

I Saw The Light

written  
by

Marc Abraham

## I SAW THE LIGHT

BLACK SCREEN. A SONG.

*"... another love before my time  
made your heart sad and blue and so  
my heart is paying now for things I  
didn't do ..."*

AS THE DEEP BLACK TURNS SMOKY GREY we are ...

Somewhere in southern Alabama. Sometime past midnight. Some time around **1950**. And though it's impossible to clearly make out details, it feels like what it is, a sweaty HONKY TONK.

Camera floats like a moth around the beautiful and hypnotic face; past the dark haunted eyes of a 27 year-old man who somehow even in this first moment feels like he's at least 20 years older. **HIRAM "HANK" WILLIAMS** born in a speck of a town, poorer than is imaginable.

Glimpses of his ever present cowboy hat. A small stately Stetson. His fancy western suit, sweat stained collar and missing rhinestones. Not because he can't afford to fix them, he just doesn't have the time. Hank is burning through the days and nights with a fever that will scorch you.

The voice is confident and ancient and yet supple like a child. But mostly it is so damn personal that every person who hears it thinks it belongs to them. And of course, it is sad. Sadder than anyone has ever heard. The song is "Cold Cold Heart."

HANK

*"In anger unkind words are said,  
that make the tear drops start  
How can I free your doubtful mind  
and melt your cold cold heart..."*

*The strains of Hank's lament play under the opening of the next scene and then as speaking voices come up, it dies out.*

**73 MILES SOUTH OF MONTGOMERY  
ANDALUSIA, ALABAMA DECEMBER 15, 1944**

EXT. TEXACO STATION - NIGHT

A light rain. A SERVICE BAY. In the B.G. a YOUNG ATTENDANT, 20s puts his tools away. An older man, M.A.

(CONTINUED)

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BOYETTE, 60s, station owner, puts a sport coat on over his work clothes; then his watch. Calls out to someone in the office.

BOYETTE (O.S.)  
You know what time I get up every morning, Hank?

HANK (O.S.)  
No idea sir.

BOYETTE (O.S.)  
Well, 4:45. Sun never ever beats me... Then know what I do at 6:15?

HANK (O.S.)  
Listen to my radio show?

BOYETTE (O.S.)  
On WSFA? ... Nope. I have my breakfast.

INT. TEXACO STATION - NIGHT

Boyette turns and enters the small office where he turns to the YOUNG MAN and WOMAN he has been talking to.

HANK  
Fair enough ... I guess we ain't that big or we wouldn't be singin' at that hour.

HANK, a handsome, lanky 22 year-old, holds a cowboy hat. He stares into the eyes of AUDREY MAE SHEPHERD GUY, 23. A good-looking blonde with a hard side and a wicked smile.

BOYETTE  
Nah, I'm kiddin' around ... I listen to your program every now and then.

Hank nods, smiles. Boyette's greased-stained hands pick up a sheaf of papers and flips through them.

BOYETTE (cont'd)  
Hmmm... couple more little Justice of the Peace details. This your license and *divorce* decree, Miss Guy?

Audrey takes a long look at the papers before answering.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

I'm Miss Shepard now. Guy was Erksine's *surname*.

BOYETTE

But these divorce papers are in order, right?

AUDREY

They definitely are, Mr. Guy and I took care of that. You'll take notice it's notarized as well.

She squeezes Hank's hand in reassurance. He squeezes it back. Their faces reveal a couple deeply in love.

BOYETTE

I see that. Just 10 days ago, huh?  
(sets the papers aside,  
picks up a Bible)

Well, to the business at hand. Just because the ceilings aren't vaulted and the windows aren't stained glass, doesn't mean that this union is any less sacred. Now, before I pronounce you two sweethearts man and wife ... is there anyone here who has an objection, if so go ahead and speak your peace.

The attendant enters.

ATTENDANT

Not me, I'm fine about it.

Laughter.

HANK

Well then, let's get on with it.

BOYETTE

Audrey Mae Shepherd Guy do you take Hiram King Hank Williams to love and honor in all duty and service. To live with him and cherish him according to the bonds of marriage.

AUDREY

I sure will.

BOYETTE

And do you Hiram King Hank Williams, have this woman Audrey Mae (pauses)...  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOYETTE (cont'd)

Shepherd to be your wife and will  
you promise faithfulness in all  
love and honor and all duty in  
service to live with her according  
to the bonds of marriage.

HANK

I will.

EXT. TEXACO STATION - NIGHT

Through the sweaty, fogged window and the growing SOUND of  
POURING RAIN, the fading words ...

BOYETTE(V.O.)

By authority vested in me for the  
County of Covington, state of  
Alabama, I declare you husband and  
wife. You may embrace.

Which Hank does. Long and hard.

INT. KITCHEN - LILLIE WILLIAM'S BOARDING HOUSE - MONTGOMERY

Good sized kitchen as befits a BOARDING HOUSE likely built in  
the late 1890's. Large table, a lot of linoleum, some smoke  
wafting about and Audrey at the stove.

AUDREY

(singing)

*"... By a stream upon a meadow  
Under clouds white as snow  
I dreamt about you baby  
Even though you let me go"*

(takes a drink from a  
beer)

Whatya' think?

Hank stretched out between two chairs, boots off, reads a  
**Ranch Romance** PULP COMIC BOOK. A five year-old girl, LYCRECIA  
(Audrey's daughter from her first marriage) sits on his lap,  
trying to grab the comic. But Hank is actually reading and  
liking it. They tussle for it.

A plain pocket-sized, overstuffed NOTEBOOK lies open next to  
him. There's an empty beer bottle on the table and he's  
drinking from another.

Hank doesn't answer, instead takes a swig.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

How long it's been since Lycrecia  
saw her daddy?

AUDREY

He's gonna stop by next week when  
she's at mommy and dad's.  
(back to singing)  
*" My heart is oh so heavy  
And my tears no longer glow  
I dreamt about you baby,  
Even though you let me go" So?*

HANK

It's fine, baby.

AUDREY

Fine?

HANK

Yeah ... fine.

As she puts a plate of overcooked collared greens on the  
table, a MAN, 50ish walks into the kitchen.

AUDREY

(rough)  
Who are you?

MAN

Raymond Wallingford. I'm a new  
boarder... are you Miss Lillie?

AUDREY

(nods towards Hank)  
Do I look like his mother?

MAN

No, uh, no, not really. Sorry ...

Wallingford spins quickly, exits.

HANK

Raymond huh ... Seems like a fine  
fella.

Hank sets Lycrecia aside, keeps reading the *comic*. He's  
really enjoying it. Laughs as he takes a bite.

AUDREY

How's the stew?

HANK

Fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY  
Everything's fine? Even Raymond's  
fine ...

Hank gets up, gets some ketchup. Sits back, pours it all  
over the greens.

AUDREY (cont'd)  
If it's fine, it doesn't need any  
ketchup.

HANK  
It ain't that fine.

AUDREY  
The food or the song?

HANK  
(chuckles)  
Well, they both need a little  
ketchup, honey.

AUDREY  
Screw you Hank.

HANK  
C'mon Auds.

AUDREY  
You c'mon... You always do this ...

HANK  
Do what?

AUDREY  
Like you promised I could sing with  
you on the program and there's been  
none of that at all.

HANK  
OK, fine.

AUDREY  
What's that mean?

Gets up, grabs another beer from the fridge, stumbles over a  
bottle and walks out the back door and down wooden steps to  
the yard.

HANK  
Jeeze, just what I said, okay ...

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

AUDREY (O.S.)  
 (from inside)  
 You think you're so high and mighty  
 and it's all you ... Well, I got  
 ambition too and ... YOU quit  
 goddamn acting like I can't sing.

Hank lights a cig, his back to the door. Suddenly one of his  
 boots nails him in the back. He calmly bends down and picks  
 it up. The other one sails out. He just puts it on and moves  
 out of range.

HANK  
 (calling out)  
 Yeah, that's a helluva song Audrey,  
 now why don't you work on your  
 sense of humor.

INT. ROADHOUSE CLUB - NIGHT

Decent crowd. Music is number three on the list of important  
 things in a joint like this: 1) illegal liquor 2) fighting,  
 then music.

HANK (O.S.)  
 (POSSIBLY HONKY TONK BLUES  
 HERE INSTEAD)  
 "And we'll go honky tonkin' honey  
 baby, honky tonkin' honey baby  
 We'll go honky tonkin' around this  
 town

Camera SNAKES THROUGH THE CROWD that has the air of danger  
 that comes after midnight on a state highway in the middle of  
 the summer. Heavy smoke parts REVEALING creased faces and  
 dirty fingernails; sandpaper hands cup beers and coke bottles  
 filled with cheap clear whiskey.

HANK (cont'd)  
 When you and your baby have a  
 falling out  
 Call me up sweet mama and we'll go  
 stepping out and  
 We'll go honky tonkin' 'round this  
 town ..."

These are young rugged farmers and factory workers in their  
 20's, watching their women eat up Hank while they stroke  
 their girl's thighs.

(CONTINUED)

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HANK ON STAGE. He wears a Stetson, a regular suit and a loosened tie. Behind him is a version of his band the **DRIFTING COWBOYS**. Through the years the name would always stay the same, but the players would change 20 times. For now DON HELMS 20'S on pedal steel guitar and LUM YORK, 20'S on bass; JERRY RIVERS, 20s and one other player (considering Sammy Pruitt).

Hank hunches over the microphone, all 150 pounds of him. As he sings, his knees buckle, his hips thrust. For *these days*, it's unique. Visceral. And the sexuality cannot be denied. He yodels, a WOMAN shrieks. Rest of crowd laughs at that.

IN THE WINGS is Hank's MOTHER, LILLIE, 40's, intense, formidable and nearly as tall as her 6 foot son. She wears a *simple* black dress and ARGUES with Audrey. They don't now, and never have, liked each other.

Lillie FLIPS THROUGH the last bills of "*tonight's take.*" Then actually starts *counting* the crowd.

AUDREY

How much we got there, *Miss Lillie?*

LILLIE

I'm under no obligation to you.

AUDREY

Right, that goes both ways ... he's drinking like a fish tonight.

LILLIE

You think so ...

ON HANK. Finishes the song, glimpses over at the two of them. Nods for Audrey to join him. She's pleased, Lillie's not.

AUDREY

Don't worry Lillie, Hank will hand it over to me before we even get home ...

LILLIE

I'd be careful little girl, that's a tinder box out there.

Hank grabs a coke bottle full of liquor off the floor. Nearly falls as he does. Big swig, then drapes his arm around Audrey. He kisses her cheek, she leans into him. They roll into "*BLUES COME AROUND*" together.

A SCARY GUY stands up in the crowd.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SCARY GUY

Hey Williams, you sound like a  
billy goat. So does she.

Hank ignores him.

AUDREY

... sit down you horse's ass.

Hank shakes his head at her. She knows better. The Man's WIFE  
pulls him back to his seat.

SCARY GUY

So you hidin' behind a woman ...  
You hear me you, you skinny little  
shit.

Hank stops, shares a look with Audrey, a quick glance at  
Helms, then to the heckler.

HANK

No, I can't hear you.

Starts the song again. GUY stands up again.

SCARY GUY

... every morning when my wife  
wakes up she's listens to you on  
the damn radio, if she's listening  
tomorrow mornin' I'm gonna beat the  
hell out of her.

Hank casually nods Audrey to step away. She hesitates, but  
does.

HANK

(smiles)

Well, partner why don't you just  
turn the damn thing off ... that's  
why they put knobs on it.

Audience laughs. The GUY explodes, CHARGES the stage, pushes  
people out of the way. Hank shows no fear, just carefully  
sets down his guitar, goes straight for the LEG OF **DON'S**  
STEEL GUITAR.

Crowd SCATTERS, the SCARY GUY trips, almost falls, gets to  
the stage, jumps up and dives for Hank. He just barely grabs  
Hank's PANTS LEG and pulls him to the floor. But as Hank goes  
down, he WAILS on the SCARY GUY with the steel guitar leg. It  
all gets bloody. Now Lillie wades in with her fists pumping,  
as Don and Lum try to separate them.

INT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE / BEDROOM - DAWN

Only a touch of morning light. Hank snores heavily. His pillow is spotted with blood. He has a Band-Aid on his cheek. Audrey is next to him, snoring even louder.

The door opens and Lillie enters, stares, then gently shakes Hank. Audrey stirs. Hank reaches over to wake Audrey. Lillie quickly stops him. She does not want *her* along.

I/E. ROAD / CHEVY - DAWN

TIGHT ON Lillie's face as she drives fast. Her eyes a study of reflection.

LILLIE

I know I birthed you Hank ... I was there.

(chuckles to herself)

But where you came from, how you got what you got and why you have it ... I swear no one knows that. Maybe the Lord ... Maybe.

Hank now barely visible in the backseat. Hat pulled over his eyes.

HANK

(a hoarse whisper)

She's going to be pissed about this.

LILLIE

Think I care ... I'm doing everybody at the station a favor. That woman doesn't have clue who's the star 'round here. And I haven't been driving you all over the state for 10 years, booking joints and schoolhouses to see her sweep in like she's the Queen of England.

HANK

Yeah ... know why you and Audrey don't get along, cause one of you's afraid the other's gonna beat her to my pocket when I get drunk.

LILLIE

How can you say that? That's hurtful, son.

Lillie takes a corner and tires squeal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

Hey, I'm whupped ... that's all.

LILLIE

Wish that was all. When's the last time you ate?

HANK

I can't recall.

They barrel in silence. Hank tries to get comfortable, stretches, puts his jacket under his back. Can't. He's clearly in pain.

LILLIE

Your back sore?

HANK

It's fine ...

INT. JEFFERSON DAVIS HOTEL / WSFA STUDIO - MONTGOMERY - DAY

A small studio on the second floor of the hotel. A MICROPHONE says **WSFA/NBC**. The band is stretched out on folding chairs behind it. Waiting. They sip coffee and smoke.

Hank enters carrying his guitar case and is immediately confronted by the Station Owner, HOWARD PILL.

PILL

Williams, where you get off wasting twelve minutes of air time? That shit's not gonna work.

Hank turns, stares, says nothing.

PILL (cont'd)

... And you smell like a damn still. All of you.

The guys stifle laughs, as Hank moves to the mic. Finally.

HANK

I'm sorry Mr. Pill.

PILL

Well, that don't mean anything to me.

Hank opens his guitar case while signaling to the engineer to get things rolling. The band gathers their instruments.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Engineer, SEBIE SMITH, peers through the booth glass to Pill, who has no option. Pill signals "OK" start the show.

PILL (cont'd)  
I'll boot you, I swear to god, I will. This is a business we're running, asshole.

HANK  
(dripping sarcasm)  
Oh I surely know that, Mr. Pill.

Sebie counts it down ...

HANK (cont'd)  
Hey, a fine very early good morning to all you friends out there. This is ol' Hank and the Drifting Cowboys ... we're awful sorry we're getting a late jump, but well, last night we *got jumped ourselves* out on Highway 31. (the band LAUGHS)  
I got a sore head and some other fellows in Alabama got some cracked heads. And oh yeah, there's one more thing. This looks like it's gonna be our last program here at WSFA.

Hank smiles at Pill who's staring back at him with disgust.

HANK (cont'd)  
And if any of you out there have enjoyed it, well, we'd like to sure hear from you. Now how about a little song I actually didn't write called "My Bucket's Got A Hole in It"...

INT. WSFA OFFICE - LATE NIGHT

Howard Pill walks up to two full U.S. POST OFFICE CARTONS next to a secretary's desk. Bends down, shuffles through a box that's filled with letters to Hank. Walks away, says nothing.

EXT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

CLOSE ON HAND. A stub of a pencil.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hank isn't writing, he's just doodling in a notebook. (*It's ever present and full, with pieces of paper stuffed in it, held together with a rubber band*).

He sits on the porch of Lillie's BOARDING HOUSE. A few other boarders are present as well. A cigarette dangles from his lips, a beer by his side.

A young girl, ELLIE, 20, sits down.

ELLIE

What you writin' Hank?

HANK

Ahh, maybe a little poem to the Lord, might turn into a song. Always use a new one.

ELLIE

Really ... Are you the religious sort?

HANK

Well, when I was a boy I spent a lot of time in church listening to gospel.

ELLIE

You still are a boy.

He reaches over and nonchalantly strokes her leg.

HANK

Think so, Ellie?

ELLIE

Why don't you write me a poem.

HANK

Okay, but I might have to get to know you a little better.

ELLIE

(coyly)

Sure, when?

Lillie comes out on the front porch, walks over, takes the beer.

LILLIE

Get lost Ellie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Ellie stands, smiles at Hank ... and *straightens* up as she sees Audrey, who walks up carrying groceries. Hank, now faces the two of them.

AUDREY  
You see Howard Pill called?

LILLIE  
When?

AUDREY  
'for I left. Says Hank's gotta come back, he has a contract.

LILLIE  
That's true, we do. And it's a good job right now.

AUDREY  
Says he'd like me to do some singing on the show.

LILLIE  
That's *not* true.

HANK  
Jesus. I was doing pretty good here.

Hank stands up, puts the notebook in his back pocket. Takes the beer out of Lillie's hand.

HANK (cont'd)  
A few more shows and I wanna be done with him.

LILLIE  
It's not that easy to get out of.

AUDREY  
Well, he can do what he wants, Lillie.

Hank heads inside.

LILLIE  
What is this, a schoolyard?

AUDREY  
(back to Hank)  
Where you going?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HANK

Right now I'm gonna take a piss.  
And day after tomorrow, I'm going  
up to Nashville. Charlie Holt gave  
me the name of a guy who could help  
with the Opry.

Audrey smiles at Lillie.

AUDREY

I been pressin' Charlie Holt. You  
know that? You know that, right ...

HANK

Sure.

LILLIE

Well that's swell, Audrey ...

AUDREY

Sounds good ... When we going,  
baby?

HANK

Friday.

AUDREY

Friday? Mom's bringing Lycrecia  
back then.

Lillie cuts a smile back at Audrey.

LILLIE

*So there you go.*

INT. WSM / LOBBY - DAY

CAMERA QUICKLY follows JUD COLLINS, the Station Announcer. He  
winds his way through the buzzing halls. Glass windowed doors  
bear the call letters, **WSM "Home of the Opry."** He enters the  
lobby.

