

LOCAL SUGAR

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. MILL ROAD - MORNING

The sun rises above the green sugarcane fields lining the dirt road. Whistling through his oversized teeth, a 12-year-old beaver named BUCKY holds out a rolled-up newspaper and rattles it along the sugarcane stalks as he pedals his red bicycle. He's wearing a sling full of newspapers.

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION

Bucky locks his brakes and skids his bike to a stop, near the wide steps of the columned porch. He straightens his sling and gulps, eyeing the nearby mailbox. The original name on it--"RATON"--has been crossed out, and it now reads ROWLEY in sloppy red letters. Bucky takes one of the newspapers, pegs it at the door, and pedals away like mad.

BUCKY
(to himself)
Not again, not again, not again--

The door of the mansion pops open, and a bulky, lumpy, sour grump of a frog--ROWLEY himself--oozes out onto the porch. Rowley scoops up the newspaper and kicks a battered yellow air compressor, which sputters to life. He drops the newspaper into a big black tube connected to the compressor by a hose, levels it at the fleeing Bucky, and pulls a trigger.

With a WHOOMP sound, the newspaper blasts out. It sails true and hits Bucky in the back--he yelps and swerves the bicycle into a ditch, collapsing in a tangle.

Rowley sets his toy aside, picks up a well-worn pencil from a nearby ledge, and makes a tally mark next to a row of them on the nearest porch column. He heads back inside the door, and slams it.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(singing)
You think that's pretty mean, well
sad to say
That's about the nicest thing he'll
do today
Rowley's cooking up a plan
Just as evil as he can
To steal fair Mary Lou's sweet
hand, uh huh.

EXT. MILL ROAD

A farm truck trundles down the road, its wooden slat bed bulging with a pile of freshly cut sugarcane. A bright green sign on the side of the truck reads "NEET'S CANE SYRUP". Behind the wheel, looking a little short in the driver's seat, a mouse named MARY LOU grips the wheel and adjusts her driver's-side mirror.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

Now, Mary Lou just got elected
mayor
Of Sugarville and everybody loves
her there--
Her mill makes sugar, white and
brown--
The biggest business in the town--
She never lets her workers down, uh-
huh.

The truck shakes and rattles up the road toward her mill, an imposing structure with a puffing smokestack. The truck backfires twice, shaking Mary Lou with a lurch each time--she frowns and turns off the main road.

EXT. SLY'S GARAGE

Mary Lou pulls up in the truck and turns off the engine. It 'diesels' raggedly to a stop. An "I Brake For Snakes" sticker is clearly visible on the back bumper.

A big live-oak tree shades half-assembled cars and their parts, a V-6 engine hanging from a chain bolted to one of its branches. A sign on the tin-roofed garage itself reads "Sly's Snake Oil Garage".

Up on a stepladder, in a greasy ballcap and stained mechanic's suit, a snake named SLY fumbles with a wrench. He gets it around a bolt on the engine and carefully turns it-- Mary Lou honks the horn on the truck and Sly startles. The bolt flies off and Sly gets a face full of oil as it streams from the engine.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

Now this here snake his name is
Sly, uh huh--
Life full of trouble and he don't
know why, uh huh--

Mary Lou pops out of the truck's cabin, grabs a tattered red shop-cloth off a toolbox, and helps Sly wipe the oil out of his eyes, apologizing all the while as he just grins.

NARRATOR (V. O.) (CONT'D)

(singing)

Miss Mary Lou thinks Sly is cute
In his one-piece mechanic's suit
Calls him names like "big galoot",
uh huh.

EXT. SLY'S LOG CABIN -- EVENING

Butted up against a hillside, sloping toward the bayou, is a house carved out of a giant fallen cypress log, with a shingled roof. A side door opens out onto a big deck up on "stilts" that stretches out over the marshy water. All along the deck's guard rail, strings of little pepper-shaped lights blink on and off.

Mary Lou starts up the steps toward the front door, but Sly coughs for attention. Mary Lou turns to look--he looks like he's tying a cherry stem in a knot with his mouth, but instead he pops his forked tongue out with a gold ring hanging from it. He gets down on two coils of his body and looks up at her hopefully.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

He took her to his bayou home one
day--
And asked if she would be his
fi ancée--
He had no knees but what the hey--
He got down on 'em anyway--
She said yes, without delay, uh
huh.

Mary Lou swipes the ring off his tongue, and wraps him up tight, nodding happily. His tongue tickles her ear as he kisses her.

INT. ROADSIDE PHONE BOOTH - EVENING

Mary Lou, giddy with joy, flings open the door, drops a coin in the pay phone, and dials a quick number. She spreads her paw and marvels at the ring on it (she wipes it on her shirt briefly).

NARRATOR (V. O.)
 (singi ng)
 First thing, she called Penny, her
 best friend--

INT. LIGHTNING NEWS OFFICES

PENNY, a lightning bug with a pencil tucked under her jaunty little press reporter's cap, stops typing at her manual typewriter and picks up the phone. Mary Lou's happy voice squawks out of the receiver--Penny's jaw drops and she leans on her typewriter keys in shock.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
 (singi ng)
 --who almost lost it on the other
 end--
 She let that ol' receiver drop
 And made the proverbial presses
 stop--
 Printed the news right across the
 top, uh huh.

Penny drops the receiver, leaps to a big lever and throws it-- paper rollers grind to a halt and a conga line of folded newspapers stop in their tracks.

Penny's four "arms" pick and move newspaper type in a flurry, her glowing rear end flicking on and off making a sound like a "newsflash" radio teletype. She steps back and pushes the lever to "RUN"--the printer starts again. A close-up of the newspaper reads "MARY LOU AND SLY ENGAGED!!!" as the headline.

EXT. TOWN STREETS - EARLY EVENING

Bucky--his 'sling arm' in a big plaster cast--pedals his wobbly bent bicycle past houses, sailing newspapers onto porches and into bushes, handing extras out to passers-by.

BUCKY
 Special edition! Read all about
 it! *Sly et Mary Lou sont fiancés!*

A montage of papers being flapped open by unseen readers ensues--

READER 1 (O. S.)
Alors!

READER 2 (O. S.)
Mon dieu!

READER 3 (O. S.)
'Bout darn time...

EXT. FLOWER SHOP

Rowley squeezes out of the door, shaking a bell on it. He clutches a huge bouquet of newspaper-wrapped roses, smirking-- but does a double-take at the paper a COW LADY is reading while sitting on a park bench by the exit.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(singing)
Rowley didn't take it very well
When he heard that Sly had won his
mademoiselle--
He mumbled curses, quite obscene
Turned five jealous shades of green
Madder than they'd ever seen, uh-
huh.

He turns the bouquet around--it's wrapped in the same front page. With his tightening, angry grip, he pricks his finger. He throws the bouquet down on the bench, and stalks off, sucking his wound.

The Cow Lady watches him go, shrugs, picks up a rose, and takes a bite of it, reading again.

INT. MRS. PIERCE'S SEAMSTRESS SHOP

Mary Lou, standing on a crate in a wedding dress, holds very still and gulps--MRS. PIERCE, a lady porcupine with thick glasses, pulls out one of her own quills and pins up a fold of fabric.

EXT. CITY STREETS

The town springs into action--squirrels sweeping the streets, a pack of kids splashing into a stream to tie strings of green cans (with the NEET'S logo) and a "JUST MARRIED" sign to an airboat. A ladder truck from the fire department lifts the FIRE CHIEF (a Dalmatian), who holds one end of a huge "GOOD LUCK SLY AND MARY LOU" banner stretching over Main Street.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(singing)
In a flash, the news spread far and
wide
That Mary Lou would finally be a
bride--
(MORE)

NARRATOR (V. O.) (CONT' D)
 So she and Sly Snake, without delay
 Got set to take their vows next day
 Two guesses who got in their way,
 uh huh--

EXT. MILL ROAD

Night falls on the busy downtown, shadows creeping up the road toward the mill. It's nestled against the levee that holds the river back from the town.

INT. CANE SYRUP MILL - NIGHT

All is quiet. A giant metal bin full of steel cans is perched above a conveyor belt.

A SHADOWED FIGURE peers around a corner, drumming its gloved fingers on the wall. It grabs a switch and shoves it to the "RUN" position.

A can drops onto the belt, which starts moving. The can is pulled along and stops beneath a spigot that squirts golden, steaming cane syrup. The can moves on--a stamper presses a lid on tight. A machine spins the can around and slaps on a bright sugarcane-green label:

NEET'S CANE SYRUP
 Sugarville, LA
 Est. 1923

The can bumps its way down the assembly line, and another takes its place.

From a bag slung over its shoulder, the Shadowed Figure pulls out a wrench, which is clearly stamped:

PROPERTY OF SLY SNAKE

The Figure chuckles, tossing the wrench into the conveyor belt wheels. The belt bunches up, and the line of cane syrup cans screeches to a halt. The cane syrup spigot keeps pumping, overflowing the stuck cans beneath it and spilling onto the floor.

Metal grinds and twists, the bin of cans crashing on its side and spilling cans. Sparking and smoking, the machinery above the cane syrup spigot breaks into full flame.

CUT TO:

INT. CANE SYRUP MILL - HALLWAY OUTSIDE BATHROOM

An "Out Of Order" sawhorse sign blocks the closed door. Flushing sounds are heard from inside, followed by groans of frustration.

INT. CANE SYRUP MILL - BATHROOM - INSIDE STALL

Sly Snake is wrapped around the base of a toilet bowl, levering at the drainpipe with a wrench. He strains and squeezes and finally gets the pipe fitting to screw on tight. He drops the wrench to the floor and wipes his brow with a 'loop' of his body.

INT. CANE SYRUP MILL - BATHROOM

At the row of sinks, Sly pulls himself up onto the counter, sighs, and bumps the soap dispenser with his head. Soap squirts down as he closes one eye and squints.

CUT TO:

Sly, curled up in the sink fumbling at the taps as a weak stream of water trickles over him.

CUT TO:

Sly, eyes and mouth flopping as he twists around in the airstream coming from the hand dryer.

CUT TO:

Sly, tugging his uniform into place and looking himself over in the mirror. He looks spiffy, almost dry-cleaned. He winks and bares a fang--it emits a star-shaped gleam with a 'ting!' sound.

SLY

And they say hand soap is only good
for hands. Lookin' good, Mr. Groom.

Humming jauntily ("Here Comes The Bride"), Sly turns away from the sinks and pulls the bathroom door open (he has to use his jaw to push the handle down).

Flaming wreckage falls into the bathroom, blocking the exit as Sly backpedals. Gasping, he looks all around--he opens another door, and rolls of toilet paper fall out, already on fire as they roll away.

He focuses on the bathroom stall, and gulps.

CUT TO:

Sly, coiled up in the toilet bowl, half under water. Smoke and floating, glowing embers fill the air.

SLY (CONT'D)
I've snaked out a few toilets in my day, but this is ridiculous.

He reaches up to the toilet handle, flushes, and is whirled away down the drain.

INT. MARY LOU'S APARTMENT - FOYER

All is dark. There's a frenzied pounding on the door.

MARY LOU (O.S.)
Hold on a second! Dang it--

Mary Lou, in her nightgown, pulls the chain for a lamp hanging in the foyer. She shies away from the light and sleepily runs a paw through her whiskers. She stumbles over packing boxes and opens the door on Penny, who has a boxy camera slung around her neck on a long strap.

PENNY
Sorry to get you up, Mary Lou, but the mill is on fire.

MARY LOU
(groans)
Another one of your stories, Penny?
This one isn't very funny.

PENNY
(nods over shoulder)
No, it's not.

Fire trucks screech up the street, the burning mill visible over Penny's shoulder. Mary Lou leans over to look around her, jaw dropping. Penny holds out a friendly feeler.

PENNY (CONT'D)
When asked for comment, the mayor said she was solid as a rock. How you feeling?

Mary Lou reaches out a trembling hand and grabs Penny's feeler.

MARY LOU
S-solid. As a rock.

PENNY
That's my gal. Come on.

Mary Lou winces, but steps outside. Penny grabs her other arm, clicks her wings open, and hefts Mary Lou into the air, her nightgown flapping.

They skim the tree-tops as they zoom toward the fire.

EXT. MILL ROAD

Dalmatian and newt firemen man the hoses, as arcs of water pour into the flame-engulfed mill. Down the street, the sooty Fire Chief leans wearily on a sawhorse barricade, a crowd of townsfolk waving their arms and yelling questions.

They scoot back to form a ring as Penny and Mary Lou touch down (Penny flashing like an emergency vehicle), some calling Mary Lou's name with a mix of sadness and relief.

FIRE CHIEF
Mary Lou! I'm so sorry about the mill, we checked those sprinklers last week!

MARY LOU
(to FIRE CHIEF)
Never mind that! Was anybody working late?

The Fire Chief takes off his hat and holds it over his heart.

FIRE CHIEF
We're--we're still looking for Sly.
No one saw him come out.

Mary Lou gasps and jams herself through a gap in the barricade.

MARY LOU
I've gotta get up there--

The Fire Chief holds her back. She tries to tear herself away, beating at his arms and sniffling. He grabs her shoulders and shakes her.

FIRE CHIEF
Now, stop it! There's nothing you can do. We just have to wait, and pray, and look when it's safe.

He lets go, and Mary Lou sags against the barricade.

MARY LOU

All right, Sparky, all right. It's just so hard...

(a beat)

Hey, do you hear that?

A nearby manhole cover scrapes, rattles, and thumps. Mary Lou, Penny, and the Fire Chief rush over and wedge their paws and feelers under the cover, heaving it off.

A waft of foul-smelling smoke escapes, but Sly throws a couple of loops of his body up out of the hole and onto the pavement. He gasps for air. Penny reels back, winding a lever on her camera, abdomen building up a slow glow, with a rising power-up sound...

PENNY

A humped shape is rising out of the pit...

Suddenly her abdomen "goes off" like a flash-bulb, all those nearby shielding their eyes.

Mary Lou grabs Sly and pulls him out of the hole, sitting down and cradling him, tears dripping on his nose.

SLY

Oh, cut it out, I'm [hack, cough] perfectly all right.

MARY LOU

I thought you were a baked snake! Never do that again, you hear me?

Sly nods, rubbing his head under her chin.

SLY

You're gonna want to wash your paws. How's the mill?

Mary Lou struggles to her feet with the others' help, still holding Sly. Flaming timbers shift in the background.

MARY LOU

Break out the marshmallows--we're making s'mores.

SLY

Aww--sweetheart, I'm so sorry. What a mess...

Sly winces as she drapes him gently across the barricade. A rat in a lab coat, DOC PACKARD, slings on a stethoscope and pats it along his side, listening intently.

MARY LOU
Don't slither off anywhere.

SLY
(nods, coughs)
Hangin' out.

Mary Lou steps up onto the bumper of a fire truck and snags a bullhorn.

MARY LOU
(through bullhorn)
Attention! Attention, everybody!

The assembled crowd quiets down and looks up at her. Penny flips open her notebook, pencil poised.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
Town meeting, usual place. The dress code is pajamas. Funny footwear optional.

A RABBIT in bunny-foot slippers and pajamas taps one foot and rolls his eyes. This gets a few nervous laughs. The crowd mostly turns away, headed back down the street.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
We're gonna get through this, people!
(turns off bullhorn)
Oh, Mary Lou, you're full of it.

She turns to look, as the firemen pull back from the glowing husk of the mill. It collapses in a whirl of sparks.

EXT. HILL ABOVE MILL ROAD

Hanging off the cab of a huge yellow bulldozer, a goose, LELAND, puts a wing over his heart and begins to warble off-key.

LELAND
(singing)
Oh, say, can you see--

He cuts off with a startled squawk as GRUNT, a muscular monkey in a loose-woven straw hat, clamps a paw around his beak. With his other paw, Grunt picks up and waves a CB microphone on a coiled cord.

GRUNT

Quiet! Boss says we're sposta lay low until we get the signal.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

The gallery is packed--floor level and balcony. Families with sleeping children, singles and couples, all jammed together as Mary Lou bangs a gavel on the council table.

She's seated in a big comfy high-back chair. Flanking her in folding seats are Rowley and Penny (scribbling away in her notebook, camera still in tow). Sly is beside the stage, working a sound board. Mary Lou bends to speak into the desktop microphone.

MARY LOU

All right, meeting called to order.
Roll call--Secretary?

Penny raises a feeler, without looking up from her notes.

PENNY

Also representing the press.

MARY LOU

Treasurer?

Rowley shifts uncomfortably, too big for his seat.

ROWLEY

Present and uncomfortable.

(slyly)

How's about I sit in your chair,
and you can sit on my knee?

MARY LOU

Fat chance, Rowley. You want my seat, win it in the next election.

(back into microphone)

All present and accounted for.

Rowley's coat emits a squawk of static--he hastily reaches into a pocket and twists a dial. Mary Lou's microphone lets out a shriek of feedback and she covers it with a paw.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

Scale that back, Sly honey.

Sly nods and twists knobs on the console with his tail. The feedback stops.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 You all know why we're here.
 Around 11 PM tonight, a fire broke
 out--the mill is a total loss.

The crowd erupts in groans and cries.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 The only good news is that the
 boilers didn't blow--that could
 have punched a hole in the levee
 and washed out the town.

Rowley grits his teeth.

ROWLEY
 Perish the thought.

The bunny-slipped Rabbit, a chorus of his wailing children
 pulling at his pajama legs, speaks up.

RABBIT
 But what about our jobs, Mary Lou?
 How we gonna pay the rent to
 Rowley?

Crowd members nod and second his question, murmuring angrily.
 Rowley raises a hand and clears his throat.

ROWLEY
 Will the mayor yield? I can respond
 to that.

Mary Lou narrows her eyes at him.

MARY LOU
 Say your piece, Rowley.

Rowley heaves himself out of the chair, grabs the microphone,
 and stands up at the whiteboard behind the council seats. He
 pulls down a retractable map of Sugarville itself--the mill,
 the town square, the bayou and criss-crossing streets.

He retrieves a red marker from the tray below the map,
 uncapping it.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 Rowley, don't you mark up my map.

ROWLEY
 I'll buy you a new one. You know
 I'm good for it.

She growls, but waves him on.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 Now, here is where the mill is, I
 mean, was.

