Johnny’s Blues Heart

By

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The true life story of Grammy award winning blues ambassador Johnny Clyde Copeland

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INT. JOHNNY’S HOME - EVENING

A middle aged, charcoal colored Johnny Clyde Copeland sits staring out of his window, softly strumming his guitar. The radio is on in the background, when the radio DJ announces one of Johnny’s earlier songs. As he picks up his lit cigarette from an ashtray, takes a drag. There is a blank look on his face as the music takes him back.

DISSOLVE

INT. YOUNG JOHNNY’S BEDROOM - MORNING

1950, the camera closes in on a handsome young boy the color of midnight. He is zoned in on his guitar. He jumps to attention from the voice of his MOTHER, from another room.

MOTHER
Johnny if you don’t get your narrow ass to school, I’m come in there. And you don’t wanna know what I’m do with that guitar.

EXT. OUTSIDE - MORNING

Young Johnny is running frantically towards his school bus that pulls off and leaves before he gets there. He slams his school books to the ground.

EXT. OUTSIDE - MORNING

Young Johnny is walking to school singing at the top of his lungs.

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The teacher is in front of the class teaching her lesson. Young Johnny’s head is bobbin back and forth, trying to fight the sleep. He finally succumbs. his neighbor ROBERT reaches over and hits him.

ROBERT
(whispers)
Hey man, you better wake up. You know she don’t play.

Young Johnny lifts and turns his head in anguish, in acknowledgment.

ROBERT
(whispers)
Another late night ha? That guitar gone kill you. If Mrs. Hathaway don’t do it first.

(CONTINUED)
(quiets and straightens up when he sees Mrs. Hathaway stare at him.)

6 INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

The bell rings and all of the students jump up and begin to exit. Robert and Johnny walk out into the school hallway together.

ROBERT
Man I ain’t gone keep saving you and not get paid for it.

JOHNNY
Who you saving? Man the I’m the last somebody Mrs. Hathaway gone give problems to. You hear how she always tell me how black and handsome I am.

ROBERT
You right. But, see how handsome you is in Mr. Drummond class you is for next period. Without me in there too, I bet you be in the principal’s office. I could see if you was Muddy Waters, but you more like well water.

Johnny and Robert starts to wrestle in the hallway before the bell sounds again and the both run off to their next class.

7 INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

Young Johnny’s mother and FATHER is sitting with one of Young Johnny’s TEACHERS in conference.

TEACHER
Honestly Mr. and Mrs. Copeland Johnny is one of the most delightful students I have ever had, extremely mannerable. It’s just that sometimes, his head seems to be somewhere else. He is completely detached from what is going on.

FATHER
Damn music! I promise you that won’t be a problem after tonight.
MOTHER
(takes a firm grasp to her husband’s arm)
I truly apologize, but Johnny has had to tend to schoolwork and chores. I promise you we will have him prepared and attentive from this point on.

8 INT. DINNER TABLE - EVENING
Young Johnny and his family has their head bowed in prayer.

FATHER
(raises his head)
Pass the chicken babe.
(places a couple of pieces on his plate and passes the container)
Johnny what’s wrong with you boy?

Johnny looks surprised.

FATHER
You know we went to your school and sat down with all of your teachers. I took an evening off from work just to hear them tell me you some lazy bum. And you know we can’t afford that.

MOTHER
Jacob!

FATHER
(looks at Young Johnny’s mother intently)
You remember when I let you keep that God forsaken guitar?

JOHNNY
Yes sir.

FATHER
And what did I tell you?

JOHNNY
That I had better make sure I was a man about my business.

FATHER
Always! And have you been being a man about it?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY

Pops...

FATHER
Yes or no? Have you been being a man about it?

JOHNNY
No sir.

FATHER
A guitar can’t feed no family. And don’t no woman want a man who can’t be a man. Understand?

(before Johnny can even reply)
That guitar is off limits to you. From now on you will spend your evenings after school tending to your lessons and chores. After dinner I want you to sit that guitar in my room and forget bout it. I shouldn’t have ever bought it and let you quit boxing.

Johnny looks at his mother and she drops her head.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Johnny is washing dishes, when his mother walks up, places dishes in the sink, and whispers to him.

MOTHER
You know where it’ll be. Just make sure you are done and it’s put up before your father gets home.

Johnny and his mother looks at each other and share a private laugh.

MOTHER
Besides, I always thought your face was too handsome to be punched on.

She gently kisses his cheek and walks off. Johnny stares at his faint reflection in the window.

INT. SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - EVENING

4 years later the school’s gymnasium is packed for a school dance. A group of musicians stop playing music, starts gathering their instruments and exiting stage when a young MC steps on stage.

(CONTINUED)
5. MC
(responding to the crowd’s cheer’s)
Yes, yes. Everyone give it up one more time for Lover’s Lane. One more time, Lover’s Lane!
(As Lover’s Lane exit stage they pass by an anxious Johnny side stage)

JOHNNY
Man, y’all tore it up!

MC
Now we come to the the time for what we’ve all been waiting on. Our very own local superstar. This boy gone travel the world and remember who told you. Jack Yates give it up for JOHNNY COPELAND! I said JOHNNY COPELAND!

As the MC and Johnny pass eachother, Johnny whispers in his ear.

JOHNNY
I told you it was Johnny Clyde.

The young MC just looks at him, frowns, and brushes him off.

Johnny takes center stage, in front of the mic and plugs his guitar in.

JOHNNY
I’m sure most of you have heard this before. And I’m sure it’s a favorite. Mine and yours.
(Johnny bursts into a furious song and the entire crowd starts dancing.)

11 INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING

Johnny is glowing and energetic. A fellow CLASSMATE approaches him.

CLASSMATE
Man! you tore it down out there.

JOHNNY
Thanks.

(CONTINUED)
CLASSMATE
Naw, I probably should thank you.

JOHNNY
Huh?

CLASSMATE
I don’t know if you know or not, but my auntie is Mamie.

JOHNNY
Don’t know?! Come on man. You can’t be from 3rd ward and not know who Mamie is.

CLASSMATE
Oh so you’ve heard of her? Well, just so happens she’s looking for a new act to play on her Thursdays. It’s paying little to nothing and the crowd is a cemetery but I’m willing to bet with your name and following all that’s gone change quick, fast, and in a hurry. Show up tomorrow before noon and tell her Bandit sent you.

JOHNNY
Man you sure about that? Mamie ain’t about that foolishness.

CLASSMATE
Trust me. You the future of third ward.

A proud smile overtakes Johnny’s face as he nods his head.

12 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB – MORNING

MAMIE is sitting on a chair going over paperwork with one of her loyal employees when Johnny walks into her path of light. A frail looking woman, Mamie looks up with the arrogance of Satan.

MAMIE
(without looking up)
I don’t know who you is but you must be close to The Almighty.

JOHNNY
(struggling to find his words)
I’m Johnny Clyde.
MAMIE
And.

JOHNNY
Bandit sent me. He said you was looking for somebody to play your Thursdays.

MAMIE
Well you ain’t him, Johnny Clyde...

JOHNNY
Copeland.

MAMIE
Copeland? As in Ruthie Lee baby?

JOHNNY
Yes ma’am.

MAMIE
Boyyy, I haven’t seen you since you was knee high to a gnat’s behind. I tell you what baby, since Ruthie Lee is a good friend, I’ll give you the chance to impress me and if you don’t I won’t kill you for wasting my time.

JOHNNY
(nervously adjusts his necktie)
I appreciate it.

MAMIE
(waves him off while attending to her paperwork and finances)
Mmm-hmmm.

Johnny walks to the stage. He cuts into a ferocious tune. Mamie can’t help but lift her head up. She looks at her worker, who is looking at her in disbelief. For a minute they just sit mesmerized at the power of Johnny’s gruff and gravel sounding voice. Mamie hops up from her seat and walks toward the stage.

MAMIE
(trying to come across as unbothered)
Ok, ok. That was Alright. I could possibly use you. First off can you be out late?
JOHNNY  
(nervously replies)  
Yeah...I think...

MAMIE  
You think? Either you a man or a  
baby that gotta be in the house  
before the sun goes down.

Mamie’s goon has a hearty chuckle at Johnny’s expense.

JOHNNY  
(deepens his voice and  
responds forcefully)  
Yeah I can be out late.

MAMIE  
Well, how long could you play  
Thursday night.

JOHNNY  
As long as you need me.

MAMIE  
Alright. Give me ten to twelve and  
I’ll give you twenty dollars.

JOHNNY  
(excited)  
Ten to twelve! I’m a give you the  
best two hours of music anybody  
ever heard.

MAMIE  
Yeah ok. Just make sure you’re here  
by nine. And keep your hands off  
the booze. Not on my watch

JOHNNY  
I don’t drink at all. Well not what  
you...  
(stops short as Mamie gives  
him a piercing stare)

MAMIE  
Good. Now is it only you or do you  
have a band? Because if I have to  
supply the band I’m knocking off  
ten dollars.

JOHNNY  
No ma’am. I got a band.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (4)

MAMIE
Well Thursday. Nine o’ clock at the latest.
(turns to walk away as Johnny begins to unhook his guitar)
And Johnny Clyde Copeland...

JOHNNY
Ma’am?

MAMIE
Don’t make me have to look for you. Because I won’t be the only one.

JOHNNY
No ma’am. Not at all.

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EXT. JOE GUITAR’S PORCH – AFTERNOON

Johnny stands on Joe Guitar’s porch, with his guitar and knocks on the door. It swings open to reveal AUBREY’S MOM, a stout middle aged woman.

JOE’S MOM
Now who the hell...? Wait don’t I know you? Yeah. You that li’l Copeland boy.

JOHNNY
Yes ma’am.

JOE’S MOM
(eyes Johnny’s guitar at his side)
You must be here for Aubrey. Mmm-hmm. He around back, with the rest of them knuckleheads, keeping up all that racket. Can’t even enjoy the Lord’s day.

JOHNNY
Thank you ma’am.

JOE’S MOM
Yeah ok.

Johnny exits the porch and walks to the backyard.
Joe Guitar stands behind his guitar barking at his bandmates, STEVE and CORNELIUS.

JOE
Cornelius, man you keep falling behind the groove. You gotta keep them drums thumping. And Steve man you just all over the place.

CORNELIUS
Man you just playing too fast. This is where the groove is.
(Cornelius goes hard with a drum pattern.)

Johnny appears from around the corner of the house. He stops at a distance and witnesses Cornelius zoning out.

JOE
(waving his hands at Cornelius)
Alright! Alright! I got you.
(then he brings attention to Johnny)
Well look-a here. Look who’s presence we have the pleasure of being blessed with Mr. Johnny Clyde. What brings the high and mighty down off of his mountain.

JOHNNY
Awww man, stop it. If anybody is running the scene around here it’s you cool cats.

CORNELIUS
So what brings you by here daddy-o? You wanna sit in on our jam session.

JOHNNY
Something like that.

STEVE
What you got shaking man?

JOHNNY
I got a gig man.

(CONTINUED)
JOE
Oh yeah? At what school?

JOHNNY
No school. Mamie’s.

There is a brief silence.

CORNELIUS
Mamie’s? How you land that?

JOHNNY
Well it’s on Thursday night, ten til twelve.

STEVE
Aww man. Don’t nothing be happening there on no Thursday night.

JOE
How you know?

STEVE
What? You forgot who my brother is. I know what night jumping at every spot and Mamie’s is dead wood on Thursday. Everybody be at The Red Rooster that night.

CORNELIUS
Anyway, why does that bring you by here brother man?

JOHNNY
First I told her I had a band.

JOE
Wait. I never seen you perform with a...

(a light bulb goes off in his head)

Ooooh!

STEVE
(speaks as if he is a detective who just solved a case)

You want us to play with you. Now why would we do that what’s in it for us?
JOHNNY
Five dollars for two hours.

JOE
She’s willing to pay us?

CORNELIUS
Man we ain’t ever been paid to play.

JOHNNY
Yep. And the way I see it, if Thursday isn’t her night and we turn it into her...excuse me OUR night, we might can get paid more than just five dollars.

STEVE
You plan on trying to negotiate with Mamie. This dude must not know who he talking bout.

JOHNNY
Hey! Mamie is a businesswoman first and foremost. She knows when something is good for business and I’m sure she’s willing to take care of us, for the sake of good business. So are y’all in?

JOE
Well if we gone be good enough we better put in the work. All we got is four days.

Johnny takes his place in the new quartet.

JOHNNY
(looks over his shoulders)
Three days.

STEVE
Hold up. Thursday is in four days.

JOHNNY
Three days, trust me.
(nonchalantly changes the question)
So do ya’ll know Walking My Baby Back Home?

(continuued)
GROUP 
(in unison)
Yeah.

JOHNNY
Ok. 1, 2. 1, 2, 3, and.

The band breaks into song.

INT. WOLF’S DEPARTMENT STORE – NOON

Three days later Johnny is inside of the clothing store, at the epicenter of Third Ward, talking to WOLF, an elderly white man with heavy Jewish features.

WOLF
So you want me to allow you to stand out in front of my spot and perform is what you saying.

JOHNNY
If you don’t mind. We are just a young band that’s trying to make a name for ourself.

WOLF
And you think standing outside of my store is going to get you the name you look for.

JOHNNY
It is the place where everybody who has a name comes. You gotta be somebody if you come here.

WOLF
(smiles and kind of blushes from the admiration)
You pretty slick kid. I tell you what you got it. Just do me two favors.

JOHNNY
You got it.

WOLF
Don’t block my door and when you get that name you’re searching for, don’t forget where you got it from.

JOHNNY
I promise.
Johnny turns enthusiastically nearly running away. Robert is fantasizing and inspecting all of the clean suits and amenities when Johnny grabs him and pulls him out of the door.

16 EXT. OUTSIDE WOLF’S - NOON

Aubrey, Tee, and Kenny is waiting outside with their equipment when Johnny and Robert bounce out of the door.

    JOE
    (anxiously)
    Well what did he say?

    JOHNNY
    (pretending to be downtrodden)
    He said don’t block his door.

The entire clique explodes.

17 EXT. OUTSIDE WOLF’S - AFTERNOON

The group is off to the side of Wolf’s performing with all of their heart. It is a high traffic area people walking by and a constant flow of cars.

Robert is working the streets handing out flyers to different people on the streets and walking into the street stopping cars to hand someone inside a flyer.

Robert especially targets any woman he sees passing by. Occasionally sparking up conversations and getting a few to write their number down on the back of one of the flyers.

After they finish their set and begin to congratulate each other a voice from across the street calls out to them. They all turn to see a car parked across the street with the DRIVER hanging partly out of the window.

    DRIVER
    (yells)
    Hey fellas, nice job.

    JOHNNY
    (yells back)
    Thanks!

    DRIVER
    So is this your set up here?

    JOHNNY
    No sir. We’re at Mamie’s every Thursday night from ten to twelve.

(CONTINUED)
DRIVER
Cool. I might have to come y and check y’all out.

JOHNNY
Please do.

DRIVER
So what do you call your band?

JOHNNY
The Dukes of Rhythm.

DRIVER
So when and where you said you would be again.

JOHNNY
(nudges Robert with an aggravated whisper)
Go give him a flyer.

ROBERT
(pushes back)
Hell naw. This my last one and it got all these females numbers on it.

JOHNNY
(yells so that he knows the gentleman retrieves the information)
We’ll be at Mamie’s on Thursday. We hit stage at ten.

DRIVER
Got ya.

The driver pulls back into his vehicle, puts the car in drive and drives off.

JOE
(with a sense of agitation)
You didn’t speak to us about changing the name of the group.

ROBERT
Technically there wasn’t a name change because this group never had a name.
JOE
Who is you to be speaking on group business?

ROBERT
Who am I? I’m your manager.

STEVE
Manager? I ain’t got no manager.

AUBREY
You might be Hollywood’s (suggesting Johnny) manager but you sho’ll not mine.

CORNELIUS
Yeah I didn’t agree to give anybody a cut of my money.

JOHNNY
Everybody calm down. Robert is just here to help. He’s not asking for a cut of anyone’s money.

(Robert gives Johnny a disturbed look)
And as for the name I didn’t think it would be fair if I just used my name, just used your name, or said Johnny Copeland and Lover’s Lane.

JOE
At least you could have asked our input, is all I’m saying.

JOHNNY
Truthfully, when I went to Mamie to ask her would she get flyers printed up for us, when she asked me the name of the band, I froze. And Dukes Of Rhythm was the first thing I thought of.

STEVE
So Mamie printed up these flyers for us.

JOHNNY
Yeah.

STEVE
For free?
JOHNNY

Nope.

Joe, Steve, and Cornelius express their disgust.

JOE

So what did we have to give up?

JOHNNY

Y’all didn’t have to give up anything. I gave up my five dollars.

CORNELIUS

As long as it ain’t coming out my pocket.

JOHNNY

Yes sir. Man I know we gonna hit big. I can feel it.

INT. MAMIE’S CLUB – EVENING

Johnny and his posse all stroll into Mamie’s front door pass one of her goons. The club is empty except for Mamie and BETTY JEAN, the most beautiful young female Johnny has ever laid his eyes on, who is diligently cleaning.

MAMIE

There go my superstars.
   (checks her pocket watch)
   Eight - thirty. Now that’s what I like to see men that’s on time and ready to work. You all are ready to work?

JOHNNY

Yes ma’am we surely are Mamie.
   (with his eyes looking over Mamie’s shoulder at Betty Jean)
   So how you doing this fine evening?

Betty Jean is stealing glances at Johnny and smiling.

MAMIE

Betty Jean go make sure everything is in order in the back.

BETTY JEAN
   (scurrying off with a bit of fear)
   Yes madea.

(CONTINUED)
MAMIE  
(addressing Johnny directly)
Booze ain’t the only thing you 
better make sure you keep your 
hands off of. We clear?

The rest of the band looks partly confused.

JOHNNY
Crystal.  
(recenters himself)
Mamie allow me the pleasure to 
introduce you to everyone. This is 
Joe Guitar Hughes. He plays the 
lead.

JOE
How you doing Mamie?

MAMIE
Well. Ain’t Kathy your moma?

JOE
Yes ma’am.

MAMIE
And she don’t mind you being in 
here?

JOE
No ma’am. She said after what she 
got through with me and this 
guitar, it’s bout time it start 
paying off.

MAMIE
(enjoys a quick and short 
laugh)
Ain’t that the truth.

JOHNNY
This is Cornelius. He plays drums.

MAMIE
Corneliu? Cornelius? Where I know 
that name from. Oh I know! You used 
to play with my grandson Marvin.

CORNELIUS
Marvin! That used to be my best 
friend. How has he been. I haven’t 
heard from him since they moved to 
Detroit.

(CONTINUED)
MAMIE
Last I heard he was fine.

JOHNNY
This is Steve. He plays the bass.

MAMIE
I swear to God you look just like this nigga named Silver.

STEVE
(proudly)
That’s my older brother.

MAMIE
I hope you ain’t nothing like him. He always got some shit going on. I really let his ass make it the other night. Back there slicking them niggas on them dice. I shoulda let em tear his ass from the bone. Don’t let me catch you indulging.

STEVE
(earnestly)
No ma’am, not me. I don’t indulge at all.

MAMIE
Good. Keep it that way.

JOHNNY
Last but not least, this is our manager Robert T. Turner.

MAMIE
I definitely done seen you before. You be over there by the track with Eagle and Chappie nem.

Robert was a peacock.

MAMIE
So what you think you some kind of pimp in training.

All of the fellas laugh at Robert.

MAMIE
Let me tell you something. In here, you are like my family, which means you are my responsibility and I take that seriously. I just ask you (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MAMIE (cont’d)
remain respectful at all times and
do your job like a professional. If
you have any request or problem at
all, just get at one of my people
and they will assure that you are
accommodated.

(A healthy gentleman appears
from the back and signals
Mamie)
And one more thing. In here you
have The Lord and the law and their
both on my side. you understand?

All of the young men agree heartily, making sure Mamie knows
there is no miscommunication.

MAMIE
Now you gentlemen must excuse me. I
have more pressing matters to
attend to. Make yourself at home.
(looks at Kenny then squarely
at Johnny)
But not too much at home.

Mamie exits her barstool and leaves, when the hulking door
man quickly makes up her rear.

19 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB – EVENING

The Dukes of Rhythm is on stage tuning up with Robert
sitting right at the front. Betty Jean walks back in and
stands behind the bar. Her and Johnny lock eyes. Johnny
stops mid-performance.

JOHNNY
You know, I could really use a
drink of water.

STEVE
(from the background)
Man that nigga bout to get hisself
killed.

Johnny unstraps his guitar and exits the stage.

ROBERT
(as Johnny passes by him he
squeals)
What you doing?

Johnny ignores all sensibilities and strolls to the bar.
JOHNNY
What a dude gotta do to get a cold glass of water around here?

BETTY JEAN
(sarcastically)
Ask!

