

The Bicycle Man

by

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FADE IN:

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- DAY

NATHAN HAGWOOD, 12, a studious-looking young man with a slight build, is playing a piano in an empty classroom. The afternoon sunlight filters in through the classroom windows, illuminating the dust floating in the air.

The MUSIC that Nathan is playing is sweet and upbeat, but very much classical.

Nathan looks content and serious at the same time.

EXT. SHELBY NEIGHBORHOOD -- DAY

The MUSIC continues to play, along with the sound of a BICYCLE'S PEDALS and CHAIN.

SUPER: LATE SPRING, 1965

A sticky malaise keeps most of the activity at a slow pace.

The neighborhood streets are lined with old oak trees that cover the street like a tunnel. The houses are a mix of Craftsman bungalows and older Victorian styles. The yards are lush with springtime plants and flowers.

The MUSIC mixes with the sounds of the environment.

Birds CHIRP.

A bicycle's BELL RINGS.

Two people TALKING on the sidewalk turn and look.

The ROAR of a CAR passes by.

A MILKMAN delivers milk to a friendly HOUSEWIFE.

A MAN dressed in a business suit picks up the morning paper from his front step and looks up toward the street.

A shaggy DOG runs down the sidewalk, BARKING and BARKING, chasing 'something' down the street.

EXT. SHELBY DOWNTOWN -- CONTINUOUS

A sign declares: Shelby, Alabama, population 1001. Est. 1833. Home of the Panthers, State 1A Football Champs, 1941.

At the Shelby Baptist church, MS. TALULAH TUTWILER, a mid-sixties 'blue hair' in an old ladies' dress, and the other GARDEN CLUB WOMEN are talking to PREACHER JIM, mid-fifties and slightly overweight, about the upcoming arts and crafts festival.

MS. TALULAH

I sure wish you'd put in a good word with the man upstairs, preacher, and ask Him to make it a little less humid for the crafts festival this weekend.

The Garden Club ladies are fanning themselves and the preacher is wiping his brow with a handkerchief.

PREACHER JIM

Now, Ms. Talulah, you know I'll be glad to put in a good word, but you better be sure to have plenty of your special lemonade on hand, just in case.

At the fire station, the FIREMEN meticulously wash the bright red fire engine.

The barber shop is already full of "regulars," and the BARBER shaves "BIG RED" BARTLEFF, the sheriff.

Suddenly, a car slams on its brakes. TIRES SCREECH and its HORN HONKS.

MAN IN CAR

(shaking his fist)

Watch it, you idiot!

EXT. MAIN STREET SIDEWALK -- CONTINUOUS

Pedestrians move out of the way of some unseen obstacle.

Purses and shopping bags go flying, as WOMEN SHRIEK and jump out of the way.

MAN ON SIDEWALK

(stepping aside)

Get off the sidewalk!

BICYCLE WHEELS

A bicycle's wheels spin furiously.

Playing cards, clipped to the front forks, flap against the spokes and make a loud CLACKING sound.

The bicycle rider's feet come off the pedals, and he heads out into the street.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

In the MAIN INTERSECTION, two cars SCREECH and HONK to a stop as the unseen bicycle rider passes through.

The DRIVERS shake their heads and fists.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- SAME TIME

Nathan and his best friend JEREMY LIMPKINS, 12, an average boy in every way, sit in the front row.

MRS. WIPER, a kind, grandmotherly-looking teacher, is giving instructions to the class.

MRS. WIPER

Okay, class, don't forget that the school of fine arts scholarship competition is in four weeks, so you had best be practicing. As you know...

Nathan leans over to Jeremy.

NATHAN

This is going to be my ticket out of this backwards town. And don't you know that I'd give my left --

The school bell RINGS and drowns out Nathan and the teacher.

The kids pour out of the classroom.

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CONTINUOUS

The CAR HORN continues to blare, and PEOPLE YELL.

Nathan and Jeremy look toward Main Street to see the mysterious bicycle rider.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

CARL, mid-sixties, is tall and gangly and dressed like a hobo.

He deftly wheels through the cars, just misses a bumper and glances off a fender.

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan looks on in complete awe.

NATHAN

Wow! That old man sure can ride a bike!

JEREMY

I guess that's why they call him *the bicycle man*.

NATHAN

The bicycle man? That's what they call him?

JEREMY

Yep, the bicycle man. He's been around here for years.

NATHAN

How do you know that?

JEREMY

I asked old lady Fleckhouse; she said she remembered Carl from when she was in school. I thought to myself, "Yeah, right, they didn't have schools back then."

The two boys laugh.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Carl's eyes pop open, and he waves his hand in the form of a cross in front of his face.

CARL

(sotto)

Mary, Mother of God... Thank you.

(beat)

Damn cars!

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CONTINUOUS

Jeremy starts to walk away. Nathan doesn't move because he is still staring at Carl.

JEREMY

Want to come over to my house and hang out for awhile?

Nathan doesn't respond to Jeremy.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Carl swerves around more cars. His bicycle emerges from behind the cars. It is decorated from stem to stern with all kinds of junk. Homemade streamers, pin wheels, flags, stickers, horns, bells, baskets, playing cards in the spokes, etc. Carl lets out a YELL.

CARL

Woo hoooooo!

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CONTINUOUS

Jeremy turns around and sees Nathan still standing there watching Carl.

JEREMY

Nathan. Nathan! Are you coming?

Nathan slowly turns to look at Jeremy.

NATHAN
Yeah... Yeah! What did you say?

JEREMY
I said, do you want to come over to
my house?

Nathan catches up to Jeremy on the sidewalk.

EXT. MAIN STREET SIDEWALK -- CONTINUOUS

They walk side by side trying hard to balance the stacks of
school books that they are carrying.

NATHAN
I'd really like to, man, but I have
my lessons this afternoon.

JEREMY
Your lessons?
(beat)
Again?

NATHAN
Yes. I have to go to my lessons if
I'm going to get good enough to win
that competition.

JEREMY
What competition are you talking
about?

NATHAN
The Boston School of Fine Arts
scholarship competition.

Jeremy looks confused.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
That Mrs. Wiper was talking about in
class.

JEREMY
(unimpressed)
Oh, that.

NATHAN
Jeremy, don't you know how much I
love music?

JEREMY
Yeah, I guess so.

NATHAN

And how much I want to be a *real* professional musician?

JEREMY

(looking and sounding dejected)

Yeah, yeah.

NATHAN

Hey, man, you're my best friend and all, but you know I'll never fit in around this old town. If I ever want to make it as a musician, I'm gonna have to get out. Speaking of which, I got to get over to Miss Meriweather's now.

JEREMY

Don't you think that Miss Meriweather's place is just a little bit creepy?

Nathan looks a little scared and concerned.

NATHAN

Why do you say that?

JEREMY

I don't know, maybe it's the moss hangin' in the trees or maybe it's her.

NATHAN

Are you trying to spook me out of going to my lesson or something?

JEREMY

No, it's just that she is this unwed, forty-seven year old, garden-clubbing, piano-teaching ex-librarian, and I bet she wants to lock you up in her closet and make you her secret lover.

Nathan relaxes, realizing Jeremy is kidding around.

NATHAN

UGH!! Don't say that, that's gross.

JEREMY

(still dejected)

Yeah, I'm probably way off base, but I'd keep an eye on her, Nathan.

(beat)

I just wish you didn't have to practice so much.

NATHAN

I don't have to; I want to.

Nathan leaves Jeremy and continues down the sidewalk. He starts to hum nervously.

EXT. MISS MERIWEATHER'S HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan stands on the sidewalk and gazes up at an ornate old Victorian house that sits way off the street, nestled in a grove of old oak trees. Spanish moss hangs from the tree limbs.

NATHAN

Okay, Nathan, you can do this. You have to do this. She's not going to lock you in her closet. Just get in and get out.

He takes a deep breath, heads up the walk and goes inside.

INT. MISS MERIWEATHER'S CONSERVATORY -- CONTINUOUS

MISS MERIWEATHER, a middle-aged lady, very prim and proper, dressed and looking quite matronly, is ready and waiting at the piano.

The room is imposingly large and very dimly lit. Shadows conceal whatever might be hiding in the nooks and crannies. The old wooden FLOOR SQUEAKS with every step.

Nathan walks straight to the piano without a word, takes a seat and immediately begins his lesson.

MISS MERIWEATHER

Wait, wait. Before you start, I need to get something from my closet.

Miss Meriweather goes to the closet, and the DOOR CREAKS loudly as she opens it.

Nathan can't see what she is doing, but the noises that come from inside the closet get his imagination going.

He hears chains CLANK and the steely CLICK of knife blades.

MISS MERIWEATHER (CONT'D)

Oh, here's that rope I was looking for.

She turns from the closet and walks toward Nathan at the piano with a wild look in her eyes.

Nathan swallows hard and slides to the end of the piano bench.

Miss Meriweather walks right past him and ties the curtains back to let in a little light.

MISS MERIWEATHER (CONT'D)
That's better. You can begin now,
Nathan.

Nathan lets out a big sigh and starts his lesson.

LATER

Nathan sits at the piano alone and finishes the last note of his lesson.

OLD CUCKOO CLOCK

It reads 5:15.

BACK TO SCENE

Miss Meriweather returns from the kitchen with some milk and cookies to find that Nathan has left without saying goodbye.

MISS MERIWEATHER (CONT'D)
Hmm, now that's odd.

INT. NATHAN'S KITCHEN -- NIGHT

MRS. HAGWOOD, an attractive woman in her early forties, wearing a dress and heels with her apron and oven mitts, pulls a TV dinner out of the oven.

INT. NATHAN'S LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

MR. HAGWOOD, a harsh-looking man in his late forties, wears a shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a loosened tie. He eats his TV dinner off of a TV tray while watching TV.

MR. HAGWOOD
(yells loudly over
the television)
Where's that boy of yours?! He never
eats with the rest of the family.
You know, family time is important.

The front DOOR SLAMS loudly.

Nathan enters the living room, and Mr. Hagwood never looks up from the television.

MR. HAGWOOD (CONT'D)
Young man, you turn around and march
right back out that door and come in
like a civilized person.

Nathan does as he is told, and when he returns, he realizes his father is so caught up in the television show that he doesn't even notice him.

MR. HAGWOOD (CONT'D)
(at the television)
Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...

Nathan's mother passes him and heads for the couch. She is also staring at the television.

MRS. HAGWOOD
Hello, dear, how was piano practice?

Nathan turns toward his mother.

NATHAN
Well, I kinda wanted to talk to you
about that if -

She plops down on the couch, still watching the TV.

MRS. HAGWOOD
That's good, dear. Dinner's in the
kitchen. Get it and come spend some
quality time with your family.

Nathan shakes his head and heads to the kitchen.

INT. NATHAN'S KITCHEN

Nathan looks at a pathetic TV dinner sitting on top of the stove.

NATHAN
Mmmmm. What's for dinner tonight?
Let's see, mystery meat, something
soufflé, ah, wait, I recognize those;
peas and carrots. All in a nice,
per-prepared, compartmentalized
aluminum serving tray.

He stares at it for a moment, lets out a sigh and takes it to the kitchen table.

He sits down alone and begins to eat. The TV blares from the other room and his parents CACKLE away at it.

MRS. HAGWOOD (O.S.)
Nathan, you're missing a really good
one.

Nathan mumbles to himself.

NATHAN
I'd rather go practice.

Nathan continues laboriously chewing and swallowing his food, with a blank stare on his face.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(voice inside his
head)

Of course, it could be worse, I guess.
My dad could be forcing me to practice
football drills until bedtime, like
Jeremy's dad. Yep, that would be
worse.

EXT. WESTERN AUTO -- NIGHT

Carl stands with his bicycle, outside the Western Auto,
watching the same show in the display window. Carl lets out
a big belly LAUGH, and then there is a beat before...

CARL

Damn television! It'll rot your
brain.

He rides off quickly.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Carl WHISTLES as he rides, and seems to have an air of
purpose.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- MOMENTS LATER

Carl stops in the alley behind the clinic.

He pulls some meat scraps from the bag mounted to the rack
of his bicycle.

Kneeling, he feeds the scraps to a small, three-legged dog
in a tiny pen. The other DOGS GROWL.

CARL

All right already, I'm gonna give ya
some. Just hold yer horses.

Carl gives scraps to all the dogs, then goes back to pet the
three-legged one.

CARL (CONT'D)

If no one comes to claim you soon,
Scooter, Mr. Watkins says he'll let
me have you. Wouldn't you like to
come home with me?

The dog wags his tail.

INT. NATHAN'S KITCHEN -- MORNING

Nathan sits at the kitchen table. He is in the same position
with the same look on his face as the night before, eating a
bowl of cereal.

NATHAN

Mmmm. Super Crunch Sugar Bomb cereal. Fortified with sugar, artificial flavors and colors, kept fresh with only the finest chemical preservatives.

The sound of the TELEVISION and the VACUUM CLEANER come on in the other room.

INT. NATHAN'S LIVING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Hagwood vacuums the living room and watches soap operas. The TV's SOUND is turned way up.

Mr. Hagwood downs a cup of coffee and YELLS over the din, as he heads out the front door.

MR. HAGWOOD

Honey? Honey! Could you take my shirts to the cleaners?

MRS. HAGWOOD

Yes, dear. Yes, dear.

Mr. Hagwood yells toward the kitchen.

MR. HAGWOOD

Nathan, be sure to take out the garbage cans!

INT. NATHAN'S KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan sits with a perplexed look on his face and then throws his hands in the air.

NATHAN

Parents. Can't live with 'em. Can't live with 'em.

MRS. HAGWOOD (O.S.)

Nathan, you're going to be late for school.

EXT. TOOMER'S DRUG STORE -- MORNING

Nathan meets Jeremy outside the front door.

JEREMY

Want some bubble gum?

NATHAN

Thanks. My parents have finally agreed to let me get a dog, since my grades have been so good lately.

JEREMY

Really? That's cool. My parents won't let me have a dog. They say that I don't need one, since I have a little brother.

NATHAN

Let's go by Watkins' clinic before class starts. Okay?

JEREMY

(sarcastically)

You sure you don't have any piano lessons this morning?

NATHAN

Hardee, har, har.

Nathan and Jeremy head down the sidewalk toward the vet clinic. They punch and push each other in a playful way as they walk.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- ALLEY -- MOMENTS LATER

The boys pet the dogs through the fence. Nathan stops in front of the little three-legged dog.

NATHAN

(to dog)

Hey, little guy, I think I've come up with a good name for you. I'll call you Tripod. You like that?

The three-legged dog wags his tail and licks Nathan's hand.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(to Jeremy)

I feel so sorry for this little guy.

Then, out of nowhere, a group of kids appear.

LENNY LUGCOWSKI, 13, a menacing kid twice as big as any of the other kids, is surrounded by his group of cronies.

They loom over Nathan and Jeremy.

Lenny looks down at Nathan.

