

GOODMAN (FIRST TWELVE PAGES)

by

Alessandro King

Alessandro King
(917) 593-9565
AlessandroMKing@gmail.com

INT. WAITING AREA - DAY

Two little boys, one Black, one White, are sleeping on a bench in a brightly lit hall. The White boy, BENNY (bespectacled, about eleven), is sleeping on the shoulder of the Black boy, BUSTER (a touch older). Buster is resting his head on top of Benny's head.

A door opens opposite the boys, awakening them: an elderly INSTRUCTOR awaits.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - DAY

The two boys are standing, playing a classical clarinet duet together; the instructor keeps time with his baton. A few flubs here and there, but they are clearly two talented children.

INT. WAITING AREA - DAY

Benny sits on a bench, practicing his clarinet fingering. Buster and his MOTHER stand by him.

BUSTER'S MOTHER
(to Buster)
There's a reason for that and you
know it: you practiced.

BUSTER
Yes, momma.

Buster turns to Benny.

BUSTER (CONT'D)
See you next week.

Benny looks up from his clarinet, waves goodbye. Buster and his mother exit.

Benny watches them leave, then peers in the opposite direction. He looks back at his clarinet and, knowing he's alone, closes his eyes and KISSES it. Releasing the kiss, he holds the clarinet to his chest.

SUPERIMPOSE: CHICAGO, 1921.

Benny hears noises coming from inside the music room. He gets up, goes to the door.

BENNY'S POV: the instructor is reading from a ledger to Benny's father, POP, a sturdily built Russian Jewish man. Their words are muffled.

Pop pulls out his wallet, produces cash, which the instructor stares at incredulously.

POP
That should cover last month.

The instructor continues to stare.

POP (CONT'D)
I have a new job.

The instructor takes the money.

Benny stares through the doorway, captivated.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - DAY

Freezing. Benny and Pop walk briskly.

POP
...So many of us from the east who can sew, sew good, it makes a tailor job difficult to find: too much supply, not enough demand.

BENNY
So what work did you get?

POP
Don't you worry about that. You can eat, that's enough, nu?

INT. GOODMAN HOME - EVENING

A freezing basement apartment. A recently used menorah is visible.

MOM, a no-frills Russian Jewish woman, is serving a soup supper to Pop, Benny, and Benny's NINE BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

Seven of Benny's siblings are older than him, with IDA, HARRY and MORRIS jockeying for status next to Pop; next to Benny are his two younger brothers, IRVING and FREDDY. Everyone wears coats and hats.

POP
...I think the man knows what he's talking about. He played in the Chicago Symphony.

HARRY

Yeah, but he didn't say what Benny was a prodigy of. Maybe he's a prodigy of playin hookie.

Harry and Benny tussle.

POP

(to Mom)

You should see this man's studio, Dora. What a beautiful room. And certificates and photographs and instruments. That our son should study with such a man.

MOM

Good Benny, you should be very proud.

Freddy quietly turns to Benny.

FREDDY

Are you going to be famous?

Benny smiles.

BENNY

Oh...

Mom reaches the head of the table but stops: there's no soup left for Pop.

MOM

Ack.

POP

It's all right.

MOM

...You know what it is, I added the barley, and-

POP

It's all right. I'm not hungry.

An uncomfortable moment as they eat.

IDA

Pop you want some a'mine?

POP

No. You eat.

A silence.

MORRIS

Say Pop...

Morris reaches into his pocket, pulls out a NEWSPAPER CLIPPING.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

I helped Sal Giordano with his homework last week. He doesn't have any money to pay me. But his father's got a pork store...

He spreads the clipping out on the table.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

He says if a ham went missing over there no one would notice.

It's an ad for the pork store featuring a giant, detailed illustration of a pig.

Pop peers over, takes in the hog, returns to his glass of water.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

He'll give it to us for free. And he says if I keep helping him he can keep making it happen.

A tense moment.

POP

So Benny, the other student plays good, yes?

BENNY

Uh, yeah.

POP

His mother tells me he plays a Selmer.

BENNY

He-

Morris puts his hand on Pop's arm.

MORRIS

Pop.

Pop immediately turns to him.

POP
We do not eat that. Do you understand?

MORRIS
But it-

POP
We do not eat that in my house, not ever. It is what my father did for me, it's what our whole family did for generations. We are not khazerniks.

He turns away from his son.

MORRIS
(under his breath)
We do not eat at all.

