

EIGHT SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF HANK WILLIAMS

Screenplay by

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Draft Script

CREDITS

The camera opens tight on Hank Williams' face: cold, puffy, ghostly white.

In the background, a male quartet sings an off-key version of "I Saw the Light."

Hank wears his white double-breasted suit with black piping. His lips are pinched without expression. He says nothing.

The camera pulls back, revealing Hank Williams stretched out in his coffin. A wail is heard in the distance.

A floral arrangement in the shape of an open Bible stands at the head of the casket; a guitar-shaped arrangement at the foot. Between them is a large pillow of white carnations studded with quarter notes fashioned from gold foil.

Continuing to boom, the camera pulls away from Hank's body, over the stage and tilts to face the 3,000 mourners crammed into Montgomery's Municipal Auditorium.

It is January 4, 1953. Standing with their backs to the camera, the quintet continues to sing: Roy Acuff, Little Jimmy Dickens, Carl Smith, Ernest Tubb and Red Foley. Hank's band, The Drifting Cowboys, accompanies them.

The camera tracks through the quintet, over the casket and past the tearful faces of those who have played roles in Hank Williams' short life: his mother Lillian, his first wife, Audrey, and children, Randall and Lycrecia. In the second row are Billie Jean, his second wife, and Miss Ragland, the governess. Further back are friends and associates: Fred Rose, Lum York, Minnie Pearl, Ray Price, Jim Denny, Vic McAlpin, Faron Young, Nudie, Dudley LeBlanc, and Billy Walker.

But, mostly, the camera passes sad rows of simply-dressed people who have traveled hundreds of miles to pay homage to a man who they only knew by the sound of his voice.

OUTSIDE, a throng estimated at 20,000 persons crowds into the streets surrounding the red brick, neo-classic Auditorium. Two flatbed trucks of flowers wait the funeral procession. Perry Street is a sea of somberly dressed men and women.

Hank Williams' funeral was the largest single outpouring of public grief in Montgomery's history, equaled only by that for Martin Luther King fifteen years later.

END CREDITS

FADE TO A TITLE READING:

THE HONKY TONKS

Spring, 1945

INT. CLUB 31 - NIGHT

HANK WILLIAMS, 21-years-old and in the full prime of his life, whips out a long leg, hunches over and sets into "Honky-Tonkin'." He looks awkward and gangling, like a good meal and a little love would do him. His voice cuts through the room like a buzz saw through new pine:

"Just come to see me baby, and
bring along some dough, and we'll
go honky-tonkin'..."

Hank wears a western shirt with a double-breasted weskit, a Cattleman hat over his forehead, cowboy slacks and boots. The "Drifting Cowboys" wear whatever they want. DON HELMS plays steel guitar. LUM YORK, the bass player who doubles as a comedian, wears polkadot makeup, a blacked-out tooth and pants cut from a potato sack.

Club 31 was a roadhouse on U.S. 31, the two-lane blacktop which leads south from Montgomery toward the rural Alabama towns where Hank Williams was born and raised. It was one of those honky-tonks where, Don Helms later said, "they sweep out the eyeballs with the glass in the morning."

The room is stripped to the essentials: walls, tables, bar, stage. Everything else has been broken in weekly brawls.

The crowd is an unstable mixture of hillbillies, factory workers and servicemen from nearby Maxwell Air Force Base. Wartime tarts rub elbows with roughhewn country women in print dresses.

Hank's wife, AUDREY, 22, takes tickets at the door. Attractive, but not beautiful. Her shoulder-length auburn hair gives Audrey a distinctive appearance -- as does her dress: a blouse and vest, jodhpur breeches and cowboy boots.

A steady stream of customers pass in and out of the club.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLUB 31 - NIGHT

A group of young bucks cluster around their cars, pouring their Co'-Colas on the ground. One young man then assists the others, refilling their Coke bottles from a "spot bottle" of bootleg whiskey.

Lownes County, like most of Alabama, was legally dry -- a fact which raised Southern manhood to rare heights of resourcefulness.

CUT TO:

INT. CLUB 31 - NIGHT

The crowd is getting "ripe." The band members exchange nervous glances.

But not Hank. Hitting the second stanza of "Honky-Tonkin'," he juts his right shoulder out and wobbles his knees back and forth. His thin, angular face ripples with an emotional wail.

These are not unconscious mannerisms. Hank knows exactly what he's doing: he's playing to the ladies. He lays those lonesome brown eyes on each woman as if she's the only one in the room.

The effect is not lost on the women in the audience -- nor on their husbands and dates.

One drunken LOCAL BRUISER, fed up with watching his wife moon over Hank, pulls himself to his feet, staggers over to the stage and calls out:

LOCAL BRUISER

My wife listens to your goddam show
on the radjo every morning, and I
tol her if she listened to you
again I wuz gonna hit her right
square upside the head.

The Drifting Cowboys stop playing. Lum pulls a blackjack out of his baggy pants. Don Helms tucks his glasses into his shirt pocket.

Hank picks a Coke off an upright speaker, takes a swig (his grimace indicates it contains more than soda pop), and turns to the drunk:

HANK

Well, boy, why don't ya just turn
it off? That's why they put knobs
on the thang.

LOCAL BRUISER

Come to think about it, I'ma gonna
beat the shit outa you rat now.

The bruiser charges toward Hank. The Drifting Cowboys, packing their instruments, head toward the rear exit.

Hank defends himself the only way possible -- with his guitar. The Local Bruiser catches a Sunburst right square in the face as the club breaks into bedlam.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALABAMA ROAD - NIGHT

Hank and Audrey's 1939 grey Chevy makes its way down the dark country roads toward Montgomery. Lum's bass protrudes from the trunk. The old car slows down, sputters and starts up again.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The occupants rock with the car. Hank is slouched in the rear seat with Audrey and Lum. Don Helms is at the wheel.

The Bailey Brothers sing "The Sweetest Gift" over the static-filled radio. The jerking car near spills the whiskey from the bottle cradled between Hank's legs.

HANK

Damn, Shag. What all was that?

DON HELMS

Jus be happy if this heap makes it at all, Hank.

HANK

Where we goin' this weekend?

AUDREY

'Round home. Andulusia, Enterprise, Camden.