He draws a little circle and marks a big red "X" through the mill. Mary Lou winces as the marker squeaks.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 All of this--

He draws a few bigger circles, around most of the city street areas.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 --is my property you've been
 renting. That's where your houses
 are, your stores, your school.

Rowley sighs, and draws big red "x"s through the other circles. The crowd looks on in stunned silence.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 There's no more money in this town.

Rowley sets the pen aside, pulls a bulky radio from a suit-coat pocket, and pushes the send button.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 Grunt? Leland? You copy me? Over.

MARY LOU
 (covers her eyes)
 Oh, no, not those two again...

LELAND (O.S.)
 (over the radio)
 Loosey Goosey and Funky Monkey
 reading you loud and clear. Over.

ROWLEY
 (pushes the button)
 Cut the chatter! Time to fire up
 that bulldozer. Over!

LELAND (O.S.)
 (over the radio)
 Roger! Over and out!

Rowley clicks the "send" button again, puts the radio back in his pocket, turns back to the map, and crosses out more circles.

ROWLEY

You'll all find eviction notices
underneath your chairs.

A couple of the townspeople check--he's right. Everyone digs under their seats, pulling papers off the bottoms of the chairs. The Fire Chief pushes open a door at the back of the hall and sticks his head out. Engine sounds growl out in the night. The Fire Chief pulls back in--

FIRE CHIEF

Those two fools are tooling down
Mill Road with a wrecking machine!

The townsfolk swap papers and scratch their heads, building up steam in a frantic babble. COCO, an elderly alligator lady, clutches her alligator handbag to her chest, sobbing uncontrollably and blowing her snout into a wadded-up notice.

MARY LOU

Rowley! Are you trying to start a
riot?

Rowley pops the cap back onto the marker and waggles it at the audience.

ROWLEY

"Trying?" I'd say "succeeding"...

Townsfolk start climbing over the wooden divider and into the area below the stage, shaking their fists and pointing fingers. Sly abandons his post at the sound console and slinks toward a pair of double doors at the back of the room.

Mary Lou bangs her gavel on the table.

MARY LOU

Ten-minute recess!

Balled-up eviction notices, pencils and pens, a water bottle, and a bunny slipper all sail toward Rowley. Sly whistles for attention--he's got the doors open.

SLY

Mary Lou! Get him in here 'fore
they tear him apart!

Penny and Mary Lou snag Rowley and hustle him through the doors. Sly squeezes through as they slam shut--the townsfolk pound the doors and jiggle the handles. Coco whacks the doors with her handbag and yells through the crack.

COCO
Get back out here! Harold and I
are gonna beat you silly!

INT. TOWN HALL -- STOREROOM

All is dark.

ROWLEY (O.S.)
"Harold?"

MARY LOU, PENNY, SLY (O.S.)
(in unison)
Handbag.

With a clicking sound like a fluorescent bulb starting up, Penny's glow bathes the storeroom in a blue-green light. Sly braces the door against the outside assault.

PENNY
Oh, I'm just itching to write your
obituary.

SLY
Looks like frog legs are on the
menu tonight.

Mary Lou wheels around and grabs Rowley by his shirt-collar with both paws, snarling in his face.

MARY LOU
I'm about to serve them up myself,
on a silver platter...

Rowley gulps, but reaches into a pocket of his suit-coat. He pulls out a roll of blueprint papers.

Sly narrows his eyes suspiciously at them, catching sight of a single word--FLOOD. Rowley stuffs them back in, then reaches into the other pocket.

ROWLEY
Now, settle down, Mary Lou, I may
just have the solution to all our
problems right here.

He pulls out a small box and flips it open, pulling it up eye-level with Mary Lou. She lets go of Rowley and recoils against Sly and the doors. She and Sly stare in horror.

Poking out of the box is a gold ring with a glacier-sized diamond, if it's real.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)

Marry me.

MARY LOU

Rowley, put that thing away!

Sly bunches and flexes his coils, struggling upright as far as practical.

SLY

I'm not the hot-blooded type, but there are some things for which I will not stand.

Rowley snorts.

ROWLEY

Son, you couldn't stand if someone gave you stilts.

He chuckles, but is cut off as Sly springs and slams into his stomach with a headbutt. The ring-box flies out of Rowley's hand and sails into a full mop bucket with a "plop".

Sly whips his body around Rowley (not all the way around-- Rowley's too wide). Rowley tries to pry Sly off.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)

What the heck you trying to do?

SLY

Gonna squeeze you in half!
(to himself, trying it)
Lemme see, was it tuck and loop, or loop and tuck--

Sly tangles up Rowley's legs--Rowley falls toward the doors, knocking Mary Lou and Penny out of the way. Penny falls back, landing hard, and her "camera flash" abdomen goes off.

INT. TOWN HALL -- NIGHT

Rowley and Sly crash through the doors, falling onto the council platform. Rowley flails around, Sly holding on for dear life, as the startled townsfolk scatter.

ROWLEY

I'm gonna turn you into a cheap belt!

Sly slaps him in the face with his tail. Rowley howls in anger and rolls onto his side, giving Sly the steamroller treatment.

SLY
 (wincing, wincing)
 Halfway there--

Rowley gets a hand around Sly's throat and pins him to the floor. He balls his other hand into a fist, draws it back-- Mary Lou steps out of the doorway, rubbing her eyes. Penny steps out behind her, laying a hand on her shoulder.

ROWLEY
 You just need a little tanning
 first--

He smashes his fist into Sly's head. Sly points with his tail and goes limp, a coil of his body slipping off Rowley and thudding to the floor.

MARY LOU
 Rowley, stop it! You're really
 gonna hurt him!

She balls up her own fists and starts for him, but Rowley smiles and cocks his arm again, ready to strike. Penny winds her camera and clicks the shutter for another shot. Rowley pins Sly even harder, making him wheeze and gasp.

ROWLEY
 This is between us boys. You want
 to see real hurt, you take another
 step.

MARY LOU
 You wouldn't dare.

She takes the step. Rowley cocks an eyebrow and unloads his punch. Sly's face morphs out of shape, one of his eyes nearly swelling shut already.

SLY
 Ouch. That hurt.

Sly spits out a curved fang with a "ptoo" sound, and it skitters away along the platform. Mary Lou spreads her paws in supplication.

MARY LOU
 Please, Rowley, don't!!!

ROWLEY
 Say yes. Say yes, and I call off
 the bulldozer.

MARY LOU
 What?!

Rowley pulls himself to his feet, still holding Sly.

ROWLEY
Say you'll marry me, instead of--
this.

He shakes Sly around like a rubber toy. The crowd gasps in collective horror. Sly squirms feebly.

SLY
(choked)
Don't do it, Mary Lou--

His plea is seconded by members of the crowd.

Rowley retrieves his radio from his jacket, twists a few knobs, and clicks the talk button.

ROWLEY
Grunt! Read me off a mailbox!

CUT TO:

EXT. RABBIT'S HOUSE

An OLD RABBIT LADY, wrapped up in a shawl, rocks slowly on the front porch, dozing on and off and rocking slowly. The bulldozer is poised beside the little house, Leland bouncing in anticipation.

GRUNT
(into radio)
This shack says "Lapin Family",
boss. You want we should knock it
over?

INT. TOWN HALL -- NIGHT

The Rabbit gathers his young ones around as they start to cry.

RABBIT
Hey, that's our house! Leave it
alone!

ROWLEY
(clicks the button)
Turn it into toothpicks.

Rowley holds up the radio as a horrendous grinding and crunching noise comes through. Nearby townsfolk put comforting paws on the shuddering Rabbit and his children.

CUT TO:

EXT. RABBIT'S HOUSE

Only the porch remains, the Old Rabbit Lady still snoring away. The house behind her is a jagged pile of wreckage. Grunt and Leland hoot and holler.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Rowley clicks a button on the radio and it cuts off.

ROWLEY

Now, anybody else here interested
in sticking up for this spineless
snake?

Rowley tightens his grip and Sly's eyes bulge. His forked tongue pops out. Mary Lou breaks out in tears and grabs Rowley's shoulder.

MARY LOU

Let him alone, Rowley! Let them
all alone.

(a beat, draws a paw
across her forehead)

I'll do it.

Rowley's warty face cracks in a victorious smile.

ROWLEY

You'll do what?

MARY LOU

I'll marry you. Now drop him.

Rowley opens his hand and Sly splats to the floor in a loose pile of beat-up snake. Mary Lou rushes to his side, propping him up against the nearby podium and fanning his face. Sly gasps and blinks, half-conscious.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

Breathe, honey, breathe--

SLY

Not--so sure--I want to.

Mary Lou rests her forehead on Sly's, and howls with sorrow.

ROWLEY
See? Was that so hard?
(nods over shoulder)
Now go fish your engagement ring
out of that mop bucket.

Penny steps up close to Rowley, antennae wiggling angrily, wings clicking and buzzing.

PENNY
She'll do no such thing.

Penny turns around and bends to talk to Mary Lou.

PENNY (CONT'D)
I'll go get that cheap chunk of
glass. Don't you worry, we'll fix
this somehow.

She stalks off toward the storeroom.

Mary Lou sniffs back her tears, grabs Sly's head and rolls back his upper lip. She starts feeling around on her hands and knees on the platform.

MARY LOU
Anybody see a tooth?

Doc Packard bustles his way forward to the stage, shoving through the fearful crowd. He pulls his medical kit open, retrieving a pair of tweezers and a little plastic bag.

DOC PACKARD
Over here, Mary Lou.

MARY LOU
Can you save it?

Doc Packard tweezers up the fang and squints.

DOC PACKARD
I can try. I'm a general
practitioner, not a herpetologist.

MARY LOU
Fix him up and get him home, Doc.
Please? I... I don't have the
heart to take him myself.

Doc Packard nods, drops the fang into the bag, and begins gingerly coiling Sly up like a rope.

MARY LOU (CONT' D)
 (to those assembled)
 All you all, just get on home. I
 got work to do. Go on now.

The townsfolk turn away sadly, a couple of them pausing at the edge of the platform to pat Mary Lou gently on the arm, or to shoot poisonous looks at Rowley.

ROWLEY
 Show's over, folks. Go home and
 rest up for the wedding.

He stretches his arms and yawns. He saunters down the platform steps toward the exit, townsfolk recoiling from him.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 That's my plan, anyways. Busting
 heads and crushing dreams is hard
 work.

He turns in the doorway and flashes a wicked smile at Mary Lou.

ROWLEY (CONT' D)
 Good thing it pays well.

He turns his back on her and steps out into the night, chuckling.

INT. TOWN HALL -- STOREROOM

Penny, down on her knees, whips the pencil from behind the fold in her hat, and pokes around with it in the mop bucket. She pulls it up and the diamond ring hangs from it. She regards it with disgust.

EXT. CITY STREETS

Townsfolk shuffle sadly down sidewalks and into their houses. Sparky the Fire Chief, at the top of an extended fire truck ladder, pulls down the "GOOD LUCK SLY AND MARY LOU" banner that hangs on a rope across Main Street.

He snuffles and wipes his eye with the banner.

EXT. SLY'S LOG CABIN

Doc Packard pulls up in his van/ambulance (a white Volkswagen bus with a blue 'star of life' painted on the side), opens the rear door and hefts Sly gently out onto the ground.

Sly, his jaw swollen and mouth stuffed with a wad of cotton under his lip, wobbles back and forth as he stumbles to the screen door of his house. He looks back as Doc Packard, back at the wheel, holds a paw up to his ear in a "call me" motion.

Sly nods dumbly, noses the door open, and slinks inside.

INT. SLY'S LOG CABIN - BATHROOM

Sly shucks his uniform (we only see him from the "waist" up) and flops into the shower. As the water trickles down his scales, he slumps against the wall. A distinctive pattern of bruises run up and down his neck.

INT. SLY'S LOG CABIN - BEDROOM

Sly crawls into his bed next to a long pillow. He casts one blackened eye at a photo of Mary Lou on his nightstand. He tucks at the pillow and fluffs it up--he shapes it into a reasonable impression of ears and a snout. He wraps his body around it and cries silently.

INT. TOWN HALL -- HALLWAY

Paint buckets and a ladder flank a door with a large frosted pane. Lettering on the glass reads "M. L. Raton - Mayor".

Mary Lou stalks up to the door and runs her paw over the glass. Growling, she picks up a putty knife from nearby the paint buckets and scratches at the lettering, taking off most of "Raton".

This done, she tosses the knife onto the floor, flings the door open, steps inside, and slams it.

INT. TOWN HALL - MARY LOU'S OFFICE

Mary Lou grips her desk and lowers herself into the chair behind it. Beside a coffee maker and stacks of papers, a potted sugarcane plant rests on the desk, a cartoon sun smiling on its container--letters on it read "Raising Cane!" She makes a face at it, grabs one of the canes, and snaps it in half.

She slams the broken end of the cane down on the desk, puts her head down and covers it with her arms, sobbing.

On the wall next to the desk is a poster of a portly, grandfatherly rat UNCLE NEET standing surrounded by sugarcane stalks, holding a clear glass pitcher of golden syrup. "NEET'S CANE SYRUP", reads the poster text, with the slogan "Neet's is a Treat!"

MARY LOU
 (through her tears)
 Oh, Uncle Neet--I went and messed
 it all up, I'm so sorry--

Mary Lou sniffs and shakes, not looking up, finally calming down, clenching and unclenching her fists, breathing raggedly but eyes closed.

A faint wind seems to rustle the sugarcane on the poster. Uncle Neet's whiskers twitch, and he blinks slowly, looking around the room and down at Mary Lou. He frowns and cocks his head.

UNCLE NEET
 Sweet child, why the tears?

Mary Lou mumbles a bit as she answers in her sleep.

MARY LOU
 Gots to get married tomorrow.

Uncle Neet smiles, relieved.

UNCLE NEET
Mon dieu, that is a good piece of
 news. Sly is the best--
 (counts on his fingers)
 --nephew-in-law I could ever hope
 for.

Mary Lou sticks her bottom lip out.

MARY LOU
 Not Sly--that Rowley frog, he's
 twisted my arm--

Uncle Neet scratches his head.

UNCLE NEET
 Rowley? That old devil. Never
 thought I'd live to see the day--

MARY LOU
 You didn't.

Uncle Neet looks around at his poster frame and shrugs.

UNCLE NEET
Touché. Well, you obviously can't
 go through with it.

MARY LOU
 But if I don't, it's the end of
 Sugarville!

Uncle Neet sighs. He dips one paw-pad in the pitcher of
 syrup he's holding.

UNCLE NEET
 You and Sly, you been sweet on each
 other since day one.

Mary Lou nods, biting her lip and fighting back fresh tears.
 He reaches out of the poster and taps Mary Lou on the paw,
 leaving a smudge of syrup.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
 If you want to beat Rowley, you be
 sweet, child. Be sweet with all
 your might, and don't you let him
 turn you sour.

Uncle Neet draws back up into his poster, straightening his
 clothes and holding the pitcher back in its original
 position.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
 And marry that snake of yours, or
 I'll come back and haunt you.

Mary Lou half laughs/half sniffles, and nods, eyes still
 closed. She blinks, looks around, and up at the poster--it's
 only paper on the wall again. She looks down at her paw and
 sees that it's resting on the broken sugarcane stalk. She
 touches her paw to her lips, and tastes the sugar.

MARY LOU
 Be sweet? To Rowley? Oh, Uncle
 Neet, I don't know if I can...

CUT TO:

EXT. MILL ROAD -- DAWN

From night, to hazy gray, color comes into the world. The
 sun rises over the sugarcane, and all is silent. Suddenly, a
 police cruiser ZOOMS past.

INT. POLICE CRUISER

A paw rummages through a paper sack, and fishes out a greasy donut. The unseen driver grunts in frustration, tosses the donut out the window, and pulls out an apple.

EXT. RUINED MILL -- EARLY MORNING

A wind rustles the yellow "crime scene" tape. SHERIFF HOGGERT, a grizzled and tusky boar, opens the door of his cruiser.

He takes a bite of the apple, chewing it thoughtfully and looking out over the devastation of the former mill. Burned-out chunks of machinery, and piles of debris still smoulder, firemen carefully picking their way through the rubble.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
That's a lot of burnt sugar.

He eyes something in the middle distance, retrieves the paper sack from the car, and stalks toward it.

EXT. RUINED MILL -- EARLY MORNING -- WATER PIPE AREA

A snapped-off pipe sags sideways out of the ground, a cracked pressure gauge still attached. Sheriff Hoggert squints at the fallen valve wheel propped against the pipe, bends to pick it up using the paper bag, and holds it up over the center bolt hole. The gauge reads "SPRINKLERS".

SHERIFF HOGGERT
That ain't right. This was sabotage...

From nearby, someone whistles to get his attention. He jumps, snaps his head around and grumbles.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (CONT'D)
That you, Tib? You almost scared me out of my skin!

TIB (O.S.)
I'll fry up some pork rinds.

Sheriff Hoggert slaps his forehead and rubs his face wearily. He puts the wheel down and stalks toward the whistler.

EXT. RUINED MILL – EARLY MORNING – CONVEYOR BELT AREA

The can hopper, giant syrup spout, and sprawling, snaking conveyor belt are all burned out and lopsided. Crouched on his haunches is a thin bloodhound in a uniform a little too big for him. His skin is also a little too big, making him look like a transport system for wrinkles.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
What's shaking, Tib?

TIB
All four cheeks. Doc Packard says
I got an extra acre of skin.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
I always said you were a new
wrinkle on law enforcement.

TIB
Cute. Come take a look at this.
Fire baked all that syrup into
candy. Kinda smoky, not too bad at
all.

Sheriff Hoggert crouches beside Tib, who brushes aside a layer of soot with a gloved paw, and reveals a caramel-colored patch of hard, crystal-like substance adhered to the concrete slab beneath. He grabs an edge with both paws and snaps it free.

TIB (CONT'D)
But this here's a wrenching
discovery.

A bent, scarred wrench floats trapped inside it, like an insect trapped in amber. A row of smudges grime the wrench itself--but clearly stamped on the handle are the words "Property of Sly Snake".

TIB (CONT'D)
Ol' Sly--he knows how to fix
machines. Maybe he fixed this mill
up, nice and final-like.