LENNY

Well, why don't you just cry for us, Nathan?

Lenny's cronies all laugh right on cue.

LENNY (CONT'D)

(to cronies)

Hey, boys, look. If it isn't the fruitcake twins.

(to Nathan)

Gimme a quarter, or you get a knuckle sandwich.

Jeremy leans in close to Nathan so Lenny can't hear what he is saying.

JEREMY

Don't do it, Nathan. If you don't stand up to him, he'll bully you around forever.

Nathan looks at Jeremy as if to consider.

LENNY

Hey, twerp, you gonna give me that quarter or what?

NATHAN

A... a...

Lenny grabs Nathan by the collar and picks him up.

Nathan quickly reaches in his pocket and hands Lenny a quarter.

Lenny takes the quarter, pushes Nathan down and kicks the fence right by the dog. The DOG YELPS, and Lenny and his cronies LAUGH as they walk away.

Jeremy helps Nathan up from the ground and dusts his back off.

Jeremy waits until Lenny is out of earshot.

JEREMY

Jerk.

NATHAN

That guy seems to have a knack for showing up to ruin my good times.

JEREMY

I can't believe you let him do that to you.

NATHAN

Look, Jeremy, I wasn't much in the mood for a knuckle sandwich, okay?

JEREMY

Yeah, but you were saving that money for more piano lessons.

Nathan, looking really dejected, bends over to pet the three-legged dog.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- LATER

MRS. MASTRONO, the science teacher, near retirement age and very mean, is addressing someone in the back of the class.

MRS. MASTRONO

Are you some kind of moron, boy? We have been over this and over this. The earth orbits the sun, not the other way around.

It is Lenny, who is trying to sink down in his chair, which isn't working real well, because he is so big.

Mrs. Mastrono now turns to Nathan, who is sitting in the front row.

MRS. MASTRONO (CONT'D)

Now, Nathan, please explain to Mr. Lugowski how the earth orbiting the sun gives the illusion that the sun rises and sets in our sky.

The entire class looks straight at Nathan.

Beads of sweat have already formed on Nathan's forehead, as his eyes dart back and forth.

Mrs. Mastrono stands right in front of Nathan's desk and stares right at him.

MRS. MASTRONO (CONT'D)

Well? You do know the answer to the question, don't you?

(beat)

Nathan? Nathan?

Nathan looks up at her. She leans down, closer to Nathan's face.

Several other students raise their hands and grunt to try and get the teacher's attention.

NATHAN

Uh, wouldn't you like to call on someone else?

Nathan looks around at the other students who are eager to answer the question and embarrass Lenny.

Mrs. Mastrono leans down a little more and gets right in Nathan's face.

MRS. MASTRONO

No, I wouldn't, Nathan, and if you don't answer, you can count on detention.

Nathan swallows hard.

NATHAN

(in a defeated tone)
Detention?

Mrs. Mastrono is so close now that her nose is touching Nathan's nose.

MRS. MASTRONO

Well, we're waiting.

NATHAN

A... a... I don't really know, Mrs. Mastrono.

Mrs. Mastrono stands up straight and looks around smugly.

Nathan lets out a big sigh and drops his head.

Jeremy is sitting right behind Nathan with a look of disbelief on his face. He pokes Nathan in the back and clears his throat.

MRS. MASTRONO

You don't know? Well, you'll just have to learn then, now won't you? You and Mr. Lugcowski shall stay after school every day for two hours until the end of the week.

Nathan shakes his head, and Lenny throws his arms up.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- HALLWAY -- LATER

Nathan walks toward his locker, his head hanging low.

Jeremy walks up behind him, with another boy named Todd.

JEREMY

Hey, man, don't be a chicken liver. You had the perfect chance to put Lenny in his place, but you chickened out. When are you going to stand up to that creep?

TODD

Yeah, Nathan, you're a chicken liver.

JEREMY

Shut up, Todd.

(to Nathan)

I just hate seeing you get shit on
all the time, that's all, man.

Jeremy puts his arm around Nathan and gives him a squeeze.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Don't let that punk get the best of
you.

Jeremy and Todd walk off.

Nathan stands at his locker, fumbling with the lock. Tears
well up in his eyes.

Lenny walks up from behind and SLAPS Nathan on the back really
hard.

LENNY

(sarcastically)

See you in detention, *friend*.

Nathan turns quickly, so Lenny won't see the tears.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- DAY

Carl is riding down Main Street, whistling "Yankee Doodle
Dandy" and greeting everyone he meets.

He makes an abrupt turn and narrowly misses hitting a
pedestrian in the crosswalk.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- DAY

Carl pulls around back to the kennels.

MR. WATKINS feeds the dogs.

MR. WATKINS

Afternoon, Carl.

CARL

Hey, Mr. Watkins. Can I have Scooter
today?

MR. WATKINS

(looking around)

Well, Carl, I guess so. The boy who
was supposed to come get him today,
hasn't shown up. And I told him to
be here an hour ago.

(back to Carl)

Now you know, Carl, you have to feed
him regular and --

CARL

Whaddya think I am, Mr. Watkins, some stupid guy who can't think for himself? Well, you're wrong about that, Mr. Watkins. It's those people out there that don't know stupid from genius.

Carl picks up the dog and hugs him tight. The dog responds by licking Carl all over the face. Carl tries to dodge the dog's affection, but smiles and laughs the whole time.

CARL (CONT'D)

(whispering to the dog)

Come on, Scooter... I'll take good care of you.

Carl puts the dog in the basket on the front of his bicycle and rides off without another word.

Mr. Watkins mumbles under his breath.

MR. WATKINS

Good luck, little dog.

Mr. Watkins goes back to feeding the other dogs.

CAR HORNS blare, TIRES SCREECH, PEOPLE YELL and a bicycle BELL RINGS.

Mr. Watkins scrunches up his face, waiting to hear a crash that never comes.

CARL (O.S.)

Hey, watch it, you crazy drivers!

Mr. Watkins relaxes his face, shakes his head and lets out a sigh.

MR. WATKINS

Good luck.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- DETENTION HALL -- DAY

Nathan and Lenny trade glances. Nathan feels safe since he didn't embarrass Lenny in front of class, but Lenny is still making threatening faces at Nathan.

The teacher blurts out.

TEACHER

Get back to work.

Nathan looks at the clock nervously. It reads 4:17 PM.

NATHAN

(sotto)

I've got to get outta here.

He looks down at the paper on his desk.

PAPER

There are musical notes scrawled all over the paper.

Some of the musical notes look like dog paws.

Classical piano MUSIC plays, as Nathan begins to daydream.

DAYDREAM

The notes are dancing around on the paper, and a little dog chases them about.

There is a LOUD SCREECH, the little dog on the paper looks surprised.

BACK TO SCENE

Nathan pops out of his daze, as the teacher slides her chair back across the floor. She stands up.

TEACHER

Okay, boys, you may leave now.

After a beat, Nathan bolts out of the classroom like a flash of lightning.

The teacher and Lenny are watching Nathan run out of the classroom.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Be here again tomorrow.
And no running!

LENNY

Hey, punk, you better be
glad I didn't...

The teacher looks at Lenny and he stops when he realizes she is staring at him.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- SIDEWALK -- DUSK

CLOCK TOWER

It reads 5:05 PM.

Nathan runs down the sidewalk and glances up at the clock tower.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- ALLEY -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan runs up and frantically looks for the three-legged dog. He is nowhere to be found.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- FRONT DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan runs up to the front of the clinic and pulls on the door. It's locked.

NATHAN

Damn it!

Nathan presses against the glass door to peer inside, but no one is there.

He sinks back, dumbfounded, staring at the "CLOSED" sign in the window.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Tripod.

He kicks the door and begins to sniffle a little.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE -- SAME NIGHT

Carl sits on a park bench, he looks through an old backpack and pulls out a can of Vienna sausages.

The three-legged dog sits at his feet.

CARL

And dinner is served.

Carl opens the can and leans toward the dog.

CARL (CONT'D)

Bon appétit!

The dog gingerly takes half of the sausage, and Carl eats the other half.

CARL (CONT'D)

Mmmm, mmmmm... That's good eats.

The DOG BARKS at Carl and turns his head sideways, like dogs do when they are curious about something.

CARL (CONT'D)

What is it, boy? You want another one?

The DOG begins to GROWL.

Carl turns around to see a flashlight shining in his face.

DEPUTY

Evening, Carl. What are you doin' out here? You know I've told you...

Then the deputy notices the little dog.

He bends down to pet him, and the DOG stops GROWLING and starts wagging his tail.

CARL
This here is my new best friend.
His name is Scooter.

DEPUTY
Where'd ya git him?

CARL
Mr. Watkins give him to me.

DEPUTY
Aw, just an old stray mutt, huh?

CARL
No, he's not, neither. He is a full-
blooded, purebred Shelby County tick
hound.

The Deputy laughs.

DEPUTY
Who told you that?

CARL
Mr. Watkins did. Said he has papers
to back it up.

DEPUTY
Well, I'm sure he does, Carl. But
I'm going to have to ask you and
your little friend to move along.

CARL
(irritated)
All right, all right... don't lose
yer britches, we're going.

Carl collects all his belongings, puts Scooter in the basket and rides off.

DEPUTY
Good night, Carl.

CARL
(muttering under his
breath)
Can't even have a picnic with my
dawg.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- BACK ALLEY -- LATER

Carl rides through the alley behind Nathan's house with the dog in the basket.

MUSIC comes from a window on the second floor.

He stops and looks up.

The second floor is dark, except for one open window. Carl squints his eyes to see if he can see anyone in the room, but he can't.

The music is soft and sad, but very good.

Carl and Scooter trade glances, with looks of curiosity on their faces.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- ATTIC -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan sits at the old piano. His eyes are moist as he effortlessly manipulates the grand old instrument with the precision of a player way beyond his years.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- BACK ALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

Carl feels the sadness coming from the melody, and a single tear rolls down his cheek. He closes his eyes for moment and smiles.

The MUSIC STOPS.

Carl opens his eyes, wipes away the tear and sighs.

He gets back on his bicycle and rides off into the night.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- ATTIC -- SAME MOMENT

Mr. Hagwood comes in as Nathan stops playing.

MR. HAGWOOD

(very harsh)

Your mother tells me you were detained after school today.

NATHAN

I... I... uh --

MR. HAGWOOD

Don't you dare talk back to me, young man, and I don't care what the reason was. You were in trouble at school, and I will not stand for this kind of embarrassment to our family. We have to attend those PTA meetings, you know. If I hear of you getting in trouble one more time -- and I don't care if it is your fault or not -- you will be grounded for a month.

He smirks at the piano.

MR. HAGWOOD (CONT'D)
That means no piano lessons.

Mr. Hagwood turns and leaves the room.

Nathan is left alone. He hangs his head and plunks out a few sad notes.

EXT. SHELBY -- DOWNTOWN -- MORNING

Nathan walks to school by himself. He looks up as he hears CAR HORNS HONKING and TIRES SCREECHING.

Nathan sees Carl ride right through the intersection and up onto the sidewalk on the opposite side of the street.

The three-legged dog is in the bicycle's basket and doesn't seem to be fazed by all the commotion.

He BARKS and smiles from ear to ear, tongue flapping and tail wagging.

Nathan notices that Carl has a small furry animal in the basket on the front of his bicycle.

A look of "Ah ha!" comes across Nathan's face.

NATHAN
(to himself)
Tripod. He has Tripod!

Nathan watches Carl continue down the sidewalk.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Hey... you... on the bicycle! That's
my dog!

EXT. MAIN STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Carl pedals down the sidewalk. Behind him, Nathan yells and waves, but his voice is drowned out by the TRAFFIC NOISE.

Carl is oblivious to Nathan's SCREAMING and continues to ride.

Nathan looks at his watch, which reads 7:39.

Nathan runs through the same intersection. CAR HORNS blare and TIRES SCREECH; somehow, he makes it to the other side without a scrape.

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY

Keeping one eye on Carl, Nathan runs up to a bicycle rack near the front of the school.

He grabs a bicycle from a boy and hops on.

THE BOY

Hey, man, that's my bike.

Nathan rides away.

NATHAN

May I borrow it for a minute?

THE BOY

I guess so. But where are you going?

NATHAN

To catch a dog thief.

THE BOY

A dog thief? School starts in less than twenty minutes!

NATHAN

I'll be right back!

Nathan rides off down the street.

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Carl rides along leisurely, without a care in the world, whistling "DIXIE." He doesn't realize that someone is following him.

Nathan starts to close ground, but is still several hundred yards behind.

He can barely see Carl up ahead, so he begins to pedal faster.

Suddenly, Carl cuts off a side road.

Nathan YELLS, but Carl has disappeared around a curve.

Nathan rounds the curve to find nothing but a fork in the road. He skids his bicycle to a stop and looks at his watch, which reads 7:45.

He looks up at the fork in the road and then turns his bicycle around to head back.

Nathan hears WHISTLING coming from the distance.

Nathan looks up on the hill above him and sees Carl riding along the ridge.

Nathan takes up chase again.

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- RIDGE

Carl looks down and sees Nathan.

Carl cops a sheepish grin and rides on.

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- RIDGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan arrives at the same spot where Carl was just moments before.

He looks down the road ahead, which he can see for a good mile or so, but no Carl.

Then he hears some RUSTLING in the woods to the right of him. He sees a shadow go behind a tree and over the top of the ridge.

Nathan leaves the bike and follows the shadow.

EXT. WOODS -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan comes to the tree and stops. The woods are as quiet as a Sunday morning.

Nathan's eye dart back and forth nervously as he realizes that fear is overcoming him. He swallows hard.

Just then a hand comes down on his shoulder and startles him.

NATHAN

Holy shit!

It's the boy whose bicycle he borrowed.

THE BOY

Man, I thought you were stealin' my bike fer good.

The boy is breathing heavily and stops to catch his breath.

THE BOY (CONT'D)

I had to borrow my friend's bike so I could catch you.

Nathan barely acknowledges the boy. Instead, he looks around anxiously.

THE BOY (CONT'D)

Hey, we gotta git back to school. It's probably done started.

Nathan looks around one last time and then follows the boy back to the road.

Carl watches from behind a tree as the boys get on their bikes and head back to town.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- LATER

Mrs. Mastrono is at the blackboard teaching a lesson.

This time, Nathan and Jeremy sit in the back of the class, in order to avoid the wrath of Mrs. Mastrono. They are WHISPERING back and forth, trying not to get caught.

JEREMY

What were you after this morning?

NATHAN

That was Carl on that bicycle, and he had Tripod in his basket.

JEREMY

Really?

NATHAN

Yes, really. Tripod was supposed to be mine.

JEREMY

I know that. What happened?

NATHAN

I was late getting to the vet clinic yesterday because of detention, and Mr. Watkins gave Tripod to that bum, and I want him back.

JEREMY

You just missed your chance. That dog is rightfully his now.

