPET MUSIC continues.

SAM, 40, a scruffy White man, swigs from a bottle of JACK DANIELS. He looks a lot older than he does in the pictures on the living room wall with Dizzy and Duke.

A picture of a beautiful woman on the night stand. There's a sense she's no longer among the living.

YOUNG SONNY'S BEDROOM

TRUMPET MUSIC continues, more prominent than before.

SHEET MUSIC tacked all over the walls. Musical notes on the bars scribbled in Young Sonny's handwriting.

Young Sonny pulls a shoe box from under the bed, reveals more sheet music. He Puts two dollars and some change inside.

Sam moves into the room.

SAM

You got something for me?

Young Sonny pulls a page of sheet music from the wall.

LOUDER TRUMPET MUSIC the moment his hands touch the page.

YOUNG SONNY'S POV - SHEET MUSIC

MAGIC. Musical notes gyrate on the bars, vibrate to the sound of the trumpet music.

BACK TO SCENE

Young Sonny hands the page over to Sam, the Trumpet Music stops abruptly.

We know now the trumpet music was all in Young Sonny's head, and he's the only one who can hear it.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Smoke drifts over red and green track lights.

CUSTOMERS chug down whiskey, smoke cigarettes, vibe to trumpet music played by --

-- Sam on the stage in the spotlight. He plays the same song heard in Young Sonny's head at the apartment.

Young Sonny spies on Sam from the wings of the stage.

AT THE BAR

AUGIE, 40, serves a shot of whiskey to a CUSTOMER.

CUSTOMER
(eyes on Sam)
That Sammy Wanderlan?

Augie nods.

AUGIE
That's him.

The Customer shakes his head.

CUSTOMER
Damn shame. He had a good run didn't he? They ever find out who wrote all those songs?

AUGIE
Nope, but that don't matter much, cause now, those songs is all he got.

CUSTOMER
Makes you wonder if it really was his kid.

EXT. LAKESIDE MUSIC SHOP - DAY

Sam and Young Sonny at the window. Young Sonny eyes on the glistening Gold Trumpet.

SAM
A promise is a promise, right?

INT. LAKESIDE MUSIC SHOP - DAY

Sam mulls over price tags on trumpets. \$200.00, \$220.00 \$325.00. YIKES!

The STORE MANAGER moves in on Sam.

STORE MANAGER
Looking for beginners or pros?

SAM
Something nice for my boy.

Young Sonny's by the window, he's got a personal connection with that glistening gold trumpet, and he won't leave it.

STORE MANAGER

He's a bit ambitious, isn't he? How 'bout I show him something for beginners?

SAM

How much is that one?

The Store Manager flips over the price tag. \$150.00.

STORE MANAGER

Maybe he can work his way up to this one. I've got something under a hundred in the back.

The Store Manager disappears to a room in the back.

Young Sonny slides his fingers over the gold trumpet. He's in love.

YOUNG SONNY

Is it too much?

Sam counts out a wad of cash from his wallet. \$92.00. Then a few coins from his pocket. .52 cents.

The Store Manager returns with a less elaborate trumpet, dull, and dented.

STORE MANAGER

I've had it for a while. Might do the trick if he's looking to just play around. Fifty dollars, it's yours.

Sam gives Young Sonny a look, but he's in another world with that trumpet in the window.

SAM

I know you're in the business of making money, and I'm not looking for charity.

Sam shows the Store Manager the money.

SAM

I've got ninety-two dollars and a kid who hears music like nobody dead or alive.

Sam slips off his watch, couples it with his wallet.

SAM (CONT'D)

Now, if you take this -- all of it,
I'll walk over to that counter and
leave it. Somebody came in, lost
it, never came back looking for it --

STORE MANAGER

Sir --

SAM

And I'll walk out of here with my
boy and that trumpet.

EXT. MELROSE AVENUE - DAY

Sam and Young Sonny move away from the music shop, Young
Sonny with a TORPEDO BAG strapped across his shoulder.

Young Sonny has a moment, looks to Sam.

INT. LAKESIDE MUSIC SHOP - DAY

Sam's wallet and watch on the counter next to the cash
register.

Young Sonny takes the two dollars Mrs. Humphrey and Fish
Bone gave him, puts it on the counter.

INT. SAM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sam swigs from a bottle of Jack Daniels.

TRUMPET MUSIC bellows from another room, and it sounds like
a masterpiece.

Sam smiles knowingly, takes another swig of Jack Daniels.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - ASSEMBLY HALL - DAY

Parent's and children bustle in, claim their seats.

BEHIND STAGE

MISS WHITIKER gathers a class of fifth graders.

MISS WHITIKER

Okay children, don't be nervous.
All you can do is your very best.

JONATHAN, a chubby kid, teary eyed, tugs at Miss Whitiker's
sleeve.

JONATHAN

I forgot my lines.

The children have a LAUGH.

MISS WHITIKER
That's all right Jonathan. Just
close your eyes, real tight, and try
to remember as hard as you can.

Young Sonny, stays by the wings, peeks through the velvet
curtain, searches for Sam.

YOUNG SONNY'S POV - ASSEMBLY HALL

The room is filling up fast with parents and children. Sam's
nowhere in sight.

BACK TO SCENE

Young Sonny glares at a clock mounted on the wall. 11:30.

INT. ASSEMBLY HALL - STAGE - DAY

Chubby Jonathan's catatonic, can't perform. Children in the
audience cackle, laugh at him.

It's too much for Jonathan to take. Screw this, he breaks
into tears, runs off stage.

It's obvious Miss Whitiker is embarrassed for Jonathan, but
she applauds him anyway.

MISS WHITIKER
Let's give Jonathan Reynor a hand.
(to Jonathan, lying)
What a wonderful job Jonathan.

Jonathan's long gone.

AT THE ENTRANCE

Sam lingers by the door, sneaks a taste of whiskey, stuffs
the bottle inside his jacket.

MISS WHITIKER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Our next performer will play The
Star Spangled Banner.

BACK TO SCENE

Miss Whitiker exits the stage, Young Sonny steps out from
behind the curtains.

Stiff silence over the audience.

YOUNG SONNY'S POV - SHEET MUSIC

MAGIC. Musical notes leap and dance on curved bars. It's like a dream.

TRUMPET MUSIC, up tempo, an intricate score of The Star Spangled Banner.

BACK TO SCENE

Young Sonny effortlessly trumpets an amazing rendition of The Star Spangled Banner.

Shock and awe over parents and children. It's a miracle.

Miss Whitiker peeks from behind the curtains, dumbfounded.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - HALLWAY - DAY

Sam moves away from the Assembly Hall.

The sound of HIGH-HEELS quick behind him.

MISS WHITIKER (V.O.)
Mister Wanderlan. Mister Wanderlan.

Sam spins around, waits.

Miss Whitiker's overwhelmed and out of breath.

MISS WHITIKER (CONT'D)
Mister Wanderlan...Sonny...

She trails off, panting, can't find the words.

Sam grins, shrug his shoulders, nods.

SAM
Yeah. I know.

He turns on his heels, continues down the hall.

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)
That cat was right when he told Augie, Sam had a good run. In his day, he played with some of the best, especially Dizzy, but it was down hill after Sonny's mama died. She was already on her way out when he come into this world. Yup, took her last breath, right there where she gave birth.

INT. GREENMILL - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

The Old Black Man, spits on his Stacy Adams, polishes it off.

OLD BLACK MAN

Must've been somethin' else for a kid that young to have all that music bottled up inside him like that. Hearin' and seein' it in that tiny little head of his. Maybe that's why he come to be one of those, what you call it? One of those...

YOUNG JOURNALIST

Insomniacs?

OLD BLACK MAN

Yeah, that. One of them. He'd be up all hours of the night playin' that trumpet, all by hisself. See, you gotta understand somethin' 'bout Sonny. He ain't never been one for the spotlight, even when he had to be. It ain't make no difference to him, long as he could play.

YOUNG JOURNALIST

It's true then? He's the one who wrote all his father's songs, and he never told anybody because he didn't want to put Sonny in the spotlight?

The Old Black Man has a light laugh, understands it's a trick question.

OLD BLACK MAN

You ain't as crafty as you think.

The Young Journalist scribbles something on the note pad.

OLD BLACK MAN (CONT'D)

What you puttin' down? Tryin' to come up with your own answer?

YOUNG JOURNALIST

Something like that.

OLD BLACK MAN

Don't go printin' no hearsay. All you gotta do is listen. It's right there in the music.

The Young Journalist pauses, confused.

YOUNG JOURNALIST

Whose? His or his father's?

The Old Black Man won't answer, he's already given too much information.

He takes a moment, puffs from the cigarette, then --

OLD BLACK MAN

You know his daddy drank hisself to death don't you? He had a mean relationship with ole Jack. Ruined his gut, that's what put Sonny on his own.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

SUPER: "CHICAGO 1970'S"

Snow flakes drift in the cold wind.

Sonny, mid 20's, good looking with tousled hair, comes down a soggy alley. He's got a torpedo bag strapped across his shoulder, and carries an old suitcase.

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)

He didn't look like nobody who knew music. You know, like those laid back cats you see 'round the chittlin' circuit. For all we knew, he was just some White boy from the ghetto.

Out of nowhere, a YOUNG PUNK whisks past Sonny, nearly knocks him down.

TWO BOYS chase after the Young Punk, one rams into Sonny, and keeps running.

Sonny's suitcase crashes to the ground, pops open, sheet music flies everywhere. He scrambles to recover them, scoops them back in the suitcase.

EXT. STREET CORNER - NIGHT

Fish Bone, dressed like a pimp, keeps his eyes on a stick thin woman dressed like a hooker across the street.

A white van pulls up to the woman, Fish Bone throws her a nod, she gets inside the van.

Sonny comes from around the corner. Fish Bone lights up.

FISH BONE

Hey, hey, Sonny, what it be like?

SONNY

How Fish, how you doin'?

FISH BONE

You know how it is.

(MORE)

FISH BONE (CONT'D)

Keepin' an eye on my bread. You dig it? Hang tight with me for a minute, play me one of them songs.

Sonny's shy about the whole thing, smirks.

SONNY

Not tonight Fish, maybe some other time. You look busy.

Fish Bone breaks into an elaborate story. It's gonna be a lie, but Sonny listens, strictly out of respect.

FISH BONE

I ever tell you about the time I found a million dollars in a pillow case? You know how many zeros that is? Told my mamma 'bout it, thought she'd be happy for me, but you know what she did? She called the cops on me, said I robbed a bank. Can you believe that? My own mamma dropped a dime on me.

SONNY

They took the money?

FISH BONE

It was already gone by then. I buried it in the Big Field, cross the street from old man Howard's liquor store.

Sonny thinks about it, confused.

SONNY

The cemetery?

FISH BONE

Wasn't no cemetery there then. By the time I went back for it, city put it up.

SONNY

That's too bad huh? Sure is a lot of money.

FISH BONE

Damn right it is. Now a dead man's sleepin' on my bread.

SONNY

Maybe next time.

Sonny forges on.

FISH BONE
Check you later Sonny.

EXT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - NIGHT

THREE NEIGHBORHOOD GIRLS, African American, hangout in front of the building, gossip.

NEIGHBORHOOD GIRL 1 flirts with Sonny as he moves past them.

NEIGHBORHOOD GIRL 1
(provocative)
Heeey Sonny.

SONNY
Hi Cassie.

He keeps moving, hardly making eye contact with the girls.
Is he blushing?

NEIGHBORHOOD GIRL 2 (V.O.)
Girl, leave that White boy alone.

NEIGHBORHOOD GIRL 1 (V.O.)
He ain't White, he Jewish. Jewish
boys need love too.

NEIGHBORHOOD GIRL 3 (V.O.)
I know that's right.

INT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Ms. Humphrey struggles up the stairs with a cart of groceries.

SONNY
(taking over cart)
I got it Ms. Humphrey.

Sonny moves up the stairs with the cart, Ms. Humphrey follows.

MS. HUMPHREY
Seem like that landlord keep adding
stairs in this place. What's he
gonna do if I fall? My bones ain't
no good you know?

INT. MS. HUMPHREY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dimly lit. A bulky floor model t.v. flickers a snowy reception.

KITCHEN

A CAT who's missing chunks of fur, eats from a plate of spaghetti on the table.

He leaps too the floor, scurries to another room when --
-- Sonny wheels in the grocery cart.

MS. HUMPHREY

I went to see your father today, and
you know what they did? They took
the flowers I left him last week.
What is this world coming too?
Robbing the dead. Your poor father
can't even rest in peace.

She takes two dollars from her purse, hands them to Sonny.
He's reluctant, won't take it.

She puts the bills in his hand, closes his fist.

MS. HUMPHREY (CONT'D)

When you gonna find yourself a nice
girl, and move out of this place?

SONNY

Sounds good, but girls like guys
with money.

MS. HUMPHREY

And some like'em with brains. I'd
marry a bum with a good think-tank
before I would a rich gambler.

She brushes lent off his shoulder, checks him out like a
mother would, smiles.

MS. HUMPHREY (CONT'D)

I wouldn't worry about it though.
That horn's gonna take you places.
Then you'll have money and brains.

She turns on her heels, exits.

MS. HUMPHREY (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'll see you out.

Sonny puts the bills on the table, exits.

INT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sam's bedroom door is cracked open. The bed is made,
everything's in place. Looks like no one's been in there
for years.

Sonny has a moment. It's obvious he misses Sam. He pulls
the door shut.

SONNY'S BEDROOM

Sheet music all over the walls, hundreds, maybe even a thousand. The collection has grown over the years.

Sonny takes sheet music from his suitcase, tacks them on the wall, overlaps them with others.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUE - NIGHT

Empty booths and tables.

Sonny plays trumpet on stage. He's got on a white bistro apron over jeans. No crowd here to hear him play, but that's okay, he's in his own world.

Augie's behind the bar, preps bowls of peanuts, and shot glasses. He has a look a his watch.

AUGIE

All right Sonny, wrap it up. Opening time.

LATER

A full house. Customer's drinking, and smoking. A BAND plays Latin Jazz on stage.

Sonny serves bottles of wine and whiskey to customer's at tables. This job is for the birds.

EXT. ELEVATED TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

All kinds of commuters coming and going, Librarians, Students, Nurses.

A BUM in a filthy beat-up coat begs for spare change by the ticket booth. No one stops. No one gives a damn.

FRANKIE, mid 20's, a pretty African American girl with a daisy in her afro, hides from the cold wind between a Windbreak.

