

Mo' Better Blues

Brooklyn, New York 1969. A group of four boys walk up to Bleek Gilliam (Zakee L. Howze)'s brownstone rowhouse and ask him to come out and play baseball with them. Bleek's mother insists that he continue his trumpet lesson, to his chagrin. His father becomes concerned that Bleek will grow up to be a bum, and a family argument ensues. In the end, Bleek continues playing his trumpet, and his friends go away.

20 years later. The adult Bleek Gilliam (Denzel Washington) is performing on the trumpet at a busy nightclub with his jazz band, The Bleek Quintet. They make up of trumpeter Bleek, saxophone player Shadow Henderson (Wesley Snipes), pianist Left Hand Lacey (Giancarlo Esposito), drummer Bottom Hammer (Bill Nunn), and bass player Rhythm Jones (Jeff "Tain" Watts). Giant (Spike Lee), whom is the Quintet's manager and one of Bleek's former childhood friends, is waiting in the wings, and advises him to stop allowing his saxophone player Shadow Henderson to grandstand with long solos.

The next morning Bleek wakes up with his girlfriend, Indigo Downes (Joie Lee). She leaves to go to college classes, while he meets his father by the Brooklyn Bridge for a game of catch, telling him that while he does like Indigo, he likes other women too and is not ready to make a commitment. Later in the day while he is practicing his trumpet, another woman named Clarke Bentancourt (Cynda Williams) visits him. She suggests he fire Giant as his manager; he suggests that they make love (which he refers to as 'mo better'). She bites his lip and he becomes upset about it, saying, "I make my living with my lips," as he examines the bleeding bottom lip.

Giant is with his bookie, betting on baseball. Then he goes to the nightclub and argues with the doormen about what time to let the patrons into the club. He meets Bleek inside with the rest of the band, except for the pianist, Left Hand Lacey, who arrives late with his French girlfriend and is scolded by Giant. Later Giant goes to the club owners office, points out how busy the club has been since Bleek and his band began playing there, and unsuccessfully attempts to renegotiate their contract.

The next morning, Giant meets his bookie (Ruben Blades), who is concerned that Giant is going too deep into debt. Giant shrugs it off, and places several new bets. He then stops off at Shadow's home to drop off a record. Shadow confides in him that he is cheating on his girlfriend. This leads to the next scene where Bleek is in bed with Clarke, and she asks him to let her sing a number at the club with his band, to which he declines.

Bleek and Giant are fending off requests from the other members of the band, especially Shadow, for a raise due to the band's success at the club. Bleek goes to the club owners to see about more money, which they refuse, reminding him that it was Giant who locked him into the current deal.

That night at the club, both Clarke and Indigo arrive at the club to see Bleek. They are wearing the same style dress, which Bleek had purchased for them both. Bleek attempts to work it out with each girl, but they are both upset with him over the dresses, and though he sleeps with them each again they leave him (after he calls each of them by the others' name). However, tension rises with Shadow, who has feelings for Clarke.

Bleek and Giant go for a bike ride, where Bleek insists to Giant that he do a better job managing and bringing in money. Giant promises to do so, then asks Bleek for a loan to pay off his gambling debt. Bleek declines, and later Giant is apprehended by two loan sharks Madlock (Samuel L. Jackson) and Rod (Leonard L. Thomas) who demand payment. Giant can't pay and gets his fingers broken. Later Giant tells Bleek that he fell off his bike on the ride home, but Bleek does not believe him. Giant asks the other band members for money and Left loans him five hundred dollars. When loan sharks stake out Giant's home, he goes to Bleek for a place to stay. Bleek agrees to help him raise the money, but fires him as manager.

Bleek misses both his girlfriends, leaving messages for each, but Clarke has begun a new relationship with Shadow. Bleek finds out about it, and fires Shadow from the band. The loan sharks track Giant down at the club before Bleek can come up with the money, take him outside and beat him while Bleek plays. Bleek goes outside to intervene, and gets beaten as well. Additionally, one loan shark (Madlock) takes Bleek's own trumpet, and smacks him across the face with it. This not only puts Bleek in the hospital, but it also permanently injures his lip, making him unable to continue playing trumpet.

Months later, Bleek reunites with Giant, who has got a job as a doorman and stopped gambling. He drops in to see Shadow and Clarke, who are now performing together with the rest of Bleek's former band. Shadow

invites him on stage, and they play together. Bleek still has scars to his lips, and is unable to play correctly. He walks off the stage, gives his trumpet to Giant, and goes directly to Indigo's house. She is angry with him because she hasn't heard from him in over a year. She tries to reject him, but agrees to take him back when he begs her to save his life.

Cast

Denzel Washington	as	Bleek Gilliam
Spike Lee	as	Giant
Wesley Snipes	as	Shadow Henderson
Joie Lee	as	Indigo Downes
Cynda Williams	as	Clarke Bentancourt
Giancarlo Esposito	as	Left Hand Lacey
Bill Nunn	as	Bottom Hammer
Jeff "Tain" Watts	as	Rhythm Jones
Dick Anthony Williams	as	Big Stop Williams
John Turturro	as	Moe Flatbush
Nicholas Turturro	as	Josh Flatbush
Robin Harris	as	Butterbean Jones
Samuel L. Jackson	as	Madlock
Leonard L. Thomas	as	Rod
Charlie Murphy	as	Eggy
Coati Mundi	as	Roberto

Memorable quotes (with notes on difficult vocabulary)

Bleek's father: Let the boy be a boy, have some fun.