JOHNNY
Oh, that’s all? I was sure it took more than that.

BETTY JEAN
Well, the Bible says ask and you shall receive.

JOHNNY
Well what if I ask for more than water? Will I receive?

BETTY JEAN
(gives him an unappreciative look)
You don’t even know who I am.

JOHNNY
Yes I do. I’ve seen you before. I’m just trying to call where exactly.

BETTY JEAN
You really have some nerve.
(as she pushes his drink to him)

JOHNNY
Why such a cold shoulder beautiful?

BETTY JEAN
Maybe because my locker has been right across from yours a full year and you don’t know who I am.

JOHNNY
I knew your face was too familiar.
(with an air of confidence)
Betty Jean! Betty Jean Collins!

Betty Jean smiles a sly smile.

BETTY JEAN
Oh so you know me now?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
I been noticed you. But I had given
up hope of ever talking to someone
as gorgeous as you. Don’t you
supposed to talk to the varsity
quarterback?

BETTY JEAN
(more to herself than
anything)
Tuh huh. I really wish that boy
stop telling people that.

JOHNNY
What?

BETTY JEAN
Nothing. So you believe everything
that you hear?

JOHNNY
Not necessarily. It’s just
eyetimewe see you you be
surrounded by so many people. You
really are the toast of Jack Yates.

BETTY JEAN
Aren’t you the one to talk? If I
could go a day without all them
hens cackling about you in the
girl’s locker room.

(Betty Jean tries to pull back
on her comment but it’s too
late)

(under her breath)
Especially Ethel desperate ass.

JOHNNY
Hunh?

BETTY JEAN
Nothing. So you like living
dangerously.

(her eyes hint to the fact
that Mamie could appear from
the back at any second.)

Johnny looks over his shoulder then back at Betty Jean with
the most confident smile.

JOHNNY
Seems like I’m not the only one. So
what must one do to be graced with
your presence?

(CONTINUED)
BETTY JEAN
Be worthy?

JOHNNY
Well am I?

BETTY JEAN
We’ll see.

Johnny stands there and looks deeply into Betty Jean’s eyes.

BETTY JEAN
I said we’ll see.

Johnny downs his water and slams the cup back on the counter.

JOHNNY
We sho’ll will.

They both give the other one more electric look. Johnny turns and struts off. Betty Jean watches him the entire way. The rest of the band was in a movie theater. Johnny passes by Robert and slides his hand out behind him and Robert slides him five.

ROBERT
My man.

As Johnny gets back on the stage, he straps his guitar on with his eyes focusing on Betty Jean’s every move, who nervously pretends to tend to her duties.

JOE
Damn! I gotta piss. where the restroom at?

JOHNNY
Gotta be back there in the back somewhere. Hurry back man. We need to run through these last songs.

JOE
Now you worried about the last little bit of songs?

Joe unhooks his guitar and bolts off of the stage.
INT. BACKSIDE OF MAMIE’S - EVENING

Joe is antsy from his necessity to urinate. He is looking at every door intently and talking to himself. He takes a turn and walks up on the unexpected. Mamie’s bodyguards is working a gentleman over, nicely.

Joe is appalled and frozen in his tracks, forgetting all about his previous situation, when Mamie notices him.

MAMIE
I would have thought someone would have told you you should always mind your business.

JOE
(struggles to find his words)
I was looking for the restroom. I need to use it.

MAMIE
Does this look like a restroom to you?

JOE
N-n-no ma’am.

MAMIE
Don’t you think it would be in your best interest to find it?

Joe doesn’t even answer. He just turns so fast, to scurry off, he runs into some unidentified objects and knocks them over. So scared, he doesn’t even stop to pick them up. He just takes the path back to the front. Once back at the stage, he snatches his guitar up and cuts into a mean solo, where the rest of the band had already been playing. Everyone just stops and looks at him as he loses his mind on his guitar.

INT. MAMIE’S CLUB - EVENING

It is right before The Dukes Of Rhythm is set to go on stage. Mamie’s is over half packed. she is sitting at the bar with BULL, one of her cronies.

MAMIE
I swear, we never had a Thursday like this before. That little handsome black bastard is a mastermind.

(CONTINUED)
Betty Jean was close enough behind the bar to hear her and stops to think of Johnny. Mamie notices and gives her a threatening look.

MAMIE
Bull, what time is it?

BULL
Nine - fifty - five.

MAMIE
Go to to the back and let them young bucks know their on in five.

BULL
Yes ma’am.

Bull gets up and labors to the back.

22 INT. BACKSIDE OF MAMIE’S - EVENING

The group is all partaking in their own preshow rituals, except for Joe. He seems to be in his own world. The all jump when Bull bursts in.

BULL
I hope y’all ready youngsters. You finna go on and it’s a pretty big crowd out here.

With that Bull exits.

JOE
(seemingly out of nowhere)
I hope all of you is ready! Because I’m not taking the heat for anybody who can’t hold their own.

The rest look at each other in the room puzzled. They shrug it off and exits the room one by one.

23 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB - EVENING

Mamie is center stage. I want to thank all of you for coming out and party with me. It’s clear you know why you are all here, so I won’t drag it out. Without further delay I present to you The Dukes Of Rhythm.

The crowd applauds.

Johnny and his band takes the stage. The cheering subsides. Johnny adjusts his mic.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Wow! I really gotta thank all of you for showing up tonight. As you pretty much know, we are the Dukes of Rhythm and we are here to make sure you have the greatest time of your life.

VOICE
(from back in the back of the crowd)
Alright then.

JOHNNY
Let’s get into it.

Johnny and his band rips into their blues set.

FADE

24 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB - EVENING

Johnny and his band is finishing up a song. The work is showing on their face through the sweat. The crowd breaks into another applause as they finish.

JOHNNY
Thank you. Thank you. Y’all are way to kind. At this time we wanna ask if anyone in the house has any requests?

From the left side of the stage a voice shouts.

DRIVER
Yeah!

Everyone on stage, and even Robert’s, head turns from the familiarity of the voice. When Johnny locates it, he sees it is the driver of the car from the day before.

DRIVER
You got something original?

Johnny pauses and debates briefly with himself.

JOHNNY
Yeah I got something original.

Johnny turns to his band, who’s all clearly in disagreement.
(CONTINUED)

JOE
(strictly to Johnny)
We didn’t practice any original material.

JOHNNY
(johnny mouths without any sound really leaving his mouth)
Don’t worry about it. Just pick up on me.
(He turns back around to the audience and glances over at an impatient Mamie.)
Hold on to your socks.

Johnny breaks into a soulful and bluesy rendition of "Wake Up Little Susie" and it isn’t long before the rest of the band is right in step with him.

25 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB – EVENING

The Dukes of Rhythm finishes their song and the place goes wild. Mamie watches with a masterful set of eyes as she makes her way to the stage.

JOHNNY
Thank you all once again. Make sure you spread the word. Dukes Of Rhythm. Every Thursday. Ten to twelve.

By now Mamie is on the stage strong-arming the mic from Johnny.

MAMIE
Correction. That’s Dukes Of Rhythm, every Thursday to Sunday right here at Mamie’s! Starting next Thursday! All night!

As the crowd explodes into a higher pitch of applause, Johnny looks around at the rest of his band members.

26 INT. BACKSIDE OF MAMIE’S – EVENING

Mamie is counting out the money to Johnny.

MAMIE
Thirteen, Fourteen, Fifteen! Looks like we gotta long and fruitful partnership ahead.

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
Do we!

Everything becomes quiet and awkward.

MAMIE
And what is that supposed to mean?

Bull studs up behind Mamie but a subtle gesture from her keeps him in place.

JOE
Robert, be cool man.

ROBERT
No disrespect Mamie, but from how I see it, this calls for an entirely new negotiation. The previous agreement was for Thursday, 2 hours, and twenty dollars. Now you are talking about four days.

MAMIE
Ok, that’s twenty dollars a day.

ROBERT
From what I see you are looking at us as headliners. We both know Thursdays around her is a ghost town. Your Fridays and Saturdays are pretty much automatic at two dollars a head. But with my group paying, I can imagine the price of everything is about to go up around here because the line is going to be to the back of the building. Then I’m sure the drinks are going to get a little more flowery, if you know what I mean.

MAMIE
You little motherfucker.

ROBERT
Now Mamie, all we all are are business people wanting what we feel we are owed. This isn’t a sleight to anyone. I’m just talking fair business. And if anyone can understand that, I would figure it to be you.
Mamie can feel Bull breathing on her neck. She turns and gives him a look of ease. She turns back and peers dead into Robert’s eyes. You can all but hear the group behind him bones rattling.

MAMIE
(spinning the ring on her pinky finger)
So what would you say is fair?

ROBERT
(with no hesitation)
Seventy - five dollars.

MAMIE
Seventy - five...??

ROBERT
A day.

MAMIE
A DAY...?

Bull is a rabid beast waiting on the instructions.

ROBERT
Now Mamie this isn’t to say we aren’t going to go all the way out for you. This not only guarantees us playing to closing, but it also delivers daily promotions of Mamie’s. Flyers to be provided by you at no cost of us of course.

Mamie can’t help but to laugh as she turns around to Bull, who begins to laugh himself. Mamie turns back to Robert in all seriousness.

MAMIE
Usually you wouldn’t leave this room on two legs. But not only do I like you, I respect anyone who has the balls to stand up for what they feel they are worth. I tell you what. It’s a deal.

The group begins to celebrate amongst themself.

MAMIE
But. You better uphold every end of your bargain. If you or my money begin to slip, Frazier’s Funeral Home gone be five coffins short.

(CONTINUED)
Everyone exchanged looks of concern.

MAMIE
Come here boys.

They all bring it in for a hug.

EXT. OUTSIDE - MORNING

Johnny is walking down the street when MAGIC, the driver of the car, who asked to hear some original material, pulls up on the side of him and drives at the pace of Johnny walking.

MAGIC
You sure are a hard man to find.

JOHNNY
Oh yeah? How so?

MAGIC
I waited outside at Mamie’s to see you the other night but never did.

JOHNNY
What was you waiting on me for Mr...?

MAGIC
Wand. But everyone calls me Magic.

JOHNNY
(pauses for a second)
Oh! I get it. Like magic wand. Cool.

A car behind Magic honks its horn. He waves it by. It swings around and speeds pass.

MAGIC
I was really impressed by your performance.

JOHNNY
I appreciate that. Hopefully you are there on nights to come and spread the word.

MAGIC
How bout I do you one better?

Johnny stops and eyeballs Magic in amazement.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
What do you mean by that?

MAGIC
I’m a record producer. I have my own studio.

JOHNNY
You? A record producer? With your own studio?
(partly laughs)
You don’t look like a record producer to me.

MAGIC
Oh yeah, and what does a record producer look like.

JOHNNY
(pondering)
I don’t know.

MAGIC
My point exactly. That little original number you done...

JOHNNY
Wake Up Little Susie?

MAGIC
Yeah that one. I’d like to record it and put it on vinyl.

Johnny gives him a look of distrust.

MAGIC
No seriously. I think...excuse me I don’t even know your name.

JOHNNY
Johnny Clyde.

MAGIC
Well I think Johnny Clyde is the next big thing.

JOHNNY
Don’t you mean The Dukes Of Rhythm?

MAGIC
No I mean Johnny Clyde.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Well I’m sorry to waste your time sir. There is no Johnny Clyde without The Dukes Of Rhythm.

Johnny starts to walk off. Magic zooms up to catch him.

MAGIC
Hold up. Hold up. I can respect a man of integrity and principle. I tell you what, I have a store at Scott and Elgin. Why don’t you and The Dukes Of Rhythm meet me there at five o’ clock tomorrow.

JOHNNY
(pauses and looks at Magic)
I’ll see if my band is willing.

MAGIC
(looks at Johnny and smirks)
Yeah I’ll see you tomorrow.
(drives off singing “Wake Up Little Susie”)

INT. MAGIC’S STOREFRONT – EVENING

The Dukes Of Rhythm walks into Magic’s store. Magic is sitting with his feet kicked up and WILLIE, a young male worker, sweeping around the store.

MAGIC
(hops up checking his watch)
Look what we have here. I knew you would come.

JOE
Doesn’t look like you was expecting anyone to me.

MAGIC
(laughs the comment off and addresses his worker)
Willie, you know who this is?

Willie looks at the group quickly, shrugs, and goes back to his chores.

MAGIC
The next superstars. I tell you The Dukes Of Rhythm will be a household name after I’m through.
The group looks at each other in disbelief of Magic’s enthusiasm.

JOHNNY
So how do you plan on doing that?

MAGIC
How do I plan on doing that? Huh? By recording that little ditty from the other night and making sure it’s in every DJ’s hand and jukebox from here to the edge of the universe.

CORNELIUS
Recording? And how are you supposed to do that?

JOE
Better yet, who are you? It’s only one person in this city with those capabilities. And it’s definitely not you.

MAGIC
Oh, is that so? Who, Robey? So you think he’s the only record producer in town? who you think started him in the biz?

(voice becomes more aggressive)
Don Robey this! Don Robey that! Let me tell you something...

The group’s facial expressions were all on high alert when Magic notices.

MAGIC
Never mind. That’s better left for another day. Follow me.

(Magic heads for the back of his store and the group follows suit)
Willie tend to the store.

WILLIE
Ok.
The back of the store was dank and dimly lit. Packed with boxes and cobwebs, they weaved until they found the open space at the very back. There was a quaint little set up, with instruments already in place. Since none of the group had ever been in a studio, they really didn’t know what they was looking at, but impressed never the least.

MAGIC
You know how I got my name? Because this is where I make the magic happen.
(pauses and recollects)
You are looking at one of the greatest music minds ever, matters what this environment suggests. The reason everyone thinks so highly of your Mr. Don Robey.

JOE
So what is it that you expect of us?

MAGIC
All I nee is for you to perform that song the exact same way you did the other night. And, I’ll take care of everything else.

STEVE
Yeah, but what do we get if we do?

MAGIC
Let me ask you something young bloods. What are you all doing this for? Do you even know?

The group looks around waiting on a response from one of their own, but only get silence.

MAGIC
(happily continues)
Well let me tell you what I know and see. There is about to be an explosion. A revolution of some sort. Black people, their culture, and music is about to be at the forefront of America’s daily living.
(gives the group a brief moment to digest his suggestions)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MAGIC (cont’d)
Now, here’s what I see in you. I’ve seen my fair share of singers and musicians, but rarely do you see a group as young and as polished as you all are. Now you can use your talent to capitalize and become rich and famous. Or you can keep on playing some little local backwoods juke joint.

STEVE
Yeah, but that still doesn’t say what we get out of this right here and now.

MAGIC

JOHNNY
We must be worth something.

MAGIC
Everything in my store is worth something.
(takes a deep breath)
Look I’m a businessman. I sell products. I’m trying to turn The Dukes Of Rhythm into a product people wanna buy. Now you can have your song all over the radio, you can have fans running out and buying your record, you can be doing shows at all of the biggest and baddest venues, but if you get caught up into thinking small time that’s all you’ll ever be.
(The group still wasn’t buying)
Fuck it! how much does Mamie pay you a night.

CORNELIUS
(blurts out)
Seventy - five dollars a day.

Joe elbows him.

MAGIC
Ok. Since you wanna be that way.
(Magic goes into his pocket and comes out with money)

(CONTINUED)
Seventy-five dollars. For one song!

Steve immediately snatches it and the group runs into place to begin recording. Magic takes a seat behind his equipment and begins to instruct them on the process.

EXT. JOHNNY’S PORCH - NOON

Johnny sits on his porch eating an orange when Robert pulls up in front of his house with a beautiful girl on the passenger seat. She flashes Johnny a flirtatious smile. Robert exits his car and dusts himself off, before gliding to where Johnny sat.

ROBERT
(while approaching Johnny)
Man what y’all do?

JOHNNY
What you talking Robert T?

ROBERT
I heard you and the group was over at Magic’s.

JOHNNY
Yeah, and?

ROBERT
And y’all recorded a record for him!

JOHNNY
So what? He paid us for one song what Mamie give us to play a whole set.

ROBERT
But...

JOHNNY
But nothing. That was the easiest fifty dollars any of us ever made.

ROBERT
Yeah baby but you don’t understand what you did.

JOHNNY
And you do?

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
Trust me I understand more than you do. Why you even ask me to be your manager if you not gone let me do my job?

JOHNNY
Your job is to make sure I get paid. And it ain’t like I can’t do that for myself too.

ROBERT
Yeah alright. Don’t come crying to me.

(Robert easily shifts gears on the conversation)
How you like my new little prospect?

Johnny looks to the female in the car. He nods as he makes a face of approval.

ROBERT
Her name is Sherryl but I call her Rainbow.

JOHNNY
Rainbow?

ROBERT
Yeah it’s gold at the end of it?

They both show a hearty laugh.

ROBERT
Chappie blessed me in last night. Every bitch walking with two legs better beware.

JOHNNY
So that’s it?

ROBERT
What?

JOHNNY
I guess it was good we did take the money.

ROBERT
I’m still your manager. I’m just managing her too. Hey man this is going to be a plus for us trust me.

(MORE)
ROBERT (cont’d)
You just can’t go to making moves without me man. These streets is cutthroat and I’m the only one out here in ‘em with your best interest in mind. Ya dig?

JOHNNY
Yeah I’m hip.

ROBERT
Well I gotta go turn a couple corners and make some things happen. All of y’all need to get on your toes and make sure you blow the roof off of the place tonight.

JOHNNY
That goes without saying.

ROBERT
I always gotta say it.

Robert and Johnny slide the other five and Robert walks off with the meanest strut. Johnny shakes his head, laughs, and pop a piece of his orange in his mouth.

31 EXT. MAMIE’S – NIGHT

Mamie’s has a line all the way around the building. DON ROBEY, a dapper extremely light skinned black man walks pass the line with a beautiful woman, matching his appearance, under each arm and three intimidating "gentleman" following closely. An inebriated MAN IN LINE with his FRIEND doesn’t appreciate the fact that Don Robey just walks to the front of the line.

MAN IN LINE
And where this privileged nigga think he going.

FRIEND
(trying to restrain his friend)
(with a semi-whisper)
Man, that’s Don Robie.

MAN IN LINE
Nigga I don’t give a fuck who it is, as long as we been standing out here in this line.

One of Don’s goons jump but Don signals him to stay back.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

FRIEND
It really ain’t been that long Mr. Robie. Please forgive my friend. He’s a little out his head.

DON ROBEY
Well mabe this ain’t the place for him. If you was really his fried you’d probably would take him home.

FRIEND
You know what you right.
(goes to struggling, fighting, and arguing with his friend to get him out of line)

DON ROBEY
(looking as the friend pulls the man off)
Peasant.
(continues into Mamie’s)

32 INT. MAMIE’S FRONT DOOR – NIGHT

Mamie sits right by the entrance watching as one of her "employees" take the money of her patrons. Don Robey and his crew steps in.

DON ROBEY
How you this beautiful night Mamie?

MAMIE
I’m good. And yourself Don?

DON ROBEY
I’m well.

MAMIE
That’s good. I don’t have to check any of your boys now do I?

DON ROBEY
You know I know better than any of that foolishness Mamie.

MAMIE
Because I’d hate for us to have to go there. I can excuse the last time you was here. As a matter fact, I apologize on behalf of my customer.
DON ROBEY
No thang Mamie. You know it always gotta be one.

MAMIE
Well we won’t be having any of that tonight.
(Mamie looks inside of her club and signals for Bull and he appears)
Bull I want you to clear that back part of the club over there for nothing but Don and his party and put Cannon on security for them. Tell him not to leave that post all night. Let Betty Jean know their first round is on me.

DON ROBEY
As classy as ever.
(shows the way for his two females into the club and turns to acknowledge for two of his me to accompany them. Don takes time to stop and whisper in Mamie’s ear.)
I hear you hurting everybody else’s books right now. You got the whole weekend now. I stopped over by the Playhouse before here and when their Sundays is dead...Let’s just say they not happy at all with this secret weapon of yours.

Mamie turn’s her head and looks Don in his eyes.

MAMIE
You know it be’s like that sometimes.

DON ROBEY
(with a sly smile)
It sho’l do, don’t it.

33 INT. MAMIE’S - NIGHT
Johnny is in mid song when he sees Don Robey walk in and strolls to the back of the club. Johnny briefly forgets the words to his song when he sees Don. Joe saves him by cutting into a wicked solo and easing over and bumping him.

A super clean Robert is sitting in his normal spot, accompanied by Rainbow, when he observes Johnny and follows

(CONTINUED)
his eyes to Don Robey. Robert leans in and whispers in Rainbow’s ear. They both raise from their seats. She follows a meandering Robert through the thick crowd. Johnny watches them all the way.

Robert makes his way to Don’s section, where he is headed off by Don’s welcoming committee. One of Don’s guards looks to Don for approval. Don waves Robert and his girl through.