HANK

Good folks in Andulusia. Momma always booked me there. Play for them folks all night. Not like these boys back here. They don't come to listen, they come to fight.

Hank slips his hat off, cradles his head against Audrey's shoulder and tries to sleep.

DON HELMS

Don't worry. Won't be long we'll
see the light from the Montgomery
beacon. Then we'll know we'll make
it.

CUT TO:

EXT. LILLY'S BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

The Drifting Cowboys straggle into Lilly's two-story wood-frame house on Katoma Street in downtown Montgomery.

CUT TO:

INT. LILLY'S BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

The band members drag-ass down the hallway. The air smells of musty wood, yellowed wallpaper and cheap perfume. A young soldier, saying goodnight to a "girlfriend," steps out of a room and passes them.

Hank, Audrey and various Cowboys stayed at Lilly's until they moved to Shreveport in 1948. The boarding house was also home base for a number of single girls without visible means of support. The War brought servicemen to Montgomery, and with the servicemen came indigent girls from outlying communities. On a single night in 1945, the police picked up girls for prostitution in downtown Montgomery. Not coincidentally, Lilly's boarding house was down the block from The Jefferson Davis, Montgomery's largest hotel.

LILLIAN STONE, 47, standing in the black dress she wore all her life, waits in the hall for her son. Mrs. Stone stood weighed 200 pounds and was, by the most generous accounts, decisive, tough-talking and high-tempered. "She had a strong punch and would lay you out just like a man," Lum York recalls.

LILLIAN

(ignoring others)

Hiram.

Hank embraces her.

HANK

Momma.

LILLIAN

Where's your gui-tar?

HANK

Lost it again, Momma.

Hank, tired and drunk, heads for his room. The Drifting Cowboys file into another room as Lilly corners Audrey:

LILLIAN
How much did you get?

AUDREY
Fifty-five bucks.

LILLIAN
Where is it?

CUT TO:

INT. HANK AND AUDREY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hank removes the .38 he wore to the honky-tonks from his waistband and sets it on the walnut dresser. He pulls off his boots, unbuttons his shirt and plops down on the bed.

Snapshots of Lilly and other relatives stand on the dresser next to Hank's pistol. Two shotguns rest against the floral wallpaper.

Hank can hear Audrey and Lilly through the door:

AUDREY (O.S.)
I had to pay the boys.

LILLY (O.S.)
So?

AUDREY (O.S.)
Then Hank and me.

LILLY (O.S.)
Where's my boarding money?

AUDREY (O.S.)
You'll get it. Hank broke a guitar.
He has to get a new one.

LILLY (O.S.)
Where's Hiram? I'll ask him.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Don't bother him. He's got to be on
radio by six.

Lilly calls out in her sing-song "poor me" voice for Hank to overhear:

LILLY (O.S.)
 Hiram wouldn't do that to his
 Momma. I'll see him. I need the
 money tomorra.

AUDREY (O.S.)
 Don't be giving me that crap. You
 liquor him up so you can take his
 money.

LILLY (O.S.)
 Somebody has to look out for him.

AUDREY (O.S.)
 That's just what I'm doin.

There are sounds of footsteps as Lilly heads towards Hank's room and Audrey grabs her. Scuffling and fighting are heard outside the door. Hank pulls his pale white "Cattleman" cowboy hat over his eyes and drifts off to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. DOTHAN RADIO STUDIO - DAY

The local DOTHAN DJ sits at the oversized WAGF microphone with PEE WEE KING. The station's small second-floor studio gives them a panoramic view of Dothan, a sleepy peanut-farming town.

Pee Wee, 31, wears a grey-and-black double-breasted western suit and slicked down hair. MINNIE PEARL, 33, wearing a print dress, stands behind them.

DOTHAN D.J.
 (obsequious)
 Again, we'uns want to thank Pee Wee King for takin' tahm out of his busy schedule to drop by WAGF, the Voice of Southeast Alabama, to chew a few words with us. Pee Wee and his Golden West Cowboys will be with the Camel Caravan gang over at the Arm'ry tonight at 8 o'clock. Thank ya again, Pee Wee.

PEE WEE KING
 Anytime, Riley. It's my pleasure and honor to be entertainin' you folks in Dothan and hope to enjoy you'all in person tonight.

DOTHAN D.J.

Along with Pee Wee will be
appearin' Becky Barkly singin' her
new song, "My Cowboy's Riding Now
for Uncle Sam" and also a gal known
well to all you folks, "The Gossip
of Grinder's Switch," Cousin Minnie
Pearl.

Pee Wee gets up and walks off as Minnie takes his seat by the
mike.

MINNIE PEARL

How-dee!

DOTHAN D.J.

How's thangs in Grinder's Switch,
Minnie?

CUT TO:

INT. DOTHAN STATION CORRIDOR - DAY

Pee Wee walks out of the studio and runs into Hank and Audrey
waiting in the narrow corridor. Hank, wearing an oversized
double-breasted brown suit, boots and a Stetson, gets up off
his haunches as Pee Wee approaches.

Minnie Pearl's voice is heard in the background:

MINNIE PEARL (O.S.)

Thangs hain't so well at the
Switch, Riley. Uncle Nabob has done
takin' hisself plumb sick and sez
he hain't a-gonna till no land no
more. He jus wants to dis-till
it...

Hank approaches Pee Wee King:

HANK

King?

PEE WEE KING

Howdy, Hank. What brings you here?

HANK

Me an' the boys playing a
schoolhouse in Slocumb. Got some
new songs here, King, thought you
might take a listen.

PEE WEE KING

You know that poem you wuz playing
in Montgomery, "Waitin' for the Day
Peace'll Come"?

(Hank nods)

I've been thinkin'. Maybe Becky
could use that.

HANK

If you want it, King, it's yours.
Take it. You can be co-writer.

PEE WEE KING

Can't do that, Hank. Got to make it
legal. Make it for "one dollar and
other considerations."

HANK

Not a buck, King. Can't you make it
a little more?

Minnie steps out of the studio and walks up to them.

PEE WEE KING

Minnie, you know Hank Williams?

Minnie Pearl, off-mike, drops her exaggerated accent and
becomes plain old Sarah Cooley, graduate of Ward-Belmont
College.