Bleek's mother: He could be a **bum** for all you care. Running the streets with those kids. That child's going to **drive me up the wall**. Go tell them to go home.

Bum: fannullone; **To drive someone up the wall:** far impazzire/arrabbiare qualcuno

Bleek: But the jazz, you know if we had to dep... if we had to depend upon black people to eat, we would starve to death. I mean, you've been out there, you're on the **bandstand**, you look out into the audience, what do you see? You see Japanese, you see, you see West Germans, you see, you know, Slabobic, anything except our people - it makes no sense. It **incenses** me that our own people don't realize our own heritage, our own culture, this is our music, man.

Shadow Henderson: That's bullshit.

Bleek: Why?

Shadow Henderson: [slurred] It's all bullsh... Everything, everything you just said is bullshit. Out of all the people in the world, you never gave anybody else, and look, I love you like a **step-brother**, but you never gave nobody else a chance to play their own music, you complain about... That's right, the people don't come because you grandiose motherfuckers don't play shit that they like. If you played the shit that they like, then people would come, simple as that.

Bandstand: palco coperto dell'orchestra; **To incense:** far inferocire; **Step-brother:** (qui) fratello

Bleek: I have a certain amount of time **allotted** for daily practice! You know this! Yet you consistently **overlook** my program

Clarke: I get the times **mixed up**

Bleek: Hmm

Clarke: Everything with you is so damn regulated. A certain time to do this... a certain time to do that. Everything's on a schedule, a time table!

Bleek: Let me explain something to you! Life is short... Okay? I need it like this to do the things I **gotta** do, I like order

Clarke: Order's fine... but you're ridiculous!

Bleek: What do you want?

Clarke: I want a man who knows what he wants... decisive! You don't know what you want! **Make up your mind**, to be a man, and don't be **wishy-washy** on me!

Bleek: Hmm...I know what I want: my music. Everything else is secondary!

Clarke: I knew you would say that

Bleek: Then why did you ask?

To allot: dedicare/assegnare; **To overlook:** (qui) ignorare/trascurare; **To mix up:** confondere una cosa per un'altra; **I get the times mixed up:** confondo sempre gli orari; **Gotta:** got to; **To make up one's mind:** decidersi/prendere una decisione; **Wishy-washy:** poco deciso/smidollato

Josh: Numbers never lie. That's why I like numbers. People lie from the **crib**, but not numbers. Moe, the numbers never lie.

Moe: But human beings?

Josh: Human beings is another story. You meet some **shmendricks** on the streets.

Crib: culla; **Shmendricks (Yiddish):** stupido/cretino

Bouncer 1: Black men can't have a smart thought?

Giant: No, because you're stupid.

Bouncer 1: Why is it always the white man? The black man is God. I'm sick and tired of your Five Percenter **malarkey**.

Giant: It's not Five Percenter. It's Five Percent.

Bouncer 2: Five percent of what?

Bouncer 1: Five percent of the population knows what's going on, the true **guts** of this planet, the original Asiatic black man from Africa with knowledge of self, sent here to teach the 85% that you're **dumb**, deaf, and blind.

Gut: (qui) pancia; **Malarkey:** sciocchezze/balle; **Dumb:** stupido

Giant: Bleek has been consistently **packing the joint**.

Josh: We're pleased.

Moe: We're more than pleased. We're ecstatic.

Josh: It's fabulous.

Giant: We want more money. You're **making a killing**. What's fair is fair.

To pack the joint: (qui) formare una band; **To make a killing:** (qui) avere un grande successo

Bleek: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, as I travel through this great big country of ours, this US of A, and being on the road as much as I do, I listen to a lot of radio stations. It's amazing how many KISS or V103 stations there are. Jesus Christ, did people **run out of** call letters, or what? Come on. Anyway, most of the stuff on the radio is so sad. It's a **drag**. One of the reasons could be because every song is about... Oh, you guessed it, huh? Love. Love. Love. L-O-V-E. What the world needs now...is not another love song. Now, **dig**. **Check this out**. The love that's professed in these songs is **shaky** anyway. It's a lustful, selfish, end-of-the-world love. [...] What a **dope** like soap on a rope, I went for the **okey doke**, You know this is true, He blew L-O-V-E, try S-E-X. I'll be a happy **chappy**, Also **nappy**, I get the **shivers** down to my livers, Other guys just **feed you lines**, but I take you to Mickey D's. Baby, I'm on my knees, Please, baby, please. But this **ain't** that song, It's gettin' long.

To run out of something: finire/esaurire; **Drag:** (qui) noia mortale; **Dig:** (qui) cercare qualcosa; **To check something out:** (qui) ascoltare qualcosa; **Shaky:** instabile/fugace; **dope:** (qui) stupido; **Okey doke (slang):** ok; **Chappy:** tipo/tizio; **Nappy:** (qui) con i capelli in stile afro; **Shivers:** brividi; **To feed someone lines:** fornire dei versi a qualcuno; **Ain't (slang):** is not

Sources:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100168/>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mo' Better Blues>