With seeing this, it is like Johnny is invigorated. The delivery of his music goes to another level, that everyone in and outside of the club notices. So much so that the line becomes hostile with trying to push their way in.

Robert takes a seat next to Don and they begin conversing. Each leaning towards the other when they felt the need to speak.

INT. MAMIE’S CLUB – NIGHT

It is two o’ clock and The Dukes of Rhythm Is finished. The crowd is screaming for more but Mamie is assuring everyone that is it. To the people’s dismay they begin to exit. As the band begins to relieve themselves Robert gives Johnny a signal. Johnny climbs off of the stage and goes to where Robert is.

ROBERT
You showed out tonight.

JOHNNY
Naw, you the one who showed out. You was all in Don Robey’s section all night. Why didn’t you tell me you knew him?

ROBERT
For what?

JOHNNY
For what? So you could have introduced me.

ROBERT
Look at him.

(Robert calls Johnny’s attention to Don Robey, where he is poised, smoking a cigar, watching everyone else file out of the club)

Does he look like the type you introduce yourself to. He introduces himself to you. Ya dig?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
(takes a real good look at Don Robey and his company)
Yeah.

ROBERT
Luckily for you, he wants to meet you.

JOHNNY
Damn, what we waiting on...

ROBERT
Slow down, low down. He wants to meet you at his office. Tomorrow.

JOHNNY
His office? Where’s that?

ROBERT
Fifth Ward. 2809 Erastus Street.

Johnny gives a certain type of look.

ROBERT
You not scared ha?

JOHNNY
Come on man, you know me.
   (his level of excitement raises)
Wait til I tell the band we got a meeting with Don Robey.

ROBERT
No band. He wants a meeting with you. You only. What about...

ROBERT
Not even me.

Johnny frowns at Robert. Then, he looks directly at Don who smiles directly at him as if he was part of him and Robert’s conversation.

ROBERT
Hey man! This is it. Make sure you are there at two o’ clock on the dot. You mess this off, you don’t have to worry about ever playing anywhere but here the rest of your life. This is the opportunity you’ve been waiting on.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
(looking back over his shoulder at the rest of the band, reluctantly)
Yeah, the opportunity I’ve been waiting on.

EXT. DON ROBIE’S OFFICE/STUDIO – AFTERNOON.

Johnny stands outside of Don Robey’s office looking and contemplating. He finally makes his mind up to knock on the door. A small slot in the door opens and he hears a BARITONE VOICE.

BARITONE VOICE
What you want?

JOHNNY
Johnny clyde here to see Mr. Robey.

BARITONE VOICE
Hold on.

The slot closes forcefully. After some seconds it opens again.

BARITONE VOICE
Come on in. He’s been expecting you.

From the outside Johnny hears the trouble the Guard has to go through to unlock the door. When it is finally open and entrance is granted, not knowing what to expect, Johnny is impressed with how immaculate everything is.

BARITONE VOICE
Follow me.

Johnny sees that the scary voice belongs to an equally scary man. Johnny walks in step with him until they come to an office door and the guard knocks on it.

BARITONE VOICE
Boss. He’s here.

DON ROBNEY
(from the other side of the door)
Show him in.
The guard opens the door, allows Johnny in, and closes it behind him. Johnny is statuesque at the sight of Don Robey behind a grand wooden desk. He is sitting on a throne of a chair, with one of his heroic body guards to his immediate right. The entire energy of it is somewhat threatening.

DON ROBEY
Have a seat.

Johnny inches over to the chair sitting in front of Don Robey’s desk. He cautiously sits down.

DON ROBEY
Johnny Clyde Copeland! I’ve been hearing so much about you for a couple of years now.

JOHNNY
It’s just Johnny Clyde.

DON ROBEY
I like the full name it has a better ring to it. I thought you was some kind of an urban legend. A musical prodigy and songwriting genius. Your name has been ringing for a while now.

JOHNNY
I don’t know why that would be. For the most part I’ve only played at Jack Yates and school parties.

DON ROBEY
Johnny lemme ask you something, if you don’t mind.

JOHNNY
Go ahead, shoot.

DON ROBEY
What is the biggest responsibility of a businessman? In any industry?

JOHNNY
(puzzled)
I don’t know.

DON ROBEY
To know what lies ahead.

(CONTINUED)
Don looks at Johnny to see if he caught the gist of his statement. When he sees the confusion on Johnny’s face he continues.

**DON ROBEY**

Any good businessman is able to anticipate what the people will want. But, the most successful businessmen are able to TELL the people what they need and get them to buy into it. It’s called staying ahead. Thing is, I have a special gift. I’m able to see the future. Believe it or not I can tell you your future.

**JOHNNY**

(boldly)

Now can you?

**DON ROBEY**

I can. The thing about it, everyone comes to a crossroad in life and whether you know it or not, you are at yours. On one hand your future has you living out your dreams. Going places you’ve never even dreamed of and living the life most could only hope for. and, on the other hand, the other has you dying on these Third Ward streets cold, bitter, and broke because you didn’t make the first come true.

Johnny’s disposition was one of intrigue.

**DON ROBEY**

See, I’m your fork in the road. I’m here to help you become a legend, an icon. One thing you and I both know, there aren’t many opportunities for black musicians. Major ones anyway. And here you are, sitting in the office of the most prominent, the first, the one and only fully owned and operated black owned record label. I have worked with everyone from Big Mama Thornton to Ray Charles. Now I’m trying to make you a part of this Peacock Records legacy.

(Don leans comfortably back in his king sized chair.)

(MORE)
DON ROBEY (cont’d)
So what do you think?

JOHNNY
First, I think that it’s a blessing for anyone to just be able to sit down in the presence of you. But, I have to be honest me and my band have been recording with someone else.

Don Robey has a laugh, from his gut, that fills the room.

DON ROBEY
Let me guess. Magic? Do you think him and his little rinky dink operation can match anything I’m offering. What did he sign you to?

JOHNNY
Sign?

DON ROBEY
Yeah sign. Hold up! He didn’t even sign you to any kind of contract?

JOHNNY
Contract? No. He just paid us to record a song.

Don has an even heavier laugh.

DON ROBEY
That’s probably gonna come back and bite you in the ass. If you didn’t sign any paperwork with him you are still a free man Johnny Clyde Copeland. What I’m offering you is some stability, some longevity. A place where you don’t have to guess who and what you are.

JOHNNY
So you wanna sign The Dukes Of Rhythm to Peacock?

DON ROBEY
I wanna sign Johnny Clyde Copeland to Peacock.

JOHNNY
I need my band! And, if you want me you need them too.
Don Robey turns to KILLER COX, his bodyguard at his immediate right.

DON ROBEY
Killer Cox, what do I always say about these youngsters of today.

KILLER COX
They have a problem telling the difference between need and want.

DON ROBEY
(turns back to Johnny)
See Johnny there’s nothing I need as far as you and I are concerned. Just take a look around. If you leave out of here without signing to me, who will be more hurt. My life will go on and I will find someone to fill your shoes. See there comes a time in every man’s life where he has to make boss decisions. I am trying to be in the Johnny Clyde Copeland business. Now, the band is your responsibility, not mine. What you can do is be the leader you was born to be or let being too loyal hold you back from fulfilling your destiny.

Johnny drops his head in the palms of his hands.

JOHNNY
But those are my friends.

DON ROBEY
If they are really your friends, they would understand. They wouldn’t hold you back. They wouldn’t hold themselves back. Tell me what better shot do they have than what I am offering you right now?

There is an awkward silence.

DON ROBEY
I’ll tell you what, Killer Cox tell Bruiser he’s Mr. Copeland’s personal security for the whole day. Tell him to take the black droptop and take Johnny to Wolf’s and get him fitted.

(CONTINUED)
(Don opens his desk.)
Here’s one thousand dollars. Go out and enjoy self. When you get back if you don’t want to sign with me, we’ll both shake hands and go our own way. No problem at all. What you say?
(Don slides the stack of bills in Johnny’s face)

JOHNNY
Only a fool would pass a deal up like that. And my moma didn’t raise no fool.
(reaches over and takes the money graciously)

Don gives the most Satanic look.

EXT. JOE GUITAR’S HOUSE - AFTERNOON
Cannon pulls up in front of Joe’s house with Johnny in the backseat, top down, enjoying the beautiful Houston weather. Johnny looks like he belongs. Joe’s mother is on the porch. After she adjusts her vision, she just leans in her chair to scream merrily through her screen door.

JOE’S MOM
Joe! Johnny just pulled up.
(more to herself)
And boy did he pull up.
(yells out to the street)
Hey Johnny!

JOHNNY
How you doing Mrs. Hughes? Is Joe home?

JOE’S MOM
Yeah. He on his way out.

JOHNNY
Ok.
(instructs Cannon)
Let me out please sir.

Joe steps out on his porch in time to see the chaffeur, he instantly recognizes as one of the men who is security for Don Robey, open the door, move the front seat forward, and give Johnny access.

Johnny takes the coolest steps towards Joe, who is meeting him halfway.
JOE
What’s this?

JOHNNY
What does it look like?

JOE
It looks like we’re about to be in some trouble with our label?

JOHNNY
What label?

JOE
So you forgot all about Magic?

JOHNNY
He’s not my label. Did you sign any paperwork with him I don’t know about?

JOE
(thoughfully)
Nooo. So what Don Robey...

JOHNNY
How did you know it was Don Robey?

JOE
That’s Bigfoot from the other night.

(Joe says this a little louder than he imagined, which prompted Cannon, who’s standing real solder like next to the car, to give him a menacing scowl. Joe jumps and corrected his tone)

Like I was saying, Don Robey gave us a new droptop Cadillac and chaffeur?

JOHNNY
Not quite. It’s just a test drive.

JOE
So what’s the word?

JOHNNY
He called me for a meeting at his office.

(CONTINUED)
JOE
When did this happen?

JOHNNY
Last night.

JOE
(with a hint of disdain)
That is what Robert being all in his ear was all about? So why didn’t you two inform the rest of the group?

JOHNNY
That’s what I’m here to talk to you about.

JOE
(shifts and his disposition is telling)
Hold up, let me take a shot at it. He only wants to sign you. Why ain’t I surprised? You know for a minute I thought you was a stand up kinda guy.

JOHNNY
What’s that supposed to mean?

JOE
You know what it means. You used us to get your shot and as soon as the door opened up, you walked through and slammed it behind you.

JOHNNY
Joe you got it all wrong.

JOE
Naw, I got it right.

JOHNNY
Look man. Nothing has changed.

JOE
Lemme ask you this then. What is supposed to be the name on the records.

JOHNNY
(hesitantly)
Well...mine...I guess.
JOE
Nothing has changed huh?

JOHNNY
(digging in his pocket)
Check it out a thousand dollars baby.

(Johnny is close enough for 
Joe’s mom to hear and see 
clearly. She leans in so hard, 
she nearly falls from her 
chair.)
I told you nothing has changed. We 
still splitting the money down 
equally.

JOE
It ain’t got nothing to do with 
money. It’s about integrity and 
principle. All of this came from a 
Dukes Of Rhythm thang. But it’s 
clear it was all about you along.

JOHNNY
(attempts his best Don Robey 
impression)
Joe there comes a time in every 
man’s life he has to make a boss 
decisions.

JOE
Save it man. You got it. It’s all 
Johnny Clyde’s because Joe Guitar 
Hughes don’t play backup to 
anybody.

Joe’s hurt shows in his eyes as he turns and walks away. 
Johnny just stands there and watch him.

JOE’S MOM
(as Joe passes by her)
Boy what the hell wrong with you? 
You done lost your gotdamn mind?

Joe doesn’t answer. He disappears in the house and lets the 
screen door slam behind him.

Johnny drops his head, turns and walks back to the car.
Johnny is standing in a full length mirror being fitted for a suit by Wolf. His face is blank as he barely recognizes himself.

WOLF
(jokingly)
I must say, for someone trying to make a name for himself, you done so in record time.

When Johnny doesn’t give any kind of a response, Wolf glances over at Cannon in the background, then goes back about his business.

WOLF
For someone on his way, you seem pretty unmoved.

JOHNNY
(stoic)
On my way to where though?

WOLF
(in a grandfatherly tone)
Well that is clearly up to you. Every man has complete control of his destiny and surroundings. One thing I’ve learned in my sixty plus years, no one can make you do anything you don’t want to.

(Wolf adjusts Johnny to get a proper inseam measurement)
So where are the rest of your band members? It would be alot more fitting if all of you had new suits up on that stage.

WOLF
(pauses)
Ooooh!
(Looks up into Johnny’s eyes)
I see.

(pulls up from his work)
Look here son. Not everything is meant for everybody. Everyone has a position to play in life. Many times we may not like it. That’s just how things are. The best piece of advice I could give you at this time is never diminish what others see in you for anyone’s happiness,

(MORE)
WOLF (cont’d)
but your own. Because, at the end of the day, your well being is placed solely on your shoulders. There are hundreds of people, places, and things that are going to come and go in the course of your lifetime.
(leans back into his work)
And the things you are meant to hold on to, you’ll know. Because, they won’t let go of you.

Johnny’s facial features relax and he even musters up a smile.

39 EXT. DROPTOP CADILLAC - EVENING

Johnny is in the back of the Cadillac, watching his neighborhood go by. He looks forward and sees Betty Jean and a young boy and girl walking up the street.

JOHNNY
Cannon pull over by her.
(pointing over the seat)

Cannon pulls the car over to the side of the street.

JOHNNY
Can I offer a pretty lady a ride?

BETTY JEAN
(smiles)
I don’t get in cars I don’t know with strangers.

JOHNNY
Oh, so now I’m a stranger?

BETTY JEAN
Strange enough.

They both enjoy a laugh.

JOHNNY
Where you on the way to beautiful?

BETTY JEAN
To take my little brother and sister to the store. So you the man now?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

JOHNNY
I’m just trying it out.

BETTY JEAN
Well it looks good on you.

JOHNNY
So you impressed?

Betty Jean leans on the car towards Johnny, seductively

BETTY JEAN
Is that what you think?

JOHNNY
I’m just asking.

Betty Jeans leans in even further until he can feel her breath in his ear.

BETTY JEAN
(purrs in his ear)
I been impressed.
(kisses his cheek)

Johnny nearly turns purple. Betty Jean’s brother and sister starts oooing and ahhhing.

BETTY JEAN
(grabbing her brother and sister’s hands)
Shut up and mind y’all business.

Betty Jean pulls them off but makes sure to look over her shoulder and give Johnny a flirty look.

CANNON
(looking at Johnny in the rearview mirror)
Lucky you.

INT. DON ROBEY’S OFFICE - EVENING

Don Robey takes a short pull of his stogie, leans back in his chair and exhales.

DON ROBEY
Are you a member of the Peacock family or not?

JOHNNY
I’d be a fool not to be.

(Continued)
Johnny doesn’t even consider reading anything about the contract before he signs. Don smiles devilishly, as he leans back again puffing away.

DON ROBEY
(waits for Johnny to raise up)
How did you like the feel of that Cadillac?

JOHNNY
Aw man! It was a cloud.

DON ROBEY
It’s yours. Peacock keeps our family looking good at all times. Anywhere you go, just tell them to put it on my account. And if I don’t have one call me and I’ll get em to start one.

Johnny stood speechless and amazed.

DON ROBEY
(animated and over exaggerated)
Welcome to being a star.

EXT. JOHNNY’S HOUSE - NIGHT

Johnny pulls up in front of his house and lets the top up. He sees his father peep out of the window. Johnny steps out of his vehicle and is greeted by his disgruntled father in the yard. His mother stands in the doorway.

FATHER
And what the hell is this supposed to be?

JOHNNY
A Cadillac.

FATHER
And what you doing with it at my house?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
It’s mine.

FATHER
It’s yours? So one of them lazy lowlifes you be around just gave you a brand new Cadillac. I don’t need any of that around here at my house. You get it out of my yard and don’t bring it back.

JOHNNY
I didn’t get it from any lowlife. I got it from Don Robey for signing to his label.
(with extra bass in his voice)
And I’m keeping it!

FATHER
You say what?!

JOHNNY
You heard me I’m keeping it!

FATHER
Boy you must done lost your mind. Telling me what you gone do at my house. Oh, so you a man now? Yeah you a man. Well every man need his own.

MOTHER
(screaming from the door)
Jacob, no!

FATHER
Stay out of it Ruthie!
(throws his hand back without taking his eyes off of Johnny)
This is between two men. And since you a man you can find you somewhere else to stay. And don’t you ever come back to my house until you learn some respect.

JOHNNY
Let me go in and get my guitar.

FATHER
You not stepping one foot across my threshold. Everything in there is mine.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
That guitar ain’t yours. It belonged to my real father.

FATHER
Well if you feel you bad enough, go through me and get it then.

Johnny looks at his weeping mother.

FATHER
I don’t know what you looking at her for. She can’t let you play before I get home from work this time.

Johnny has a look of surprise.

FATHER
Yeah.

Johnny backs away to the door of his car, opens it and starts to get in.

FATHER
Son...

JOHNNY
I ain’t no son of yours.

FATHER
Be that as it may, you do know you can never live under my roof again.

Johnny stares his step-father down, takes one last look at his mother, gets in his car and speeds off.

42 INT. CADILLAC - NIGHT

Johnny drives around, until he finds himself on the track. He pulls up and a WOMAN approaches the car.

WOMAN
Hey daddy! You looking for a good time?

JOHNNY
Naw, I’m looking for Rob T.

ROBERT
(from behind the woman)
Who looking for Rob T?

(CONTINUED)
The woman turns quickly, sees that it’s Robert, drops her head and all but runs away.

Robert leans into the window of the Cadillac.

JOHNNY
Damn man! What you do to her?

ROBERT
It’s what I’m gone do to that ho if she look at me long enough.
(rips his hand along the door)
Look at you! Big man in a big ride. I take it you and Robey came to an understanding.

JOHNNY
Something like that.

ROBERT
And the terms?

JOHNNY
Terms? What terms? Man get in.

ROBERT
(yells across the car to a female standing on the other side of the street)
Hey bitch you need to get on your job. Just standing there. Let one more motherfucking John pull up and you not at his ass...
(Robert slides in Johnny’s car)
These bitches will put you in the poor house if you let em.
(Robert looks at the astonished look on Johnny’s face)
So what’s up man? You on my time.

JOHNNY
My old man tripped out.

ROBERT
Again? What’s new?

JOHNNY
For real this time. He kicked me out and told me I couldn’t ever come back. Wouldn’t even let me go in and get my guitar.
(CONTINUED)

ROBERT
(shifts and puts his back to the door)
So what you gone do?

JOHNNY
Don’t know. I guess get me a room for the night and go to Robey’s tomorrow and see if he can help me out.

ROBERT
Hold up man. You don’t wanna go to leaning on him like that. Trust me. I got you.
(digs in his pocket and retrieves keys)
I got a little hideaway in the Cune, apartment one-fifteen. You can stay there and we’ll figure something out.

JOHNNY
You don’t know how much...

ROBERT
Save all that. We family. Ain’t nothing in there to eat though. I’ll shoot by with something from Alfreda’s in the morning. Let me get back out here. You gotta keep your foot on these bitches necks.

JOHNNY
Be careful.

ROBERT
Naw, these bitches better be careful.
(gets out of the car)

JOHNNY
Rob T.

ROBERT
(sticks his head back in window)
Yeah.

JOHNNY
Thanks for everything.
ROBERT
You going soft on me? Apartment...

JOHNNY
One-fifteen. I heard you the first time.

ROBERT
Alright, tomorrow then.

Robert stands up and goes to barking at his two women. Johnny watches him as he passes in front of his car to cross the street.

EXT. CUNEY HOMES - MORNING

Johnny pulls a chair out on the apartment porch and takes a seat. It’s fairly warm already. He watches the young children at play in the early summer morning. He is equipped with a pen and pad. He hums to himself, working out the melody for a song. Then he drops his head and begins to jot down words, singing them out as he writes.

Robert comes up the sidewalk, with a bag of food and a guitar, and sees Johnny writing.

ROBERT
It better be a hit too.

Johnny looks up and hops to his feet before he knows it. He attacks Robert. Robert tries to offer him the food but Johnny relieves him of the guitar instead.

JOHNNY
Man, look at her she’s a beauty.

ROBERT
You don’t wanna eat?

JOHNNY
Just sit it in there. I’ll get it later.

ROBERT
Well, I’m finna lay down for a spell. Let me know when you leave for practice.

JOHNNY
I’m not.

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
What? Why not? You all need to be sharper than ever.

JOHNNY
Ain’t no more band? I was meaning to tell you that last night also, but it slipped my mind. Robey only wanted me. He said the band is my responsibility. I went by Joe’s yesterday...

ROBERT
And he got mad when you told him. (expresses his disgust)
Now we gotta find a new band.

JOHNNY
Fast!
(pauses as he watches Robert contemplate)
I tried to tell him we’d still split the money. I tried to give him his cut but he didn’t want it.

ROBERT
Give him his cut? Why you ain’t try to give me my cut? How much money he give you.