MINNIE PEARL

No, but I've heard his name
hereabouts.

PEE WEE KING

This here's Hank and his wife
Audrey.

Hank, in awe of no one, makes a polite introduction. Audrey's
eyes reflect a different reaction: she is greatly impressed
by those with more, power or "culture."

HANK

Pleased to meet you, Miz Pearl.

AUDREY

How you feeling?

MINNIE PEARL

Not so good. Got the worse kind of
headache.

AUDREY

Let's go to the drugstore and get
some 'monia.

Audrey and Minnie walk off and Hank turns back to Pee Wee:

HANK

I'll tell you, King, you make it
ten bucks and I know a boy who can
get us some Southern Comfort.

CUT TO:

EXT. SLOCOMB SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

During the day the white, tin-roofed one-room building serves
as a classroom for grades 1-12; during the evenings it's the
social center for eastern Geneva County.

Fifty cars, trucks and pick-ups are parked along the red-
dirt road. A sandwich sign in front of the schoolhouse reads:
"Hank Williams Tonight."

CUT TO:

INT. SLOCOMB SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

The thirty pew-like rows of seats are crowded with all manner
of country folk: from plain-faced women in gingham dresses to
obese "good ol' boy" caricatures in their Sunday-go-to-
meetin's.

Hank, on stage with the Cowboys, wears a bright hand-painted
tie to offset his somber double-breasted suit. Hank preferred
double breasted suits with padded shoulders -- in fashion or
not -- because they filled out his spindle-shanked frame. His
tie is slightly off-center.

Audrey, dressed in a fringed cowgirl outfit, stands behind
Hank. Lum York, wearing black-face and baggy pants, stands by
Hank, who plays the straightman.

No microphone is needed: every word echoes through the small
room.

LUM YORK

(shuffling)

Whys, Mistuh Hank, you don' beleeb
in dose ghosts?

Hank is a seasoned stage performer. He's been playing
churches, schoolhouses, bus stops and honky-tonks since he
was fifteen.

He knows all the ways to manipulate crowds, when to evoke laughter or tears, when to set their heels a- clicking. In fact, he feels more at home on stage than anyplace else.

HANK

Why no, Rasmus, I don't.

LUM YORK

Missus Cholly's grand-daddy he
ceaseded and become a ghost an goes-
a thump-thumpin' all ober de house.

Hank points to the guitar behind Lum:

HANK

Rasmus, hand me that guitar.

Don Helms motions to Hank as Lum turns around to pick up the guitar. When Lum turns back, Hank is gone.

Hank crouches behind the podium and calls out:

HANK

What was you sayin' about ghosts,
Rasmus?

Lum, confused, looks from side-to-side:

LUM YORK

Mistuh Hank? Mistuh Hank?

HANK

I'm right here, Rasmus, hand me
that guitar.

Lum extends the guitar toward the thin air. When his hand accidentally passes over the strings, the guitar player picks a loud twang.

HANK

(angry)

I didn't say play, Rasmus! I said
give it here.

Lum rolls his eyeballs in mock fright as the audience cracks up. Audrey, standing in the background, cringes. She thinks Hank and Lum's black-face routine is "low-toned."

LUM YORK

Oh, Lawdy, Lawdy.

Lum drops the guitar and dashes off to the amusement of everyone. Hank stands up, walks around the podium, picks up the guitar and hits an opening chord.

Lum walks back to his bass as Hank motions for the crowd to give him a hand. They do, and Lum tips his hat in appreciation.

Hank hits the second chord and the band goes directly into "Lost Highway":

"I'm a rolling stone, All alone and
lost, For a life of sin I have paid
the cost. When I pass by people
say, Just another guy on the lost
highway."

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

FRED ROSE

Fall, 1946

EXT. WSM BUILDING - DAY

Hank and Audrey enter the old WSM building in Nashville.

CUT TO:

INT. ACUFF-ROSE HALLWAY - DAY

Guitar case in hand, Hank, wearing a black suit and white Fedora, waits as Audrey knocks on a door reading "Acuff-Rose, Music Publishers."

Acuff-Rose is now a powerful music conglomerate, but in 1946 it was a small one-room office (preserved, intact, in the company's Franklin Road office). Acuff-Rose had been founded four years earlier by Fred Rose, a Tin Pan Alley songwriter from Indiana, and Roy Acuff, a Grand Ole Opry regular. In Acuff-Rose may have been small, but it was the only music publisher south of the Mason-Dixon line, and the only place for an itinerant songwriter like Hank Williams to sell his material professionally.

Audrey knocks again. There's no answer.

FRED ROSE and WESLEY ROSE, ping-pong paddles in hand, walk down the hall toward Hank and Audrey.

Fred Rose, 48, balding, wears thick glasses, loose trousers and striped suspenders. Ten years before Rose, composer of "Red Hot Mama," was broke, alcoholic and suicidal when he became a devout Christian Scientist. Hard times brought him to Nashville and, before he died in 1954, Rose had in large measure determined the course of modern country music. His son Wesley, 28, pudgy with black hair and mustache, kept the books for his father's small company.

AUDREY
Mr. Rose?

FRED
Yes?

AUDREY
This is my husband Hank Williams.
We're from Montgomery. He's a
songwriter and would like to sing
some songs for you.

FRED
(awkward)
Well...
(to Wes)
Do we have the time?

WES
Except for lunch.

FRED
(acquiesces)
Okay. Sure, why not?

Fred tucks his paddle under his arm and, after some fumbling,
unlocks the office door and opens it.

CUT TO:

INT. ACUFF-ROSE OFFICE - DAY

Two metal desks face each other in the rectangular office.
Several framed sheet music covers hang on the pine-paneled
walls.

Hank, finishing a song, sets down his guitar and looks across
at Fred Rose, who sits against the edge of his desk. Fred,
extremely near-sighted, strains to see him through his
glasses.

AUDREY
(breaking the silence)
Hank doesn't just sang sad songs.

Fred stands and takes a short step toward Hank:

FRED
How old are you, son?

HANK
Twenty-two.

FRED
How long you been playing?

HANK
You mean regular?
(Fred nods)
'Bout seven years, I reckon.

