

# The Wright Way

Based on a true story

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1.

1906

Atlanta, Georgia

Such a beautiful dream. He saw his father and mother dancing in the kitchen. It was as if they feel in love all over again. The look in their eyes showed complete happiness and understanding. They seem to be as one as they gracefully moved together and let their spirits move with one another. Pure happiness. Oh what a beautiful dream.

Gunfire. It woke Louis up from his deep sleep. He heard his momma scream. He could hear his stepfather telling her to calm down. Louis got up from bed in a hurry and rushed to see his momma. She was in the bedroom crying.

“What’s wrong momma?” Louis asked.

“I’ll tell you what’s wrong.” his stepfather said sternly. “There’s a race riot going on. It was finna happen. We can’t let them take us down!”

“Don’t do nothing crazy!” Louis’ mother pleaded. She tried to console his stepfather but he moved away,

“Louis, follow me.” he said and left the room.

They went to the back of the house where his stepfather had a gun collection. People shouting and more gunfire was heard. In his fifteen years of life, Louis had never been more genuinely terrified. He couldn’t help notice his body was shaking more than a snake’s tail. The shadow of fear that had always followed him now had entered his body. He watched as his stepfather calmly loaded a Winchester rifle and handed it to him.

“Son, you cover the front of the house. If anybody comes in that gate, let them have it. If you see they’re going to get you, try to take two of them with you.”

Louis froze with the gun in hand. “Go on now!” his stepfather commanded.

It didn’t even feel like he was moving his own feet. He passed by his mother’s bedroom and she was praying. Another gunfire startled Louis. He turned his attention back to his momma. She was calmly praying. The ease he saw in her gave him the strength to step outside and take post at the front of the house. He could hear the shouts more louder now and the sound of footsteps. Louis squinted his eyes under the moonlight in all directions. The footsteps sounded closer and more like it was people marching. Then he saw the bright color of fire as if it was gliding closer. Louis smelled it in the air and he knew

homes were being burned down. He started to panic and gripped his gun. It was time to be a man.

The marching sound was more heavy now and Louis squinted in that direction. He could finally see what was happening. Louis saw the state militia marching up the road that led to the front of his house. They were coming closer. He looked to his sides and saw his white neighbors walk up the road with guns in their hands. It was in that moment, Louis was certain he was doomed for death. He and his stepfather had no chance against an army that was seeking to kill or have someone lynched.

“Don’t cry. Don’t cry,” he whispered to himself but couldn’t help the tears fall down his cheeks. Unable to move, he just listened to the marching. And then the sound of a car engine.

Louis glanced in the other direction. A car was coming up the other side of the road and approaching their home. He couldn’t make out who was in the car as it came closer.

“What’s that?” his stepfather asked with Louis’ momma by his side. They joined Louis on the porch.

“A car is coming!” Louis shouted as if it was his last words.

The car pulled in front of the house. “Get in!” the driver said.

Louis recognized the man. He was a local auto mechanic around the way. It felt conflicting for a white man to help but he was their only means of survival. They would have to trust him.

“Hurry! You don’t got much time!” the man shouted. Louis and his family entered the car as the driver pressed the pedal hard and sped past the mob and on their way to a safer part of town. For the most part, they had kept their heads down and only looked up when it was safe. They could hear the state militia yell racial slurs and shouts about redemption. Louis rested his head on his momma’s lap. Most of the trip he stared at the roof of the car. Louis went back to his dream he had earlier. The dancing, the laughing, the happiness. Pure happiness.

## 2.

### Summer of 1911

Louis embraced the freshness around him. Today was a start of a new era. He stretched his arms high in the air and took a deep breath.

“Look at my boy, all grown up.” Mrs. Penn said. “Ready to make it in the world. Trying to make his momma lonely.”

“I’m just going to school.” Louis said as he gave her a hug.

“You come back here for your momma’s cooking.” his stepfather, Dr, William Penn told him. “She always cooks too much and you know how I hate throwing food away.”

“Let us know if they’re giving you problems, you hear?” Mrs. Penn said. “North or south, they still have bad apples everywhere.”

“Okay momma.” Louis lifted his luggage as the train pulled into the station. The feeling of nervousness and excitement made goosebumps on his arms. He was on his first step on becoming a physician.