NATHAN

Well, I'm going back up there after school to find that... that... hobo and tell him that I want my dog back.

Mrs. Mastrono stops her lesson, and the entire class turns around to look at Nathan.

MRS. MASTRONO

Nathan, if you don't mind, I'm trying to teach a lesson up here. You're already in enough trouble as is, so you better watch out. If you give me any more trouble, young man, I'm going to call your parents. Do you understand me?

NATHAN

(humbly)

Yes, ma'am.

The BELL RINGS just in time to save Nathan from more tongue lashing.

Nathan slides out of the class.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan stops as he passes a window in the hallway.

He looks out to see Carl riding down the street with the three-legged dog in his basket.

Nathan starts to run down the hall, watching Carl through the windows as he goes.

Nathan turns a blind corner to go out the front door, but when he looks around, Carl is nowhere in sight.

NATHAN

Aw, man.

He turns and heads back to his locker.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- LATER

Nathan sits in his desk, his hands propping his head up. He stares at the clock on the wall. We hear the TEACHER'S VOICE droning in the background... Blah, blah, blah.

CLOCK ON THE WALL

It reads 2:59.

Nathan raises one eyebrow, but barely changes expressions.

He stares at the clock, but the hands don't move.

Nathan's eyebrows raise a little higher.

The clock doesn't move.

Nathan leans toward the clock as if he is trying to will the arms on the clock to move.

The clock doesn't move.

Nathan's mouth drops open. He can't believe this minute is lasting so long.

He looks at the teacher who is still droning on and on.

NATHAN'S IMAGINATION

The teacher's gestures and voice drag in SLOW MOTION.

Nathan looks back at the clock, and he hears an exaggerated SQUEAKING noise as the minute hand begins to move ever so slowly.

Nathan throws his hands up in the air in a show of disgust and speaks out loud.

NATHAN

Damn it!

BACK TO SCENE

The CLOCK TICKS to 3 o'clock, and the school BELL RINGS.

Nathan darts out of the class before the teacher can even say anything.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan passes Lenny in the hall. Lenny turns to watch Nathan run down and around the corner.

LENNY

Hey, twerp, detention's this way!

Lenny is pointing in the opposite direction.

Nathan disappears around the corner, and Lenny just stands there with a perplexed look on his face.

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan catches Jeremy walking out the front door.

NATHAN

(breathing heavily)

Jeremy, can I borrow your bicycle?
I'll bring it right back. Meet me
at Toomer's in fifteen, and I'll buy
you a float.

JEREMY

Well --

NATHAN

Thanks, man. I'll see you in a
minute.

JEREMY

Be careful, Nathan. That guy might
be a little crazy.

Nathan zooms off.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Hey, Nathan, don't you have detention
this afternoon?!

Nathan doesn't respond.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Oh, well, I guess he got out of it.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- DETENTION HALL -- LATER

Mrs. Mastrono paces the front of the classroom, obviously agitated that a student would dare miss detention.

Lenny gazes at the empty chair beside him with a look of amazement.

Mrs. Mastrono checks her watch once again.

MRS. MASTRONO
What time do you have, Lenny?

LENNY
I have 3:15, Mrs. Mastrono.

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- SAME TIME

Nathan stops at the same place near the ridge where he had been earlier that morning. He dismounts his bicycle and slowly heads for the top of the ridge.

As he walks up the hill, all is quiet, except for the CHIRPING of a strange BIRD.

Nathan is scared, but determined, and he moves on.

EXT. WOODS -- CARL'S LEAN-TO -- SAME TIME

Carl sits in a lean-to in the middle of the woods, WHISTLING and tinkering with his bicycle.

He hears FOOTSTEPS CRUNCHING on the leaves.

EXT. WOODS -- SAME TIME

Nathan CRUNCHES on leaves. He stops, trying not to make any more noise. The BIRD SOUNDS stop, too.

Nathan begins to look really scared.

He is breathing heavily and starts to panic. He looks back and forth, quickly, one way and then the other.

He thinks he sees shadows behind every tree.

Nathan turns quickly to run away and runs SMACK into a tree and falls backwards to the ground.

Lying on the ground, he shakes his head and opens his eyes.

He looks up to see a shadowy figure standing over him. As his eyes adjust to the light, he notices that the figure is Carl.

There is a pregnant pause, and then Carl extends his hand to help Nathan up.

CARL

Boy, you better quit tusslin' with these pine trees, they'll whip ya every time.

He helps Nathan to his feet.

CARL (CONT'D)

What's your name, son?

Nathan stands there for a moment in a state of shock.

CARL (CONT'D)

I said, what's your name?

Nathan is still a little shaken.

NATHAN

Nathan. Nathan Hagwood, sir.

CARL

Well, Nathan Hagwood, whaddya want with me? I mean, why'd ya come all the way up here... twice?

Nathan starts talking fast, running his words together.

NATHAN

Well, you see, you have Tripod. And I was supposed to get him. That is, Mr. Watkins promised me that I could have him. But the day I was to get him, I got detention at school and --

CARL

Slow down, son. Take a deep breath. You got detention and what?

Nathan takes a deep breath and continues talking more slowly.

NATHAN

I got detention at school, and I had to stay late.

CARL

Okay, and...

NATHAN

By the time I got to the clinic, it was closed. I guess you beat me to the punch, and Mr. Watkins gave Tripod to you.

CARL

So you came up here to see if I would give him to you. Is that it?

NATHAN
 (tentatively)
 Uh huh, that's what I was thinking.

CARL
 Well, Nathan, that's a real sad story
 and everything, but you don't think
 I should give up my new best friend
 just because you got in trouble in
 school, do you?

Nathan starts talking fast again.

NATHAN
 It wasn't my fault. If I answered
 the question, it would've embarrassed
 Lenny Lugowski, and then he would
 have given me a knuckle sandwich for
 sure, and I really wasn't that hungry.

Carl laughs.

CARL
 Slow down, slow down. I'm not sure
 I follow you.

Nathan lets out a sigh and starts again, slowly.

NATHAN
 My teacher, Mrs. Mastrono, she was
 going to make me answer a question
 that Lenny couldn't. If I answered
 it correctly... smack!

Nathan punches his fist into his hand.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 Knuckle sammy. If I don't answer,
 Mrs. Mastrono gives me detention.

Nathan looks at his watch.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 Detention! Holy smoke, I'm late for
 detention.

Nathan turns and starts to run back to his bicycle.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
 I have to get back, or I'm going to
 be in real trouble.

Carl yells to Nathan as he watches him run to his bicycle.

CARL
Watch out for the trees!

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- DETENTION HALL -- LATER

Nathan CRASHES into the classroom, books and papers flying, as he stumbles into a desk.

Lenny and Mrs. Mastrono look up at Nathan.

MRS. MASTRONO
(indignantly)
Where have you been, Nathan Hagwood?

NATHAN
(stuttering)
I... I um...

MRS. MASTRONO
Never mind. I don't want to know.
You are in serious trouble.

Mrs. Mastrono has a puzzled look on her face. She looks around and talks to herself.

MRS. MASTRONO (CONT'D)
Skipping detention? It's never been
done before.

Nathan drops his head down in shame.

Lenny stares at Nathan in disbelief.

LENNY
That's pretty cool for a twerp.

Mrs. Mastrono regains her composure and speaks to Nathan.

MRS. MASTRONO
You will report to the principal's
office bright and early tomorrow
morning. Mr. Strappenflogger will
know what to do with you. Until
then, SIT DOWN!

Nathan dives into his seat beside Lenny and slides down into the desk.

Lenny just stares at him.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- ATTIC -- NIGHT

Nathan plays the piano without much passion.

Mr. Hagwood appears in the doorway behind him.

MR. HAGWOOD
How was school today, Nathan? You
didn't get in any more trouble, did
you?

Nathan doesn't turn around.

NATHAN
No, I didn't. Sir.

MR. HAGWOOD
Good, because you know what happens
if you do, don't you?

NATHAN
Yes, sir.

MR. HAGWOOD
All right. I'm glad you understand.

He turns to leave, but stops short.

MR. HAGWOOD (CONT'D)
Oh, I almost forgot why I came up
here. Could you keep it down? Your
mother and I are trying to watch a
little television. Thanks.

Mr. Hagwood exits. Nathan stands and walks over to the open window. He looks up at the stars for a moment and then back down at the alley.

He sees Carl standing in the alley with his bicycle and the three-legged dog; they are looking up at him.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- ALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan leans out the window.

NATHAN
Hey, what are you doing?

CARL
I followed you home. We never
finished our conversation, you know.
Besides, you followed me. Why can't
I follow you for a change?

NATHAN
Sorry I left in such a hurry, but I
had to get back to detention.

CARL
It's late. Maybe I should come back
another time.

NATHAN
No, no... I'm coming down.

CARL
Isn't it your bedtime? What about
your parents?

NATHAN

No, it's fine. My parents are watching a television show; they won't even know I'm gone until the show's over. Wait right there; I'm coming down.

Nathan crawls out of the window onto the roof and shimmies down a tree.

Nathan walks over to Carl and the dog.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm glad you came by. You know, I kind of like you. I thought you were just a bum or something, but you're really kinda nice.

CARL

Thank ya kindly; I'll take that as a compliment. In fact, I'll take anything as a compliment, cuz they're good for the soul.

He looks up at the attic window.

CARL (CONT'D)

So, you're the piano player.

NATHAN

(perking up)

Yeah. Did you hear me?

CARL

Sure I did. I stop by this alley quite a bit. I just didn't know it was someone as young as you playing that piano. You play purdy darn good fer a youngster.

Carl holds the dog and pets him.

Nathan watches intently.

NATHAN

Thanks. I don't get as much practice as I'd like to, but I love to play, even if it is just one note.

CARL

Well, with that kind of love for your instrument, you should be great one day.

NATHAN

I've dreamed of playing with the best symphony in America someday. But I don't think I'll ever get that chance.

CARL

(indignantly)

And why not?

NATHAN

Well, my parents think my piano playing is stupid. They think I should study business or be a football player. Look at me. A football player?

Nathan laughs.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I want to go to The School of Fine Arts in Boston. I had a chance, but I think I've blown it.

CARL

What do you mean?

NATHAN

I mean, there is this competition at school, and the winner gets a scholarship to The School of Fine Arts. Each year, the Boston Symphony picks the top student from the school to be a guest player at a special concert.

CARL

That all sounds good.

NATHAN

But I've gotten in a little trouble at school. Okay, a lot of trouble.

CARL

Just watch your step.

NATHAN

I try. But like today, I just forgot about detention because I wanted to get Tripod so badly.

CARL

Tripod? You mean Scooter?

Carl hands the dog to Nathan, and Nathan's face lights up with a big grin.

NATHAN
I call him Tripod.

CARL
I tell you what, Nathan: you win that competition, and we'll see about Scooter... er, I mean Tripod, coming to live with you.

NATHAN
(very excited)
Really? You mean it?

CARL
Yes, but you'd have to take good care of him and feed him regular and all.

NATHAN
Yeah, yeah... I know, I know. You really mean it?

He looks down at the dog.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Aw, that would be great.

Carl tries his best to look sincere.

CARL
Um hmm.

Nathan stutters with excitement.

NATHAN
We'd come visit you, and you could come hear me play piano anytime you'd like.

Carl smiles.

CARL
Sounds good to me.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- SIDEWALK -- MORNING

Nathan walks to school, smiling and lost in thought.

He comes upon a group of boys. It's Lenny and his cronies.

Lenny talks to Nathan in a nasty tone of voice.

LENNY
Hey, Nathan, don't forget you have a little visit with the principal this morning. I wouldn't try to skip that, if I were you.

Nathan stands his ground.

NATHAN

Well, you aren't me, Lenny. And you never will be.

Lenny's cronies can't help themselves and let out some laughter. Lenny shoots them a menacing look and then grabs Nathan and gets right in his face.

LENNY

Look here, you little shit. I ought to pulverize you right here and now, but then I wouldn't get to see what happens to you in Strappenflogger's office today, now would I?

Nathan doesn't say a word. Lenny shoves him toward the school.

LENNY (CONT'D)

See you in detention... if you make it that far. Ha, ha, ha!

Once again, Nathan walks with his head down, completely dejected.

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- FRONT ENTRANCE -- MOMENTS LATER

He looks at the front door and sees the principal standing near the entrance. Nathan turns and walks around to the back door in order to avoid more trouble.

EXT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- BACK DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

As Nathan comes around the corner, he sees Carl and the dog waiting by the door.

CARL

Good mornin', young fella. I just wanted to know... well, actually, Tripod wanted to know if you would like to come visit this afternoon after school?

Nathan hangs his head.

Carl puts his hand on Nathan's shoulder.

CARL (CONT'D)

What's the problem, little buddy?
Can I help?

NATHAN

No, I don't think so. I'm in trouble, and I think I'm going to be in more trouble before the day is over.

CARL
Whaddy mean?

NATHAN
You know the trouble I was telling you about before? Well, I have to go see the principal this morning, and I'm really scared.

CARL
What are you scared of? It's just the prince-i-pal. He's a prince and he's your pal.

NATHAN
Not this principal. His name is Mr. Strappenflogger, and I've heard he's got a paddle in his office this big.

He motions with his hands.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
And the paddle has steel spikes on it. I hear some kids have been maimed so severely that they had to be put in a special home for severely maimed children.

CARL
Come on now, Nathan. That just sounds like some silly urban legend. Well, maybe you can come see me tomorrow since it's Saturday.

NATHAN
I'd like that, Carl, but who knows if I'll even survive my visit with Strappenflogger.

Nathan looks off and pauses for a moment.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Well, Carl, I have to go. I'll see you soon, I hope.

CARL
Keep your chin up, boy. You'll make it through.

Nathan goes into the school as Carl rides off.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- HALLWAY -- MOMENTS LATER

The school BELL RINGS, and all the kids go into their classrooms.

Nathan stands alone in a long empty hallway.

He is at his locker, exchanging books. Nathan closes his eyes and pauses for a moment.

NATHAN'S IMAGINATION

Some very moody MUSIC begins to play, ala Yella's "*Stalakdrama*."

The hallway is completely empty now, except for Nathan. It is very quiet and dark, almost surreal. It is very strange for a school to be this quiet.

Nathan's BREATHING is pronounced, his HEARTBEAT is audible and he hears the sound of WATER DRIPPING.

He looks very anxious and increasingly panicked.

Suddenly, a hand comes down on Nathan's shoulder, scaring him so badly that he slams his locker door with a BANG! It's Mrs. Mastrono.

MRS. MASTRONO

Don't forget, Nathan, Mr. Strappenflogger wants to see you now.

NATHAN

How could I forget?

MRS. MASTRONO

Watch it, smarty britches.

Nathan starts walking away slowly.

MRS. MASTRONO (CONT'D)

I wouldn't suggest that you be late.
Ha, ha, ha!

Mrs. Mastrono turns and walks away in the opposite direction, her LAUGH echoing and trailing off in the distance.