AUDREY
He plays WASF in Montgomery.

FRED
Who taught you to sing?

HANK
My mama. And a nigger name of Tee-Tot.

FRED
Roy mentioned you once. Can you set this music down?

HANK
You mean write music?
(Fred nods)
No. But I got more songs.
(no response)
I do a song like Acuff...

FRED
Well, we're interested in the gospel songs. We're lookin' for something for Molly O'Day.
(a beat)
Look, why don't we just take these songs you've got now, what is it? Six of them?
(Hank beams)
I can't promise Molly'll cut any of them, but I won't cheat you either. We'll get you a regular contract and if this works out, maybe we could use some more songs.

CUT TO:

INT. LILLY'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

It's about noon -- but you couldn't tell by looking at Hank and the Drifting Cowboys. They've been on the road two weeks; each seems to stagger out of the car in a different direction.

The '39 Chevy has been replaced by a used grey Chrysler; otherwise little has changed for Hank and his Drifting Cowboys.

They lug their equipment up the wood steps.

CUT TO:

INT. LILLY'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Lilly's boarding house clan sits around the dining room table. Several girls, Hank's WATERHEAD COUSIN and the ever-silent MR. STONE sit with Hank, Audrey and the boys.

There's no decorum here. Diners get up or sit down as they wish. The Cowboys bump elbows reaching across the table for bowls of food.

Hank dumps a quarter bottle of ketchup over an over-cooked piece of meat and starts to eat. Dots of ketchup spot his wrinkled, sweat-stained white shirt. Ernest Tubb sings "Rainbow at Midnight" over the old box radio.

Audrey counts a wrinkled stack of bills:

AUDREY

You did fifteen shows and come home
with two hundred and twenty
dollars?

There's a silence around the table. SAMMY PRUETT, now one of the Drifting Cowboys, offers:

SAMMY PRUETT

We had to buy some clothes.

AUDREY

(to Sammy)

How dare you bring him home in this
condition?

Sammy says nothing. Hank, a little pie-eyed, tries to ignore what's going on around him.

AUDREY

And you keep telling me about the
money we'll be making. You can't
even support yourself.

Hank stands up crookedly (a childhood back injury had permanently ruined his posture), fishes through his pockets and comes up with a wrinkled twenty dollar bill. He drops it on the table and goes back to his ketchup.

AUDREY
Big screwy deal.
(to Cowboys)
How much you boys hid for him?

Lilly, watching from across the room, interjects:

LILLIAN
Don't talk to my son that way. He
ain't feeling good.

AUDREY
(to Lilly)
You shut up. You only fight with
him.

LILLIAN
I've been fighting with him longer
than you have.

Hank turns to his mother:

HANK
Shut up, Momma. Can't you see me
an' Audrey's fightin'?

AUDREY
Yeah.

LILLIAN
(holding her heart)
Oh, Hiram, how dare...

HANK
Shut up.
(to Audrey)
You too.

The Cowboys, knowing what comes next, start to silently rise
and file out of the dining room.

AUDREY
Hank Williams! You ungrateful
S.O.B!

Audrey grabs a pan of collard greens and chucks them across
the table at Hank. She rushes around the table and starts to
beat him about the head.

Hank stands and swings wildly back. If he wasn't drunk, he
might land some of his blows. But then, if he wasn't drunk,
he wouldn't have the guts to stand up against Audrey either.

They fight their way out of the dining room and into the small water closet at the end of the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. WATER CLOSET - DAY

The 4 x 5 cubicle contains only an old-fashioned flush toilet. Bits of poems and songs are scribbled on the faded wallpaper.

Hank and Audrey are fought out. Crying, Hank wraps his arms around her like a child.

HANK

Audie, why you treat me this way?

Tears come to Audrey's eyes as she looks at Hank's pleading face. She starts to kiss him:

AUDREY

I'm sorry, darling. I really am.

HANK

I've been in that goddamn car so long and we broke down and my back hurts and I had to pay the boys and nobody...

AUDREY

That's alright, baby.

HANK

I'll do better next time. I just need a little lovin'.

AUDREY

I love you, Hank. I truly do.

Pulling him tighter, Audrey gives Hank a long, sexual kiss.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN FIELD - DAY

Five hunters walk through an open field in the lush, rolling pine-covered hills north of Montgomery.

Hank, wearing a baseball cap, flannel shirt and cowboy slacks, carries a bolt-action shotgun slung on his arm. Sammy Pruett and TILMAN, a good old boy, walk along side him. Ahead, two other GOOD OLD BOYS talk as they walk.

Hank sings a chorus from a spiritual as he goes:

"Are you ready to meet the Angel of Death?"

He turns to Sammy:

HANK

What's the matter, boy? Can't you carry a tune?

It didn't matter that Sammy was older than Hank: everyone was "boy" or "son" to him -- everyone, that is, except Fred Rose, who he came to call "Pappy."

SAMMY PRUETT

I didn't come to sing, I came to shoot.

HANK

I hope you shoot better'n you sing.

One of the Good Old Boys calls back:

GOOD OLD BOY #1

I thank one of the dogs done spotted hisself sumpin'.

They all stop.

GOOD OLD BOY #2

Quail.

TILMAN

That's no quail dog, that's a coon dog.

As Tilman speaks, a flock of quail fly from the brush. They aim and fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. RESTING SPOT - DAY

They sit around the deserted share-cropper's cabin where the car is parked. A string of quail hangs from the Chrysler's door handle.

Tilman sits on the steps, drinking a Coke, discoursing on life in general.

Hank, absorbed in his own thoughts, sits crouched beside the car. A loner by nature, Hank was self-assured around men -- either cocksure -- almost arrogant -- or totally withdrawn. If he wanted to talk, the others would listen; if he didn't, nobody could make him.

"A lot of people didn't like Hank as a person," recalled Lum York. "You had to be around him to understand him."

As Tilman and the others talk, Hank takes a scrap of paper from his pocket, writes something on it, and tucks it away.

TILMAN

...that was like that crazy Irma-Lee Presswood, daughter of one of those Presswoods in Covington County by Gantt Lake where the bass are like to jump in the boat. You know those people, Hank?