JOHNNY
A thousand.

ROBERT
You do know my managerial fee is ten percent.

JOHNNY
Man I got your money.

Johnny reaches for his pocket.

ROBERT
Freeze on that.
(looks around in a paranoid manner)
We’ll take care of that later.

Johnny’s head follows Robert’s eyes around.

JOHNNY
(naively)
Oh, yeah, ok. You sho’ll right.
I’m gone in. Wake me up in four hours exactly. We gotta find you some new musicians. Today!

Robert walks up and opens his door but takes the time to look back at Johnny take a seat and start strumming at his new toy, ignoring Robert altogether. Johnny begins to belt out a song from his soul, calling the attention of all the kids in his vicinity, who stopped what they were doing and started to make their way to where Johnny was. Robert smiled, shook his head and walked in the house.

Johnny is pacing back and forth in the club, checking his watch. Betty Jean is putting things in their place cutting her eyes at Johnny.

(with concern)

Is everything alright?

(talking to the air)

I told them before nine. Before nine!

Who?

My new band?

What happen to the fellas you always play with?

Long story.

Betty Jean and Johnny make sure there is an adequate distance between them when they hear Mamie’s voice coming. The deceptively small lady pops out of the back.

What’s going on in here?

(guiltily)

Wha... Huh?
MAMIE
The rest of the band. Why aren’t they here.

JOHNNY
Well Mamie I...

Johnny hears a voice he instantly recognizes as THEO’s.

THEO
(loud and boisterous)
Let the show begin!

Johnny looks up to see Theo, LEROY, and DO NO GOOD. They clearly had been drinking, which didn’t get pass Mamie.

MAMIE
Hold up! Who are these drunk bums.

THEO
Who she calling a bum? I ain’t no bum.

DO NO GOOD
(comically)
But you is drunk.

The band members have a good laugh.

JOHNNY
Man what y’all doing, trying to get me and you killed. I told you to be professional.

LEROY
(acts as if he straightens himself up and "attempts" to speak properly)
You can’t tell I am a professional.

DO NO GOOD
A professional jick.

They all bust out laughing again and start stumbling towards the stage. Mamie and Johnny watches in aggravation. Betty Jean is in the back trying to keep her composure and not crack up laughing.

MAMIE
Baby I’ve come to like you. Now I don’t know what you got going on but it’s not looking too good for you.
(looks at the barely coherent band)
But I am gonna have me a good show on that stage tonight. Right?

Out of nowhere the men on stage goes to playing even better than Johnny remembers them practicing.

JOHNNY
On for the ages.

MAMIE
Keep them winos away from my bar.

Mamie had her back to the stage but Johnny had his eyes on the band. He sees Theo pull a flask from his pocket and take a swig, then pass it to Leroy.

JOHNNY
Oh, I don’t think that’ll be a problem at all Mamie.

45 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB - EVENING

Mamie’s is packed to capacity. There are beautiful women all vying for Johnny’s attention. The finishes a song.

JOHNNY
How y’all feeling tonight? (the crowd responds)
I can’t hear y’all I say how y’all feeling tonight? (the crowd responds back louder.) Yeah that’s what I’m talking bout. For all y’all that don’t know I’m Third Ward’s own Johnny Clyde Copeland.

FEMALE VOICE (from the crowd)
I love you Johnny!

Betty Jean pauses from serving drinks.

JOHNNY
I love you too baby. It’s so many lovely ladies in the house tonight. I was just wandering if y’all mind if I slowed it down one time? (the ladies scream.) So y’all don’t mind? (the ladies scream again) (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY (cont’d)
Well this is something new I wrote, for a special little someone.

FEMALE AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE
For me!

JOHNNY
Oh? You say it’s for you? If you want it to be.

Betty Jean fumbles with the bottle in her hand. Johnny starts with a slow and seductive guitar melody, as his band eases in.

JOHNNY
The name of this is "Hold My Baby..."

(gets all the way up on the microphone and drops his voice as low as he possibly can, in octave and volume)

"...All Night Long".

He begins to tease every woman in the place with his melodic and physical suggestions. There is none more under his spell than Betty Jean and Johnny makes sure to let his eyes let her know he knows.

46 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB - LATE NIGHT

Johnny and his band was wrapping things up. All of Mamie’s waitresses were cleaning up but Johnny’s eyes was on Betty Jean straightening things up behind the bar.

THEO
(in the background)
Do No Good you think it’s alright if we have a drink now?

DO NO GOOD
I don’t know. Look like the bar closed.

LEROY
So we gotta go to the backdoor like everybody else.

THEO
Boy Mamie is as heartless as they come.

Johnny, totally oblivious, hops off of the stage and goes to the bar.

(CONTINUED)
LEROY
Johnny you finna look out for us baby?

Betty Jean pretends not to see him. He just stands there and watch.

BETTY JEAN
(never looks up)
You trying to get me in trouble.

JOHNNY
What I can’t come and get a cup of water?

BETTY JEAN
You don’t want no water.

JOHNNY
Yes I do. I want your water.

Betty Jean stops and looks up.

JOHNNY
I want you to come see me.

BETTY JEAN
When?

JOHNNY
Tonight.

BETTY JEAN
And how am I supposed to do that?

JOHNNY
I’m sure you can figure it out.

BETTY JEAN
I don’t even know where you stay.

JOHNNY
The same place you stay.

BETTY JEAN
You don’t stay in the Cuney.

JOHNNY
As of right now I do.

BETTY JEAN
(in disbelief)
Where?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Apartment one-fifteen.

BETTY JEAN
I’ll think about it.

JOHNNY
I’m sure you will.

INT. ROBERT’S APARTMENT - NIGHT
Johnny throws Betty jean against a wall. They are at it hot and heavy kissing?

BETTY JEAN
(talking through kissing and making out)
What are we doing?

JOHNNY
(talking through kissing and making out)
You serving me your water.
(helping Betty Jean out of her clothes)

BETTY JEAN
(talking through kissing and making out)
I...you...we shouldn’t be...

JOHNNY
(talking through kissing and making out)
But we are.

BETTY JEAN
(talking through kissing and making out)
I never...

Johnny pauses and looks at Jean in her bra and panties.

JOHNNY
You mean...?

BETTY JEAN
(looks away embarrassed)
Yeah.
JOHNNY
(turns her head back to him)
Hey. Un-unh. That’s special. And
I’m a make sure you feel that way.

Johnny falls down to his needs and begins to pleasure Betty Jean. She moves and moans uncontrollably.

48 INT. ROBERT’S APARTMENT - NIGHT
Johnny and Betty Jean is laying on the couch. He has his arms around her. Betty Jean hops up.

BETTY JEAN
(gasps)
I gotta go.
(starts grabbing her clothes)
If my moma wake up and I’m not there. I had to sneak out. Climbed out of my bedroom window. Uuugh!
What was I thinking?

JOHNNY
(attempts to calm her)
Baby, everything gonna be alright.

BETTY JEAN
If you knew anything about grandmother, you wouldn’t be so calm. My moma tell Mamie I was sneaking in the house, we both dead!

Johnny’s face changes and he hops up to help Betty Jean.

49 INT. DON ROBEY’S OFFICE - AFTERNOON
Johnny and Robert sits in Don’s office when he walks in flanked by his usual crew of guards.

DON ROBEY
(sits at his desk)
Apologies fellows. I had someone that needed my immediate attention. Some people you gotta be hands on with.

(laughs devilishly and reaches for the box on his desk to retrieve a cigar)
Cigar gentlemen?
(turns box to Johnny and Robert)

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
I’m good.

JOHNNY
Don’t smoke.

DON ROBEY
(turns it back and closes it)
I like that. Johnny you don’t smoke or drink do you? So what’s your vice? Every man has one.

JOHNNY
(answers dryly)
Music.

Don fires up his cigar, leans back, and makes a peculiar face.

DON ROBEY
Well everybody has to fall short.
(changes subjects)
I know you gentlemen wanna know why I called this meeting. I think it’s time for Johnny to grow. I didn’t sign you to continue playing backwood hole in the walls. That don’t make us no money. That don’t make me no money.

ROBERT
So what do you suggest?

DON ROBEY
Robert don’t get me wrong. I think you are the man for the job. I do. I just think if you showed the same attention to his career like you do them bitches, we could take over the world.

JOHNNY
So, what are you trying to say Don?

DON ROBEY
I’m saying it’s time for you to spread your wings. Mamie’s is cool, but I’ve had other associates to inquire about your services. We got a whole bunch of leverage right now and it’s time to use it.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
But, I got an agreement with Mamie.

DON ROBEY
An agreement! But you got a contract with me. You understand the difference? An exclusive contract!

ROBERT
So these associates of yours, what are they proposing. We’re definitely here to capitalize.

JOHNNY
Yeah, I don’t know bout all that. We got a good thing going on.

DON ROBEY
Yeah but it can always be better. Never forget that.

ROBERT
So what type of money are they talking about Robey.

DON ROBEY
The possibilities are limitless. Who tells you how much one of your girls is worth? Johnny how much do you think you’re worth?

Johnny and Robert gives each other a side-eye.

DON ROBEY
(leans forward and places a finger to each of his temples)
Now y’all finally getting it. I also need you in the studio. It’s time to go to work. I need as much music as you can churn out.
(pauses)
You think you can handle that?

JOHNNY
What? Turn me loose on that studio!

DON ROBEY
Go talk to Pearl in the front and she’ll let you know what times the studio will be available for you.

Johnny and Robert raise up.

(CONTINUED)
DON ROBEY
Robert I want you stay for a minute.

Robert and Johnny look at each other. Then Robert looks around at Don’s goons.

DON ROBEY
(laughs and leans back)
Come on now, you think that little of me?

Robert relaxes and sits back down. Don waits for Johnny to close the door behind him.

DON ROBEY
Rob T! You know what I see when I look at you.

ROBERT
What would that be?

DON ROBEY
You possibly could be one of the greatest managers ever. You for sure have the ambition. And you are a bonafide player. It’s been a while since I’ve seen someone step out on the strip and make as much noise as you have. I wanna do you a solid.

Robert shifts his head out of curiosity.

DON ROBEY
I’m gonna enlighten you to all of the ins and outs of this business. And I’m a be truthful. I need you. I need you to be Johnny’s eyes and ears at all times. He shouldn’t eat a sandwich without asking you what he should get on it. I know he has the music part covered. It’s everything else that’s gonna determine his success though. And I don’t think he cares about any of that at all.

ROBERT
Yeah, you put a guitar in his hand and a microphone in front of his face and the world disappears.
DON ROBEY
That’s alright. That’s what we need from him. I love those type of artists. But you know what I need from you?

ROBERT
I’m sure you’re going to tell me.

DON ROBEY
Use them females for more than just street purposes. They’ll help you to get way further in this world when they sell possibility and fantasy. You dig?

(puffs his cigar and watches as Robert processes)

You know Bird-O?

ROBERT
Over there at Playhouse? Yeah.

DON ROBEY
He been trying to solicit Johnny’s talents. He also soft behind women.

(Don literally sees a light bulb go off in Robert’s head. He leans back and has a hearty laugh)

You know Rob T, you gone be alright.

EXT. PLAYHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Robert pulls up to Playhouse in his car with two females. He shuts the car off and waits for the both of them to get out and come open his door. Bird-O is sitting in front of his club watching as workers clean and pick up around his establishment. Bird-O admires Robert and all of his theatrics.

ROBERT
(walks up with both of his girls walking closely behind him)

Bird-O what’s up my man?

BIRD-O
What’s happening with you youngblood?

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
I come to talk business with you.

BIRD-O
And what business would that be.

ROBERT
Well Robey...
  (Bird-O perks up at the
  mention of Robey)
...was telling me that you was
interested in my artist.

BIRD-O
Your artist? What...? You manage
Copeland?

ROBERT
Yeah, amongst others.
  (Robert turns slightly to
acknowledge his ladies.)

BIRD-O
Yeah man I would love to get him up
in here. He the hottest thing
going.

ROBERT
Well you know that ain’t that easy.

BIRD-O
I’m willing to do what it takes to
make it easy.

ROBERT
Oh, are you now?

BIRD-O
Surely. What’s your terms?

ROBERT
What day you talking bout?

BIRD-O
How bout Friday?

ROBERT
(pretends to be contemplating
and thinking about it deeply)
I can get Johnny in here on Friday
for...let’s say four hundred
dollars.

(CONTINUED)
BIRD-O
(takes a drink and nearly chokes)
FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS?!!

ROBERT
One hour!

BIRD-O
Man if you gone rob me at least pull your pistol first!

ROBERT
And...

BIRD-O
AND?!!!

ROBERT
Promotions.

BIRD-O
Promotions?!

ROBERT
Yeah. Commercials on KCOH.

BIRD-O
Hold up, hold up, hold up!
Obviously we started off on the wrong foot or something. This is way too much.

ROBERT
Is it? How your business been doing since Johnny been playing at Mamie’s?

BIRD-O
My business? Funny. You gone ask me about my business. My business is always solid.

ROBERT
You sure bout that? Bird-O let’s stop playing kiddie games. Mamie been knocking a dent in everybody’s head. her parking lot be having more people in it than your’s have inside. We both know this. Now you can listen to me and make more money in one night than you’ve probably made in your best month.

(MORE)
ROBERT (cont’d)
Or I can take these two beautiful muufuckas with me, get in my car, and get over here to Nightlife. Because you said it your self Johnny the hottest thing out and everybody ringing my phone.

Bird-O stares Robert down.

ROBERT
Welp.
(turns and begins to walk off)
Come on ladies.

BIRD-O
(watches Robert for a few seconds)
(yells aggravatedly)
He better pack the house too!

Robert doesn’t even turn. He keeps walking with the slickest smile on his face. He gets to his door and his ladies open it for him. He stands in the door.

ROBERT
Don’t you own all that land right there?

BIRD-O
Yeah. And?

ROBERT
Make sure you cut the grass. You gone need it for parking.

Robert laughs out loud and gets in his car. As he backs out, Bird-O looks at him and has to laugh himself.

51 INT. JOHNNY’S CAR - NIGHT 51

Johnny and Betty Jean is parked somewhere secluded in his front seat. They are kissing.

JOHNNY
(pulls away)
I got something to tell you?

BETTY JEAN
(a little confused)
What?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
(searches for his words)
Well, lately...things been really taking off. And...and. You know I really appreciate what Your grandmother done for me. I mean I love playing there. Seeing you and thangs...

BETTY JEAN
(getting irritated)
Johnny what are you trying to say?

JOHNNY
I got some better offers to play at other clubs.

The car is quiet besides the soft music. Betty looks hard at Johnny.

BETTY JEAN
I take it you haven’t told Mamie yet?

JOHNNY
Naw. I wanted you to know first. I don’t wanna go but...

BETTY JEAN
You know Mamie not gonna pay you one cent more.

JOHNNY
That and I got this feeling that if I don’t start seeing what the outside of Third Ward has to offer, I’ll be trapped here forever.

BETTY JEAN
Is that so bad? I’m in Third Ward.

JOHNNY
Betty...
(looks deep in her eyes)
I want more.

BETTY JEAN
More? So I ain’t enough.

JOHNNY
Not more; like you. I mean more; like this.
(Johnny escorts his hands around his surroundings.)
Haven’t you ever dreamed passing downtown?

BETTY JEAN
(warms up to Johnny)
Honestly I never gave it much thought.

JOHNNY
Well, I have. And I want to see the world.
(grabs Betty’s hand)
I want my woman to see the world.

Betty takes Johnny’s hand and places it on her belly.

BETTY JEAN
Your baby?

Johnny’s face frowns in oblivion. The car again goes silent. He jerks his hand back.

JOHNNY
My baby? What you talking bout?

BETTY JEAN
Yeah. Well, at least I think so.

JOHNNY
(in total rejection)
No! No! No! This can’t be. What makes you think...

BETTY JEAN
Well...

JOHNNY
Who else you been with?

BETTY JEAN
Been With?! I’m not that kind of girl!

JOHNNY
You the kind of girl that’s here with me right now! How I know what kind of girl you are?

Betty Jeans falls against the passenger door in shock and begins to weep. Johnny can’t help it he softens up and tries to offer her consoling. Betty explodes.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (4)

BETTY JEAN
(throwing wild punches and crying)
Don’t touch me. Don’t you put your sorry hands on me.

Johnny pulls back and watches as Betty struggles with the door.

BETTY JEAN
Don’t you worry bout me. And if I am pregnant don’t you worry bout MY baby. I just want you to know, you ain’t no man. You less than a man. Now take that with you around the world.

Betty exits and slams the door behind her.

JOHNNY
Damn.
(drops his head)

52 INT. STUDIO - EVENING

Johnny is sitting inside the booth, on a stoop with his guitar across him, staring into nothingness. The rest of the band is sitting outside, in the studio, watching him through the glass. Robert walks in and scans the room.

ROBERT
What’s going on?

LEROY
Hey! What’s up Rob T? Man I don’t know ol’ Clyde been sitting in there since we got here just like that.

DO NO GOOD
Boy ain’t moved. I don’t even think he blinked once.

ROBERT
How long y’all been here.

THEO
Bout five or ten minutes.

ROBERT
Man lemme go in here and see what’s shaking.

Robert walks into the booth. Johnny still doesn’t move.

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
Man what the hell wrong with you?
Sitting in here like one of them
dummies in Wolf’s.

Johnny doesn’t answer but he does breaks his stillness to go
in his pocket and get a cigarette. He lights it and goes
back comatose. Robert walks right in front of him.

ROBERT
Oh so you igging me now nigga? What
got you all shook up man. First
time I ever seen you like this.

Johnny drops his head and takes a drag of his cigarette. He
lifts his head and exhales.

JOHNNY
Man, I think Betty Jean pregnant.

ROBERT
Wait, wait, hold up! What the hell
I miss.

JOHNNY
Yeah man.

ROBERT
And it’s yours?

JOHNNY
Don’t you think I already asked her
that?

ROBERT
And what she say?

JOHNNY
Went up side my head.

Robert fights back a laugh. Johnny cocks his head and frowns
harshly at Robert.

ROBERT
So what you gone tell her to do?

JOHNNY
What you mean?

ROBERT
(shifts his body to a more
offensive stance)
Nigga what you gone tell her to do?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
(picks up on Robert’s insinuation)
(shakes his head)
Man I don’t know.

ROBERT
Well you better figure something out. Quick, fast, and in a hurry. Get your head back on what’s going on. Because I don’t think Robey will care about any of that as much as he will about you messing off his money. Dig?! 

JOHNNY
Yeah, I dig it.

ROBERT
Alright then. Let’s get to work. And it better be a hit. 
(Robert turns and walks to the door. Right before he opens it.) And Johnny...

JOHNNY
Yeah?

ROBERT
Ma everything gone be alright. Trust me.

Robert takes his exit. Johnny hears him instructing the band.

ROBERT
Off your ass and on your feet soldiers. Y’all done already wasted enough of Robey’s money and my time.

The band erupts in friendly banter as they stand and make way to the booth.

53 INT. DON ROBEY’S OFFICE – EVENING

Johnny, Robert, Don, and his usual goon (in his usual position) all are in Robey’s office. Robey presses stop on his reel to reel playback.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
(anxiously)
So what you think?

DON ROBEY
(takes his time for dramatic effect.)
(draggs himself to his desk and sits, retrieves a cigar, and allows his goon to light it for him)
You know, I like it. It’s good. But...it’s not great. You can do better.

JOHNNY
(his sensitivity and passion is in his voice)
What you mean it’s not great. That’s a hit!

Don pulls his cigar from his lips and gives Johnny a domineering look. Robert places his forearm across Johnny’s chest to calm him and instructing him to sit back.

ROBERT
So what is it that you are looking for Robey?

DON ROBEY
(With a flare for the dramatic)
I need him to WOW me! You gotta remember this is going to be the first time the world is going to hear you. I need them to be asking "Who is that"! If they aren’t ringing the phones off of the hook to hear it again, you failed as an artist and I failed as record producer and label. And failure is just not an option. So It’s up to you. Do you wanna be local or a legend.

(Don examines his cigar, sits back in his chair and puffs away as he observes Johnny’s body language, smiling devilishly)
INT. MAMIE’S CLUB – EVENING

Johnny walks into Mamie’s with his guitar case. Mamie is sitting inside the club, by the bar.

MAMIE
(excitedly)
We gonna kill em this weekend, ain’t we baby?

Betty Jean stops her domestic duties.

JOHNNY
(stops in his tracks and takes a pause)
About that Mamie.

MAMIE
(shifts in her seat and voice takes an entirely different tone)
About what?

JOHNNY
I wanted to get here early so I could tell you...
(takes a heavy breath)
This is my last night here.

Betty Jean turns her head to gather herself, which doesn’t go unnoticed by Mamie?

MAMIE
What you mean it’s your last night

JOHNNY
Well, I’ve got much much better offers for my service and I don’t reckon...