The hallway is very dark, with harsh rays of sun beaming in at an angle, through windows, making pools of light on the hallway floor.

The MUSIC continues to play.

Nathan looks very scared, and sweat is forming on his brow.

Nathan walks slowly down the long corridor and approaches the office door. He extends his hand tentatively and turns the doorknob. The DOOR makes an awful CREAK as it opens.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

The office is completely empty; not a soul in sight.

As Nathan moves into the room, he sees the silhouette of Mr. Strappenflogger behind the brightly illuminated smoked-glass door of the principal's office.

Large block letters spell "PRINCIPAL" across the door.

Nathan sits on the cold vinyl couch. The springs in the couch are worn out, and Nathan drops straight to the metal bottom.

MOMENTS LATER

Nathan watches Mr. Strappenflogger interrogate another student, silhouetted behind the smoked glass in the door.

Nathan sees Mr. Strappenflogger pull out "the paddle." It is huge, with long spikes sticking out of it, like some medieval torture device.

In silhouette, Strappenflogger raises the paddle high, and the student cowers in fear. The MUSIC reaches a crescendo, and the student screams as the paddle starts to come down.

Nathan covers his eyes. He hears SMACK, BOOM, SMACK and then silence.

Nathan looks up, but doesn't see any silhouettes. He darts his head around the room, looking in the shadows.

Suddenly, the door swings open with a BANG. Strappenflogger's mountainous frame fills the doorway.

The paddle hangs at his side. He is bathed in a 'monster light.'

Nathan SCREAMS.

For a split second, the principal looks like a hairy monster.

Nathan SCREAMS again and again, until...

The MUSIC stops and the CLICK of a DOOR HANDLE turning snaps Nathan back to reality.

BACK TO SCENE

Nathan looks around. There are now other people in the office, as the real MR. STRAPPENFLOGGER appears in the door. He is actually short in stature and very friendly-looking.

He ushers a student out of his office.

MR. STRAPPENFLOGGER

(pleasantly)

Now remember what I said, and try your best to do a good job.

Mr. Strappenflogger looks over at Nathan sitting on the couch. Nathan is covered in sweat.

MR.STRAPPENFLOGGER
Okay, Nathan, you can come in now.

He turns and re-enters his office.

Nathan stands and takes a step toward the office door, but pauses a beat before going in.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- STRAPPENFLOGGER OFFICE --
CONTINUOUS

Nathan looks around the office. No implements of torture, no skeletons hanging on the wall; just a normal office.

MR.STRAPPENFLOGGER
Nathan, I've looked at your records, and let's just say that I'm very surprised to have you in here. This is your first time, correct?

Nathan tries to answer, but his throat is so dry he can't speak.

MR.STRAPPENFLOGGER (CONT'D)
You are normally a good student. In fact, one of our brightest. What is going on that is making you do these foolish things, Nathan?

Mr. Strappenflogger looks at Nathan with a puzzled look. Nathan can't speak.

MR.STRAPPENFLOGGER (CONT'D)
(irritated)
Well, if you're not going to answer me, then...

He reaches for his phone.

MR.STRAPPENFLOGGER (CONT'D)
...we'll just have to have your parents down here for a little conference.

Nathan tries to speak again, but nothing comes out. He hangs his head.

INT. MR. HAGWOOD'S CAR -- LATER -- SAME DAY

Mr. Hagwood drives, and Nathan slumps down in the passenger seat, looking out the window.

MR. HAGWOOD

I can't believe you are doing this to our family. What a disgrace. Well, I warned you, didn't I?

NATHAN

Yes, sir.

MR. HAGWOOD

So first off, I talked to Mr. Dennismont and arranged for you to work at the hardware store after school. You need to learn about hard work and responsibility.

NATHAN

But, Dad, I have piano lessons after school, and the competition is in two weeks. I don't stand a chance if I can't practice.

MR. HAGWOOD

Well, that's just too bad now, isn't it? And when you get home from the hardware store, you will go straight to your room.

NATHAN

May I practice on the piano in the attic?

MR. HAGWOOD

We gave that away to the Salvation Army today. It's obvious that all these pie-in-the-sky dreams of playing with some symphony are getting in the way of your school work. You will graduate and go to State College, just like I did.

NATHAN

But --

MR. HAGWOOD

Don't "but" me, young man. You will do as you are told.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- BACK ALLEY -- NIGHT

Carl sits on his bicycle in the alley behind Nathan's house, looking up at the dark attic window.

Carl looks back at the three-legged dog in his basket.

CARL
Looks as if we won't get a performance
tonight. I hope he isn't in too
much trouble.

Carl and the dog ride away.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- SIDEWALK -- DAY

Nathan once again walks alone. As Nathan passes a narrow
alley, he hears a voice from the alley.

CARL
Psssst! Hey, Nathan, where ya goin'?

Nathan turns to see Carl hiding in the alley.

NATHAN
(upbeat)
Hey, Carl!
(down beat)
I'm goin' to work.

CARL
Goin' to work?

NATHAN
Yeah. I got in some real bad trouble
yesterday. The principal called my
dad, and my dad grounded me.

CARL
That stinks.

NATHAN
I know. I won't be able to practice
for the competition, so I guess I
won't win that scholarship.

They both look off into space for a moment.

CARL
So what are you gonna do?

NATHAN
I don't know. I have to work right
after school, so I can't make my
lessons, and Dad gave our old piano
to the Salvation Army. That leaves
no time and no place to practice.

Nathan looks down the street.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Well, Carl, I have to go to work
now. See ya later.

Carl watches sadly as Nathan sulks off.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- LATER

Nathan wears an apron and sweeps the floor. MR. DENNISMONT, mid-fifties, a kind-looking man with slightly gray hair, helps a customer.

Outside the window, Carl rides up. He gets off his bicycle, peers in the window, then he comes inside.

The BELL over the door DINGS loudly. Everyone in the store, except Nathan, looks up from what they are doing. When they see that it is Carl, they immediately go back to what they were doing.

Carl moseys over to where Nathan is sweeping, admiring merchandise along the way. He stops and peeks through a shelf at Nathan.

CARL

Hey.

Nathan jumps.

NATHAN

Hey, Carl. I didn't see you come in.

CARL

I was thinking about your little problem, and I might be able to help you... if you really want to win that competition.

Nathan heads for the stock room in the back, and Carl follows.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan opens up some cardboard boxes full of supplies.

NATHAN

Oh, really, what can you do for me?

Nathan goes about his work of straightening up the stock room.

CARL

Well, I don't have it all ironed out yet, but come see me when you get off work, and we'll talk about it.

NATHAN

Come on, Carl... Can't you tell me a little bit?

MR. DENNISMONT (O.S.)
Nathan? How's that stock room coming?

CARL
I'll tell you more later. It's
something I've been waiting for for
a long time.

Carl turns and walks out, WHISTLING a catchy tune. He walks right past Mr. Dennismont, who glares at him.

Nathan has a puzzled look on his face as he watches Carl exit the store.

EXT. WOODS -- CARL'S LEAN-TO -- LATER

Nathan walks up to Carl's shack. It is a patchwork of different found materials. It barely looks waterproof.

Carl pops up right behind Nathan.

CARL
Nathan, my boy, you made it!

Nathan jumps sky high.

NATHAN
Dang it, Carl! Stop scaring me to
death!

CARL
Never mind that. We must get started.
Follow me.

Carl turns and walks toward a tall row of scraggly hedges.

NATHAN
Where are we going? What's the plan?

Carl continues, pushing his way through the hedge row.

Once on the other side, Nathan can't believe his eyes.

EXT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- CONTINUOUS

They are standing in front of a huge old mansion. The mansion is overgrown with vines, shutters falling off, windows broken out and the vegetation in the yard is out of control -- obviously neglected for many years.

NATHAN
I've heard about this place.

CARL

My great-grandfather built it in the early 1800s. It has been passed down through generations. And when my parents died, it was left to me.

NATHAN

Why don't you live in it?

CARL

(snapping)

I didn't earn it, so I don't deserve it.

Carl continues toward the front entrance of the mansion, and Nathan follows him in.

INT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- CONTINUOUS

Dark and cold, with bright shafts of light pooling all around, the rooms are piled high with boxes of all shapes and sizes. It looks like a warehouse with all kinds of different goods.

Carl makes his way through, walking with purpose.

Nathan follows slowly. He stops to poke through some boxes and notices yards and yards of rope, a box of hammers from the hardware store, sets of linens and a multitude of things.

NATHAN

Where did you get all this stuff?

Carl stops and comes back to where Nathan is standing.

CARL

I bought it from neighboring towns, where no one would know me.

Carl looks at the boxes.

CARL (CONT'D)

You never know when you might run out of something.

NATHAN

All this stuff had to cost a fortune.

CARL

My family was very rich. I don't mind spending their money to help the local economy.

INT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- BALLROOM

The ballroom is virtually empty, except for a piece of furniture sitting in the corner. As Nathan moves closer, he realize that it's a piano.

His eyes light up.

NATHAN

Wow! Who in your family played the piano?

Nathan lightly traces the sleek lines of the piano with his fingertips.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Who in your family played the piano?

Carl grows uncomfortable.

CARL

My... mother... did.

Nathan turns and looks at Carl.

NATHAN

Your mother?

CARL

Yes, my mother.

Carl turns away to hide an obvious look of guilt on his face.

CARL (CONT'D)

You're welcome to use this piano to practice. That was my idea.

NATHAN

That would be great, Carl, but I don't know when I'd be able to. I have to study every afternoon after school, and then I go in to start cleaning up the hardware store right before it closes at five -- and I'm there until eight.

CARL

I'll think of something. Go home and get some rest, and we'll talk about it tomorrow.

NATHAN

Thanks for thinking of me, Carl, but I don't see how we can make this work.

Nathan walks out of the room.

Carl gently touches the keys on the piano.

CARL

Maybe this is my chance.

Carl looks at his hands and rubs the fingers on one hand, with the other hand.

INT. CHURCH -- SANCTUARY -- SUNDAY MORNING

Nathan sits with his parents near the front of the church.

The pews are made of hardwood, so the people have to fidget to make themselves comfortable.

Beautiful stained-glass windows filter in the early morning sunlight, splashing color all around the sanctuary.

The old blue-haired ladies fan themselves constantly, trying to keep themselves from melting.

Preacher Jim wipes his brow with a handkerchief he keeps in his jacket pocket. He stands behind the podium as if conducting an orchestra, waving his Bible around for effect.

He is already well into his sermon.

PREACHER JIM

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

He pulls some coins out of his pocket and puts them into a little cloth sack.

PREACHER JIM (CONT'D)

And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to each according to his ability; and straightway took his journey.

The noddors are all in unison, and the deacons are right on cue.

DEACONS

Amen. Amen!

PREACHER JIM

He that had received five talents went and traded with them and made five more. And likewise, the one that received two did the same. But he that had received one, went and buried it in the earth.

DEACONS

Amen, brother.

PREACHER JIM

After a long time, the lord of those servants returned and reckoned with them. He that had received five talents came and brought five more talents, saying, Lord, thou deliverest unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

The preacher takes the change out of one of the bags and drops the coins one by one, so the congregation can hear the exact amount he is dropping into a can.

The congregation responds with scattered "amens" and "praise the lords."

PREACHER JIM (CONT'D)

He that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliverest unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two talents besides them. His lord said unto him, well done: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

The preacher does the same trick with the four coins and gets more response from the congregation.

Then the preacher pauses and lets the congregation settle down a bit.

PREACHER JIM (CONT'D)

(speaking in a low,
controlled tone)

The one who had the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not scattered seed: and I was afraid. I hid the one talent in the earth: here is that which is thine.

The preacher takes the last little cloth sack, holds it high over the can and turns it up-side down. One coin falls from the sack and plunks in the can.

The congregation shifts in their pews and mumbles among themselves.

PREACHER JIM (CONT'D)
 (starting low and
 gaining volume)
 His lord answered and said unto him,
 Thou wicked and slothful servant!

He pounds his bible on the podium with a loud THUMP. The crowd responds quickly to this line, and the preacher continues.

PREACHER JIM (CONT'D)
 Thou knewest that I reap where I
 sowed not: therefore you should have
 invested my money, and then I would
 have received my money with interest!

DEACONS
Amen! Amen!

PREACHER JIM
 I will take therefore the talent,
 and give it unto him which hath ten
 talents.

The preacher reaches in the can and pulls out a handful of COINS and drops them right back in the can, creating quite a RACKET.

PREACHER JIM (CONT'D)
 For unto every one that hath shall
 be given, and he shall have abundance:
 but from him that hath not shall be
 taken away even that which he hath.

Nathan looks over at his friend Jeremy in the next pew, and they both have a look of utter confusion on their faces.

The rest of the congregation nod their heads as if they understand exactly what has been said. Even Nathan's father calls out.

MR. HAGWOOD
Amen! Amen.

The preacher walks over to a big gold plate near the front that has a sign on it that says, "OFFERINGS," and he dumps all the coins from the can into the plate.

PREACHER JIM
 (again he lowers his
 tone for dramatic
 effect)
 And cast ye unprofitable servant
 into outer darkness: where there
 shall be weeping and gnashing of
 teeth. Amen.

The preacher looks at the choir, and they start into a loud and STIRRING HYMN.

EXT. CHURCH -- LATER

The congregation files out past the preacher.

As Nathan and his parents exit, he spots Carl and the three-legged dog across the street.

NATHAN

I'll catch up with you at the car.

Nathan doesn't even wait for the answer and takes off across the street.

MR. HAGWOOD

All right, but I want to be home by one! Don't make me miss my football game!

EXT. SHELBY -- MAIN STREET -- SIDEWALK -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan runs up to Carl, who is peering in the window of the five and dime store.

NATHAN

Hey, Carl!

Carl points at some miscellaneous merchandise in the window.

CARL

Whoa, boy, I sure would love to have some of those.

Nathan pets the dog as Carl turns back around to face him.

CARL (CONT'D)

You ready to do some practicing?

NATHAN

Yeah. I'll meet you at the mansion. I have to go home and change clothes first.

EXT. SHELBY -- CHURCH -- SAME MOMENT

Mr. Hagwood watches Nathan talk to Carl with a look of disapproval.

MR. HAGWOOD

What is he doing talking to that bum?

MRS. HAGWOOD

I don't know dear. He probably just likes his dog.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- GARAGE -- LATER

As Nathan is getting his bicycle out of the garage, Mr. Hagwood appears out of nowhere, and Nathan jumps.

MR. HAGWOOD
Where ya goin', Nathan?

NATHAN
Uh, um, I'm... uh... going to ride over to Jeremy's house.

MR. HAGWOOD
Don't be late. Tomorrow's a school day, you know.

NATHAN
Yes, sir.

Nathan starts to wheel past, but Mr. Hagwood grabs his arm kind of sternly.

MR. HAGWOOD
And by the way, what were you doing talking to that derelict, old man Zealotenmuser?