(no answer)

Well, Irma-Lee had the pilot light turned up all the time. She could fling herself a cravin' on jus' about anythang whut could get itself in a male pair of pants. Jus' go walkin' like a young cat hound by the saw- mill ev'ry day. Got to the point where her daddy had to do something -- or he's gonna have hisself some new inlaws. So he sent her off to New Or'lons where she went to a doctor, but it wasn't no reg'lar doctor...

GOOD OLD BOY #1

A city doctor?

TILMAN

No, worse. It was one of those pointy- head doctors.

GOOD OLD BOY #1

Shit, I never seen a reg'lar doctor.

GOOD OLD BOY #2

That's why you're still alive.

TILMAN

So this New Or'lons doctor said she was sick in the head. She was sick aw-right, but it weren't in the head...

Hank, irritated about something, stands and walks over:

HANK

(interrupting)

You boys gonna sit and chew all
afternoon or are you gonna go out
and get something to drink?

They look at each other: they had instructions not to bring
along any booze.

HANK

Well?

TILMAN

I got me a Co-Cola.

HANK

Tilman, I ain't know'd you to ever
drink no Co-Cola.

Sammy offers an explanation for the group:

SAMMY PRUETT

You know how you get when you get
to drinking, Hank. Go two, three
days, sit with your paw, then have
to go to the hospital to dry out
and Miss Audrey says we're going to
Nashville...

HANK

Did Audrey tell you not to bring
any beer?

SAMMY PRUETT

She'an your mama hide my ass if you
come back lickered up, Harm. You
gonna cut those records. You don't
want to screw that up, do you?

HANK

(angry)

Are you telling me what to do,
Sammy?

SAMMY PRUETT

(cowed)

No, Hank.

Hank looks accusingly at the others. They mumble denials: "we
ain't telling you nothing, Hank."

HANK

I just wanted to make sure.

GOOD OLD BOY #2
(volunteers)
Want us to get some beer, Hank?

HANK
Nope. We're goin' up to Nashville
to cut some sides tomorrow.
(heads toward car)
But don't tell me what I can't do.
I just don't want a drink.

CUT TO:

EXT. LILLY'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Hank and Audrey's Chrysler, packed and ready to go, waits on Katoma Street.

Hank, wearing a white double-breasted suit and Stetson, remembers something and crawls out of the back seat:

HANK
I forgot to say goodbye to Momma.

CUT TO:

INT. LILLY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Hank enters his mother's bedroom. Lilly, wreathed in her black sack dress, is stretched out on the bed.

LILLIAN
I wuz wonderin' if my son cared
enough to say goodbye to his Momma.

HANK
You feelin' aw-right, Momma?

LILLIAN
My heart's real weak-like.

Hank sits on the bed beside her:

HANK
Don't worry. You're aw-right. Mr.
Stone will look after you.

LILLIAN
You don't forget your Momma when
you're gone, do you Hiram?

HANK

No, Momma. You don't have to worry.
It won't be long you won't have to
take in no laundry or boarders, you
won't have to move again. I'm gonna
be a big singer, Momma. The world's
jus' about lonesome enough for
Hank. Remember, every time you hear
me sing on the radio or on a
record, I'm singing every song for
you.

Hank's feelings for his mother are so confused that he has no
idea whether he is lying or telling the truth.

CUT TO:

INT. FRED ROSE'S ATTIC - DAY

Fred Rose moved a piano into his attic and used it as a
"studio." Fred could sit here alone by the hour, mull over
songs, or chew the fat with writers. It was here that many of
the Hank Williams songs were "written."

Fred sits on the piano bench. Hank walks around pulling
various scraps of paper out of his many arrow-darted western
pockets.

He places seven or eight pieces of paper on the piano top:

HANK

I got some po'ems here, Pappy, I
ain't too sure of. Some of them
I've been singing, and they do work
pratty well.

FRED

Play a little something. Let's see
how it sounds.

Hank picks up the battered studio guitar and strums a few
bars.

FRED

We've got the studio all morning
tomorrow and I'd like to work out a
few more songs.

HANK

(walking around)
"I just don't like this kind of
livin', When I..."
(starts over)
(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)
 "I just don't like this kind of
 livin', Where you do all the takin'
 and I do all the givin'..."

Fred plays a few basic chords on the piano. Hank stops; he has something else on his mind. He picks up one of the scraps of paper off the piano:

HANK
 (reading)
 What do you think of this, Pappy?
 "Did you ever see a robin weep when
 the leaves turn to fly, I'm so
 lonesome I could die. I could cry."
 (a beat)
 Do you think anybody would
 understand that, Pappy?

A sad look passes over Fred's face.

FRED
 I think so, Hank.
 (plays piano)
 You got some more, Hank?

TIMECUT: Fred sits on the couch thinking. Hank strums the Gibson on the piano bench. There is a knock on the door.

FRED
 Who is it?

ROY ACUFF
 Roy.

FRED
 Come on in.

Roy Acuff, wearing a checkered coat and a tie, walks in flashing the already famous Acuff smile.

ROY ACUFF
 Howdy, Fred, Hank. I was driving by
 so I thought I'd come in. Lurleen
 said it was aw-right to come on up.

Fred and Roy may be good musicians, but actors they're not. Roy has "dropped by" by pre-arrangement.

FRED
 Hank and I were working on some
 material we might cut tomorrow.

ROY
 Don't let me interrupt.

FRED

No, I'd like you to hear some of this. All right, Hank?

HANK

(flattered)

Sure.

Hank slouches on the sofa with his guitar as Fred steps over to the piano. After a few false starts, they begin a slow version of "Move It On Over":

"Came in last night half past ten,
That baby of mine wouldn't let me
in, So move it on over..."

Before long, Acuff and Williams start swapping songs. When Hank does a couple lines from "Wabash Cannonball," Roy returns with "Honky-Tonkin." Hank turns to "Great Speckled Bird," and Acuff follows with a line from "Move It On Over."

The session closes with Fred and Hank doing a final run-through of "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry":

"Did you ever hear a robin weep,
When leaves begin to die, That
means I've lost the will to live,
I'm so lonesome I could cry."

As Hank finishes, alone and unaccompanied, tears drop from his cheeks, spattering against the pale varnish of his Gibson Sunburst. Fred and Roy watch silently, their emotions a mixture of pity and awe.