“All aboard!” yelled one of the train officials.

Louis walked toward the train and to his future. He looked back at his parents, who both had smiles on their faces. He gave one last wave goodbye and got into the train. It was a long trip to Boston.

Only a few weeks earlier, Louis had graduated from Clark College in Atlanta as a superb student and one that was popular among the faculty. His instinct for learning was undeniable and many could see a bright future because of his work ethic.

He found his seat in the crowded train. This wasn’t going to be a peaceful ride. Louis could hear babies crying, people shouting, and the movements of people from seat to seat. He sighed and took his aisle seat. Louis had guessed the poor economy had everyone looking for a new start. It was a good thing he brought a few books with him for the ride. Someone bumped him against his leg.

“Hey, I got the window seat.” the man said.

Louis looked up and saw that the man was not about to apologize. He stood up so the man had enough room to squeeze through. As he passed Louis, the smell of tobacco and alcohol drifted in the air.

“What they call you?” the man asked as he sat down.

“Louis. Louis Wright.” They shook hands.

“They call me Twitch. Real name, Thomas though.”

“Twitch?” Louis laughed. “What a funny name!”

Twitch was not amused. Louis saw his tight expression and gradually stopped laughing. There was a brief silence between the two of them.

“So where you headed?” Louis asked, so at least they could be on conversational terms.

“Boston. I was down here to see my aunt for awhile. She in bad shape. Poor woman suffers from diptera.”

“Diphtheria.” Louis corrected. Again, the man was not amused.

“Anyways, her skin is all swollen and she has patches of darker skin. Doctors say the throat infection is deadly and there’s nothing they can do about

it. It makes my heart sad to see that poor woman suffer so. I feel bad for making a point to visit her.”

“Why should you feel bad? It was good for you to come to see her.” Louis stated.

The train started to move. Twitch took out a small liquor bottle and took a sip of his favorite brandy. He grimaced as the burn hit his throat.

“That wasn’t the first reason. I heard ol’ lady was doing bad and I wanted get in good before she wrote her will.”

Louis tried not to laugh but couldn’t help it. This time, Twitch laughed with him. Twitch then took another sip of his brandy and put the liquor away.

“So where you headed, young man?” Twitch asked.

“I’m going to Boston too.” Louis said proudly. “I’m going to Harvard.”

Twitch looked at him as if he was crazy. “Harvard?” Twitch asked in disbelief. Louis nodded his head yes.

“You mean that fancy school with new books and teachers that actually show up to class?” Louis nodded his head yes again but with a smile. “Boy, are you serious?”

“Serious as can be. I’m going to be a physician.”

“Well excuse me, Mr. Wright.” Twitch saw the enthusiasm in his eyes and decided he wanted it to stay there. “That’s good Louis. We could use folks like you up north. It’ll make me feel like I’m back home.”

“You got a family, Thomas?” Louis asked.

“Call me Twitch. No, but my wife has three kids.”

Louis nodded in disapproval. “You ain’t right Twitch.”

“Let me tell you something about females, young man. They’re hard to live with. It’s hard enough trying to make it in this white man’s world and I gotta come home and hear her complain! So what if I go from job to job. It ain’t my fault. They’re either laying us off or not giving us the pay we deserve. Now when I come home, I want my dinner cooked and my clothes clean and pressed. All I hear is lip.”

“So why’d you marry her in the first place? Sounds like you wanna be alone.” Louis said.

Twitch looked Louis in the eyes and then looked away. “You know, there’s nothing to replace a woman’s touch. Every man knows that. I do come home when I need that touch. It gets me through life sometimes. Don’t get me wrong, my wife can make me feel brand new. But the other times, I feel like, I feel like....” Twitch looked back at Louis. “I’ve let her down. And the reason why she complains is cause I haven’t applied myself as they say. She’s just making the whole thing worse.”

Louis didn't know what to say. This was an awkward moment if there ever was one. He decided to give him a few pats on the back.

"It's alright Twitch. You ain't the only one that's going through that."

"Tickets!" a white man in a crisp blue suit yelled. He was walking down the aisle with a bell in his hand. He eventually came to Louis and Twitch.

Louis passively reached inside his pocket and gave the man his ticket. The man handed it back. "What's your name, boy?"

"Louis Wright." The man stared at him and observed his facial movement.