Sonny moves down the platform, torpedo bag strapped across his shoulder. He stands across from Frankie.

They share a quick glance, instant attraction.

The B TRAIN whizzes into the station, doors slid open, passengers get on and off.

INT. B TRAIN - MOVING - DAY

Jam packed. Standing room only.

Passengers cling on to overhead railing, rock side to side as the train rumbles down the tracks.

Sonny and Frankie at each others side, his arm stretched over her head, hand clasped on the rail. They're so close, he can smell her perfume.

The train JERKS, forces Frankie against Sonny's chest. He unconsciously grabs hold of her hand.

A moment as their gaze meet, intense and overpowering.

The CONDUCTOR'S voice thunders over the intercom.

CONDUCTOR (V.O.)
 (in intercom)
 Wabash. Connections, State Street,
 Green Line.

Frankie slides her hand from under Sonny's, but keeps her eyes on him.

The train comes to a stop, Frankie exits onto the platform.

EXT. ELEVATED TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

The train pulls off slowly. Frankie has a last look at Sonny through the window.

FRANKIE'S POV - THROUGH TRAIN WINDOW

Sonny's watching her too.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DAY

Augie preps the place for an evening rush, flips down chairs, arranges tables.

AUGIE
 (to Mike)
 Who're your friends?

MIKE, African American 30, dressed in a suit with no tie, looks to STICKS.

STICKS, African American 20's, with a speech impairment, twirls drum sticks.

MIKE
 This here's Steven, but we call him
 Sticks.

STICKS
 Cause, cause, these here sticks is
 like, is like women to me.

AUGIE
 What's wrong with his tongue?

MIKE

It get caught up sometimes, but that ain't got nothin' to do with the way he murder them drums.

DAX, African American, 30, enjoys the company of two voluptuous women, one on each arm. He's got processed hair, a killer smile, and two pistols peaking out from his belt.

MIKE (CONT'D)

And that's Dax, our trumpet player, when he feel like it.

AUGIE

And who are they?

MIKE

His fans.

AUGIE

(eyes on Dax's pistols)
I wasn't talking about the girls.

MIKE

He likes to be on the safe side.

Mike introduces KAI, a handsome Asian American in his 20's, and Frankie.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Kai's our strings. That's my baby girl Frankie.

AUGIE

All right. I've got three weeks open on the bill, it's yours if you want it. Don't pay much and you'll have to split it five ways.

MIKE

How much is not much?

AUGIE

A hundred dollars. Four nights a week and your own tip jar at the bar.

Frankie gives Mike a nod.

MIKE

We can work with that.

AUGIE

Crowd gets heavy 'round ten. Nine on weekends.

Mike extends his hand.

MIKE
We appreciate it Mister...

AUGIE
(shakes on it)
August.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

Customer's haven't arrived yet. Sonny plays trumpet on stage.
He's in another universe.

GLADYS, and Augie set up the bar.

GLADYS
That kid sure can play. Better than
his old man was.

Augie doesn't give a shit.

AUGIE
He's up there dreamin', that's all.
You see that apron he's wearin' don't
you?

Customers wander in. Augie has a look at his watch.

AUGIE (CONT'D)
All right Sonny, wrap it up.

GLADYS
Why won't you let him play a set?
Put him on the bill for a night.

AUGIE
You wanna hear subway music? Go
down to Freddy's joint, he's got
plenty of it.

Gladys is disgusted.

GLADYS
You're a Stiffer, Augie.

AUGIE
I'm a business man. Now do what I
pay you to do and go get the ice out
the back.

LATER

Sonny delivers cocktails to customers. Augie's on stage at
the microphone.

AUGIE (CONT'D)

(in microphone)

I wanna thank everybody for coming out on this cold night. Here's a little something to take the chill off. Give it up for Birdland.

CLAPPING over the Customers.

Frankie takes the stage. She's got on a psychedelic mini dress, and a flower in her afro.

Sticks clicks his drumsticks together, leads the band into a smooth jazz song, nice and easy.

Frankie hums a few notes, then --

SHE SINGS. Her voice flows into the microphone like honey.

Sonny pauses, turns his attention to the stage. She's beautiful and she sings? He doesn't even know her name, but already she's got him wrapped around her finger.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Sonny empties a trash can. The door to a dressing room is open. He see's Frankie and Mike inside, spies on them.

SONNY'S POV - FRANKIE AND MIKE IN DRESSING ROOM

Mike whispers in Frankie's ear, she smiles, he slips money in her pocket. They share a hug.

BACK TO SCENE

Sonny's crushed, disappears out the back door with the garbage.

EXT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - ALLEY - NIGHT

It's freezing out here. Too cold to snow.

Sonny tosses garbage bags inside the dumpster.

Frankie hides by the back door with a cigarette, trembles under her coat.

FRANKIE

You got a light?

Her sudden presence catches Sonny off guard.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Where's your coat?

Sonny's slow to answer, his breath seeps from his mouth, turns to frost.

SONNY
Inside. I'm used to it.

Frankie flashes the cigarette.

FRANKIE
A light, you got one?

Sonny flicks a lighter to her cigarette. She takes a long drag, relaxes.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Promised my brother I'd give it up two months ago. He says it ain't good for a singer's voice. I've gotta find a new habit.

SONNY
I couldn't tell. You sounded pretty good in there.

Frankie extends a hand.

FRANKIE
Francesca. Friends can call me Frankie.

They shake on it.

SONNY
Sonny.

FRANKIE
You're the guy from the train right? A couple days ago? That bag you wear -- you a musician?

Sonny doesn't want to admit it.

SONNY
(stumbling)
Yeah -- no -- no, not really.

FRANKIE
You don't look like one, maybe that's 'cause your head ain't up your ass. You know what I mean?

She takes another drag from the cigarette.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
You live 'round here?

No time to answer. The door opens. Mike, Sticks, and Kai step out.

Dax behind them with his harem of women.

Frankie tosses the cigarette fast.

Dax, with his women, Sticks, and Kai share a few laughs, move down the alley.

MIKE

What you doin' out here baby girl?

FRANKIE

Catchin' some air.

(beat)

Sonny, this is my brother Mike.
Mike, Sonny.

Mike and Sonny shake on it.

MIKE

What it is, Cool Breeze?

FRANKIE

Sonny's a musician --

Mike's not interested.

MIKE

We better split.
(to Sonny)
Check you later.

Frankie moves away with Mike, looks over her shoulder at Sonny, she's already crazy about him.

FRANKIE

Later, Sonny.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Sonny scribbles melodies on a page of sheet music, titles it FRANCESCA.

EXT. SUBWAY STATION - DAY

Commuters coming and going like ants.

Sonny plays trumpet in the shadows, his torpedo bag upright. A man tosses a fist full of change inside, keeps moving.

INT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JAZZ MUSIC. A record spins on the stereo. An LP jacket on the coffee table.

ON LP JACKET

A picture of Sam playing trumpet. The title reads:
WONDERLAND.

BACK TO SCENE

Sonny lays back on the couch. There's a sense of loneliness about him.

SAM (V.O.)

You got a gift -- real talent Sonny,
no one can ever take that away from
you, so don't be afraid of it. You
wanna know what'll happen if you do?
The magic stops.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Frankie looks out over the main floor from the wings, her eyes search for Sonny.

MIKE

You ready?

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT - LATER

Frankie sings a SMOOTH JAZZ SONG. Dax belts out a solo on trumpet. Frankie takes this moment to look over the customers, entrance, and bar. No Sonny.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT - DIFFERENT DAY

Gladys serves Frankie a glass of wine.

FRANKIE

You seen Sonny around?

GLADYS

He's off on Monday and Tuesday nights.
Who's lookin' for him?

EXT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

The band files inside an old Ford Van. Mike opens the door for Frankie.

FRANKIE

I've gotta go see a friend. I'll
catch up with you later.

MIKE

It's after midnight, too late for
you to be in the streets by yourself.
Get in, we'll drop you off.

FRANKIE

I'll get a cab. It'll only be a few
minutes.

Sticks hurries them from inside the van.

STICKS (O.S.)

Rock-n-roll Mike!

FRANKIE

A few minutes. I promise.

EXT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - NIGHT

A cab pulls up in front of the building, Frankie steps out,
hands the driver money through the window.

Tags on the buzzers read: TUCKER, HUMPHREY, WANDERLAN.
Frankie doesn't know which one to call.

Fish Bone exits the building, feather in his hat, dressed to
the nines, he flirts with Frankie like a pro pimp.

FISH BONE

Mmm, mmm, foxy lady, look at you
girl. You a young tender thang,
ain't you? What's shakin' mamma?

Frankie's not interested, won't give him a second thought.

FRANKIE

Sonny live here?

FISH BONE

Third floor, all the way to heaven.
Say, uh, look here --

She moves past Fish Bone quickly, goes inside, but he's still
trying to rap to her.

FISH BONE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Come on sweet thang, give Fish Bone
some time.

INT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - NIGHT

Frankie walks up to the 3rd floor.

EXT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Frankie gives herself a moment, then KNOCKS on the door.

She waits. Nothing.

Another KNOCK.

INT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK in the dark.

Movement. A light flicks on. Sonny staggers from another room, barely awake. He peaks through the peephole.

SONNY'S POV - THROUGH PEEPHOLE

Frankie's in the hallway, distorted through the thick glass.

BACK TO SCENE

Sonny looks over the apartment. It's a wreck. Clothes everywhere, LP's and 45's scattered about the coffee table.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Damn, no time to spruce-up the place. Sonny opens the door.

INT./EXT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

An awkward moment between Sonny and Frankie as they stand at the door eyes locked on each other.

Then finally --

FRANKIE

Hi.

Sonny looks like he's stuck in a dream, says nothing. She throws him a hint.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

(beat)

It's kinda cold out here.

INT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sonny scrapes cloth off the couch, tosses them in a chair.

SONNY

You wanna sit down?

Frankie takes off her coat, hands it over to Sonny.

FRANKIE

You weren't at the Mill. Guess I kinda got used to seeing you around.

Sonny sits at the far end of the coach as if he's afraid to be alone with her.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

What do you do when you take off?

Sonny's too nervous to talk, he needs a minute.

SONNY

Nothing really, just --

Frankie makes a connection, gives him a smile.

FRANKIE

Don't worry, my brother and his boys ain't waitin' down stairs for my cue to bust in and rob you.

SONNY

How did you find me?

Frankie doesn't answer, instead --

FRANKIE

You must don't have too many women comin' 'round often.

Frankie comes to her feet, goes to the --

KITCHEN

-- pulls down two glasses from the cupboard, rummages through the refrigerator.

SONNY

How do you know I'm not some deranged lunatic out to hurt women?

FRANKIE

How do you know I'm not a deranged lunatic out to hurt men?

(beat)

You want somethin' to drink?

It's clear Frankie's the one in charge here, but that's okay. Sonny grins, loosens up a bit, he likes it.

LATER

Frankie fingers through the milk crate of LP's.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

You're kinda different, like you ain't from around here. You always lived here.

SONNY

Yeah, but my parents lived in New York before they got married.

Frankie studies pictures of a younger Sam with famous musicians on the wall.

FRANKIE

That your daddy?

Sonny nods yes.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Must be some kinda man hangin' round cats like Dizzy. Where he at?

SONNY

He died a couple years ago. I never knew my mother.

Frankie pauses, looks like she's going to say something, "sorry" maybe. Nevermind. She puts on a record instead.

SOFT JAZZ MUSIC PLAYS

FRANKIE

I ran away from home when I was sixteen. Went to live with Mike, thought I'd be better off there than with my mother. She had a lot of boyfriends who couldn't keep their hands to themselves. But Mike, he'd never let anything like that go down.

SONNY

He looks tough.

FRANKIE

Yeah, he's knocked a couple of guys around in his day, but he ain't never laid it down on nobody who didn't deserve it, 'cept for some cats he figured might be diggin' on me...

She gives him a look with a hint of flirtation.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

...or the other way around.

She flashes a cigarette.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

You mind?

Sonny scrambles to light her cigarette, like a dog on command.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

You ain't much on talkin' is you?
What people say about you? Call you
one of those shy White boys? Well,
color ain't got nothin' to do with
it. You just different, a real deep
thinker, that's all. I can tell.

They have a moment, there's a deep connection going on here.

SONNY

You always up this late?

Frankie grins, blows cigarette smoke, she's sexy.

FRANKIE

I sing in night clubs. What's your
excuse?

MOMENTS LATER

Frankie comes out from the bathroom, catches Sonny locking
his bedroom door.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Who you tryin' to keep out of there?
Me or you?

Sonny's nervous all over again, fumbles to put the key in
his pocket.

Frankie moves in on him, closes the air between them.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

You wanna let me see what you hidin'?

Sonny's stiff like he's frozen in time, looks like his tongue
is caught in his throat.

Frankie slips the key out of his, puts it in the lock.

Sonny puts his hand over hers, looks petrified, beads of
sweat on his brow.

SONNY

Wait...

They have a moment.

Frankie's presence is over powering, he can't say no to her even though he wants to.

Sonny lets go of her hand.

Another moment while he waits for her to open the door, his eyes full of anxiety. Then --

Frankie takes the key out of the lock. She won't do it, not this time, maybe later.

FRANKIE

You wanna hang out again tomorrow?

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DAY

Mike, Kai and Stick in a jam session, nothing elaborate, just feeding off each others vibe.

WILL, 40, watches from a table near the entrance, looks important. He wears a trench coat and fedora. There's a brief case on the floor next to him.

Frankie breezes past Will, throws her coat on a rack, steps on stage.

MIKE

You're late.

FRANKIE

Where's Dax?

KAI

Somewhere passed out.

STICKS

Got drunk with some broa...broa..broads last night.

KAI

Why he get all the women?

STICKS

Cause he, he, he, got a bad perm and likes the taste of puss, puss, pussy.

Frankie's offended.

FRANKIE

There's a lady in the house.

KAI

You ain't no lady. I've seen you rough up guys twice your size.

Kai and Sticks have a laugh.

STICKS
She, she, she bad ain't she?

MIKE
What time you get in?

Frankie won't answer.

FRANKIE
Start from the top.

Gladys takes Will's order.

GLADYS
What you havin'?

WILL
How old is your Scotch?

GLADYS
Got a nineteen-sixty in the back.
That old enough?

Will nods. Gladys scribbles on a pad. Frankie CROONS to music in the background.