Hank finishes, wipes the tears from his cheeks, looks up and says unemotionally:

HANK

Well, whatja think?

CUT TO:

EXT. FRED ROSE'S HOUSE - DAY

Fred and Roy wave as Hank drives off in Fred turns to walk Roy back to his car:

ROY ACUFF

That's a good boy, Fred. You gotta look out for him.

FRED

I'd like to get him on one of the big radio shows.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

The Barn Dance, the Jamboree, maybe even the Hayride. The Opry won't touch him.

ROY ACUFF

Cause of the drinkin' problem?

FRED

Yeah. The boy's already got himself a real bad reputation. Worse than yours, boy.

ACUFF

(laughs)

I got a problem, but I ain't got a reputation. There's a difference.

FRED

He's been a drunk since he was about fifteen. Can't seem to moderate himself. Maybe if he gets a regular spot, he'll straighten out.

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

THE LOUISIANA HAYRIDE

Fall, 1948

EXT. DOWNTOWN SHREVEPORT - DAY

Cleveland and Boston are playing the third game of the World Series on the car radio. One billboard promotes the Truman/Barkley ticket. Another extolls the merits of Gov. Earl Long.

They pull up in front of the Commercial National Bank Building, which housed the KWKH studios. Hank gets out of the car and, in a characteristic mannerism, pops his shoulders up and down before he ambles toward the door. Audrey follows.

CUT TO:

INT. KWKH STUDIOS - DAY

Hank walks into the studio offices and looks around. A DJ broadcasts live through a pane of glass. The SECRETARY catches Hank's attention:

SECRETARY

Can I help you?

HANK

I'd like to speak to Henry Clay.

The Secretary's tone of voice indicates that Mr. Clay is not the sort of man to speak to any hillbilly who wanders in off the street:

SECRETARY

Do you have an appointment?

HANK

My name's Hank Williams. I record for M-G-M Records. I've come from Montgomery to play on the Hayride.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - EVENING

A long line stretches around Shreveport's Municipal Memorial Auditorium, a massive red-brick "WPA Deco" structure.

It's Saturday night and they've come from miles around to attend the Louisiana Hayride, country music's second largest live radio show. Each week KWKH, a 50,000-watt clear channel station, broadcast the Hayride live to every community from San Antonio to Birmingham.

The Hayride liked to call itself "The Cradle of the Stars." The big boys at WSM's Grand Ole Opry just referred to it as "the farm club." In either case, there's no doubt that many of country music's biggest stars got their start as regulars on the Hayride: Jim Reeves, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Johnny Horton, Faron Young, Red Souvine, Webb Pierce, Lefty Frizzell, George Jones, David Houston, Kitty Wells -- and Hank Williams.

And at 30¢ a seat, there was no hotter ticket in Shreveport on a Saturday night.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUISIANA HAYRIDE - NIGHT

Two thousand hillbilly fans fill the floor and double balconies of the Municipal Auditorium. Shreveport is only a "long spit" from Texas, and the Louisiana audience sports more cowboy hats and boots than those in Alabama.

On stage, a painted canvas backdrop bears the legend: "KWKH Louisiana Hayride KWKH." The backdrop depicts a pastoral scene: a red barn, a water pump, several trees, and a large-uttered cow. A large sign advertising JAX Beer (that segment's sponsor) hangs above the performer's heads.

Unlike the Opry, the Hayride did not have individual hosts for each sponsor segment. The announcer would bring each act for one song twice in the course of the show. If the act was encored, it could do a second number. Since the attraction of the Hayride was "exposure," not money, performers competed fiercely for their encores.

An air of anticipation fills the auditorium: this is the big time.

On stage, the Bailes Brothers conclude their best-known song, "Dust on the Bible." The Bailes, from West Virginia, came from a long tradition of rock-ribbed bluegrass groups such as the Monroe Brothers, the Delmore Brothers and the Blue Sky Boys. Their style was straight-forward, sentimental and sacred in tone. When Hank Williams came to Shreveport, the Bailes Brothers were the biggest act on the Hayride; today they are remembered only by folk archivists.

HORACE LOGAN, the announcer, helps the crowd give the Bailes Brothers a hand as they walk off. The Jax Beer advertisement is raised and replaced by one for Light Crust Flour.

HORACE LOGAN

The Bailes Brothers ladies and gentlemen, Johnny, Walter and Homer.

(watches advertisement)

Now to begin the Light Crust Flour segment of the Louisiana Hayride, we'd like to bring out a Montgomery boy who's made quite a hit since coming to Shreveport. It's that "Lovesick Blues" boy and his Drifting Cowboys. And right now he's got himself a big hit on his hands for M-G-M records, so come on out here Hank Williams and "Move It On Over!"

The Drifting Cowboys assume their positions as Logan speaks. Don Helms has left the group and BOB McNETT, a Pennsylvania boy, has replaced Pruett at lead guitar. Lum York still wears his baggy pants and plays bass fiddle.

The Cowboys now wear matching brown western outfits. Audrey is not on stage.

There's a short pause, and Hank, dressed in a flashy white suit and hat, ambles out on stage, swinging his guitar like a club along side him. He wears a bright, hand-painted tie and black boots with large red-and-yellow eagles stitched across the front.

He stops beside the painted cow, pretends to milk one of her nipples, then dashes for the large KWKH mike. The audience howls.

Before the audience stops laughing, before he even reaches the microphone, Hank bursts into the opening chords of "Move It On Over." The song bears little resemblance to the slow ballad Hank played in Fred's attic. It is now an up-beat, hard-driving honky-tonk song: "She told me not to play around, But I done let the deal go down, So pack it on over, tote it on over, Move over nice dog, 'cause a bad dog's movin' in."

The audience goes wild. Hank is rocking the huge auditorium in the same way he rocked the roadhouses of South Alabama.

Whether the crowd at the Hayride realized it or not, they were watching the first wave of a music revolution: honky-tonk style had gone big time. The contrast between Hank and the Bailes Brothers could not be more radical: Hank hunches over the mike, popping his shoulder up and down and wobbles his skinny legs back and forth.