Hank smokes a cigarette, stares at a DJ through a booth  
window. Absently strokes the back of his head. Next to him  
sits a beat up leather bag. A grey fedora rests on top of it.

JUD

Hey there.

Hank turns, extends his hand. They shake.

HANK

I'm Hank Williams.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUD  
I heard that.

Hank takes this in.

HANK  
I'll get down to it then. Charlie Holt gave me your name, Mr. Collins. He said you'd tell me what I have to do to get on the Opry.

JUD  
(laughs)  
Well, there's only one way to do that and that's audition for Jack Stapp.

HANK  
You know I sure hate those auditions, Mr. Collins.... Could I just meet him?

Young SECRETARY in the hall calls MR. COLLINS, who signals just a moment.

JUD  
Son, they're no shortcuts to the Opry.

HANK  
Then would you tell Mr. Stapp that I'm here.

JUD  
Hank, how old are you?

HANK  
Twenty-four when I last checked.

JUD  
Well, that oughta be old enough to know that's not how it works. You'll have to make an appointment, play for him and then if he likes it, you play for Judge Hay.

HANK  
And then what?

JUD  
Then Judge Hay is likely to tell you to come back when "you're hot enough to draw flies ..."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

I just might know how to do that.

JUD

Then you got a good start.

Jud sizes him up, thinks for a moment ...

JUD (cont'd)

You know Fred Rose?

HANK

Know of him. Roy Acuff's partner.

JUD

Among other things ... Maybe you oughta know of him a little better.

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

FRED ROSE, mid 40's, slight widow's peak, a keen visage that has no trouble holding an intense gaze. That said, his smile when revealed, is warm. There's a piano in the office. He sits on swivel desk chair looking *straight at us*.

**Fred is being interviewed by a reporter WHO WILL NEVER BE SEEN ON CAMERA. His voice will be intelligible but muffled.**

FRED ROSE

Since you're asking me ... I think basically it's impossible to understand why or what happens when an artist or performer captures people's imagination. The drums start to beat and the message moves across the mountains. Of course, there's no shortage of managers or publishers or press for that matter, explaining why so and so is hot, or proclaiming this fellow is going to be a star ... That's an opinion ... (beat) and I'm familiar with a lot of them ...

INTERVIEWER

But you obviously thought Hank had something.

FRED ROSE

Yes I did. It would have been hard not to ...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRED ROSE (cont'd)

When he first came to see me he played some of the songs he'd written, and some other folks material too. (Takes a beat) Actually I believe Audrey, his wife, had been calling here quite a bit, pushing me to see him ... Anyway, I offered him a contract right then and there as a song writer. Twenty dollars a song I believe.

INTERVIEWER

... and to be clear, you're a song publisher here in Nashville.

FRED ROSE

Yes ... (laughs) I was originally a song and dance man from St. Louis, via New York, but yes, Roy Acuff, who as you know has been a big Opry star for quite some time ... we have a company.

(thinking, smiling)

I really liked Hank right off. Maybe it was because **he** didn't give a darn whether you liked him or not.

*JUMP CUT*

INTERVIEWER

Don Helms says you're the only one who he'd really listen to about his music.

FRED ROSE

Let's put it *this way he would listen to me*. That doesn't mean he *heard*.

*JUMP CUT*

INTERVIEWER

Did you see, or rather what did you know about his ... *problems*?

FRED ROSE

All I'll say is, as a young man I was personally no stranger to similar troubles myself.

EXT. ALABAMA ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON/DUSK

A '42 Plymouth rolls across a country bridge.

FRED ROSE (V.O.)

So I told him I was a Christian Scientist, which he was not likely not to know, and we assert that humanity is spiritual rather than material. That ... that faith has helped me through some dark times ... and he should call me if he needed me.

I/E. ALABAMA ROAD / PLYMOUTH - DUSK

Don Helms drives, a woman next to him. Hank is stretched out in the backseat, head in Audrey's lap, bare feet out the window. Radio plays low. (Probably a baseball game). Goes on a bit, then ...

DON

A damn publishing deal. A publishing deal.

AUDREY

Ten dollars per song, plus royalties.

DON

Officially ... a *paid* songwriter.

HANK

That's right, so I suggest you address me as Mr. Hiram Williams.

Audrey leans over, tips up his baseball type cap.

DON

Where the hell *did* "Hiram" come from?

HANK

My old man. Got it from King Hiram in the Book of Kings. And then misspelled it on the birth certificate. Put in an extra "I." That's why they used to call me "Harm."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

Boy, Lillie never mentions your daddy at all, like he never existed.

HANK

Well, she put him in the Veterans Hospital in Pensacola when I was six. War injury from France or something, but some cousin told me it was from a truck accident at the lumber yard. Anyway, he was messed up and that was about it for us... after that ... well, I was pretty much my own daddy.

Audrey takes a beat, strokes his temple.

AUDREY

I'm so glad we're taking a couple of days.

HANK

Yeah, me too.

WOMAN IN CAR

Don't you just love lightning bugs?

AUDREY

Love 'em.

DON

Who doesn't?

HANK

Lizards ... 'cause that *light juice* kills 'em when they eat 'em.

They laugh.

DON

Man, can't wait to get out in that boat and do some real fishin'.

HANK

And just think, if you knew how, how much fun it'd be.

DON

I'll have two in the wet well before you have a worm on the damn hook.

INT. LAKE COTTAGE / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Screened SLEEPING PORCH. Hank, bare-chested, scrawny and in boxers, lies on the bed, smoking. Audrey is propped up on her elbow in a cotton nightgown.

AUDREY

Come on baby ... what'ya doing over there?

A mosquito buzzes around Hank. He swats at it. Misses. He sits up, then gets up, comically trying to clap it out of the air.

HANK

Hold on.

Audrey stares at the BONY LUMP on his lower back. Finally, he nails it.

HANK (cont'd)

Night, night lil' bastard.

Before he lies back down, he empties several aspirin from a bottle on the bedside table and gulps them. Audrey gently touches the bump.

HANK (cont'd)

I think we might have a little bronco riding tonight.

AUDREY

Really, says who?

HANK

Says ol' Hank.

AUDREY

Well, I look forward to that event.

HANK

You should.

AUDREY

(teasing)

Especially since you're not drinkin'.

HANK

Now darling, that's uncalled for.

He turns off the light. IN THE DARK.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY  
You're right. C'mon climb up  
cowboy.

HANK  
Nah ... too sore, you be in the  
saddle tonight.

Sheets rustle, then she gets on top of him.

AUDREY  
You love me?

HANK  
You love me?

AUDREY  
Do you love me, *honey*?

HANK  
Hmmm, most of the time, I do.

They laugh, start rocking. Squeaking bed.

HANK (cont'd)  
You know what I want Auds?

AUDREY  
Me.

HANK  
All the marbles.

AUDREY  
What? ... what about my marbles?

HANK  
They're included ...

AUDREY  
Good thinkin'.

HANK  
Baby, nothin's gonna stop me.  
Really. Nothin'.

Moaning from Audrey, grunts from Hank.

AUDREY  
Yes, nothing's gonna stop us baby.  
(beat)  
Now ... really, can you not stop.

INT. CASTLE RECORDING STUDIO (NASHVILLE) - DAY

SOUND BOOTH. Fred and Hank are there alone. Band is fiddling around in the background.

HANK  
You never been in the doghouse have you Pappy?

FRED  
Not if I can avoid it son ... it's certainly been a long while.

HANK  
Well, I kinda think you're the exception. Most of the men I know end up there sometime.

FRED  
Then you go out there and make them feel better about themselves.

Hank stands slowly, smiling ...

HANK  
Yessir, yessir ...

INT. STUDIO

Hank enters and looks at Don.

DON  
Move It On Over?

Hank nods.

DON (cont'd)  
Any ideas chief?

HANK  
You know what to do.

Hank counts it down, Don strums the pedal steel and the band rips into the blues-y, rocking tune.

HANK (cont'd)  
"Came in last night at half-past ten  
That baby of mine wouldn't let me in  
So move it on over  
Move it on over  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK (cont'd)  
Move over little dog 'cause the big  
dog's movin' in"

***"Move It On Over"* plays over beginning of next scene, then slowly fades.**

EXT. HANK & AUDREY'S HOUSE (STEWART ST., MONTGOMERY) - DAY

Hank and Audrey have moved into a small home. Audrey stands out front, instructing a WORKMAN who's installing bright-colored metal awnings over the windows.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Hank at the kitchen counter, looking out at Audrey. He smokes a cigarette, pours a coffee. Then notices a note on the counter. Doesn't read it.

He opens the fridge. It's ALMOST EMPTY. He picks up a bottle of milk, smells it. Sour. Puts it in the sink. Walks to the kitchen table and sits down. A FUR COAT lays conspicuously over one of the chairs.

Audrey enters. He motions for her to sit on his knee. Before she does, she *slips* the fur coat over her summer dress. *The Montgomery Examiner* NEWSPAPER is spread open on the table.

HANK  
(smiling)  
You see this ... "Where the  
inspiration for *'Move it On Over'*  
came from, Hank couldn't say. It's  
surely not his own married life.  
Mr. and Mrs. Hank Williams have a  
model domestic life."

AUDREY  
(smiling)  
You think that's funny?

HANK  
Kinda, don't you? ... also says  
here "we've sold over 90,000."

As Hank adjusts how he's sitting, his back tweaks a it. Audrey notices and gets off his lap. She stands up, then looks closer at the article.

AUDREY  
If it's even half true, I wonder  
what kinda money that *really* adds  
up to.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

Adds up to Hiram Williams is a big damn deal.

AUDREY

Well big deal, you see that note on the counter? Howard Pill called, making sure we're at the station tomorrow.

HANK

Hell with that show. I should have never gone back.

INT. JEFFERSON DAVIS HOTEL / WSFA STUDIO - MORNING

Hank stands at one mic. There's another one next to it that Audrey walks up to.

HANK

... so folks say you're milkin' a cow or just going to the store for some extra feed or supplies we sure appreciate you listening to us... really do and now here's a little tune I'm gonna sing along with my precious wife, Audrey.

INT. JEFFERSON DAVIS HOTEL / WSFA BOOTH - CONTINUOUS

Pill and the sound engineer can't hide their frustration.

HANK (O.C.)

It's called "Pan American," which some of you know is the locomotive that highballs it from Cincinnati to New Orleans every day and right through my old home in Georgiana, Alabama. Set your clock by it ...

PILL

At least turn her mic down, for god's sakes.

Hank starts off and then Audrey *joins in for some solo singing*, before Hank jumps back in.

INT. JEFFERSON DAVIS HOTEL / WSFA HALLWAY - DAY

Don at the coffee machine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DON  
Well, we got through that.

JERRY RIVERS  
Barely.

Pill enters.

PILL  
Somebody's got to do something.

Just then Hank comes out of the studio. They clam up. He picks up on what's happening.

HANK  
Well, you boys discussing the weather ... or Audrey?

LUM  
Actually, we were discussing her singing.

PILL  
Hank, she's ... well ... awful.

HANK  
Hey you sonuvabitch, that's my wife.

PILL  
You know it as well as I do.

Hank's unaware Audrey is walking up behind him. Before he can be warned ...

HANK  
Maybe I do, but that don't matter right now. *She's my wife.*

Silence from everyone, as they stare past him.

AUDREY  
Screw you ... my *husband.*

Hank spins. She walks off. He gives the guys a look, "thanks."

HANK  
Hey darlin' you didn't hear what I was saying, I was defending you ... c'mon, you did a helluva job on that tune.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY

Just forget it.

She disappears around the corner. He rushes after her.

HANK

Baby, it's a beautiful morning, you look beautiful, we're doing really swell.

She stops.

AUDREY

Have another drink, Hank, we're doing shit.

HANK

Why do you have to say that?

AUDREY

People like my singing ... they tell me that. But not you. Every time you get a chance you squash me like bug.

HANK

What are you talking about? A bug. More like a damn queen bee. I bring you up there, I stand by your side.

AUDREY

Yeah, holding your nose. I'm sick of feeling bad, Hank. Sick of it and everything else that comes with it.

HANK

Hey, we got a hit record, a new house, you got a goddamned fur coat ... Audrey stop! Dammit stop!

AUDREY

Think that makes up for all the drunken whoring around bullshit I take?

HANK

It oughta make up for somethin'.

AUDREY

Well, it don't. Not for a second does it make up for crushing a person's dreams.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AUDREY (cont'd)

And I tell you what, cause it's clear as hell right now. You can take your hit record, wrap it up in your fur coat and ... answer the phone when my lawyer calls.

A beat as Hank watches her disappear.

HANK

Great ... He can call right fuckin' now.

Then he kicks a chair halfway down the hall.

*This all echoes as "They'll Never Take Her Love From Me" or an Alt - begins to play underneath.*

EXT. PENSACOLA, FLORIDA MOTEL - DAY

Hank, unshaven, beat, sits on a MOTEL BALCONY overlooking the ocean in PENSACOLA, eighty miles south of Montgomery. The winds gust, sun washes his face, sand blows, whitecaps.

In his hand is a half crumpled letter. As he reads it, and this is clearly not the first time, **Fred Rose's voice comes up ...**

LETTER/FRED ROSE (V.O.)

"Dear Hank, I feel kinda let down today after receiving your call 'cause I knew you were drinking again and Hank that is something I refuse to go for because it only proves a man's weakness ...

The hard sun sinks heavy as it nears the water.

LETTER/FRED ROSE (V.O.)

... if you want Audrey back, get a haircut and buy a new suit, wash your face and throw that damn whisky bottle out the window ...

He drops the letter, stumbles to the bed, sits unsteadily. But Fred's voice still resonates.

LETTER/FRED ROSE (V.O.)

If you think you want to straighten out and let me take care of business as I have been doing, sign the enclosed contracts, have them notarized.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LETTER/FRED ROSE (V.O.) (cont'd)

If you feel sorry for yourself and  
keep drinking then just tear them  
up and forget the whole deal."

He closes his eyes. The screen goes DARK WITH THEM.

When he opens his eyes, he's staring into an ANIMAL HIDE ...  
The FUR COAT he gave Audrey, but wrapped around a NAKED WOMAN  
of 25. She pulls it open, leans down, kisses his pained  
forehead. Hands him a sweating beer bottle.

PENSACOLA WOMAN

Why don't we spread this little fox  
over there and have a lay down.

Hank smiles, takes a sip. Then the bottle DROPS from his  
hand, slowly spilling over the sheets.

"Why Don't You Love Me or ALT" fades out

INT. PRATTVILLE SANATORIUM (ALABAMA) / ROOM - NIGHT

A stark room with THREE beds. Bars on the windows. Light  
comes from parking lot lampposts outside.

Hank is sprawled on one of the beds. There's another man  
sleeping/sedated on another one.

Hank wears pajama bottoms and a sleeveless undershirt. And  
he's sweating, rolling around, half asleep, biting his cheek.  
Shaking. For the first time, we notice his hair is thinning.

INT. PRATTVILLE SANATORIUM LOBBY - MORNING

Tile floor. NURSE RECEPTIONIST at a check in/out desk. Feels  
more like a *secure* women's club than a hospital.

A half opened duffel bag sits on a bench. Poking out between  
a pair of rolled up slacks, a gun barrel. At the other end of  
the bench sits a young girl lost in her own thoughts.

Hank paces, looks out the front window, waiting. Turns to the  
receptionist rubbing his freshly shaved face.

HANK

Say how do I look?

NURSE

Better than you did when you came  
in, Mr. Williams.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK  
(sardonic)  
Thank you Miss Warwick ... and I  
ain't *coming in* again.

NURSE  
I'm pleased to hear that.

He turns back to see Don Helms entering carrying a big box of **Boston Baked Beans**. Hank half smiles at the candy, looks behind Don, then they stare at each other. Don noticeably uncomfortable.

HANK  
My darling valentine's not with  
you, huh?

Don shakes his head, "no."

HANK (cont'd)  
You hear anything from her?

DON  
No ...

Hank takes a beat and then, raises his arms to show off his bony biceps.

HANK  
Well, Shag ... winner and still  
champeen.

Don manages a smile. Looks at the nurse for ... something. They share a look. Hank slowly picks up his bag.

INT. MONTGOMERY BANK - DAY

CLOSE ON

Hank's face. Toothpick hangs from his mouth. His eyes move slowly back and forth as he reads something.

WIDE to reveal a large panelled conference room, second floor, looks out on a SAVINGS and LOAN SIGN.

Hank is very alone at the far end of a large table. Cleaned up. Serious. Reading some papers. Then ...

HANK  
(reads)  
"This day in April, 1948...  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK (cont'd)

my husband, Hank Williams is 24 years old and has a violent and ungovernable temper. He drinks a great deal, and during the last month he has been drunk most of the time. My nervous system has been upset and I am afraid to live with him any longer."

A BANKER enters behind him, carrying an envelope. Hank continues reading without acknowledging the man.

HANK (cont'd)

Yeah ... " the past few months has been engaging in the wildest extravagances and wasting the funds which come into his hands ..."

Banker hates listening to this. Hank finally sets them down.

BANKER

Well, Hank, Audrey sure ran up a hell of a tab at Lowry's Furniture. The owner says he wants it all by end of this week.

HANK

You can tell that guy, that every month I put all my bills in a hat and then I draw one out and that's the one I pay. If he presses me up again, I'm not even gonna put his damn bill in the hat.

BANKER

(laughs)

Awright, whatever you say.

(hands him the envelope)

Here it is. Everything else will get settled up when you actually finalize the divorce papers ... It's a push on the house essentially. But you're out from under it and here's the deposit \$2250.00 ... in cash.

Hank lets him set it neatly and slowly on the table.

HANK

It's all a just a bunch of paper ... some green and some bloody ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BANKER

Yes, well, it's certainly a lot of cash.

HANK

Not so much that it sticks around.

BANKER

If you'd like to discuss a savings plan of some sort.

HANK

You call Audrey. Maybe she will when she gets her hands on *her* half.

EXT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

A few boarders going in and out. Mailman drops off several letters.

HANK (O.S.)

Maybe you just lost faith Pappy.