Sheriff Hoggert winces and shakes his head.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
I surely do hope you're wrong, Tib.
But it does look bad.

He holds the wrench up to the light, tracing the outline of the wrench with one finger, stopping at the smudges.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (CONT'D)
 You can even see where he coiled up
 to get a better grip.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLY'S LOG CABIN

Sheriff Hoggert opens the screen door and hammers on the solid front door behind it. Tib hangs back, leaning against a police cruiser and idly twirling a set of handcuffs.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 (over his shoulder)
 Don't you lock yourself in those
 again.

Tib rolls his eyes and nods, whirling the cuffs around once more with a flourish and jamming them into a belt holster.

INT. SLY'S LOG CABIN - BEDROOM

Sly, one side of his face still puffy, one eye bloodshot, groans in pain. With each pound at the door, Mary Lou's picture dances closer to the edge of the nightstand, and it finally falls over on Sly, *thwack*. He yelps in surprise and pain. From outside, the knocking sound comes again.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (O.S.)
 Come on out, Sly. We got to talk-

Sly sticks his snout out from under the picture.

SLY
 (yells back)
 Hold up! I've been framed!

EXT. SLY'S LOG CABIN

Sheriff Hoggert sighs and turns to Tib.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 That's what they all say.

He points at Tib and makes a rolling "go on" motion. Tib shrugs and cups his paws.

TIB
 (yells to Sly)
 Come out with your hands up!

With a click of deadbolts and doorknobs, the front door creaks open. Sly sticks his head out into the light and squints with a halfhearted chuckle.

SLY
That one never gets old. Hey,
partner.

Tib sweeps his hat off his head and rolls it sheepishly in his paws.

TIB
Hey, Sly. I'm sure sorry about
Mary Lou.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
You and the whole town. Show him
why we're here, Tib.

Tib reaches into the cruiser and pulls out the evidence bag with the 'wrench candy' in it. Sly flops out onto the porch (he is clothed only in one leg of a pair of boxers with hearts on them--the other flops free) and slithers over for a closer look. His good eye goes wider with recognition.

SLY
Hey, that's my five-eighths.
Where'd you get that?

TIB
At the scene of the crime.

SLY
Crime? What crime?

Sheriff Hoggert glowers, pulls down the brim of Tib's hat roughly, and yanks the handcuffs out of Tib's belt holster.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
Tib, don't go blabbin' police
business.

TIB
Sorry, boss.

Sheriff Hoggert turns sadly to Sly, flipping one ring of the handcuffs open and advancing on him.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
Sly Snake, you have the right to
remain scaly. Anything you hiss
will be held against you in a pit
of law.

Sly recoils, backing against the screen door, but Sheriff Hoggert gets the cuff around his neck.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (CONT'D)

You have the right to a cold-blooded attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be roused from hibernation for you.

Sly sags, utterly deflated.

SLY

I guess I'm under arrest.

SHERIFF HOGGERT

That's about the long and the short of it.

INT. POLICE CRUISER

Sheriff Hoggert (driving) and Tib sit up front, with Sly propped up in the middle seat in back. A paper sack full of Sly's clothes rests on the seat next to him. Sly shifts uncomfortably, rattling his handcuffs in frustration.

SLY

This is ridiculous.

TIB

Rules are rules, Sly.

SHERIFF HOGGERT

You ride in the back, you get the jewelry.

Sly sniffs.

SLY

No, no, forget the cuffs. Why don't you go bother Rowley? Something goes sour in this town, he's the first one I think of.

Tib turns around with one arm over the seat, the "wrench candy" evidence bag clutched in his paw.

TIB

Well, he didn't leave his prints on a wrench--

SHERIFF HOGGERT

Tib, I told you to shut your yap!

Sly eyes the bag, squinting at the smudges.

SLY
Say, wait a minute--

His eyes go wide.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Rowley squeezes his hand around Sly's neck, making his tongue pop out. Rowley's fingers dig into Sly, leaving a light coat of slime--

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CRUISER

Sly shakes his head to clear it. He twists around in the safety belt, showing his side to Tib, with the line of bruises showing dark against his scales.

SLY
It's that Rowley! Same slimy sneak
put those marks on that wrench as
put these on me!

Tib's eyes go wide.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
Tib, he serious back there?

Tib unbuckles his seat belt and leans in close to Sly, putting a paw on one of Sly's handcuffs and holding the wrench up to match the marks.

TIB
(calling back)
Sure enough looks like...

CUT TO:

EXT. MILL ROAD

A closeup of the right front wheel, bumping along the road-- suddenly WHAM! It hits a pothole in the road, splashing out water.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CRUISER

Tib lurches toward Sly as the cruiser shakes. With a ratcheting sound, the handcuff goes tight around Sly. Way too tight. Sly puffs out his cheeks and sits bolt upright in silent panic. He flails around as Tib shields his face from the blows. Sheriff Hoggert tilts the rearview mirror for a better look.

SHERIFF HOGGERT

What did you do?!

TIB

Sly! Calm down, dagnabi t--

Sly turns an unhealthy shade of green and his eyes cloud over. In his throes, he whips his tail around Sheriff Hoggert's headrest and across his face. Sheriff Hoggert lets go of the wheel with both hands to pry Sly off.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILL ROAD

The cruiser swerves madly and launches off the road, smashing into the base of a billboard on the far shoulder. It reads "Welcome to Sugarville! Drive Safe and Sweet!" Steam rises from the mangled hood of the vehicle.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE CRUISER

Sheriff Hoggert is slumped over the steering wheel, unconscious, one arm up on the dash. Tib is twisted around in the gap between the driver and passenger front seat. Sly hangs limply from the seatbelt in back.

TIB

(weakly)

Sly--hold on, Sly--

Tib reaches up a shaky paw, gripping a pair of handcuff keys. He fumbles the key around, gets it in the lock of the handcuff around Sly's neck, and turns it. Sly falls forward against the back of the driver's seat, gasping. Tib groans and lets his arm drop, eyes rolling back in his head and then closing.

SLY
 (wheezing)
 Tib, you--you idjit, you nearly
 killed me! Tib?

Sly pushes at Tib's shoulder with his tail. He groans but doesn't wake up.

SLY (CONT'D)
 Sheriff?

Sheriff Hoggert moves his arm, knocking a lever by the steering wheel. The windshield wipers flick on, washer fluid splashing the cracked windshield, but Sheriff Hoggert himself doesn't move again.

SLY (CONT'D)
 Well, shoot. I guess I'd better go
 get help.

Sly disentangles himself from the seatbelt, and slithers gently over Tib into the front passenger seat. He wraps a loop of his body around the manual window handle and wrenches at it. The window rolls down several inches, then the handle pops off in his grip.

A cold wind whistles through the gap in the window. Sly shudders.

SLY (CONT'D)
 Hate to leave you fellers out in
 this--hey, that'll do--

Sly grabs a newspaper from the floorboard and spreads it out over Tib for a makeshift blanket, tucking it in. On the front page is a massive headline: "FIRE AT MILL -- FIGHT AT TOWN HALL". Two action shots of Rowley and Sly's fight are below the headline--the first with Sly tripping up Rowley and the second with Sly getting squashed as Rowley rolls on him.

SLY (CONT'D)
 Not my most shining moment. Hm--

He squints at the first photo--something's sticking out of Rowley's pocket, like a roll of paper, with letters on it--

SLY (CONT'D)
 (reading)
 Floo--

He looks to the second photo, with a different angle of the papers.

SLY (CONT'D)

--ood.

He bunches the photos up together, like a "fold-in" from a MAD Magazine inside cover, so the pictures of Rowley's pocketed papers overlap. They form the word "FLOOD".

SLY (CONT'D)

Flood?

(narrows his eyes)

Don't like the sound of that.

Sounds just like Rowley, though--

From the floorboard in back, he retrieves his mechanic's suit, which has spilled out of the paper bag. He shakes his head sadly at the unconscious cops.

SLY (CONT'D)

Hold tight, fellas. Looks like I'm going in without backup.

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - MARY LOU'S OFFICE

The phone on the desk rings. Mary Lou, one arm over her face, is slumped over her desk. She groans, blinking blearily, and picks up the receiver like it's a dead fish.

MARY LOU

(into receiver)

Tell me something good.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. PHONE BOOTH

Sly, back in his mechanic's suit, has a loop of his body wrapped around the receiver. He gulps, and breaks into an old Ricky Nelson song.

SLY

"Hello, Mary Lou--
Goodbye heart--

CUT TO:

INT. TOWN HALL - MARY LOU'S OFFICE

Mary Lou looks at the receiver in shock, grabs it tight with both hands, and starts to tear up.

SLY (O. S.)
 (through receiver)
 "Sweet Mary Lou
 I'm so in love with you
 I knew, Mary Lou
 We'd never part
 So hello, Mary Lou
 Goodbye heart."

MARY LOU
 Sly, you stop it right now or I'm
 going to die of lonely. Where are
 you?

CUT TO:

INT. PHONE BOOTH

Sly looks back over his shoulder--in the middle distance, a plume of steam still rises from the police car.

SLY
 In a whole heap of trouble. Listen
 quick--I got arrested. Cops
 thought I burned down the mill.

MARY LOU (O. S.)
 (through receiver)
 That's a giant load of--

SLY
 --I know, I know. Can you do two
 things for me?

MARY LOU (O. S.)
 (through receiver)
 You name it, sugar.

INT. TOWN HALL - MARY LOU'S OFFICE

SLY (O. S.)
 (through receiver)
 Get Doc Packard out to the corner
 of Cane Street and Mill Road. Tibb
 and the Sheriff hit the Welcome
 sign.

Mary Lou flips expertly through the wheel-shaped Rolodex file on her desk and pulls out a card.

MARY LOU
We just paid off that police
cruiser. Grr... Okay, what else?

SLY (O. S.)
(through receiver)
You got to get Rowley out of his
house. He burned down the mill--

Mary Lou crumples the card in her hand.

MARY LOU
That slimy sneak--

She realizes she's crushed the card and smooths it out,
shaking her head.

SLY (O. S.)
(through receiver)
That ain't all. He had a set of
blueprints on him, something about
a flood--got to get my coils on
those.

MARY LOU
It'll take a miracle to drag him
out of his lair--

INT. PHONE BOOTH

Sly scratches his head with his tail, thinking hard.

SLY
Just do what works on me.

INT. TOWN HALL - MARY LOU'S OFFICE

SLY (O. S.)
(through receiver)
Be sweet.

Mary Lou gasps and puts a paw to her mouth.

In flashback, she sees Uncle Neet from her dream, reaching
down from the poster.

UNCLE NEET
You be sweet, child.

Back in the present, Mary Lou shakes her head to clear it.

SLY (O. S.)
 (through receiver)
 You there, sweetheart?

MARY LOU
 Yeah, Sly honey, I'm here.
 (gulps)
 I'd rather be sweet to Rowley for a
 day than be stuck with him for
 good.

SLY (O. S.)
 (through receiver)
 That's my gal. I got to go.
 Love you.

MARY LOU
 Love y--

The connection cuts out on Sly's end.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 (sighs)
 Love you too.

She clicks the switch hook button on the cradle, thinks for a moment, then dials a well-practiced number. As it begins to ring, she mashes a button on the coffee-maker.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 Penny? Want to help me make some
 news?

Straightening the coffee pot on its base as it begins to fill, Mary Lou listens as a muffled question comes through the phone. She smirks, positively brimming with mischief.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 Tempting, but they'd probably strap
 you in the bug zapper for that,
 even if it was Rowley. No, let's
 just call this, hmm... Operation
 Sugar Rush.

CUT TO:

INT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - BEDROOM - MORNING

Dirty clothes litter the floor. An alarm clock jangles on Rowley's dresser. Rowley grumbles, rolls over, and cracks a crusty eye open at it. He yawns, stretches, and sends a lightning-quick tongue shooting out at the clock.

This knocks it off the dresser and against the wall, where it smashes into little bits of gears and springs.

Rowley opens up the top drawer of the dresser, grabs another alarm clock from a pile of them, winds it twice, and puts it back on the dresser.

CUT TO:

Rowley, opening up a wardrobe with a mirror on the inside of the door. Newspaper photo clippings of Mary Lou line the mirror. One is a wedding announcement with Mary Lou beaming at the camera, a hole ripped out where Sly should be. Rowley adjusts the mirror until his own fat mug shows up in the photo.

ROWLEY

Upon reflection, I do believe I'll
take myself a bride today.

He chuckles and shuts the wardrobe door.

INT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - KITCHEN - MORNING

Stacks of dirty dishes leaning precariously. Rowley surveys the wreckage, clicking his tongue disapprovingly.

ROWLEY

My, my. Mary Lou can't possibly
get this place in shape by herself.

Rowley snaps up the receiver of a nearby rotary phone on an end table, pages through an address book, and dials a number.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

Broom Service Cleaners? This is
Anthony Rowl--

(grits teeth)

--yes, down at the old Raton place.
How long you all gonna keep calling
it that? Never mind, just get
somebody down here for my annual
cleaning.

(a beat, listening,
frowns)

Already there? What--all right,
I'll let 'em in.

He hangs up, blinks in confusion, and shakes his head.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

Well, that's more than half odd.

INT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Rowley walks up to the door, hefts his sizeable stomach and tugs his robe into slightly more agreeable shape. A knock sounds--Rowley narrows his eyes and turns the knob.

He is nearly bowled over by LINDA LEE, a lady raccoon. She's in a maid's outfit, pushing a wheeled cart brimming with mops, brooms, buckets, and rags. Two OTHER RACCOONS in similar outfits bustle in behind her, one carrying a feather duster and the other carrying a dustpan and hand-brush. Mary Lou trails the crew, gesturing deeper into the house.

MARY LOU

Kitchen on the left, bathrooms back
and to the right, oh, Lord, this
place has gone to pieces.

The raccoons nod at her and split up, Linda Lee and one helper heading to different rooms, and one helper staying to dust a long-neglected mantelpiece above the fireplace. Rowley steps away from the cloud of dust, coughing, and clenches his fists, bending down to get in Mary Lou's face.

ROWLEY

M. L., you brought raccoons into my
house?

MARY LOU

Oh, don't you start with that "my
house" business, I grew up here.
And anyway, raccoons are the best
cleaners.

ROWLEY

They'll rob me blind!

Mary Lou puts her paws on her hips and raises an eyebrow. She gestures back and forth between her and Rowley.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

(growls)

They'll rob us blind.

The dusting raccoon shoots a dirty glance over her shoulder, shaking her head and 'tsk-tsk'ing. She sets aside the feather duster, picks up a vase, and cleans it out with her bottle-brush-shaped tail.

MARY LOU

(rolls her eyes)

Mr. Rowley, that's just the sort of
attitude--

(MORE)

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 (clasps her paws together
 and grins)
 --that makes you such a wonderful
 challenge!

A crash and bang come from the other room. Rowley winces.

LINDA LEE (O.S.)
 Sorry! Knocked over a tower of
 crap!

MARY LOU
 (cups her paws and yells)
 Keep knocking, Linda Lee!
 (to Rowley)
 You and I have a date for
 breakfast.

Rowley takes a half-step toward the other room.

ROWLEY
 Duh-date? But--I can't go out like
 this--

Mary Lou folds the collar on his pajamas and gives it a tug.

MARY LOU
 There, that's better. Don't worry,
 we'll get you out of those and into
 a tuxedo before you know it.

She pulls him along as he works his mouth in confusion.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION

Mary Lou pulls Rowley out his front door, as he rubs his eyes. His front lawn has been invaded by a flurry of townfolk--setting up tables, hauling buckets of paint, hefting potted plants.

Bucky, the erstwhile paperboy, is shoving a push-mower up and down the yard. He still has a cast on one arm. Bucky stops in front of the steps, shoving the mower handle aside, letting it drop and wiping cut grass off his paws.

BUCKY
 (wrinkles his nose)
 I can't believe I'm doing this for
 free!

Mary Lou shakes a finger at him.

MARY LOU
 Now, Bucky, I did say you could
 kiss me in the receiving line.

Bucky kicks at the earth, dissatisfied. He holds up three fingers.

BUCKY
 I get to count to three.

MARY LOU
 You drive a hard bargain. Okay,
 then.

BUCKY
 (growls)
 I still say a little sugar ain't as
 good as cold hard cash.

Rowley eyes him with surprise, and maybe a little respect. Mary Lou makes a fist and starts down the steps after him. Bucky snatches up the mower handle and hightails it away.

MARY LOU
 Oh, get out of here, you little
 businessman!
 (turns to Rowley)
 He's a romantic at heart.

ROWLEY
 You know, I may have misjudged that
 boy.

Rowley's head swivels as he looks down toward the lake, where a gazebo seems to be a focus of activity.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
 What are they fooling around down
 there for? It's off limits!

Mary Lou cautiously turns around and eases up the steps, reaching a calming paw up to his shoulder.

MARY LOU
 Now, Rowley, I was gonna talk to--

Rowley shoves her paw away, and shoves past her. Tendons stand out from his neck, his hands raked into angry claws as he stalks down the steps.

Mary Lou looks back up the porch.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
 --well, got him out of the house.
 Ooh, Sly--you better get here
 quick. . .

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GATE

A swinging gate across a path has a hand-lettered KEEP OUT sign on it. It's open.

Rowley snatches a chain and a busted rusty lock from the ground, twisting it in his hands and growling. He flings the chain back to the ground and stomps through the gate.

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO

Carpenters in overalls (beavers--one is BUCKY'S DAD) hammer freshly-laid planks and rip up old rotted ones on the floor of the gazebo. Old alligator lady Coco, in a wide-brimmed sun hat, is painting one of the gazebo's posts (white probably)--her handbag is nearby but out of splatter range. Other townsfolk are raking leaves and pulling weeds. Rowley barges in and spins around looking for someone to make an example of.

ROWLEY
 Idjits! Can't you read them signs?
 Keep out of here!

COCO
 Oh, the signs need painting too.
 We'll get to those next, won't we
 Harold?

The handbag doesn't answer, though Rowley can't help looking.

ROWLEY
 Gimme that, you crazy old biddy--

Rowley roughly snatches the paintbrush away from Coco, drawing back like he means to hit her with it, but he's distracted by a flash--the scene turns into a black and white newspaper photo for a moment. Color returns to the world and Rowley wipes his eyes, getting paint on his forehead.