NATHAN
I... I was just petting his dog... that's all.

MR. HAGWOOD
Well, I don't want you hanging around him. He is a worthless, do-nothing bum. And considering the direction you've been heading lately, you definitely don't need a role model like that.

Mr. Hagwood walks away with his chest all puffed out, feeling like the king of his domicile.

Nathan just shakes his head and rides off quickly.

INT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- LATER

Nathan wanders into the piano room.

NATHAN
Carl! Carl! Are you here?

No answer.

Nathan pulls some sheet music from his knapsack, sits at the piano and begins to play.

Carl appears in the doorway behind Nathan and listens quietly.

As Nathan finishes the song, a sad smile comes across Carl's face.

The dog runs past Carl and over to Nathan at the piano.

Nathan turns around to see Carl standing there.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Hey. Where were you?

Carl has a cardboard box and moves over to Nathan.

CARL

I was up in the attic getting some things. I found these lessons my mother used to practice. Maybe they can help you.

He sits the box on the floor and hands Nathan some sheets of music.

NATHAN

Thanks.

SHEET MUSIC

Nathan glances down at the sheets and a puzzled look crosses his face.

CARL

I think I have a plan to get you time to practice.

NATHAN

I'm all ears.

Carl sits beside him and leans in.

CARL

Okay, here is what we're going to do...

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- NIGHT

Mr. Dennismont flips the sign on the front door to "CLOSED".

MR. DENNISMONT

Make sure the doors are locked when you leave, and put the new shipment of rope on the second shelf.

Nathan is already working.

NATHAN

Yes, sir. Good night, Mr. Dennismont.

MR. DENNISMONT

Good night, Nathan.

Mr. Dennismont exits and heads off down the sidewalk.

Nathan steps closer to the window and follows him with his eyes. Once he is out of sight, Nathan turns and runs to the back door in the stock room.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan leans close to the door.

NATHAN

Carl, you there?

CARL (O.S.)

Yep! I'm here.

Nathan unlocks the door and lets Carl in.

NATHAN

(barking orders)

Mr. Dennismont wants this shipment of rope to go on the third... second... no, no... third shelf.

Nodding his head, Carl moves over to the boxes of rope and picks them up.

CARL

Nice rope. I wonder how much he wants for it.

NATHAN

(agitated)

Carl? Are you sure this is going to work?

Carl stops fiddling with the rope and looks at Nathan.

CARL

Trust me...

(his words hang out there for a beat)

...it'll go off without a hitch. Besides, you got a better idea?

NATHAN

No.

CARL

Then just do as I say. The gas lanterns are lit so you can see, and I left some milk and cookies for you.

Nathan shoots Carl a puzzled look.

NATHAN

Uh, okay, Carl... I'll be back by
7:45.

(beat)

Are you sure?

Carl ushers Nathan out the door.

CARL

Shoo, shoo, shoo... don't worry.
Now go practice, practice, practice.

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan rides slowly down the dark, empty road. He looks around nervously.

A flashlight taped to his handlebars only illuminates a small area directly in front of him.

Sounds of the night are exaggerated in Nathan's imagination.

An OWL HOOTS and Nathan turns quickly toward the noise.

He rides on slowly.

A strange BIRD SCREECHES and Nathan turns in the other direction to see what it is.

Then he catches a glimpse of something in the darkness on the side of the road. It moves quickly behind the bushes.

Nathan watches that side of the road and picks up speed.

Suddenly, a possum crosses the road in front of him and stops. Nathan jams on his brakes. The possum turns toward him and lets out a hair-raising HISS. Nathan SCREAMS.

NATHAN

What the hell are you doing?

The possum just stares at the light with his big pink eyes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Go on. Get out of the road you stupid
varmint.

The possum waddles across the road and Nathan continues.

EXT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan parks his bicycle out front and looks at the run down house. The moon peeks through the trees. The gas lanterns flicker from inside.

Nathan takes the flashlight and shines it at the front door. Spider webs hang all around.

NATHAN

I don't know if I can do this.

A COYOTE HOWLS in the distance.

Nathan retreats to his bicycle.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm outta here.

A DOG BARKS from inside the house and then nudges his way out the front door. It's the little three-legged dog.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Hey Tripod, am I glad to see you.

Nathan and Tripod have a little reunion.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

You'll protect me, won't you boy?

The DOG BARKS again. They go inside.

INT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- LATER

Nathan plays the piano as the little dog watches. Nathan is totally engrossed in the MUSIC.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- DETENTION HALL -- DAY

Nathan sits at his desk, doodling in his notebook, waiting for the bell to ring.

As the school BELL RINGS, Nathan jumps up and runs out of the room.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- MOMENTS LATER

The BELL on the door JINGLES loudly, and all the customers turn to look as Nathan bolts in the front door

NATHAN

(very upbeat)

Good afternoon, Mr. D!

Nathan proceeds straight to work, dusting and sweeping and rearranging things on the shelves.

Mr. Dennismont looks bewildered.

MR. DENNISMONT

Boy, you sure got a snoot full. You win the raffle at the YMCA?

Nathan continues working.

NATHAN
Nope, just happy to be alive.

Mr. Dennismont shakes his head and returns to counting the money in the cash register.

LATER

The clock hands move from 4:30 to 5:15.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- SAME NIGHT

Nathan straightens up items on a shelf.

There is a KNOCK at the door, and Nathan looks up with a smile on his face.

He heads for the door.

EXT. SHELBY -- DOWNTOWN -- SAME TIME

Carl rides past the clock tower. He looks up. It reads 5:16.

CARL
Damn, I'm late.

He picks up his pace.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- SAME TIME

Nathan gets to the door and sees that it's locked.

He digs in his pockets for the keys, but they aren't there.

NATHAN
Hang on a minute...
(mumbling to himself)
I can't find the key!

He goes out to the front counter and begins looking through the drawers.

EXT. SHELBY -- MAIN STREET -- SAME TIME

Carl passes different businesses along Main Street.

He rounds the corner and passes in front of the hardware store's front windows.

Carl looks in and sees Nathan behind the counter, gives a RING of his BELL and waves.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- SAME TIME

Nathan sees Carl riding by and waves back at him.

He looks back down at the drawer and continues looking for the key.

Then suddenly, he freezes.

His head pops up with a look of horror.

He looks at the back door. At that exact moment, he hears another series of loud KNOCKS.

Nathan looks back to the front to just catch a glimpse of Carl heading for the back alley.

Nathan's eyes focus in on the front door knob.

The keys dangle from the lock.

Nathan GASPS out loud.

NATHAN
(to himself)
Mr. Dennismont must have left them
in the lock from earlier.

Nathan runs for the door, grabs the keys and heads for the back.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit!

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- BACK DOOR

Nathan's hands shake, he fumbles with the keys and lock, but finally gets the door open.

It's Mr. Dennismont, and he starts to speak.

MR. DENNISMONT
I forgot --

Nathan grabs him, pulls him inside and looks up and down the alley. No Carl.

Nathan pops back in and closes the door.

NATHAN
(short)
What are you doing here?
(again, but nicer)
I mean, what are you doing here?

MR. DENNISMONT

As I was saying before you jerked my arm out of socket, I forgot my lunch bucket.

Mr. Dennismont heads for the front.

MR. DENNISMONT (CONT'D)

What's gotten into you? First, you come in this afternoon, glowing like a new moon, and now you're acting as if someone is coming to get you.

Nathan straightens up and follows him to the front.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- FRONT COUNTER -- CONTINUOUS

NATHAN

(nervously)

I don't know what you are talking about.

MR. DENNISMONT

Well, you just about jerked...

He notices that Nathan is looking off nonchalantly.

MR. DENNISMONT (CONT'D)

Oh, never mind. I'll just get my lunch bucket and leave.

Mr. Dennismont reaches down behind the counter, as Nathan hears a CRASH at the back door.

Mr. Dennismont comes up from behind the counter and heads to the back. Nathan stands right in his way.

Mr. Dennismont tries to step around him, and Nathan moves in front of him again. Not thinking anything about it, Mr. Dennismont steps the other way, and again Nathan shadows his movement.

MR. DENNISMONT (CONT'D)

Dang it, boy, what is your problem?

NATHAN

I'm sorry, sir, what is that?

MR. DENNISMONT

Get out of my way. I'd like to go home.

Nathan still stands in his way.

NATHAN

Oh, excuse me, let me get out of your way.

Then Nathan sees over Mr. Dennismont's shoulder, out the front window. Carl rides past again. He waves at Nathan.

Mr. Dennismont finally steps past Nathan.

MR. DENNISMONT
All right then, I'll see you tomorrow.

Nathan turns to follow Mr. Dennismont to the back door.

NATHAN
Tomorrow?

MR. DENNISMONT
Yes, tomorrow.

NATHAN
Not again tonight? But tomorrow?

Mr. Dennismont cuts his eyes at Nathan.

MR. DENNISMONT
Yes, Nathan, tomorrow.

Mr. Dennismont shakes his head and continues to the back.

Then there is a KNOCK at the back DOOR.

Mr. Dennismont stops short and looks at Nathan.

MR. DENNISMONT (CONT'D)
Now I wonder who that could be?

NATHAN
(answering quickly)
Nobody. Probably just the wind.

Mr. Dennismont totally ignores Nathan's strange comment and moves toward the door.

Nathan covers his face as Mr. Dennismont opens the door.

Nathan cringes as the door opens.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF (O.S.)
Hey, Frank, I was driving by and saw your lights on, so I just thought I'd check it out.

Nathan slowly peers out from behind his hands.

Sheriff Bartleff is standing in the door talking to Mr. Dennismont.

MR. DENNISMONT

Thanks, Red. It's just me and young Nathan Hagwood. Nathan is doing a little work for me after hours.

He turns away from the door to look at Nathan.

MR. DENNISMONT (CONT'D)

He'll be here during the week, but you should check on him just the same.

Nathan is facing the two men and can see out the open door behind them. Just as Mr. Dennismont stops talking, Carl rides past the door in the alley.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

Well, alrighty then, I'd better be going.

Mr. Dennismont and Sheriff Bartleff start to turn toward the door.

NATHAN

(practically yelling)

NO! I... uh... I...

Nathan looks around for something to talk about. He points at some boxes.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I need some help moving these heavy boxes.

Mr. Dennismont shakes his head, but walks over to help Nathan, while Sheriff Bartleff looks on.

Mr. Dennismont grabs one of the boxes and tugs hard. He almost falls over backwards, because it is actually very light.

MR. DENNISMONT

Ooop! What the...

Nathan ignores Mr. Dennismont and looks out the back door. No Carl.

Nathan looks back at Mr. Dennismont.

NATHAN

Oh. well, never mind. I can manage.

Mr. Dennismont regains his balance and looks at Nathan.

Nathan pretends that nothing is amiss.

Mr. Dennismont turns toward the door and Sheriff Bartleff.

MR. DENNISMONT
(to the sheriff)
That boy is a little strange.

Mr. Dennismont and the sheriff leave.

Nathan falls back against the boxes and breathes a sigh of relief.

He hears a KNOCK at the front door and jumps sky high.

He runs to the front.

It's Carl on his bicycle.

Nathan shakes his head and then motions for Carl to go around back.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

Carl rides up to Nathan.

Nathan is still jumpy and out of breath.

NATHAN
Man alive, was that close!

CARL
(not even fazed)
Close? Nah.
(beat)
You ready to practice? I have found
some more lessons for you.

INT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- LATER

Nathan is perched masterfully at the piano. The MUSIC is very powerful and soothing.

He is in deep thought.

The MUSIC continues to play, and we go into Nathan's daydream.

INT. CONCERT HALL -- STAGE -- NIGHT

NATHAN'S DAYDREAM

Nathan is playing a piano on an empty stage. The spotlight enshrouds him.

He finishes, and the audience gives him a standing ovation.

Nathan smiles and scans the audience. He stops and his smile slowly fades.

His parents sit in the audience. They are still seated, and they aren't clapping.

They have disapproving looks on their faces.

There is a television set in front of them.

MR. HAGWOOD
We're trying to watch TV, Nathan.
Can you keep it down?

A voice breaks the silence.

CARL (O.S.)
Nathan. Nathan. Nathan!

BACK TO SCENE

Nathan jumps up from the piano to see Carl standing in the doorway behind him.

NATHAN
Jeez, Carl, you scared me again.

CARL
Nathan, that's excellent! That was
absolutely wonderful!

Nathan wipes the tears out of his eyes, so Carl won't see them.

NATHAN
You really think so?

Carl moves over to Nathan.

CARL
Nathan, my boy, I know talent when I
hear it.

NATHAN
Really?

CARL
Really.

NATHAN
My father tells me that I shouldn't
dream of playing the piano, that
it'll get me nowhere.

CARL
Believe in your dreams, Nathan. If
you don't, no one else will.

NATHAN

I just don't know, Carl. What if I don't win that competition? Then what will I do? It's really my only hope of getting out of here. My dad isn't going to pay for me to go to the Boston School of Fine Arts.

CARL

Don't think about that. You're going to win that competition.

Nathan stares at Carl for a moment.

CARL (CONT'D)

You better run along now. It's getting late.

Nathan grabs his things and stops to look at the piano for moment. Then he turns and leaves.

NATHAN

I'll see you tomorrow, Carl.

Nathan heads for the door, but stops and turns back to Carl before exiting.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Thanks again, Carl. Thanks again.

Nathan closes the door.

Carl sits at the piano.

He raises his hands to the keys and lays them there.

His hands are dirty and covered by tattered wool gloves.

They begin to tremble.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- MORNING

Nathan sits at the kitchen table, eating breakfast and looking at the back of his father's newspaper.

Mrs. Hagwood walks by.

MRS. HAGWOOD

Would you like some more cereal?

Nathan taps the table with his fingers, as if he is playing the keys on an imaginary piano, and hums softly.

NATHAN

No, thanks, Mom. I'm fine.

Mr. Hagwood speaks from behind the paper.

MR. HAGWOOD

Nathan, I hope you're learning your lesson.

Nathan looks down at his fingers and back up at the back of the paper.

NATHAN

I am, don't worry.

Nathan looks down and starts tapping and humming again.

MR. HAGWOOD

(speaking from behind
the paper)

Good. Now stop that noise; it's bothering me.

Nathan's face shows a look of utter disbelief.

EXT. MAIN STREET -- SIDEWALK -- LATER

Nathan is walking to school and comes upon Lenny and his cronies.

LENNY

Hey, Nathan, I need another quarter.

NATHAN

(meekly)

Not today... okay, Lenny?

Lenny grabs Nathan by the shirt and pulls him close.

LENNY

Hey, just because you didn't make me look stupid in science class, doesn't mean I'm gonna go light on ya.

Carl watches from across the street.

Nathan fumbles for a quarter in his pocket and pulls it out.

Lenny sticks out his hand.

Nathan looks down at the change, clasps his hand shut and busts through Lenny and his cronies.