INT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE / HALLWAY UPSTAIRS - DAY

Hank stands next to **the telephone**. He's in his underwear, obviously just woken up. RAYMOND WALLINGFORD crosses.

FRED ROSE (ON PHONE)

Just the opposite son. I took my first step with you based on faith because I surely couldn't see where we were going. It's because I do *believe* in you that I want to get you out of Montgomery.

Lillie enters. Hank looks up.

LILLIE

You talkin' to that divorcing bitch?

Hank ignores her. **Randomly INTERCUT back** and forth between Fred and Hank.

HANK

It's the Opry Fred, that's what I want. I've always wanted it. It's the everything. It's the deal.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRED ROSE

I get it, but that's not in the cards yet, not yet. I'm talking to those boys, but we're going to have prove ourselves ... and not just with music frankly, but with reliability.

Lillie stares. He nods for her to get out. She doesn't.

HANK

The hell with them then. They can go screw themselves if they think they're better than me.

LILLIE

That's right, they can kiss your ass.

Fred pauses, calm.

FRED ROSE

I'm not the enemy Hank ... Look, I've got things just about set up with the Hayride down in Shreveport on KWKH.

Hank takes his time answering.

HANK

Okay.

FRED ROSE

Okay?

HANK

For the time being ...

FRED ROSE

Now how's the family, Audrey? I heard something ...

HANK

(takes his time)  
She's just fine.

LILLIE

She's a demon that's what she is.

FRED ROSE

That's good, cause women can be vengeful when they're not on your side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK  
She's on my side.

LILLIE  
She's on her own damn side.

Hanks shoots her a look.

FRED ROSE  
We'll get to Nashville, son.

HANK  
We got to Pappy.

EXT. FARMHOUSE (BANKS, ALABAMA) - DAY

A harsh sun, flat fields, an endless horizon. Hank leans on his car parked in a gravel area, in front of Audrey's PARENT'S farmhouse. He shifts back and forth, waiting.

A curtain in the window moves. Finally Audrey steps out. A moment later, Lycrecia appears in the doorway next to her. Audrey STAYS at the door. Hank stays at the car. Calls across the dusty drive.

HANK  
Audrey.

AUDREY  
Hank.

HANK  
I'm gonna be going to Shreveport for the Hayride. I want you to come with me.

AUDREY  
Uh hunh. You get the papers?

HANK  
Yep ... you get the house money?

Hank slowly begins to shuffle towards her.

AUDREY  
Un hunh ...

HANK  
C'mon Audrey ...

AUDREY  
You always *c'mon*. We're about to be divorced in case you didn't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

It's too hard, this divorce thing.

AUDREY

You should have thought about that a long time ago.

HANK

Probably. But I couldn't see that far. I couldn't see that fighting with you was better than being apart.

AUDREY

People do divorce all the time. Trust me you can do it.

HANK

Yeah, but I married the *right* woman for a man like me and I'm not ready to say goodbye to her.

AUDREY

I don't know that. Don't exactly know what it means.

HANK

I need you with me, that's what it means ... Besides, don't I look good?

AUDREY

Uh huh. You look okay ... Lillie going?

HANK

No.

AUDREY

(digging in)  
Lillie going ...?

HANK

(smiles)  
Uh uh ...

Audrey slowly starts to walk towards him.

AUDREY

Think you can treat me properly, quit drinking?

HANK

Yeah I do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY  
You can't.

HANK  
I can try. Just come with me.

AUDREY  
I'm afraid to.

Long pause.

HANK  
I love you.

AUDREY  
You do, huh? ... You gonna quit  
fighting me about singing together?

He hesitates, but just for a split second.

HANK  
Yeah.

AUDREY  
You mean it?

HANK  
I mean it.

They are just about next to each other. Hank slowly bridges the last few feet. And then she hugs him as they both hold on tight.

EXT. GARAGE APT. - DAY

**SHREVEPORT SUMMER 1948**

8 MM FOOTAGE. HANDHELD. SILENT.

MUSIC: OF THE TIME: SINATRA, NAT COLE, PEGGY LEE, DEXTER GORDON AS EXAMPLES.

Hank and Audrey outside their small garage apartment. Hank's smoking and laughing at Lycrecia, who chases a neighbor's dog. Audrey looks really happy.

On side of the driveway is a tiny TRAILER. The door opens and Lum York steps out, smiles at the camera, fake trips.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Don and Hank, side by side, dueling spinning rods, casting into a quiet lake

EXT. SHREVEPORT MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

OUTSIDE SHREVEPORT MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM. Night time. 100's are lined up. Hank, arm around Audrey stands under the MARQUEE, pointing up - Johnnie and Jack, The Bailes Brothers, Curley Kinsey and Hank Williams.

EXT. ROAD - SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH - DAY

The band car pulling a trailer, cruises a Dixie highway.

8MM FOOTAGE ENDS

INT. BAND CAR - NIGHT

Everyone is asleep, save Don, who is driving. Hank rides shotgun but can't get comfortable. After a beat, he searches his pockets, brings out a hand full of aspirin and an INHALER. Takes a snort. The label says *Benzedrine*. He offers it to Don, who shakes it off.

EXT. GARAGE APT - EARLY MORNING

Hank walks up rickety metal stairs.

INT. GARAGE APT. - DAY

Hank stands at the kitchen sink washing his face.

He the walks down hall and enters bedroom. Audrey stirs. He moves to the bed, pulls off his boots. Collapses backwards.

HANK  
(closes his eyes)  
Mornin' darlin'.

AUDREY  
How'd the road go, you alright?

HANK  
It all went fine, but I'm pretty  
beat ... Sorry I woke you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY  
You didn't. I haven't been sleeping  
worth a damn.

HANK  
No? Well I know about that ...

AUDREY  
... Nah, haven't.

HANK  
Well you getting up? Cause I'm  
going down ... or try to.

AUDREY  
In a sec.

She stares over at him. In near sleep, he's a boy. She  
brushes his cheek.

AUDREY (cont'd)  
Hank ...

HANK  
Yeah.

AUDREY  
You listening?

HANK  
I'm kinda driftin' off honey.

AUDREY  
I was gonna tell you somethin'

HANK  
(barely)  
Yeah.

AUDREY  
You're gonna be a daddy.

Hank lies there for a moment. Sits up.

HANK  
Audrey Mae ...

She just nods.

HANK (cont'd)  
My god, we're gonna have a baby.  
Really?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AUDREY

Really.

He puts his hand on her belly. She moves it away. Raises her nightgown and then puts his hand back. He gently rubs her flat belly.

HANK

Can't tell.

AUDREY

You will.

HANK

Oh Audrey ... I love you.

AUDREY

I love you.

HANK

This is gonna be great, goddamned great. He's gonna have a real dad. Yeah ... not like I had it, not like it was for me. No, he's gonna have family.

They're giddy.

AUDREY

How do you know it's a boy?

HANK

Well, whatever it is, he's gonna have a real family.

He gently lowers his cheek to her belly.

EXT. GARAGE APT. / DRIVEWAY - DAY

Hank and Don beside the trailer TOSSING stones at a magnolia tree.

HANK

Shag, the other day Pappy said seems I'm running out of ideas.

DON

I've got no sense of that, but you are "smiling" more. Maybe happy is too hard on you.

HANK

That's kinda frightenin'.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DON  
Yeah, well ...

Hank considers this.

HANK  
(only half joking)  
Well, you know I think I'd rather  
be unhappy than unsuccessful.

DON  
(laughs)  
I believe you would.

HANK  
Anyway, he wants me to head up to  
Cincinnati for a session.

DON  
Yeah. When?

HANK  
Next week.

DON  
I'm good.

HANK  
Yeah ... (beat) Look, Pappy says he  
wants to try out some other boys to  
back me up for this one.

DON  
What the hell, what'd you tell the  
man?

HANK  
His call.

DON  
(beat)  
I don't like that much.

HANK  
Didn't figure you would. But that's  
the way it's gotta be.

DON  
Maybe you don't need us at all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

Look, it doesn't mean anything,  
just that Red Foley's band's  
already up there and Fred wants a  
record right away.

DON

(sarcastic)

Oh, I see, doesn't mean nothing.

HANK

I don't need any shit, Shag.

DON

Me neither.

Neither one says anything. It just settles.

DON (cont'd)

What's he got in mind?

HANK

Sent me something called "*They'll  
Be No Tear Drops Tonight.*" I don't  
much care for it. I want to try  
"*Lovesick.*"

DON

Well, he won't like that since you  
didn't write it.

HANK

No, that's true ... but I made it  
mine *now*, didn't I?

Hank throws another rock, which misses. Sails into neighbor's  
yard. Dog barks.

HANK (cont'd)

Shit ..

INT. HERZOG RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

**December 22, 1948**

**E.T. Herzog Studio, Cincinnati Ohio**

**3 hours in ...**

Red Foley's band - JERRY BYRD, ZEKE TURNER, a couple of  
others, sit on folding chairs. Feet up, sipping Coke, smoking  
and watching Hank and Fred ARGUE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

We just did a couple for you Pappy,  
I got one for me. *Lovesick*. Right  
boys?

Turns to the band, who give him no support.

HANK (cont'd)

Well, hell, screw you guys ...

FRED ROSE

Hank that song is painful ... and  
not in the right way. It's out of  
meter and you hold some of those  
notes too damn long.

HANK

Well, when I find a note I like, I  
like holdin' on to it.

FRED ROSE

Fact is, it's pretty awful. No  
disrespect.

HANK

Yeah, well you may not like it, but  
when I walk off the Hayride stage  
after singing it and then I throw  
my hat *back on the stage* the hat  
gets an encore... that's pretty  
hot.

FRED ROSE

I'm getting a cup of coffee, just  
be done when I get back, okay?

Hank turns to the boys and smiles. They don't. They were  
really hoping Fred won the argument. But they slowly get up  
and move towards their instruments.

HANK

Awright let's keep it simple.

JERRY BYRD

Oh no need to worry, Hank ... all  
this shit is *simple*.

They lock hard eyes on this. Tense ... until Jerry picks up  
his instrument and Hank moves to mic. Zeke leads the intro of  
"Lovesick Blues" - Hank comes in.

HANK

"I gotta feeling called the blues,  
since my baby said goodbye  
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK (cont'd)  
I don't know what I'll do,  
All I do is sit an cryyyy ..."

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. FORT WORTH DINER - AFTERNOON

Hank stands at a table eating, or trying to ... barely touches a ketchup slathered hamburger and drinks a cup of coffee. Don sits across from him. SAMMY PRUETT 19, at another table, reads BILLBOARD.

HANK  
Sammy, you get there yet?

SAMMY PRUETT  
Nope. I didn't start at the back.

HANK  
I guess in high school you still read front to back.

SAMMY PRUETT  
That's funny, Hank. You're not that much older you know.

HANK  
I was born older than you...

Sammy gets up, walks over, drops the Billboard on the table.

**THE CHART PAGE.** At the top. NUMBER 1. **Lovesick Blues.**

Hank stares. No one says anything. He looks up at the guys. And in his face we can see *this is it*.

HANK (cont'd)  
You know what Jerry Byrd said when we were in the studio...

DON  
There's no telling.

HANK  
Said he "couldn't believe anything as sorry as 'Lovesick' could ever be a hit..." I'll tell you something, and this ain't bull. If this don't get me to the Opry, I'm gonna give it up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Laughter. But none from Hank.

HANK (cont'd)  
No shit, they'll have to find me on  
a boat full of bass and come  
begging.

Just at that moment, OSCAR DAVIS, their MANAGER, first seen  
through the window, rushes in. Sweating. Out of breath.

OSCAR DAVIS  
Hank. HANK ... It's Audrey!

INT. HOSPITAL / HALLWAY - NIGHT

SILENCE. A clock says **1:05 a.m.** The middle of a hospital  
night. A station NURSE answers a phone.

Suddenly the muffled sound of a WOMEN'S SCREAM.

CLOSE Hank's face. He turns towards it quickly. Stares down  
the hall. Waits, faint moaning. Perfectly still, he takes  
this in. PULL BACK he stands in front of a Coke machine. He  
puts in a dime, takes the Coke from the machine. As he tries  
to pop the bottle cap, another scream. The bottle drops to  
the floor. FIZZES everywhere.

*JUMP CUT*

**1:45 A.M.** Double doors swing open. Doctor walks out, smiles.  
Hank leaps up.

DOCTOR  
Congratulations, you have a son Mr.  
Williams.

HANK  
I do?

DOCTOR  
You do.

HANK  
I *have a son.*

DOC  
(laughs)  
Yes you do.

HANK  
A boy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOC  
Yes, Mr. Williams ... a boy.

Hank is overwhelmed. He lowers his eyes, tears forming. His body shakes. He wipes his eyes with his sleeve and looks back up.

HANK  
Thank the Lord. How is he... how's the mama?

DOCTOR  
She's good, she's strong ... The boy, well, he's healthy and ... *big.*

HANK  
Big?

DOCTOR  
Over 10 pounds. Biggest this year.

HANK  
He's a hoss huh?

DOCTOR  
That he is.

HANK  
Thanks Doc.

Hank shakes his hand vigorously, turns away and catches his own reflection in the dark hospital window. A huge smile spreads across his face.

INT. HANK & AUDREY'S APT. / JUNIOR'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hank walks down a dimly lit hallway towards the weeping of his son.

He enters the baby's tiny bedroom. Gently lifts him out of the crib he shares with a giant Teddy Bear. No chance this stops the crying. Hank holds him close and strokes his head.

HANK  
(softly)  
Oh little one, come on now  
Bocephus. Daddy's here ... it's  
alright, it's alright ...

In the muted light, his baby against his shoulder, Hank's youth is suddenly so apparent. He's just another 26 year-old father trying to calm his little one and probably can't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hank slowly lowers himself to the floor, leans against the wall and starts doing what he was born to do ... slow and oh so gently as a lullaby ...

HANK (cont'd)  
*I wandered so aimless, life filled  
 with sin  
 I wouldn't let my dear savior in  
 Then Jesus came like a stranger in  
 the night  
 Praise the Lord I saw the light ...*

But Hank has to smile, because this has absolutely no effect on Junior.

Then he looks up ... as Audrey has JOINED him in singing the next refrain. Together they serenade their newborn.

Audrey, in her robe, stares down at them with true affection. She reaches for the baby. Hank carefully hands him to her.

HANK (cont'd)  
 Well, he was sleepin' pretty good  
 there for a few days ... I guess  
 they finally put the batteries in.

Audrey manages a sleep deprived grin and pats Junior's back. He begins to calm. After a moment.

HANK (cont'd)  
 He sure likes his mama.

She just smiles. He puts his arms around both of them, then after a beats whispers.

HANK (CONT'D (cont'd)  
 I'm going to the Opry, Aud.

AUDREY  
 Of course you are, honey.

HANK  
 I mean now.

AUDREY  
 Really ... somebody called ... who,  
 Fred?

He nods.

AUDREY (cont'd)  
 When?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

Two days ago.

This registers with her. Junior whimpers. Audrey rocks him. A snapshot would say perfect family.

AUDREY

How'd he'd get past Jack Stapp and that gang?

HANK

Oscar and Fred both swore I'd keep my nose clean, that I'd been sober.

Audrey ever so gently lowers the baby into the crib.

AUDREY

I ought to be there. I oughta be there, Hank ... And I can't, can I? This peanut's too little.

Hank says nothing.

AUDREY (cont'd)

It's not right.

HANK

Yeah, honey, I'm sorry.

AUDREY

Suddenly, just happened that fast?

HANK

Not fast enough for me.

Audrey fights tears.

HANK (cont'd)

Look, Audrey, baby this is what it's all been about. Now finally we got it.

AUDREY

You up in Nashville at the Opry for the first time.

HANK

It's just one night Auds, there's going to be a 1000 more.

She can't find the words to comfort him or herself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HANK (cont'd)  
 Hey it'll be swell. It's all gonna  
 be good for us.

AUDREY  
 Yeah, sure ...  
 (not much enthusiasm)  
 Sure. Congratulations.

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - EVENING

In slow motion Hank's car passes the CROWD in front of the RYMAN, home of the Opry. Lines snake around the block. He pulls into the lot behind the auditorium.

I/E. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / PARKING LOT / CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sits a moment. Reaches in his pocket takes out an aspirin bottle. Taps out six. Downs with a coke from in between his knees. Slowly gets out.

**SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 1949**

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Crowded with PERFORMERS. No one pays Hank any attention. He looks lost. Music drifts in and out from the stage front.

People greet each other warmly. Good natured ribbing, laughing. Overly friendly. If you didn't know better you'd think it was phony ... it's not.

The FACES of the performers are alive, vibrant. They may look like hillbillies in what they're wearing, but they are savvy show business veterans.

HIGH ANGLE

On Hank amidst the wasp hive of activity. His Stetson just one of many. A MAN makes his way to Hank. It's Fred.

FRED ROSE  
 Hank.

HANK  
 (relieved)  
 Pappy.

Quick handshake and an arm on his shoulder. Then Fred looks him over hard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRED ROSE  
How you doing?

HANK  
Pretty fair.

In the B.G. and O.C., ERNEST TUBB sings "Walkin' the Floor Over You."

Fred takes one more beat and one more hard look into Hank's eyes. Notes his nervousness. Hank stares towards the stage.

FRED ROSE  
Don't worry, they can kill you, but they can't eat you.

HANK  
(half smile)  
That's strangely comforting.

FRED ROSE  
I'm very proud of you Hank, and I say that as a friend.

HANK  
Well, I wouldn't be here without you Pappy ... and it's everything I've ever wanted.

For Hank Williams that's "*confession.*" Not something he's given to do.

FRED ROSE  
Now as soon as ET wraps it up, there'll be a couple of commercials then it's you. Foley's boys are backing. They're down the hall.

Jim Denny walks up to Fred & Hank.

JIM DENNY  
Fred.

FRED  
Jim. Hank, this is Jim Denny, manager of the Opry.

HANK  
Yessir.  
(Beat)  
Thank you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JIM DENNY

Sure. Good luck.

Fred leads Hank through a narrow hallway with lots of small cramped dressing rooms on either side.

FRED ROSE

How's little Bocephus? ...  
peculiar, but funny you call him  
that.