MAMIE
Boy, you might wanna think real hard about your next words.

Johnny pauses and looks at Betty Jean. Betty Jean shakes her head to let him know their secret is safe. Johnny breathes a sigh of relief.

JOHNNY
(courageously)
Well Mamie, I don’t reckon you wanna match the other offers. I mean you been real generous...

(CONTINUED)
MAMIE
Generous?! Generous?! You hear this negro. You know the greatest thing anyone can have?
(pauses briefly)
Loyalty. I gave you the opportunity to come into my house, get on my stage, and what you do as soon as you feel something better comes along. You high tail it outta here so fast.

Mamie raising her voice prompts her main goon to enter from the back. He looks around frantically and is confused when he sees no one but Johnny.

MAMIE
One thing I can give to you is you are way smarter than you look. If you think I’m gonna give you one penny more. And since this is your last performance here, and you don’t need my money anymore, you gone play for free.

JOHNNY
Now come on Mamie that ain’t fair.
I can’t ask my band...

MAMIE
Ask?! Tuh-huh! That sounded like a request? Life ain’t fair. You better get used to it.

The monotony is broken up by Johnny’s bandmates walking in with their usual fanfare.

55 INT. MAMIE’S CLUB - NIGHT

Mamie sits by the front door of her club, half-heartedly greeting people as they walk in and move around. Her eyes is more fixated on Johnny on stage. He is giving his usual stellar performance with women flocking the stage as always. Mamie’s eyes catch a glimpse of Betty Jean who is supposed to waitressing, yet clearly fuming from all of the feminine attention Johnny is receiving.
Johnny finishes up a song to a raucous round of applause and screams.

JOHNNY
(moves his guitar and adjust his microphone)
Thank y'all. Thank y'all. You’re much too kind. If you don’t mind I wanna sing something new for y’all.

VOICE
We don’t mind.

ANOTHER VOICE
(from the back)
Go head baby.

JOHNNY
The name of this is "Lying On Me". I hope you enjoy it.

Johnny and his band cuts into a soulful bluesy ballad. Betty Jean stops in her tracks. Halfway through the chorus, she realizes the song is about her and Johnny’s disbelief of her pregnancy. Before she knows it she rushes the stage, interrupting his performance, and starts beating him with the tray she had.

MAMIE
(to herself more or less)
Mmm-hmm.
(points to one of her goons)
Go get her crazy ass.

Mamie’s goon dashes to the stage and struggles to pull a punching, kicking, and cursing Betty Jean Off of Johnny. An embarrassed Johnny is at a loss as everyone looks on.

DO NO GOOD
(from the background)
Gotdamn, she got on that nigga ass.

JOHNNY
Y’all have a good night.
(exits stage immediately)
INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

The disc jockey HAROLD THE HITMAKER walks into the radio station and stops by the front desk and talks to JEN, the receptionist.

HAROLD THE HITMAKER
Hey what’s up Jen? Any mail for me today?

JEN
No. But, you did receive a call from a one Mr. Don Robey, for the third time. He said it was imperative that you contacted him. It sounded important.

HAROLD THE HITMAKER
Oh yeah? For who?
(changes subject)
So when you gonna let me take you out on the town foxy lady?

EXT OUTSIDE DON ROBEY’S OFFICE/STUDIO - DAY

Don Robey is sitting in the backseat of his car with a carload of his "boys" in a vehicle behind him. After assessing the scene Robert walks up to Robey’s vehicle and sticks his head in the window.

ROBERT
What’s going on Robey?

DON ROBEY
Get in. I want you to ride with me.

ROBERT
Everything alright?

DON ROBEY
It will be.

INT. BACKSEAT - DAY - MOVING

Don and Robert is in his backseat as Don puffs on his signature cigar.

DON ROBEY
You know Rob T. it’s alot you gotta learn about this industry. The first being, it’s always about the money. Rarely does anyone do anything just because. It’s either (MORE)
DON ROBEY (cont’d)
a motive or money behind every action. And you know I can respect that. I can appreciate a man that let’s me know straight up what his going rate for his service is. It’s up to me to either pay that or not. Depending on the terms and how beneficial it is to me I give it a serious amount of consideration. Once I determine what it will take for me to come out on top, I usually partake in it.

(Don Robey sees the expression on Robert’s face is one of trying to figure out where all of this is going.)
You know, I know what they say about me in the streets. Trust me I know what you have heard. Some true. (quick bragging laugh)
Alot of it. One thing you never hear though, is I’m a fair and generous man. And I am. I’m also a man of my word. A man standing by his word means more to me than anything on earth. And in this music world you’ll find that there are liars, thieves, and crooks around every corner. Leeches. Every now and then, your manhood is tested. If you let it go once, they start to come out of the wood works. Next thing you know respect becomes a foreign concept when it comes to your business.

(the car comes to a stop and Don peers out of his window)
Oh. We here.

Robert looks around trying to identify where here is. Don’s chauffeur/guard opens the door for him.

DON ROBEY
Come on.

60 EXT. OUTSIDE - DAY

Harold The Hitmaker is sitting in his car when he sees Don and his entourage walking his way. He nervously tries to light his cigarette.

(CONTINUED)
HAROLD THE HITMAKER
(voice quivering but he tries
to sound genuine)
Hey Don! How you doing boss?

DON ROBEY
Now see Rob T. this what I was
talking bout. A dishonorable leech.

HAROLD THE HITMAKER
What you talking bout baby?

DON ROBEY
Oh now you don’t know what I’m
talking bout? How many times I
gotta call?

HAROLD THE HITMAKER
Called? When? Where? Nobody told
me. I woulda been got at you.

DON ROBEY
Whole thing is, if you woulda been
doing what I paid you to do I
wouldn’t have had to call.

HAROLD THE HITMAKER
Aww come on. You know how it go.
You know I got you.

DON ROBEY
All I know is you took my money and
ain’t done what we agreed upon.

Don steps to the side and one of his goons punches Harold
through his car window, then snatches him out through it.
Don’s other associates quickly join in, beating Harold
bloody and senseless.

DON ROBEY
(talking to Robert)
Look at the business we in. It
could all be so simple if people
didn’t think they was so slick.
(yells to his squad)
Ok y’all, that’s enough. I don’t
need y’all to kill him. He still
gotta play my records.
(walks over and leans down
over a beaten Harold)
(pulls a handkerchief out of
his pocket)

(MORE)
CONTINUED: (3)

DON ROBEY (cont’d)
Don’t make me have to come back
because it’s gonna get much worse
if I do.

(points back at Robert)
Take a good look at that face right
there. He’s gonna be paying you a
visit real soon. Treat him with the
same respect you would treat me.
Put it on my tab. Have some class.
Clean yourself up.

(throws handkerchief in
Harold’s face)

61 EXT. TSU CAMPUS - AFTERNOON

Johnny sits on the campus of Texas Southern University
during their band practice. He is in a zone as the band
displays their full glory. The fullness of the sound and
spectacle of it all hypnotizes him.

62 EXT. CUNEY HOMES - MORNING

Johnny is sitting out on the porch still in somewhat of a
zone. Robert walks up.

ROBERT
What’s wrong with you? You sitting
out here like you lost your best
friend.

JOHNNY
(answers robotically)
I want a band.

ROBERT
What? Man you got a band.

JOHNNY
Naw, a real band.

ROBERT
Clyde what you talking bout? Where
the hell all this coming from?

JOHNNY
I wanna put on a show.

ROBERT
What’s wrong with the show you got
right now.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
It’s average. I want to put on a spectacle. Have a revue. You know with back up singers, dancers, horn, the whole sha-bang.

ROBERT
And how do you plan on pulling this off?

JOHNNY
I don’t know but I’mma make it happen.

ROBERT
You know what kind of budget something like that calls for? Where you expect to get that kind of money?

Johnny lifts his head up to Robert and gives him a shifty look.

ROBERT
What? I don’t know what you thinking but it can’t be good.

JOHNNY
It’s just time for us to go to work.

Johnny gets up and starts to walk inside

FOR REAL!

ROBERT
(trails Johnny)
Us? What you think I been doing this for fake.

63 INT. STUDIO - EVENING

Johnny and his band is in the studio recording when Don walks in. Don stands there and takes the song in for a second.

DON ROBEY
(addressing Robert)
Woooh! Now this is what I’m talking bout! I can walk this into any station in America and make some noise.
ROBERT
(bobbing his head)
Yeah, he in a zone. This his third one. This ain’t nothing. You should hear the other ones.

DON ROBEY
Third one? How long he been in here?

ROBERT
Going on a hour.

DON ROBEY
(looks at his watch)
A hour? He got three songs done? And you say the other two just as good?

ROBERT
Yep.

DON ROBEY
What got into him?

ROBERT
Whatever it is I hope it stay in him.

DON ROBEY
(more to himself than anything)
Me too.

ROBERT
Huh?

DON ROBEY
Nothing.

INT. JOHNNY’S CAR – NIGHT – MOVING

Johnny is driving with his radio on when the radio personality, STAN THE TOP FORTY MAN, starts to speak.

STAN THE TOP FORTY MAN
You’re tuned into Houston’s number one station ninety-four point five with Stan The Top Forty Man. And I’m about to bring to you one of the hottest songs in the country. It keeps our phone line ringing off the hook. Here’s Wake Up Little Susie by The Everly Brothers.
Johnny forcefully turns his radio off as the poppy sounding tune comes on.

INT. STUDIO - EVENING

Johnny walks into the studio, where he is greeted by Don Robey and a few of his soldiers. He looks into the booth and sees Bobby Blue Band, who gives him a nod. When Johnny recognizes Bobby is recording his song he becomes a little irate.

JOHNNY
(frustrated)
What’s this?!

DON ROBEY
Excuse me?

JOHNNY
That’s my song?

DON ROBEY
Excuse me? Every song recorded in here is my song.

JOHNNY
Hell naw. I wrote that.

Johnny lunges for the boards but Don’s goons stop him.

DON ROBEY
(dangerously calm)
See now that was your first mistake. But being the man I am I’m willing to overlook that because I know you are naive and a little emotional. Now you better make your next move your best move.

Johnny shakes himself free of Don’s detail (really they allow it).

DON ROBEY
See Johnny, I’m all about exclusivity. Now you may not know what that mean. But nothing comes in or out of here without my say so. And everything that transpires within these walls, and beyond in conjunction with my business, is under my domain. Simply put, I own your black ass and everything you do. Now this is not to say that you

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
DON ROBEY (cont’d)
won’t be compensated for all of your efforts. It’s just Bobby’s last song was hot and he needs a follow up. And my ear says that this song compliments him better than it does you.

You can all but see the steam coming from Johnny’s head.

DON ROBEY
Now this is the moment of truth. Either you can take this and view it as the win it is for you or you can leave here with more than just your pride hurt.

Johnny scans the room, focuses on Bobby singing his song, then turns and storms out aggressively.

DON ROBEY
(as Johnny is leaving)
Smart man.

INT ROBERT’S APARTMENT - NIGHT
Robert enters into his apartment all of the lights are off. It’s pitch black and totally quiet. He is startled when he cuts on the lights and Johnny is sitting there.

ROBERT
Nigga you scared the shit outta me. What you just sitting in total darkness for?

Johnny refuses to answer in his sunken state.

ROBERT
What’s eating you?

JOHNNY
I ain’t no punk!

ROBERT
I know you ain’t no punk. I ain’t said that. Who said that?

JOHNNY
(tearfully)
Them white boys singing my song on the radio. Then I go to the studio and Robey done took my song and gave it to Bobby and said that it’s his.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

ROBERT
Damn!
(switches to tough love)
First of all, don’t you ever let me see you drop your head in defeat, like you giving up. Hey man this is the game. Now you can sit there and cry about it or realize that you making music so good that people gotta steal it. That should tell you something!

JOHNNY
(menacing)
What that tell me?! Except, people think they can treat me like some lame!

ROBERT
What it should tell you is you’re destined for greatness. You on your way man and everybody knows it. That song them white boys and Bobby stole, that’s your best material?

JOHNNY
(studs up)
Far from it!

ROBERT
Alright then! What you crying for? In this world everybody has to give something sometimes to get more in the end

JOHNNY
You ever let your girls give something?

ROBERT
(pauses)
Now that’s different.

The friends look at each other and share a laugh.

67 INT. RADIO STATION - NIGHT

Robert is inside the station with Harold The Hitmaker dropping off Johnny’s record. As the song The Hitmaker currently plays begin to fade, he goes into his spiel.
HAROLD THE HITMAKER
Ladies and gentleman I got something new to get you grooving and moving. It’s guaranteed to put a glide in your slide and a dip in your hip. Third Ward’s very own Johnny Clyde Copeland with his very first megahit. And I promise you it’s a doozy that’s gonna make you woozy. So let’s get into it Johnny Clyde Copeland with "Rock N Roll Lily". Remember who brought it to you first HAROLD THE HITMAKER.

(Harold finishes his delivery and moves his mic from in front of his face.)

Rob T. I really appreciate this Daddy-O.

(reaches out to shake Robert’s hand)

ROBERT
(shakes Harold’s hand)
I appreciate you.

68 INT. RADIO STATION(S) - DAY

Disc Jockeys are shown city to city, locally, introducing and playing Johnny’s hit song "Rock N Roll Lily".

69 INT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

1971, MICHAEL stumbles into MRS. CARROLL’S music class. She takes one look at him and becomes irate.

MRS. CARROLL
Un-unh! Get out! Right now! I told you about coming to my class high and drunk.

MICHAEL
I ain’t going nowhere!

MRS. CARROLL
Oh yeah, today you is!

MICHAEL
You better act like you know who you talking to. Johnny Clyde Copeland my daddy.

(Continued)
MRS. CARROLL
Johnny is not your father.

MICHAEL
And why not?

MRS. CARROLL
Because he’s my brother in law.

MICHAEL
I tell you what take my number off that enrollment card and call him then and see.

MRS. CARROLL
I definitely will. You still getting up out of here though.

CUT

EXT. OUTSIDE - AFTERNOON
Michael is walking up into his yard, where he is greeted by a more mature Betty Jean sitting at a concrete table. She is unusually ecstatic.

BETTY JEAN
There’s a number in there for you by the phone.

MICHAEL
Oh yeah? Who?

BETTY JEAN
Go see.

INT. BETTY’S HOUSE - AFTERNOON
Michael walks in and stops at the phone. He sees the piece of paper with the foreign number on it and picks it up and look at it. He starts to dial the rotary phone. It rings and then a gravelly voice speaks.

JOHNNY
Hello.

MICHAEL
Hello.

JOHNNY
Who is this?

(CONTINUED)
MICHAEL
Michael, who is this?

JOHNNY
This your old man! You wanna go to a gig with me this weekend?

MICHAEL
A gig? What’s that?

JOHNNY
Do you want me to come pick you up so you can see me play?

MICHAEL
Yeah! When?

JOHNNY
I’ll come after you get out of school Friday. You stay in Acres Homes now don’t you?

MICHAEL
Yeah.

JOHNNY
Where at?

MICHAEL
On Lucky. You exit Forty-five at Little York and make a left. Pass Shepherd. When you get to Banjo make a right and Lucky is the first street.

JOHNNY
Ok then. I’ll be there around five.

MICHAEL
All right see you then.

JOHNNY
Cool.

Michael hangs up the phone and just stands there.

Johnny and Michael are riding, uncomfortably, both intent on not saying much. The radio is playing when Stevie Wonder comes on the radio. Michael starts humming but it isn’t long before he is singing. Johnny has to do a double take from the richness of Michael’s voice.

(Continued)
JOHNNY
So you like Stevie ha?

MICHAEL
(breaks his tune to answer quickly)
My favorite.
(picks the song back up without missing a beat)

JOHNNY
Yeah, he’s one of my favorites too.
(joins his son in song)
Michael eyes his father, surprised by how good he sounds. They both smile at each other and sing even harder as they ride down the street.

DEFOCUS TRANSITION

INT. JOHNNY’S CAR - EVENING - MOVING
Johnny and Michael are back riding in their own awkwardness. Johnny takes advantage of getting caught by a red light and turns the radio down.

JOHNNY
(apologetically)
Look man. I know I haven’t been in your life. And honestly, it’s my fault that I haven’t. I could never make up the time I missed. I mean...if I could change the past...I... Hey I can understand if you never forgive me but if you give me the chance, we can start over right here and now.

MICHAEL
(continues to look out of his window to hide his tears and answers as unbothered and dry as he could)
We good.
(wipes his eyes)

JOHNNY
(looks sorrowfully at his son)
Yeah. Understood.
(responds to the sound of a horn being honked behind him)
INT. JOHNNY’S CAR – EVENING

Johnny pulls up in front of a cafe in Third Ward.

JOHNNY
(sstarts to exit his vehicle)
You wanna come in?

MICHAEL
I'm good.

Johnny gives a perplexed look and gets out of the car.
Michael’s eyes follow him all of the way into the club. When
Johnny disappears he turns the radio up.

It isn’t long before Johnny exits with a miniature version
of himself. Michael instantly sees the resemblance. His eyes
widen, more from whom he knows to be his brother’s outfit.
Dawrence stands next to Johnny in a blue crush velvet suit
with a pink shirt, looking like he just stepped off of stage
or a future pimp. Michael has it hard deciding. Michael
nervously smiles and waves.

EXT. OUTSIDE – NOON

The next day, Michael and his newly discovered brother is
sitting in the front yard of Johnny’s brick home.

MICHAEL
Man, you tore it up yesterday. So
you a part of the show.

DAWRENCE
Yeah. I just dance. What happened
to you.

MICHAEL
Huh?

DAWRENCE
They called you on stage and you
went to hiding. Straight froze up.
And daddy said you can sing.

MICHAEL
That was a big crowd. Kinda caught
me off guard. I didn’t know he was
gone do that.

DAWRENCE
Yeah he did that to me the first
time too.
(pauses)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
DAWRENCE (cont’d)
So why I never met you before?

MICHAEL
(reflects briefly on his answer then replies simply)
I don’t know.

DAWRENCE
You shoot dice.

Dawrence goes in his pocket and pulls dice out, shake em in his hand, then shows Michael.

MICHAEL
Naw, not really.

DAWRENCE
That’s cool. You wanna go with me around the corner. You can watch my back while I crook these niggas asses.

MICHAEL
Them crooks?

DAWRENCE
I thought you didn’t shoot dice?

MICHAEL
I don’t, but I been around ya dig?

Dawrence’s devil horns start to show.

DAWRENCE
So what’s your poison?

MICHAEL
Snake venom if it’s good.

DAWRENCE
Well, I’m finna go in here and tell daddy we bout to walk to the store.

Dawrence gets up and goes inside. As soon as he does a limo pulls up directly in front of Johnny’s home and parks. Michael is marveled. His first time ever seeing a limo in person. A well dressed driver steps out and opens the back door. Robert emerges. When Michael sees him he almost passes out. Everything about Robert is immaculate and sharp.
CONTINUED: (3)

ROBERT
(floats up to Michael)
Hey what’s up young blood. You one of Dawrence potnas?

MICHAEL
(in disbelief)
No. I’m his brother.

Now Robert’s expression nearly matches Michael’s.

ROBERT
Hold up?
(pulls back and takes a good look)
Damn, it’s been that long.
(with his hand on his chin in remembrance)
It has been hasn’t it.

Michael tries to figure out what all of this means.

ROBERT
I’m Rob T!
(with an air of confidence that Michael should know him)
You Betty Jean’s boy ain’t you. I see it now. Damn look like somebody smushed Johnny’s and her face together.

Dawrence steps out of the door.

DAWRENCE
(in acknowledgement)
Rob T!

ROBERT
Li’l Clyde.

Michael tries to hide his disgust and jealousy at the sound of that.

ROBERT
So you met your brother?

DAWRENCE
Yeah, for the first time yesterday.

Dawrence walks by and taps Michael. Michael responds by following him to exit the yard.
ROBERT
Where y’all headed?

DAWRENCE
To the store.

ROBERT
You wanna take the limo?

DAWRENCE
Naw we got it.

Michael’s disgust is apparent at that.

ROBERT
You bout to go round there where them niggas gambling at.

Dawrence is at a loss.

ROBERT
Man don’t have me have to come around there and kill one of them turkeys.

DAWRENCE
(laughs)
Yeah. I hear you.
(taps Michael again)
C’mon bro.

MICHAEL
(as they walk off side by side
Michael whispers)
Who is that?

DAWRENCE
(nonchalantly and as if Michael should know)
That’s just Rob T.

MICHAEL
(looking back in time to catch the last of Robert’s full length mink disappear into Johnny’s house)
Oh. What he do?

DAWRENCE
He Clyde’s manager...
(pauses)
And a pimp.
Johnny and a sizable amount of his band is on his tour bus with Johnny’s name and face on the side of it. The rest are in a matching van behind the bus. He stands and begins to instruct everyone on it.