WILL
(of the band)
Regulars?

GLADYS
For about another week. They come
in the afternoon, do a couple runs,
then play till midnight.

WILL
What they call themselves?

GLADYS
Bluebird. That pretty little thing
singin' they call Frankie. Girl's
gotta be somethin' worth it, give
her a name 'long to a guy.

Gladys turns on her heels, disappears.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Frankie brushes on lipstick, pins a daisy in her afro.
Someone's playing a breathtaking song on trumpet. She pauses,
turns her attention to the sound.

Frankie peaks from behind the curtain at the wings, sees --

ON STAGE

-- Sonny in his bistro apron, orchestrates an improvisational grove of smooth jazz fueled with riffs of soul. This man's a mastermind.

Customers make their way inside the club, fills the place up fast.

AUGIE (O.S.)
That's a wrap kid!

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Frankie adjusts Mike's tie, too stuffy, he rips it off.

MIKE
Dax show up yet?

Sticks drums on the counter with his drum sticks.

STICKS
You act like he...he..he got some
respons...respons...responsibility,
or maybe you got a, a, a genie in
your pocket don't none of us know
nothin'...nothin', nothin' about.

KAI
If he ain't here now, he ain't comin'.

MIKE
Call him up, tell him --

STICKS
Aw man, it's too late for all of
that. We gonna have to
play...play...play without him.
We've done it before.

MIKE
Not with this new set. He's got
four solo's.

Frankie thinks about it.

FRANKIE
We can get somebody to fill in.

MIKE
Now? You now somebody on a dime?

BEHIND STAGE

Frankie inches the curtain open. Mike looks over the customers.

Sonny serves cocktails to a couple at a table.

Mike has a laugh.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Cool Breeze? The garbage boy?

FRANKIE

I know what it looks like, but he can play. I don't know what kinda style he's diggin' on, but it's the best thing I've ever heard.

Give Mike a moment to take it in.

MIKE

Okay, let's see what he got.

Augie sets a tray of drinks on the counter, disappears.

Sonny moves from the bar with the tray, Frankie intercepts, mouths something to him. Sonny looks reluctant, eyes Augie who's stealing a shot of whiskey.

DRESSING ROOM

The band waits, all eyes on Sonny.

Mike hands him a page of sheet music.

MIKE (CONT'D)

All right Cool Breeze. Think you can cover this?

Sonny answers without giving the page a look.

SONNY

Yeah.

MIKE

Wait, wait. Hold on. Don't say you can just yet. This one's a bullet. Look at it.

Sonny glances over the score, hands it back to Mike in seconds.

Mike doesn't trust it.

MIKE (CONT'D)

That's it? You need another minute?

SONNY

I got it.

Mike looks to the others.

MIKE

All right.

STICKS

Rock-n-Roll.

AT THE BAR

Augie sees the tray of drinks he left for Sonny untouched.

AUGIE

(to Gladys)

Where's Sonny?

ON STAGE

Frankie's at the microphone, while the band plays a mellow intro. Sonny's to her right, trumpet in hand.

FRANKIE

(in microphone, over
music)

You know ladies, some things are hard to explain. Like how the wind makes you feel when it blows straight through you on a cold winter's night. Or that feeling you get when the warm sun rises on you in the early morning. But you know girls, there's just some feelin's that can't be denied, and that's the feeling you get when your man walks into the room.

WOMEN CUSTOMERS burst into praise.

WOMEN CUSTOMERS

Uh, hu, I know that's right. Tell it like it is. Ooowee.

FRANKIE

(in microphone)

Y'all know what I'm talkin' 'bout. It's that feelin' you get when he touches you, that one feelin' that makes you wanna...

Frankie throws the audience a sinful smile.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

(beat)
 ...give that man everything you got.
 Nice...and...slow.

Sonny breaks into the intro on trumpet looping scales light and easy. Kia, on double base brings up the rear.

AT THE BAR

Gladys and Augie turn their attention to the stage.

GLADYS

(smiling)
 Well I'll be damned.

AUGIE

Tell him to get over here and get back to work.

GLADYS

Leave him alone. He ain't hurtin' nobody.

Gladys takes the tray of drinks, moves from behind the bar.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

He deserves fifteen minutes of fame too.

ON STAGE

Frankie SINGS, glances over at Sonny, smiles at him.

Sonny explodes into a magnificent trumpet solo, send the customers whaling.

The band's caught off guard. Mike gives Frankie a look. What is he doing? He'd stop Sonny, but Frankie nods, it's okay, let him finish.

Gladys brings a bottle of wine to Will.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Guess you figured out this the hot spot. You bound to find what you lookin' for, you keep comin' around.

WILL

(eyes on stage)
 You might be right about that.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Mike splits money with the band, gives everyone their fare share. Sonny stays off to side, looks like he doesn't expect to be included.

Mike moves to Sonny, hands him a few bills. Sonny hesitates.

MIKE

Go on, it's yours, you earned it.

Sonny takes the money.

SONNY

Thanks.

MIKE

What you thankin' me for? You the one killed that set -- where a White boy like you learn how to blow a horn like that?

Sonny's unpretentious about his talent, shrugs his shoulders.

SONNY

Around.

MIKE

You ain't much on words is you?

Mike waits for a response, Sonny doesn't give him one, only smiles.

Mike grins, nods.

MIKE (CONT'D)

That's all right. God give you some chops like that, you ain't gotta do no talkin'.

INT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

Will makes a call, watches the band file into the van while he waits for an answer on the other end.

WILL

(in phone)

Dom, Will, yeah..yeah -- in Chicago. Listen, there's this band, four guys and a girl, you've never heard anything like it --

Sounds like Dom's not interested.

WILL (CONT'D)

(in phone)

Wait, wait a minute, listen. You won't believe it, I'm tellin' you. This group, this band's on fire, money in the bank -- my life on it.

EXT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

The band loads into the van. Mike opens the passenger's door for Frankie.

FRANKIE

I gotta catch up with a friend.

MIKE

Where this friend at? She's like a ghost.

FRANKIE

You gotta give me some air Mike. I'm not sixteen anymore.

MIKE

You run off in the middle of the night...we're in Chicago.

FRANKIE

I'm a big girl.

A cab rolls up to the curb, Frankie gets inside, rolls down the window.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

A few minutes. I promise.

INT. CAB - MOVING - NIGHT

The CAB DRIVER, creepy looking with dread-locks, eyes Frankie from the review mirror.

Frankie spots Sonny moving down the street up ahead.

FRANKIE

Catch up to that guy. Right up there. The one with the bag.

The Cab Driver pulls up to the curb alongside Sonny.

Frankie gets out, hands the Cab Driver a few bills through the window, hurries to Sonny.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Where's your coat? It's freezing out here.

SONNY

No blizzard, I think I'll be okay.

FRANKIE

White people like cold weather, don't they?

Frankie smiles at him, he returns another.

SONNY

Hard to say. I never asked them.

A moment as their smiles fade. An undeniable chemistry between them. It's serious now.

FRANKIE

You want some company?

INT. SONNY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Outside of Sonny's bedroom --

Frankie seductively slips the bedroom key out of his pocket. Sonny's nervous, shaking, he wants to stop her, but she's so alluring he can't. She's got him under her skin.

Frankie puts the key in the lock. Sonny reaches for her hand. Wait.

It's too late. Frankie opens the door.

FRANKIE'S POV - SONNY'S BEDROOM

Sheet music every where, all over the walls, on the night stand, desk, in the old suitcase.

This is the living space of a tortured musical genius.

INT. SONNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie should be struck, but she's not. She understands she's in the presence of a beautiful mind.

FRANKIE

You hear it don't you? All this music, it's inside of you.

SONNY

It keeps me up at night, since I can remember, I was only a little...

He trails off as if it's painful to remember.

Frankie marvels at the pages on the walls, runs her finger tips along them.

FRANKIE
What it sound like?

Give Sonny a moment to think about it.

Nothing. It's too complicated. He can't explain it.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
How 'bout now?

Sonny nods yes, looks like he's ashamed to admit it.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)
Show me.

Sonny puts his hands over Frankie's ears. She closes her eyes, hums a soothing melody, hears herself muffled.

Romance abounds. Frankie gives him a gentle kiss. Her intentions are evident, but Sonny needs to make sure.

SONNY
What do you want?

Beat.

FRANKIE
I want to be your woman.

Another kiss, this one fueled with a necessary urgency.

Sonny lifts Frankie, her legs wrapped around him, he throws her against the wall. Breath on breath, too far gone to turn back. He's got to have her, right here, right now.

They claw at each other, rip off clothes. Sheet music flies off the walls everywhere. Fuck it.

This is the pinnacle of passion. They make love, and it's beyond explosive, it's ecstasy.

EXT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - NIGHT

A cab waits outside at the curb.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Dax in the back seat, smokes a joint, his groupies all over him.

The car breezes past the apartment building. Dax spots Frankie as she come out of the building, gets inside the cab.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DAY

The band's in a jam session, save for Dax.

Will enters, well dressed, ready for business.

MIKE

What it is brotha? Who you lookin'
for?

MOMENTS LATER

The band sits with Will at a table. He hands Mike his
business card.

MIKE (CONT'D)

You got a couple of gigs for us?

Will smiles, Mike's got it all wrong.

WILL

I'm not about gigs, I'm about hit
records. Your styles too good for
small clubs like this, it's made to
be put on vinyl, heard on airwaves.
You the Front Man?

MIKE

Ain't but one Birdland, that make us
one in the same.

Will eyes Frankie, admires her beauty.

WILL

I doubt that, but if you say so.

MIKE

You come all the way from California
to hear us?

WILL

I'm always looking for talent, that's
what I do. I've been doin' this a
long time and I know it when I see
it.

FRANKIE

So what are you sayin'? You want to
manage us?

WILL

I want to do more than that. I want
to put you on the map, top of the
charts. I wouldn't have come here
if I thought you'd be one hit wonders.

MIKE

Let's say we're looking for a manager --

WILL

Lay down a demo. I'll get it over
to a friend of mine. Dominic Sorelli.

Kai's impressed.

KAI

He owns SBC Records. You know him?

Will gives Kai a look.

WILL

(to Mike)

He's like a sore thumb ain't he?

MIKE

No more than when Sticks opens his
mouth. Ain't nobody better than the
next between us, cept Frankie cause
she's off limits to the boys.

WILL

Keeps everything in perspective don't
it?

Is he flirting?

WILL (CONT'D)

There's a studio on the West Side,
I've got it booked this afternoon.
I'm ready when you are.

INT. WEST SIDE STUDIO'S - DAY

Will's at the sound board with RICHARD, on the other side of
the Plexiglas the band preps for a recording.

Dax polishes his trumpet.

DAX

(to Mike)

How we know this cat ain't some two-
bit hustler?

Mike looks over the place, clearly never having been in a
recording studio.

MIKE

We don't, but if he is, he's a damn
good one.

Will's got his eyes on Dax, confused. He grills Mike through the speaker.

WILL
(in speaker)
Hey, who's that guy?

MIKE
Dax, he's on trumpet.

Will comes from behind the Plexiglas, has a moment with Mike and Frankie.

WILL
He's not the same guy I saw the other night.

FRANKIE
That was Sonny.

MIKE
Yeah, Cool Breeze -- the White boy.
He was just a stand in. Works at
the club -- a Runner, or something.

WILL
A Runner? Well, I gotta tell you,
if that's all he is, then you lucked
up and found one hell-of-a stand in.
I want him on the demo. Can you get
him here?

INT. WEST SIDE STUDIO'S - DAY - LATER

Frankie hands out sheet music parts. Sonny has a quick look at it. Easy. He stuffs it in his back pocket.

Dax flags his part.

DAX
What's this? Who says I'm on sax?

WILL
I did.

DAX
You got me twisted, brotha. I don't
do sax.

WILL
You do today.

Will flashes Richard a thumbs up.

STICKS

Rock-n-roll.

MUSIC

Sonny executes a spontaneous trumpet riff in the middle of the song. Will catches it, the others don't

WILL

(to Richard)

What was that? Did you hear that?

He calls out to Sonny over the intercom.

WILL (CONT'D)

Hey, what was that?

The music stops, confusion over the band. Who's he talking to?

WILL (CONT'D)

Yeah, you trumpet boy. That was off the scale.

Sonny doesn't respond, all eyes on him. Will comes out of the control room, moves into the sound room.

WILL (CONT'D)

What do you call that? That sound you just did?

Sonny can't explain it.

SONNY

Sorry about that --

WILL

No, I like it. Do it again.

Sonny plays the riffs.

WILL (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's it. Mike, can you key that?

Mike duplicates the riff on piano. Will lights up.

WILL (CONT'D)

Sticks, Kai?

Kai shakes his head. Now way.

KAI

Can't be done on the coffin. Impossible.

WILL
Bullshit, don't tell me that.
Anything can be done.

He looks to Mike and Sonny.

WILL (CONT'D)
Put it together.

Mike and Sonny play the intricate notes in sync. Will gives Kai a nod. Kai duplicates the sound. The three replay the notes together.

WILL (CONT'D)
Sticks, bring in the beat. Dax,
follow up.

The band starts again, this time including the intricate scales, the sound is unlike anything ever played in jazz.

Dax eyes Sonny while they play. If looks could kill.

INT. MIKE'S APARTMENT - DAY

The band is here, and the room is thick with anticipation. Mike paces the floor. Dax has other concerns.

DAX
(of Sonny)
Who the hell is that cat? Y'all
done brought a stray up in here.

MIKE
You heard him play. He's good. We
need a sound like that. Something
new.

Dax waves it off, obviously jealous.

DAX
Man, that shit ain't new. Sounds
like somethin' he ripped off from
the cats in Harlem.

KAI
Naw, that ain't no Harlem sound.
What he's doin' ain't been done yet.

Sticks laughs, teases Dax.

STICKS
You, you, you wanna step aside?

DAX
Fuck you.

RRRING! RRRING!

The phone.

Mike pauses, looks afraid to answer.

RRRING! RRRING!

He answers.

MIKE
(in phone)
Yeah.

He listens to the person on the other end.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Yeah. Okay. Okay. Uh, hu. I will.
Thanks.

Mike puts the phone back on the cradle. Looks to Frankie, gives her a slow smile.

MIKE (CONT'D)
We're goin' to California.

INT. SONNY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie's in bed, naked under the covers, next to Sonny, enjoys an 'after sex smoke.'