HANK

He ain't little.

They come to a room where the band is hanging out. Hank stands in the doorway. Hank and Jerry Byrd share a hard look. Hank nods at the boys.

HANK (cont'd)

Jerry.

JERRY BYRD

Hank.

Jerry graciously doffs his hat, gives Hank the credit he deserves for making the Opry.

CLOSE ON HANK'S FACE.

Suddenly everything goes TOTALLY SILENT. Seems like minutes, probably 3 seconds. Then the SOUND of the Stage MICROPHONE BURSTS THROUGH.

RED FOLEY M.C. (O.S.)

Tonight's big-name guest is making  
his first appearance on Prince  
Albert Grand Ole Opry...  
He's a Montgomery, Alabama boy,  
been pickin' an singing about 12  
years, but it's been about the last  
year he's really come into his own  
... and we're proud to give a  
rousing welcome to the "Lovesick  
Blues" boy, Hank Williams.

CRASH INTO:

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

From the REAR OF THE STAGE looking out. Hank framed from the back, silhouetted against the packed former church.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Tennessee hot and humid. Half the people are fanning themselves with fans advertising a Funeral Parlour.

Working people, their families with them. Mopping the sweat, straining to see. Folks are asking each other ... "Who?"

For a moment Hank is motionless. The tension builds.

His lanky frame hunches over the mic. He slowly settles the guitar strap around his neck. He stretches out his left arm, holds the guitar stiffly away from his body. Then with force and magnetism he strikes the first chords.

On top of it comes the BEAUTIFUL TWANG of the STEEL GUITAR - cuts straight to the heart of every soul there.

HANK

"... I gotta feeling called the  
bluuuuuuues oh Lawd, since my baby  
said goodbye  
Lawd, don't know what I'll  
doooooo all I do is just sit and  
sigh  
That last long day she said goodbye  
Well Lawd, I thought I would cry  
She'd do me, she'd do you,  
She's got that kind of lovin'  
Lawd, I love to hear her  
When she calls me sweet daddy..."

SHOUTING now. Screams from the girls, even the women. Hank smiles. Genuine. Too long in coming.

And then it's over. He doffs his hat to an audience that is clamoring for more.

Not sure what to do, Hank looks backstage. Searches the faces of the Opry regulars, who ALL seem to be watching. He finds smiles, laughter, approval.

ON FRED: who takes this in as well. Opry bosses, JIM DENNY and HARRY STONE stand next to him. Nod in respect. RED FOLEY, the ANNOUNCER, steps out, raises his hand to stop the applause. Doesn't work. And so the pedal steel TWANGS once more and leads into an encore.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / ALLEY / POTENTIALLY BACK STAGE- NIGHT

Alone for a moment, Hank smokes a cigarette in the alley. He looks towards Fourth Avenue. A sexy young GIRL, framed against headlights, walks towards him.

GIRL  
Hey.

HANK  
Hey.

GIRL  
I liked your song.

HANK  
Yeah.

GIRL  
You done for the night?

HANK  
You trouble?

GIRL  
Depends ... besides you're married.

HANK  
Yeah.

GIRL  
Happily?

HANK  
Is there such a thing?

GIRL  
I don't know, I'm too young for that stuff.

HANK  
Me too.

He drops the cig. Rubs it out. Stares at her, his eyes intense above a crooked smile.

NEWS REEL FOOTAGE - MUSIC? JAZZ? EDITH PIAF?

**NEWS OF THE WORLD  
B&W FOOTAGE**

*IMAGES MATCH THE NARRATION*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COMMENTATOR

... And the destruction toll from the August 5th, Ecuador Earthquake just keeps rising. At last count over 6000 people have perished and 50 towns and villages have been destroyed ...

... The newest in photograph technology, the Polaroid Instant Camera went on sale for the hefty price \$89.95...  
Gasoline hit 17 cents a gallon ...

*IMAGES OF HANK AND GROUP surrounded by TROOPS-- THEIR WIVES AND HUSBANDS ARE WITH THEM - AUDREY AND HANK ARE VERY COZY.*

... And finally a troupe of Grand Ole Opry stars toured several US Air Bases in Germany this month. The extremely popular country style music is just what the homesick troops ordered ... there's Roy Acuff, Minnie Pearl and Hank Williams, the "Lovesick Blues boy," a young man really on the rise ... they say 'he's singing what people' are thinking ... here's Hank arriving at his new Nashville home with his wife Audrey ...

*IMAGES FLICKER OUT*

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

*"It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like Christmas" plays.* Loud. So are the laughter and the conversations. A soup ladle slops through a punch bowl with gardenias floating in it.

A WOMAN'S HAND grabs a cocktail wiener off a messy tray. Two kids, one of them Lycrecia, are a blur as they thread their way through the 50 people filling the house. A full-on Christmas party. A TREE with colored lights blinking and a few straggler gifts.

Other than Fred Rose and a few others, almost everyone else is in their TWENTIES/early thirties.

A series of vignettes play:

Hank talks to Fred.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK  
Nashville, Pappy. (Big smile)  
Nashville.

FRED  
Yep, Hank, Nashville ... Nashville.

Audrey talks to Don.

DON  
I took my wife to see *The Heiress*.

AUDREY  
Oh, I saw it was at the Bellmead.  
Did you like it?"

DON  
She loved it ... I thought it was  
too long.

Don picks up a guitar and starts to play.

Audrey passes Hank and she spins him around like they're  
going to start dancing.

Fred and Hank talk.

FRED  
I hope it's a great year for you  
and Audrey.

HANK  
Thanks, Pappy.

Hank pats Fred on the back.

Audrey puts a coaster under a drink.

Audrey talks to Fred.

AUDREY  
What do you want for Christmas,  
Fred?

FRED  
Nothing, darling. Well, maybe a  
few more hit songs.

AUDREY  
Well, I'll write you one then.

Wisps of cigarette smoke. Full ashtrays. A couple MAKES OUT  
in a corner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KITTY WELLS talks to Fred who looks over, spots Hank, his arm around a young girl. She brings *her drink* to Hank's lips. He takes a long sip. Then sees Fred looking at him. Winks.

A handsome guy, 20's, takes a drink from Audrey's hand and replaces it with a fresh one. He holds on to her hand a little too long.

EXT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE (FRANKLIN RD.) / DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Frame is filled with a GARAGE DOOR, though at first, it's hard to make out exactly what it is.

Suddenly the door starts to RISE. A light comes on from inside, illuminating a Cadillac convertible. HALFWAY UP the door reverses and starts to go DOWN ... then UP again.

FIND Hank standing outside, playing with an obviously new garage DOOR OPENER which sits on a wooden post. He DRAINS a highball glass, laughs, shakes his head. Like the rest of the party, he's not too sober.

Sounds of the party spill out. A picture window frames the festivities. Audrey appears on the walk by the edge of house.

AUDREY

What the hell you doing out there?

HANK

I love this thing, love it ... come on out here baby.

AUDREY

You're crazy, it's too cold. Come back inside.

He presses the opener again.

HANK

Yeah sure. Bring me a drink willya.

AUDREY

C'mon, you don't need one ... get inside before you get sick.

HANK

This is inspirational ...

(as he presses the button,  
he sings)

"I had my ups ... had my downs ..."

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

Seriously. I'm glad you're inspired, now for god's sake come in.

HANK

Hey, you like your necklace?

AUDREY

I love it, honey.

HANK

Come here and do it once, just once.

AUDREY

No way, I'm freezin'.

HANK

Aw, forget it then.

AUDREY

Now you're mad.

HANK

Naw, I'm not mad.

AUDREY

Good, 'cause I'm going inside and you can just keep on playing with your own little button.

She starts walking away.

HANK

Yeah good, 'cause I love my button.

AUDREY

(as she moving farther  
away)

Awright, you just keep loving it.

HANK

I will.

AUDREY

You do that.

INT. FRANK WALKER'S OFFICE (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY

An impressive office. Walls adorned with FRAMED RECORDS. Standing at a window, looking out at the SNOW falling on a busy Manhattan street, 20 floors below, is FRANK WALKER, 40's. He is listening to ...

***A record that's playing, but the song is SPOKEN, as a 'poem.'***  
***Hank recorded these recitations as LUKE THE DRIFTER***

HANK

(spoken with minimum  
 accompaniment)

*"You'll meet a man just like me  
 along life's busy street  
 With shoulders stooped and heads  
 bowed low and eyes that stare in  
 defeat ...  
 For souls that live within the  
 past, where sorrow plays all the  
 parts,  
 For a livin' death is all that's  
 left for men with broken hearts"*

***FRANK, like Fred Rose, is being interviewed by the reporter  
 we never see on camera. Come in mid sentence ...***

FRANK WALKER

We didn't, and neither did Fred,  
 want to put these recitations out  
 under Hank's name. Not really  
 jukebox material. So we compromised  
 and he released several songs under  
 the pseudonym of "Luke the  
 Drifter."

REPORTER (O.C.)

How did they do?

FRANK WALKER

They didn't sell well, but they  
 seemed to offer Hank emotional  
 relief. Fred said, "They were  
 almost apologies."

REPORTER (O.C.)

Could you tell us who you are.

FRANK WALKER

Frank Walker. I run MGM Records and  
 I signed Hank Williams to a  
 contract two years ago in 1947.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRANK WALKER (cont'd)  
 Hank's first record for us was  
 "Move It On Over." Our second  
 session he recorded "I Saw The  
 Light."

REPORTER  
 ... and these sold quite well ...

FRANK WALKER  
 ... yes, Hank has made a lot of  
 money selling records and writing  
 songs ... several years now, of  
 more than \$100,000 dollars.

REPORTER (O.C.)  
 ... And Audrey Williams, did you  
 work with her?

FRANK WALKER  
 No, we don't work with Audrey. But  
 how do I say this, we were happy to  
 have Decca release them.

FADING UP ...

LUKE THE DRIFTER  
*"You have no right to judge, to  
 criticize and condemn. Just think,  
 but for the grace of God it would  
 be you instead of him."*

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE/ LIVING ROOM - MORNING (POSSIBLY  
 PUT LYCRECIA IN HERE)

Audrey sits on the sofa, drinking a cup of coffee and reading  
 Billboard. She reads it carefully and every few beats  
 circles something with a red pen. Junior tries to grab the  
 paper and she gently pulls it away.

AUDREY  
 Miss Ragland ... Miss Ragland ...

MISS RAGLAND, portly 30's, enters wearing a dressing gown.

AUDREY (cont'd)  
 Take the child, please.

Audrey sets the paper and crosses to the telephone. She picks  
 up a note-pad, checks a number and dials.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
 Sheridan Hotel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY  
Room 237 again.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Yes, of course, I'll try once more.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

The bed. A mess. A suitcase, some clothes out. A tray of uneaten eggs. A woman's purse next to them. Several beer bottles, an half empty whiskey quart. The sound of the SHOWER running. Phone RINGS. A WOMAN'S hand picks up the purse. She crosses ... only a blur of her dress can be seen. RING, RING.

INT. HOTEL BATHROOM

Shower still on. Steamy. Behind the curtain, we hear Hank singing his ass off as he's working out a song ... and he's going very bluesy with it. CAMERA close on the tear drops of water.

HANK (O.S.)  
"I went down to the river to catch  
me a big 'ol fish,  
Went down to the river to swig me  
some dirty ass water,  
I went down to the river to watch  
the fish swim by,  
Then I jumped in the goddamn water  
to take a goddarned bath ...  
Now she's a long gone and now I'm  
lonesome blue ..."

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / BEDROOM - MORNING

Audrey listens to the ringing ... going from disappointment, to pain and then ... Operator comes back on the line.

MAN'S VOICE  
I'm sorry ma'am, there's still no  
answer. Would you care to leave a  
message?

AUDREY  
Yes. Tell him, "I need to talk to  
you, you son of a bitch." You got  
that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN'S VOICE  
(stuttering)  
Uhh ... yes ma'am.

AUDREY  
Good and tell him "He can kiss my  
ass."

MAN'S VOICE  
Certainly.

EXT. MUSIC FESTIVAL - DAY

A BLAZING HOT SUN

Seared across the SCREEN through waves of heat ...

**MUSIC FESTIVAL - DELEON, TEXAS**

**1950 - 10:45 a.m.**

INT. FARMHOUSE / PARLOUR - DAY

Through a window, a portion of a large crowd is visible.  
Sweating family faces, watermelon juice dripping off double  
chins. Kids running about.

W.B. NOWLIN  
(on the phone)  
Oscar, what the hell is going on  
here?

PULL BACK AND PAN PAST

The FARMER and his wife, who own the place and rock gently on  
a porch swing. Implacable... as they listen to a swearing  
PROMOTOR, W.B. NOWLIN, seersucker suit, sweat soaked, talking  
on the farm phone.

Intercut with OSCAR DAVIS in a NASHVILLE office.

OSCAR DAVIS  
You know how he can be.

W.B. NOWLIN  
No, you tell me how he can be.

OSCAR DAVIS  
Look, I can't say where he is.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

W.B. NOWLIN  
Can't or won't.

OSCAR DAVIS  
Can't W.B.

W.B. NOWLIN  
Why the hell not?

OSCAR DAVIS  
'Cause I ain't his manager anymore.  
Son of a bitch fired me. Cold as  
night. Said I rode him about his  
drinking worse than his momma.

W.B. NOWLIN  
Well, I'm not just the promoter  
here. I'm the damn Mayor and he  
doesn't show ...

OSCAR DAVIS  
... Sorry W.B.

W.B. NOWLIN  
You should've called me and told me  
you were out. These people they  
don't give a shit about your job  
they give a shit about where Hank  
Williams is? **Hank** fuckin' **Williams**.

OSCAR DAVIS  
Like I said W.B. I'm sorry.

EXT. WILLIAM'S HOUSE (FRANKLIN RD.) - DAY

Contrasting the expansive Texas field is a dark, rain filled sky. (STILL CONSIDERING RAIN AS MUSIC FESTIVAL MAY NOT BE HOT DAY)

An ELDERLY MAN in a black raincoat and hat approaches the front door. He's accompanied by a woman under an umbrella. The man holds a DOCTOR'S BAG. He KNOCKS. After a beat, Miss Ragland answers. They enter.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

AUDREY O.S.  
That the doctor ... or whatever he  
is that does these kind of things?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Doctor and woman follow Miss Ragland down the hall to the bedroom. She slowly opens the door, reveals Audrey in bed. Nervous. Whiskey on a bedside table. The Doctor hesitates. But in true fashion, she stares straight at him.

AUDREY

Well, come on in, let's get this over with.

EXT. MUSIC FESTIVAL / BACKSTAGE - DAY

1:45 pm

Behind a makeshift stage. Crowd visible through scaffolding. Hank's Packard LIMO drives into area at rear of stage. It's trailed by a Police sedan.

Packard stops, *sits there sizzling in the heat*. The POLICE CAR pulls alongside it.

W.B. NOLIN gets out of the cop car, then the CHIEF OF POLICE. Nothing stirs from the Packard. They walk over to passenger side. Jerry rolls down the window.

JERRY RIVERS

Mr. Nowlin?

W.B. NOWLIN

This ain't gonna do fellas ...

JERRY RIVERS

I'm sorry sir, he's just come down with something and is too damn sick to perform up to our usual standards.

Some fans start to run around the stage and crowd the car. Nolin looks in past Jerry to see Hank in the back seat. Hank stares blankly back. Police Chief peers in as well.

W.B. NOWLIN

I don't know what's goin' on with you Williams, but you're going up on that stage and give these folks, who been waitin' hours for your ass ... a fine piece of yourself. You understand?

Hank has no reaction.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE (FRANKLIN RD.) / HALLWAY - DAY

Darkness, cut by a single hall light. EERILY QUIET except for the plaintive sound of Audrey WEEPING.

EXT. MUSIC FESTIVAL / STAGE - DAY

REAR OF STAGE, Nowlin walks up steps. Disappears out front. Two other men follow, then Hank; glazed and deliberate. At the top of the steps he shares a look with Don.

W.B. NOWLIN (O.C.)  
 (through a buzzing mic)  
 Ladies and gentleman I have an  
 announcement. Mr. Hank Williams is  
 here ... and ready to give you the  
 show you been hopin' for ...

Loud cheers, drown him out. He turns, stares back, waiting for Hank.

W.B. NOWLIN (cont'd)  
 Hank Williams folks ...

Hank moves slowly towards the microphone. Behind him the band pick up their instruments and begin to move into an opening number ...

HANK POV

Trying to focus ... crowd faces, angry, confused, some smiling, laughing, sweating, smoking ...

His blurred gaze drops to the floor. He leans on the mic. The crowd starts clapping. He looks back at Don, who is not sure what to play, then turns back to the crowd.

HANK  
 You know friends I wonder how many  
 homes are broken tonight, just how  
 many tears are shed by some word of  
 anger that never should have been  
 said. ...  
 (struggling)  
 Hmmm ... folks ... hey ... do any  
 of you out there know my very good  
 friend Luke the Drifter ... well,  
 Luke wrote these words ...

Audience is now both captivated and confused.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK (cont'd)  
 I'd like to tell you a story of a family I once knew.  
 We'll call 'em Mary and William and their little girl Sue.  
 Now Mary was just a plain mother and Bill, well he was just a usual Dad, and they had their family quarrels like everybody else. But neither one really got mad  
 Then one day summin happened, it was nothing of course, but one word led to another and the last word led to divorce ...

The band just stares along with everyone else. And Hank just drops his head, stops his drugged preaching and stands there, totally alone.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PACKARD - NIGHT

Don drives as Hank rests his head against the seat back, his body half curled. In his lap are a dozen white roses. Hank is staring at the roses and realized something.

HANK  
 You know there are 13 in here?

Hank takes out one rose and sets it on the dashboard.

HANK (cont'd)  
 Thanks for doin' all the drivin'.

DON  
 Sure. (Beat) Want me to wait around?

HANK  
 Nah.

DON  
 Hope she's okay.

HANK  
 Yep ... but I got a bad feeling, Shag.

DON  
 Like I said, hope she's fine ...  
 (Beat) Hank?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

Yeah.

DON

I was thinkin' ...

HANK

Uh oh.