Penny looks up from her camera, grinning.

PENNY

Oh, that'll make the front page.
"Grumpy Groom Helps With Cleanup
Efforts."

Rowley roars, reaches down, and snags Coco's handbag, winding up like a discus thrower and flinging it into the lake. Penny sets her camera aside on a nearby tablecloth-covered picnic bench as Coco's toothy jaw drops.

PENNY (CONT'D)

Oh, now you've done it--

Coco wails and hurries to the water's edge as the handbag splashes down, bobs once or twice, then sinks. She throws herself into the water, thrashing feebly toward a few air bubbles left in the purse's wake.

Bucky's Dad drops his hammer, runs to the lakeshore, and leaps in after Coco, who is barely treading water. He grabs her bodily and hefts her out with Penny's help. Coco coughs up water and reaches back toward the lake.

COCO

Oh, Harold, don't lose Harold--

Bucky's Dad rolls his eyes but with a flip of his tail he flashes underwater. A few seconds later, sputtering, he emerges with the soggy handbag and crawls back onto dry land.

Coco snatches the handbag back and curls up around it, tail and all, sobbing.

VOICES (O.S.)

Somebody got a towel?--
What a jerk!--You monster!--Get a
towel for Harold, too...

Mary Lou steps through the gate and surveys the scene, everyone glowering at Rowley.

MARY LOU

Making friends as always, I take
it?

Mary Lou grabs Penny's camera off the picnic table and hands it to her. Mary Lou snatches up the tablecloth, gets Coco to sit up, and wraps it around her, she and Penny rubbing her down.

ROWLEY

You get them out of here, Mary Lou.
There ain't no way in Hades I'm
letting you open this place back
up...

Mary Lou rolls her eyes.

MARY LOU

Uncle Neet's been pushing up
sugarcane for ten years. Ain't you
been mad at him long enough?

ROWLEY

Not nearly.

EXT. LAKESIDE - MUCH EARLIER

Through a yellow haze of faded time, the scene changes to
yesteryear. A banner hangs across the entrance to the
gazebo: "HAPPY RETIREMENT, UNCLE NEET!!!"

Alligator Lady Coco, with a tiny sliver of cake on a plate,
slaps the hand of a much larger, fatter alligator, HAROLD,
with a giant wedge of cake of his own. He rubs the hand and
growls, eyeing her ruefully.

COCO

Harold, you got enough love handles
already.

Uncle Neet sits at the head of a long table, looking a little
gray and stringy. He's bundled up in a wheelchair with a
blanket pulled up nearly to his chest. A piece of untouched
cake rests in front of him. A cluster of sugarcanes in a
pitcher of water stand as a centerpiece.

To his right, a younger Mary Lou is seated, holding his hand
and looking worried. To his left, a younger (but not young)
Rowley finishes a last bite of cake, leans forward in his
chair. He slides a folder onto the table.

ROWLEY

I brought the contract.

UNCLE NEET

Thought you might.

Rowley gestures to Uncle Neet's uneaten slice of cake. Uncle
Neet waves him on and Rowley snags it, shoveling in another
bite. Rowley eyes Mary Lou and gestures with the fork.

ROWLEY

You sure do keep a lot of sweet things around, Neet.

MARY LOU

Go poke your fork at someone else, Rowley. I'm spoken for.

Mary Lou waves down the table at a younger Sly, who scratches at his itchy, shedding skin but waves back with his tail.

Uncle Neet reaches forward and plucks a leaf off the sugarcane, folds it between his paws, and blows, letting out a piercing shriek and making Rowley choke a little. The party-goers set down their food and stop their conversations, turning to look.

Uncle Neet makes an effort and rises from his chair--Mary Lou helps pull him up. Once upright, he pats her shoulder and leans on the table. He picks up Rowley's contract with distaste, drops it back on the table, and picks up a stalk of sugarcane. Everyone watches as he points it solemnly at his guests, each in turn. A little girl gulps nervously.

Uncle Neet suddenly twirls the cane from paw to paw like a drum major's baton, rolling it over his knuckles. He flips it up to balance on end, on the back of one paw, then whips it up spinning into the air. He half-turns on the spot and catches it behind his back.

The partygoers applaud and whistle. Uncle Neet steadies himself against the table, a short coughing fit taking him. Mary Lou tugs at his sleeve.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

Be careful, Uncle Neet!

Uncle Neet pats her hand reassuringly and clears his throat.

UNCLE NEET

It's good to see you all turn out--
(turns toward Rowley)
Some better than others--

Rowley frowns as the others chuckle.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)

I may be leaving the business, but I leave you in good hands. Hands that have helped me through some hard times lately.

Rowley shuffles his seat back and begins to slowly rise, smiling, but then--

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
I speak, of course, of my niece,
Mary Lou.

Mary Lou's jaw drops. There's a gasp from all assembled,
then they break out into applause again.

ROWLEY
Wait, wait. You can't just turn
the mill over to her! She's hardly
into her first set of
whiskers!

Mary Lou narrows her eyes at him and wiggles her whiskers,
grumbling. Uncle Neet snorts, tipping his glasses and
looking over them at Rowley. He scoops the folder off the
table, rapping it accusingly with his knuckles.

UNCLE NEET
You want us to sell out to D and I
Sugar Holdings. Ship our sugarcane
up north.

ROWLEY
That deal is worth millions!

UNCLE NEET
And it would put half the town out
of work! I have always looked out
for my people and I know Mary Lou
will do the same.

Uncle Neet opens the folder, pulls out the contract, rips it
to confetti, and blows the bundle of pieces off his paws into
Rowley's face.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
Rowley only looks out for Rowley.

Rowley gets up from his chair, purposefully flipping his half-
eaten plate of cake over and sending it sailing at Uncle
Neet. Rowley pokes Uncle Neet's chest with an outstretched
flipper.

ROWLEY
You'll regret this. Both of you.

UNCLE NEET
Well, I won't regret it very long.

Rowley stalks off, Mary Lou brushing crumbs off Uncle Neet.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
 That one is trouble.
 (to all assembled)
 Never mind all that. Put your paws
 together and welcome the new
 president of Neet's Cane Syrup,
 Miss Mary Lou Raton!

Cheers and whistles. Uncle Neet winks at Mary Lou, who cocks
 her head quizzically.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
 Hold me up for a second.

Mary Lou grabs him under one arm and holds him up. He points
 to a spot down by the water, sheltered by a spreading live
 oak that creaks in the wind.

UNCLE NEET (CONT'D)
 That looks like a pretty good spot.

MARY LOU
 What for, Uncle Neet?

UNCLE NEET
 To spend some time, child.

He draws back and pitches the sugarcane like a javelin. It
 sails over the table, all the party guests watching it go.
 It buries itself half a foot into the ground underneath the
 live oak.

The yellow haze of yesteryear fades as the sugarcane grows in
 time-lapse into a clump of little canes--a white fence
 springs up around them. A headstone fades in, bringing us
 back to:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO

Mary Lou, who brushes sugarcane leaves and dirt off the
 headstone. Its epitaph reads:

NATHANIEL "NEET" RATON - EVERYBODY'S UNCLE

ROWLEY
 We could have been richer than King
 Midas. I'll be hanged if I'm gonna
 let you all turn this place into
 some kind of shrine to that
 sentimental crackpot.

Mary Lou gives Penny a wink, nodding over her shoulder at
 Rowley.

MARY LOU

We just need it for a day, Rowley.
If you still feel the same
tomorrow, we'll lock it up tight.

She stands, walks to him, and grabs his hand (the paintbrush is still in it). She stands on tip-toe to whisper in his ear.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

And you won't feel the same
tomorrow.

She pries the paintbrush out of his hand (he doesn't resist much).

ROWLEY

(a beat)
Just one day?

MARY LOU

(nods)
One perfect wedding day, like every
little girl dreams about.

ROWLEY

You got 'til sundown. And no
tricks, or Grunt and Leland start
plowing under tacky little houses
on Mill Road. You hear me?

MARY LOU

Loud and clear.

An unpleasant gurgling emanates from Rowley. Mary Lou
scrunches her nose up.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

I also hear your stomach. I did
promise you breakfast.

Rowley chuckles and cracks a toothy grin.

ROWLEY

I could eat you alive.

Mary Lou gulps nervously.

MARY LOU

Better get you over to Cutter's
Cafe before that happens.

Rowley harumphs.

ROWLEY

What? That old greasy spoon?

MARY LOU

The greasiest. You'll fit right in.

CUT TO:

EXT. CUTTER'S CAFE

Smoke rises out of a boxy vent on top--the building itself is shaped like a big cane syrup can turned on its side, with wide windows cut out in front.

INT. CUTTER'S CAFE -- KITCHEN

Spattering piles of hash browns and eggs swim in grease on the grill. CUTTER, a mosquito in a hair-net and sleeveless t-shirt chops and flips the food in a blur, using spatulas with two arms.

With one of his free arms, he grasps a huge coffee mug emblazoned with the words "NO DECAF". He sticks his snout into the mug and takes a long series of gulps. Coming up for air, he sighs contentedly, humming and buzzing his wings. He's airborne for a moment.

CUTTER

Ahh, coffee-coffee-coffee-coffee.

INT. CUTTER'S CAFE -- DINING ROOM

Cutter's wife KENDRA, another mosquito, zips up and down the counter refilling coffee cups as a trail of chatting townsfolk come in the door and take seats at the counter. She slaps down slices of pie, and retrieves plates that come out of the serving window. She puts a mug down for a seated HORSE in a cap, who is streaked with white paint.

KENDRA

There you go, sugar.

(a beat)

Got paint on you. Makes you look like a zebra. Or a referee.

The horse raises his arms over his head.

HORSE

And it's good!!!

Chuckling, Kendra snatches up another pot of coffee, turns back to the serving window and calls into it.

KENDRA
Two cackl eberries. And wreck 'em!

CUTTER (O.S.)
Tout sui te, cher!

He holds the coffee cup out the window.

CUTTER (MOSTLY O.S.) (CONT'D)
More.

Kendra refills it while taking an order from another customer. Cutter pulls it back into the window.

CUTTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Ah, sweet nectar of life--

The doorbell rings and Penny steps inside. She flops into a booth and starts winding her camera.

KENDRA
Ooh, it's the press. Come to write another glowing review?

PENNY
Nope. A scathing expose' this time. Ya got bugs in your kitchen!

This gets a laugh from all assembled. Everyone falls silent as the bell above the door jangles again, though--

Rowley sticks his head inside, scans for trouble. He finds it in the glowering faces of the patrons. He ducks out, but a second later Mary Lou shoves him bodily through the door.

MARY LOU
Oh, get in there, it's just breakfast.

Rowley grips the door handle for dear life.

ROWLEY
It ain't the food, it's that bloodsucking waitress--

Kendra rolls her eyes (all of them).

KENDRA
Don't knock it 'till you try it.

MARY LOU

She's harmless. Now sit down and eat, I'm not having the groom faint of hunger on my wedding day.

She walks to Penny's booth, slides in across from her, and pats the seat. Grumbling, Rowley lets the door handle go, stalks over, and wedges himself in beside her.

ROWLEY

What's edible in this--

Kendra buzzes her wings angrily. Rowley gulps.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

Ahem. What would you ladies recommend?

Penny rubs her 'fingernails' on her suit, as if trying to get rid of a piece of dirt.

PENNY

Packing up, leaving town--

Rowley leans over the table and gets in her face.

ROWLEY

Newsflash--not gonna happen.

He squashes back into his place.

MARY LOU

It was worth a try, Penny.

(to Rowley)

Well, everything here is good, but I ordered ahead.

Kendra sweeps in with her arms full of food and drink. She lays down a platter of pancakes for Mary Lou.

KENDRA

Gonna run out of cane syrup if you don't get that mill running again.

MARY LOU

Bug me about it tomorrow. Buzz off.

KENDRA

Ha, ha. Do I make mouse jokes at your place?

Kendra sets down a plate with home fries, biscuits and gravy in front of Penny, plus a big mug of coffee.

KENDRA (CONT' D)
That'll put the spark in your
sparkplug. And for you, Mr.
Rowley...

She slaps down a plate with eggs and hollandaise sauce, also
known as--

KENDRA (CONT' D)
Eggs Benedict. With extra betrayal
and a side of how dare you.

Rowley grits his teeth.

ROWLEY
There goes your tip.

Kendra smiles.

KENDRA
Here's a tip. Keep your windows
closed at night.

She sticks her (sharp) tongue out at him with a slurping
sound, and he recoils in genuine fright. Kendra laughs and
goes to check on her other customers.

Penny and Mary Lou saw away at their breakfast. Rowley picks
at his with a fork, shuddering a bit.

MARY LOU
(through a bite of food)
Now, down to business. What kind
of cake do you want?

ROWLEY
Cake? For breakfast?

MARY LOU
(sighs)
No, tonight, for the wedding. We
each get one. Mine's cheesecake--
family tradition.

ROWLEY
(sniffs)
Tradition? Give me a red velvet
cake any day.

Mary Lou's eyes go wide and she gasps. Unfortunately, she's
got a mouth full of pancake. She wheezes and chokes and
clutches at her throat.

Everyone swivels around to look, many crying out in dismay.

KENDRA
You all right, darlin'?

Mary Lou claws her way across Rowley's lap, and flops onto the floor. The 'painted horse' and Kendra heft her bodily-- Penny leaps to her feet, wraps a pair of arms around her, and jerks hard. A wad of pancake sails across the aisle, and hits Rowley square in the face. Mary Lou breathes deep, doubled up, and starts laughing.

ROWLEY
(swelling with anger)
What's got into you?

KENDRA
The flapjack, genius. Good thing it got out of her.

Mary Lou shakes her head vigorously.

MARY LOU
No, no. The cake! You said red velvet. We've already got one.

CUT TO:

INT. MARCEL'S CAKE SHOP

CHEF MARCEL, a beaver in an apron and chef's hat, stands with his back to a cake on a table. It's shaped like a coiled-up snake with a baseball cap, obviously Sly. Chef Marcel pats at the cake's icing with his paddle-shaped tail.

CHEF MARCEL
Well, that looks like Sly, right down to the scales.

A phone rings on a nearby counter at the front of the store. Chef Marcel picks up the receiver.

CHEF MARCEL (CONT'D)
Bonjour, this is Marcel, baking cakes that look like snakes.
(listens)
Oh, but--with so little time? And--
(listens)
The sloppier the better?

Chef Marcel grins.

CHEF MARCEL (CONT'D)
Oh, I promise, it'll look terrible.

He hangs up and cracks his knuckles. He grabs a trowel, dips it into a jar of chocolate frosting, and slathers it onto the cake, whistling as he works.

He steps back. The cake looks like a giant, steaming pile of...

CHEF MARCEL (CONT'D)
I have captured Rowley's true
essence. A giant *piece de--*

He stops himself and bites his tongue.

CHEF MARCEL (CONT'D)
--resistance.

The hat, eyes, and tongue from the original cake lay discarded on a counter.

CHEF MARCEL (CONT'D)
(sighs)
I liked the snake better.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAYOU NEAR RUN-DOWN SHACK

A rickety pier juts into the bayou, with boats in various states of disrepair dragged up onto the shore alongside it. A shack leans against the pier, with fishing nets hanging from the eaves and a rusty anchor in the yard.

Sly zips across the yard and creeps inside a hollow log, hiding himself completely. Only his flickering tongue can be seen.

SLY
(to himself, whispering)
Okay, just get the boat and go--

He sticks out his head, and looks both ways.

SLY (CONT'D)
Quick as lightning, cool as a
cucumber--

A looming shadow suddenly rears up behind him.

SLY (CONT'D)
(gulps)
Dead as a doornail.

He retreats into the hollow log as LUTHER, a Louisiana Black Bear with a grin full of teeth, clamps his massive paws over both ends of the log.

Luther whistles jauntily as he upends the hollow log and shakes it like a cocktail shaker (but not too hard), Sly making jiggly noises inside.

Luther pours Sly out and drapes him over one massive paw, tossing the log aside. He then holds Sly out straight between his paws like stretching a rubber band, with a few cracking noises. Sly's eyes bulge in alarm.

SLY (CONT'D)

Ack! Luther! Cut that out!

LUTHER

Oh, come on, Sly. Do the crankshaft.

Sly sighs, but then bunches up his body in a repeating rectangular pattern and whirls slowly around.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Ah-ah! Make the noise.

Sly rolls his eyes, but makes a rrr-rrr-rrr sound like an engine turning over. Luther chuckles.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Gets me every time. How's city life treatin' you?

Luther lets Sly go with one paw--Sly winds around Luther's other massive arm like it's a tree branch. He cracks his neck and adjusts his jaw.

SLY

I've been going through a rough stretch.

LUTHER

No trouble with Mary Lou, I hope...

Sly shakes his head forcefully.

SLY

That sneak Rowley threw a wrench in our wedding plans.

LUTHER

Sneak? From what I've seen he isn't the only sneak in these parts.

Sly opens his mouth to protest, but Luther cuts him off, pinching his mouth closed with one paw.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Yes, I saw you eyein' my boats. It hurts my feelings that you didn't just ask me for help.

Luther lets Sly's snout go and flicks him on the nose. Sly rubs it.

SLY

I'm a fugitive from justice. Helping me, that's called aidin' and abettin'.

LUTHER

You're going to stick it to that good-for-nothing Rowley, ain't ya?

Sly nods vigorously. Luther grins.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

That's called "fun". Count me in.

EXT. BAYOU

Sitting in the back of a flat-bottomed dugout canoe, Luther dips his paddle in the water, sending it sliding past massive cypress trees, their roots poking up around their bases, long beards of Spanish moss trailing from their branches.

In the front of the canoe, Sly pokes his head out of a woven basket.

SLY

Why the basket?

LUTHER

To keep you from flopping all over the boat. You do that when you're worried.

Sly rears up out of the basket, arching his back and hissing a little. He throws a couple loops of his body up on the sides of the basket, writhing.

SLY

Well, I can't help it! How can I not be worried when Rowley's out there--

Luther sighs, lays down the paddle inside the canoe, and reaches into a pocket of his coat.