JOHNNY
Ok everybody. We pulling into Lafayette. Let’s make this the greatest show we’ve ever played. Let’s have everybody leave just how we got here. You go to jail, I’m coming to get you but there go your check until I’m paid back every penny. And you know how it can get in these small towns. Michael...

(Michael’s head snaps up)
I know how you is about them females. Man be careful. These dudes get real touchy about their women. It’s not many of them to go around and they be ready to kill behind em especially how you like em.

DO NO GOOD
And they all how we like em in Louisiana.

There is a slight raucous laughter by some of the male band members. One of the female members pops Do No Good in his arm. He pretends it hurt him.

JOHNNY
Hey! Soon as the show is over you got fifteen minutes to get back to this bus or get left. We moving out and pushing on up he highway.

Michael stares out of the window and sees people running along the side of the bus. He eyes one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen and they smile at eachother.

LOUISIANA, a dark man with curly hair gets on stage to bring Johnny up.

LOUISIANA
We got a full house tonight. And we bringing back an all time Lafayette favorite. Everytime he comes to

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
LOUISIANA (cont’d)
town it’s a guaranteed blast. So y’all know what to do. We need everybody on your feet. Move all them tables and chairs because you know we bout to throw down up in here tonight.

(puts extra emphasis on his introduction)
Johnny Clyde Copeland And The Soul Agents!!!

Johnny and his full ensemble is on display. They come on forcefully and uptempo. The horns are blowing, the drums are beating, the piano is rocking, the guitars are rolling, even the harmonica is piercing through. Johnny’s back up singers and dancers are all on point. The place is jammed packed and jumping.

JOHNNY
(before Louisiana gets off stage)
Holla at me after the show.

Johnny’s coal black skin is glistening, as his words seem to manifest from the depths of his soul, somewhere.

78 INT. TOUR BUS - NIGHT

Johnny steps on the bus, with Louisiana behind him.

JOHNNY
 stil glowing)
Great show y’all! Great show indeed! Everybody here, we can go.

The BUS DRIVER stammers.

BUS DRIVER
Well Johnny…

JOHNNY
(his eyes instantly looks to the back of the bus)
Michael! Ain’t none of y’all seen him?

LEROY
Last time I seen him he was with some bad li’l thang. Mmmh!

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Dawrence?!

DAWRENCE
I don’t know.

JOHNNY
This nigga here! Gone get his self killed. Shit!

As Johnny starts to storm off of the bus a BAND MEMBER makes it a point to make a statement.

BAND MEMBER
Bet we ain’t leaving now.

JOHNNY
(stops)
What?! Somebody got something to say? Speak up.

(complete silence)
Thought not. Nobody gets off this bus for nothing. Louisisan come with me.

79 EXT. CLUB - NIGHT

Michael and the LITTLE BEAUTIFUL SISTER is around some dark and secluded corner in back of the club making out. Michael’s pants are to his ankles and the girl’s dress is up. He hears Johnny’s voice before he sees him. He tries to speed up but Johnny hits the corner.

JOHNNY
(partly in shock at the sight)
Boy what you think you doing?

(snatches Michael away as he identifies the girl as one of the club owner, Broussard’s, daughters)
If you don’t pull your pants up and get your ass on that bus. And little lady you need to be making your way home.

LITTLE BEAUTIFUL SISTER
I wanna go with y’all. I wanna be with Michael. I love him!

JOHNNY
(laughs)
I think not darling. Broussard would kill me.
Johnny lets Michael pull his pants up before he drags him off scolding him.

80 INT. ARENA - NIGHT

Johnny is performing in Corpus Christi. Michael and Dawrence is standing on the side of the stage, watching and waiting to go on. BESSIE MAE, a pretty lady holding a baby walks up to Michael and Dawrence. Michael is unattentive towards her

BESSIE MAE
How you boys doing?

DAWRENCE
We alright.

Bessie Mae pushes the baby in front of Michael’s face.

BESSIE MAE
You wanna see your baby sister?

MICHAEL
(jumps back)
Better get that gotdamn baby out my face. That ain’t my sister. Groupie ass.

Bessie Mae is taken aback. She fades back into the background.

DAWRENCE
Hey man, you better hope that woman don’t tell Clyde you did that.

MICHAEL
Nigga I don’t care.

DAWRENCE
Yeah but you can’t say that, though. You know Clyde be fucking these women everywhere we go.

MICHAEL
All I know is, I don’t need em running up on me with all that. That’s Johnny responsibility.
Johnny is performing at an arena in Victoria, Texas. He and his band is rocking. Johnny spots Michael walking through the crowd high and drunk out of his mind, stumbling and bumping into people. Johnny turns briefly to his band to see who is all paying attention. Then He turns and finds Louisiana on side of the stage and gives him a look as if to go grab that fool.

Johnny gets on the bus and lasers his focus directly on Michael. Everyone else braces for the inevitable.

JOHNNY
What the fuck you think you doing?

MICHAEL
Who you talking to?

JOHNNY
You! I ain’t ever been so embarrassed in my life.

MICHAEL
You ain’t gotta tell me that.

JOHNNY
And what’s that supposed to mean?

MICHAEL
What’s that supposed to mean? Huh! Everybody else might think you hot shit but I know the real Johnny Clyde Copeland.

Johnny’s road manager, BIG BROWN, tugs at Michael.

BIG BROWN
(whispering)
Hey man, this ain’t the time or place.

MICHAEL
Nigga if you don’t get your hands off me. Naw it’s the perfect time. See all y’all might kiss his ass but he know I ain’t built like that. Respect is earned not given. You think just cause you just stepped back into my life I’m supposed to forgive and forget.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MICHAEL (cont’d)
Truth is you ain’t shit. You damn sho’ll ain’t no father of mine.

JOHNNY
Since I ain’t your father, you can get off my bus then.

MICHAEL
I ain’t going nowhere!

JOHNNY
Oh yeah, you gone get up off of here. If I gotta do it myself.

MICHAEL
(stands up)
I’d like to see you try.

Johnny squares off. Big Brown steps in between them.

BIG BROWN
(leans in to Johnny)
You know he keep a pistol on him and he ain’t in his right mind. Let him make it. It’ll all blow over. He don’t mean it man. He just speaking from a place of hurt.

Johnny and Michael exchange menacing stares. Johnny pulls away from Big Brown and walks to the back of his bus.

JOHNNY
(talking to the air)
I shoulda left your ass in Acres Homes. Ghetto ass! Don’t nobody disturb me! If the bus catch on fire just let me burn up.

(slams door behind him)

Michael stands there swaying embarrassingly, the center of attention. He waves everyone off in attempt to hide his shame.

83 INT. STUDIO - EVENING

Johnny and his band is in the recording booth waiting on his ENGINEER to give him the word.

ENGINEER
We ready.

Johnny counts his band off and they tear into his song Ghetto Child.

(CONTINUED)
Johnny and his band is suited and booted performing Ghetto Child on the LARRY KANE Show. At the end of the performance Larry Kane takes the stage with the band, to the crowd’s applause.

LARRY KANE
Keep it going for Johnny Clyde Copeland.

Larry Kane steps to the side as if he is presenting something. Johnny stands there as basks in it all.

The phone at Michael’s home rings and he runs and picks it up.

MICHAEL
Hello?

Johnny recognized his son’s voice.

JOHNNY
Hey what’s up Mike?

Michael responds.

MICHAEL
Nothing much. What’s happening with you?

Johnny answers.

JOHNNY
Cooling. Can you get out here. I want you to see what Rob T done got.
89 INT. MICHAEL’S HOME – DAY

Answers nearly before Johnny finishes.

MICHAEL

Yeah.

90 INT. CAR – DAY

Michael instructs his girlfriend, a pretty white girl, to pull up in front of the yard Johnny and Dawrence stood in, behind the cleanest vehicle he ever seen. Michael gets out.

91 EXT. JOHNNY’S HOME – DAY

Johnny and Dawrence walk up to meet Michael.

DAWRENCE

Who that sexy ass white girl is bro?

MICHAEL

One of my gals.

JOHNNY

You love living dangerously don’t you.

MICHAEL

(smirks and changes the subject; pointing at the foreign vehicle)

What’s this?

JOHNNY

Rob T. He something else. They let this dude design his own car.

MICHAEL

Yeah, but what is it?

DAWRENCE

What’s it called Pops?

Cor...corv...

(Dawrence tries to sound it out)

JOHNNY

Corvarado. A Corvette and El Dorado combined. Check it out.
Michael walks around the vehicle in admiration then opens the door.

    MICHAEL
    Where Rob T at?

    JOHNNY
    I don’t know. he just came by here, said he’ll be back, and left in that Rolls Royce.

    DAWRENCE
    Pops let me see the keys and drive it around the corner.

    JOHNNY
    Boy you out your mind.

    DAWRENCE
    Aww man.

    JOHNNY
    Aww man my ass.
        (Johnny walks up close to Michael.)
    Mike.

Michael looks at his father’s disposition.

    MICHAEL
    (drops his head; as he picks it up)
    You know man I...

    JOHNNY
    Hey it’s cool. Whether you know it or not I understand. We good. So I’m going back on the road for a few weeks next week you wanna go.

    MICHAEL
    (child-like)
    Yes sir!
        (falls into his father’s embrace)

    JOHNNY
    (jokingly)
    I’mma kill you you ever do me like that again.

Michael pulls back and smiles at Johnny. Johnny pulls him in again for another hug.

    (CONTINUED)
Johnny let’s Michael go and directs him towards the white girl’s car.

JOHNNY
Come on introduce me to your li’l moma.

INT. CEILING - NIGHT
ELROY, one of Johnny’s roadies, is in the ceiling spying on LAVELLE, one of Johnny’s opening acts. Beautiful and fine, she is in her panties.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT
There is a knock at Lavelle’s door. She answers it. She sees it’s Michael and Dawrence and allows them in.

LAVALLE
(friendly)
What you two bad asses want?

DAWRENCE
We came to see you.

LAVALLE
See me ha? About what?

MICHAEL
I told you she didn’t remember.

LAVALLE
What I’m supposed to remember?

MICHAEL
You said you was gone get both of us diamond rings for Christmas.

LAVALLE
You know what? I sho’ll did. I’m sorry but i just didn’t make as much money as I thought I was? Now y’all got me feeling bad. (pauses)
What if I gave you something better than a diamond ring?

DAWRENCE
Something better than a diamond ring?
LAVELLE
Yeah...pussy.

MICHAEL
(spellbound)
Dawrence lock the door.

INT. CEILING - NIGHT
Elroy sees Lavelle get fully undressed and gets too excited. He begins to move around too much in the cramped space. Before he knows it, the ceiling gives in and he falls to the floor.

INT. BACKSTAGE - EVENING
Lavelle and the boys are completely shocked as they see Elroy fall from the ceiling to the floor, and spring to his feet like it was nothing.

LAVELLE
What the hell...

ELROY
What you li’l niggas think y’all doing. Get y’all asses outta here.

LAVELLE
They ain’t gotta go nowhere. you get your pervertic ass outta here.

ELROY
I ain’t leaving. If you don’t give me none I’mma tell Johnny.

LAVELLE
Tell him what? How you fell out of the ceiling spying on me.

ELROY
And what you was about to do with his sons.

LAVELLE
We wasn’t bout to do anything. Was we boys?

MICHAEL
How we gone do something when we ain’t even here.
DAWRENCE
I ain’t seen Lavelle since she got off stage.

LAVELLE
Now who you think Johnny gone believe. I bet I still be working tomorrow night. What about you?

Leroy looks around the room and sees he has no win.

ELROY
Yeah, ok.

LAVELLE
Now get your punk ass out my dressing room.

Elroy turns to leave. Lavelle uses her head to instruct the boys to leave to.

LAVELLE
(mouths to the boys silently)
I got y’all. Don’t worry about it.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT
Johnny is being thrown a congratulatory party. All of the local influential movers and shakers in the music industry, as well as other industries, legal and illegal, are there. The place is packed and the drinks and accessories are floating around. Everyone is looking good in their finest. Everyone Johnny passes vies for at least a second of his attention, to congratulate him. WALSH ALLEN, the biggest DJ in all of Houston, is in attendance and being his usual life of the party self.

Michael, keeping close to his father, follows Johnny to where Walsh Allen is standing with a crowd around him.

WALSH ALLEN
(calling attention to Johnny)
There he is the man of the hour. Johnny come over here. It’s some people who’ve been dying to meet you.

As Johnny approaches the different people in the crowd acknowledge him. He moves into the inner circle.

WALSH ALLEN
Johnny man when I tell you you smoking right now. My phones
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
WALSH ALLEN (cont’d)
wouldn’t stop ringing up at the show. I almost done something I’ve never done...played your song back to back.

Everyone in the crowd enjoys a laugh.

WALSH ALLEN
I need to get you in there for an interview.

JOHNNY
Anytime. Just let me know when.

WALSH ALLEN
Definitely needs to be soon.

A gentleman standing next to Walsh pulls a small container and offers up a sampling of cocaine to Walsh, who engulfs it quickly.

WALSH ALLEN
(playing with his nose and snorting)
Let Johnny taste that.

The gentleman pushes his open container to Johnny.

JOHNNY
(declining)
No thanks I’m good.

A silence falls over the immediate crowd.

WALSH ALLEN
Go head man everybody in here is family.

JOHNNY
Naw I don’t get down. I appreciate it though. Michael, he mess around though.

Michael doesn’t hesitate to take advantage of the situation.

Walsh’s entire demeanor has changed. His shoulders are squared and his face is serious.

WALSH ALLEN
What you mean you appreciate it though? You know who you in the presence of...

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Walsh man...

WALSH ALLEN
Naw nigga. You gone insult me like that?! I let you in and you spit in my face. Man we don’t get down with squares.
(pauses)
I tell you what. You too good to get high with us...I’m too good to play your record. Matter of fact, you good as dead around here.

MICHAEL
(stepping in front of Johnny and reaching into his jacket simultaneously)
Who this turkey think he talking to?

Johnny places his arm across Michael’s chest, stopping him.

JOHNNY
(laughing it off)
Michael, be cool. It’s all a misunderstanding.

WALSH ALLEN
A misunderstanding? We’ll see.

97 EXT. JOHNNY’S HOME - DAY

A month or so passes and Robert is beating at Johnny’s front door.

ROBERT
Open the door. I know you in there.

After a few more beats and a couple of seconds, Johnny comes to the door. He doesn’t greet Robert he just turns and walks off.

98 INNT. JOHNNY’S HOME - DAY

Robert is looking around at the condition of Johnny’s residence as he follows him to his den, where Johnny plops down on his couch.

ROBERT
Man look at you. This how you living now?
(looking around and stepping over trash)

(CONTINUED)
You way better than this. I been calling and I know you been hearing the phone ring. What the hell wrong with you?

JOHNNY
It’s over. I’m done.

ROBERT
You done?! It ain’t ever over until it’s over. What I tell you about all that feeling sorry for yourself? You a player. But right now you acting like a five dollar Jensen trick.

JOHNNY
What you want me to do?

ROBERT
I tell you what I want you to do... You know what I just remembered. I got an extremely important phone call to make.

JOHNNY
You know where the phone at.

ROBERT
(feeling around on his body)
Yeah but I ain’t got no more smokes. Do your potna a favor and go to the store for me.

Johnny looks at Robert with a look of ill repute.

ROBERT
What you too good to run to the store for me now? All the things I done for you?

JOHNNY
(exhales)
Give me your keys. You parked behind me.

ROBERT
hey just walk down there. Clearly you haven’t been out of the house in a while and I need you to at least get some fresh air to clear your mind.

(Continued)
Johnny snarls at Robert. He stills stands and proceed to leave for the store.

ROBERT
you know what kind I smoke.

99 INT. JOHNNY’S HOME - DAY

Robert peeks to make sure Johnny has left. Once he is sure Johnny is gone, he starts grabbing some of Johnny’s possessions. Once he has gathered enough and placed it by the door a thought strikes him.

ROBERT
Damn, the guitar!
(rushes to retrieve it)

100 EXT. STREET - DAY

Johnny is walking down the street back to his home as he sees Robert’s car pulling up towards him. The closer it gets he recognizes the backseat is full. Robert pulls all of the way up on the side of Johnny.

ROBERT
Where you going?

JOHNNY
What you mean?

ROBERT
Come on get in the car.

JOHNNY
For what? Where we going?

ROBERT
Don’t worry bout all that. Just get in the car.

JOHNNY
(stressing his point)
I ain’t getting in nothing and I ain’t going nowhere.

ROBERT
Alright then. Don’t matter me none. All I know it’s gone be hard to write and play music without a guitar. And it ain’t like you just bringing money in like that right now.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY  
(focuses on Robert’s backseat)  
My guitar!

ROBERT  
Now, see. Literally, it’s my guitar. Besides me, probably the best friend you’ve ever had. How you feel you gone get along without it? Can’t you see ain’t nothing here for you man. You’ve outgrown this. You’re way bigger than all of this. Everyone knows it. It doesn’t mean anything if you don’t know it though. Come on get in the car dude.
  
(stops and looks at Johnny hard and raises his voice)  
Johnny get in the car man.

As they ride off, Johnny is looking out of the window.

JOHNNY  
(audaciously)  
I’ll be back.

ROBERT  
(turns his head and sees the fire in his friend’s eyes)  
I know you will. I know you will. Ain’t no thang baby.  
(Robert stretches out his right hand for Johnny to give him five)

Johnny is hesitant but finally slides his hand across Robert’s and Robert drives off laughing.

ROBERT  
Now that’s what I’m talking bout.

101 INT. RECORD STORE - DAY 101

Robert and Johnny is walking, talking, and browsing through a record store in Harlem. Johnny stops and searches through a record section.

JOHNNY  
(pulls up a record)  
Man they got my record in Harlem!

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
Sho’ they do. You Johnny Clyde Copeland.
(pauses)
So what you think?

JOHNNY
(still searching through records)
About what?

ROBERT
About this place?

JOHNNY
My record in here! Any place that carries Johnny Clyde Copeland gotta be cool.

ROBERT
That’s good to know because it’s yours.

Johnny looks up with a dumbfounded look on his face.

JOHNNY
(excited)
This place...? It’s mine...? Man you gotta be jiving.

ROBERT
You know me. I ain’t got that kind of time. Square business this your joint.

JOHNNY
(admires the scenery)
Rob T You the baddest man I ever met in my life.

ROBERT
I take it you dig it then.

JOHNNY
Dig it I love it.

ROBERT
It ain’t for free now. You gotta repay me by writing them hits like you do and networking.
JOHNNY
Networking?

ROBERT
Yeah I’m not gone be here long. So it’s gone be up to you to put together you a band. I gotta go holler at this club owner in a little bit about getting you in there. After that you’ll see me once maybe twice a year. You know I got other things going on too.

JOHNNY
Yeah I know.

ROBERT
You think you can handle it? Lemme know now.

JOHNNY
I’m good. Better than good!

ROBERT
My man. Now let’s go meet your employees.

(walking off with Johnny)
Now you know if you need anything just call Able Ten and let Rose know.

102 INT. CAB - DAY - MOVING

Johnny is in a cab. Looking at the back of the head of an attentive CAB DRIVER.

JOHNNY
Right here.

CAB DRIVER
Right here?! The middle of the Brooklyn Bridge?

The cab driver stops and Johnny pays as he exits. He is right on the Brooklyn Bridge. He carries his guitar and a small amplifier. He walks for a second or so, before he finds a spot he likes. He plugs his guitar in and begins to wail away at it.
Johnny is sitting behind the counter of his record store when Stevie Ray Vaughn, a scrawny white kid with a guitar and urban cowboy hat, walks in. It catches him off guard, with him being in the middle of Harlem. The sight of the guitar kind of put Johnny at ease.

JOHNNY
Can I help you?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
( approaches the counter and puts his hand out for Johnny to shake)
Yeah. I’m Stevie and I don’t mean to trouble you but...

As if Stevie being white with a cowboy hat on wasn’t enough, his accent, that Johnny instantly recognized, didn’t help.

JOHNNY
Man where you from?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Texas. Dallas, Texas to be exact.

JOHNNY
Get outta here! I’m from Houston?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
You serious?

JOHNNY
As a heart attack. I’m Johnny Clyde Copeland.

Stevie’s facial expression changes as he first scrutinizes Johnny closely, then steps back for a more full view.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Naw?!!! The Johnny Clyde Copeland? Rock N Roll Lily Johnny Clyde Copeland?

Johnny sings a couple of lines from one of his song.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
I can’t believe it. Johnny Clyde Copeland working in a record store in Harlem. I always wondered what had happened to you.

Johnny’s demeanor becomes shameful.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
One day you was one of the hottest voices on the radio then it’s like you just fell off the face of the...

Stevie’s excitement had overtaken him for a spell not allowing him to see Johnny’s emotions had changed along with the direction of the conversation.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
...so is the owner in?

JOHNNY
(once again prideful)
You looking at him.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Oh wow! The odds. I just wanted to know would it be ok if I stood in front of your store and played for a bit?