Allen Rankin, a Montgomery columnist, described it shortly after Hank's death: "Hank didn't have much of a personality except when he was singing. He'd come slopping and slouching out on stage, but when he picked up the guitar and started to sing, it was like a charge of electricity had gone through him. He became three feet taller. He had a voice that sent shivers up your spine and made the hair rise on your neck with a thrill."

Within eight years, the Hank Williams' style, emulated by singers like Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis would sweep the country under the name of "rock and roll."

The audience cheers and cheers for more. Hank smiles and looks from side to side. He loves it.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF SHREVEPORT - DAY

Hank, his brown Stetson set back against his head, walks into the bank. The sleeves of his blue western shirt are rolled up; it has a yellow yoke with red-and-blue embroidered flowers.

INT. BANK - DAY

Hank steps over to a young TELLER and hands her a check:

HANK
I'd like to cash this, honey.

She looks at the check, then back at Hank, discombobulated: Hank already has quite a reputation in the Shreveport area.

TELLER
(bashful)
I'll haff to get this okayed, Mr.
Williams.

The cashier has the check approved by her boss and returns.

HANK
I'd like that in one dollar bills,
if you don't mind.

TELLER
(looks at check)
I don't think we carry that many
singles, Mr. Williams.

HANK
That's aw-right. I'll wait. How
long will it take?

TELLER
I reckon we could haff it by this
afternoon.

Hank nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. BANK - DAY

Later that day, Hank walks out of the bank with a small cloth bag and throws it into the front seat of his shiny 1949 Packard. The top of the dark blue limousine is mounted with two loudspeakers. The Cowboys will now be able to travel in "comfort" and broadcast their shows as they go.

Hank drives away.

CUT TO:

EXT. MODICA STREET HOUSE - DAY

The blue Packard is parked outside Hank and Audrey's house on Modica Street in Bossier City, Shreveport's twin city to the east. Hank has moved twice since coming to Shreveport four months before; as his fortunes have improved, so have his living conditions. The Modica house is a modest three-bedroom ranch home with yellow awnings.

CUT TO:

INT. MODICA HOUSE - DAY

Hank empties the cloth bank bag and spreads the dollar bills -
- thousands of them -- across the living room floor. The room
is decorated with department store furniture with a few
western touches: a sunset landscape, two mounted shotguns.

HANK
(calling)
Audie, Audie!

Audrey, wearing a plaid skirt and western shirt with a floral
yoke, enters and looks around in amazement:

AUDREY
Hiram, what are you doing?

Hank smiles like a naughty child:

HANK
I got my first check for "Move It
On Over."
(looks around room)
Five thousand one hundred and
seventy dollars.
(kisses her)

AUDREY
All in one dollar bills?

HANK
I just wanted to see what it looked
like, all at one time.

Lycrecia, hearing the commotion, walks in.

LYCRECIA
What's all this?

Hank teasingly takes his step-daughter by the shoulder, wraps
his skinny arm around her neck and rubs his knuckles on the
top of her head.

HANK
(teasing)
Hiya, Jughead. Whatja think?

LYCRECIA
(not amused)
Stop it, Hank! That hurts.

Hank sets Lycrecia free and she leaves the room, unimpressed
by the five thousand dollar bills.

But nothing can dampen Hank's feelings. He wraps his legs underneath him and squats on the floor in the middle of the money. He takes his Stetson off and throws it on a chair. His hair is visibly thinning.

HANK
(almost to himself)
I wish Momma was here, now.

He lets the money run through his fingers with child-like wonder. Then thinking of something, he looks up at Audrey and says seriously:

HANK
Why doesn't she ever call me Daddy?

AUDREY
Who?

HANK
Lycrecia. We've been married four years and she never has called me Daddy or Dad.

AUDREY
Gee, I don't know, Hank. I never thought of it that way. I'll tell her to start calling you "Dad."

HANK
(goes back to money)
No, no. Don't tell her anything.
Let her do as she wants.
(a beat)
I was jus' wonderin'.

CUT TO:

EXT. TEXARKANA - DAY

Hank's blue Packard, pulling a matching trailer, drives down Texarkana's "strip." The loudspeakers proclaim:

PACKARD LOUDSPEAKER
...Auditorium. That's Hank Williams, folks, the Lovesick Blues Boy, star of the Louisiana Hayride, and his Drifting Cowboys will be at the Arkansas High School Auditorium tonight at 8:00. Along with Hank will be the whole Hayride gang, including the Bailes Brothers, Johnny and Jack and Miss Kitty Wells.

(MORE)

PACKARD LOUDSPEAKER (CONT'D)
All for only 75¢ for adults, 35¢
for the kids. That's tonight at...

CUT TO:

INT. PACKARD - DAY

Bob McNett is at the wheel. Beside him, another of the Drifting Cowboys broadcasts over a hand mike.

Hank, Lum and another Cowboy are stretched out in the back seat. The limo has two radios; one on the dash, another on the back of the front seat. Each plays a different football game. The car is littered with the paraphernalia of boredom and traveling: comic books, candy bar wrappers and a couple of baseball mitts. M-G-M records are stacked in the rear window.

MCNETT
(driving)
I can't find Harvey Street.

Hank, hunched over his guitar, strums to himself:

HANK
"...lights all grow dim, And the
dark shadows creep, And when your
loved ones are gathered to weep..."

Lum points and calls out:

LUM YORK
There it is. KADO.

HANK
(looking up)
Pull over, boy.

McNett pulls to the curb.

BOB MCNETT
Shall we wait, Harm?

HANK
No, jus' go 'round broadcastin'
some more. I'm just gonna see this
ole boy and be out in fifteen
minutes.

Hank takes a 78 record out of the window and gets out of the car. He straightens his brown striped western suit and walks toward a two-story nondescript building. A folded copy of Billboard, tucked in a back pocket, flops against his "gimly-ass" as he walks.

He spots a liquor store, stops, goes back and enters.

CUT TO:

INT. KADO - DAY

BILLY BOB, KADO's afternoon DJ, sits at the broadcast desk as Hank enters. Moon Mullican's "Sweeter Than The Flowers" plays over the studio monitors.

A bottle of Dewar's Scotch sits on the counter next to the MGM 78 record.

BILLY BOB

Why thank you, Hank. Nice of you to stop on by.