SLY (CONT'D)
Croakin' that crackly croak of his--
(imitates it)
Hur, hur, hur...

Luther pulls out a little recorder-like musical instrument and begins to play a familiar snake-charming tune on it. Sly calms down--way, way, down--as the music takes hold, swaying back and forth.

SLY (CONT'D)
Rubbin--his slimy flippers--all
over Mary Lou--uhhhh...

Luther "plays him down" into the basket, where he unkins his body, draping into a relaxed coil, eyes shut.

LUTHER
Mary Lou's no fool. In her heart,
there is only snake.

Sly smiles hopefully, eyes still shut.

SLY
You mean it?

LUTHER
Sly, that gal is snake-crazy.

Sly sighs contentedly, tongue flicking. Luther keeps rowing, the bayou sliding past in green shaded silence.

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION--SHORE NEAR BACK OF HOUSE

Luther gently prods Sly's basket with the paddle. Sly reluctantly rolls over and groans.

LUTHER
Rise and slither, sleepy-scal es.

Sly rears up over the edge of the basket, blinking blearily at the mansion's back door, with a set of stone steps framed by a climbing-rose trellis against the house. The roses bristle with thorns...

SLY
(yawns)
Al ready?

Luther shushes him, gently pushing him down inside the boat and crouching down as far as his own massive size allows. Luther points up toward the mansion with his paddle.

LUTHER

Mary Lou might have got Rowley out,
but not everybody.

Behind a ground-floor window, a raccoon whisks a feather duster along the windowsill. Briefly looking up and out of the window, she sneezes, wipes her nose, and moves along.

SLY

I could just knock on the front
door, they'd probably let me in...

Luther shakes his head.

LUTHER

If Rowley hears you're poking
around, he'll hop back here like a
slimy green flash. Besides--

He points toward the front of the house--the goose Leland is attacking an innocent flower bed with the push-mower, cackling with delight.

The monkey, Grunt, stretches back the rock-laden pocket of a Wrist Rocket slingshot and takes aim at a stretch of picket fence, on which has been scrawled a crude approximation of Sly. Grunt lets fly, and WHACK! the cartoon snake's head is replaced by a gaping hole.

The real Sly gulps and ducks his head.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

--those two aren't exactly stable.

SLY

You got a point.

Sly looks further up the house--a second-story window is slightly ajar.

SLY (CONT'D)

Might as well start at the top.

CUT TO:

Luther, pressed against the side of the house by the rose trellis. He's holding the boat's paddle out flat with Sly coiled up on the 'blade'.

SLY (CONT'D)
You sure about this?

LUTHER
You'll be fine. Just stay limp on
impact. Ready?

Sly nods, and Luther flips the paddle up, sending Sly sailing onto the top of the trellis, just below the window.

SLY
Ow! Dang it!

LUTHER
You all right up there?

Sly pulls himself out of a tangle of roses, sporting a few fresh scratches, his mechanic's suit torn a bit.

SLY
(sotto voce)
Limp on impact, he says.
(to Luther)
I'll live.

Luther sighs with relief.

LUTHER
Good. I'll be down by the water.
Whistle if you need me.

SLY
Snakes don't have lips!

LUTHER
That's not what Mary Lou says--

Sly blushes.

SLY
Aw, go on! Get out of here before
you get caught!

LUTHER
Good luck, Romeo. What snake
through yonder window breaks?

Luther lumbers toward the boat. Sly turns to the window. He tugs at it with a loop of his body, but can't get it open more than a crack. He wrenches at it, and shakes it back and forth. He wipes sweat off his brow.

SLY
Wish I had me some WD-40...

Sly looks at a glistening coil of his body.

SLY (CONT'D)
Ah, well, snake oil's next best.

He bunches up his suit, rubs his bared skin along the edges of the window. He wedges under the window, kinks the rest of his body into rectangles, takes a deep breath, and twists.

SLY (CONT'D)
(straining, making the
crankshaft noise)
Rrr-rrr--rrr!

The window shifts. Just a little, but enough.

CUT TO:

INT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - ATTIC

Sly wedges his head into the gap, and the window wobbles. He twists around face-up, trying to haul the rest of his body through the window, but looks up at the ceiling and frowns.

Creaking, suspended from a rope and pulleys, is a fifty-pound sandbag. The rope is tied to the window's inside handle.

Frantically, Sly thrashes and pulls himself through the window, springing away from it just as the sandbag lets go.

It crashes into the floorboards, breaking a few.

CUT TO:

INT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - GROUND FLOOR

Linda Lee is running a vacuum cleaner, humming along to music that blasts from her chunky headphones attached to a portable 8-track player.

She turns off the vacuum, lifts one earpiece of the headphones to listen, shrugs, and turns the vacuum back on.

CUT TO:

INT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - ATTIC

Sly pokes at the sandbag.

SLY
Snakes alive, that was close.

A large table takes up most of the middle of the room. Sly looks around at 'floor level'.

SLY (CONT'D)
He sure has gone to a lot of trouble. Wonder what else he's got up--

Sly pokes his head above the table and his jaw drops.

SLY (CONT'D)
--here. Well, well...

Stretched out across the table is a model of an amusement park. Letters spanning its entrance read BAYOU-LAND. Sly reads from a sign posted by the entrance:

SLY (CONT'D)
Bayou-Land, a property of Rowley Enterprises. Former site of Sugarville, Louisiana. Former site?

Water-slides coil around the park, a paddle-wheeled steamboat puffing cotton "smoke" (most of the park is on stilts, with plastic "water" running under).

Sly pokes the tip of his tail through a ragged hole in the levee by the ruined, burned-out mill. More of the 'water' is flowing through it and down the hill--

SLY (CONT'D)
Well, yes, if you blew a hole in the levee, that would wash us out, real quick.

A miniature roller-coaster car is perched at the top of a "hill". Sly nudges the car--it sails around the track, dips and dives, and comes to rest.

Up on a green grassy hill sits a model of a familiar house--the mansion itself. Sly squints for a closer look.

SLY (CONT'D)
There he is, our model citizen.

A grinning figure of Rowley is seated on the front steps, overflowing money bags clutched in his flippers and a glowing cigar in his mouth.

A miserable-looking figure of Mary Lou stands behind him, fur matted and barefoot. She carries a big-eyed monstrosity of a child in her arms--it looks like a tadpole covered in fur. A few others tug at the hem of her dress.

SLY (CONT'D)
 Oh, poor Mary Lou--and the kids
 look like Rowley, poor things.
 Wonder where he put--oh, that's
 just wrong.

Downhill from the mansion is a little shack with an open front and a "MAINTENANCE" sign, a broom and dustpan propped against the counter. Behind the counter is a pipe-cleaner snake figure with a baseball cap and googly eyes... obviously Sly.

SLY (CONT'D)
 Not only does he steal my girl, he
 makes me clean up his mess. Well,
 not if I can help it.

Sly looks all around the attic and narrows his eyes, "hmm"-ing. Over in the corner is a drafting table. On it, spotlighted by a worklamp, are the blueprints. They're titled "FLOOD PLANS".

SLY (CONT'D)
 Something old--something new--

Sly slithers close to the drafting table, reaching a coil of his body up --

SLY (CONT'D)
 Something borrowed--and something
 blue.

He leans on the table, across the blueprints. A loud "CLICK" sounds.

SLY (CONT'D)
 What the--

The floor swings open beneath him--it's a trapdoor. The desk tilts up, dumping Sly and the blueprints into the hole.

INT. CHUTE

Sly slips down a slick metal slide, flapping blueprints covering his face. Rough lath-and-plaster walls fly past, occasionally lit by a bare lightbulb.

Sly wriggles his head free of the blueprints just as hanging signs appear above the chute. They carry just one word each: LEFT -- OR -- RIGHT? Sly whips his head around to look.

SLY
 What's that supposed to--

Ahead, the chute splits in two. The right fork drops off into a red crackling glow with leaping sparks in its depths.

SLY (CONT'D)
Left. LEFT!

Sly scrabbles along the left wall of the chute and stays on the left fork.

INT. BASEMENT

A furnace with a big front grate extends a pipe into the ceiling, and casement windows show the front yard just outside. Sounds of yelling and banging on metal get closer...

A flap opens in the wall and Sly tumbles out, into a steel cage (it would come up to about Rowley's waist). Blueprints scatter all around the room.

Sly's momentum carries him against the side of the cage. A hatch on top of the cage slams shut and locks with a click--yanking a string tied to its handle.

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION--ROOF

Underneath an overhang, a string is tied around the trigger of a flare gun. The string suddenly yanks, and a flare arcs into the air, bursting over the mansion.

INT. BASEMENT

In the cage, Sly untangles himself, and gingerly touches his side--his skin is scraped and a few scales are missing.

SLY
Well, let him try turning me into a
belt now. Not enough skin!

Sly tries to squeeze through the mesh of the cage, but the holes are too small. Sly hangs his head in defeat.

SLY (CONT'D)
Oh, Mary Lou, I'm sorry. I tried,
I really did.

Sly rests his head on the side of the cage, then bangs it a couple of times in frustration. A creak, like a loose hinge, continues for a bit, and Sly looks up for its source.

Caught in the flap on the wall, a corner peeking out, is a page of blueprints, fluttering in the draft.

Sly bangs the cage again and the blueprints slip a little further out. He bangs again, bang-bang-bang, and they slip free, sailing down and looping once, coming to rest beside the cage.

Sly pokes his tail through the mesh of the cage, straining to reach the blueprints. He brushes a corner--

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. PIERCE'S SEAMSTRESS SHOP

Rowley is in a dress shirt, tie, and pajama bottoms. He's up on a cane syrup crate, in front of a full-length mirror, his back turned to the door. He shies away from the prickly porcupine Mrs. Pierce, as she holds up a measuring tape against his arm and Mary Lou enjoys his discomfort.

ROWLEY

You watch them spikes, hear?

Mrs. Pierce smiles.

MRS. PIERCE

Oh, I hear just fine. It's my eyes that are going.

MARY LOU

Her fashion sense is still sharp as a tack, that's what matters.

Rowley gulps.

ROWLEY

Sharp as a bag of tacks...

Mrs. Pierce takes note of her measurement and turns away to a closet. She takes a long, tubular piece of cloth off a hanger and puts her arm through it, wiggling her fingers.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

What's that? A sleeve?

She turns it around to show a bowtie on the front.

MRS. PIERCE

No, no. That was the whole suit, when we had the real groom.

(sighs)

I might have to start over.

ROWLEY

You think?

From outside the shop comes a distant whistle and bang. Rowley tilts the mirror to look out the door, and grins evilly.

Far up the road, the flare leaves a bloom of sparks above the mansion. Mrs. Pierce and Mary Lou turn to look.

MRS. PIERCE

What's all that ruckus up at the mansion?

Rowley chuckles and straightens his tie.

ROWLEY

I expect some uninvited guest was--
slithering around. Not any more.

Mary Lou looks from Sly's suit to Rowley, and gulps.

MARY LOU

Rowley? What have you done?

ROWLEY

Remember that old garbage chute? To the furnace?

Mrs. Pierce's eyes go wide behind her glasses, as she grips Sly's suit tight in her paws. Mary Lou rakes her hands into claws, stalking toward him.

MARY LOU

If you've hurt Sly I'll knock you
off that box and put you in a
coffin.

Mrs. Pierce, quills bristling, holds out a paw and stops her.

MRS. PIERCE

Don't dirty your paws.

She hands Sly's suit to Mary Lou and turns toward Rowley.

MRS. PIERCE (CONT'D)

You know what would really look
good on you, Rowley?

ROWLEY

Please, do tell.

MRS. PIERCE

A hug.

She wraps her spiky self around his closest leg and squeezes. Rowley bites his lip and puffs up his cheeks like balloons.

EXT. MRS. PIERCE'S SEAMSTRESS SHOP

A roar of pain from Rowley blasts out of the door, shaking the hanging sign on its hinges. (The slogan reads: "For the Sharp-Dressed Lady and Gentleman".)

CUT TO:

INT. SUGARVILLE MEDICAL CLINIC

A shark named SHEILA sits behind the receptionist's counter, in a nurse's cap. She picks up a piece of paper from the "IN" tray, looks it over, shrugs, and chomps on it a few times. She puts the mangled shreds in the "OUT" tray.

The phone jangles on the counter as Sheila turns away and grabs another stack of paper, dumping it into the "IN" tray.

In a nearby hospital bed, his hat on the nightstand, Sheriff Hoggert groans and holds an icepack to his head.

SHERIFF HOGGERT

You gonna get that?

SHEILA

Oh, hold your bacon.

(picks up phone)

Sugarville Med Clinic, Sheila speaking. Is this an emergency?

(a beat, begins scribbling notes on a pad)

Rowley? Around fifty, you say?

Deeply embedded, oh my. Yes, we'll get Doc right over there. Bye now.

Sheila hangs up, throws her head back, and laughs toothily.

Tib, in bed with one leg propped up in a cast, shudders. One of his paws is handcuffed to the bed.

TIB

Makes my wrinkles pucker when she does that.

Sheila gets up and pushes open a door behind the counter, calling into it.

SHEILA

Doc! You got a pin-cushion special, up at the old Raton place!

DOC PACKARD (O.S.)

Oh, lovely. I'll get my pliers.

Sheriff Hoggert swings his feet over the side of the bed and stands wobbily. He puts the icepack on his head and his hat on over the icepack.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
I'll ride with you, Doc.
(to Tib)
Tib--stay.

TIB
(rattles the handcuffs)
Ain't goin' nowhere.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
Good dog.

Tib wags his tail, thumping it against the bed.

CUT TO:

ROWLEY'S MANSION - FRONT PORCH

Grunt and Leland roughly shove a path through a crowd of curious onlookers for Rowley, as he stomps up the stairs.

He stands in front of the door, digging in his pocket for the keys, but pulls his hand out with a yelp--another porcupine quill is stuck in it. One of his legs is dotted with quills.

Mary Lou tries to muscle past Rowley.

MARY LOU
I'm going to check on Sly!

Rowley pushes her away--she nearly falls down the stairs, but Penny grabs and steadies her. Rowley pulls the quill out of his hand and jabs at them with it.

ROWLEY
Back! If you're lucky, I won't wring his snooping neck!

PENNY
Good luck finding the neck on a snake. Takes special training, right Doc?

Doc Packard sits down on a rocking chair by the door, wielding a pair of pliers. He clamps down on a quill stuck in Rowley's leg.

DOC PACKARD
Years, actually.

ROWLEY
Oh, get on with it.

DOC PACKARD
This may sting a bit.

He rocks back in the rocker, pulling hard--the quill comes out with a sound like a fiddle string breaking. Rowley stamps his foot as Doc drops the quill into a cane syrup can.

DOC PACKARD (CONT'D)
You think this hurts, wait until you see my bill.

Be pulls another quill with similar results.

ROWLEY
(waves him off)
I'll be back. Meanwhile you can practice on Miz Baldy over there.

A rather patchy Mrs. Pierce shakes her head sadly.

MRS. PIERCE
I should have quilled him years ago.

Rowley unlocks the door--Grunt and Leland head in and Rowley drags himself inside. He slams the door. A moment later the door pops open again--Rowley and his goons shove the protesting trio of housecleaning raccoons roughly onto the porch, Rowley grabbing one hard by the arm.

ROWLEY
And stay out! Sneaks and spies and ringtailed thieves, all of you!

He slams the door again. Mary Lou rushes to one of the raccoons and grabs her paws.

MARY LOU
Did you find anything, Linda Lee?

LINDA LEE
(shakes her head)
Checked everywhere but the attic and the basement. Your groom of doom has 'em locked up tight.

MARY LOU
Rowley's not my groom.
(to Penny)
That garbage chute comes out in the basement.

PENNY

I'm on it.

Penny buzzes her wings, and takes off out of sight. Mary Lou grabs a handle on the yellow air compressor by the door, hefts it, and begins dragging it down the stairs. Bucky-- carrying his sling of newspapers--rolls his eyes, rushes over, and helps her.

BUCKY

What do you want this thing for?
It's pure evil!

MARY LOU

Might have to--
(grunts as they hit a
step)
--break a window. For starters.

BUCKY

On purpose? Cool!

He tugs harder.

CUT TO:

INT. BASEMENT

Sly, glumly stretched out in his cage, startles as Rowley kicks open the door at the top of the stairs and takes a few steps down.

ROWLEY

Helooo? Anybody down here? Ah,
there you are, why didn't you speak
up?

Grunt and Leland start to follow through the door, but Rowley pushes them back through.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

I've got this one, fellas. Go beat
up an orphan or something.

He shuts the door, turns around, and descends to the basement floor. Sly coils menacingly and flickers his tongue at Rowley, eyes narrowed, but does not speak.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

Bet you got a real good look at my
amusement park model upstairs.
Amused?

Sly shakes his head.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
 Oh well. It'll be a hit with the
 tourists.
 (clicks his tongue)
 Just look at this mess.

Rowley grabs a pair of pliers from a workbench and pulls a quill out of his leg. He winces, but chuckles.

He jabs the quill through the mesh of Sly's cage from various sides, Sly leaping away to avoid getting skewered.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
 Whee! Look at him squirm!

Rowley leaves his game and begins spearing the blueprint pages with the quill.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
 Be a pity if these fell into the
 wrong hands--not that you've got
 any. Armless freak. Don't know
 what she sees in you.

Sly bares his fangs and hisses. Rowley holds up a speared stack of blueprints, admiring it, then turns toward the furnace. He opens the front grate.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
 There they go--
 (pitches them in)
 --up in smoke.

The blueprints curl and crisp, the words FLOOD PLANS turning to ash. Sly grits his teeth. Rowley picks up the cage and opens its hatch, swinging it around to face the furnace.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
 Might as well dump you out with the
 rest of the garbage.

Rowley tilts the cage, laughing, and Sly scrambles to keep a grip on the walls as flames leap into the hatch.

Off-screen, a camera flash whines, warming up. POP! It goes off, and Rowley shields his eyes--through one of the basement windows, Penny looks up from her camera and waves.

PENNY
 Let's try that again, Rowley, I
 only got your giant backside.