They stand there in awe as Nathan runs off.

Lenny regains his composure.

LENNY (CONT'D)

Yer gonna pay for that stunt, Hagwood.

Lenny's cronies are just standing there, staring at him.

LENNY (CONT'D)
 (to his cronies)
 What are you looking at, butthead?

He punches one of them in the arm.

CRONY #1
 Hey, what did ya do that for?

Carl's eyes draw a narrow bead on Lenny.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- LATER

Mrs. Wiper addresses the class.

MRS. WIPER
 Before we begin today's lesson on the eminent danger of communism and the black list, let me remind you that the Boston School of Fine Arts scholarship competition is only three weeks away. All entrants must be signed up by this Friday.

Nathan looks down anxiously at his watch.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- SAME DAY -- AFTERNOON

Nathan bursts in the front door full stride.

NATHAN
 Okay, I'm here now. You can leave.

Mr. Dennismont looks up from behind the counter.

MR. DENNISMONT
 Hey, Nathan, I've got a few things for you to do.

Nathan begins to shoo Mr. Dennismont out from behind the counter.

NATHAN
 Okay, fine, whatever you want.

He pushes Mr. Dennismont toward the door.

MR. DENNISMONT
 Now wait a minute, Nathan. I need you to move the rakes and shovels to the --

Nathan continues to push Mr. Dennismont.

NATHAN
 Okay, I got that.

MR. DENNISMONT
 (kind of flustered,
 but continuing)
 Well then, okay... and put the new
 tool boxes up near the front --

NATHAN
 Yeah, yeah, I got that. Anything
 else, Mr. Dennismont?

MR. DENNISMONT
 Yes, Nathan, I'd like you to clean
 up the nail bins.

Nathan gets Mr. Dennismont out the door.

NATHAN
 Sure thing, Mr. Dennismont, it's as
 good as done.

Nathan practically closes the door in Mr. Dennismont's face.

Mr. Dennismont is just standing there with a very puzzled
 look on his face. After a beat, he finally turns and walks
 away.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- BACK DOOR -- MOMENTS
 LATER

Nathan opens the door, and Carl is standing there waiting.
 Nathan walks out past Carl.

NATHAN
 Hey, Carl, good to see ya. I'll
 meet you back here tonight.

Nathan continues to his bicycle and mounts up.

CARL
 Okay, Nathan. Any special
 instructions?

Nathan is already heading down the alley. He turns around
 to yell.

NATHAN
 Oh, yeah, rake the floor and move
 the mailboxes to aisle three... or
 no, no... aisle two!

Nathan speeds off into the darkness.

Carl stands in the doorway talking to himself.

CARL
 (puzzled)
 Rake the floor?

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan turns onto Indian Springs Road, unaware of an approaching car.

INT. PATROL CAR -- SAME TIME

Sheriff Bartleff watches Nathan pass by.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
What in tarnation is that boy doin'
headin' out there?

He raises his cap to scratch his sweaty bald head.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF (CONT'D)
I guess Frank was right. That boy
is a little strange.

Sheriff Bartleff drives on without another thought.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- LATER -- SAME NIGHT

Carl is busy moving boxes around.

He stops and looks at one labeled "GARDEN HOSES".

CARL
Now I wonder what he wants me to do
with these?

A big grin appears on Carl's face.

CARL (CONT'D)
Boy, I sure would like to have these
beauties.

Carl grabs the box and begins to drag it toward the back.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- BACK DOOR -- LATER

Carl stands by the back door.

Nathan rides up.

NATHAN
Sorry I'm a little late. I --

CARL
Oh, no problem. Don't worry about
it. You get some good practicin'
in?

NATHAN
Yeah, I think so. But I want to
talk to you about those lessons.

CARL
 We can talk about that tomorrow.
 You need to get on home; it's late.

NATHAN
 Well... I... a...

Carl shoos Nathan away.

CARL
 Now go on and we'll talk about it
 later.

Nathan rides off slowly and turns around to look.

Carl is still standing there.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- FRONT COUNTER -- DAY

Mr. Dennismont stands behind the counter talking to Sheriff Bartleff.

MR. DENNISMONT
 Like I said, I'm not fer positive,
 but I can't find that garden hose
 anywhere. And he was acting really
 strange last night. Tryin' to rush
 me off and all. You know, like he
 was up to something.

Sheriff Bartleff stands there for a moment, scratching his head, and then a light comes on inside his head.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 (pepping up)
 You know what? I saw that boy riding
 out Indian Springs Road last night.

MR. DENNISMONT
 When was that?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 I don't really remember.

MR. DENNISMONT
 Was it before you came by the store?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 No, no... it was after that. Well
 after that.

MR. DENNISMONT
 After I was closed?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 Oh yeah, it was right after you
 closed.

MR. DENNISMONT
 How could that be? He was supposed
 to be here cleaning up the store.
 Are you sure it was him?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 Don't he have a red bicycle?

Mr. Dennismont nods his head.

MR. DENNISMONT
 Yeah.
 (beat)
 I just can't believe it.

Mr. Dennismont paces around and tries to think. The sheriff
 just stands there.

MR. DENNISMONT (CONT'D)
 Listen, Red, would you do me a favor?
 Would you keep an eye on the place
 tonight?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 Sure, Frank, no problem.

The front door bell JINGLES.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- FRONT COUNTER -- NIGHT

The bell is still JINGLING, and the front door SLAMS.

NATHAN
 Evening, Mr. Dennismont. How are
 you?

A look of concern comes across Mr. Dennismont's face.

MR. DENNISMONT
 Well, Nathan, I'm not sure. I need
 to ask you something.

He pauses for a beat.

NATHAN
 Yeah, what is it?

MR. DENNISMONT
 Nathan, I have some garden hose
 missing. And you've been acting
 strange lately, and stuff is all
 rearranged and what-not. Now you
 have to understand, Nathan, I'm tryin'
 to run a business here, and what I'm
 tryin' to say...

Mr. Dennismont's VOICE FADES into the background as we go inside Nathan's head. He is starting to formulate his own theory.

NATHAN (V.O.)

Carl sure was acting funny last night... and he does have a thing for garden hoses. Aw, man...

BACK TO SCENE

Nathan feigns concern, trying to cover his anxiety.

MR. DENNISMONT

...I just hope you're not the one. But if you are, please just put it back, and I'll forget about it this time.

Finishing his thought from the voice over...

NATHAN

Carl.

Mr. Dennismont looks up at Nathan.

MR. DENNISMONT

What was that?

NATHAN

I... um... nothing, sir.

MR. DENNISMONT

I hope you do the right thing, son.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- BACK DOOR -- LATER

There is a KNOCK at the back door.

Nathan rolls his eyes and goes to the back door and opens it.

It's Carl, he comes in.

CARL

(chipper)

Good evenin', young Nathan.

Nathan walks out past Carl without even a glance.

NATHAN

Yeah, right.

Nathan gets on his bicycle and rides away.

Carl looks down at his old Mickey Mouse watch without any hands.

CARL
 (tapping the watch
 face)
 Gee, I didn't think I was late.

EXT. ALLEY -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan rides past the vet clinic.

Sheriff Bartleff's patrol car is parked out front of Beatherman's diner, which is just down the alley and across the street.

INT. BEATHERMAN'S DINER -- SAME TIME

Sheriff Bartleff is sitting at the counter, dunking a big ole glazed donut in a cup of black coffee.

He takes a big bite and starts to speak through the smacking to LYLEAN, a mid-thirties, rode-hard-and-put-up-wet, gum-smacking waitress.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 (muffled in the chewing)
 Hey, you ain't seen anythan' funny goin' on ov'r thar at the 'ard 'are stow?

Lylean looks past the sheriff, watching Nathan ride out from behind the buildings and off down the street.

Then she brings her attention back to the sheriff.

LYLEAN
 Naw, I ain't. Have you?

Sheriff Bartleff wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 (frazzled)
 I wasn't askin' just to be askin', Lylean. I know somethin's goin' on. I'm just lookin' fer witnesses.

LYLEAN
 (not even fazed by his snippy comment)
 Oh, yeah? What's the scoop?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
 Seems Frank hired that Hagwood boy to do some cleanup after 'ours at the store. And it seems that the boy has a different meanin' fer the word cleanup, if ya know what I mean.

LYLEAN

It really scares me, Red, but I think I'm the only one in town that does know what you mean. But I know that Hagwood boy, and he's a good kid.

Not really listening to Lylean, the sheriff continues.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

So Frank asked me to get on the case.

LYLEAN

Well, you know, Red, come to think of it, I have noticed something kinda strange. I've seen that Hagwood boy leaving Frank's store this same time every night. And he heads right out of town. In fact, I just watched him ride off... not two seconds ago.

The sheriff turns and looks down the street.

He jumps up, knocking over his coffee, throws some change on the counter and heads for the door.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

Keep the change. Gotta go, Lylean. Can't leave criminals lurkin' 'round our streets.

EXT. INDIAN SPRINGS ROAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan is sitting on the side of the road, trying to get the chain back on his bicycle, when he hears a car approaching.

He quickly ducks into the bushes.

Nathan watches the car slow, but pass by. It's the sheriff, and he heads up the old driveway to the mansion.

NATHAN

Where's he going?

Nathan pushes his bicycle up the driveway behind the sheriff, but out of sight.

EXT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- BUSHES -- SAME TIME

Nathan hides in the bushes and watches as the sheriff goes into the house. From outside, he can see the flashlight as it goes from room to room.

NATHAN

What is he doing?

The sheriff comes running back outside in a big hurry. He jumps in the patrol car and gets on the radio.

Nathan can hear every word from his vantage point.

INT. PATROL CAR

Sheriff Bartleff barks into the radio.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
Car One to HQ! Come in, HQ!

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
This is June. Red, is that you?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
(indignantly)
Yes.
(regains composure)
HQ, this is 'Big Red.' Come back.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Where are you, Red?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
I'm at the old Zealotenmuser mansion,
and we have a 1022... no, no... a
1014... no, no... a... oh, fergit
it. June, we have a possible burglary
in process at the hardware store.
Call for backup to meet me over there
right away.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
So you want me to tell Deputy
Ledbetter to meet you there?

SHERIFF BARTLEFF
(deflated)
Yes, June, Deputy Ledbetter.

EXT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- BUSHES

Nathan looks shocked.

NATHAN
Oh, no.

He turns to run and barely misses a tree.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Oh, noooooooooo!

EXT. HARDWARE STORE -- TWENTY MINUTES LATER

Two patrol cars sit out front. One is parked normally, and the other is up on the sidewalk, smashed into a mailbox with steam coming from under the hood.

Nathan pulls up across the street just as they are bringing Carl out the front door in handcuffs.

Nathan bolts over from across the street.

NATHAN

Wait... wait a minute, you've got the wrong guy. I did it, not him.

Mr. Dennismont comes out of the store.

MR. DENNISMONT

What do you mean, Nathan? The sheriff found all that stuff in his mansion.

NATHAN

He doesn't live there anymore. I put all that stuff in there.

The sheriff is pointing to Carl.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

Then what was he doing in the hardware store?

NATHAN

(fumbling)

I... um... asked him to take my place at the store so I could go out to the mansion and practice lessons on his old piano. Then I would take the stuff from the hardware store and hide it in the mansion. He had no idea what was going on.

CARL

Nathan!

Nathan cuts a mean look at Carl.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

(to Mr. Dennismont)

We didn't actually catch him taking anything, Frank. And the old codger hasn't lived in that place for years.

MR. DENNISMONT

(to Nathan)

I called your father, Nathan. He'll be here in a minute, and he can help us sort this all out.

Mr. Dennismont turns back to Sheriff Bartleff.

Sheriff Bartleff pulls out a pad and starts writing.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

All right, Frank... exactly what was stolen?

MR. DENNISMONT

Actually, the only thing I found missing was garden hose, but the store is all rearranged, so I'm not completely sure.

CARL

(interrupting)

That's what this is all about? Garden hoses? I put those in that back closet, on the top shelf.

Nathan, Sheriff Bartleff and Mr. Dennismont reply in unison.

NATHAN, SHERIFF & MR. DENNISMONT

Wwwwwhaattt!?!

CARL

Yeah, I put those back here in the closet.

Carl heads back into the store.

Nathan, Sheriff Bartleff and Mr. Dennismont follow.

INT. HARDWARE STORE -- STOCK ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Carl goes straight to the closet in the back of the store and motions for the sheriff to unlock the handcuffs.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

Oh, yeah. Sorry.

Carl opens the door and reaches for the top shelf.

CARL

I put these up here because Nathan didn't say anything about them, and I didn't want them cluttering up the store.

Sheriff Bartleff looks at Mr. Dennismont for approval.

MR. DENNISMONT

I... I... I don't know what to say.

CARL

As for the stuff at the mansion, I have receipts for everything.

SHERIFF BARTLEFF

(to Mr. Dennismont)

Frank, what do you want to do? You don't really have much of a case.

MR. DENNISMONT

Since it's a misunderstanding, I guess I'll drop the charges.

Mr. Hagwood enters the room, and Mr. Dennismont walks over to talk to him.

MR. HAGWOOD

What's going on, Frank?

MR. DENNISMONT

It seems we've had a bit of a mix up. We thought your boy was stealin' merchandise from the store, but as it turns out, it's all a misunderstanding.

MR. HAGWOOD

What's Zealotenwhosit doing here?

MR. DENNISMONT

Seems he's been doing Nathan's job while Nathan goes out to the old mansion to practice piano or somethin'.

Mr. Hagwood walks over to Nathan and cuts a look at Carl.

He snatches Nathan up by the shirt.

MR. HAGWOOD

Come on, boy, we're going home. This is the last time you embarrass the family.

Carl steps forward.

CARL

Go easy on him, sir. It was all my suggestion.

Mr. Hagwood spins around to Carl.

MR. HAGWOOD

(rudely)

Stay away from my boy, you weirdo.

CARL

I really didn't mean to get him in trouble.

MR. HAGWOOD

Well, you did. So mind your own business, and maybe next time you won't get the boy in trouble.

Mr. Hagwood drags Nathan off by the arm.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- NATHAN'S ROOM -- LATER

Nathan sits on his bed with his head hanging low.

Mr. Hagwood stands at his door.

MR. HAGWOOD

That is the last time you embarrass my family. Do you understand me?

NATHAN

Yes, sir.

MR. HAGWOOD

And you come home right after school. No hardware store, no bum's mansion, no friend's house, no nothing. Straight home. Do you understand me?

NATHAN

Yes, sir.

MR. HAGWOOD

Obviously this piano competition means a lot to you, so if you still want to participate, I'd suggest you stay out of trouble -- or otherwise you won't get to compete at all.

Mr. Hagwood turns and heads out the door.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- LIVING ROOM -- SAME NIGHT

Mr. Hagwood sits down to watch television when Mrs. Hagwood enters the room.

She walks across the room and turns the television off.

MR. HAGWOOD

Hey! What are you doing?