FRANKIE
I never been to California before.
Farthest I been from Chicago is
Monroe, and that ain't no place
special. How come you never played
with a band before?

SONNY
Never wanted to. It's easier by
myself.

FRANKIE
You scared cause folks don't hear
what you hear? You cheatin' yourself.
All them songs you got in your head,
somebody besides you deserve to
hear'em too.

Sonny thinks about it.

SONNY
Why you believe in me like you do?

FRANKIE

Cause if a man's woman don't believe
in him, no one else will.

Frankie gets out of bed, slips on clothes.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Mike finds out about us, he's gonna
bust you up good.

She says it like it's no big deal.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Not cause you a White boy, hell, he
wouldn't give a damn what color you
was. You with Birdland now, the
lady's off limits to the boys, and
you and nobody else gonna change
that rule no time soon.

EXT. MIKE'S APARTMENT - DAY

The band loads equipment into the van. There's a sense of
excitement over them.

Frankie trails behind Mike.

FRANKIE

I need to talk to you --

Mike stuffs a double bass inside the van, too busy to pay
attention.

MIKE

What time is it?

Frankie doesn't answer, instead...

FRANKIE

Slow down a minute, let me --

Mike's not listening.

MIKE

We need to be on the road before
dark.

He turns to her.

MIKE (CONT'D)

That girlfriend of yours know you
leavin'?

FRANKIE

Yeah, see, that's what I wanna talk
to you about --

Another interruption.

STICKS

Where's Dax?

MIKE

Ain't seen him.

STICKS

Somebody better find, find, find his
ass before we leave him hangin'.

Mike turns his attention back to Frankie.

MIKE

What were you sayin'?

He waits for a response, but she can't get the words out.
She takes her eyes off him.

FRANKIE

No, I didn't mention it to her.

MIKE

We can drive over to let you see her
for a minute while we scoop up Cool
Breeze.

FRANKIE

No, I'll call her when we get down
there.

Dax comes out of the apartment building. Mike moves away
from Frankie.

MIKE (O.S.)

(to Dax)

Where the hell you been? You gotta
stop with the disappearing acts.

INT. VAN - MOVING - DAY

Mike rides down Sheridan Avenue, Frankie's on the passenger's
side, Dax, Kai and Sticks in the back.

MIKE

You say he live down here?

FRANKIE

Go up another block.

EXT. SHERIDAN APARTMENTS - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

The van pulls up in front of the building, Frankie gets out.

INT. VAN - PARKED - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Dax looks out of the window. He remembers this place, saw Frankie a couple of nights ago here. It's all suspicious.

INT. VAN - MOVING - NIGHT

The van breezes down the highway. Sonny's cramped between Sticks and Kai in the back seat.

Mike shuffles through radio stations, stops on an a classic jazz song.

MIKE

Now this cat, this cat here plays
some happenin' grooves. Bet I could
run with him.

He bobs his head to the music.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Ooohh...yeah...now that's what I'm
talkin' 'bout.

STICKS

He's, he's, he's out of your league,
but you got big dreams, I like that.

Laughter over the band.

MIKE

Hey Kai, what kinda spots they got
in China?

KAI

I don't know, I ain't never been to
China.

DAX

You ain't never been to China? How
you Chinese and ain't never been to
China?

Kai's offended.

KAI

Fuck you. You ever been to Africa,
mothufucker? My parents from Japan.
Do I look like a Chinaman to you?

DAX

Hell yeah, cause all y'all chink-eyed mothafuckas look a like.

KAI

Fuck you.

STICKS

Don't, don't, don't fuck with him.
He know Kung Fu.

FRANKIE

It's Karate. Japanese don't do Kung Fu.

Frankie flips down the overhead vanity, paints on lipstick, spies on Sonny through the mirror. If she could leap to the back seat to kiss him, she would.

MIKE

Hey Cool Breeze. You all right back there? Don't let them fools scare you. They just talkin' shit.

Sonny doesn't respond, catches Frankie's reflection through the vanity mirror.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Frankie says you been playin' a long time. Your daddy played too. How come you workin' at that joint dumpin' garbage?

SONNY

Landlords don't care how you come up with the rent.

MIKE

You must ain't got no woman, pickin' up leavin' like you is.

Sonny meets Frankie's gaze through the mirror. Secrecy in their eyes.

Dax's eyes dart back and forth between Frankie and Sonny. He makes a connection.

MIKE (CONT'D)

That's all right, cause if you ain't got one, you'll find one. Heard they got some fine ass women down in Californ-I-A. Better get you one before Cat Daddy Dax, put'em in his pocket. Ain't that right Cat Daddy?

Dax gives Sonny a dirty look.

DAX
Yeah, that's right.

Frankie flips up the mirror, aggravated by all the 'men talk.'

FRANKIE
Why y'all always gotta talk about
women around me? Turn up the radio.

MIKE
We doin' you a favor. The more you
hear it, the better you know how
cats be thinkin'. That way, can't
nobody run game on you.

FRANKIE
I ain't worried about no body runnin'
nothin' on me. I can handle myself.

MIKE
Good, cause if I even think you off
dealin' with a knucklehead, I'm gonna
find him and break his face.

Mike and the boys have a laugh, save for Sonny who looks
scared shitless.

Dax glances over at Sonny, gives him a wicked smile.

EXT. RUN DOWN MOTEL - NIGHT

In the middle of nowhere.

INT. RUN DOWN MOTEL - NIGHT

A HUNCHED BACK CLERK moves like molasses to the counter,
each step seems like forever.

HUNCHED BACK CLERK
How many rooms?

Mike looks over the band, seemingly taking count in his head.

MIKE
Three.

Mike turns to the band.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Two to one, three to another, Frankie
get's her own.

STICKS

Why she, she, she get her own room?

MIKE

Cause she's the only one of us wearin' panties.

Kai give Sticks a look, taunts him.

KAI

How you know that?

STICKS

Fu, fu, fuck you.

Mike puts money on the counter. The Hunched Back Clerk hands over keys.

HUNCHED BACK CLERK

Check out time's Noon.

EXT. MOTEL ROOM 101 - NIGHT

Dax takes in some night air, puffs on a cigarette, turns his attention to --

EXT. MOTEL ROOM 105 - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Where Sonny creeps out, disappears down the walkway.

INT. FRANKIE'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Frankie closes the door behind Sonny. They kiss.

FRANKIE

I tried to tell him, but...

SONNY

He's not going to like it Frankie.
You heard what he said? He's gonna
to break my face. I like my face.

Frankie caresses his jaw.

SONNY (CONT'D)

I want to be with you. Buy you a
big house, nice car...pretty things.

FRANKIE

Have some babies?

SONNY

Lots of babies.

LATER

Light out. A shadowy figure in the chair by the window.

MUFFLED TRUMPET RIFFS.

Frankie wakes, flicks on the light, reveals Sonny in the chair. The muffled music stops abruptly. It was all in Sonny's head.

FRANKIE

Can't sleep?

Sonny doesn't answer, looks discouraged.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Come here. I'll sing you a song.

Frankie and Sonny lay in bed. She spoons herself against him, strokes his head, hums a soft melody. Sonny drifts to sleep.

EXT. RUN DOWN MOTEL - DAY

The band files inside the van. Sticks pats Sonny on the back.

STICKS

Where you dip off too la, la, la,
last night?

SONNY

Went for a walk.

Dax shoots Sonny a suspicious look.

DAX

Musta been some walk.

INT. DOMINIC'S OFFICE - DAY

SUPER: "SBC RECORDS - CALIFORNIA."

DOMINIC, a fat balding man with a cigar, sits behind a desk, swivels in a chair, listens to the bands demo.

The band sit across from him with Will.

Dominic points to Will.

DOMINIC

You got yourself some real hit makers.
What's the name again?

Mike doesn't give Will time to answer.

MIKE

Birdland.

Dominic thinks about, nods.

DOMINIC

There's a joint in New York by that name. I like it. It's gonna look good on vinyl.

WILL

You sayin' you wanna sign them?

Dominic pulls contracts out of the desk.

DOMINIC

Of course I want to sign them.

Will distributes the contracts.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

Let's make it fifty-fifty over seven -- and I never do fifty-fifty, but in this case...

KAI

What's that mean?

WILL

It means you get fifty percent on royalties, on a seven year contract.

DOMINIC

Five-hundred fifty in advance. Think it over if you need to.

EXT. DOMINIC'S OFFICE - DAY

The band huddles outside Dominic's door.

STICKS

That's a lot of mon, mon, money.

KAI

We've been waiting on something like this for a long time.

MIKE

How much is that six ways?

Dax flashes a look at Sonny, then Mike. Hell no.

DAX

Six ways?

No one catches on.

FRANKIE

Let's do it.

INT. DOMINIC OFFICE - DAY

Dominic enjoys another track, bobs his head, impressed.

DOMINIC

Who's on trumpet?

WILL

White kid, Sonny Wanderlan.

DOMINIC

He's good, sounds like Sam Wanderlan.
They related?

WILL

That his kid.

DOMINIC

He had a couple of hits back in the
fifties. The girls loved him. I
remember.

Dominic nods.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

Make it eight-hundred thousand, and
change the name to Sonny Wanderlan's
Birdland.

EXT. DOMINIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Will moves in on the band.

WILL

He's changed his mind.

Straightaway disenchantment over the band.

WILL (CONT'D)

He's making it eight-hundred thousand.

INT. DOMINIC'S OFFICE - DAY

The band celebrates. Will and Dominic pop open champagne
bottles, one after another, expensive bubbly everywhere.

INT./EXT. - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

BEGIN SHOPPING SPREE MONTAGE

- 1) Frankie tries on pretty dresses, buys them.
- 2) Dax buys a new white Cadillac.
- 3) Mike buys a house.
- 4) Sonny buys a pearl necklace and a diamond ring.
- 5) Kai and Sticks get fitted for tailor-made suits.
- 6) Dax drives away from a car lot in a new black Cadillac, drinks a bottle of whiskey behind the wheel.

END MONTAGE

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

70's music plays, guests mix and mingle at the bar, drink, smoke cigarettes. A lot of important people here, producers, song writers, established musicians.

STELLA, African American, 20's, comes to Will, sits on his lap, wraps her arms around him.

She's Will's delight, his eyes light at the sight of her, it's obvious he's spoiled her rotten.

WILL

This is my niece, Stella.

STELLA

Uncle Willy says great things about you.

Mike shakes her hand, they share a smile, eyes flirting with each other.

STELLA (CONT'D)

You must be Michael?

MIKE

Mike.

STELLA

And Frankie?

Frankie looks her over, admires Stella's fancy clothes.

FRANKIE

You sing too?

STELLA

No, just follow Uncle Willy around on the road. He likes to pretend I'm his Assistant, but most times I'm too busy tryin' to see all the wonderful sites.

WILL

Show Frankie around while I talk to the boys.

Frankie moves away with Stella.

STELLA

You're going to love it here. Never gets cold like Chicago.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Stella opens a closet, reveals expensive shoes and dresses. Frankie marvels at them.

STELLA

Looks like we wear the same size. Pick one.

FRANKIE

I couldn't.

Stella grabs a dress, holds it up to Frankie.

STELLA

Tag's still on it, take it.

FRANKIE

Will sell a lot of records?

STELLA

He's been in the business a long time. Best thing about him is, he won't cheat you. Most Managers and Producers in this business like snakes. That's not my uncle. He's one of the good guys.

FRANKIE

Bet you've seen a lot of places.

STELLA

Europe's beautiful, but every where you go people get bored real fast with new artists, especially when you don't top your first hit.

FRANKIE

Sonny writes. He's got enough music to pull us through just in case.

Stella nods no.

STELLA

Uh-uh, it'll never see the light of day. Richard writes all the music, all the label wants you to do is record it. You'll need to get to know this business, learn the ropes and how to negotiate. Count your own money and let your Accountant count it again.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - BAR - NIGHT

Will pours drinks for Sonny and Mike.

MIKE

Never been in one room with so many superstars.

WILL

One day, someone's gonna say the same about you.

SONNY

When do we start recording?

WILL

Tomorrow. You'll lay down the first single. No second guessing yourselves boys, this is the real deal.

INT. L.A. MUSIC STUDIO - DAY

A quartet in the sound room with the band. Will distributes sheet music parts.

WILL

I brought in some extra strings and horns for this one -- where's Dax?

Dax enters, wasted, reeks of whiskey.

DAX

What? Y'all gonna start without me?

He eyes Sonny, wicked.

DAX (CONT'D)

What's he doin' here?

WILL

Same thing everybody else is. Tryin'
to make a hit record.

He hands Dax sheet music for sax.

Dax looks it over. Hell no, not again.

DAX

Sax? I told you, that ain't my thing.
Mike, talk to this man.

Mike hands a saxophone to Dax, doesn't want to argue about
it.

MIKE

It's cool, you the man. Show'em
what you got.

DAX

Cool my ass. Y'all got this stray
mothafucka up in here on my toes.
Y'all tryin' to replace me, I ain't
stupid.

Mike attempts to calm him down.

MIKE

No body's tryin' to replace you.
You the man, I told you.

STICKS

He, he, he like a little girl ain't
he? Play, play, play the damn
saxophone, and stop cry, cry, cryin'.

Dax draws his pistol.

DAX

Who the fuck you talkin' too?

Every one scatters.

MIKE

Hey, hey, wait a minute now. Take
it easy Dax.

DAX

Naw, this tongue tied son-of-bitch
speakin' up for this White boy?

Sticks moves to Dax, he's got balls.

STICKS

Yeah, yeah, I said it.

DAX
Sticks, you make another move, and
I'll blow a whole clean through them
size twelve's.

Sticks doesn't believe him, takes another step forward.

BANG!

Dax fires a shot in Stick's foot.

Chaos in the room.

WILL
What the hell -- you crazy?

MIKE
Dax --

STICKS
(on floor)
He, he, he shot me! Crazy mothafucka
shot me!

Dax waves the pistol, daring.

DAX
Who else wants some of this?

He turns to Kai who's hugging his double bass, scared as
hell.

DAX (CONT'D)
You Chinaman? You want some?

Then to Sonny.

DAX (CONT'D)
How 'bout you Snow Flake? Man just
took a bullet for you, least you
could do is return the favor.

Sonny holds up his hands, remains calm.

SONNY
I got no problems with you Dax.
Easy.

DAX
Who you think you foolin'? I know
what's goin' down with you round
here makin' time with what don't
belong to you.

WILL
What's he talkin' about? I'm callin'
the cops. Get him outta here.