ROWLEY

Aww, not the shutterbug again--

Mary Lou gently shoves Penny aside and levels the 'newspaper cannon' at the window, pulling the trigger. Shards of glass fly into the basement and Rowley dives for cover, slapping the cage hatch shut and ducking behind a workbench.

MARY LOU

Hand him over, Rowley!

She shoves another newspaper into the muzzle of the cannon and cocks it.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

I've got the Sunday special edition and I'm not afraid to use it!

Rowley pulls another quill out of his leg, wincing. He spears a scrap of white cloth, and waves it cautiously around the corner of the workbench.

ROWLEY

Parley?

The 'ka-chunk' of the newspaper gun sounds again. A sailing newspaper missile obliterates the 'flag' and puts a giant dent in the far wall. Rowley flaps his fingers.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

Oww! That was a flag of truce!

MARY LOU

That was a fickle flipper of falsehood! You let Sly go, now!

ROWLEY

All right! On one condition!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION - DRIVEWAY

Sly is still in the cage. Sheriff Hoggert and Doc Packard heft it into the back of the medical van. Sheriff Hoggert holds his icepack and hat on with one hand, grabs the handle of the van's rear door, and starts to shut it.

Mary Lou puts a hand on the door, stopping him.

MARY LOU

Sheriff, you can't lock him up!

SHERIFF HOGGERT
He broke into Rowley's house, Mary Lou. The law is the law.

MARY LOU
But Rowley has something awful planned! Not just for me, for the whole town!

SHERIFF HOGGERT
I believe you, Mary Lou, but you need proof. And you can't just go stealin' it.

Mary Lou grabs Sly's cage and puts her face up against the steel mesh.

MARY LOU
Tell 'em, Sly! Tell 'em what Rowley's gonna do!

Sly shakes his head, coughing and working his mouth, but nothing comes out. Rowley (one pant leg rolled up and that leg wrapped in bandages), steps up behind her and slams the van door shut.

ROWLEY
At least he'll miss our wedding. Maybe it's kinder this way.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
Kinder? There ain't a kind bone in your gelatinous body.
(to Mary Lou)
We'll take good care of Sly. We know he was just trying to help.

Sheriff Hoggert climbs into the front passenger seat of the van. Doc Packard sticks his head out the driver's side window.

DOC PACKARD
Hey, Rowley--want some free medical advice?

ROWLEY
Well--I do want to live a long healthy life with my new bride.

He sweeps Mary Lou close with one arm--Mary Lou wriggles out of his grip, wiping her paws on her pants.

DOC PACKARD

All right, here's the advice. Get stuffed.

He revs up the engine and motors away in a puff of exhaust, leaving Mary Lou reaching after.

NARRATOR

(singing)

She stood there and watched him go,
uh-huh.

It hurt so bad, she loved him so,
uh huh.

There are few words that would
express

Her sudden sense of loneliness

Empty is my closest guess, uh-huh.

Penny puts a comforting arm around Mary Lou and gently forces her arm down.

MARY LOU

(absently)

Sly's gonna have to give that thing
a tune-up.

ROWLEY

Well, as a common criminal he'll
have to work off his debt to
society some-way or other.

Mary Lou breaks into tears and turns away, Penny holding her against her shoulder and patting her back.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)

It's not so much that I hate to see
you cry. But over that blasted
snake?

Mary Lou looks down the road at the dust trail kicked up by the ambulance.

MARY LOU

He was my prince. All you're gonna
get of me is the leftovers, and I
hope you choke on 'em.

CUT TO:

INT. LIGHTNING NEWS OFFICES

Penny steps up to a lever, pulls it, and her printer begins cranking out wedding invitations. She picks one up and reads it out loud--

PENNY
 "You are invited to the wedding of
 ANTHONY J. ROWLEY
 And
 MARY LOU RATON
 A date which will live in infamy."

She turns off the machine, shuffles a stack of invitations, turns off the light and locks the door, dropping the key into her pocket.

CUT TO:

EXT. MRS. PIERCE'S SEAMSTRESS SHOP

Bucky knocks at the door and Mrs. Pierce totters out, a bit off balance from her recent loss of quills. Bucky gingerly extends a wedding invitation and Mrs. Pierce takes it.

MRS. PIERCE
 I shall make it a point to attend.

She slaps it on her shoulder (it sticks). She shuts the door, locks it, and tucks the key into her pocketbook. Looking both ways up and down the street first, she pulls out a quill, sticks it into the lock, and snaps it off.

CUT TO:

EXT. COCO AND HAROLD'S HOUSE

It's seen better days--the paint on the porch columns is peeling, the stairs are cracked. Coco, sitting on her porch in a rocker, takes an invitation from Bucky.

COCO
 Harold and I will be there.

She stuffs the invitation into her handbag and pats it. She looks back at the house, kisses two fingers, and presses them to the doorframe.

COCO (CONT'D)
 And then we're going on a little
 trip, aren't we, Harold?

CUT TO:

INT. DOC PACKARD'S OFFICE

Sheila the nurse shark regards the invitation coolly as she turns it over with her fins. She chomps down on it with her rows of teeth as Bucky scatters back.

SHEILA
 Tastes like bad news. The lavender
 is a nice touch though.

She lays the shreds in the "OUT" box on the desk, turns, and turns the lock on a file cabinet.

CUT TO:

INT. CUTTER'S CAFE -- KITCHEN

Kendra calls through the kitchen window, Cutter still at his chopping and grilling duties.

KENDRA (O.S.)
 Put out the lights and cry!

Cutter scratches his head and frowns.

CUTTER
 Liver and onions?

Kendra tacks a piece of paper to the hanging "order wheel". Cutter turns it around in the serving window--an invitation is tacked to it, and Cutter scans it.

KENDRA
 No, really. Put out the lights.

CUTTER
 Hmmmm. Bummer.

He turns a dial, and the blue glow of the flame under his grill cuts out. He hangs his spatula on a nearby hook and turns off the kitchen light.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE - EVENING

The sun dips below the cypress trees out on the bayou.

A set of covered picnic tables nearby creaks under the weight of casserole dishes and hors d'ouvres plates.

Coco steps up, closely followed by a "THIN ALLIGATOR" in a wide-brimmed hat and dark sunglasses with side shades. This fellow is carrying a plate of scaly green treats, and Sheila the shark looks askance at both.

COCO

Oh, you poor thing. They got you on guard duty again?

SHEILA

(shrugs)

It's always a Doberman or a shark.

COCO

Watch out for Rowley, he'll eat the buffet out from under you.

The Thin Alligator whisks the tray of treats down into a gap between platters on the table.

"THIN ALLIGATOR"

Coco whipped up a batch of her alligator eggs--

Sheila gasps and recoils from the table.

"THIN ALLIGATOR" (CONT'D)

--not real alligator eggs, for heaven's sake, they're an avocado recipe.

Sheila sighs, relieved. Coco tugs on the Thin Alligator's shoulder and points toward the swiftly-filling rows of chairs.

COCO

Come on, Harold, they're already passing the basket--

She hustles him off, waving goodbye. Sheila returns the wave, but stops and thinks.

SHEILA

"Harold?" Wait, what?

COCO
 (over her shoulder)
 Always showing up at the last
 minute. Why'd you think I always
 called him my late husband?

INT. BRIDE'S TENT

Mary Lou, up on a sugarcane box yet again, stands dully as Mrs. Pierce tightens her dress in back and ties its lacings into a bow. Fluffing out the bow, Mrs. Pierce snuffles, takes her glasses off, and wipes at the corners of her eyes.

MARY LOU
 Don't stick yourself! Do I really
 look that bad?

MRS. PIERCE
 Of course not! I just don't like
 gift-wrapping you for that monster
 Rowley...

Mary Lou tugs her elbow-length gloves on tighter, and clenches her fists.

MARY LOU
 He's thinks he's got me beat. But
 I'll show him. I've got a trick up
 my sleeve he'll never expect.

MRS. PIERCE
 We'd all like to pull one on
 Rowley. What's yours, sugar?

Mary Lou covers her eyes, lips trembling.

MARY LOU
 I'm gonna up and die of a broken
 heart.

MRS. PIERCE
 Oh, darlin', don't talk like that.

Mrs. Pierce holds her arms wide, and hugs Mary Lou around the middle. Mary Lou shrieks, but calms down, breathing out with a "whoosh" as Mrs. Pierce squeezes the air out of her. Short on options, she pats Mrs. Pierce gingerly on the nose.

MARY LOU
 How--why aren't you all piercy?

Mrs. Pierce lets go, straightens her glasses, and smooths out Mary Lou's rumpled wedding gown. She hands Mary Lou a bouquet--made from magnolia blossoms and sugarcane leaves.

MRS. PIERCE
I left my best quills in Rowley,
remember? Except for--

Mrs. Pierce reaches over her shoulder and pulls out a big sharp quill. She pins it through Mary Lou's hair.

MRS. PIERCE (CONT'D)
--this one. And remember--this
whole town loves you. Don't you
give up.

MARY LOU
I'll try. No promises.

A cough for attention sounds outside.

HAROLD (O.S)
May I intrude?

Mrs. Pierce steps to the tent flap and brushes the fabric curtain aside.

MRS. PIERCE
(struggling to get it out)
Uh-- Buh-- Of course! C-come in!

Harold ducks into the tent and flashes a dangerous smile, raising his dark sunglasses and revealing bruises around his eyes. Mary Lou gasps and fumbles her bouquet, nearly dropping it.

HAROLD
Looks like you seen a ghost.

MARY LOU
Harold? Come here, you leathery
piece of luggage!

Mary Lou tosses her bouquet to Mrs. Pierce and launches herself off the box at Harold, hugging him tight and lifting him off the ground for a moment.

HAROLD
Careful! You'll split my stitches.

Mary Lou pulls back to get a better look at him.

MARY LOU
 (gasps)
 Where's the rest of you?

HAROLD
 Well, I had some reduction work
 done. Nip here, tuck there..

Mary Lou winces and nods.

MARY LOU
 Miz Coco's handbag--

HAROLD
 I sent her the extra skin. Coco
 always was kind of artsy-craftsy.

MARY LOU
 (grimaces)
 Eww. So, what brings you back?

HAROLD
 Coco sent word you was getting
 hitched. And with old Uncle Neet
 gone, I didn't know if you had
 anybody, well...

Harold shuffles his tail modestly. Mary Lou grabs his hands.

MARY LOU
 I would be honored if you'd walk me
 down the aisle.

Harold snuffles and raises his dark glasses again, wiping
 away a tear.

HAROLD
 I'm not much of a stand-in.

MARY LOU
 Oh, no crocodile tears. You're
 perfect.

Harold straightens himself up.

HAROLD
 Young lady, you have mistaken my
 species. On behalf of all
 alligators, I am offended.

He holds out an elbow and she hooks her arm through it.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
 Today, I'll let it slide.

Mrs. Pierce sticks her head through the tent opening and pulls back inside.

MRS. PIERCE

It's time!

From outside the tent, the opening chords to "Here Come The Bride" start up on an organ. Mary Lou gulps--she and Harold step out the exit.

CUT TO:

INT. SUGARVILLE JAIL

Sheriff Hoggert bumps the door open as he backs inside, carrying one end of Sly's cage. Doc Packard has the other.

DOC PACKARD

I still don't like the way he's breathing. Hear that hissing sound?

SHERIFF HOGGERT

Any snake gonna hiss when he's upset.

Doc Packard shakes his head, 'hmm'ing doubtfully. They put the cage on Sheriff Hoggert's desk. Sheriff Hoggert takes his hat off and wipes his brow.

Sly makes a rattling, wheezing noise like an oversized kazoo, pointing at his mouth with his tail again.

DOC PACKARD

What, you want me to--

Sly rasps and nods vigorously. Doc Packard cracks open his medical bag and retrieves a pair of forceps.

DOC PACKARD (CONT'D)

Sheriff, if you would--get him out of there and hold him up.

Sheriff Hoggert grumbles, but undoes the latch. He reaches in and drapes Sly over one shoulder like a fire hose. Sly gapes his mouth open again and sticks his tongue out.

DOC PACKARD (CONT'D)

Same to you.

Sly slaps his tail impatiently against the desk. Doc inches the forceps inside Sly's mouth and Sly tries not to gag.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
You gonna get bit, Doc.

DOC PACKARD
No, I don't think so.

Doc Packard digs deeper with the forceps, Sly rolling his watering eyes and groaning. Doc's whole hand is down Sly.

DOC PACKARD (CONT'D)
Just a little further, I think I've got it. Now, Sly, whatever you do, try not to--

Sly makes a loud "glug" sound, and Doc's arm disappears down Sly's throat.

DOC PACKARD (CONT'D)
--swallow. Oh, predicament.

Sly makes gargling noises around the arm. Sheriff Hoggert yanks at Sly.

DOC PACKARD (CONT'D)
Careful! We could turn him inside out!

SLY
(around the arm)
In gailow?

Sly, not calmed by this prospect, involuntarily whips his tail around.

A knock sounds at the door and Tib creaks it open, stumping along on crutches.

TIB
What you all getting up to?

Tib takes in the scene and valiantly leaps in, brandishing a crutch and whacking Sly with it. Sly jerks with pain at each blow, emitting muffled moans.

TIB (CONT'D)
Snake gone crazy! Sly, you puke him up right now!

DOC PACKARD
Stop it, Tib!

Sheriff Hoggert lets Sly go and catches Tib's crutch on the downswing.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
It ain't what it looks like!

DOC PACKARD
Gentlemen, I've got ahold of something, and it doesn't feel like snake. Pull him off. Now!

Doc Packard braces a foot against the desk. Tib and Sheriff Hoggert grab Sly and pull with all their might. With a slithering slurping sound, Doc Packard and Sly part ways--Doc holding the forceps and a soggy roll of paper.

SLY
Took you all long enough--

They all crowd in to pat Sly on his poor bruised back.

DOC, SHERIFF, TIB
Sly! You're all right! (etc.)

DOC PACKARD
Well, except for the crutch marks and papercuts--

SLY
Ow, ow, ow, gentle. Ain't got no more time to waste. Look at the dang blueprints!

Doc Packard shakes them off a little.

DOC PACKARD
More like brownprints. Ugh.

He slaps them down on the desk and smooths them out flat as Tib clicks a lamp on for a better look.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
(reading out loud)
Flood plans--charges set for demolition--

TIB
Oh, it's that rascal Grunt. Lookit.

A scribble of a monkey, hunched over with a barrel of TNT on his back, is shown ducking into a large pipe in front of the levee.

TIB (CONT'D)
 (reading)
 Sugarville Basin submerged after
 blast--

Sheriff and Tib look up from the blueprints.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 He's gonna blow a hole in the
 levee!

SLY
 Yes, and he's gonna do it today!
 There Rowley is, making a getaway--

Sly slaps his tail on the blueprints, and the others squint at a drawing of Rowley dashing away on a fan-driven airboat, Mary Lou clamping her veil on with one paw against the wind.

SLY (CONT'D)
 With my bride, no less.

Sheriff Hoggert snorts, yanking open a drawer of the desk. He pulls out a police star.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 Not while I'm the sheriff. And not
 while you're my emergency deputy.

He pins the star on Sly's mechanic's suit. Sly twists around to admire it.

SLY
 Deputy? Wait, that's all it takes?

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 Well, you usually raise your right
 hand.
 (points to Tib)
 Raise his.

Sly dutifully raises Tib's hand off the desk.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (CONT'D)
 Do you swear to uphold the law, et
 cetera?

SLY
 You bet.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 Then get out there and stop that
 wedding.

Sheriff Hoggert picks up his hat and pulls it on tight, frowning at the blueprints and gritting his tusks.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (CONT'D)
I've got some monkey business to take care of.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE - EVENING

Harold and Mary Lou step slowly down the aisle, arm in arm.

Up ahead, arches of braided sugar cane arbors line the approach to the gazebo.

Standing at the foot of the stairs, a bible tucked under one arm, is a rail-thin priest--MANNY the praying mantis.

Penny (with camera as always), Sheila, Kendra, and Linda Lee stand to the right of the gazebo stairs, in bridesmaids' dresses. Rowley (in a gray suit, all business) and Leland (in a broad-shouldered sportscoat and ridiculously huge bowtie) stand to the left.

MARY LOU
(whispers)
If I try to run, you have permission to wrassle me to the ground.

HAROLD
(whispers back)
You won't run. Not the type.

All too quickly, they've reached the front of the stairs. Manny steps down from his perch on the stairs and puts a feeler on Mary Lou's shoulder.

MANNY
Saints, Mary Lou--what a mess. If you don't get to marry Sly--

He casts a smouldering look at Rowley, who is fidgeting with his watch.

MANNY (CONT'D)
--a little bit of God's light in this world has gone dark.

ROWLEY
A time to get and a time to lose-- right, Rev?

MANNY
The devil himself can quote
scripture, Rowley. Color me
unimpressed.

Leland holds up a finger (or feather, as it were).

LELAND
And a lovely shade of green!

ROWLEY
Shaddup.

Rowley smacks Leland on the back of the head. He ducks his
long neck and shies away.

LELAND
Sorry, boss.

Mary Lou kicks Rowley lightly in the (still bandaged) shin.
He winces, sucks air through his teeth, and shakes the leg.

MARY LOU
Heck of a way to treat your best
man, even if he is a silly goose.

Manny clears his throat and steps up onto the gazebo stairs.

MANNY
(under his breath)
Heaven help me.
(out to the crowd)
Dearly beloved--

The crowd quiets down as Manny leafs through his bible with a
sigh, then slaps it shut.

MANNY (CONT'D)
--We are gathered here today to
join these two creatures in holy
matrimony.

Manny grits his mandibles.

MANNY (CONT'D)
Though the temptation is great, I
won't tell you what I think of the
groom. You already know.

This gets a few scattered chuckles.

MANNY (CONT'D)
 Instead, let me tell you about the
 bride.

CUT TO:

EXT. SUGARCANE FIELDS - WINTER

Mary Lou, bundled up and breathing frozen puffs into the air, reaches down with a cane knife and hacks at the base of a sugarcane stalk. Breaking it off like a giant green icicle, she tosses the cane onto a steaming pile nearly as tall as she is.

MANNY (V.O.)
 She cut sugarcane with us 'til her
 paws bled, that year the early
 freeze nearly did us in.