MRS. HAGWOOD

Don't you think you are being a little hard on Nathan, dear?

MR. HAGWOOD

What do you mean?

MRS. HAGWOOD

I just think that you are being a little too hard on him. He's had some bad luck and all. He really is a good boy.

MR. HAGWOOD

And I intend to keep him that way. I don't want this crazy dream of his ruining his life.

MRS. HAGWOOD

(condescendingly)

James, really? How soon we forget. I remember a young man who had a dream, and *his* father who had other ideas.

MR. HAGWOOD

(getting uptight)

Now, Marge, that was different.

MRS. HAGWOOD

A dream is a dream, dear, even if you think that football is more important than music. Remember, your dad thought you were too small, and he wanted you to get your business degree so you could run the family business.

MR. HAGWOOD

And that's just what I did.

MRS. HAGWOOD

And you've regretted it ever since.

Mr. Hagwood GRUNTS and shifts around in his easy chair.

Mrs. Hagwood keeps after him.

MRS. HAGWOOD (CONT'D)

So are you going to make your son's life miserable, too, by applying the same rules your father set down for you? Or are you going to change the course of family history and support Nathan?

(beat)

Well? Well?

MR. HAGWOOD

I don't know, Marge. I'll think about it.

(diverting attention)

But I'm not going to stand for all this trouble he's been getting into at school.

MRS. HAGWOOD

Yes, dear. I hear you. Just think about what I said.

Mrs. Hagwood heads to the kitchen.

Mr. Hagwood sits quietly for a moment and then gets up to turn on the television.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- NATHAN'S LOCKER -- DAY

Nathan and Jeremy stand by their lockers, exchanging books.

JEREMY

Man, what happened last night? I heard you are going to jail for robbing the hardware store.

Nathan rolls his eyes and continues getting his books.

NATHAN

This town is so small.

JEREMY

What?

NATHAN

Are you going to believe everything you hear?

JEREMY

What do you mean?

NATHAN

Think about it, Jeremy. Look who are you talking to; It's me, Nathan.

Nathan walks off and leaves Jeremy just standing there.

JEREMY

Hey, you can't just walk off without telling me something.

Jeremy catches up to Nathan outside the classroom.

NATHAN

Misunderstanding.

JEREMY

Miss Understanding? Who is she?

Nathan stops and just stares at Jeremy.

The BELL RINGS, and they move into class.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM

Nathan settles into his seat next to Lenny.

LENNY

Hey, spaz, I got your garden hose
right here.

Nathan ignores the remark.

The teacher calls for attention.

MRS. MASTRONO

Okay, class, today we will talk about
the moon. Lenny, here's your chance
to redeem yourself. What gives the
illusion that the moon is rising and
setting in our sky? Does the moon
orbit the earth like the sun, or
does the earth orbit the moon? This
is so simple that even you can get
this right, Lenny.

Lenny fidgets in his seat.

LENNY

Um, I think a... I... I... a...

Miss Mastrono turns toward Nathan.

NATHAN'S IMAGINATION

He sees Mrs. Mastrono turn in SLOW MOTION, and the SOUND of
her voice is DRAGGING.

MRS. MASTRONO

Nathan, will you tell us the answer
this time, or shall it be more
detention for you?

BACK TO SCENE

Nathan looks at Lenny.

Lenny stares back, mean as ever, and cracks his knuckles.

Nathan looks at Mrs. Mastrono, and she looks at him with a
smirk.

Nathan hears his father's voice.

MR. HAGWOOD (O.S.)
 Obviously the piano competition means
 a lot to you. So if you still want
 to participate, I'd suggest you stay
 out of trouble. Otherwise, you won't
 get to compete at all.

Nathan swallows hard.

NATHAN
 Um... a... the moon... it... it
 orbits...
 (he swallows again)
 ...the earth.

Nathan lets out a sigh and hangs his head.

The entire class ROARS with LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.

Lenny's face turns beet red.

LENNY
 (to Nathan)
 You're in deep shit, punk!

EXT. FARM -- AFTERNOON

Lenny and his cronies have Nathan pinned up against the side
 of the barn.

They are holding some cow manure on a stick right in front
 of his face.

LENNY
 (in an immature, whiny
 voice)
 Eat up, you little rat fink. You're
 full of it anyway, so a little more
 won't hurt ya.

Nathan struggles to get away. He tosses his head from side
 to side.

Lenny's cronies grab Nathan's head and slam him up against
 the barn.

NATHAN
 Ouch! You're hurting me.

CRONIES
 (mocking)
 Ouch, you're hurting me.

NATHAN
 Please don't make me eat that. It'll
 make me sick.

LENNY
 (to his cronies)
 Did ya hear that, boys? It'll make
 him sick.
 (back to Nathan)
 No shit!

Lenny and his cronies ROAR with LAUGHTER.

Out from around the barn comes Carl on his bicycle. He has his shirt buttoned up over his head, so it appears that he is headless.

Making a very loud GUTTURAL MOANING noise, he rides straight for Lenny.

At the last second, he turns to go between Lenny and Nathan and slaps the stick out of Lenny's hand.

The manure flies up in the air and comes down on Lenny's head.

Lenny SCREAMS at the top of his lungs, and he and his cronies run off.

Carl turns around and rides back to Nathan, who is frozen in terror and still standing against the barn.

As Carl rides by Nathan, he peeks out from his shirt.

CARL
 Run while you can, before they come
 back.

LENNY AND HIS CRONIES

have stopped a few hundred yards away.

LENNY
 Hey, that was that bicycle man...
 that weren't no headless horseman.

As Lenny speaks, the boys notice that he wet his pants.

They point and begin to CHUCKLE.

Lenny looks down at his soiled pants and then back up at the boys. Awkward silence.

The cronies run off, leaving Lenny embarrassed and alone.

Lenny, his face bright red and covered with manure, looks back at the barn and sees Carl riding away.

LENNY (CONT'D)

(steaming)

You'll pay for this, Mr. Bicycle
Man...

(cooling)

You'll pay.

EXT. FARM ROAD -- MOMENTS LATER

Nathan walks home, manure all over his shirt.

Carl catches up with him on his bicycle.

CARL

Nathan, Nathan... you okay?

NATHAN

Yeah, I guess so. I can't seem to
do anything without getting crapped
on.

CARL

Don't let those boys get to you.

NATHAN

That's easy for you to say.

CARL

You have something a lot more
important to think about.

NATHAN

What's that?

CARL

Come on, Nathan. You've got to keep
your head up. Anyway, I think I've
figured out another way for you to
continue your practicing.

NATHAN

Carl, I'm tired of practicing. It's
getting me nowhere.

CARL

(snapping at Nathan)

Bullshit!

(beat)

No pun intended.

NATHAN

Real funny, Carl, real funny.

Carl swerves to miss a dead possum in the middle of the road.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I wish a truck would just come along
and put me out of my misery.

CARL

(put out)

Enough of that talk, Nathan. If you
are going to --

NATHAN

I mean really, Carl. Nobody
appreciates classical music around
here. All they care about is football
or fishin'. Nobody supports me; my
parents don't even want me playing
music. And every time I turn around,
something bad happens.

CARL

(softly)

Now, Nathan.

NATHAN

(angrily)

No really, Carl. I must be jinxed
or have some kind of bad luck mojo.
You better stay away, Carl, or
something bad is going to happen to
you, too. I already got you in
trouble with the law.

Carl stops his bicycle.

Nathan walks a few more steps, stops and turns to face Carl.

CARL

(sternly)

That's enough, Nathan! You are too
good to quit now. You were given
this talent, and it's not your place
to question that. It *is* your job to
use it. You have to find a way to
get it out there. You never know
who your music will touch or how it
might inspire them. I don't want to
hear anymore of this defeatist
attitude.

NATHAN

Do you really believe that baloney?

CARL

(snapping at Nathan)

Yes I do! I've seen it first-hand
and don't you forget it.

Nathan can see the conviction in Carl's eyes and realizes he has touched a serious place inside him.

NATHAN
Okay, okay. I'll try.

It takes Carl a minute to calm down and regain his composure.

CARL
Besides that, just who am I, chopped liver? I believe in you.

NATHAN
I'm sorry, Carl.

Nathan starts walking again, and Carl starts walking with him, pushing his bicycle.

CARL
Like I said earlier, I think I've figured out another way for you to continue practicing.

NATHAN
But Carl, this practicing isn't going to win the competition. What I really need is an original piece of music if I'm going to have a chance to win this scholarship.

CARL
Trust me on this, Nathan.

NATHAN
(agitated)
I need an original piece of music.

CARL
Just keep practicing the lessons I give you, and when the time comes, you'll be able to play from the heart. I'm... I mean, the lessons are preparing your ears and your fingers for the story that your heart has to tell.

Carl pauses for a moment to let his last statement sink in.

CARL (CONT'D)
You can do it, Nathan.

NATHAN
I don't know, Carl. Time is running out, and I haven't come up with anything original yet.

Carl has a look of knowing on his face.

CARL
Be patient, boy, and it will come.
I promise.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- NATHAN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Nathan sits at his desk, doing homework, when he hears a LOUD CRASH outside in the alley.

He gets up and looks out the window.

The little three-legged DOG looks up at him and BARKS and then runs off down the alley, disappearing into the darkness.

Nathan notices something leaning against one of the trash cans.

His curiosity gets the best of him, and he decides to go down and investigate.

EXT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- BACK ALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan shimmyes his way down the tree and moves over to the trash cans.

He can't believe what he sees. It's the keyboard from Carl's grand piano. It's obvious that it has been removed from the rest of the piano with some type of power tool. The edges are all roughly sawed.

NATHAN
(dumbstruck)
Oh, my god. I can't believe he did
this.

Nathan rubs his hands over the keys and then over the rough edges.

Nathan notices a note tacked to the keyboard. He picks it up and starts to read.

THE NOTE

reads...

CARL (V.O.)

Dear Nathan, here is the keyboard from my piano. I've rigged it so that it will still work. I know that it will be silent, but you can imagine the music in your head. Remember what I said about practicing. Trust me on this one. Better yet, trust yourself. God gave you extraordinary talent... use it, or it may be taken away. Don't let the fruit wither on the vine. Here are some more lessons. They are very special. Practice them diligently, and I am sure you will be able to come up with an original piece of music. If I don't see you before the competition, good luck. Knock 'em dead and make the old man proud. I'm sure you will. Your friend, Carlton P. Zealotenmuser.

Nathan stands there for a moment, trying to collect his thoughts. Then he grabs the keyboard and heads for the house.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- NATHAN'S ROOM -- LATER

Nathan sits on his bed, plunking away at the silent keyboard.

He looks intently at the lessons Carl left with the piano keyboard. The lessons are lying on the bed right next to the note Carl left.

It is obvious that the handwriting on both the lessons and the note are exactly the same.

Nathan doesn't make the connection.

INT. TOOMER'S DRUGSTORE -- AFTERNOON

Lenny and his cronies try to steal candy, but they aren't having any luck, because the store clerk is watching them like a hawk.

One of Lenny's cronies looks out the window and notices Carl ride up to the vet clinic across the street.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- FRONT DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

Carl parks his bicycle outside of Watkins' Clinic.

INT. TOOMER'S DRUGSTORE -- CONTINUOUS

Crony #1 is still staring out the window.

CRONY #1
 Hey, Lenny, thar's that bicycle man
 over at the vet clinic.

Lenny spins around to see Carl going into the vet clinic.

EXT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC -- FRONT DOOR -- CONTINUOUS

Carl leaves his bicycle and enters the clinic.

INT. TOOMER'S DRUGSTORE -- CONTINUOUS

A shit-eating grin crosses Lenny's face.

LENNY
 Let's go, boys.

INT. WATKINS' VET CLINIC

Carl walks up to the counter.

CARL
 Hey, Mr. Watkins? You here?

MR. WATKINS (O.S.)
 Hello? Is that you, Carl?

CARL
 Yeah, it's me, Mr. Watkins.

MR. WATKINS (O.S.)
 I'll be right there, Carl. Just
 give me a minute.

CARL
 No hurry, Mr. Watkins, take your
 time. It's not like I have anywhere
 to be.

Behind Carl, through a window, Lenny and his cronies cross
 the street from the drugstore.

They sneak up to Carl's bicycle. One boy peers in the window,
 blocking the view of the other boys behind him.

Carl is standing with his back to the window.

Mr. Watkins returns with Scooter. Outside, the boys scatter
 like rats.

MR. WATKINS
 Here he is, Carl. He's had his shots
 and even a bath.

CARL
 Thanks, Mr. Watkins.
 (to the dog)
 You ready to go home, boy?

Carl turns and leaves.

EXT. TOOMER'S DRUGSTORE -- SIDEWALK -- MOMENTS LATER

Lenny and his cronies watch Carl put Scooter in his basket and ride off on his bicycle.

LENNY
 This ought to fix him.

Just as Carl picks up speed, a woman steps out of the beauty shop right in front of him.

Carl TOOTS his bicycle HORN and swerves to miss her, riding right out into the busy street.

CARL
 Watch it, lady!

Carl looks up just in time to see that he is headed for an oncoming car.

He tries the brakes, but nothing happens.

Car TIRES SQUEAL and HORNS HONK. Carl hits the car head on, and he and Scooter go flying over the car.

They end up in a pile on the street.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- NIGHT

Carl is hooked up to machines via a patchwork of tubes.

The MACHINES BEEP and their MOTORS WHIR.

Carl is in a coma.

Nathan sits at Carl's side, holding his hand and fighting back tears.

NATHAN
 Carl, don't leave me. You're the only one who believes in me. I wouldn't know what to do without you. Why are all these things happening to me? Why?

The nurse enters.

NURSE
 Young man, your father is here to take you home. It's time to go.

Nathan holds Carl's hand as long as he can, as the nurse pulls him away.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- KITCHEN -- MORNING

Nathan plays with his food as his father speaks from behind the morning newspaper.

MR. HAGWOOD

I know you're upset about the old bum...

NATHAN

(snaps back)

He's not a bum. He's supported my dream more than you ever have.

Mr. Hagwood puts the newspaper aside and looks Nathan in the eye as he continues speaking.

MR. HAGWOOD

It's your crazy dream that's caused all this mess.

Nathan looks extremely hurt.

MR. HAGWOOD (CONT'D)

You just need to forget about playing piano and get back to your studies, like I told you to before. Don't you see what happens when you have these pie-in-the-sky dreams? It's not reality, son. Life is not about dreaming; it's about doing what you're supposed to do.

Those last few words echo in Nathan's head.

EXT. HARDWARE STORE -- FRONT -- SIDEWALK -- LATER

As Nathan, deep in thought, walks to school, Lenny and his cronies come up behind him.

Lenny shoves Nathan up against a car.

LENNY

Where's your bicycle man to save you now? Huh?

Nathan's face turns red. He's had enough. Nathan draws back his fist and punches Lenny right on the nose just as he turns around.