Mike intervenes.

MIKE
Hold on. Hold on. Everything's all
right. Let me talk to him.
(to Frankie of Sticks)
Clean him up, see what damage he
got.

EXT. L.A. MUSIC STUDIO - DAY

Mike gives Dax a pat on the back, shakes his head.

MIKE
Listen, you can't be comin' up in
here bustin' up the place. We tryin'
to make a record.

DAX
Fuck all that, this wasn't part of
the plan Mike. Dig, you need to
figure it out, cause I ain't vibin'
on that cat. He ain't one of us.

MIKE
What you want me to do? Go back in
there and tell him it's a wrap? Aw
man, You know better than that.

Mike has a moment.

MIKE (CONT'D)
Look, I know how you feel. It's
different, six instead of five, I
get it, but how we 'spose to know we
can do this thing if you don't give
it a try? Now, you know we need
you, so you gotta roll with it for a
minute.

INT. L.A. MUSIC STUDIO - DAY

Mike moves to Will.

MIKE
He's ready. Let him play.

Will extends his hand, wants Dax to give him the pistol.

DAX

Man, I ain't forkin' over my heat,
forget it.

Mike gives Dax a look, nods, it's okay.

Dax reluctantly hands over the pistol.

DAX (CONT'D)

Cock it, and I'll kill you.

Will waves off the threat, moves to the control room.

WILL

(in intercom)

Let's make a hit record. And get me
another drummer.

INT. MIKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Frankie, Stella, Mike and Sonny play cards, talk over MUSIC
on the radio.

Frankie pauses, listens.

FRANKIE

Wait. You hear that?

They listen.

FRANKIE'S VOICE SINGING ON THE RADIO

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

That's us. That's our song.

She leaps to the radio, turns up the volume.

INT. CAR - PARKED - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Dax has raunchy sex with a FAT WOMAN in the back seat.

The band's song plays on the radio.

DAX

(humping on Fat Woman)

How you like that baby? I'm a
superstar.

RADIO D.J. (V.O.)

(on radio)

That was something new for y'all
cool cats out there. Sunset Strip
by Sonny Wanderlan's Birdland. Here
comes a little easy, breezy Sly And
The Family Stone...

Dax pauses. What the hell?

INT. MIKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - SAME TIME

Stiff silence in the room, fueled with confusion. All eyes on Sonny.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

The band's concerned, meets with Will.

WILL

Look at it this way, everything's in a name. People hear Wanderlan and it's money in the bank.

MIKE

I told you, ain't no leader, nobody's the Front Man.

WILL

Hold on, think about what you're saying. People like repetition, they say they don't, but it's all bullshit. What they really want is another hit from Miles. They're waiting on Hancock's new number one. You know how many records Alice Coltrane sold? Play her on the radio, and bam! Everybody remembers Johnny.

MIKE

What you sayin' is Birdland ain't got no legs, the name don't mean shit.

WILL

I'm sayin' take advantage of a good situation.

SONNY

My father never sold millions of records --

WILL

He sold enough.

STICKS

What's the big deal? I'm, I'm, I'm down with it. Whatever works, it's just a, a, a name.

KAI

Don't bother me none either.

The phone.

RRRING! RRRING!

Will answers.

WILL
(in phone)
Yeah?

He listens.

WILL (CONT'D)
(in phone)
Good. I'll do that. Thanks.

He hangs up.

WILL (CONT'D)
Sunset Strip just went gold.

MIKE
You jivin'. Don't fuck around Will.
That's some heavy shit.

WILL
You're on your way to the top baby,
straight into the stratosphere.
Now, You want that name back, or you
wanna go on the road?

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - NIGHT

Bright lights, flashing marque's. Limousines pull up and away from hotels and casino's.

EXT. CAESARS PALACE - NIGHT

The band files out of the tour bus. A Porter loads their luggage onto a cart, wheel's it inside.

INT. CEASARS PALACE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Marble fixtures, Roman statues, water fountains under a dome ceiling.

Frankie's awed by the beauty and magnitude of it all.

FRANKIE
I've never seen somethin' so fancy.
It's like a dream.

MIKE
We're a long way from Chicago, baby
girl.

DAVID, who looks fresh out of high-school, meets Will and the band. He's got a notebook ready to take instructions.

WILL

Everybody, this is David. He's here to help take care of whatever you need. Use him well, we're paying him a lot of money.

David trails behind Will quickly, tries to keep up with him. The band follows.

Will spits out demands, David can barely scribble them down fast enough.

WILL (CONT'D)

Make sure the lady has her own room. Handle dinner reservations, and order a few bottles of champagne.

DAVID

Yes Sir.

WILL

First show's Friday night. Get Rolling Stone on the phone, tell them to send Grace, she's a good reporter, and knows her music. Milk dried behind her ears a long time ago.

Everybody into the elevator. This is the moment of truth.

WILL (CONT'D)

Welcome to Vegas.

The doors slide shut.

INT. CEASARS PALACE - BAR - NIGHT

Dax mingles with women, smokes, has a couple of drinks.

INT. FRANKIE'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Frankie inspects the room like a kid in a candy factory, opens closets, checks out the view from the window.

Sonny watches, lets her enjoy herself.

Frankie crashes onto the bed, arms spread out like an eagle.

FRANKIE

I could live here forever.

Sonny leans into her.

SONNY
Let's get married.

Frankie laughs, doesn't take him seriously.

FRANKIE
(taking his hands)
Okay. I Franchesca Sikes, take you,
Sonny Wanderlan to be my husband --

SONNY
I mean it. Let's get married,
tonight, right now.

Frankie realizes this moment is real for him.

Sonny reveals a diamond ring.

SONNY (CONT'D)
I love you Frankie. Marry me.

INT. CEASARS PALACE - BAR - NIGHT

Dax flirts, whispers in a woman's ear.

Frankie and Sonny step off the elevator, move through the
bar holding hands.

Dax spots them, looks vindictive.

EXT. FRANKIE'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Mike knocks on the door. Dax comes down the hall.

DAX
She ain't there.

MIKE
You seen her?

DAX
With Sonny. They just rolled outta
here like they had a plan to catch.

MIKE
They say where they were goin'?

Dax's got something on his mind.

DAX
We need to talk.

INT. WEDDING CHAPEL - NIGHT

An OFFICIANT in a ten gallon hat and cowboy boots, puffs on a hand rolled cigarette, weds Frankie and Sonny.

Sonny slips the diamond ring on Frankie's finger.

OFFICIANT

I pronounce you man and wife. Kiss
your bride cowboy.

Frankie and Sonny kiss, lost in the moment, but time's ticking.

The Officiant clears his throat.

OFFICIANT (CONT'D)

That'll be fifty dollars. Cash.

INT. COLOSSEUM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Kai strums his double base, Sticks plays a beat on the vanity counter with drums sticks.

KAI

How many people you think out there?

STICKS

It's a sold out show. I, I , I
stopped counting after ten.

A MAKE-UP ARTIST caters to Frankie, puts on blush, lipstick, flowers in her hair.

Sonny adjusts his tie in the mirror, checks out Frankie's reflection, smiles at her.

Mike bursts in out of nowhere, heads straight for Sonny like a raging bull, fist tight.

MIKE

You mothafucka...

He grabs Sonny, slams him against the vanity, punches him in the face, one, two, three times. They wrestle, make-up on the counter flies everywhere.

Sticks and Kai leap out of the way fast.

STICKS

Oh shit!

Mike slams Sonny to the floor, beats the hell out of him.

Frankie's hysterical, shoves the Make-Up Artist out of the way.

FRANKIE

Mike, stop! What are you doing?
Stop it, you're gonna kill him!

She grabs at Mike.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Mike, you're gonna kill him!

She pulls him off Sonny.

Sonny picks himself up, stumbles. He's dazed, it all happened so fast.

Frankie wipes blood from Sonny mouth with a handkerchief.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

(lovingly)
You okay, baby?

She shoots Mike a look.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

You feel like a man, now?

MIKE

He's done.

KAI

What going on?

MIKE

He's finished. Get him outta here.

FRANKIE

We're married.

Shock and awe over everyone.

Will TAPS on the door.

WILL (O.S.)

In ten.

EXT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

GRACE, 40's, turns on a tiny tape recorder. Will speaks into it.

WILL

First show, sold out.
(MORE)

WILL (CONT'D)

I'm telling you Grace, this group is hot. They're like brothers, you know, all for one.

GRACE

You found them in a grungy night club, sounds like you.

WILL

I wouldn't call it grungy, but hey, no matter where the place, good talent can't hide long.

The band files out of the dressing room, moves past Will and Grace, continues down the hall.

Will grabs Stick arm.

WILL (CONT'D)

(of Sonny)

What the hell happened to him.

STICKS

(nonchalant)

He, he, he married Frankie last night and Mike punch him in the face.

Will throws Grace a wink and a smile, plays it off.

WILL

See, nothin' but love between these guys. Like I said, just like brothers.

INT. COLOSSEUM - STAGE - NIGHT

Curtains drawn, tension over the band is thick. Movement and chattering from the audience on the other side.

The curtains slide back, lights dim, the CROWD CHEERS.

Sonny, battered and bruised, plays the first note on trumpet, fills the arena with music.

Is that blood on his shirt?

INT. TOUR BUS - MOVING - DAY

Frankie naps, snuggles against Sonny.

Sticks reads Rolling Stone.

STICKS

La, la, la listen to this: "'spite a pre-show brawl, over new, new, newlywed's Wanderlan and his Lady Bird, the band sold out twenty shows, proving they, they, they earned the title Best New, New, New Artists."

Kai laughs.

KAI

That's journalism talk for Give Those Boys A Grammy.

STICKS

Willy, how, how, how many dates in New York?

WILL

Two at The Garden, and another at Shea. That's after The Bowl.

STICKS

Big shoes to, to, to fill at that one, huh Kai? Nat Cole, Ella, Billie Holiday --

KAI

Yeah, we better get you fitted for some more twelve's.

Sticks throws the magazine at Kai, hits him in the back of the head.

INT. DESSERT DINER - MEN'S ROOM - DAY

Mike and Sonny clean up at the vanity. Sonny eyes Mike through the mirror, but Mike won't look at him.

SONNY

For what it's worth, I love her.

Finally Mike takes a moment, looks Sonny square in the eyes, he believes him.

EXT. DESSERT DINER- DAY

Dax and Mike watch Sonny and Frankie who stays by the bus.

Sonny strings up Frankie's shoe, an obvious gesture of affection.

DAX

See, that's the problem.
(MORE)

DAX (CONT'D)

White folks want everything. Can't stand to see the black man with nothin'. What he know 'bout us? It ain't enough he dippin' in our music, he gotta have our women too?

Sonny takes off his jacket, wraps it around Frankie's shoulders.

MIKE

Color ain't got nothin' to do with it. Maybe she loves him because he's good to her.

Mike won't talk about it anymore. He gets on the bus.

Sticks limps to the bus with a shoe on one foot, and a surgical sock on the other. Dax has a look at his feet, smirks.

STICKS

What, what, what you grinnin' for? You, you, you need to reach down in your pocket, and buy, buy, buy me another pair of shoes.

DAX

How 'bout I just blow a hole in that good one? That way they both look alike.

INT. NEW HOUSE - VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY

A REALTOR guides Sonny and Frankie from room to room. This place is monstrous in size.

The kitchen window overlooks a pool in the back yard.

FRANKIE

It's so big. What are we going to do with all this space?

SONNY

You like it?

Frankie's nearly speechless.

FRANKIE

Well, I, I...how much is it? Can we afford it?

SONNY

Don't worry about that. You can have whatever you want.

She give him a slow smile, nods yes.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY

Kai and Sticks haul a new sofa into the living room.

Frankie and Stella unload boxes in the kitchen.

EXT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Sonny comes out of a moving truck, hauls boxes.

Mike gets out of his car, moves to the moving truck meets Sonny as he exits.

A moment while they share a look, neither not knowing what to say to the other. Then --

Mike takes a pair of work gloves from his pocket, moves past Sonny disappears inside the moving truck.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

The band records a song. Frankie sings, stops abruptly, looks sea sick. She rips off bulky headsets, hurries out of the room.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - WOMEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Frankie on hands and knees pukes in the toilet.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sonny brushes his teeth. The toothpaste cap rolls off the sink, topples into the wastebasket. He fishes for it at the bottom, pulls up a box. The box reads PREGNANCY TEST.

Frankie appears at the door.

FRANKIE

Sonny --

Sonny looks to her. She sees the box in his hand. They have a moment.

It looks like all sorts of things are running through Sonny's head.

SONNY

Was it...

He trails off.

Frankie smiles, no need for words.

Sonny comes to his knees, wraps his arms around her, rests his head on her stomach.

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN - MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A TOILET FLUSHES.

Sonny comes out from a stall, washes his hands.

Dax is preoccupied at the vanity, unravels a tiny piece of foil, sniffs COCAINE.

Sonny turns his attention to Dax. They share a look.

Dax doesn't give a damn. So what.

DAX

What? You got somethin' you wanna say?

SONNY

What you got against me?

DAX

(brutally honest)
I ain't diggin' you. Thought you knew that.

SONNY

I don't won't no problems with you, I'm not here for that.

DAX

You roll up in here, throwin' things out of order. You in my way.

SONNY

That's not what I'm here for.

DAX

That's what your mouth say.

Fuck it, Sonny gives up. He dries off his hands, exits.

DAX (CONT'D)

Yeah, that's right Snow Flake. Fuck you too.

(beat)

Square mothafucka.

He treats himself to another hit of cocaine.

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

MUSIC. The AUDIENCE goes wild.

The Band plays a smooth jam without Dax.

Mike takes center stage.

MIKE

(over music)

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.
Thank you for having us tonight.
Right now, I want to take this time
to introduce to you one of the
greatest Trumpeters I've ever had
the pleasure to jam with. Ladies
and gentlemen, if you will, give it
up for --

Dax pops up on stage out of nowhere, descends into the
spotlight, showboats on trumpet.

The band looks on, can't stop him. What the hell is he doing?

CHEERS in the Audience. They're oblivious to the hostile
takeover.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Looks like a secret meeting going on between Will and the
band.

Dax staggers in, swigs from a bottle of wine. An instant
hush over the band.

DAX

What's goin' on? Y'all havin' a
meetin' without me, or about me?

MIKE

You gotta stop with those stunts
man. That trick wasn't cool.

DAX

What? Nobody liked my show?