"Alright." he said. "Where's your ticket?" he asked Twitch.

"Right here sir." Twitch responded and handed him the ticket.

The man took the ticket, looked at it, and handed it back. "What's your name?" he asked Twitch.

"Lee Johnson." Twitch responded with ease. Once again, the man studied Twitch's facial expression. Louis tried to keep calm and not look at Twitch.

"Lee Johnson, eh?" the man said rhetorically. "I heard a criminal boarded this train and I got brief description. All you colored folks look the same to me. You wouldn't know any criminal boarding this train, would you?"

"No sir. I know no criminal is smart enough to get away on a train. That'll be just stupid if you don't mind me saying sir."

Louis held his anxiety in. This Twitch fellow was brave. He either was a criminal mastermind or just flat out stupid. Louis lowered his eyes because he knew his fear would show. In the meantime, Twitch and the man were looking straight at each other.

"I'm keeping an eye on you." the man said and walked away.

Louis looked down and saw that Twitch's right leg was shaking. Twitch saw Louis looking at it. He grinned.

"Now you know why they call me Twitch." He gave a sigh of relief and took another sip of his brandy.

It was awhile before either of them started talking again. Louis looked out the window as the train sped across northern states he had never seen before. Twitch was sleeping for the most part and snoring loudly. Louis looked out the window and wondered how the black folks in these states were being treated. Was it the same from where he was from? Louis thought about the race riots he saw as a child. Maybe it was different out here. Maybe up north they treated people with the dignity and respect that they deserve. He smiled at the thought of being considered an equal, another human being, and not being segregated from each other.

Twitch woke up and observed Louis. Then he laughed. "You can't change the world Louis. It is what it is. You just have to accept it."

"Well, at least I won't be no criminal."

Twitch leaned up straight with that remark. "Listen, you don't know the whole story. So watch your mouth!" Twitch looked around and noticed people were looking at him. He smiled and played it off.

"Times are bad. Ever since Roosevelt left office. You know that. I only take what I should be getting anyways. I took a few jewelry pieces from a rich white man up north. Sell it on the street so my family still has a house to live in. The will may be wrong but the intentions are right. Don't blame me cause I'm trying to put food on the table." Twitch's tone became a whispered shout.

"I got you Twitch. I understand." Louis replied.

"See, me and you Louis, we're not all that different." Twitch was now more relaxed. "We both want the same things in life. A good job, nice home, a good cooked meal." Twitch nudged Louis with his elbow as Louis grinned. "Not everybody is blessed with a smart mind like you. We just doing what we're good at to make it in this world."

"Yeah, I reckon that's true." Louis replied. Twitch started to look out the window.

"Who knows. One of us might need the other. These things sometimes happen."

"You sound like you help now. Something bothering you there Twitch. Something I can help you with?" Louis asked with concern.

"No, not now. We have to see what happens. I don't know how everything is going to fold out for me but I do know I'm a try my best to make it look good. They're just things I'm not ready to deal with now. I rather not talk about it."

Twitch, promise me something." Louis said as Twitch was taken aback.

"Yeah, you got it." Twitch said as he faced Louis.

"If I become successful, don't steal my jewelry."

## Boston, MA

Louis had not seen so many white faced people in his life. Plus, they looked different from those of the South. As soon as he stepped off the train and said goodbye to Twitch, he was amazed by their appearance. These people had paid more attention to the way they dressed and their physical appearance. It was the look he had seen in the magazines.

Louis looked for the nearest person selling newspapers and bought one. There was an article about President Taft coming to the Montserrat station and

only about a hundred people came to greet him. He was on his way to his new summer home which he saw for the first time and was very pleased by it. He turned to the section of the newspaper where it talked about race relations. More lynching had been done in the South for the pettiest crimes, the paper said. Some members of the representatives in Washington pushed for anti-lynching laws. The constituents from the South rejected it and said lynching was needed "to preserve that certain crimes do not go unpunished." Louis tore that section of the newspaper and put it in his pocket.

He began walking the busy streets of Boston. In the country, everything was more spread out and people weren't in a rush. It seemed everyone was in a rush to get somewhere. There were some stares as people walked by him, but the majority of people didn't pay him no mind. It was like he was one of them. Louis happily went on his way to Harvard University.