DON

Maybe I haven't been much of a *real* friend ... maybe been too reluctant to speak up about some things, hard things.

HANK

You been fine. Whatya goin' do?

After a moment.

HANK (cont'd)

You know my Uncle told me that Grant was drunk every afternoon by 3:00 ... but he still took Vicksburg.

DON

Yeah, I guess he did ... (beat)  
I'll see you then.

HANK

See ya.

Hank climbs slowly out and walks towards the entrance.

INT. NASHVILLE GENERAL HOSPITAL / ROOM - EVENING

Audrey sleeps. A half-eaten tray of food next to her. No flowers, no cards.

Hank sits in the shadows staring at her through lidded eyes. She wakes up.

HANK

Hey.

AUDREY

How long you been here?

HANK

A little bit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

Took you long enough.

HANK

Just got off the road, came  
straight here... How are you?

She doesn't answer, looks away.

AUDREY

How'd you do?

HANK

Made out okay... How's my boy?

AUDREY

He's okay... How much?

HANK

Where's he at?

AUDREY

The house, where you think?

HANK

Billboard says we did 11,000 paid  
last week ...

AUDREY

Heard you and Luke had some trouble  
in Texas.

HANK

(tries to smile)

Yeah ...

(long beat)

What is it, baby? You gonna be  
okay?

AUDREY

Hell, you come home whenever you  
please from wherever you are and  
then we sleep together ...  
You don't have a damn clue.

He tries to make sense of this. He's swimming.

AUDREY (cont'd)

You did this to me, Hank Williams.  
You're the bastard caused me to  
suffer like this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

What are you saying ...

AUDREY

You're barely here. You're barely even a father now and you can't handle being more of one.

HANK

My god ... what did you do? You can't, you can't do that without me.

AUDREY

It's done. We got nothing. You and I got nothin'.

Hank squeezes his eyes shut, so hard, so pained, hoping when he opens them he's not even here. The flowers lay across his lap.

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

*Another time, same Interview style -*

A RECORD is carefully placed on a turntable. The NEEDLE drops on "*Cold Cold Heart.*"

For 15 SECONDS. Just the simple glory and crippling heartache only Hank could render.

HANK

"Another love before my time made  
your heart sad and blue  
And so my heart is paying now for  
things I didn't do ..."

From the spinning record to Fred's face.

"In anger unkind words are said  
that make the tear drops start  
How can I free your doubtful mind  
and melt your cold cold heart."

FRED ROSE

What a truly powerful song ... If I was a betting man, which I'm not, I'd say three times a week we get a request to record it. Tony Bennett for one, did a heckuva rendition ... you probably know that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REPORTER

Did Hank enjoy other performers doing his songs?

FRED ROSE

He loved it. If he came across a jukebox with a Tony Bennett version, he'd play it over and over.

REPORTER

Well, to say the least, it's a very sad and painful song. Where do you think that came from?

FRED ROSE

... Being an artist, doing the writing, the composing, the real work, that itself can be pretty painful ... But I can't really say ... family's have pain, men and women cause each other pain, there's physical pain ... but turning it into a poem like that, I don't know.

REPORTER

You think he enjoyed his success?

FRED ROSE

I don't believe it mattered much to him. He wanted the Opry and he got it. But beyond that whether a song was number one or fifty ... he cared a lot more about just doing what he wanted to do.

REPORTER

And the money? The Wall Street Journal had his earnings at 150 thousand last year.

FRED ROSE

People like money. Some a lot more than others. Some it's a way to keep score. He was fine just not having to think about it. He didn't do what he did for money.

*JUMP CUT:*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FRED ROSE (cont'd)  
 The thing with Hank, he couldn't  
 stop writing, he couldn't stop  
 working. Whatever he had inside him  
 he just had to get it out ... and  
 of a body that was as frail as a  
 baby's.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. MONTGOMERY COW COLISEUM - DAY

A MARQUEE:

**JULY 19**  
**HANK WILLIAMS HOMECOMING**  
 MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

An excited crowd streams in.

INT. COLISEUM

STAGE WINGS. Lillie and Audrey and in between them, Lycrecia.  
 Junior waddles over to his grandmother. She picks him up.  
 Audrey doesn't care for this, but puts up with it. She then  
 turns around looking for Hank. This prompts Lillie to do the  
 same.

MAN in a suit, obviously the promoter, walks to Audrey.

PROMOTER  
 We're alright, aren't we?

Audrey gives him a strained smile.

HANK SNOW(O.C.)  
 Thank you ladies and gentleman. And  
 that about wraps it up for today.

Crowd can be heard shouting "NO" ... "HANK, HANK!"

HANK SNOW (O.C.) (cont'd)  
 Oh right, there is a little more in  
 store, isn't there. I almost forgot  
 about the man y'all have come here  
 to say hello to and rightfully  
 honor...

INT. MONTGOMERY COW COLISEUM / BELOW THE STAGE - DAY

Hank palms a cigarette. His FATHER, LON WILLIAMS, 58, looks 70, his face with a slight paralysis, is also there. A long *silence*.

LON  
How many folks out there, son?

HANK  
Around 9000 they say.

Lon nods in amazement. They sadly search for something, anything, to say. Filtering in from above.

HANK SNOW (O.C.)  
He's my very very good friend, a young man with talent to burn.

HUGE ROAR from crowd. Hank takes a long drag.

HANK SNOW (O.C.)(cont'd)  
Maybe the finest songwriter I've ever had the pleasure to know.

EXT. MONTGOMERY COW COLISEUM - DAY

BACK UP ON STAGE

Everyone there, *all the family and friends*, now wait anxiously.

HANK SNOW  
Two number one hits on the charts right now, in fact. Let's welcome at his **Montgomery homecoming DAY** ... a great and loyal son of Alabama, Hank Williams.

INT. MONTGOMERY COW COLISEUM / BELOW THE STAGE - DAY

LON  
I'm real proud of you Hank.

HANK  
Thanks Daddy, I appreciate it.

A beat. Lon looks at Hank as the crowd sounds continue to build. It's obvious he wants to reach out to his son. Hank cuts a look up at the noise.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LON  
It's awful good to see you. We probably should've done it more.

HANK  
Yeah, don't you worry about it, we got plenty of time ...

LON  
I'm sorry son, I swear I am.

He's getting a little thick in the throat. This is hard.

HANK  
C'mon now ... aren't we all (then)  
I better get up there...  
(smiles)  
... 'Fore they figure I'm too drunk to show.

LON  
You probably got that right.

Hank drops his smoke, crushes it.

LON (cont'd)  
You look after yourself, okay? You look a little tired.

HANK  
(tight smile)  
Nah, I'm tip top.

LON  
Sure you are ... (then) Hiram, thanks for allowing me to be here.

Lon holds his hand out and Hank shakes it gently.

CROWD CLAPPING LOUDER, INTENSE.

Hank walks up the stairs followed at a distance by Lon.

EXT. MONTGOMERY COW COLISEUM - DAY

CAMERA FLOATS ABOVE THE AUDIENCE, PUSHING IN ON THE STAGE.

Audrey comes over, makes a show of kissing Hank. Lillie follows with an embrace. Hank moves to stage front.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

Well, hello Montgomery. It sure is good to be back here and thank you all so much, thank you. And I much appreciate the warm welcome you've given my family, my mother Lillie, my wife Audrey, my big boy Bocephus.

APPLAUSE with each of the intros. Junior now just runs to Lon, who scoops him up. Audrey quickly and with authority takes him away. Lon lets go easily.

HANK (cont'd)

Here's a little song been awful good to me and the family and the fellows behind me, The Driftin' Cowboys ... It's earned us quite a few beans and biscuits. It's called "Good Lookin' You Got Anything Cookin', how's about cookin' somethin" up with me

Hank stares at a crowd which is *lost* in him. Then turns to those behind him; the faces that rely on him most. Audrey ... Junior. Holds the gaze as his son smiles so sweetly. Then turns back to a throng, whose love for him is as unadulterated. It is a moment of true pleasure and peace.

EXT. CBS BUILDING (NEW YORK CITY) - DAY

Hank and Don seen from across 52nd Street in Manhattan. Amidst a crowd of midday New Yorkers, Hank, as always, stands out.

THE CBS BUILDING. A Black DOORMAN stands at the door chatting with a young woman.

GUARD

Where you two fellas going?

DON

Perry Como show.

Guard gives them a once over and nods 'em in.

INT. KING EDWARD HOTEL / BAR - NIGHT

Old school bar. Hank leans over a cocktail table, WRITING on a piece of hotel stationary. Don and LUM are sitting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TWO WOMEN walk past trailed by a BELL HOP with their luggage.

LUM  
Evening ladies.

First woman stops and smiles, a half nod. Slightly curious.  
Second woman gives scant attention and keeps moving.

DON  
Would you care for a cheese ball?  
They just plain brought them to us.

This gets a laugh.

BAR WOMAN  
(touch of sarcasm)  
No thanks ... so are you cowboys  
lost?

Hank looks up. She takes notice.

LUM  
No ma'am ... we're on the Perry  
Como Show.

She and Hank lock in. A bit intimidated, she breaks the gaze.

BAR WOMAN  
Oh ... well, good luck.

She half smiles, then moves off toward her girl friend. One  
look back. Lum stares after them. Don starts giggling, can't  
quite stop.

HANK  
What you laughin' about?

LUM  
Man, you sure couldn't get that  
damn jingle right, could you? Don't  
you know there are 20 smokes in a  
pack of Chesterfields?

Now Hank laughs hard. The guys start laughing harder. When  
Hank's like *this* it's very contagious.

HANK  
Oh I know exactly ... but you know  
somethin' else? Ol' Hank didn't  
come all the way to New York from  
south Alabama to sing a damn  
cigarette commercial.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The waitress shows up. A tough New Yorker.

WAITRESS

You gentlemen want another round or  
have you hit your limit on soda  
water?

DON

I'm good honey.

LUM

Me too.

HANK

Hey, have a damn drink. Baby-  
sittin' hour is about up.

Don and Lum share a look. A MAN approaches the table, 30's,  
tweed jacket. He addresses Don.

MAN

Mr. Williams, James Dolan from the  
Tribune, really sorry I'm late.

Don smiles, slowly points to Hank.

JAMES DOLAN

Oh ... sorry.  
(embarrassed)  
So, uh, Mr. Williams, James Dolan.

HANK

Hey.

JAMES DOLAN

Mind if I sit down?

As he takes a chair, the other guys get up.

DON

You don't need us. We'll catch up  
to you.

Dolan takes out a NOTEBOOK, eyes Hank's notebook.

JAMES DOLAN

A song I presume?

HANK

Part of one.

JAMES DOLAN

Well, so how do you like New York?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

HANK

It's alright.

JAMES DOLAN

(writing throughout)

You're doing the Perry Como show,  
which is quite a big deal. What  
kind of a guy is he?

HANK

Pretty regular, I'd say.

JAMES DOLAN

Do you find people up here  
appreciate your kind of music?

HANK

I guess, do you?

JAMES DOLAN

I can't say it's my favorite type  
but... it's interesting.

HANK

Why'd they send you to talk to me  
then? Must've picked the short  
straw?

JAMES DOLAN

No, of course not. It's very  
popular.

HANK

Uh huh.

JAMES DOLAN

Why do you think that is?

HANK

Why do you think that is?

JAMES DOLAN

I suppose it speaks to them.

HANK

Suppose you might be right.

Nolan makes more notes. Hank feels no need to fill the  
silence. But he does signal the waitress. She comes over.

HANK (cont'd)

I'd like a long bourbon in a short  
glass. From your well will do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

She leaves.

JAMES DOLAN

You don't like doing this much do you?

HANK

Comes with the job, but I don't like people pretending one thing and having something else on their minds. You do what I do, get where I am, you see plenty of that. People thinking they'll make a nice pie with a slice of me.

JAMES DOLAN

Well, I'm only looking to give people some insight into you ... why you write what you write and sing what you sing.

HANK

I write and sing because that's what I do. Not much choice, really.

JAMES DOLAN

As an artist.

HANK

Your word.

Drink arrives, Hank takes a swig. Looks past Dolan to see Sammy and Don watching him.

JAMES DOLAN

But you are offering your fans something. What would you say that is?

HANK

Mr. Dolan everybody has a little darkness in them. They may not like it, don't want to know about it, but it's there. I show it to them. They touch it ... but they don't have to take it home with them.

JAMES DOLAN

Do you think that's what they expect from you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

HANK

They expect I can help their troubles. I know because they write me and tell me about them. If their husband dies and they're left with eight starving kids. They write. If their sweetheart done them wrong. They write. I dunno know, but I reckon they think I'm some sort of red cross.

Nolan laughs, Hank half-smiles, takes another swig.

HANK (cont'd)

Folk music, hillbilly, it's sincere. Nothing phony. Man sings a sad song, he knows the 'sad.'

JAMES DOLAN

Right ...  
(writes this down, then)  
Let me see how to put this ...  
there's well, a lot of speculation  
about the hard lives that western  
or folk singers live.

HANK

What do you mean, *hard*?

JAMES DOLAN

Well, more like the women, whiskey  
...

HANK

If you're getting at something,  
then get at it.

Dolan's gaze goes to the whiskey in Hank's hand. With Hank staring straight through him, Dolan thinks about it.

JAMES DOLAN

There are a lot of rumors, Mr.  
Williams, that you have struggled  
with alcohol.

HANK

Didn't know you were in the rumor  
business.

JAMES DOLAN

I don't mean to offend you ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

HANK

... but since you obviously are,  
why don't you just say they're all  
true, every one of them, make it  
easy.

JAMES DOLAN

That's not what I do, *Mr. Williams*.

HANK

*Mr. Dolan*, you can do whatever you  
wanna do, but I'm done doing this.

Hank gives him a hard smile, stands and still HOLDING HIS GLASS walks slowly past Dolan, out of the bar and into the street. Behind him Don and Sammy stand. **Out of focus** they approach Dolan.

EXT. 47TH STREET - NIGHT

Hank walks - now a *reflection* against wet taxi windows and shiny hoods.

He drains the glass, then sets it precariously on a taxi roof. A horn blasts. A driver SHOUTS. It echoes. Hank stares towards the mid town lights.

FADE OUT.

EXT. TENNESSEE WOODS - DAWN

SOUNDS of dogs BARKING. Cold ground fog rises from the damp leafy forest floor.

INTO FRAME TWO DOGS. Black LABS. Excited, on a scent. They reach the edge of woods, move into a harvested cornfield. Flat, barren. The SUN crests a distant hill. It bathes the scene in a morning glow. A VOICE calls out.

JERRY RIVERS (O.S.)

Yes Zeke, whoa Zeke ... yes boy,  
yes boy.

One of the dogs stops, SITS.

HANK (O.S.)

He's gottem, he's on one.

Hank and Jerry emerge from the woods carrying SHOTGUNS. Treading softly, quietly. Waiting. The sudden THUDDING CLAP of a flushed quail. Jerry FIRES, and again. Misses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JERRY RIVERS

Dammit. Damn.

Hank starts laughing. But suddenly the other dog bolts. He's after something.

JERRY RIVERS (cont'd)

Whoa whoa... that's a coon he's on,  
or something.

HANK

(yelling)  
Clete, Clete ... No! No!

Jerry runs hard after him. CAMERA FIGHTS IT'S WAY through the trees, picks up Jerry and dogs. THEN SWINGS BACK to find Hank chasing. Jerry jumps a small RAVINE and keeps on going, disappearing out of sight.

Suddenly the woods are strangely still, save the baying of the hounds. After a beat, Jerry comes running back ...

JERRY RIVERS

Hank, Hank ... Hey, Hank!

Jerry approaches the ravine, cautiously slowing down and then he sees Hank LAYING still on the ground. Jerry, almost afraid to ask. Half jokes.

JERRY RIVERS (cont'd)

Hey man, whatya doin' down there?

There's a long beat before Hank answers.

HANK

I ain't dead. But I wouldn't mind  
it.

JERRY RIVERS

Goddamn Hank ... here.

He offers his hand. Hank waves it off. He's ashen.

HANK

Give me second, Burr.

Hank tries to take a deep breathe. He's struggling for air. The pain is excruciating.

HANK (cont'd)

Tried to jump it, took a nasty one  
... my back is fucked. Really  
fucked.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Jerry stares down at him. The dogs continue barking, Hank closes his eyes.

INT. HOSPITAL / ROOM - EVENING

A greenish tint to the room. Rain pelts a window. Hank is in bed, cigarette in his hand. A DOCTOR takes the cigarette from his hand and puts it out in the ashtray.

DOCTOR

Your back is not broken Mr. Williams.

HANK

(slurring his words)  
I couldn't feel it, if it was.

DOCTOR

Yes, you have quite a bit of morphine in your system.

The Doctor continues to observe him.

HANK

Have to get the recipe from you.

DOCTOR

How much do you know about your condition?

HANK

I know my back has been shot my whole life. Had that bump. Docs early on didn't want to do much about it.

DOCTOR

There's a name for that. *Spina Bifida Occulta*. It means your vertebrae are not completely closed. People with the mildest form of this type of spina bifida often do not even know they have it.

HANK

Well, now I know it's got a name.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DOCTOR

It's chronic, it'll never go away,  
but, we can operate and try and  
alleviate the pain as much as  
possible.

HANK

Cure me or kill me Doc, but I can't  
go on like I been doing anymore.

INT. HOSPITAL - HANK'S ROOM - DAY

A TELEPHONE has been wheeled on a cart into Hank's room. He's  
sitting in a chair.

HANK (O.S.)

I want you to come get me. I want  
out of here now. I need to spend  
what's left of the holidays with my  
family.

TO AUDREY: on a garish Oriental sofa in the screened porch.  
Cigarette, a drink, and a friend sits across the room.

AUDREY

Darlin' you know the Doctors say  
you aren't ready. I'll bring the  
kids to you.

HANK (O.S.)

No need for Junior to see me in a  
hospital. It'll likely scare him.

AUDREY

You stay there a few more days, get  
well and we'll bring you home right  
before New Years.

HANK (O.S.)

(louder)

Nah, nah. I want to be with you and  
the kids now. This is the time when  
children need to know all's good in  
the world.

AUDREY

'Course they do ... but who's gonna  
take care of you here?