Pop THROWS his empty bowl against the wall, SHATTERING it. Benny and the younger children are frightened.

POP
A shande! A shande! Do you have any idea how easy it would be?

MOM
David...

POP
You do it once and it's never just once. You do it again and again and again. This is my last time saying this: we do not touch the carcasses of swine.

A tense moment.

A furious Morris stomps out. Everyone left is silent.

INT. GOODMAN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tiny, all the children sleeping in shared beds, their arms flung across each other.

A THUMP causes Benny to sit up in bed. He finds his glasses, puts them on. He climbs over his siblings, gets to the door, peers through a crack: Pop is putting on huge work boots.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE GOODMAN HOME - DAWN

Pop emerges from the basement in heavy work gear, disappears up the empty tenement block.

A moment in the quiet morning air. Benny noiselessly climbs up in pursuit, disappearing in the same direction as Pop.

EXT. SWIFT TROLLEY STATION - DAY

A trolley car pulls in and Pop disembarks with a crowd of husky, bundled, silent working men.

Just before the train pulls out, Benny emerges from the back of the car and trails his father from a distance.

Benny catches glimpses of this strange neighborhood: a massive conglomerate of industrial buildings, anchored by a giant steel tower pumping smoke into the air.

EXT. SECURITY BOOTH - DAY

The men approach a large iron gate and present identification to a guard. Benny is luckily small enough to duck down and get lost in the pack.

EXT. UNION STOCKYARDS - CONTINUOUS

As Benny passes the gate, the crowd of men dissipates, and he begins to absorb his surroundings: he is in the middle of a five-hundred-acre complex of animal pens. Cattle and sheep are packed into tight quarters, engulfing Benny in cacophonous BLEATS and MOOS.

Benny gets up close to one pen and a sheep JUMPS right up at him, startling him and hurling him back.

FOREMAN (O.S.)

Goodman!

Benny whirls around and sees a FOREMAN shouting while holding a shovel. Pop approaches the foreman, who hands him the shovel and points him in the direction of the big steel tower. The foreman exits right past Benny; Benny slowly follows his father.

INT. THE KILLING FLOOR - DAY

Benny carefully enters a terrifyingly dark warehouse.

Overcome by a powerful, putrid stench, Benny clutches his face with his hand, grabs a wall, vomits. He recovers, wipes his face.

Benny goes deeper, his face now covered with a handkerchief. Nightmarish SHRIEKS and POUNDING machinery. Every once in a while there is a hellish BLAST of fire coming from God-knows-where.

In a pool of light, Benny sees his father hunched over, shoveling a mysterious substance. Benny quietly approaches, hides behind a machine.

Drops of liquid are slowly dripping down on Pop. Benny looks up and sees their source: a hanging herd of PIG CARCASSES, freshly killed, oozing blood. Looking down, Benny can now see that Pop is shoveling the entrails of swine, the organs and intestines swamping his boots.

Pop freezes. Benny watches as his father hunches, holds his head in his hand, his body consumed in unspeakable shame and pain, his face intermittently illuminated by the hellish flames.

INT. SOUTHMOOR HOTEL - NIGHT

A scene typical of 1920's nightlife: peppy music played by a twelve-piece band of uniformed musicians for wealthy dancers in a ritzy ballroom. Everyone is White.

The ebullient bandleader, POLLACK, points to seventeen-year-old, gawky Benny, by far the youngest person in the room. Benny stands and takes a daring solo, filled with showmanship and zany barnyard effects. Everyone is getting a kick out of this whiz kid.

Benny sits back down the audience APPLAUDS.

The band wraps up the tune. As the audience APPLAUDS again, Pollack points to Benny to take a bow.

POLLACK

The kid in short pants, ladies and gentlemen! The kid in short pants!

SUPERIMPOSE: CHICAGO, 1926.

Benny is beaming with pride.

INT. GOODMAN BEDROOM - DAY

Lazy Sunday afternoon.

Benny's sister Ida is very pregnant, lying on her back on a bed. Entertaining her are Benny's younger brothers: Irving, Freddy, and a new toddler, JERRY. Benny sits off to the side, fingering his clarinet.

IRVING

...So you say look, my kid
brother's the star of the band, put
a coupla chairs together and let me
lay down!

IDA

It don't matter if they let me in,
my water could break in the middle
of the show.

IRVING

So we bring a mop.

FREDDY

Yeah!

IRVING

(to Benny)

You hear what we're doing for you
here?

FREDDY

He can't hear you. He's in love
with that clarinet.