Johnny started to laugh, which confused Stevie.

JOHNNY
You came all the way from Dallas...

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
(corrects Johnny)
Austin.

JOHNNY
(pauses to recollect)
I thought you said Dallas?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
From Dallas. Was staying in Austin.

JOHNNY
Well you mean to tell me, you traveled all the way from Texas to play your guitar in front of my store in Harlem?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Well you traveled all the way from Texas to own a record store in Harlem. So, yeah.

JOHNNY
You got me there. So where you staying?

(CONTINUED)
STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
That all depends.

JOHNNY
On what?

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
How much money I can make. If you let me play in front of your store.

Johnny laughs again and Stevie’s confusing look partly returns.

JOHNNY
Yeah you can play out front.

Stevie reaches over the counter to thank Johnny and shake his hand again.

JOHNNY
(grabbing Stevie’s hand)
Under two conditions. Don’t block my door. And when you get that name you’re searching for, don’t forget where you got it from.

Stevie’s look became more peculiar.

104 INT. JOHNNY’S APARTMENT - MORNING

Johnny is in his Harlem apartment. New York’s energy permeates through his windows. He walks into his living room where his new found friend, STEVIE RAY VAUGHN, is on the couch listening to Jimi Hendrix and plucking away at his guitar, with evidence of his living situation all around him.

JOHNNY
Stevie Ray you drunk up all the juice again.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
My fault. I was meaning to go to the store but I started listening to Jimi.

JOHNNY
And we all know once you start listening to Jimi...

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Check this out. Tell me what you think.

(CONTINUED)
(Stevie Ray performs a solo on his guitar comparable to Jimi himself)

JOHNNY
(listens intently)
I think you one bad white boy. As good as you is, you gotta do your own thing though. Take all of that and create something new. You gotta make sure you give the world you. So they don’t view you as just some cheap Jimi Hendrix imitation.

Stevie Ray sits on the couch soaking in every word. He begins to play and delivering a song on the spot. Johnny walks off inspecting the juice carton as if there was something in it he may have missed.

Johnny and Stevie is backstage in his dressing room, when BEAR, the master of ceremony, knocks at the door.

JOHNNY
Come in.

MASTER OF CEREMONY
(peeps his head in the door)
You got a couple minutes.

JOHNNY
Come here real fast Bear. I need you to do me a favor.

Perplexed, Bear steps in.

BEAR
What’s up Johnny?

JOHNNY
I need you to do something for me.

BEAR
Anything.

JOHNNY
I need you to introduce my man Stevie Ray on stage before I go on.

Stevie, surprised, looks upside Johnny’s head.
BEAR
(with perfect comedic timing)
Anything but that. Man you gone
crazy. You trying to get me fired
and killed all in the same night. J C
if you ain’t like me, all you had
to do was tell me. I got two babies
on the way.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Twins?

BEAR
My wife and my girlfriend. I’m
sorry but I can’t do that Johnny.

JOHNNY
I’ll give you one hundred dollars.

BEAR
White boy you go on in couple
minutes.
(starts to walk to the door)
Now I’mma tell you something. I
ain’t gone be responsible for your
white ass when you walk out on that
stage and all them niggas start
going crazy. Can you at least take
that hat off?
(talks all of the way out of
the door)
Looking like the nigga that shot
Dr. Martin Luther King.

Once the door closes Stevie begins to plead his case.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Johnny what you doing? I can’t go
out there.

JOHNNY
(inspirational)
Yes you can! You got this! You
ready!

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
I didn’t even bring my guitar.

JOHNNY
(picks up his guitar and walks
to Stevie)
Here. Use mine. Listen man I
believe in you. I know you can do
it.
Johnny and Stevie listen to Bear’s introduction.

BEAR
We got a real treat for you all tonight. Something extra special. Just remember if you don’t like it, it’s not my fault. We bringing a newcomer to the stage. But he one bad white...
(Bear stops and cleans it up)
One bad motherfucker.

JOHNNY
Besides it’s too late.

BEAR
Stevie Ray!!!

106 INT. JOHNNY’S APARTMENT - DAY

Johnny’s phone ring. He picks it up and instantly hears a OPERATOR.

OPERATOR
You have a collect call from Michael Collins in the Harris County Jail. Do you accept the charges?

Johnny answered before the operator finishes.

JOHNNY
Yeah!

MICHAEL
Hello?

JOHNNY
So you calling me from jail now?
(More to himself than his son)
I knew I shoulda brought your ass up here with me. What’s up?

MICHAEL
I’m locked up.

JOHNNY
Tell me something I don’t know. Why?

MICHAEL
It’s not that serious.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Not that serious?

MICHAEL
Yeah. I only signed for two years.

JOHNNY
So two years in jail ain’t that serious to you? Boy you really is messed up.

MICHAEL
I’ll be home in six months or less.

JOHNNY
You sound like you happy to be there?

MICHAEL
What choice do I got? Might as well make the best of a bad situation. I was just calling to let you know I was in jail and ask if you could put something on my books?

JOHNNY
Books? What the hell is that?

MICHAEL
My commissary?

JOHNNY
Commissary?

MICHAEL
Money so I can get me something to eat, some hygiene, stamps and envelopes. Shit like that.

JOHNNY
And how am I supposed to do that?

MICHAEL
Give me your address and I’ll send you some money slips.

JOHNNY
Money slips?

MICHAEL
Yeah. Fill it out and send it back with a money order.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
I shouldn’t have to be doing any of this.

There’s an awkward silence.

JOHNNY
How’s my grandson?

MICHAEL
He’s fine. Healthy and happy.

JOHNNY
You need to get yourself together so you can do right by him.

Another awkward silence.

MICHAEL
I need your address up there so I can write you and send the money slips.

JOHNNY
You ready?

MICHAEL
Yeah.

JOHNNY
Eight twenty-nine West one twenty-fifth street. New York, New York one zero zero two seven. Apartment seven-o-nine. You got it?

MICHAEL
Yeah I got it?

JOHNNY
You need anything else?

MICHAEL
Some magazines, if you don’t mind.

JOHNNY
Alright, no problem. Call me if you need anything else. And son...

MICHAEL
Yeah?

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Take care of yourself.

MICHAEL
I will.

Johnny holds the phone to his chest before he finally hangs up.

107 INT. CLUB - NIGHT

Johnny is on stage performing at a club in North Carolina, when Sandra, a beautiful woman, catches his eye. They exchange flirtatious looks through Johnny’s entire performance.

108 INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Johnny and Sandra sit in a booth at a restaurant. Sandra is nervously stirring her drink. Johnny stares at her incessantly.

SANDRA
(looks up)
What?!

JOHNNY
You.

SANDRA
What about me?

JOHNNY
You gotta be the sexiest creature I’ve...

SANDRA
(jumps in and completes him)
...seen tonight? How many women you’ve told that before?

JOHNNY
It doesn’t matter how many I’ve told that. I’m telling you? And if I didn’t mean it I wouldn’t say it.

SANDRA
I bet.

JOHNNY
Seriously. I got a total different energy about you. I almost forgot I was on stage singing. It was like a vision or something.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

SANDRA
A vision ha? Of What?

JOHNNY
(gives her the most genuine eyes)
Forever.

Sandra blushes so hard, she can’t help but try to hide her face.

INT. RADIO STATION - DAY

Johnny is in a radio station with BLUES DADDY about to conduct an interview about his new hit song "Down On Bended Knee". Sandra is sitting to the side with a beautiful baby girl on her lap.

BLUES DADDY
We’re back from commercial and just like I promised I got a special guest in the studio with Blues Daddy. Singer of one of the hottest songs coast to coast and climbing, Johnny Clyde Copeland. How you doing king?

JOHNNY
I’m alright. Thanks for asking.

BLUES DADDY
You running things right now, it must feel good.

JOHNNY
Well you know, I’m just working trying to deliver the people the best music possible. Know what I’m saying?

BLUES DADDY
I definitely do. You surely delivered with Down On Bended Knee. Chicago love you man. If I don’t get five or six calls an hour about you I gotta check the phone and make sure it’s still working. So you playing the legendary Checkerboard Lounge?

JOHNNY
Yes sir, tonight.

(CONTINUED)
BLUES DADDY
We talking the likes of Chuck Berry and Muddy Waters. That’s some company.

JOHNNY
It’s an honor and a privilege. I still can’t believe I’m playing Chicago. Chi-town!

BLUES DADDY
I tell you what, let’s give the people what they want. We about to get into Down On Bended Knee and when we get back we’re going to the phones so the people of Chicago can give you a proper greeting.

JOHNNY
Sounds good to me.

BLUES DADDY
Is there anything else you would like to tell the people before we get your song on?

JOHNNY
Definitely. Chicago has some of the most beautiful women I’ve ever seen and I pray I see all y’all pretty faces in the place tonight.

Blues Daddy looks over Johnny’s shoulder to Sandra and she holds her composure.

BLUES DADDY
That’s right! Johnny Clyde Copeland at the Checkerboard Lounge tonight. And now here it is Down On Bended Knee with your one and only Blues Daddy.

(points at the man working the boards and Johnny’s song creeps in)

110 INT. JOHNNY’S APARTMENT - DAY
Johnny opens his front door and to his surprise it’s Robert.

JOHNNY
Rob T?! What you doing here?

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
Damn! You ain’t gone ask your best potna in?

JOHNNY
Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Come on in man.

(allows Robert in and closes the door)
You alright? You hungry? You want something to drink?

ROBERT
Naw I’m good. You might wanna get you something to drink and have a sit down.

JOHNNY
Why? What’s up?

ROBERT
I just booked you a show.

JOHNNY
I needed to sit down for that?

ROBERT

Johnny was all but floored.

JOHNNY
(in a vengeful tone)
I told you I’ll be back.

111 EXT. EMANCIPATION PARK - DAY

ROBERT CRAY finishes up his set and exits the stage. KATHY LEE WHITMIRE, the mayor of Houston enters as he leaves. She removes the microphone from it’s stand.

KATHY LEE WHITMIRE
Y’all give it up for Robert Cray. We about to bring up a Houston legend right now. It’s been a while since he been here and since he’s back, as mayor of the greatest city in the world I feel it’s my duty to give him the key to the city.

A worker brings a key and a plaque on the stage.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: (2)

KATHY LEE WHITMIRE
Now everyone put your hands
together for Houston’s own Johnny
Clyde Copeland.

Johnny comes out on the stage beaming. he and Kathy exchange hugs. When they un-embrace the worker hands him the plaque. Johnny grabs it, raises it above his head, and shows it to the entire crowd. The crowd explodes.

KATHY LEE WHITMIRE
(waits for the crowd to subside)
Johnny it is a pleasure and a honor
for me to present to you on this
day, the nineteenth of June
nineteen eighty-four, the key to the city.

As she hands it to Johnny, they pause for a photographer to capture it on camera.

KATHY LEE WHITMIRE
Now let me get off here and everyone can see who their here to see. I present to you Johnny Clyde Copeland.

The crowd erupts again.

JOHNNY
(retrieves and resets the microphone)
Hooooouston! Can I ask Y’all one thing?

The crowd responds.

JOHNNY
Can I come home?!

The crowd responds again. Then Johnny rips into a rocking track.

112 EXT. EMANCIPATION PARK - DAY

Johnny is pushing through the crowd of people asking for autographs and handshakes, trying to make it to his limo. Robert is standing, monitoring his watch as if it was a countdown to armageddon. Michael and his son is standing next to the chauffeur, who is holding Johnny’s door for him. Johnny finally makes it to the limo. His grandson runs up and hugs him around the leg. Michael and Johnny is conversing.

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
(making his watch the focal point)
You gotta cut that short. We gotta go and get on the road.

Johnny ignores him.

ROBERT
(more aggressive tone)
You heard me!

JOHNNY
Nigga they can wait. I’m talking to my son and grandson.

Robert gives the back of Johnny’s head an aggravated gesture before he sinks and slides into the limo on the passenger side. Johnny picks up his grandson and him, his son, and grandson all share an embrace.

113 INT. LIMO BACKSEAT – NIGHT – MOVING

Robert and Johnny sits in the backseat of a limousine.

ROBERT
What do you think about Europe?

JOHNNY
I don’t know. Am I supposed to think about it. Shit, it’s across seas.

ROBERT
What do you think about touring over there?

JOHNNY
What for?

ROBERT
What you mean what for? Because we leaving a lot of money on the table.

JOHNNY
Rob T what money? What you talking bout man?

ROBERT
There was an agent from England at the show tonight. Backstage. He told me blues is booming over there and you have a cult following.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Why haven’t I heard anything about that?

ROBERT
I don’t know. Maybe something we need to ask the label about. You dig?

JOHNNY
I sho’ll do.

ROBERT
But he said you’re being spun on the air and everything. You’re big man, like the Beatles in reverse or something.

JOHNNY
Oh yeah?

ROBERT
Yeah. He told me if we can get you over there to Great Britain, by the time they are done all of Europe will be booking you. And who says we have to stop there.

JOHNNY
They?

ROBERT
Yeah, him and his agency. I was thinking about turning that part of my managerial duties over to them.

JOHNNY
And you made all of these decisions without consulting me first?

ROBERT
Nigga what you think I’m doing now?

JOHNNY
You didn’t even bring him to meet me. How do we know we can trust this cat?

ROBERT
He had to cut out before he could meet you. He’s legit though. I contacted some of my people and they verified him. You forgot who

(MORE)
ROBERT (cont’d)

JOHNNY
(laughs and eases the tension)
Yeah whatever.

114 EXT. STOREFRONT – DAY

Dawrence is in front of a store. He walks up to a car and engages in an obvious drug deal. As the car pulls off and Dawrence repositions himself, a police car zooms in and two cops hop out. Dawrence is instantly shocked and deflated. COP 1, on the passenger side hops out first with his gun drawn with COP 2 following him closely.

COP 1
(pointing gun and screaming)
Freeze! Don’t you move!

COP 2
Hands up! Give me a reason boy!
Oooo give me a reason!

Dawrence hands fly up.

COP 1
(to his partner)
Cover me.

COP 2
Got ya.

Cop 1 walks to Dawrence and roughly grabs him and throws him to the hood of the police car.

DAWRENCE
Damn man! Nigga this hood hot!

COP 2
(cuffing then frisking
Dawrence and sits his pocket’s contents on the car)
So you think you just gone be out here all day selling this bullshit. We passed by three times and you was standing in the same place.
(digs in Dawrence’s jeans)
Look what we have here.
(holds up a plastic baggy of drugs)

(CONTINUED)
COP 1
Got his ass now.

Cop 2 grabs Dawrence takes him to the backseat, opens the door, and shoves him in the car. Cop 2 goes to retrieve Dawrence’s belongings that was left on the hood.

115 INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Cop 2 comes and joins his partner in the front seat.

COP 2
This idiot ain’t have any I.D. on his person.

COP 1
What you think? All that money but no identification. Fucking genius.
(looks over his shoulder to backseat)
Hey Einstein, what’s your name?

DAWRENCE
(answers with an attitude)
Dawrence. Dawrence Copeland.

COP 1
(laughs)
This bum has the same last name as Johnny.

DAWRENCE
That’s cause that’s my daddy.

Both cops turn and take a good look at Dawrence.

COP 2
What you think?

COP 1
He do kinda favor old Johnny.

DAWRENCE
(confidently)
I’m telling you. He over there at Johnson’s.

COP 2
Johnson’s?

DAWRENCE
Johnson’s Funeral Home.

(CONTINUED)
COP 1
(sarcastically)
And what is doing there?

DAWRENCE
At my grandmother’s funeral.

COP 2
Mrs. Ruthie Lee funeral?! And you up here...un unh I’m taking your dumb ass to jail.

COP 1
(calming the situation)
Hold up man. Little Copeland I tell you what, today your lucky day. We gone take you up here to Johnson’s and Johnny better be up here. If not it’s gone turn into your unlucky day.

Dawrence breathes a sigh of relief and falls back.

116 EXT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Cop 2 gets out and opens Dawrence’s door, gets him out of the backseat, and begins to remove the cuffs.

COP 2
You gone run in front of our car all the way up there. And you better not stop for nothing but stop signs and red lights. If you do you gone be shitting out out bumper for months. You got me.

DAWRENCE
(in disbelief)
Run?

COP 2
Yeah run. Now you might wanna get started.

Dawrence pauses to look at the cops and assess if they are serious or not. He then turns and opens into a full run.
Michael is out on the porch of Johnson’s funeral home smoking a cigarette. He looks and sees Dawrence struggling to make it up the street. He then focuses on the police car in close pursuit. Michael laughs and thumps his cigarette butt away.

Dawrence runs up to the front of the building and all but collapses.

MICHAEL
Man, what the hell you got going on?

Dawrence, in total disarray, missing one shoe, can’t answer for being bent over, panting, sweating, and trying to catch his breath. The cops stop their vehicle and gets out.

COP 2
Whose funeral is being held here?

MICHAEL
(rebelliously)
My grandmother?

COP 1
(reacting to Michael’s tone)
And who is your grandmother?

MICHAEL
(pointing at Dawrence)
My brother’s grandmother.

COP 2
How bout you go in there and get somebody we can talk to with a little more sense than you?

MICHAEL
(exchanges hateful glances with both cops)
Yeah.
(turns and goes into the church)

Within seconds a small crowd emerges, with Johnny as the lead and Michael on his heels.

JOHNNY
(barely out of the door and seeing Dawrence)
Boy what the hell...
COP 2
Johnny what’s up man? We caught your boy down the way, by the store selling dope. We started to take him to jail,
(eyes Dawrence)
but the only reason we let him make it is because we know you.

JOHNNY
Man David, Glen I appreciate that. If it’s anything I can...

COP 1
Naw we good. You too good of a man for us to cause you anymore grief today. Sorry to hear about Mrs. Ruthie Lee too.

JOHNNY
Thanks.

COP 2
(directly to Dawrence)
You might wanna stay from up there on that corner. Next time you might not be so lucky.

JOHNNY
Boy if you don’t get your ass up in here. Looking like who did it and what the fuck for.

118 INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

The reverend is delivering his eulogy when he instructs everyone to bow their heads in prayer. As the reverend delivers his overly expressive prayer, Robert creeps in in a glowing, full length, all white mink and matching hat in his hands. Robert eases up to the casket and stands there paying his respects to Ruthie Lee.

The reverend finishes his prayer with an amen, which the congregation echoes. When everyone lifts their head and sees Robert standing at the casket in all of his splendor, there is a simultaneous gasp that nearly sucks all of the air out of the room. It is near pandemonium when the choir breaks into song, immediately afterwards.
Johnny is back in New York. He walks by SHEMEKIA, his five year old daughter’s room, and hears her singing with the control, force, and tone of a seasoned vet. He stands right outside of her bedroom door and beams with pride at his baby girl.

Johnny is in West Africa. He’s sitting at a bar having a drink when an AFRICAN MAN approaches him.

AFRICAN MAN
(excited with a heavy accent)
Johnny! Johnny Clyde Copeland! Oh my God. I can’t believe it. Can I have your autograph.

JOHNNY
Sure. No problem.

As Johnny signs his autograph the man strikes up a conversation.

AFRICAN MAN
Do you mind if I sit?

JOHNNY
Be my guest? Anything to drink?

AFRICAN MAN
Oh no thank you? So how do you like it?

JOHNNY
What’s that?

AFRICAN MAN
Travelling and seeing the world by doing what you love?

JOHNNY
It’s cool. Alot of times I find myself tripping though. I still can’t believe little old me could be so blessed. One thing I can say it’s a major culture shock and eye opening experience. I still try to figure out what is it that makes people from another country, that can’t even speak my language, connect to my music?

(CONTINUED)
AFRICAN MAN
Well, I can’t speak for the other places you have travelled but I can say as for us, your pain is our pain. It is one in the same. And just like love pain is a universal language.

Johnny shifts on his bar stool.

AFRICAN MAN
(continues)
Where do you think your pain derives from. You are merely bringing it back home. You were taken and exposed to an entirely new type of pain. We had to deal with the pain that our loved ones were taken and we were powerless to do anything about it. That pain still exists. That pain connects us.

(turns his head and acknowledges a female)
Oh there is my wife. It was an honor and a pleasure Mr. Johnny Clyde Copeland.

JOHNNY
It was an honor and pleasure as well Mr. .... I didn’t get a chance to get your name.

AFRICAN MAN
Bolaji.

JOHNNY
(repeats it with feeling)
Bolaji.
(reaches out to shake Bolaji’s hand)
Mr. Bolaji.

121 INT. HOTEL - DAY
Johnny is in his room on the phone with Robert Turner.

JOHNNY
(overly excited)
Robert man I just had the most random meeting with a fan and he gave me the greatest idea.
(pauses)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY (cont’d)
I’m gonna record an album right here in Africa.
(pauses)
A blues album! But I’ma implement African instruments, sounds, and elements.
(pauses)
What you mean you don’t know if it’ll work? You let me worry about the music and what’ll work or not.
(pauses)
I need to hurry up?! For what?
(pauses)
(drops the phone and begins hopping around and screaming)
The Grammy’s!!! I’m nominated for a Grammy.
(realizes he had dropped the phone and runs back to retrieve it)
Turner you still there?
(brief pause)
Yeah? When?
(brief pause)
Ok. No problem. As soon as I knock this album out, I’ll be on the first thing smoking.