HANK

(beat)

My damn wife.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It took just a second and it's *heated*.

AUDREY

Well, your damn wife ain't a nurse.  
Am I? Don't be so damn stubborn,  
Hank. Now I gotta go, kids are  
calling for me.

She hangs up. He looks around to see a nurse entering.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Late. Hank in bed, awake, a notebook in his lap. Next to him on a night table are several pill vials and a glass of water.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Front door opens. Audrey slowly and quietly enters. She's tipsy. She looks down the hall, sees a sliver of light from the bedroom. Moves towards it and peeks in, hoping to find Hank asleep.

AUDREY

(softly)

Hey.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

She enters. Stops.

AUDREY

How you doin'?

HANK

I suppose you been out with your  
*friends*.

AUDREY

Yeah.

HANK

At a joint?

AUDREY

At a house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

Drinking ... Exactly how sick would I have to be for you to stick around and provide a little comfort?

AUDREY

A little comfort is something runs two ways.

HANK

Not in your case.

AUDREY

Screw you, Hank.

HANK

Come over here and you can.

She walks past the bed, into the bathroom.

AUDREY (O.S.)

I doubt it.

HANK

Professional like you, I'm sure it'd be no problem.

She comes out of bathroom and faces him from doorway.

AUDREY

You son of a bitch, all you do is go out on the road, sleep with a different woman every night. Then finally get home for a day and night ... and then you criticize me.

HANK

You want it all don't you baby? Whore around and still be Mrs. Hank Williams.

AUDREY

You know what, you can keep your *great* Mrs. Hank Williams, I give it back to you.

A noise in the hall draws their attention. Junior stares, sleepy-eyed at them from the doorway. Hank's ferocity falls away. Audrey, a quick turn back to him, then swoops up her son and disappears towards his room.

EXT. HANK AND AUDREY'S - DAY

Two men climb out of a BLUE SEDAN. JIM DENNY, Opry manager, 30's and HAROLD, 40's.

HANK (O.S.)

Okay, sure, I know I can't make D.C or Baltimore, Jim. But why can't we just tell 'em the truth and live with it?

Harold goes around to the trunk, opens it and begins taking out AUDIO RECORDING equipment.

JIM DENNY (O.S.)

I'm sorry Hank, but I think we got to do it this way.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / BEDROOM - DAY

Hank sits up in bed as Harold arranges a microphone in front of him, then sets up the tape recorder at the vanity. Jim, no nonsense and hating this, stands at the foot of the bed. Hank is angry. He KNOCKS the mic to the floor.

HANK

You don't hear me, I don't wanna do it. And I sure as hell don't want Audrey standing in for me or anybody else at the show.

Jim tries to remain calm. Picks up the mic, hands it to Harold.

JIM DENNY

I don't see a way around it.

HANK

Simple ... *I couldn't make it because I'm laid up.* I'll get the boys as soon as I can and go there on my own money... Make it right.

JIM DENNY

Connie Gay is putting these shows on. He and I go back forever. Now, there's nobody else available. I got the Opry spread all over on New Year's Eve ... Toledo, Baltimore, Raleigh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hank reaches over, takes A VIAL and pours out SEVERAL pills. Washes them down. Jim watches, casts a glance at Harold.

HANK

Says one every three hours. I figure three every hour ought be that much better ...

(beat, intensely)

... it's 'cause I need it, Jim, and that's why with this back I shouldn't be there. People need to know that.

Harold wishes he were invisible, but he winds the tape.

JIM DENNY

Harold you good to go?

HAROLD

Yes sir.

JIM DENNY

Look, you don't show, everyone there will think it's the whiskey talking and Connie Gay will be stuck bad. Now whether you like it or not I represent the Opry and as fond of you as I am, if you want to stay part of this you got to do it.

HANK

Sounds like a threat.

JIM DENNY

It's a fact, Hank. You need to record this, we'll play it that night.

Hank takes his time.

HANK

You've always been a son of bitch, JD.

JIM DENNY

May be, but it's 'cause I have to be. But I always been solid by you.

He hands Hank a typed piece of paper. Hank glances at it, turns it over to the blank side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

Give me a pen. I think I can write  
my own damn apology.

He starts scribbling.

INT. ARMORY (WASHINGTON D.C.) - NIGHT

A huge New Year's Eve crowd. Listening intently.

THE STAGE

Empty. But over the PA SYSTEM, Hank's voice.

HANK (V.O.)

*"... I had really been lookin'  
forward to visiting you folks in  
Washington today but a couple weeks  
ago I had to have a operation on my  
back. It had gotten to where I  
couldn't even walk. Truth is, it  
was just deformed or broken when I  
was a child and it just wore out.*

STAGE WINGS. Audrey whispers to an unknown musician. But as Hank's words echo through the auditorium, she can't help herself, so she turns and stares across the crowd's faces. Her own a portrait of love and loss. She closes her eyes.

HANK (V.O.)

*... Fact is I was on that operating  
table for over three hours ... I've  
been in bed a couple weeks and  
well, I sure am sorry I couldn't be  
there tonight ...*

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dark. Only when Hank takes a long draw off his cigarette can his eyes be seen and they are wet.

HANK (V.O.)

*... and thanks for buying my  
records."*

EXT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE (FRANKLIN RD.) - DAY

Damp, cold, grey afternoon. Audrey and two women, late 20'S, walk to the house. They enter.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE (FRANKLIN RD.) / LIVING ROOM -  
CONTINUOUS

Audrey calls out.

AUDREY  
Hank ... Hank... Miss Ragland!

AUDREY'S FRIEND  
Doesn't appear anyone's here to  
greet mommy.

They laugh. They've had a cocktail or two. Audrey heads  
towards the bedroom.

AUDREY  
Hank.

Suddenly the LOUD REPORT of a PISTOL. The women jump,  
terrified, not sure what to do. They listen for another  
second. Then Audrey gathers her courage and walks towards the  
back of the house where the gun shot came from.

She peers around the door to the back porch.

EXT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE / PORCH - CONTINUOUS

The porch is now glassed in. Furnished with bamboo, tiki  
style. Hank sits in a chair rocked back on its hind legs. His  
*back to her.*

The door to the yard is open. The chair is in that doorway.  
Hank spins a 38 caliber pistol cowboy style. The trees are  
bare.

The other women creep up behind Audrey. Hank carefully points  
the gun at a tin can and several bottles and FIRES. HITS the  
bottle which explodes in slow motion. He turns and stares at  
the three women.

HANK  
So how was our nation's capitol?

AUDREY  
What are you doing?

HANK  
Killing bottles waiting for my  
loving wife to come home.

AUDREY  
Well I'm home now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK  
Hi ladies.

OTHER WOMEN  
Hi Hank.

AUDREY  
Are you drunk?

HANK  
Are you?

AUDREY  
You think you can wait until we're  
alone before you start up? You  
really have no couth.

The women start backing out.

HANK  
Well, I suppose you're right, dear.

Hank turns all the way around and FIRES a SHOT into the sofa right next to her. She jumps back and scrambles away. The other women SCREAM from another room. Hank laughs and fires three more into the furniture.

HANK (cont'd)  
Now draw you god awful tiki wiki  
shit.

A moment passes. Audrey steps back on to the porch. She walks slowly towards Hank, who just stares, the pistol hanging by his side.

Close enough to embrace, but a thousand miles away from each other. She holds his gaze.

AUDREY  
Hank Williams ... I'll never live  
another day with you ... never.

She turns and walks away. He stares after her, watching until she's long out of sight, then SHOOTS the sofa in an act of desperate frustration.

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

*The Documentary style interview of Fred Rose continues.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRED ROSE

Yeah well, he moved in with Ray Price. Ray was a bit younger and innocent in many ways and really looked up to Hank as did many of the guys ... The house was a nice place in the Natchez Trace area of Nashville. One thing's for sure, Ray wasn't ready for what Hank was bringing.

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - NIGHT

Past midnight. Layer of smoke. House full of people. Drinking, playing guitars, singing. RAY PRICE, 20's, true, warm face, is among them. Conversations drift in and out.

In the corner of the DINING ROOM, some people are looking in a FOOT LOCKER. It's full of GUNS. Hank walks up carrying a beer. A man takes out a pistol and holds it up, spins it.

HANK

Vice squad guy in El Paso gave me that one ... but be careful now buddy, lot of folks get killed with *unloaded* pistols.

Hank goes to a pretty young blonde, 28, BOBBI JETT. She stares at him sweetly and reaches for the beer he's holding. Instead, he takes a long slow gulp, almost drains it. His eyes never leave her.

BOBBI JETT

You're evil, you know it ...

Just then Hank reaches in his jacket pocket, takes out a fresh cold one, offers it to her. Just as she reaches for it, he pulls it back, laughing. She grabs his arm, pries it loose and mock angry, struts off.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER. Party has thinned out. Bobbi stands in doorway talking to a YOUNG GUY. Hank walks up behind the man, pulls a face. She starts laughing. Hank puts his arm around guy's shoulders.

HANK

That's one sweet face she's got, ain't it, Jimmy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOBBI JETT  
Yours ain't half bad either.

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER. 3:00 am. Guitars lean against walls. Place is a mess. A few people left. Ray dumps bottles in a trash can.

Hank on the sofa reads from a STACK OF LEGAL PAPERS. He's many beers to the good. He wads up one of the papers, then another, throws them towards Ray's trash can. They miss.

HANK  
(reading another paper)  
"... but by the spring of 1951, his conduct was intolerable. He became abusive, cursing me and even striking me on numerous occasions." That's a damn lie, Ray.

RAY PRICE  
I'm sure it is.

HANK  
Why she have to go that far?

RAY PRICE  
Well, Hank that's divorce in this country as far as I can tell.

HANK  
Says I made 92 grand last year... Hell, I didn't make that ... "the house at 55 grand; the three Cadillacs" ... You know what, I'm a very successful man.

Bobbi enters from the kitchen. Tipsy.

HANK (cont'd)  
(reading)  
"In the past months defendant has been enjoying a life of wild extravagance..."  
Come here Bobbi. Have a seat. I'm rich and ... dangerous.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Audrey reads from a stack of papers. Junior can be seen in the B.G.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

(out loud, ostensibly to  
Miss Ragland)

Says I had an affair with a highway  
patrolman while he was on he road.  
Look at this ... "I insisted on  
singing with him when I had neither  
a voice or musical ability... "  
Well that's it. And he thinks he's  
gettin' custody of my little boy.

Junior enters pulling a wooden toy duck.

EXT. WILLIAMS FARM - DAY

The 507 acres Hank and Audrey bought two years ago. 56 miles  
south of Nashville.

A chilly afternoon. From a great distance, Hank can be seen  
LEADING a small horse that CARRIES JUNIOR. Bobbi walks along  
side them.

HANK

Come on Daddy, I wanna go faster.

HANK (cont'd)

Sure son. Hold on now ... hold on.

JUNIOR

Come on Daddy, C'mon, let's go,  
let's go.

BOBBI JETT

I just can't believe this place is  
yours.

HANK

For about another hour. Was gonna  
build a house over by that pecan  
grove, but that ain't happening  
now.

MOVE IN CLOSE

Hank takes Junior off the horse, hands him the reins to hold.

BOBBI JETT

Well, then you'll get another one  
somewhere else.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

'Somewhere else.' Hell honey, I  
been there before. And it ain't any  
better... besides, gonna be one  
sumbitch of a year just to dig out  
...

BOBBI JETT

That wouldn't matter to me.

Hank looks at her sweetly, but his smile says *she doesn't get it*.

HANK

Sometimes I wish I was back at WSFA  
making 12 dollars a week and  
knowing who my friends were ... if  
I really had any.

BOBBI JETT

Do you wish you were still married  
too?

HANK

No ... it'd been better if it  
worked out ... but no, not really.  
I mean losing a wife, I can handle  
that ... but I ain't ever gonna  
lose this little fella.

EXT. VAN NUYS AIRPORT (SAN FERNANDO VALLEY, CA) - DAY

A plane lands in the crystalline sun of southern California  
and taxis to a stop. Possibly the searing strains of Hank's  
**"You Win Again." or a Tommy Dorsey type instrumental.**

LOS ANGELES - APRIL 1952

EXT. MGM STUDIOS - CULVER CITY, CA - DAY

Hank and Fred walks through the studio lot.

HANK

(clears his throat)  
Dry as hell out here, isn't it?  
(then) So what'ya think?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FRED ROSE

Let's just get a sense of the whole thing first ... but remember, we've kept them cooling for nine months now.

HANK

You know him?

FRED ROSE

By telephone only. He's okay.

HANK

Bet he's never heard one song.

FRED ROSE

Maybe ... but they don't take notice unless they think you're a draw.

HANK

Well, I don't need them to tell me that.

INT. MGM STUDIOS / DORE SCHARY OFFICES - DAY

Large outer office. They've obviously been waiting.

FRED ROSE

Roy's already made one and ET too.

HANK

Yeah, but they weren't much good.

Fred takes in his attitude.

FRED ROSE

This isn't a test, Hank. You got the job and it's a \$10,000 guarantee.

HANK

Which I don't need.

SECRETARY

You gentlemen may go in now.

But then the door opens revealing DORE SCHARY, MGM Head of Production.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DORE SCHARY

Hank, Fred, welcome. Sorry to keep you waiting.

FRED ROSE

How are you, Dore?

DORE SCHARY

Fine, Fred, if you call doing fine spending your days begging movie stars to do parts that'll only make them more money, more famous and get them even better seats in the best restaurants. Hank, how are you?

HANK

Alright, Mr. Schary.

DORE SCHARY

Well, take your hat off, sit down and relax.

Hank sits, doesn't remove his hat.

DORE SCHARY (cont'd)

How was the flight in?

FRED ROSE

Fine. Little bumpy over Wichita though.

DORE SCHARY

Yeah, always is... Hank I'm very sorry to hear about you and Audrey having troubles. The business is tough on marriage.

HANK

Marriage is tough on marriage.

A moment as Schary sizes up the situation. Decides ...

DORE SCHARY

Yep ... Whatya' say we just cut to the chase. I saw your press release announcing our deal, something like, "Top quality pictures, first time anyone had been offered such a contract without a screen test ... yada yada." You fellows played it up nicely.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FRED ROSE

I was generally pleased with the response.

DORE SCHARY

Well, we're thinking of a part for Hank in "*Small Town Girls*" with Farley Granger and Jane Powell.

Fred looks at Hank.

FRED ROSE

My wife loves Jane Powell.

DORE SCHARY

Perfect ... so does America. And Fred as we discussed, no more than four weeks work and a salary of \$4500 a week ... That's quite a lot of money isn't it?

HANK

Not as much cash as I can make on the road, is it Pappy?

DORE SCHARY

I'm sure between Fred and I, we can come to an arrangement, if we're all serious.

Hank says nothing, gives away nothing.

DORE SCHARY (cont'd)

Can I get you something?

FRED ROSE

I'm okay, but thank you.

Hank gives an imperceptible, no.

DORE SCHARY

(into phone for secretary)  
Coffee. One.

(then)

Hank how tall are you?

HANK

About the same as my mother.

DORE SCHARY

(laughs)

Really ...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

DORE SCHARY (cont'd)

Is that with or without your hat  
because I don't think I have ever  
seen you without it.

HANK

Me neither.

DORE SCHARY

Would you mind, I'd like to see,  
well, your general look, your hair  
... (smiles) you do have some hair,  
right?

HANK

Oh yeah, I got a whole drawer full  
of it.

A strained laugh from Schary, then a look from Fred that says  
he knows where this is going. Hank makes no move to take off  
his hat. Schary gets steely.

DORE SCHARY

I'm serious, Hank.

HANK

Me too.

It's clearly a stand off as they each look from one to the  
other.

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Backstage at the OPRY. Hank and Lillie. Fred approaches from  
the far end of the hall. The M.C. patter can be heard.

HANK

You know, I read something today  
said I was a genius, Lillie ... why  
you figure that makes me fearful?

LILLIE

Maybe it's the load, Hank.

HANK

Yeah maybe.

Sounds of crowd laughing. Few more beats pass.

HANK (cont'd)

Divorce was final today. She got  
custody of Bocephus.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LILLIE

You have visitation, no doubt?

HANK

Whatever that'll mean ... I miss him so much. So damn much.

LILLIE

I know you do, I know, but you're better off without *her* son. She was never worth a half of you.

Fred notes the intensity of their conversation, holds back.

LILLIE (cont'd)

I got a little boy I worry about, too.

Hank nods, Fred steps up.

FRED ROSE

Miss Lillie.

LILLIE

Mr. Rose.

She and Fred exchange looks.

HANK

... the movie thing?

FRED ROSE

Dead ... just like you wanted it, I believe.

HANK

I didn't have an opinion on it really.

Sound of the M.C. becomes prominent.

RED FOLEY M.C. (O.S.)

(Introducing Hank)

Ladies and gentlemen. Let me just give you the lowdown on this next fella's latest run... "*Baby We're Really in Love*" has been on the charts for six months. "*Honky Tonk Blues*" was number two for three months. "*Half As Much*" followed that at Number Two. Course leaves no room for any body else hardly.

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / STAGE - CONTINUOUS

CAMERA FOLLOWS behind Hank as he threads his way to front of stage. He joins Red Foley. HUGE applause.

RED FOLEY M.C.

I hear you got a new song there  
Hank.

HANK

Yep Red, I gotta brand new song  
ain't never been aired.

RED FOLEY M.C.

Ain't never been aired?

HANK

No, and it might need it.

Red laughs. The crowd eats it up and the BAND KICKS IT OFF.

HANK (cont'd)

"Today I passed you on the street  
and my heart fell at your feet  
I can't help it if I'm still in  
love with you

Somebody else stood by your side  
and he looked so satisfied  
I can't help it if I'm still in  
love with you ..."

Hank may be more and more raggedy, but it doesn't matter.

On the *last verse*. Hank scans the crowd. On the FRONT ROW, a pretty girl, 20's stares knowingly, then breaks into a sweet smile. He smiles back. She loves it. UNTIL Hank turns towards an AREA where the OPRY GUESTS sit.

And there he sees BILLIE JEAN ESHLIMAN, a 19 year-old VISION. Ravishing auburn hair, hypnotic green eyes. An off the shoulder dress does nothing to hide her voluptuous body.