Irving picks up a pillow, throws it at Benny, knocking the clarinet out of his hands. Jerry starts laughing.

IDA

Watch the baby!

Benny tackles his brother and soon they are grappling on a floor bed as Jerry shrieks.

Mom bursts into the room wielding some sort of household implement.

MOM

Knock that off now! You let him
practice! You hear?

Mom whacks her sons in mock aggression. She falls onto the floor bed and is soon enmeshed in the silly tussle. Everyone is very giddy with laughter, except the baby, whose wailing only makes everyone laugh harder.

Pop appears in the doorway. Taking in the love, he lets out a hearty, jolly laugh.

INT. GOODMAN HOME - DAWN

Pop, in work boots and suspenders, sits at the dining room table, gently polishing his son's clarinet: a craftsman.

BENNY (O.S.)
You gonna make the show this week?

POP
Eh...

BENNY (O.S.)
Pop.

Benny joins his father with two cups of coffee.

POP
Let me get a day off, I'll go to Murray's, get a suit. I know which one, in the window, powder blue.

BENNY
Pop. I'll buy you the suit.

Benny takes the clarinet from his father, reaches inside, removes a wad of cash hidden in the tube.

BENNY (CONT'D)
A hundred fifty dollars a week.

He holds it out. Pop is paralyzed.

BENNY (CONT'D)
You can leave that job whenever you like. You don't have to live like this anymore. I can help you.

Benny's arm stays extended.

POP
Oh...Oh, Benny.

Pop slowly raises a massive hand and gently pushes the money away.

POP (CONT'D)
Don't...don't do that.

BENNY
But-

POP
Please. My boy.

Pop holds Benny.

POP (CONT'D)

Don't do that. Don't play for that.
You love this music, yes? It brings
you joy.

BENNY

Of course.

POP

Then play for that. That's the
whole reason I came to this
country. That's why I work that
job. To bring you joy. And the
minute you start playing for some
other reason, the whole thing goes
to hell. Do you understand?

Benny, getting choked up, nods.

POP (CONT'D)

It would be a sin. Aveira.

He hands the clarinet to Benny.

POP (CONT'D)

Play this thing and let me worry
about the family.

Benny takes it.

POP (CONT'D)

Oh, my boy.

Benny grabs his father.

POP (CONT'D)

Oh, my boy, my boy.

Father and son hold each other as the rising sun splashes
their faces.

INT. SOUTHMOOR INN - NIGHT

Pollack and the band perform again. This time, Pollack is on
drums, playing a duet with Benny. Pollack eggs his young star
on verbally as Benny responds with an adventurous solo,
improvising phrase after phrase. The crowd eats it up.

EXT. HALSTED TROLLEY STATION - NIGHT

A trolley pulls into the station. Near-empty, the passengers are just Pop and a few other stockyard workers.

Pop disembarks to the corner.

STOCKYARD WORKER
See you tomorrow, Dave.

POP
(holding up a hand)
Tomorrow.

The trolley pulls away as Pop waits for the pedestrian light. He removes a newspaper from the crook of his arm, opens to an ad: THE POLLACK BAND, FEATURING BENNY GOODMAN, THE KID IN SHORT PANTS. Pop smiles.

The light changes. Pop's feet descend from the curb.

Desperate SHOUTS and a violent TRUCK HONK.

Pop looks up from his newspaper.

INT. SOUTHMOOR INN - NIGHT

Pollack's musicians are packing up their instruments. The crowd has left. Pollack and a few of his men stand around Benny.

MUSICIAN
Say Pollack, ain't you afraid to take this kid out on the road? What if his balls drop in the middle of a tune?

POLLACK
I don't care if they drop and roll to your sister's front door, this kid is too valuable to cut: a genius with no responsibilities, I can take 'im anywhere. Ain't that right, kid?

BENNY
Yes, sir.

Pollack laughs, tussles Benny's hair.

Sound FADES.

A COP stands in the doorway. One of the men points Benny out to him. The cop approaches Benny.

The shadows of Benny and the cop speak to each other. The cop puts his hand on Benny's shoulder and Benny doubles over in pain.

INT. GOODMAN HOME - NIGHT

The door opens, Benny enters, his face ghostly pale.

Mom, Ida, and the younger brothers stare at him expectantly. Ida cradles her NEWBORN BABY.

Benny, the new breadwinner, takes it all in, his stomach churning.

CUT TO:

BLACK

END OF SAMPLE