MIKE

It wasn't funny.

DAX

Oh, I see, the world against Dax,
huh?

MIKE

Nobody's against you --

WILL

That was Sonny's solo and you know
it.

DAX

So what. Ain't nobody get hurt.
The crowd loved it. You heard them.

WILL

That's not the point. You're a loose
cannon. When you get up on that
stage, you need to do it right or
don't do it at all.

DAX

That's it? Anybody else?

He looks to Sonny.

DAX (CONT'D)

What you got to say about this?

SONNY

We're a team right? We're all
brothers in this.

DAX

Now see, that's where you're wrong.

Mike comes to his feet.

MIKE

Dax --

DAX

(to Sonny)

To hell with this. You think you
better than me? You think you started
this? You ain't did nothin'.

MIKE

Let it ride man.

DAX

All y'all sittin' here judging me.
Where was this muthafucka when we
was scrappin' up change five and six
nights on the road, rollin' from gig
to gig? He ain't put in no work but
y'all hand him a free pass?

MIKE

We just want you to give it a chance.

DAX

Man, fuck this shit. I don't need
this. I don't need none of y'all.

Dax moves to the door, opens it, eyes Sonny.

DAX (CONT'D)

And I ain't your brotha. Jive turkey.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie rolls over in her sleep to hold Sonny. He's not here. She wakes. The clock reads 2:30.

LIVING ROOM

Sonny sits in the shadows, TRUMPET MUSIC plays in his head.

Frankie flicks on the light. Instantly the music vanishes from Sonny head. He looks like he hasn't slept in days, dark rings under his eyes, tousled hair.

FRANKIE

How long you been up?

SONNY

Two, three days.

FRANKIE

You want a drink? There's some vodka in the fridge.

SONNY

No, I just want some sleep. I keep waiting for it to happen...

He trails off, frustrated.

Frankie gives him a quick back rub. He rests his head against her stomach. She's full term in her pregnancy.

FRANKIE

Come back to bed. I'll sing you a song.

BEDROOM

Frankie spoons herself against Sonny, strokes his head, hums a soft melody. He drifts off to sleep.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Small booths, a couple of tables and a bar. Not too extravagant.

A Waitress serves Will and Sonny drinks, disappears.

Sonny looks like hell warmed over.

WILL

You need to see about this insomnia thing you got going on. Get a doctor to write you a prescription or something.

Sonny doesn't want to talk about it.

SONNY

I've got a couple of songs. Maybe we could put them on the next album.

Will shakes his head no.

WILL

That's what Richard's for. He writes, crank out hits, you play, everybody's happy.

SONNY

At least see if Dominic will listen to them, he says he's always looking for something fresh.

WILL

We're playing Carnegie next week, let's talk about it when we get back. My only concern right now is Dax. He's a loaded gun waiting to happen. Is he in or out? Coming or going? He showboats at Carnegie it'll be all over the place, we'll hear about it.

SONNY

He's convinced there's not enough room for the both of us.

WILL

Then you've gotta make him think otherwise --

SONNY

I'm the last person he's gonna listen to. I never wanted to take his place, nothing matters to me but the music. Let him do the solos Will -- all of them if he wants to.

Will downs his drink, laughs.

WILL

That sleeping problem you've got,
got your head fucked up. Stop kidding
yourself, Birdland wouldn't have a
nest to fall out of if it wasn't for
you.

It's clear Sonny doesn't feel the same, he doesn't want to
be put on a pedestal.

Will makes a connection, tries to sugar coat it.

WILL (CONT'D)

Look, you're right, it's about the
music, good music, no matter who's
playin' it, right? Let's just try
to keep a tight leash on him. I
don't want no surprises. Go talk to
him, kiss his ass a little bit, but
keep it simple. He likes to keep
his finger on the trigger.

INT. DAX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Guests drink, smoke pot, get high. A horde of GROUPIES dance
and gyrate all over the place. More Groupies cuddle up next
to Dax on the couch, treat him like a king.

There's a plate of COCAINE on the coffee table. Dax sniffs
up a line.

Mike and Sonny sit across from him.

DAX

I know Will sent y'all over here to
sprinkle sugar on me, but y'all can
tell him, if he got somethin' he
wanna say, say it to my face.

SONNY

We're playing Carnegie next week,
you in? 'Cause we need you there.

Dax laughs, bullshit.

DAX

Is that right? You hear that Mike?

MIKE

He's right. We're a team. You need
to be on the road with us.

CHARLES staggers out from the bedroom, plops down beside
Sonny, nods in and out of conscious.

Sonny has a look at Charles, his eyes says he wants to be unconscious too.

BEDROOM

TINY, a big black guy, cooks up HEROIN, injects it in a Groupie's arm. She slides back on the bed in ecstasy.

DAX

Yeah, that's the ticket. She's
feelin' good.

Sonny moves into the room, lingers at the door.

DAX (CONT'D)

Close the door man. You comin' in
or what?

Dax chops up cocaine on a plate, snorts a line.

TINY

(to Sonny)

What's your game brotha?

Sonny's not sure how to answer, says nothing.

Dax has a light laugh.

DAX

Who? Snow Flake? Shit, he's squarer
than a sanctified Preacher on Sunday.

Sonny gestures at the Groupie.

SONNY

What's wrong with her?

TINY

She cool. Just takin' a ride. She'll
be back.

DAX

(smiling)

Dream a little dream.

Sonny's aching to dream too.

SONNY

You got some more of that?

Tiny looks to Dax.

TINY

I thought you said he ain't got no
game.

DAX

He don't, and he don't know what he talkin' 'bout.

SONNY

I've been up for three days. I need some sleep.

DAX

Then lay your ass down mothafucka.

Dax and Tiny have a laugh.

Sonny can't find the humor in it, he's locked in a serious situation. Maybe they didn't hear him the first time.

SONNY

I need some sleep.

A moment while Dax and Tiny eye each other knowingly.

TINY

Sit down.

Sonny sits. Tiny rolls up Sonny's sleeve, smacks a vein, straps rubber tubing around his arm.

SONNY

How long is this going to take?

TINY

Easy...easy, don't rush it.

He injects heroin in Sonny's vein.

In seconds, Sonny's a changed man. Eyes glazed over, head tilted back, he licks his lips. Then --

Sonny doubles over, pukes.

Dax has a look at Sonny, not surprised.

DAX

Must be some good shit.

INT. DAX'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

The party's over. Dax cleans up the place. Sonny nods on the couch.

MIKE

Cool Breeze, let's roll. Get you back before baby girl comes lookin' for you.

Sonny doesn't respond, nods in and out.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Sonny?

Nothing.

Mike shoves him. Sonny looks up at him through droopy eyes.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Hey, you all right?

Dax pauses from his task, shakes his head with pity.

DAX

I told Tiny that mothafucka was square.

Mike checks out Sonny's arm, runs his finger over his vein.

MIKE

(verge of anger)
What y'all give him?

DAX

I ain't give him shit. He said he needed some sleep.

MIKE

He ain't sleep, he's on a trip. Tiny gave him dope?

DAX

I ain't got nothin' to do with that.

Dax goes back to his task. Mike slaps Sonny a few time.

MIKE

Cool Breeze, hey, come on. Cool Breeze...

DAX

I'm goin' to bed. Lock the door on your way out.

MIKE

Dax man, I can't take him home like this. Frankie'll kill him. What you let Tiny give him that shit for?

DAX

I ain't no goddamn baby-sitter. He's a grown ass man. Take him home, let Frankie deal with it.

Mike's had enough, fuck it.

MIKE

No, you take him. This one's on
you.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Dax drives around the block, Sonny's in the passengers seat
stoned out of his mind.

Dax parks the car in front of Sonny's house. The lights are
out, save for the upstairs bedroom.

A moment while Dax thinks about it.

He can't do it.

DAX

Damn.

Dax pulls off.

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)

I don't know what Sonny was thinkin'
that night, choosin' to dance with
the devil like he did.

(beat)

That one quick decision would take
him down a real bad road, lead him
straight to hell.

EXT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "1980's"

A black Rolls Royce pulls up in the drive way. Sonny gets
out, carries luggage inside.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Three children hurry down the stairs, bum-rush Sonny with
excitement. SAMANTHA, 7, a pretty little girl with pigtails,
MICHAEL, 8, and 10 year-old JUNIOR.

Samantha leaps into Sonny's arms.

SONNY

There's Daddy's little girl.

MARIA, the Housekeeper, a slender woman with a thick Spanish
accent takes Sonny's luggage.

MARIA

Welcome home Mister Wanderlan, good to see you.

SONNY

Good to see you too Maria.

Maria disappears with Sonny's luggage.

SAMANTHA

Daddy, what you bring me?

SONNY

What did you ask for?

SAMANTHA

A dolly and some candy, remember?

Sonny pretends he's lost something, spins in circles, goes to a bag, gives Samantha a look.

SONNY

What's this?

Like a magician, he pulls a curly haired doll and a giant lollipop out of the bag.

SONNY (CONT'D)

How'd this get in there?

Samantha flashes a big smile, Sonny hands over the goodies.

SONNY (CONT'D)

A promise is a promise, right?

He looks to Michael and Junior.

SONNY (CONT'D)

You boys been good, helping your mother and Aunt Stella while I was gone?

Michael and Junior nod yes.

SONNY (CONT'D)

Then I guess you've earned this...

Sonny hands over baseball cards to Michael, and a Walkman radio to Junior.

Stella enters from another room.

STELLA

How was Chicago?

SONNY

Good. We booked an extra show at the last minute, but it was nice to be back home. Where's Frankie?

STELLA

Upstairs. Lil took her first steps last week. You missed it. She's gonna be getting into everything now.

SONNY

Thanks for helping out around here Stella.

STELLA

Tell Frankie I'll see her in the morning. Have her call me if she needs anything.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Frankie paces with LIL, 1, who's crying at the top of her little lungs. Frank hums a song, tries to soothe her.

FRANKIE

Her teeth are coming in, keeping her up all night, and me too.

Sonny responds from the bathroom.

SONNY (O.S.)

Did you take her to the doctor?

FRANKIE

Four kids, you're out of touch with reality. They can't give her anything, nothing I haven't already tried.

Lil's cries simmers to a whimper. Frankie sits her on the bed, unpacks Sonny's suitcase. Shirts, ties, socks.

Lil frolics over the clothes, pulls rubber tubing out of the suitcase, puts it in her mouth.

Frankie turns her attention to Lil, takes the tubing, has a moment. Shock and confusion over her. She tucks it back in the suitcase.

Sonny comes out from the bathroom.

SONNY

I wish I didn't have to be on the road so long. I never know what's going on around here, and I miss everything. Especially you.

He kisses her, but she doesn't return his affection, instead looks troubled.

INT. JUNIOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Junior plays trumpet for Sonny, he's good, but Sonny wants him better.

SONNY

When you play Junior, don't just hear the notes, feel them, see them. Turn everything else off in your head.

JUNIOR

You get nervous in front of all those people?

SONNY

No, 'cause I don't see them. When I'm on stage, nothing else matters to me but the music.

Frankie TAPS on the door.

FRANKIE

Junior, time for bed.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sonny slips out of bed, careful not to wake Frankie. He gets dressed, leaves.

INT. SEEDY NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Strobing lights, everybody gyrates to up tempo music.

Down the stairs and into the --

V.I.P. ROOM

Two STRIPPERS explore each other while Tiny cooks up heroin.

Sonny watches him, mouth watering for a hit.

TINY

You keep comin' up short.
(MORE)

TINY (CONT'D)

I'm not runnin' no charity 'round here, so you need to figure out how you gonna get me my money after this.

He injects the heroin in Sonny's vein.

STRIPPER 1 kisses Tiny, long and hard.

TINY (CONT'D)

Take care of my friend. Show him a good time.

Stripper 1 kisses Sonny, unbuttons his shirt. He's too stoned to stop her.

STRIPPER 1

I'm gonna make you feel real good suga.

She unzips Sonny's pants, slides to her knees.

EXT. CAFE - DAY

Frankie and Stella finish lunch.

Frankie hands over her credit card to the WAITRESS.

The Waitress disappears with the card, returns moments later with the MANAGER.

MANAGER

Mrs. Wanderlan, your card..

FRANKIE

Is there something wrong?

MANAGER

Your card's been declined.

Frankie smiles.

FRANKIE

Run it again, I'm sure there's been a mistake.

MANAGER

We did Ma'am, three times.

Frankie rummages through her purse.

FRANKIE

I've got cash.

Stella hands over her credit card.

STELLA

Use mine.

The Manager disappears with Stella's card, the Waitress follows.

FRANKIE

I'm really sorry about this. This is the second time this week.

Stella has a moment, concerned.

STELLA

Frankie, I'm not one to get in anybody's business, but we've been friends a long time, so I think it's okay to ask you this. Is Sonny messing around?

Frankie fakes a smile.

FRANKIE

Why would you ask that?

This is serious shit to Stella.

STELLA

Listen, being on the road is different than it was when you were touring with the band. You didn't have to worry about where he was or what he was doing. Hell, at least you didn't have to wait by the phone for a call.

FRANKIE

I don't worry about what he's doing. Sonny wouldn't get caught up in that. He's a lot of things, but he's not a cheater.

STELLA

Then where's all the money Frankie? You told me yourself, it's gone as fast as the label makes a deposit. Five gold, and seven platinum records over ten years, that's a lot of money, even if it is split five ways. All I'm saying is, don't get blind sided.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Sonny's shaky, can't get through the melodies.

MIKE

You all right over there?

SONNY

Yeah, just need a break. Let's come back in ten.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - MEN'S BATHROOM - DAY

Sonny sneaks a sniff of heroin in the stall, hears someone enter outside the door, gathers himself quickly.

Dax lingers at the stall, waits for Sonny to come out.

Sonny exits the stall.

DAX

You fuckin' up Snow Flake.

Sonny's caught off guard.

DAX (CONT'D)

It ain't my game gettin' worked up about everybody else's shit. I don't care what you do, but Frankie find out about you...

Sonny waves it off.

SONNY

It's just a little something to take the edge off, you know how it is.

DAX

This ain't about me. I ain't got no wife and four kids.

SONNY

I know what I'm doing. I can stop when I want to. I've got in under control.

Dax isn't convinced.

DAX

Like I said.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sonny creeps out of bed, careful not to wake Frankie.

Frankie wakes, lays there, doesn't move, hears the door close.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The light flicks on. Will goes to the door, has a look through the glass window, opens the door.