CUT TO:

EXT. RABBIT'S HOUSE

A howling wind whips at Mary Lou (she clenches nails in her teeth and a hammer in one hand). She wrestles two banging shutters closed with the Rabbit's help, slaps a two-by-four over them, and secures it with a few well-placed nails.

The house's door opens briefly and questing hands pull her and the Rabbit in out of the storm as she tries to hammer in one more nail.

MANNY (V.O.)
 She fought a hurricane to a draw,
 almost bare-handed.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION

Mary Lou, Penny, Sly, and the Fire Chief heft boxes and a beaten-up lamp onto the back of a Neet's Cane Syrup sugarcane truck. Rowley sits on the porch and smugly waves goodbye. Sly flickers his tongue at him menacingly. Mary Lou looks at the mailbox--it still reads "Raton". She shakes her head and picks up another box.

MANNY (V.O.)
 She sold off her own home rather
 than lay off workers when times
 were tight.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO

Manny gestures to someone in the crowd. Mary Lou lifts a corner of her veil and turns to look.

MANNY
 We don't have much to give her in
 return. But we do have one early
 wedding present.

Bucky struggles to the stairs carrying a loaded collection plate.

MARY LOU
 Oh, Rev, I couldn't--
 (turns to face the crowd)
 --you all don't have a dime to
 spare!

The Rabbit cups his paws and yells from the middle of the crowd.

RABBIT
 Those ain't dimes!

MANNY
 Take a closer look, Mary Lou.

She does--and scoops up the contents of the collection plate, letting them fall back in--dozens of door keys, some bright and shiny, some scarred and dented.

MANNY (CONT'D)
 The keys to the city. Can't think
 of a better recipient.

MARY LOU
 Your keys? But why?

PENNY
 If you can't marry Sly, this isn't
 the kind of place we want to live
 in any more.

Mrs. Pierce pulls herself free from her chair in the crowd, leaving a few more quills behind.

MRS. PIERCE

Rowley can have my dusty old dress shop--if he can get the door open.

Kendra and Cutter stand up, hand in hand in hand...

KENDRA

He can have my greasy old diner!

CUTTER

Our greasy old diner, *cher*. And save the coffee.

Others take their cue and rise.

BUCKY'S DAD

He can take my splintery lumberyard!

LUTHER

My rusty ol' boat dock!

The whole crowd is on their feet.

PENNY

And my inky old printing press. As long as he leaves you and Sly alone, he can have it all.

MARY LOU

No, no, you can't give up! There's still good in this town, and we've gotten through worse!

ROWLEY

What sweet lies. You really are a born politician.

MARY LOU

Your compliments could use some work.

(turns back to face Manny)

Come on, Rev. Make with the ceremony before I lose my nerve.

CROWD

No! Come on, Mary Lou, don't do it! [etc.]

CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE IMPOUND YARD

Tib, with his crutch, hobbles up to a chainlink fence--Sly simply squeezes through a hole and waits as Tib gets the gate open. They approach a tarp-covered silhouette--even covered, the lines of the craft are sharp and speedy.

SLY
Is she fast?

TIB
Scary fast. Took it off that foreign fella over by Slidell.

Tib whips the tarp off--it's a red-and-white Glastron speedboat.

SLY
Oh, I remember him. Posted bond pretty quick but left the boat. Lucky us--

A distant motor sounds--Sly and Tib shade their eyes and look toward the setting sun, as a line of dust kicks up.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEVEE TOP

A motorcycle zooms along the narrow earthwork. Behind the visor the helmeted Sheriff Hoggert revs the engine and grits his tusks.

CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE IMPOUND YARD

Tib whistles, impressed.

TIB
There he goes--justice, on the hoof.

SLY
Hope he stops Grunt from blowing that hole...

TIB
If he don't, you'll be glad we're on a boat. Come on.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO

Manny clears his throat.

MANNY

Besides the obvious, can anyone
here give just cause as to why
these two should not be married?

A wind sweeps up. The creaky old live-oak above Uncle Neet's tombstone groans in the breeze, and with a sudden "SNAP!" drops a hefty branch right at Rowley. Mary Lou snags him out of the way as the lumber lands with a thud. The audience mutters with disappointment.

PENNY

(snaps her fingers)
Darn your reflexes--

Manny puts a hand over his heart.

MANNY

Well! Uncle Neet, I don't think
vengeance from beyond the grave is
a very good reason.

Manny scratches his head.

MANNY (CONT'D)

Where was I? Ah, yes.
(sighs)
Who gives this woman to be wedded
to this man?

Harold raises his hand half-heartedly.

HAROLD

I do. Much to my chagrin.

He takes Mary Lou's hand, looks at her for permission, and she nods. She winces as Harold puts her hand in Rowley's and clasps them together.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

(to Rowley)
I hope you find some kindness in
you somewhere. I doubt it.

Rowley's hand squishes audibly as Harold lets go and steps back. Harold sits down by Coco, who grabs his arm and blows her snout into a handkerchief.

MANNY

Mary Lou Raton, do you take Anthony Rowley to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do you part?

Mary Lou gulps.

MARY LOU

Lord help me, I do.

MANNY

Anthony, do you take Mary Lou to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do you part?

ROWLEY

With great pleasure.

MANNY

A simple "I do" will suffice.

ROWLEY

Hmpf. I do.

MANNY

May we have the rings?

Bucky stalks forward with the rings on a pillow.

BUCKY

One second, Rev.

Bucky hands the pillow to Penny, hefts a folding chair and sets it down by Mary Lou. He clambers on top of it, flips back Mary Lou's veil, grabs her by the shoulder and plants a toothy kiss squarely on her lips.

Laughs, whistles and cheers erupt from the crowd as Rowley crosses his arms and taps his foot. Mary Lou whacks Bucky on the back with the bouquet, trying to extricate herself. Bucky very slowly counts to three with his free hand.

ROWLEY

That's enough, son. Come up for air.

He grabs Bucky by the back of his collar and lifts him off the chair, letting him drop roughly to the ground.

Bucky gets up and dusts himself off as Mary Lou gingerly checks her lower lip.

BUCKY
I wanted that kiss you promised
before he smeared frog germs all
over you.

ROWLEY
Frog germs? Well, I never!

Mary Lou smooths the veil back down over her face.

MARY LOU
"A" for enthusiasm. Just try to
pick on someone your own size,
okay?

BUCKY
Spoil-sport.

ROWLEY
If you two are quite finished?

MANNY
The rings, Bucky.

BUCKY
Yeah, yeah.

He yanks the ring pillow away from Penny and holds it out between Mary Lou and Rowley.

BUCKY (CONT'D)
Proceed with the execution.

Manny makes the sign of the cross over the rings.

MANNY
May the Lord bless these rings
which you give to each other as the
sign of your love and fidelity.

ROWLEY AND MARY LOU
Amen.

Rowley takes Mary Lou's hand and places a ring on it.

ROWLEY
Mary Lou, take this ring as a sign
of my love and fidelity. In the
name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

Mary Lou turns her hand over and looks at it, letting it drop to her side like it weighs a ton. She picks up the remaining ring and Bucky steps back with the pillow.

MARY LOU

Anthony, take this ring as a sign
of my I--

Mary Lou's voice breaks. She bites her lip. Penny comes up behind her and lays a hand on her shoulder.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)

--of my love and fidelity. In the
name of the father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

MANNY

Well then. By the power vested in
me by the state of Louisiana--and
against my better judgement--I now
pronounce you man and wife. You
may kiss the bride.

Rowley flips up Mary Lou's veil and smirks at her as her eyes brim with tears. He kisses her on the lips but she can only bear it for a couple of seconds before she breaks away and hangs her head.

ROWLEY

You'll warm up to me. You'd
better.

VOICE (O.S.)

(far off but getting
closer)

I OBJECT!!!

The crowd starts grumbling.

COCO

Well, who could that--

She grabs a pair of binoculars, still around the neck of a nearby MOLE, and yanks them up to her face.

MOLE

Ack!

COCO

(gasps)

It's that Sly Snake!

She lets the binoculars drop, and the Mole struggles free of the tangled straps.

COCO (CONT'D)
 And I thought you were always late
 to the party, Harold...

CUT TO:

EXT. BAYOU

Sly hangs over the windshield of the speedboat as it skips along at headlong speed. He yells into a bullhorn.

SLY
 Stop the wedding! I OBJECT!!!

At the wheel of the boat, Tib works a lever. Gears grind. Tib tugs on Sly's tail.

TIB
 Sly?

SLY
 What? Kinda busy yelling--

TIB
 I think that foreign fella messed
 up the throttle.

SLY
 What makes you say--

TIB
 And the steering.

Tib slaps the wheel--it spins freely but the boat remains straight on course for the lakeside gathering ahead. Sly whips around and gets back on the bullhorn.

SLY
 (into bullhorn)
 Get out the way!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO

Guests are quick to comply, diving for cover and upending folding chairs--a hapless Armadillo tucks himself into a ball and his neighbors roll him away down the aisle, a Chicken cackles and scrambles out of the boat's path, scattering feathers.

The speedboat ramps off the waterfront and crashes back down, tearing through the now-empty chairs and skidding straight toward the cake tables. Sly and Tib hunker down behind the windshield.

The baker beaver Chef Marcel, still in his chef's hat, covers his eyes with his 'paddle' tail.

CHEF MARCEL
Oh, that takes the cake!

The speedboat obliterates the table holding Rowley's ugly lump of a cake--the cake itself splats against the windscreen as a row of thick hedges catch the speedboat.

It hangs there, its propellers still spinning at full as wedding guests approach--Mary Lou gasps, lifts up her wedding gown as much as possible, and dashes toward the boat, Rowley clutching after her.

MARY LOU
Sly! Are you all right?

Sly sticks his head up above the windscreen and shakes it to clear it.

SLY
Long as you ain't married yet!

Mary Lou winces and bites her lip. Before she can speak--

The main cake, on another table by the boat, starts to wobble and slide.

CHEF MARCEL
No-no-no--

The cake topples right into the spinning propellers, which spray chopped-up cake and icing at turbo speed. The shower of cake stops Mary Lou in her tracks.

Mrs. Pierce pulls out a quill with a chunk of cake on it, shrugs, and eats the cake.

Penny winds up her "flash" for a shot, but a glob of icing hits her, obscuring her camera lens. She wipes it off and licks her finger.

PENNY
Now that's what I call media coverage.

BUCKY
It's a smear campaign!

Bucky eyes a flying slice, runs after it, and makes a diving save with his bare hands. He buries his face in the cake and chows down.

Harold reaches up and retrieves a wad of cake. He bows slightly and presents it to Coco.

HAROLD

There you are, m' dear. I'm on a diet myself--

The cake ground down to a stub, the shower of baked goods peters out. The motor dies as well, puffing smoke and propellers grinding to a stop. There's a general groan of disappointment as everyone brushes off icing.

COCO

Fun while it lasted.

Puffed up with anger, Rowley pushes his way through the frosted crowd.

ROWLEY

Tib? I'll have your tin-plated badge for this. And what's that snake doing here?

Sly raises himself up in the seat and grabs a nearby napkin. He carefully wipes icing off his deputy's star and it gleams with a high-polished shine. Onlookers 'ooo' in awe.

SLY

This snake is arresting you for the arson of Neet's Cane Syrup factory, the attempted destruction of the Sugarville levee, and generally being a creep.

ROWLEY

On what evidence?

Sly nods to Tib, who unlatches a compartment on the boat. He pulls out the page of blueprints, in a clear plastic bag, and holds it up. It's still gross.

SLY

It was hard to swallow. But I saved one of your blueprints.

Rowley grits his teeth and pulls the CB radio out of his suit coat pocket.

ROWLEY

You and your blueprints are gonna be underwater in a minute.

(clicks the send button)

Grunt! This is Rowley! Set it off!

CUT TO:

INT. LEVEE PIPE

A plunger-style detonator box rests by an empty dynamite barrel. A coil of fuse hooked to the detonator leads down the pipe, which is big enough to walk through, though cramped.

The other CB radio crackles as Grunt twists together fuses on a tightly packed bundle of dynamite jammed into a hole in the dirt at the end of the pipe.

ROWLEY (O.S.)

(over radio)

Grunt! You blow that levee, you hear me? Over!

Grunt grabs the radio and clicks the send button.

GRUNT

Working as fast as I can, boss.
Over.

SHERIFF HOGGERT (O.S.)

"Over" is right.

Grunt looks up from his work.

GRUNT

What the--

Sheriff Hoggert swings a shovel at Grunt. With a giant CLANG, all goes to flashing stars and then darkness.

Sheriff Hoggert scoops up the squawking CB radio and turns it over smugly in his hands.

ROWLEY (O.S.)

(over radio)

Grunt, you useless ape! What's taking you so long?

Sheriff Hoggert clicks the send button.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 Grunt can't talk right now. He's
 having himself a barrel of fun.
 Over.

Behind Sheriff Hoggert, Grunt is folded up and stuffed uncomfortably into the empty dynamite barrel, groaning pitifully.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO

Rowley stares at the CB radio in horror. He looks back at the glowering crowd, many of whom are limbering up--cracking knuckles, pounding a fist into one hand, and otherwise preparing for mayhem.

MARY LOU
 Oh, you've done it this time,
 Rowley.

ROWLEY
 I'm not done yet.

Rowley whips off his suit jacket and tosses it at Mary Lou, tangling her up.

MARY LOU
 (muffled)
 Rowley! What in--

Quick as a wink, Rowley wraps his beefy arms around Mary Lou and hefts her over his shoulder. With a bounding leap and surprising speed, he jumps over the first wave of wedding guests and bolts for the water like a running back.

Sly flops out of the suspended speedboat and slithers after Rowley and Mary Lou, as quick as his coils will let him.

SLY
 Somebody stop that frog!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE

Rowley makes it to the pier, Mary Lou pounding on his back. He hops down into the waiting airboat (with a JUST MARRIED sign and a line of cans tied behind it...) and casts off, dumping Mary Lou in the bottom of the boat and pushing away

from the pier with one of his massive legs.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE

Wedding guests stand at the edge of the water yelling threats. One or two, including Bucky's Dad, dive into the water and paddle after the boat.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - ON AIRBOAT

Mary Lou pushes herself up, but Rowley shoves her back down and ties the sleeves of the suitcoat together, straightjacketing her, and pins her down with one knee.

MARY LOU

Sly! Get this idiot off of me!

Quick as a wink, Rowley loops a length of rope around her legs and ties it to the base of the pilot's seat--she thrashes but can't get free.

SLY (O. S.)

(distant)

Hang on, Mary Lou!

Rowley yanks at the ripcord of the airboat's motor--the giant blades revolve half a turn in their cage as the motor kicks. He pulls it again.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE

The angry crowd at the water's edge (and in the water) suddenly stops and turns at an earsplitting "whistle for attention". They part as Bucky and Penny drag Rowley's air cannon in.

BUCKY

(cups a paw and yells)
Hey, Rowley!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - ON AIRBOAT

Rowley pauses in the middle of jerking the ripcord again.

ROWLEY
What, you bucktoothed little flea-
trap?

He kicks at the hands of Bucky's Dad and others as they start to creep up over the sides, rocking the boat.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE

Bucky grabs a bundle of rice, tied off with a ribbon, out of a basket at his feet.

BUCKY
I hear it's good luck to throw rice
at weddings!

He pops the bundle into the barrel of the air-cannon.

BUCKY (CONT'D)
So--I got just one question.
(cocks the cannon)
Do you feel lucky?

He pulls the trigger and staggers back from the recoil.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - ON AIRBOAT

Rowley shies away as the bundle hits the fan-blade shield and sprays rice at him. He howls in pain, clawing at his face.

Another incoming missile hits him in the jaw, turning his head around. He stumbles to his feet and ducks behind the fan shield, grabbing the ripcord again.

This time, the motor catches, and a powerful gust of wind whips up waves. Rowley climbs into the pilot's seat, throws a lever, and the airboat picks up speed.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE

Wedding programs and leaves whip around in the gust. Sly reaches up and tugs on Bucky's sleeve. Bucky looks down.

SLY
Launch me!

Bucky pumps an arm in victory.

BUCKY
YES! I've got a gun that shoots snakes!

Luther, standing nearby, swoops a giant arm down and scoops up Sly, dumping him into the barrel. Together, he and Bucky aim.

LUTHER
Ready--steady--fire!

With a KA-CHUNK sound, Sly goes sailing out over the lake on an intercept course with the boat. Luther yells after him.

LUTHER (CONT'D)
Stay limp on impact!

SLY
(fading)
You try it!

EXT. LAKE - ON AIRBOAT

Sly lands with a clatter on the back of the airboat's fan-guard, startling Rowley. Sly is tangled up in the fan-guard's grating, and a crunching sound makes him wince as he tries and fails to extract himself.

SLY
Ow, ow, yep, that's a rib.

Sly makes an "urk!" sound as Rowley grabs him with both hands, yanks him out of the fan-guard, and holds him up to his face. Water kicks up from the lake as they bump along.

ROWLEY
Son, you just don't know when to quit, do you?

Sly bites him on the nose. Rowley howls with pain and drops him.

MARY LOU
Sly! I knew you'd come get me!

SLY
All in a day's work for the
airborne snake service.

Sly tugs at Mary Lou's bonds, getting one of her arms free of Rowley's suitcoat.

SLY (CONT'D)
You got something on your nose,
Rowley.

Rowley pulls it out of his nose and looks at it--Sly's loose fang. He flicks it away off the boat.

ROWLEY
You bit your last bite, snake!

Rowley lunges for him. Sly whips his body up and around Rowley's middle. Rowley looks down and howls with laughter, grabbing Sly's neck.

ROWLEY (CONT'D)
Oh, this is too much. You trying
your squeeze play again?

Sly smiles--a knowing, dangerous smile.

SLY
I remember how it went. It was
loop, tuck, loop.

ROWLEY
(frowns)
Huh?

Sly tightens his coils, muscles bunching under his skin, and draws closed around Rowley like a Victorian corset. Rowley shrieks and whistles, air cut off.

Rowley twists around wildly, falling to his knees and bending over the side of the boat.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - UNDERWATER

In a whirl of bubbles, Rowley thrusts Sly's head under the water. Sly thrashes and struggles, but gets nowhere.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - ON AIRBOAT

Rowley pulls Sly up -- Sly wheezes and coughs up water, losing his grip on Rowley.