Lenny's cronies stare in complete silence.

Lenny holds his bleeding nose for a minute and then looks up at Nathan.

LENNY (CONT'D)
You're dead meat, Hagwood.

Lenny lunges toward Nathan. Nathan doesn't back down.

Mr. Dennismont comes running out of his store and steps in between the boys to break up the fight. He shoves Lenny back and grabs a hold of Nathan, who is still swinging wildly.

MR. DENNISMONT
(talking to Lenny and cronies)
You punks get the hell outta here before I call the police.

Lenny backs off.

LENNY
Yeah, yeah. You can have the sissy now, but I'll get him later.
(to Nathan)
I'll get you later, Nathan.

Mr. Dennismont turns to Nathan, who is finally calming down.

MR. DENNISMONT
(sweetly)
You okay, son?

Mr. Dennismont touches Nathan's eye, and he flinches.

NATHAN
Ouch. I'm fine, Mr. Dennismont.
I'm just fine.

Nathan picks up his books from all over the sidewalk and heads for school.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- CLASSROOM -- LATER

Nathan slumps in his desk, with his hand over his eye, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible.

The teacher calls the class to order.

MRS. WIPER
Good morning, class. First, I want to remind everyone to attend the Boston School of Fine Arts scholarship competition on Friday. I also want to wish those of my students who are participating good luck.

A couple of students look up and acknowledge the teacher's comment, but not Nathan.

MRS. WIPER (CONT'D)
Now, for today's lesson --

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- HALLWAY -- LATER

Nathan is dragging down the hall.

Jeremy comes up from behind.

JEREMY
Hey, Nathan.

Nathan doesn't even acknowledge him, and Jeremy realizes the severity of Nathan's condition.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
I didn't realize how much this bicycle
man meant to you.

Nathan cuts Jeremy a mean look. It's a look we haven't seen from the usually timid boy we've come to know. There is a new fire, a passion bubbling just below the surface.

NATHAN
(talking through his
teeth)
Means to me.

JEREMY
(caught off guard)
Huh?

NATHAN
Means to me. Still means to me.

Jeremy takes a step back.

JEREMY
I'm sorry, Nathan, I didn't mean it
that way at all.

Nathan calms down, but doesn't say anything. He just keeps on moving.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Are you still going to compete on
Friday?

NATHAN
I don't know, Jeremy. I don't know.

Jeremy stops, and Nathan continues to walk down the hall.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- NATHAN'S ROOM -- NIGHT

Nathan lies on his bed. Tears roll down his cheeks.

The keyboard is on the bed beside him. The lessons are scattered about.

A gentle breeze moves the curtains in the open window.

NATHAN
Don't leave me, Carl.

A DOG BARKS outside, but Nathan ignores it.

Another BARK, and another.

Finally, Nathan goes to the window and looks down.

Nathan sees the three-legged dog in the alley.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Tripod! Tripod!

EXT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- BACK ALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

Nathan crawls out the window and down the tree to the alley.

He grabs Tripod and hugs him tight. The dog responds with lots of kisses.

NATHAN
Where have you been, boy? I have
been worried sick about you.

Tripod jumps out of Nathan's arms and begins to BARK again.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Quiet, boy, or you'll wake up my
parents.

The DOG BARKS again and runs a few yards down the alley.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
Where are you going now, you silly
dog?

Tripod BARKS several more times.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
(stage whisper)
Sssssssssssshhh! Be quiet!

Tripod runs back to Nathan and tugs on his pants leg.

NATHAN (CONT'D)
What are you doing?
(starting to realize)
You want me to go with you?

Tripod tugs one more time and heads down the alley, BARKING the whole way.

Nathan looks around and spies his bicycle. He grabs it and jumps on, taking off after Tripod.

EXT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- LATER

Scooter sits at the front door.

Nathan pulls up on his bicycle, completely out of breath.

Tripod scratches at the door. It opens and he goes inside.

Nathan just drops his bicycle and runs in after the dog.

INT. ZEALOTENMUSER MANSION -- CONTINUOUS

Tripod goes into the room with the piano.

Nathan finds a gas lantern and lights it. The lantern illuminates the room.

Tripod goes straight to the piano bench. There is a picture sitting on the bench, and Tripod just stares at it. His head cocks to the side, and his ears go up.

Nathan walks over to the bench and catches his breath.

NATHAN

What is it, Tripod?

Nathan picks up the picture. It is an old photograph of a young man playing the piano.

There is a large cardboard box sitting next to the bench. In the box are more pictures, newspaper clippings and some plaques.

Nathan looks inside the box and pulls out a newspaper clipping.

NEWSPAPER CLIPPING

The photograph in the newspaper is the same photograph as the one sitting on the bench.

Nathan reads the headline out loud.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Young pianist's career cut short.

(pauses a beat)

Carlton P. Zealotemuser, the bright young prodigy from Shelby, had his career cut short after doctors found a rare and debilitating form of arthritis in his hands.

Nathan's hands fall to his lap, and he stares off with a look of disbelief on his face.

After a moment, he begins digging through the box. He finds numerous awards and articles proclaiming Carl a world-renowned concert pianist.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I just can't believe this.

Nathan digs around in the box and pulls out a stack of handwritten letters. They appear to be get-well cards from many different people.

LETTERS

"Thanks for your music, you've always inspired me. Get well soon." "Your music has helped me through many hard times. My thoughts and prayers are with you." "If it hadn't been for your music, I never would've made it home. Sincerely, Pvt. Jack Douglas, USMC."

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Why didn't he tell me?

Nathan lays the papers down beside him and looks up at some sheet music still sitting on the piano's music stand.

There is a piece of sheet music with only a couple of lines written in.

A pencil rests on top of the piano, along with more blank sheets of music paper.

Nathan picks up the unfinished piece of music. It's titled "Friends, Dreams and Life -- Nathan's Song." Nathan picks up the paper and inspects the writing closely.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

This is the same handwriting.

Nathan looks down at the missing keyboard and all the sawdust. Tears well up in his eyes as he puts all the pieces together in his mind.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

(sweetly)

Carl.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- LATER

Nathan comes in with the sheet music in his hand.

He stops at the foot of Carl's bed and waves the sheet music at him.

NATHAN

Why didn't you tell me, you stubborn old mule?

Carl doesn't move a muscle.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to finish this. You just wait and see. We're going to win this contest.

Nathan turns and heads out the door.

INT. HOSPITAL -- CAFETERIA -- SAME TIME

Nathan strides past the door, glances in and then stops. He backs up slowly and looks in. He enters the room and heads for an old piano sitting in the corner.

He sits down tentatively at the piano, places the sheet music on the stand and slowly begins to play.

He stumbles around with the tune, stops and lets out a big sigh.

He tries to play again, but to no avail.

Suddenly, a voice rings loud and clear inside his head.

CARL (O.S.)

Just trust yourself and play from the heart.

Nathan looks back down at the keys and then up to the sheet music and begins to play. The music starts to come out perfectly when a nurse interrupts.

NURSE

Excuse me, son, but the hospital is closed, and the patients are trying to sleep.

Nathan looks back at the piano and plays three more notes. He stops, but the SONG continues to play.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

As the MUSIC plays, a very slight smile crosses Carl's face.

Scooter sits at Carl's bedside.

As Carl's smile grows bigger, Scooter begins licking his hand. MUSIC fades.

INT. NATHAN'S HOUSE -- NATHAN'S ROOM -- LATER

Nathan is playing on the silent keyboard and reading some lessons that Carl had given him earlier.

NATHAN

Doe, re, me, fa, so, la, tee, doe.
Right hand, left hand. Doe, re, me,
fa, so, la, tee, doe. Right hand,
left hand.

Nathan fumbles around the lessons, but keeps doing them over and over again.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- AUDITORIUM -- BACKSTAGE -- NIGHT

Teachers and students scurry around, making last-minute preparations for the competition.

Nathan sits off in a corner, TAPPING his fingers in his lap and HUMMING.

NATHAN

Dum dum ba dum. No, no, that's not
it. Dum dum ba ba dum.
(agitated)
NO! NO! That's not it!

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- AUDITORIUM -- STAGE -- MOMENTS
LATER

Mrs. Wiper steps up to the podium, rearranges some papers and adjusts her glasses.

MRS. WIPER

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.
And welcome to the Boston School of
Fine Art's annual scholarship
competition.

The audience gives an obligatory round of light applause.

MRS. WIPER (CONT'D)

As you know, the winner of tonight's
competition will earn an invitation
to the world-famous Boston Symphony
Orchestra's summer program and a
full scholarship to The Boston School
of Fine Arts.

More light APPLAUSE.

Nathan is on the side of the stage, looking like a deer in headlights.

MRS. WIPER (CONT'D)

I'd like to thank Mayor Rebel McBride and McBride Motors for providing transportation for our judges tonight. And if our judges are ready, with no further ado, I give you our first contestant: From Valley Elementary in Blount County, Miss Janet Smetterholf, playing the trumpet.

Mrs. Wiper exits the stage as Janet comes on.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- AUDITORIUM -- BACKSTAGE --
CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Wiper comes up to another teacher standing backstage.

MRS. WIPER

Who's next?

TEACHER

Benston Flegglemier from Briarwood Christian Academy, and then Nathan P. Hagwood.

Mrs. Wiper turns to the two boys.

MRS. WIPER

Are you ready?

The two boys nod timidly. Nathan looks like he might be sick.

Nathan looks down at the sheet music in his hand and tries to HUM the tune, but he messes up again.

Janet finishes and comes off stage to a nice round of APPLAUSE as Benston goes onstage.

Mrs. Wiper walks up to Nathan.

MRS. WIPER (CONT'D)

Do you have your music together?

Nathan looks down and flips through his sheet music until he comes to a sheet that says "MOZART" at the top.

NATHAN

Yes, ma'am, I guess so.

MRS. WIPER

You guess so? You better be sure, because tonight is the night, and you have some stiff competition.

Nathan looks back down at the sheet music, flips through it one more time and shakes his head.

Mrs. Wiper heads for the stage as Benston finishes his MUSIC.
He receives a roaring round of APPLAUSE.

Nathan looks worried.

INT. SHELBY ELEMENTARY -- AUDITORIUM -- STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Mrs. Wiper steps up to the podium.

MRS. WIPER
Wow! That was an excellent
performance. The next student is
Shelby's very own Nathan P. Hagwood.

The audience APPLAUDS, but Nathan doesn't come on stage.

MRS. WIPER (CONT'D)
Nathan?

Slowly, Nathan walks on stage and makes his way to the piano.

He takes his place at the bench, closes his eyes and takes a
deep breath.

He places his sheet music on the stand. The sheet on top is
the one that says "MOZART" on top.

Nathan begins to play the "MOZART" piece, but we can see in
his face that his heart isn't in it, and he makes one mistake
after another.

AUDIENCE

The faces in the crowd grimace at the mistakes Nathan is
making.

STAGE

Finally, Nathan just stops playing, and the AUDIENCE GASPS
and begin WHISPERING among themselves.

Mrs. Wiper motions to Nathan to keep playing, but Nathan
just sits there, frozen.

Mrs. Wiper starts to head for the podium, and Nathan starts
to get up from the piano.

TRIPOD (THE DOG) (O.S.)
BARK. BARK, BARK!

Mrs. Wiper and Nathan both stop in their tracks and turn
toward the audience.

AUDIENCE

Nathan's parents push Carl in a wheelchair, with the little three-legged dog in his lap.

STAGE

Nathan's eyes light up.

AUDIENCE

Carl places his hand over his heart.

CARL

(silently)

Play from your heart.

STAGE

Nathan moves slowly back to the piano and sits down.

He regains his composure and flips the "MOZART" sheet music over, so it is no longer visible.

The audience goes silent, and Mrs. Wiper steps back off stage.

Nathan closes his eyes as he begins to play.

The first few notes are a little shaky. He continues, and the notes come together into a beautiful melody.

The first part of the song is the music Carl had written, "Friends, Dreams and Life -- Nathan's Song." But as he plays, Nathan adds to Carl's work.

The look on Nathan's face is a look of pure joy. Nathan manipulates the keys to his every whim, truly lost in the music.

The audience feels the power and the emotion.

Nathan plays from his heart.

As he finishes, the crowd gives him a standing OVATION.

Nathan looks out at Carl, who has a tear rolling down his cheek. Carl smiles broadly, and gives him a thumbs-up.

Nathan's parents are also smiling and clapping loudly. Mr. Hagwood can't deny the power and talent of Nathan's performance.

He looks back at the rest of the audience, smiles and takes a bow.

EXT. SHELBY -- BUS STOP -- MORNING

SUPER: SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

Nathan, Carl and the little three-legged dog stand at the bus stop outside the hardware store.

Nathan's luggage is by his side, and he pets the dog.

CARL

Where are your parents?

NATHAN

Believe it or not, they wanted to come, but I told them that I wanted to walk by myself.

CARL

So everything is square with them?

NATHAN

Yeah, my father and I had a nice long talk, and he admitted to me that he had his own dream as a kid. And that his father wouldn't let him pursue it. He said he was sorry that he let that influence the way he thought about me and my dream. I'm not sure what did it, but he finally came to his senses.

CARL

Better late than never, I guess.

(beat)

So, summer camp with the symphony and the Boston School of Fine Arts in the fall? Keep your eyes and ears open, boy, and you will learn a great deal.

NATHAN

You know I will. What are you going to do, Carl?

CARL

Even though I totally rearranged the hardware store, Mr. Dennismont is going to give me a job. He said it is actually more organized now than it's ever been before.

NATHAN

But you don't need money.

CARL

I know, so he's going to pay me in merchandise. And you know my weakness for hardware supplies.

Nathan looks down at his shoes.

NATHAN

I'm going to miss you, Carl.

Carl starts to speak.

CARL

I'm going --

Nathan runs to him and gives him a great big bear hug.

The DOG runs around them, BARKING.

CARL (CONT'D)

...to miss you, too.

The bus rounds the corner.

NATHAN

Any last words of wisdom from the bicycle man?

Carl smiles and rubs his chin.

The bus stops at the curb, and the driver gets off to load Nathan's luggage.

Nathan starts to board the bus.

NATHAN (CONT'D)

Well, what's it going to be? Don't tell me you're at a loss for words.

Carl looks up at Nathan.

CARL

(thoughtfully)

Never ever give up on your friends, your dreams or your life... and always... always play from the heart.

Nathan smiles warmly, then boards the bus.

Carl steps over to his bicycle and picks up the dog.

The bus pulls away, and Nathan makes his way to the back.

Carl gets on his bicycle and follows the bus down the street.

As the bus begins to pull away from Carl, Nathan waves one more time.

BUS

From the back of the bus, Nathan watches Carl follow on his bicycle, waving. Carl rides right through the intersection. CARS SCREECH to a halt, HORNS BLARE.

Carl never even notices.

SLOW MOTION

Carl continues to ride and wave as MUSIC begins to play.

FADE OUT.