Sonny rushes in, anxious behind sunglasses, clearly on the brink of disaster.

WILL

Sonny, you know what time it is?

Sonny doesn't care.

SONNY

I need a favor...I'll pay it back.

WILL

Money?

SONNY

I'll pay it back.

Will closes the door.

WILL

Sonny, you in trouble? Because if you're in trouble --

SONNY

Can you do it or not?

Will thinks about it. Finally he disappears to another room, returns with a check.

SONNY (CONT'D)

You don't have any cash? Banks don't open till eight.

Will's not comfortable with this, but he leaves the room, returns moments later with a wad of bills anyway.

WILL

You wanna talk about this?

Sonny snatches the money, bolts out the door like lightning.

EXT. SONNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

SLIM, a mean looking bodyguard, with a thick neck and shiny bald head is posted at the door.

INT. SONNY'S HOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sonny, on the floor, shoots up heroin.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - VARIOUS ROOMS - NIGHT

Frankie rips through drawers, cabinets, Sonny's pockets, like she's on a mission to find evidence.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie's mad as hell.

FRANKIE

Don't lie to me Sonny, do anything,
but don't lie to me.

SONNY

Frankie I love you. You know I
wouldn't --

FRANKIE

What's love got to do with this?
You leave here in the middle of the
night, going God knows where. Stop
treating me like I'm stupid. Who is
she? A groupie?

SONNY

There's no one baby --

FRANKIE

Is that where the money's going?
You takin' care of another woman?

Sonny grabs hold of Frankie, looks her square in the eyes, convincing.

SONNY

Frankie, stop. Listen to me. You
know I love you, you're everything
to me. Okay, so I made some bad
business decisions, owed a few people
some money, but that's over now.
There's no other woman. I swear it.

Frankie has a moment, simmers.

FRANKIE

We don't talk anymore. I never know
what you're doing, where you are.
You're always gone, and even when
you're here, you're not really...

She trails off. Sonny caresses her face.

SONNY

You're getting yourself worked up over nothing. You know what you mean to me?

He kisses her, slow and tender.

Sonny undresses Frankie, makes love to her.

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Stella serves drinks, and finger sandwiches to Stick's and Kai's WIVES. They gossip while children play in the background.

STICK'S WIFE

If I had a dollar for every time Steven said he wasn't doing nothing behind my back on the road -- I need to be married to a musician like I need a hole in my head.

KAI'S WIFE

If I ever find out Kai's sleeping around, I'm taking everything. The house, the car, kids, he won't have a dime by the time I'm done with him.

STELLA

See, y'all ain't never been on the road. I know what they do.

STICK'S WIFE

Did you hear about Sonny?

Everybody listens.

STICK'S WIFE (CONT'D)

I don't know if Frankie knows, but, Dax told the guys he's using. Getting high every night. Coke, blow -- you name it. He said he's so stoned most of the time, they just leave him in the hotel and do the shows without him.

STELLA

I wouldn't put much stock in nothin' that comes out of Dax's mouth. How does he know what Sonny's doing? Every time I see him, he's the one who looks high.

KAIS' WIFE

No, it's true, Kai told me the same thing.

Frankie enters with Samantha, Junior, Michael, and Lil, sends them off to play.

A hush falls over the room. This is an awkward moment.

FRANKIE

Sorry I'm late, been up packing for Sonny all night.

STICKS' WIFE

(on her feet)

I better get going. Cara's got ballet lessons.

She plants a kiss on Frankie's cheek.

STICKS' WIFE (CONT'D)

(lying)

I'll call you later. We'll catch up.

KAIS' WIFE

(on her feet)

Me too. Let's do lunch soon.

She plants a kiss on Frankie's cheek.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ARENA - NIGHT

The band performs before a crowd of thousands. Sonny looks like hell, but sounds good, until --

A missed note, Sonny's off key. This performance is getting ugly. Dax takes over, saves the day.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Will gather's with the band, save for Sonny.

WILL

How long has this been going on?
Mike, did you know about this?

MIKE

I thought he was just dabbin', you know, experimenting. It wasn't nothin' serious. He was just using to bring him down after a gig.

KAI

It's worse than we thought. He's doing it all the time.

STICKS

You saw him. He's slip, slip, slippin'.

WILL

Mike, what you wanna do?

MIKE

Like I said, ain't no front man, if there's a decision to make, we make it together. There's three more shows. Who wants to pull him out?

Mike looks to the band. One by one they each nod yes.

WILL

If that's what you want to do, fine, but don't forget the reason why those shows are sold out. The fans love Sonny, pulling him out for the rest of the leg could be a bad deal. We could loose big time on this one.

A moment while the guys take it in. They're not going to change their mind.

WILL (CONT'D)

Okay. He's out.

INT. HOLLYWOOD ARENA - NIGHT

Curtains drawn. The AUDIENCE is wild. They chant.

AUDIENCE

Sonny! Sonny! Sonny!

MUSIC. The curtains slide open, reveals the band already playing. No Sonny.

The Audience insists on seeing the star of the show, continues to chant.

AUDIENCE (CONT'D)

Sonny! Sonny! Sonny!

They realize Sonny's not going to appear, fanatical chants turn into violent HECKLES.

This concert doesn't look good.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Stella and Frankie prepare lunch, listen to the radio.

D.J. (V.O.)

(on radio)

Things got real ugly at the Hollywood Arena last night. Thousands of fans demanded refunds for tickets they bought at a sold out show featuring Sonny Wanderlan's Birdland. Management of the platinum recording band sited the group's lead trumpeter Sonny's absence as an unexpected emergency. Sources confirm drugs may be involved, as were several previous absences.

Stella turns down the volume, her expression apologetic.

STELLA

Frankie...

Frankie's not going to listen. She turns on her heels, exits.

BEDROOM

Stella trails behind Frankie, this is urgent.

STELLA

Frankie --

FRANKIE

They're lying. The media's always making things up. It's not true.

STELLA

But what if it is? What if all everyone's saying is right? Wouldn't you want to know? Have you talked to him? What has he told you?

Frankie lights a cigarette, nervous and shaky.

STELLA (CONT'D)

Did he tell you about the drugs? Everybody knows about it, everybody but you. Or maybe you do, maybe you just don't want to believe it.

FRANKIE

Don't you see what they're doing? They're trying ruin him. It's Dax, he's doing this.

STELLA

Frankie --

FRANKIE

He's hated Sonny the moment he laid eyes on him. He's always been jealous of him, I told you, remember?

Stella lays it out, tired of Frankie's excuses now.

STELLA

Frankie, he's a junkie.

Still Frankie doesn't want to hear it.

FRANKIE

That's a lie.

STELLA

It's the truth, and you know it.

Frankie's too upset to contain herself.

FRANKIE

You come here, pretend to be my friend -- you're not my friend, you're just like the rest of the snakes in this business.

STELLA

You're in denial Frankie. He's kept you pregnant and in the dark for ten years, for what? So he can go off and live life by his own rules?

Frankie laughs.

FRANKIE

You're jealous too.

STELLA

Jealous, of what?

FRANKIE

You're jealous because I was able to give Sonny what you couldn't give my brother. That's why he wouldn't marry you, because you couldn't give him children.

Tears in Stella eyes.

STELLA

You don't mean that.

Stella's tears mean nothing to Frankie.

FRANKIE

Get your shit and get out.

A moment, then --

Stella, heartbroken, picks up her coat and purse, turns and exits.

As soon as Stella's out of sight, Frankie crumbles, sobs uncontrollably.

INT. SONNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Booze, drugs, and Groupies everywhere. Dax searches the room for Sonny.

In the --

HOTEL BEDROOM

-- Sonny lays back on the bed, GROUPIE 4 undresses.

Sonny's high, doesn't even know she's here.

Dax moves in, grabs Groupie 4, shoves a blouse to her.

DAX

Put your clothes back on.

GROUPIE 4

Just for the record, you're blowin' my thing. That's Sonny Wanderlan, I'm his biggest fan. I've never made it with a superstar before.

DAX

And you won't tonight either. Get the fuck outta here.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The phone rings.

RRRING! RRRING!

Frankie's curled up in bed, eyes on the phone, but she won't answer it. Tears stream down her face.

RRRING! RRRING!

INT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

Frankie loads food onto the conveyor belt, hands over her credit card to the CASHIER.

The Cashier swipes the card.

BEEP!

The card's rejected.

The Cashier swipes the card again.

BEEP!

Rejected.

CASHIER

Uh, this card's no good.

Frankie can only look embarrassed.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT - DAY

Frankie gets in the car.

INT. CAR - PARKED - DAY

Junior, Samantha, and Michael in the back seat. Frankie cranks up the engine.

SAMANTHA

Mommy, I thought you said we could have ice cream.

Frankie fakes a smile.

FRANKIE

You'll get your ice cream honey.

SAMANTHA

(pointing)

But it's in there. How come you didn't bring it out?

FRANKIE

They didn't have your favorite kind sweetie. And you really want chocolate don't you? We'll get it from someplace else.

Junior's not stupid, senses something's wrong.

JUNIOR

You okay Mom?

Frankie can't hold back the tears, bursts into sobs.

JUNIOR (CONT'D)

Mom?

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Frankie's in bed, but wide awake. Looks like she hasn't slept in days.

RRRING! RRRING!

The phone.

Frankie hesitates like she's afraid to answer.

RRRING! RRRING!

Finally, she picks up.

FRANKIE

(in phone)

Hello?

INT. JUNIOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Frankie wakes Junior, hurries him.

FRANKIE

Junior, wake up, get dressed. Go get your brother, and help your sister get her coat on.

INT/EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Frankie with the kids at the door.

STELLA

Frankie, what's going on?

FRANKIE

It's Sonny.

Stella hurries them in.

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Stella helps the kids out of their jackets. Michael and Samantha still in pajamas.

Frankie hands over Lil to Stella.

FRANKIE

I have to go get him.

STELLA

In the middle of the night? It's a two hour drive.

FRANKIE

I can't leave him there. He's alone. I've said some bad things -- I was angry, and I'm sorry, but I've got to be there.

STELLA

Frankie, look at you. What are you doing? Hasn't he hurt you enough? You've given up everything for him, your career, your freedom. Why are you holding on?

Beat.

FRANKIE

(with conviction)
Because he's my man.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Frankie drives over the speed limit. Junior's on the passengers side. She needs to slow down, but she won't.

INT. SONNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Slim is posted by the door. Frankie and Junior step off the elevator, hurry.

Slim flags his hand, ready to reject Frankie.

FRANKIE

Sonny in there? Open the door.

BIG BODYGUARD

Can't do that Frankie. No one get's in, that's what I was told.

Frankie's struck, then hostile.

FRANKIE

I don't give a damn what you were told. Now you open that goddamn door before I break it down.

INT. SONNY'S HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Frankie rushes in, checks every room, no Sonny. She races to the --

BATHROOM

Sonny's on the floor, drugged up, helpless. He's a mess.

Frankie rolls up Sonny's sleeve, reveals his arm riddled with needle punches. She sobs briefly, then quickly pulls herself together as if to realize there's no time for tears.

FRANKIE

It's okay baby. It's all right.
I'm here.

Junior watches it all unfold, he's frightened.

JUNIOR

Mom, is dad in trouble?

Frankie brushes tears away.

FRANKIE

Your father's sick Junior. Come here, help me get him up.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Sonny's a disaster, slumped over in the back seat. Frankie checks on him from the rear view mirror.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sonny's in the tub, limp, and fully clothed. Frankie rips off his shirt, then a shoe. Junior stays next to her, eyes glued on the needle marks on Sonny's arm.

FRANKIE

Junior, get the other shoe.

Junior doesn't hear her, too taken by the sight of Sonny's beat up veins.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

Junior!

Junior snaps out of it, hurries to get Sonny's shoe off.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Frankie kneels eye level to Junior, shows him two keys.

FRANKIE

Listen to me. Here's two keys, one for me, and the other for you. I want you to take it, and don't let anyone in here, no one. You understand?

Junior nods yes.

Frankie slips back inside the bedroom, closes the door behind her.

INT. DOMINIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Dominic, snug behind his bulky desk, sucks on a cigar. Will flags an envelope at him, angry.

WILL

What the hell is this?

DOMINIC

Look, Will, what do you want from me? This is a business, nothing personal.

WILL

You're suing them, not as a group, but individuals, I'd say that's pretty damn personal.

DOMINIC

I won't go into the politics. You've been in this business long enough to know how it works.

WILL

The first leg of the tour just ended, give them some time. We've got New York and Miami lined up, you're moving too fast on this one.

DOMINIC

They blew the first leg, and I haven't seen a new record in years. You know how much money that deal cost me? Will, look, I've got eyes and ears all over the place. Sonny's washed up, and your boys didn't deliver, bottom line.

INT. WILL'S HOUSE - DAY

The band is here, save for Sonny, and tension is high.

MIKE

He's suing us?

WILL

Every last one of you. I tried to talk to him, asked him to rethink it, but Hollywood was the last straw. I've canceled the second leg.

KAI

This is Sonny's fault. Where am I going to get that kind of money? I'd have to give up my house, everything I worked for.

MIKE

Maybe we could finish the tour on our own.

WILL

Too complicated to roll that out. You wouldn't be able to under the bands name, the label owns it.

DAX

Mike, man, I told you a long time ago I didn't like how this was goin' down. We should of left his ass in Chicago.

STICKS

So this is, is, is it? We're done?

WILL

I'm sorry guys. It's the end of the road.

INT. STELLA'S HOUSE - DINNING ROOM - NIGHT

Samantha plays with her peas. Michael glares at his potatoes. A since of gloom in the room.

Stella tries to lightened things up, puts on a smile.

STELLA

How about we take a drive to the amusement park tomorrow?

SAMANTHA

Can we go home now?

Stella doesn't answer.

MICHAEL

Is my Mom gonna come back for us?

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sonny's curled up on the bed, shakes violently, sweats profusely. He MOANS, looks like he's in excruciating pain.

Frankie glares out of the window, she can't look at him, but her eyes says she shares his pain.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - DIFFERENT NIGHT

Sonny's shivering, Frankie wraps a blanket around him, tries to feed him, but he pukes it up.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sonny's doubled over on the floor, looks like he'll explode in any second. He begs.

SONNY

Frankie, please, help me.

Frankie rocks him in her arms.

FRANKIE

Fight it baby.

SONNY

I can't, I can't do it. Please.