ROWLEY
You like that? You like it, you meddling reptile?

Rowley dunks him again.

MARY LOU
Rowley, don't! You're killing him!

Rowley, intent on holding Sly down, barks over his shoulder.

ROWLEY
Says who? Don't have to be any witnesses out here.

Mary Lou feels up around her veil and pulls Mrs. Pierce's quill out of her hair. Holding it like a dart, she lines up a shot.

MARY LOU
You've got a point. Here's another.

She whips it at him, and it buries itself in his back. Rowley howls with pain, clutching for it and twisting around.

Sly hangs limply over the side of the boat.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
Come on, Sly, breathe!

Rowley lunges for Mary Lou--she gets a leg free and kicks Rowley in the gut. His eyes bulge even wider than usual in surprise. Sly raises his head, opens his mouth wide and takes a gasping breath as Rowley falls toward him.

MARY LOU (CONT'D)
No! Look out!

Rowley crashes into Sly--they both tip over the side and plummet into the depths, Mary Lou wriggling free of the suit coat and gripping the side of the boat, scanning the murky water for a sign of life.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - UNDERWATER

In a whirling mass of bubbles, Sly and Rowley sink deeper and deeper.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - ON AIRBOAT

Mary Lou kills the engine. She stands up in the boat, yells, and waves at the distant shore, where a few would-be rescuers have started toward her in paddle-boats.

MARY LOU
 Help! Oh, God, please don't take
 Sly away from me.

She gulps, closes her eyes, and jumps into the water. She leaves her veil behind as it comes off and spreads across the surface. The water calms and all goes still.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE

Would-be rescuers poke around the lake with paddles and poles, scratching their heads, diving into the water...

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE - TWILIGHT

Bedraggled searchers paddle back to shore, looking dejected and waterlogged. They get out of their boats and shuffle onto land, heads held low. Bucky rushes to meet his dad among them.

BUCKY
 Dad! Did you--

BUCKY'S DAD
 Still no sign. Penny's searching
 the shoreline, but we're losing the
 light.

Bucky grins hopefully.

BUCKY
That's all right, Dad. Penny's got
her own light. And a nose for
news.

CUT TO:

EXT. FAR SHORELINE - NIGHT

Penny zips low along the shoreline, her blue-green firefly glow illuminating her path.

She zooms past a low series of lumps by the water, hunched up against a fallen log--but stops in midair and backtracks for a second look.

Waterlogged and shivering, her dress streaked with lake muck and weeds, Mary Lou cradles Sly, draped unconscious on her lap. Sly's still half in the water.

PENNY
Mary Lou!

Penny touches down, rubbing Mary Lou's arms. Sly groans and squirms.

PENNY (CONT'D)
You're soaked to the bone!
(gasps)
And poor Sly! What's wrong?

MARY LOU
Help me pull him up!

PENNY
What--

MARY LOU
You'll see.

Together, with all their strength, they haul the rest of Sly onto land--his stomach has a giant bulge in it.

PENNY
Oh, Lord, is that Rowley?

Mary Lou falls back against the log, exhausted, and nods.

PENNY (CONT'D)
Is he--

MARY LOU

Alive? He'd better be! I've been blowing air into Sly's stomach for half an hour. Sorry, sweetie--

She covers Sly's nostrils, clamps his jaw shut, and blows into his mouth as he makes an exhausted "MMPH" sound. The lump in his stomach kicks and twists.

PENNY

I'll get help.

She launches into the air, flashing like an emergency beacon.

CUT TO:

EXT. FAR SHORELINE - SHORTLY AFTER

Doc Packard throws open the back doors to his ambulance, waving Bucky's Dad, Harold, and others on as they heft Sly and his unwieldy bulge into the vehicle.

DOC PACKARD

Get him in quick! He needs an emergency frogectomy!

CUT TO:

EXT. MILL ROAD - NIGHT

The ambulance bumps along the dirt road, lights flashing and sirens blaring.

CUT TO:

INT. AMBULANCE

Mary Lou sits beside Sly, who's on a gurney in the back of the ambulance. Sly's snout is covered by an oxygen mask--Mary Lou moves it to the side and blows air into him again.

She lets go--Sly belches loudly, and groans.

SLY

Oh, nasty, I can still taste him--

Doc Packard listens to Sly's stomach with his stethoscope, frowning.

SLY (CONT'D)

Uggggh...

TIB

Can we do anything for you, Sly?

SLY

(belches)

Got any Tabasco for this frog in my throat?

DOC PACKARD

I wouldn't recommend it. It might irritate your, ah--stomach contents.

The Rowley-lump thrashes and wriggles. Sly hiccups.

CUT TO:

INT. SUGARVILLE MEDICAL CLINIC

A P.O.V. shot from Sly's perspective as Doc Packard wheels the gurney along a hallway, banging through swinging doors. They enter an operating room with trays of instruments and a big swinging light.

DOC PACKARD (O.S.)

No, Mary Lou, better wait outside. How's that I.V. drip, Nurse?

SHEILA (O.S.)

Dreamland in two minutes.

DOC PACKARD (O.S.)

Good. This is going to be messy.

SLY

Mrrr?

Sheila the shark, with a surgical mask on, hovers over him with a plastic tube.

SHEILA

I'm sorry, Sly, but this goes up your nose.

She bends over him--a slurpy sound ensues, mercifully off-screen.

SLY

Graaak...

DOC PACKARD
 Okay, Sly, count backward from ten.

They whip a standing curtain over his stomach. Sly's view goes hazy.

Sly
 (slurring)
 Ten... nine... egg... sebb...

Sly flutters and closes his eyelids--all is dark.

DOC PACKARD (O.S.)
 Scalpel.

SHEILA (O.S.)
 Scalpel.

There's a terrible sound like someone unzipping a gym bag.

DOC PACKARD (O.S.)
 Sponge.

SHEILA (O.S.)
 Sponge. Well, look at that. It's
 a boy!

CUT TO:

Rowley's dripping, trembling flipper, reaching out past the curtain. Sheriff Hoggert, standing by the bed with a surgical mask and gloves on, slaps a handcuff on it.

SHERIFF HOGGERT
 Rowley! Welcome back, you lucky
 cuss. You're under arrest.

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE STATION

Rowley, rumpled and stained, holds a booking slate across his chest, with his name on it. He stands against the customary height chart--Penny's "flash" goes off. He turns wearily to his right as Penny cranks her camera for another shot.

PENNY
 You know, that's three, and I still
 haven't found your good side yet.

CUT TO:

INT. PARI SH COURTHOUSE

A WEASEL LAWYER shuffles papers at the defendants' table as the seated Rowley (cleaned up a little), Grunt, and Leland face the judge.

The JUDGE himself is a big-eared bat with huge glasses, hanging upside down from a coat-rack-like contraption behind the bench. He raps the gavel and the gallery of Sugarville citizens all sit down.

JUDGE

Has the jury returned a verdict?

The JURY FOREMAN, a sardine packed closely into the jury box with eleven others, takes a sip from a glass of water and gets to his feet (or fins as it were).

JURY FOREMAN

(nods)

Guilty as charged, your honor.

The gallery erupts into cheers.

The Weasel Lawyer turns to his clients and shrugs. Rowley puts his head down on the table and pounds a fist. Grunt covers his ears, then his mouth, then his eyes. Leland shudders, sneaks a flask from a pocket, and takes a drink.

The judge bangs his gavel.

JUDGE

Order! Order in the court.

Leland raises a wing.

LELAND

Crawfish etouffee?

Rowley kicks him under the table. The gallery settles down.

JUDGE

Sentencing will be set at a later date. The court does have one other matter pending. Mrs. Rowley, if you would please approach the bench.

Mary Lou points to herself, frowning and unsure. The judge nods. The others in the gallery all pat her on the back and point her toward the bench, a couple of them opening the gate leading to the courtroom floor.

Mary Lou steps up to the bench and the judge hands her a folder. She opens it--it's a marriage license, with a big "NULL AND VOID" stamped on it in red."

JUDGE (CONT'D)
 Congratulations, Miss Raton.
 You're a free and unmarried woman
 once more.

More cheers and whistles from the gallery. Mary Lou goes up on her tiptoes, shielding her mouth and whispering something to the Judge, who leans in and listens.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
 What's that? Hmm. An odd request,
 but under the circumstances, I'll
 allow it.

Mary Lou nods thankfully, takes the license out of the folder, rips it to shreds, and holds them in her paws.

She stalks over to the defendant's table, where Bailiffs are hoisting Rowley and his compatriots to their feet. She takes a big breath and blows the "confetti" in Rowley's face. He shies away, spitting out a piece or two.

MARY LOU
 (gritting her teeth)
 Rowley, you--
 (bites her tongue)
 --you take care of yourself.

Rowley's jaw drops open in wonder. He looks back over his shoulder at her, as the bailiffs muscle him and his cronies toward the exit.

NARRATOR (O.S.)
 (singing)
 And so old Rowley's plans all came
 to naught--
 When the sentence came down it was
 twenty years he got--

CUT TO:

EXT. PARISH COURTHOUSE

The convicts climb into the back of a police wagon in leg irons and handcuffs.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 (singing)
 It weren't no country club
 (MORE)

NARRATOR (V. O.) (CONT' D)
 vacati on--
 Angola was thei r desti nati on--

CUT TO:

EXT. LOUISIANA STATE PENITENTIARY - FIELDS

The convicts, chained together, kick up dust as they hack at the hard earth with their hoes. A nearby GUARD, a sharp-beaked hawk, watches them from a nearby tower, toting a rifle.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
 (si ngi ng)
 Working on the hot pl antati on, uh-
 huh.

LELAND
 Ni ce day to be outsi de, huh Boss?

ROWLEY
 Shaddup.

CUT TO:

INT. SUGARVILLE MEDICAL CLINIC

A bunch of "Get Well Soon" cards are propped up on Sly's night-stand and bed tray. A Glastron Speedboat repair manual lies nearby with a bookmark in it. Sly himself is asleep, bandages wrapped around his middle--he groggily opens his eyes as Mary Lou kisses his forehead.

She brings something up and places it on his bed tray--it's a big bottle of Tabasco with a red bow tied around it. Sly smiles.

SLY
 That's my gal.

She wraps her arms around him, noddin g vi gorousl y.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROWLEY'S MANSION

Mary Lou, driving the Neet's Cane Syrup truck, pulls up in the driveway, Sly in the passenger's seat. The mailbox (on its post) is covered with a paint-spattered drop cloth.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

The court gave Mary Lou back her
old house
As restitution from her former
spouse--

Mary Lou turns the engine off and hops out of the driver's side door. Out of the back of the truck spill the Rabbit and his many children, as he and Mary Lou heft the Old Lady Rabbit down from the truck bed in a wheelchair.

NARRATOR (V. O.) (CONT'D)

(singing)

But she decided not to stay
And gave that big old house away
She surely made that Rabbit's day,
uh-huh.

Mary Lou points toward the mailbox as the Rabbit scratches his head. Sly grabs the dropcloth with his teeth and pulls it off--the mailbox has been neatly repainted white and now reads "LAPIN". The signal flag on the mailbox is a pair of painted rabbit ears.

The Old Rabbit Lady clasps her paws together in delight. The Rabbit swoons, falling to the ground with his back against the truck as his children fan air into his face. Mary Lou and Sly help him up.

RABBIT

You sure?

Mary Lou nods. She presses the keys into his hands. The Rabbit give her a big hug, lets go, and brushes all of his kids toward the porch.

The kids squeal with delight, rushing across the lawn (one doing cartwheels) as the Rabbit follows, pushing the Old Lady Rabbit in her wheelchair. Mary Lou and Sly wave them on (Sly with one of his coils).

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO -- SPRING

The town is back together, magnolias are in bloom, and a big archway at the head of the aisle reads "NEET RATON COMMUNITY PARK". The priest Manny is back on the gazebo steps (smiling this time). Sly, in his tuxedo, and Mary Lou, in her carefully cleaned dress, turn to look at him.

MANNY

Then finally, I pronounce you man
and wife. You may kiss the bride.

Coco pulls a handkerchief out of her handbag, dabs happy
tears from her eyes, and blows her nose.

Mary Lou bends to kiss Sly, but Bucky gets up from the front
row, snagging his stepstool. He muscled between them and
sets the stool up.

SLY

Hey, watch it--

BUCKY

Oh, don't have a hissy fit.

He backs away, making a rolling "get on with it" gesture.
Sly climbs the stepstool and looks Mary Lou in the eye.

SLY

Thanks for waiting.

Mary Lou taps her foot.

MARY LOU

My patience has its bounds.

Sly throws a coil around her shoulders, pulls her close, and
kisses her deeply.

MANNY

Ladies and gentlemen, I present to
you Mister and Mrs. Sly Snake!

The crowd claps and cheers. Penny winds her camera and
charges her "flash". She raises the camera as Sly and Mary
Lou turn toward her.

PENNY

Say cheese!

Sly shakes his head.

SLY

Uncle Neet would say, "Laissez les
bontemps rouler!"

MARY LOU

Oh, Sly, you remembered--

PENNY

Even better. On three--one, two,
three!

MARY LOU AND SLY
Laissez les bontemps rouler!

Penny pushes the button and her flash fills the screen.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKESIDE GAZEBO - SEQUENCE OF STILLS ON PHOTO STOCK

In the first, Mary Lou and Sly stand on the gazebo steps. He's looped his coils into the shape of a heart behind her (no mean feat in a tuxedo).

In the second, she tosses her bouquet to a pack of bridesmaids and other female guests--

In the next, they all part to show the bouquet stuck to Mrs. Pierce.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(singing)

The good times rolled, that's how
our story ends--
With Sly and Mary Lou and all their
friends--

EXT. SLY'S LOG CABIN - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

With considerable difficulty, Sly hunches up his coils and hefts a giggling Mary Lou across the threshold, as she steadies herself against the doorframe.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(singing)

Except some business we've got--
Let's tie it all up in a wedding
knot--
Excuse me while I sing the plot, uh-
huh.

EXT. LEVEE TOP ABOVE MILL - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

Another still shows Sly (holding blueprints) and Bucky's Dad (pointing an arm) looking down from the levee top at the old mill site. Trucks haul pipe and sheet metal below.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

(singing)

With a lot of hard work and
perspiration
(MORE)

NARRATOR (V. O.) (CONT' D)
They got the mill back in
operati on--

EXT. NEW MILL GATES - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

Another still shows Mary Lou and Sly cutting the ribbon on the gates of the shiny new mill as happy workers toss their caps in the air.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(si ngi ng)
The dedi cation was a great
sensati on--
Cause for plenty jubili ati on.

EXT. BOAT DOCK - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

Luther, with an improbably tiny pair of racing goggles, is crammed into a tiny speedboat with a massive motor. His body hangs over the sides.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(si ngi ng)
Luther took up racing boats--

EXT. TOWN HALL - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

In a rain of multi colored balloons, Mary Lou stands at a podium under a VICTORY! Banner with Sly by her side. Bucky, in a business suit, sits off to the side in a folding chair, folding his arms and scowling.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(si ngi ng)
Bucky ran for mayor and got five
votes--

INT. BOOKSTORE - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

Penny sits at a book-signing table with a stack of books and a line of waiting customers.

NARRATOR (V. O.)
(si ngi ng)
Penny kept taki n' those pictures
she used ' ter--
Got hersel f published by Simon and
Schuster.

EXT. HIGH-CLASS FASHION SHOP - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

The sign above the display window reads "HAUTE COTURE". Behind the glass, many scaly purses are arrayed with price tags--high ones. Coco stands in the doorway grinning, flipping through a huge wad of cash.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

Coco made a line of alligator bags
Out of most anything that hangs or
sags--

INT. CUTTER'S CAFÉ - STILL SHOT ON PHOTO STOCK

The kitchen is full of stainless steel and bubbling pots with a couple of Rat sous-chefs. Cutter is pointing at a stove with a big knife and a big hat, but his apron reads "Kiss the Cook". In another hand he holds his ever-present coffee mug.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

The local café got an upgrade or
two
When Cutter went to study at Le
Cordon Bleu--

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD

The Painted Horse, in a referee's uniform, rushes onto the field and blows a whistle as a pile of football players jostle for the ball.

NARRATOR (V. O.)

(singing)

The painted horse from scene twenty-
three
Got a job as a football referee--
But we can't follow everyone--
One last peek, and our story's
done.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILL ROAD - TWILIGHT

Bucky pedals his beat-up old bicycle along the road, wearing his newspaper sling.

EXT. ROWLEY' S MANSI ON - TWI LI GHT

Though i t' s not Rowley' s any more... Bucky skids hi s bike to a stop at the head of the driveway and looks at the mail box that now reads "LAPIN".

Bucky gulps, and props hi s bike against the mail box. He takes a bundle of flowers out of the sling and walks toward the porch.

EXT. ROWLEY' S MANSI ON - PORCH - TWI LI GHT

Bucky straightens hi s collar, clenches and unclenches hi s fists, winces, and knocks on the door. From i nsi de, there' s a sound of a scooting chair. A rabbit girl named BETTY speaks up i nsi de.

BETTY (O. S.)
I' ll get it, daddy!

She pops the door open. About Bucky' s age, she has sizable teeth and big round glasses--she looks like she' d grow up into a pretty librarian. She looks Bucky up and down.

BETTY (CONT' D)
Hello. Were you looking for someone?

BUCKY
If you' re Betty, I was looking for you. I brought you these...

He hands her the flowers. Betty grins.

BETTY
I' m surprised you remember. There are about twelve of us.

BUCKY
You kind of stand out.

Betty shuffles a foot shyly.

BETTY
Well, aren' t you a charmer?

Betty' s father calls from i nsi de.

RABBIT (O. S.)
Who' s that, Betty?

BETTY
(calls back)
It's Bucky DePlanque, daddy!

RABBIT (O.S.)
What's he selling?

Bucky rolls his eyes.

BUCKY
Nothing today.

BETTY
So what exactly are you doing?

Bucky scratches his head and thinks about it. He snaps his fingers and nods.

BUCKY
Picking on someone my own size.

FADE OUT.

THE END