Hank actually can't look away. The girl in the front row; her face betraying confusion as she knows she's lost his attention. She gazes towards the other seats, but from where she stands, she can't see anything.

Hank finishes the song and Red steps in for a commercial break.

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / GUEST BOOTH - NIGHT

Billie chatting. Cross conversations. Hank comes up. Squats down next to her chair. She ignores him. He smiles in a way we've seen far too rarely.

HANK  
Girl, who you here with?

Billie turns, takes her time.

BILLIE JEAN  
Faron Young.

She turns back to the woman next to her, resumes their conversation.

HANK  
The boy guesting up here from  
Shreveport?

Without looking at Hank.

BILLIE JEAN  
Yeah, that's him... and that's him  
right over there behind you.

Hank turns to see FARON YOUNG, handsome, maybe 22, staring. Hank smiles. Turns back to Billie, then back to Faron. Faron forces a smile back. Hank signals him to come on over. Reluctantly Faron heads that way.

FARON YOUNG  
Hey Billie ... Hank.

HANK  
Son, you gonna marry this girl?

Faron can't help but laugh. But he thinks about it for a second.

FARON YOUNG  
Not likely, she's far too good  
lookin' for a wife.

BILLIE JEAN  
What did you say?

HANK'  
Well, if you ain't going to marry  
her ol' Hank just might.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLIE JEAN

Oh really?

Nervous laughter from the others in the booth. Hank stands, puts his hand on Faron's shoulder and leans in closer.

HANK

I hope I'm not causing you any pain.

Faron not sure how to handle all this with the *biggest name* on the Opry. Then with mild resignation ...

FARON YOUNG

Nah ... Don't worry about it.

Hank pats his shoulder turns back to Billie Jean.

HANK

You're like an angel.

**SONG TO BE DETERMINED  
FOR UNDER THIS SCENE**

EXT. MR. JONES' HOUSE / BACKYARD - DAY

Beautiful late spring afternoon. Billie's daughter, JERI LYNN, 2, runs joyously around a small suburban backyard. Billie Jean watches.

She gets chased by her Uncle, SONNY JONES, 25, one of Billie Jean's two brothers. MR. JONES, 40's, Billie's DAD, wears a BOSSIER CITY POLICE uniform, drinks a beer. Two other lawn chairs; one occupied by Billie's MOM, the other by Hank.

MR. JONES

Pregnant at 16, so Jeri Lynn there.

MRS. JONES

Married and pregnant, *Mister* Jones.

MR. JONES

Well, I'm not selling her short, she is pretty tough ... But at 19 what the hell do you know? I could barely tie my shoes then.

Hank smiles, doesn't respond, isn't compelled to.

MR. JONES (cont'd)

My boys over there, Alton and Sonny, big fans of yours.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

I'll surely take all of them I can get.

Jeri Lynn runs over and hops up on Hank's swinging leg. Nestles against his boot. He lifts her up.

MRS. JONES

We love this little bug.

HANK

I like children a lot. I got one of my own and my former wife had one, too.

Billie walks up. Puts her arm around Hank. Everyone smiles.

BILLIE JEAN

Handsome, talented and loves kids. How about that, daddy?

MR. JONES

I appreciate you coming out here to see us, Hank.

HANK

Yessir.

Billie leans in, kisses Hank. Genuine and loving. While he and Billie kiss, he lifts Jeri Lynn on his leg. She squeals.

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

FROM A DISTANCE

Hank and Billie Jean walk towards Ray's house.

HANK

Well, I got Lafayette, Homer, Opelousas, then Orange, Brownwood and Austin.

BILLIE JEAN

I'm gonna forget Homer and Opelousas baby, but I'll meet you in Austin.

They laugh.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

Honey, you can meet me anywhere  
anytime. But let's make sure we  
make a damn night of it tonight.

CLOSER

Front door is open. MUSIC drifts out. Hank pauses, slowly  
takes his arm from around her shoulders.

He opens the screen door. First sees Ray, who gives him a  
*look*. Then turns to see Bobbi Jett on the sofa. He looks back  
at Billie, as she steps inside.

INT. NATCHEZ HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hank looks from one woman to the other. Billie DROPS the  
suitcase.

BILLIE JEAN

(addresses Bobbi, nods  
towards Ray)

You with him?

BOBBI JETT

Nope... you with him?  
(nods towards Hank)

HANK

Bobbi, what are you doing here?

BOBBI JETT

What do you think, Hank?

BILLIE JEAN

That's nice.

BOBBI JETT

Thank you.

Billie's face starts to flush. She hardens. Her eyes slice  
holes in Hank's suit.

HANK

Billie let me handle this. Bobbi we  
gotta talk.

BILLIE JEAN

*Talk?* ... just get her out of here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOBBI JETT

I'm sorry darling, who do you think you *are*?

BILLIE JEAN

I was the woman he was gonna marry.

BOBBI JETT

Really? Lucky him. Maybe you should've told some of your other girls that, Hank.

BILLIE JEAN

Well, you're right about that, honey.

Billie spins and bolts. Hank goes after her.

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

HANK

Billie, BILLIE, BILLIE!

She keeps walking. He runs up to her.

HANK (cont'd)

Baby there isn't anyone else. I swear to god. She's got it wrong about us... They get it that way... C'mon just stop.

Billie does stop, squares off.

BILLIE JEAN

"*They?*" "They" ... Boy you're a real piece of work, Hank Williams. I may just be a Bossier City kid, but I have enough sense to know you're trouble and you're gonna tear me up.

Hank is frozen, at a loss in the face of her vulnerability and strength. He simply drops his gaze ... as in the distance the figure of Bobbi Jett watches from the doorway.

EXT. CITY STREETS/ RYMAN AUDITORIUM PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Hank's car WEAVES wildly on the street and then skids into the lot forcing a parking attendant/guard to get out of his way. It's quick, but it's clear he is out of control and lost.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Pretty empty. Packing boxes around. Jim Denny stands at the screen door. He knocks, no answer, slowly enters.

JIM DENNY  
Hank... Hank.

Hank, looking tired, walks into the room.

HANK  
Hey Jim.

JIM DENNY  
Hank.

HANK  
Want sumpin ... cup of coffee?

JIM DENNY  
No thanks... where's Ray?

HANK  
Moved out.

Jim nods, takes his time. So does Hank.

JIM DENNY  
I don't want to know where you  
were, or why you weren't at the  
show ...

HANK  
(interrupts)  
I'm sorry, J.D.

JIM DENNY  
I'm sure. But sorry don't mean shit  
anymore. We're grown men here.

As always, Hank's temper is a blink away.

HANK  
I see. Should I be taking notes on  
this lesson?

JIM DENNY  
Opry is a brand and you're pissin'  
on it Hank. It means something to a  
lot of people ... music, family ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK  
(interrupts)  
Money.

JIM DENNY  
You wanna play the artist on me  
Alright then, an artist like you, a  
man who can make folks happy and  
sad, make them cry, forget their  
troubles. You have an obligation.

HANK  
You know, you been workin' me  
pretty hard JD ... 100 outta 119  
days on the road. I don't really  
need any more obligations.

JIM DENNY  
Nobody does, but that's just the  
way life works ... look, I'm not  
trying to be disrespectful Hank, or  
looking to put you down.

HANK  
Don't worry ... I gave up giving a  
shit about what people think a long  
time ago.

JIM DENNY  
Fine, then, here's the deal. August  
9th in your regular Opry spot and  
then August 10th an Opry *sponsored*  
show in Knoxville.

HANK  
Awright, OK.

JIM DENNY  
I'm imploring you Hank, don't let  
me down.

HANK  
They'll get their money's worth.

JIM DENNY  
Okay, but just don't let me down.

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - EVENING

**August 9, 1952**

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROWD FACES. Happy, beautiful, old, young, map of America in the smooth cheeks and wrinkled eyes. Excited, as they file through the front doors.

PINNED to one side of each door is the NIGHT'S LINEUP. Handwritten. Red Foley, Hank Snow, Minnie Pearl, Hank Williams.

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM / BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Jim Denny. Alone. Stares down the bustling hallway. Hoping against better judgement. MOVE IN ON HIS EYES. HOLD THERE until we reverse PULL BACK. We are now ...

INT. RYMAN/ OFFICE - DAY

Jim hangs up the phone. Stares at it. Closes his eyes, squeezes them shut. When he opens them, they're holding back tears. He looks up to see Red Foley standing in the doorway.

JIM DENNY  
Jambalaya hit number one today, you know that?

RED FOLEY M.C.  
You alright?

Jim shakes his head, looks out the window.

JIM DENNY  
I had to do it, Red. I had to let Hank go.

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

FROM A DISTANCE - Hank sits on the front porch. MOVE IN slowly. A piece of newspaper blows across the lawn. Leaves fall in the same breeze.

CAMERA finally settles on his face. He looks like he's been shot. His eyes are hooded, empty, lost.

After a LONG MOMENT, he stands and walks back into the house.

INT. MR. JONES' HOUSE / HALLWAY - DAY

Phone rings, rings.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SONNY (BILLIE JEAN'S BROTHER)

Hello.

INTERCUT with Hank standing in the empty house.

HANK

It's Hank.

SONNY

Hey Hank. It's Sonny.

Sonny looks at Billie Jean walking past him, listening. Shakes her head, "No."

HANK

Your sister around?

SONNY

(bad liar)

Nah. I don't know where she is.

HANK

(not buying it)

Well, when you see her. Tell her I called and ... uh ... well, I called. And Sonny, help me out will you.

Hank hangs up. Paces. Thinks about it. Goes back and DIALS another number. Rings.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hello.

HANK

Bobbi it's me, Hank.

BOBBI JETT (O.S.)

Hi.

HANK

Pack a bag. I'll be by in half an hour.

BOBBI JETT (O.S.)

Where we going?

HANK

Lake Martin. A lodge at Kowliga Bay. Pal of mine is loaning it.

A long beat ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BOBBI JETT (O.S.)  
Make it an hour.

INT. KOWLIGA LODGE - NIGHT

Summer cottage hallway. Faint light. Sound OFF SCREEN of throwing up.

Hank walks into frame. FOLLOW him as he weaves towards the sound. Bobbi is on her knees, on the floor, bent over the toilet.

HANK  
Hell Bobbi, you're even drunker  
than ol' Hank.

She wipes her mouth looks up.

BOBBI JETT  
Hank, I'm not drunk.

Hank leans against the door.

HANK  
You're not? ... I sure am.

BOBBI JETT  
No ... I'm pregnant.

EXT. KOWLIGA LODGE / LAKE PIER - NIGHT

Crickets and potato bugs pop against the pier's lamppost. Hank and Bobbi sit on folding web chairs. Both smoking. Hank with a beer.

HANK  
What is it with me? Every woman in  
my life has kids. Every one of 'em  
even before I ever got to them.

BOBBI JETT  
You're obviously very attractive to  
mothers, Hank.

They laugh.

HANK  
Jesus, Bobbi ... you're pregnant  
...

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOBBI JETT  
We could get married.

HANK  
Baby, you don't want to marry me.

BOBBI JETT  
I will.

HANK  
That's different.

He stands, looks out at the lake.

HANK (cont'd)  
(sardonic laugh)  
Boy, I'm a professional at making a  
mess of things ...

BOBBI JETT  
If we got married Hank things would  
be more stable. And just think ...  
we'd have this new little one right  
here.

HANK  
Bobbi, I love you, you're a great  
gal ... but not like that, not that  
way.

The sadness of this plain truth washes across her face.

HANK (cont'd)  
I'm gonna marry Billie Jean.

She steels herself. Takes a breath.

BOBBI JETT  
She know that?

HANK  
Not exactly (beat). But darlin'  
I'll look after this little baby.  
I'll give you money and I'll be its  
poppa even ... but there'll be no  
marriage.

BOBBI JETT  
Hank, you are *really* screwed up.

HANK  
I know.

INT. MR. JONES' HOUSE / HALLWAY - MORNING

The phone on the wall, hangs by the cord. Billie enters in a cotton nightie.

CLOSE ON her sensuous mouth as it brushes the phone.

BILLIE JEAN  
Hello.

HANK (O.C.)  
I got a date picked out.

INTERCUT **CLOSE** on their faces.

BILLIE JEAN  
Yeah.

HANK. Unshaven.

HANK  
October 19th.

BILLIE JEAN  
And what are you gonna do then?

HANK  
Marry you.

BILLIE JEAN  
That's nice.

HANK  
I know.

BILLIE JEAN  
I think I'm getting my hair done  
that day.

HANK  
Change it to the 18th and it'll all  
work out perfectly.

BILLIE JEAN  
I'll think about it.

Silence.

HANK  
Billie, I love you. You hear me? I  
love you ... I love you ... and if  
you're still there, I still love  
you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLIE JEAN

Hank.

HANK

What?

BILLIE JEAN

I love you, too.

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

*The Documentary style interview of Fred Rose continues.*

FRED ROSE

The Opry ... yeah, the Opry ...  
 getting the boot ... devastating  
 Nearly as much for me as him ...  
 We'd worked so hard for it ... But  
 there was a small part of me  
 thought, maybe it might get us on a  
 better road ...

*JUMP CUT*

FRED ROSE (cont'd)

In the end, I pulled every string.  
 I had to get him back where we  
 started, on the Louisiana Hayride  
 in Shreveport. The money was less,  
 but he wouldn't be idle. And they  
 did have an easier way down there,  
 not protecting an image so much.

(lights a cigarette, takes  
 a long drag)

His back was still bad and we were  
 concerned about the medications.  
 Especially on the road ... I  
 couldn't imagine that aspect would  
 get worse ... and then it did. By  
 way of man named Toby Marshall.

INT. OKLAHOMA CITY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Hank lies on the bed. He's in severe pain. And drunk. Billie  
 sits in chair looking worn down. Worried.

HANK

It's not just my back baby, I feel  
 like my chest is getting jumped on.

PHONE RINGS. She answers, listens. Hangs up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK (cont'd)  
That Audrey? She have Bocephus?

BILLIE JEAN  
(shakes her head, no)  
No ... Stage manager. They told the crowd you couldn't make it. I hope it's handled.

KNOCK on the door. KNOCK. She goes to it. MAN enters, late 40's. Behind him another MAN, early 50's, grey hair, distinguished until you see his cold, darting eyes behind wire-rimmed glasses. TOBY MARSHALL. He carries a worn black crocodile bag.

Billie blocks the first man. He looks around her at Hank.

BILLIE JEAN (cont'd)  
Who are you?

MAN/PROMOTER  
LeBeau. The promoter.

She looks past him to Marshall.

BILLIE JEAN  
You?

TOBY MARSHALL  
Dr. Marshall.

BILLIE JEAN  
What kind of doctor?

TOBY MARSHALL  
I specialize in alcoholism.

BILLIE JEAN  
What does that mean?

Hanks squirms, moans.

HANK  
What'ya got Doc? What's the man have?

Marshall and Billie stare at each other.

TOBY MARSHALL  
It means I've been there and back, ma'am. I know the compassion that is needed and the pain that is endured.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Every bone in her body wants these MEN to go away. Anyone would. They feel wrong. She holds her ground, doesn't move.

HANK  
(shouting)  
Let the man in.

Marshall steps around her. Moves to the bed. He takes Hank's hand and simply holds it for a long time.

All **SOUND** slowly FADES AWAY. Slow Tempo Instrumental Version "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" FADES UP.

Marshall now leans down, opens his bag, takes out a rubber strap and begins wrapping it around Hank's upper arm.

Fred Rose's VOICE comes in.

FRED ROSE (O.S.)  
Chloral Hydrate. Ever heard of it?  
It's what's in a "Mickey Finn"...  
knock-out pills. So powerful they  
use them to sedate circus animals.  
Never supposed to be administered  
with alcohol or to someone with a  
heart condition, which Hank likely  
had.

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

***Back to the Fred Rose interview.***

FRED ROSE  
Marshall was by his own admission a  
pathological liar. A former  
alcoholic who had been in prison  
for armed robbery. His diploma ...  
came from the Chicago University of  
Applied Sciences and Arts. Bought  
it off a salesman at a gas station  
for 25 dollars... then just before  
his 29th birthday, Hank called and  
told me he was in Toby Marshall's  
care.

INT. NASHVILLE RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Band gets ready. Hank stretched out in a chair. He's clearly exhausted and so sore he can't seem to stand. His eyes are closed. Might be asleep, until ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

HANK

What we got left?

FRED ROSE (INTERCOM)

Hour or so.

He opens his eyes, leans up, stares at the clock ... **3:10 P.M.** Fred walks out of the booth, takes a long look at him,

FRED ROSE (cont'd)

You alright?

A faint nod.

FRED ROSE (cont'd)

We can be done, Hank. Call it a day.

Hank leans down and picks up his guitar. Lays it across his lap.

HANK

Let me run something past you.

FRED ROSE

Okay ... you sure?

Hank says nothing more, just slowly begins picking out the first simple chords of his new song. And without even rising from his chair and with more agonizing emotion than is imaginable, he begins to sing.

HANK

*"Your cheatin' heart  
will make you weep  
You'll cry and cry  
and try to sleep  
but sleep won't come  
the whole night through  
Your cheatin' heart  
will tell on you*

*When tears come down  
like the fallin' rain  
You'll toss around  
and call my name  
You'll walk the floor  
the way I do  
Your cheatin' heart  
will tell on you"*

ON FRED

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

In awe at the sheer power of the words, he can't actually bear to look at Hank singing one of the greatest and most mournful ballads ever written.

ON BILLIE. Tears forming in her eyes.

TIGHT ON HANK'S FACE

Beautiful, creased, almost serene. One week past his 29th birthday but he could easily be a man twice that age.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL (BOSSIER CITY, LA) - DAY

A long, ugly way from Franklin Road and the dream it came with. A sparse tiny kitchen. Hank and Billie Jean sit around a linoleum top table.

BILLIE JEAN

(a slight whisper)

It's embarrassing to have people here.

HANK

I know.

BILLIE JEAN

You told me you hate managers ... they got the morals of a cash register.

HANK

Honey, it's not a matter of liking 'em, sometimes it's a matter of needing 'em.

