

## The Big Break

Jeremiah Fulton rang the buzzer in the alley of Harlem's Cozy Cat Jazz Club, his arms laden with piles of white lilies that the club manager, Wallace Stringer, insisted on having delivered to the club every afternoon.



Wallace opened the door, and Jeremiah was shown into the club where a bass player and a trumpet player were rehearsing on the stage.

"They're sounding really good, Wallace," Jeremiah said as he handed over the huge bouquets.

Wallace opened a safe concealed underneath the counter, and counted out cash for the lilies.

"That's Lee Tenison on bass and Robby Clark on trumpet. They just came up from Alabama, with their piano player, Thomas Fontaine, and Margaret Sweet, who does vocals. You've got to hear her, Jeremiah. She's got a voice like an angel."



Jeremiah pocketed the money and headed for a back table. The Cozy Cat was Jeremiah's final delivery of the day, and Wallace didn't mind if Jeremiah hung out while the bands rehearsed. As he listened to the horn and strings, Jeremiah daydreamed about learning to play piano in his mother's parlor. He had mastered it quickly and played in church as a boy, but making a living in the city meant there was little time for playing piano these days.

Jeremiah's daydream and the music were interrupted when a woman frantically ran out onto the stage. It was clear that something was wrong.

"We're in a predicament, boys. I just got word from Thomas that he broke his hand while working at the factory today! There's no way he's going to be able to play with us tonight, and he's out of commission for the next few months!"

"We can't perform without a piano player, Margaret," declared Robby, "We go on in three hours. Finding a replacement in time will be impossible!"

Before realizing what he was getting himself into, Jeremiah heard himself speaking up from his seat, "I can play the piano."

The group turned their heads in his direction, noticing him for the first time. Margaret was the first to respond, "That's sweet of you honey, but we need a jazz player."

"Hold on," added Lee, "We don't have any alternatives, so let's just see what the kid can do."

Jeremiah approached the stage, and Lee handed over sheet music. Jeremiah took a seat at the piano as the rest of the group looked on. With a gulp of air, Jeremiah started. As his fingers moved over the keys, Jeremiah was taken back to his mother's house, and when the song was done, he looked up to see Margaret, Robby, and Lee smiling widely.

"I doubted you at first, kid" said Margaret, "But you can play! Let's work our way through this set and then get ready for tonight!"

"Sounds good to me!" beamed Jeremiah.