Frankie stares him in the eyes, strong and demanding.

FRANKIE

Yes you can. Now you fight this, you hear me Sonny? I'm not going to let this have you, so you're gonna have to fight.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Frankie sits with her back against the door, hears Sonny's agonizing CRIES on the other side.

SONNY (V.O.)

Frankie! Please!

Frankie's expression is pained, tears down her face, she lays on the floor.

BOOM! BANG! CRASH!

Sounds like Sonny's breaking down the walls inside the room. He's a hostage in his own home.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

Frankie sleeps on the floor by the bedroom's door. She wakes to a pair of little shoes at her head.

JUNIOR

Uncle Mike is here.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mike waits. Frankie comes in from another room.

MIKE

How's he doing?

Frankie doesn't answer, lights a cigarette.

MIKE (CONT'D)

The band broke up. Dominic's taking us to court. We owe him a lot of money Frankie.

FRANKIE

Did you know? How sick he was. Did you?

MIKE

I knew it would hurt you. It happened so fast, I...

A moment.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What are you going to do.

Frankie puts out the cigarette, turns on her heels.

FRANKIE

Tell him he'll get his money.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Frankie and Junior by the bedroom door.

FRANKIE

Give me the key.

Junior hands over the key, Frankie unlocks the door, opens it, reveals --

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Sonny scribbles on pages of sheet music, looks like a mad scientist.

Thousands of musical notes drawn all over the walls in black marker.

Sonny looks over the room, amazed, has a fresh burst of laughter.

SONNY

You see it? Listen. It's everywhere.

Junior doesn't understand.

JUNIOR
What does he see Mom?

FRANKIE
(beat.)
Music.

SONNY'S POV - THE BEDROOM WALLS

MAGIC. Musical notes twist and twirl, leap from pages of sheet music, dance to breathtaking music in his head.

INT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - STUDIO - NIGHT

Frankie spruces up the place, opens the closet, brings down boxes, sees Sonny's old suitcase in the corner.

MOMENTS LATER

Frankie ruffles through sheet music in the suitcase, discovers a page titled FRANCESCA, dated 1975.

SONNY (O.S.)
I wrote it the first time I saw you.
On the train.

Frankie turns her attention to the door. Sonny looks a hell of a lot better than he has in a long time.

SONNY (CONT'D)
They create themselves. I can't
take credit for it.

FRANKIE
Why did you try to make it go away?

SONNY
The music? I've never been without
it. It's always been there, for as
long as I can remember. I wanted to
feel normal. If you knew what it
was like...

FRANKIE
It's not for me to know. It's your
gift, all I ever wanted you to do
with it was share it.

Sonny sits at the control board, fiddles around with some nobs.

FRANKIE (CONT'D)

There isn't anything left of the band. You have to make it right Sonny, you owe it to them, they're you're brothers.

EXT. SONNY'S AND FRANKIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Sonny carries Lil, strolls with Mike along a small pond.

MIKE

What you need to talk to me about? If it's money, I'm dried up. SBC took care of that.

SONNY

You're mad, I understand. You should be.

MIKE

I'm writing checks out of my ass, damn right I'm mad.

Beat.

SONNY

I want to start a label.

He waits for Mike's reply, instead, Mike turns on his heels.

MIKE

See you around Cool Breeze.

SONNY

I need a partner Mike, and I trust you guys, you the most.

Mike spins around.

MIKE

You know what you did? You put a lot of asses on the line.

SONNY

I know --

MIKE

You trust me, that's good to know, but who's gonna trust you? How long you been clean? Five, six months?

SONNY

We can do this.

MIKE

With whose money? Ain't nothin' left. Did you know the bank's tryin' to Stick's house? Shit Sonny, he's got kids. You ain't the only one with mouths to feed.

SONNY

We can do this Mike, I know we can.

Mike takes a moment.

MIKE

You're a crazy ass White boy, you know that? I swear, if it was anybody else married to my sister, I would of made her a widow a long time ago.

SONNY

So you'll talk to them?

Mike takes his eyes off Sonny, shakes his head, reluctant.

MIKE

This better not be a bad deal, man.

SONNY

That a yes?

MIKE

For Sticks and Kai maybe. I'll think about it.

SONNY

And Dax?

MIKE

His bullets ain't got no names on'em. I'll leave him up to you.

EXT. GOLF COURSE - DAY

Sonny tries to talk to Will, but he's not really listening, plants a tee peg in the grass, strikes the golf ball.

Sonny hands Will pages of sheet music, get's his attention.

INT. MIKE'S HOUSE - DAY

Mike paces back and forth, Sticks and Kai keep their eyes on him.

KAI

If Sonny's idea supposed to be a good one, why you look nervous about it?

MIKE

He's gonna talk to Dax -- alone. That's what I'm worried about.

STICKS

So, where, where, where is all this music he, he, he got? You seen it?

Mike shakes his head no.

MIKE

Not yet.

STICKS

And you trust him?

MIKE

I know I shouldn't, but he sounds real confident about the band doing things on our own. I believe him.

INT./EXT. DAX'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dax at the door with a 38 Special, gives Sonny a cold hard look.

DAX

What you want?

Sonny's not intimidated, even though he should be.

SONNY

I need to talk to you. You got a minute?

Give Dax a moment to think about it.

INT. DAX'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Dax lays the 38 on the coffee table next to a plate of COCAINE.

He shares a look with Sonny, both of their eyes dart back and forth from the Cocaine to each other.

Sonny could take a hit, but he won't.

SONNY

I want us to start our own label.
(MORE)

SONNY (CONT'D)

I've already talked to Mike about it
and --

DAX

That's what you come over here for?

SONNY

Hold on, wait a minute. I know what
you're thinking.

DAX

Is that right? You know I wanna
blow a hole clean through your head
and you still sittin' here?

A NAKED WOMAN moves through the room, disappears into another.
Sonny's taken for a moment, Dax doesn't pay her any attention.
No big deal.

DAX (CONT'D)

Where you plan on gettin' the money
from? All y'all broke. Should'a
did like me. I knew some shit like
this was bound to go down, that's
why I counted my own bread. Paid
that fat mothafucka in one lump.

SONNY

I'll get Dominic his money, I just
need to know if you want in.

DAX

You the reason why the group got
busted up in the first place, puttin'
that shit in your arm. You still
sound like a junkie comin' up in
here makin' promises your ass can't
keep.

SONNY

I fucked up Dax, and I'm sorry about
it. Ride this thing out with me,
and you'll get back double what you
lost.

DAX

And what if I don't?

SONNY

You will, trust me.

(beat)

Look, you don't like me -- I'm not
asking you to, all I'm asking is for

(MORE)

SONNY (CONT'D)

a second chance, and if you think it's not working out for you, walk away.

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)

That ole Sonny had some steel balls askin' a man who didn't give a damn about him for a second chance didn't he? Guess you gotta admire a man like that.

INT. STUDIO - DAY

Will and Richard at the control console. The band is behind Plexiglas in the sound room save for Dax.

Sonny looks to the door.

MIKE

You keep lookin' over there like he's gonna walk through it in any second. Forget it Cool Breeze, he ain't comin'.

GUS

(in intercom)

Okay boys, let's have it.

Suddenly Dax strolls in from outside, looks like he really doesn't want to be here. All eyes on him.

Sonny polishes a trumpet, moves to Dax. They have a moment. Then --

Sonny hands the trumpet over to Dax, whispers in his ear.

YOUNG JOURNALIST (V.O.)

What he say to him?

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)

One thing I learned about Sonny. He's a humble son-of-bitch. He said...

SONNY

(whispering in Dax's ear)

Thank you.

WILL

(in intercom)

Let's make a hit record guys. Sonny calls this one Franchesca.

Sonny cues the band.

SONNY

One, two, three, four.

MUSIC. Smooth Jazz, and it's beyond beautiful, it's dynamic.

Sonny explodes into a silky melody on trumpet, nothing like it has ever been done before.

Frankie comes to the console, listens.

WILL

This is what you sound like to him.
He said he's had it in his head since
the moment you met. I've never heard
anything like it.

Frankie's misty eyed, all choked up, can barely speak.

FRANKIE

It's...beautiful.

INT. HOLLYWOOD RECORD PRESSING - DAY

Vinyl patties down a conveyor belt. Hundreds of them.
Pressed into LP's.

The LP's are packaged in sleeves with a BLUE BIRD PERCHED ON
A TRUMPET.

INT. WGCI RADIO STATION - DAY

An ASSISTANT hands over a record to the D.J. The record's
jacket cover has a picture of a Bluebird perched on a trumpet.

INT. WKIS RADIO STATION - DAY

The D.J. pulls a record out of the sleeve. The sleeve has a
picture of a Bluebird perched on a trumpet.

INT. RECORD STORES - VARIOUS LOCATIONS - DAY

CUSTOMERS swarm in, swipe up copies of the band's new record,
CASHIERS can't ring them up fast enough.

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)

I don't know what he said to Will to
get him to front all that money to
get that label started, but if it
had anything to do with promisin' to
pay him back double, that wasn't no
lie, cause that record went Double
Platinum in two weeks.

INT. AWARD SHOW - NIGHT

PRESENTERS on stage announce the recipient.

PRESENTER 1
 ...and the album of the year goes to
 Birdland for Birdland.

LATER

Another Presenter.

PRESENTER 2
 Record of the year goes to...Birdland
 for Francesca.

LATER

And another Presenter.

PRESENTER 3
 Song of the year to Sonny Wanderlan,
 for Francesca.

OLD BLACK MAN (V.O.)
 We made history. No other jazz group
 ever did that. Best part was, we
 got our name back.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

The Old Black Man slips on his Stacy Adams, strings them up.

YOUNG JOURNALIST
 It was you wasn't it? That night on
 the phone -- you're the one who called
 Frankie.
 (beat)
 Why'd you help him?

INT. PHONE BOOTH - NIGHT

BEGIN FLASHBACK

Dax dials numbers, wait's for an answer.

DAX
 Frankie, it's bad. Real bad.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (V.O.)
 Now don't get it twisted. I'm still
 not his biggest fan, but I see it
 like this, every family's got's it's
 ups and downs, different
 (MORE)

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 personalities, hell, you ain't gotta
 like them, but you damn sure need to
 respect them. And I gotta whole
 lotta respect for Sonny.

END FLASHBACK

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)
 Don't make me no difference if you
 print that or not, just wanted you
 to know the truth.

Two women, and two men move into the room. The Young
 Journalist comes to his feet.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)
 This here's Sonny's boys, Junior and
 Michael.

The Young Journalist extends a hand, Junior and Michael shake
 on it.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)
 And his girls, Sam and Lil.

YOUNG JOURNALIST
 It's a pleasure. I've heard a lot
 about you. Rolling Stone's doing a
 cover story on your father. He's a
 special man. If you don't mind,
 we'd like to take a few pictures
 after the show.

Someone TAPS on the door.

MALE'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Rock-n-Roll. Five min, min, minutes.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX
 That's my cue.
 (on his feet)
 See y'all on the other side.

The Young Journalist shakes his hand.

YOUNG JOURNALIST
 Thank you for your time Sir, it's
 been a real pleasure.

Dax gives himself a moment, looks like he's remembering the
 good ole days.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX
 Nope. Pleasure's been all mine.

INT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT

A full house, every table and booth taken. This place is a lot more elegant than it was 40 years ago.

ON STAGE

The band plays a soft jazz melody.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX

(in microphone over music)

Good evenin' Ladies and Gentlemen,
thank you for comin' out tonight.
You know, it's been thirty years
since we been on this stage -- time
flies when you're havin' fun, but it
sure is good to be back home.

(beat)

Ladies and Gentlemen, if you will,
I'd like to introduce to you Chi-
Town's very own, Birdland.

CLAMPING and WHISTLING in the audience.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)

(in microphone over music)

Over here, on drums, give it up for
Mister Steven Sticks.

Sticks is old but still looks good.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)

(in microphone over music)

And, here, on my right, my double
bass brotha, Kaimoro Amora.

Doesn't look like Kai's aged much over the years.

Dax gestures to a bald man on piano.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)

(in microphone over music)

We got our very own Mister Michael
Sikes right there on piano.

Mike's got on a suit with no tie. He gives Dax a wink and a nod.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)
 (in microphone over
 music)
 And for all y'all cats who don't
 know, I'm Dexter Stevens.

He twirls his trumpet between his fingers looks to the wings.

OLD BLACK MAN/DAX (CONT'D)
 (in microphone over
 music)
 Last, but certainly not least, I'm
 honored to bring to the stage tonight,
 a man I'm glad I've had the pleasure
 sharing the stage with for thirty
 years. Ladies and Gentlemen, give a
 warm welcome to Mister Sonny
 Wanderlan, and his beautiful Lady
 Bird Francesca.

CHEERS and APPLAUSE in the audience. A STANDING OVATION.

Sonny and Frankie, both old but vibrant, move onto the stage.
 Dax bows to Sonny, plants a kiss on Frankie's hand.

Frankie curtsies to the audience, then to the band members.

SONNY
 (in microphone over
 music)
 This first song is something I wrote
 right here many, many years ago, and
 tonight, I dedicate it to all the
 strong women who stood by their man,
 and never gave up on them.
 (beat)
 We call it, Francesca.

The band rolls into MUSIC, plays FRANCESCA in it's entirety
 over FLASHBACKS through the years.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS - NIGHT/DAY

BEGIN FLASHBACK

- 1) Young Sonny comes down the street, carries a grocery bag.
- 2) Young Sonny tacks sheet music on his bedroom wall.
- 3) Young Sonny and Sam marvel at a trumpet in a music shop's window.
- 3) Young Sonny plays trumpet at the school's recital, Sam watches from the door.

- 4) Sonny's grown up, plays trumpet in a bistro apron on stage at the Greenmill.
- 5) Sonny and Frankie meet on the elevated train for the first time.
- 6) The band gets a record deal, pop open bottles of champagne.
- 7) Sonny and Frankie get married in Vegas.
- 8) Mike kicks Sonny's ass in a dressing room.
- 9) Frankie's pregnant.
- 10) Sonny's a heroin junky.
- 11) Frankie helps Sonny fight his heroin addiction.
- 12) The band gets back together.
- 13) The band accepts several Grammy Awards.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. GREENMILL JAZZ CLUB - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

The band poses for a picture. A PHOTOGRAPHER takes a snap shot.

The picture floats in mid air with other photos of Birdland's time together over thirty years.

FADE OUT:

<END>