She goes to the stove, heats up the coffee pot. In B.G. A TOILET flushes.

HANK (cont'd)

Listen, baby, I want you to hear out some ideas Oscar has about the wedding.

BILLIE JEAN

*Our* wedding?

HANK

Yeah, these guys organize things. Just promise you'll listen ... it's kinda fun.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLIE JEAN

Fun?

OSCAR DAVIS walks out from the bathroom, into the kitchenette. Smiles at Billie, subtly looks around.

HANK

Billie's been looking for a house in Shreveport. We've seen some nice ones

OSCAR DAVIS

That's great.

Beat, as Billie brings the coffee to the table.

OSCAR DAVIS (cont'd)

You know, Hank spent most of his time on the phone telling me all about Billie and turns out he wasn't even doing you justice.

BILLIE JEAN

Well he's like that.

HANK

Oscar, why don't you take us through your thinking about the wedding.

OSCAR DAVIS

Billie, that okay?

BILLIE JEAN

It's *just* my wedding, why not.

OSCAR DAVIS

Awright ... Well, we've only got three weeks till October 19, I say we go "big" and in the city that knows about having a "big" time ... New Orleans.

BILLIE JEAN

What exactly does big mean?

OSCAR DAVIS

Well, it means hmmm, large enough to accommodate Hank's fans.

BILLIE JEAN

I'm sorry, you wanna invite fans?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

OSCAR DAVIS

I'd put it more like giving them the opportunity to attend by say, buying tickets.

BILLIE JEAN

Is this a *joke*? Hank ...?

HANK

C'mon Billie, just listen.

She puts the coffee pot down hard.

BILLIE JEAN

What do you think I'm doing?

OSCAR DAVIS

Billie, you'd be doing them a favor. Really. This is a storybook romance. And I believe I understand romance. I've actually spent some time in Paris and they've got noting on you kids. There'd be a lot of love in that hall. And they'd be happy to pay.

BILLIE JEAN

Oh I see, we're going to *sell* tickets?

OSCAR DAVIS

But we would never take advantage.

BILLIE JEAN

Oh Hank, you know I love you and that means I love every bit of you ... so I'm gonna bow out of this conversation before I *don't*.

She leaves the room. They stare at each for a beat.

OSCAR DAVIS

What'ya wanna do?

HANK

Just tell me what you got.

OSCAR DAVIS

Well, after you called, I spoke to Ed Pendergrass at WBOK and he figures we could get the City Auditorium, charge say a buck to 2.50 ... the place seats 7000.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

OSCAR DAVIS (cont'd)

Get some of your pals down from the Hayride.

HANK

Woman's right, this is crazy shit, Oscar.

OSCAR DAVIS

Yeah, but it'll be something to remember, won't it?

HANK

Only if my bride shows up.

**NEW ORLEANS OCTOBER 14, 1952**

INT. WBOK STUDIOS - DAY

A DJ, 40, DWAYNE, interviews Billie Jean. It's LIVE.

DWAYNE

We're sure sorry Hank Williams couldn't be with us today. But we are still more than OK here at WBOK New Orleans. Apparently Hank's got important business in Montgomery, but we're proud to have his fiancée, Billie Jean Jones.

BILLIE JEAN

Thank you, Dwayne.

INT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hank's smoke-stained hands cup a cigarette.

The Boarding House dining Room. Rain pelts the windows. Around the table: a LAWYER, Bobbi Jett, Hank next to her. Lillie stands in the doorway.

LAWYER

Basically this is what we'll draft over at the office.

He looks at Hank, reads from notes. Hank stubs out the cig.

LAWYER (cont'd)

*"Hank Williams may be the father of said child. Hank will provide for Bobbi's room and board here at Lillie's.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAWYER (cont'd)

*Hank will pay all the doctor's bills and hospital bills and 30 days after the birth will provide a plane ticket to anywhere in California Bobbi wants to go. Lillie here is going to look after the baby for two years and Hank will pay for a nurse..." We on track so far?*

Hank looks at Lillie, softly pats Bobbi's hand.

INT. WBOK STUDIOS - DAY

Dwayne and Billie Jean.

DWAYNE

Billie Jean we're awful excited about the big shindig on October 19. So gracious of you and Hank to have invited all of us fans to the wedding. And by the way, for those of you who don't have tickets to the sold out ceremony, you can see this gorgeous gal and "The Lovesick Boy" at a rehearsal at 3:00 in the afternoon ... now Billie tell me, are you a nervous bride?

BILLIE JEAN

I sure am Dwayne ... after all I'm marrying Hank Williams... but I think that makes me about the luckiest girl in the world.

DWAYNE

I think you're right. Well, if you can stick around Billie, we'll play a little of Hank after this message.

He turns off the mic. Pushes a couple of buttons.

INT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE / LIVING ROOM - DAY

LAWYER

*"During that time both of you will have the right to visit the child and on the child's third birthday, Hank will assume custody until the baby is five.*

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAWYER (cont'd)  
*From that point, father and mother  
 will share custody."*

He stops reading from notes. No one speaks. Hank looks again to Lillie. Bobbi never takes her eyes from the table.

INT. WBOOK STUDIOS - DAY

DWAYNE  
 Pretty sweet and pretty funny what you said about being nervous for marrying Hank. I just bet you are.

BILLIE JEAN  
 Yep, Hank thinks I'm funny too.

He reaches over, slowly rubs her hand.

DWAYNE  
 You know since Hank's not in town tonight, Billie Jean, we could grab a couple drinks and I'd be happy to show you some real *Nawlins* hot spots ...

BILLIE JEAN  
 I *sure* appreciate that Dwayne, but I meant what I said about being lucky.

**B&W DOCUMENTARY STYLE FOOTAGE  
 OF THE WEDDING  
 JAMBALAYA PLAYS UNDERNEATH**

I/E. NEW ORLEANS - DAY/NIGHT

*Inside a LIMO. Billie kisses Hank, escort seen out the window.*

*A marquee announces nuptials.*

*Lillie hides her face. Behind her a quick Flash of TOBY MARSHALL.*

*Backstage. Hank walks past a row of CHAMPAGNE CASES. He plops on the boxes. Mugs for the camera.*

*Bridesmaids fidgeting in front of a huge LILIES OF THE VALLEY arrangement.*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

*Hank and Billie On STAGE with Preacher. Hank isn't wearing his hat. Hank pulls back the veil and kisses Billie.*

I/E. STREET/ TOY STORE - NIGHT

A TRAIN LOCOMOTIVE

Coming straight at camera. Smoke puffs from the stack, whistle blowing. PULL BACK to realize it's A LIONEL MODEL TRAIN winding through a small play village.

PAN to find Billie and Hank, hand in hand, strolling down a New Orleans street. They stop in front of the toy store. Hank stares at the tableau.

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S HOUSE - EVENING

The same train now going round and around on the living room floor. Junior sits next to it. He's holding on to the phone. Audrey watches him from the sofa.

HANK (O.S.)

I heard you got a new toy.

Junior smiles.

JUNIOR

A choo choo train, daddy.

HANK

Oh, you did?

JUNIOR

Are you gonna play with me?

HANK (O.S.)

You betcha, I will. Just as soon as I can be there ... (then) you know how much I miss you don't you Bocephus?

JUNIOR

More than all the ants on all the sidewalks, more than all the leaves on the trees in the whole world.

HANK

That's right.

Junior smiles. Audrey takes the phone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUDREY

We gotta go now. It's getting past his bedtime. I don't want him getting worked up.

INT. SHREVEPORT MOTEL APT/ROOM - EVENING

Hank on the phone.

HANK

(reluctant)

Sure. OK. Fine.

AUDREY

OK then.

HANK

Audrey, why don't you bring him up to Shreveport next weekend?

AUDREY (O.S.)

That won't work out.

HANK

Why not? It'd just be for Saturday. You can leave him here and we'll bring 'im back.

AUDREY

We got plans on Saturday.

HANK

Sunday then ...

AUDREY

No, look, we're just gonna have to find a better time. Talk to you later, hon.

She hangs up. His dejection impossible to mask.

Billie has been listening from the doorway. Hank still holds the phone. Is there an emptier feeling? From the table, he picks up a sheet of paper.

**H.W. Itinerary. Confirmed until further notice.**

November 18 - Duval County Armory, Jacksonville, Fla.

November 19 - Main Theater Ft. Benning, Georgia

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

November 20 - Comer Auditorium - Columbus, Georgia

November 21 - DJ convention - Nashville, Tenn.

November 22 - Home of Austin Wood, St. James, MO

Flight St. Louis to Montgomery

November 25 - Mont. Civic - Claude King, Tommy Hill

November 26 - Opelousa and Lafayette, La.

November 30 - Louisiana Hayride

Hank finishes reading. SAILS the papers across the room. A blur that becomes the blur of the ...

I/E. ALABAMA HIGHWAY / HANK'S CADILLAC - DAY

**... THE OPEN ROAD of a southern highway seen THROUGH A WINDSHIELD**

*"I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas"* PLAYS UNDER ...

Billie drives. Hank is slumped in the seat next to her. He reaches over and tries to tune in a baseball game. Just a faint *play by play* through heavy static.

Hank takes out a pill vial. Pours several in his hand. She looks over at him. He stares straight ahead.

BILLIE JEAN

Do you have to?

HANK

Yeah, kinda do.

He just chokes them down. They drive on.

HANK (cont'd)

I'm sorry baby.

BILLIE JEAN

For what?

HANK

Everything.

Driving in more silence, then ...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BILLIE JEAN

Well, I'm glad we're gettin' out of Shreveport, but to tell the truth, I don't really want to see your mother.

HANK

I know that, but at least she'll be *happy* to see me. Lately people see me coming, they just want to cross the street.

BILLIE JEAN

That's not true ... and don't sound so sorry for yourself.

After a beat.

HANK

Tell you what, let's don't go to Lillie's, you're right. Let's go see my daddy.

BILLIE JEAN

You want to just drive down to McWilliams and drop in on Lon?

HANK

No use calling. Only phone is at the train depot. Let's just go, it'll be good.

EXT. LON WILLIAMS' HOUSE - DAY

A small weathered house along a rural road in McWilliams, Alabama. The winter sun low across this unyielding farm country. The Cadillac pulls in. Hank and Billie get out, walk to the door. Hank carries a box of chocolates.

He knocks. Knocks again. Turns the knob. It's not locked.

INT. LON WILLIAMS' HOUSE - DAY

Hank enters. Billie stays in the doorway.

HANK

Lon... daddy ... you here? Anybody home?

No answer. Hank walks further in. Pokes head in kitchen. Walks back over to his dad's easy chair, worn, ragged, saggy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He stares down at a pile of newspapers next to it on the floor.

He kneels. Sees an old Billboard. Opens it to the country charts page. "*Jambalaya*" near the top.

Drops it back on the pile. Stands up. He's still holding the chocolates. Carefully places them in the chair. He tears off a piece of newspaper, takes a pencil from his coat pocket.

Writes on the PAPER SCRAP:

*Merry Christmas Lon,  
Love Hank and Billie and Junior.*

He takes another look, walks out past Billie, unable to meet her eyes.

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - DAY

*The Documentary style interview of Fred Rose CONTINUES.*

FRED ROSE

Oscar and A.V. Bamford booked Hank two dates at the end of December. New Years Eve in Charleston, West Virginia and New years day in Canton, Ohio. The weather in the south had turned horrible, bone cold and as wet as a beavers pocket, so he couldn't fly and instead looked around for someone to drive him in his own car. When he couldn't find any friends to take him up on that, he called a buddy at Lee Street Taxi in Montgomery and that fellow got his 17 year-old son, Charles Carr for the job. Charles was a freshman at Auburn on holiday break.

**December 30, 1952**

EXT. LILLIE'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Cold, windy, about to rain. The CADDY sits on the street. Trunk open. Billie Jean leans against the hood. She wears a wool coat and has a shawl wrapped around her.

The front door opens. Hank walks out carrying his guitar. Thinner than ever. Gaunt. Cigarette hanging from his lips.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLES CARR, 17, the DRIVER, is behind him. He carries a suitcase and balances a box of song books.

Hank wears a Blue serge suit, a white sweat-stained fedora and dirty white cowboy boots. Over this, a blue overcoat.

He puts the guitar in the trunk, where there are two other boxes of records. Starts COUGHING, hacking. Cig drops to the pavement. He goes to Billie. They hug. He steps back.

HANK

Baby I'll call you when I get up to Charleston.

BILLIE JEAN

How come I can't come? I don't want to stay around here and deal with her.

She glances up at the house where Lillie stands in the doorway.

HANK

Go back to Shreveport and I'll meet you there in a couple of days. You don't have to stay.

BILLIE JEAN

I don't see the big deal about coming along.

HANK

It's a long ass trip and truthfully you might get real sick of me and we might end up going at each other ... right?

She gives him a look. They hug, he kisses her. Starts to walk away. Comes back.

HANK (cont'd)

One more for luck, huh?

She comes back kisses him while cradling his cheeks. They pull away, he goes to the car. He smiles at something he's thinking about.

He climbs in the car. Charles gets in the drivers seat. Hank rolls down the window.

BILLIE JEAN

What are you smiling about?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

HANK

Well, another reason I don't think you should come is ... I could use the leg room.

BILLIE JEAN

Go to hell, Hiram Williams.

Now she walks back over, kisses him on the cheek.

BILLIE JEAN (cont'd)

One more for extra luck.

HANK

See you back in Louisiana darling ... and "Happy New Year."

BILLIE JEAN

Drive safe, Charles. He's a real SOB, but I think I love him.

CHARLES CARR

Yes ma'am.

As the car pulls out. Hank looks back at the house. Lillie has come out on the porch and is waving. He waves back, touches his hat, and gives his mother a sweet smile.

Billie stands in the street. HOLD on the two of them watching the Caddy SLOWLY DISAPPEAR down the road.

**NEW YEAR'S DAY 1953  
CANTON, OHIO 3:00 P.M.**

EXT. CANTON MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM - DAY

**MARQUEE: New Years Day,  
Thursday Jan 1,  
2 hour Stage Show  
featuring HANK WILLIAMS**

**also Hawkshaw Hawkins,  
Homer and Jethro, Autry Mann  
and many many more.**

A light snow dusts the shoulders of the last stragglers rushing into the auditorium.

INT. CANTON MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM - DAY

The crowd is thrilled, pulsating with anticipation. The New Year is coming in right.

CAMERA moves among, between and around the JOYOUS FACES. IT sweeps past a few COUPLES in their 20's and lands on the beaming face of a 12 YEAR-OLD BOY in a cowboy hat. He stares up at the stage in wonderment.

INT. CANTON MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM / BACKSTAGE - DAY

Behind the curtain *all* the PERFORMERS, including Don Helms, are unexpectedly gathering. Most are quiet, a few whisper, others are quietly weeping.

The show's EMCEE, CLIFF ROGERS, 30's, walks slowly past them. Head down. Stops at Don, whose 27 year old face wears a 100 years of pain. They share a final look, then Rogers moves to where the curtains meet up and slips out onto the stage.

INT. CANTON MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM / STAGE - DAY

The crowd HOOTS, HOLLERS, "Happy New Years" are SHOUTED ...

THE STAGE

Rogers walks to the microphone. Clears his throat. Looks out over the crowd.

CLIFF ROGERS

Ladies and gentlemen, I've been in show business almost twenty years, and I've been called upon to do many difficult things in front of an audience. But today I'm about to perform the most difficult task I have ever done.

In the audience, nervous laughter, a few shouts, "*I bet*", "*like what*"...

CLIFF ROGERS (cont'd)

This morning on his way to Canton to do this show, Hank Williams died in his car.

There are even a few more laughs from those who can only believe this must be part of an act.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLIFF ROGERS (cont'd)  
 Ladies and gentlemen, this is no  
 joke.  
 (steels himself)  
 ... Hank Williams is dead.

With that, Rogers slowly walks away from the mic. The house lights DIM one by one.

A SINGLE SPOT hits the solitary microphone.

From behind the curtain, come the powerful voices of the WHOLE CAST as they begin SINGING.

CAST  
*"I wandered so aimless, life filled  
 with sin  
 I wouldn't let my dear Savior in  
 Then Jesus came like a stranger in  
 the night  
 Praise the Lord I saw the light."*

The curtain FOLDS BACK revealing the cast, still in shock, washed in pain, but singing with all their hearts. They remain at the rear of the stage, while the SINGLE LIGHT stays on the microphone in the front.

ON THE CROWD

As this impossible news sinks in ... Gradually, family by family, strangers and friends, all begin to stand, and as they come to their feet, many sobbing, they join in the singing. The auditorium now rings fully with the beauty and power of Hank's words.

EVERYONE  
*"Just like a blind man, I wandered  
 alone  
 Worries and fear I claimed for my  
 own  
 Then like the blind man that God  
 gave back his sight  
 Praise the Lord I saw the light,  
 I saw the light, I saw the light  
 No more darkness, no more night  
 Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in  
 sight  
 Praise the Lord I saw the light."*

FADE TO BLACK.

COME UP ON:

INT. FRED ROSE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Fred's face, half lit, a study in sorrow. His head down, his hands trembling. Under this ...

A RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.S)  
 (deep baritone, static  
 laced)  
 "Sunday, January 4th, 1953,  
 hillbilly singer and composer Hank  
 Williams was buried in Montgomery,  
 Alabama. His tragic death, at the  
 age of 29, was presumed to be the  
 result of heart failure ...

Fred looks up, stares into the *INTERVIEWER'S CAMERA*. Holds his gaze.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.S)  
 ... A crowd estimated at 20,000  
 stood outside the city auditorium.  
 2750 friends, family and fans were  
 inside.

DISSOLVE TO:

ACTUAL DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE OF HANK'S FUNERAL FADES UP.

RADIO ANNOUNCER  
 The casket was brought in at 1:00  
 p.m. and opened at 1:15. Hundreds  
 filed past. The musical program was  
 organized by Roy Acuff. In addition  
 to the many Opry stars, The  
 Southwind Singers, a Negro gospel  
 quartet performed. This was the  
 first time something of this nature  
 had occurred in Alabama.  
 At 2:30 the doors closed."

**FOOTAGE FADES**

**BLACK**