Johnny hangs the phone up and goes back to celebrating.

122 EXT. ARENA – NIGHT

1986, Johnny is in a tuxedo, walking down the red carpet, exiting the Grammy’s ceremony. He is flanked by ROBERT CRAY and ALBERT COLLINS, also appropriately dressed and all three are holding a Grammy. There is a clear cut REPORTER vying for their attention amidst the mayhem.

REPORTER
Albert! Johnny! Robert!

They float over to the reporter.

REPORTER
How you fellas doing? Ernest Gilmore with Living Blues. How does it feel to be Grammy winners?

ALBERT COLLINS
I can’t really speak for them, but I imagine they feel just as great as I do.

(CONTINUED)
REPORTER
Did you expect to win tonight?

JOHNNY
Truthfully, we were honored to just be nominated. But to be recognized on such a grand scale for something you pour all of your heart and soul in is an amazing feeling.

REPORTER
One more question before you go if you don’t mind. So what can we expect from you gentlemen, perhaps another joint effort?

ROBERT CRAY
Who knows? Right now we are just focused on enjoying the success of "Showdown!".

REPORTER
Thank you gentlemen and congratulations once again.

Johnny and his two collaborators walk off smiling and waving at all of the people adorning the sidewalk.

123 EXT. ASTRODOME - NIGHT
Michael is at the back entrance of the Astrodome with his baby mother’s gorgeous older sister, LYNN, and her date. When Robert sticks his head from around the big bulky security guards.

ROBERT
(acknowledging Michael)
Yeah he good. That’s Johnny’s son.

MICHAEL
(pushing his way through)
I told em that.

ROBERT
Yeah but you know how that go.

124 INT. ASTRODOME - NIGHT
Michael and his company is barely through the door when Robert notices Lynn and her date trailing Michael.
ROBERT
Hold up Michael who is that?

MICHAEL
That’s my gal sister and her dude.

ROBERT
(with a more ill intent)
Naw I mean...
(stressing each syllable)
who is that?

MICHAEL
(looks at Lynn then back at Turner catching his drift)
It ain’t nothing like that Turner.

ROBERT
(loud enough for Lynn and her date to hear)
She can come in but he can’t. All you got is a plus one.

MICHAEL
What? Where Johnny?

ROBERT
Getting ready for stage. Hey man those the rules.

Michael turns and looks at the disappointment in Lynn and her date’s face, then back at Robert.

MICHAEL
Turner you be on that bullshit!
That’s why I don’t fuck with you.
Fuck this shit, let’s go.

As Michael tries to exit, Lynn grabs his arm.

LYNN
Go in there and see your daddy.

MICHAEL
Naw I’m...

LYNN
(takes a firmer grip and stares in Michael’s eyes)
It’s alright bruh-in-law. We’ll go catch a movie or something.

Lynn kisses Michael’s cheek.
Michael enters Johnny’s dressing room amazed at all of the energy and glamour happening around it. Johnny was facing the mirror with people tending to different aspects of his appearance.

MICHAEL
You came a long way from doing all of that yourself.

JOHNNY
(smiles and comes to life, waving off his attendants)
Yeah! All of a sudden I’m some big kind of a deal now. How you doing son? You been staying out of trouble?

MICHAEL
Yeah I’m good, but that nigga Turner man. He be on some bullshit. He turned my gal and her dude away.

JOHNNY
You know how Rob T is. You shoulda came and got me.

MICHAEL
He wouldn’t.

JOHNNY
So how’s my grandson?

MICHAEL
He alright.
(pauses as people go back to poking and prodding at Johnny)
You a hard man to get in contact with. I haven’t seen or heard from you in a while.

JOHNNY
Since the Grammy’s it’s been a nonstop whirlwind. I’m all over the place. Man do you know Apple Computer got me to do a commercial for them. Every month it’s a check in the mail like clockwork. You been staying out of trouble ha?

Michael doesn’t answer. He just gives his a father a revealing look.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Yeah. I don’t know what’s wrong with you and Dawrence. You know he locked up.

MICHAEL
Yeah I heard.

JOHNNY
I don’t know why you two won’t do something with your gifts. Just gone squander em away. (pauses to reflect) That’s life I guess. You need anything?

MICHAEL
I...I...I’m alright.

Johnny takes a hard look at his son. Then points to his assistant, MILDRED.

JOHNNY
MILDRED make sure you give him five hundred dollars.

She instantly moves.

MICHAEL
I told you I’m good.

JOHNNY
Not for you for my grandbaby.

A female with a headset slides in between Michael and Johnny. When she moves Johnny sits up.

JOHNNY
That’s my cue. Mike you make sure you catch Stevie Ray set. Baddest white boy you ever gone see.

MICHAEL
Ain’t he the white boy you said used to sleep on your couch.

JOHNNY
(begins to walk by Michael) Yep. Ain’t that something. Now I’m opening up for him. (stops right by Michael’s ear) Don’t get in trouble back here. It’s a lot going on. A lot.
Johnny slaps Michael on the back and heads out. Michael turns his body and let his eyes follow his father. Until he sees someone hand Johnny his guitar and he disappears into the thick of the crowd.

126 INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Michael is walking around backstage marveling at all he saw. Women with hardly anything on. People openly smoking weed in front of the police. He even sees people pass joints to cops and the cops hit it. There is a spread with every kind of food and drink imaginable.

Michael finds the restroom and is ill prepared. It is an open unisex restroom, men and women with no privacy. By now he is engulfed by the lifestyle. He pulls out his penis and begins to piss right next to a beautiful white girl sitting on a toilet next to him. Her admiration of his manhood is the opening of Pandora’s box.

127 INT. SIDE OF THE STAGE - NIGHT

Michael is at the side of the stage mesmerized by Stevie Ray’s guitar antics.

128 INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Stevie Ray ends his song then goes to interact with the crowd.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Houston how y’all doing?

The crowd roars.

STEVIE RAY VAUGHN
Beautiful city. Beautiful people. I swear i could make this my second home.

(the crowd roars again)

I wanna bring somebody back out. I don’t think you know what this man means to me. He is the epitome of your city and one of the greatest representatives that the blues could ever have. My brother from another mother, Johnny Clyde Copeland.

Johnny bumps into Michael as he pushes pass him, halfway bringing him out of his trance. The music is already swinging as Johnny come to the forefront of the stage, where he joins in. Johnny and Stevie rips into "Tin Pan Alley".
129 INT. HOTEL - DAY

Mildred is knocking at Johnny’s bedroom door, repeatedly.

MILDRED
Johnny?
(knocks again)
Johnny?

She eventually sticks her head inside and sees Johnny laying on the floor, clearly in distress. She calls out for help as she runs to his rescue.

130 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Johnny is in a hospital bed, hooked up to all of these different type of machines. DR. BLEDSOE walks in and comes to Johnny’s bedside.

DR. BLEDSOE
That sure was a close call. I’m glad you’re still here with us. You don’t know how blessed you are.

JOHNNY
Funny, I don’t feel blessed.

DR. BLEDSOE
Well you are. You had a mild heart attack. A minute or two longer, we probably wouldn’t be having this conversation. We ran some tests and we’re going to keep you here for a day or two for monitoring. I’ve encountered this before with people of your stature. And I know you don’t want to hear this but you gotta slow down and take it easy.

Johnny attempts to speak.

DR. BLEDSOE
Now I already know the argument you’re going to try to make. You got commitments and people depending on you, but the truth of the matter is none of that will matter at the slightest if you’re not here. And if you continue on the path you are on, that’s definitely gonna be the case. Now I’m about to step out and let you think about it, but I’ll be back.

(MORE)
DR. BLEDSOE (cont’d)
Besides, you have some people outside shaken up who wants to see you.

JOHNNY
Thanks doc.

DR. BLEDSOE
Thank me by taking care of yourself.
(tURNS AND EXITS AND SPEAKS TO Johnny’s family and friends on the way out)
He can see you now.

Johnny’s family and friends enter the room in a celebratory fashion.

131 INT. JOHNNY’S HOME – EVENING
August 27, 1990, Johnny is at his home in New Jersey watching tv. There is breaking news. A news reporter informs that Stevie Ray Vaughn has been killed in a helicopter accident. The news reporter offers as much information as it has available. Johnny sits and watches in disbelief as tears begin to roll down his face.

132 INT. ARENA – NIGHT
Johnny is dressing room and Robert sticks his head in.

ROBERT
(playfully)
You decent?

JOHNNY
(solemnly staring in his movie)
Yeah I’m good.

Robert steps in.

ROBERT
I got someone you need to meet.

JOHNNY
(turns in his chair)
Oh yeah? Who’s that?

Robert signals to HAMILTON LOOMIS on the outside the door to step in.

(CONTINUED)
ROBERT
Johnny Clyde Copeland I present to
you Hamilton Loomis.

Johnny looks at the wide eyed, teen aged, white boy with his
guitar.

JOHNNY
How you doing Mr. Hamilton Loomis?

Loomis is dumbfounded and searching for his words.

HAMILTON
Johnny Clyde Copeland! I’m actually
in Johnny Clyde Copeland’s dressing
room.

Johnny shares a look of unsurety with Robert.

HAMILTON
(runs to Johnny to shake his
hand)
Mr. Copeland...
(his guitar partly interferes)
My guitar.
(he moves it)
You don’t know how many times I’ve
played along to Tin Pan Alley with
you and Stevie Ray.

JOHNNY
That’s funny because you kind of
remind me of him, the first time i
met him.

HAMILTON
Really? No? Really?

JOHNNY
Yeah really? So I take it you play
the guitar?

HAMILTON
I sing too?

JOHNNY
Oh do you now?

HAMILTON
Yes sir. I pretty much know every
song you’ve ever recorded.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
Every song?

HAMILTON
Pretty much.

JOHNNY
Since you pretty much know all of my music, how would you like to join me on stage?

HAMILTON
What?! Are you serious?

JOHNNY
You do have your guitar with you. What would be the point of having it and not using it.

HAMILTON
(turning all around exclaiming to the walls)
Man, I can’t believe I’m going to hit stage with a legend.

Johnny winks at a smiling Robert.

ROBERT
Come on son. Let’s get you something to eat and drink before you go on, to help calm you down.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Johnny is on stage.

JOHNNY
(talks to the crowd)
Being an ambassador of the blues I have a responsibility to not only protect it but to ensure that it lives on. I must push it forward. Sometimes to move forward you have to give back. I’ve always made it a point to share all I can with anyone who has it in their heart to be apart of the blues. I feel it’s my duty. So tonight I have not one, but two treats for y’all. It is my pleasure to present the future of the blues. My daughter Shemekia Copeland and Loomis Hamilton.
Shemekia and Loomis walk front center stage. They hear Johnny count off to his band and they all began an epic journey together.

134 INT. STADIUM - NIGHT

Johnny is finishing up a show in Denver, Colorado. He bids farewell to the audience. He gets up and walks backstage. No sooner as he hands his guitar off to a roadie, Johnny collapses. Everyone around runs to his aid.

135 INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Johnny opens his eyes. His vision is blurry and he is confused. A strange face, DR. HEATHE, is standing over him with a couple nurses.

DR. HEATHE
Mr. Copeland! Mr. Copeland! Do you know where you currently are?

JOHNNY
(struggling to look around and make sense of it all)
A hospital?

DR. HEATHE
(to one of the nurses)
Looks like he’s very well aware. Could you go retrieve his charts from the cardiovascular ward please?
(turns back to Johnny)
Do you know what happened?

JOHNNY
Another heart attack, I guess?

DR. HEATHE
Mr. Copeland you are what we around these parts would call a medical miracle.

The other nurse rushes to Johnny when he tries to sit up.

JOHNNY
(gestures for her to give him some water)
And why would that be.

DR. HEATHE
Well we had to call for your file. When we finally received it, you (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
DR. HEATHE (cont’d)
can imagine my surprise. Eight open heart surgery. Honestly I didn’t even know that was humanly possible. It’s hard to imagine one heart could take that amount of stress and strain, and still be functional.

JOHNNY
(a little smug and unimpressed)
Yeah, so?

DR. HEATHE
Well it got me to thinking. For one to have a continuous issue, procedure after procedure, what was being overlooked. After going through your files, I decided to do some further testing. As much as I hate to tell you...

JOHNNY
But I have a feeling you’re gonna tell me anyway.

DR. HEATHE
It’s my job. I’ve found that your condition is extremely worse than previously thought.

JOHNNY
How worse?

Dr. Heathe is hesitant.

JOHNNY
Doc I’m a big boy. I can take it.

DR. HEATHE
Have you ever heard of congenital heart defect.

JOHNNY
Can’t say that I have.

DR. HEATHE
Well it’s a disease that presents itself at birth.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
So you telling me I was born sick?

DR. HEATHE
well in your case, yes and no.

JOHNNY
Well which is it doc?

DR. HEATHE
Please remain calm Mr. Copeland. Getting excited doesn’t help at all. See the thing about this disease is just because you are born with it, doesn’t necessarily guarantee that it can, or will, be detected. It’s one of them things that can become troublesome with time. As in your case.

JOHNNY
So what are you telling me?

DR. HEATHE
Your heart is having a hard time doing it’s job.

JOHNNY
Meaning?

DR. HEATHE
You have circulatory problems.

JOHNNY
So is there a cure?

DR. HEATHE
Not traditionally. But there is a treatment. There is a fairly new experimental device called the ventricular assist device which can help you. But it’s only temporary. What you will need to be is placed on the list for a heart transplant.

JOHNNY
So I have to be cut on again?

DR. HEATHE
And hopefully once more after that.
JOHNNY
Hopefully?

DR. HEATHE
When you receive your new heart. Not to fret Mr. Copeland, we have recommended you to one of the young, up and coming, hotshots in the country. He’s aces. Dr. Oz.

JOHNNY
Like the wizard?

DR. HEATHE
(has an introspective laugh)
Well I guess so?

JOHNNY
Ain’t that something. I gotta go to Oz for a heart.

136 INT. HOSPITAL – DAY
Sandra and Shemekia walks into Johnny’s room. The doctor, Dr. OZ is already there, making his scheduled visit. He turns when he hears the door open.

DR. OZ
How you doing Mrs. Copeland?

SANDRA
I’m fine Dr. Oz. The real question is how is Johnny doing?

Dr. Oz eyes shift from Sandra to Shemekia in concern.

SANDRA
(somewhat bothered by his hesitance)
Well?

DR. OZ
Well, aside from him being in a coma his condition is stable. His blood pressure has leveled off and his heart is functioning. All we can do now is pray and wait. One thing I can say is, he has to be the strongest man I have ever encountered.
(turns his attention to Shemekia)

(MORE)
DR. OZ (cont’d)
Aren’t you just the prettiest little lady. What’s that you’re carrying.

SHEMEKIA
(innocently)
It’s a tape player for my daddy. It has a tape of his music in it.

DR. OZ
Isn’t that thoughtful.
(takes his right hand and places to the opposite side of his face and lowers his voice like he’s telling Shemekia a secret)
It’s really against rules but I think we can make an exception this time. Here.
(reaches his hand out and takes it from Shemekia)
We’ll place it right here next to him, to make sure he can hear it.
(sits it next to Johnny’s bed and looks back)
You say it’s his music? Well let’s play a little of it for him and see how he enjoys it.

Dr. Oz presses play on the small cassette player. Johnny’s voice meanders through everything but the beep of the heart monitor. Everyone stands hypnotized by his voice for a spell. Dr. Oz decides to give them some privacy he stops to console Sandra before he leaves. Shemekia walks directly to Johnny’s bedside.

SHEMEKIA
Don’t cry daddy?

DR. OZ
(as an afterthought)
Cry?!
(moves quickly back to Johnny’s bedside)
Johnny’s eyes begin to move. As laboring as it appears for him, Dr. Oz cheerleads him back to consciousness.
Johnny is sitting on the set of Good Morning America, joined by CHARLES GIBSON and JOAN LUNDEN. One of the shows PRODUCER(s) gains their attention.

PRODUCER
And we’re back in five, four, three...
(uses fingers to finish countdown and signals they are live)

CHARLES GIBSON
Good Morning America and you’re back. I’m Charles Gibson.

JOAN LUNDEN
And I’m Joan Lunden. Right now we are being joined by one of the most resilient, gifted, and I would have remiss not to add, most blessed men on earth. Wouldn’t you say.

CHARLES GIBSON
(laughs)
I would. Too many our next guest might be a stranger but to loyal and devout blues fans he is a legend, Grammy award winning, blues ambassador. Yes you heard me correctly, a real United States ambassador. Johnny Clyde Copeland.

Johnny beams with a megawatt smile.

JOHNNY
It’s a pleasure and an honor to be here.

JOAN LUNDEN
Likewise. Now Johnny much of America doesn’t know of you but you have the most remarkable story.

JOHNNY
Thanks, but it’s just life to me. you know I started from very humble beginnings, in Houston Texas.

CHARLES GIBSON
Yes but you worked your way into being thought of in the same way as the greats.

(CONTINUED)
JOHNNY
You don’t know how humbling that is.

JOAN LUNDEN
You have accolades on your resume others could only dream of.

JOHNNY
True. I am the only blues artist to play Russia during the Cold War.

JOAN LUNDEN
Wow!

JOHNNY
I am currently, the only blues artist to also record an entire in Africa.

CHARLES GIBSON
And you’ve traveled the world twice over.

JOHNNY
Yes, and it’s been a memorable experience.

JOAN LUNDEN
As of lately, you have been making headlines for other than your music though.

JOHNNY
Well, recently I was diagnosed with congenital heart defect.

CHARLES GIBSON
And what would that be exactly.

JOHNNY
Simply put my heart isn’t performing it’s most fundamental task and that is to beat and make sure my blood circulates.

CHARLES GIBSON
So is that the reason for this device you have hanging from your shoulder.
JOHNNY
It is. It’s called an L-VAD. Left ventricular assist device.

JOAN LUNDEN
And it is supposed to assist your heart in functioning correctly.

JOHNNY
Exactly.

JOAN LUNDEN
Do you ever take it off? Can it be removed?

JOHNNY
No ma’am. It is basically a part of me. An extension of my heart you could say.

CHARLES GIBSON
So it has been said you have had eight heart surgeries.

JOHNNY
Nine, as of now. But who’s counting?

JOAN LUNDEN
(looks directly into the camera)
You would think with this condition, someone in his shoes would slow down. But nope, not this one. His heart is as big as the state he hails from.

CHARLES GIBSON
Sure is. When we get back from commercial Johnny Clyde Copeland will be performing his latest single. Don’t go anywhere.

Johnny is sitting with his doctor, in his doctor’s office.

DR. OZ
Johnny it’s good you made it in for your check up. Your new heart isn’t doing so well.
JOHNNY
(mumbles)
Must not be so new.
(speaks up)
What is it now?

DR. OZ
As much as I hate to tell you this, your heart is leaking. We have to go back in. Don’t worry though. This should correct it for good and eradicate any complications from this point on.

JOHNNY
(mumbles again this time standing and staring out of the window)
Yeah, hopefully.

139 INT. AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Four months later, Johnny is on stage in Memphis, at the W. C. Handy awards. He is giving the performance of a lifetime. The room is full of emotion ans Johnny sings and plays like his life depended on it. When he finishes the crowd roars and several fans emotions show in the tears streaming down their face. Johnny says his thanks and waves to the crowd.

FADE TO BLACK

Three months later, on July 3rd 1997, Johnny Clyde Copeland dies due to heart complications. He is laid to rest in Houston, the city that meant the most to him, in Paradise South Cemetery. Someone once said, "There may never be another heart as big as Johnny’s Blues Heart."

140 INT. PENITENTIARY - DAY

Michael is in the penitentiary laying on his bunk, reading a magazine. He jumps up and takes off walking fast, with the magazine in his hand.

141 INT. OFFICE - DAY

Michael walks into the WARDEN THALER’s office.

MICHAEL
Warden you mind if I use the phone.

WARDEN THALER
Make it quick. I’m on my way out.
Michael picks up the phone and dials. After a couple rings Sandra picks up.

MICHAEL
Hello, Sandra?
(pauses)
Yeah this Michael.
(pauses)
No I’m still locked up.
(pauses)
Everything’s fine.
(pauses)
(somewhat agitated)
Look I don’t have that much time. I was just reading a magazine and I read an article that said The Rolling Stones about to drop a new album.
(pauses)
Listen. It’s a new album dedicated to Texas Blues
(brief pause)
Yeah, and they supposed to be using to of Johnny’s songs. You might wanna call somebody and check on that.

THE END