HANK

How's the coon huntin' been this year, Billy Bob?

BILLY BOB

Didley-squat, but the pike's been just a jumpin' out on Texarkana Lake this year.

HANK

Then we gotta go.

BILLY BOB

I'll take Lydell's boat.
(interrupts)
Just a second.

"Sweeter Than The Flowers" reaches its saccharine conclusion and the DJ switches on the studio mike. Hank sits down beside him.

BILLY BOB

"Sweeter Than The Flowers," Moon Mullican on King Records number 673. Love that song. And it's available right through here, Radio Kay-do, K- A-D-O, the Voice of Ark-La-Tex. Now I've got a real special surprise for you folks that just happen to be listenin' in this afternoon. Hank Williams who has that big hit "Move It On Over" out on M-G-M, available through Radio Kay-do, jus' happen to walk into the studio to say hello.

(MORE)

BILLY BOB (CONT'D)

Hank, if for some ignorant reason
you hain't heard, will be playing
at the high school auditorium
tonight at 8:00. Hank, say hello to
the folks.

HANK

Howdy, friends and neighbors.
Pleasure to be with you Billy Bob
and the folks in Texarkana again.

BILLY BOB

Hank, I wanted to ask you about
that song you been singin' on the
Hayride ev'ry Saturday that's got
the folks all stirred up, "Lovesick
Blues." Is that the record you
brought by today?

HANK

No, Billy Bob, I've been so busy
playing the Hayride and going here
and there to entertain folks I
hain't taken time to put that
"Lovesick Blues" on record yet. But
I got a new one here, so new the
wax hain't even dry yet, called
"Mansion On The Hill," and me and
the boys plan to be singing it
tonight at the auditorium.

BILLY BOB

(picks up record)

We'll play it for the folks in just
a second, but I'll have to warn 'em
first that this is a brand new
record and we hain't got any copies
yet at Radio Kay-do, but when it
comes out, we'll be the first to
git it fer you...

CUT TO:

EXT. KADO - DAY

Hank walks out of the station and enters the waiting Packard.

CUT TO:

INT. PACKARD - DAY

They pull into traffic.

BOB MCNETT
Let's go to the ho-tel.

LUM YORK
I gotta git some real sleep.

HANK
(nods)
You know that bastid up there,
Billy Bob Cullum, what's the DJ
here, you know what that asshole
once told Henry Clay? He said,
"That Hank Williams, he won't be
such a big singer if it weren't for
all them sad and morbid songs he
sings." Well, look at this:
(pulls Billboard out of
pocket)
"Move It On Over" Number Four on
Billboard. Fuck him and the
President, too. What does he know?
He ain't worth the shot it'd take
to send him to Hell. Number four on
Billboard. People jus' like to spit
behind your back.
(a beat)
Lum, turn that radio over to Kay-do
and see if that prick's plugging
our show.

Hank, having said his piece, slouches back into the seat. His little tirade draws no response from the Cowboys: they've heard it all before.

CUT TO:

INT. FRED ROSE'S ATTIC - DAY

Hank slouches in his wrinkled white suit on Fred's sofa. He crosses one spindly leg over the other, flashing his new butterfly-emblazoned boots.

Fred takes a few steps, scratches his head and says:

FRED
It just ain't a hillbilly song,
Hank. It ain't your kind of song.
It's some Tin Pan Alley tune.

Hank pushes his hat back so Fred can see his eyes.

HANK

Look, Pappy, all I know is
ev'ryware I go folks ask me for
that goddamn "Lovesick Blues" and
ev'ry time I sing it on the Hayride
I get four or five encores. Hell, I
could throw my hat out on stage and
get an encore. You tell me I
shouldn't cut a song like that?

FRED

(in Yankee innocence)
But it ain't country. If you record
that song, Hank, I won't go in the
studio with you. You'll have to cut
it alone.

HANK

I may just do that.
(pause)
Did you talk to Stone?

FRED

About the Opry? I don't think it's
much use, Hank.

HANK

What do they want from me? I have
been fully straight the last five
months. Ask anybody in Shreveport.
I hain't had but four or five
drinks, I never missed a show, I
never did no cuttin' up 'cept the
one time I ran the curtain down on
the Bailes and ev'rybody know'd
that was a joke.

(pleading)

Pappy, I'll crawl on my belly from
Bossier City to be on the Opry.

FRED

I'll try again. Maybe we'll get a
guest slot.

HANK

Get me a chance. You know I kin
whup'em. I've been real good in
Shreveport. Even on the road. Just
ask somebody.

FRED

I know.

HANK

You do?

FRED

I talk to Henry Clay on the phone.

Hank takes his hat off and brushes his hair back.

HANK

(exonerated)

See, I tol' ya.

Fred notices something on the back of his head.

FRED

What you got on the back of your head?

HANK

(sensitive)

Don't joke about my hair.

FRED

(looks closer)

You got a big cut there, Hank.

HANK

(shakes his head)

Oh, it's that Audrey. She done conked me one. Took one of those lamp things and jus' conked me right square backside the head.

Fred goes to the piano bench and looks over some bits of paper Hank has laid out. Even though he is the only person beside Lilly Hank could confide in, Fred knows better than to pry into his life. If Hank wants some advice, he'll ask.

HANK

(awkward)

Maybe you can hep me, Pappy.

FRED

How?

Hank fumbles for the right words:

HANK

It's this music thing again. Audrey wants a music contract.

FRED

But she can't sing.

HANK

You know that, I know that, but try tellin' her. She'll jus' haul off and whop you one. She can make a feller's life pretty rough. She wants to sing with me on stage, on radio. You could get her a contract, Pappy. I'll pay for it.

FRED

I'll talk to Paul Kohn at Decca. He owes me a favor. Maybe we can work it out.

HANK

Now that she's pregnant, it don't make things any easier.

Fred turns around, startled. A boyish grin spreads across Hank's face.

FRED

Audrey's pregnant?

HANK

Yep.

FRED

How many months?

HANK

Four.

FRED

You never told me.

HANK

You never asked.

Fred, happy for Hank, walks over to him:

FRED

Congratulations, Hank.

Hank, blushing, stands as Fred takes both his hands.

FRED

You're gonna be a father, Hank. You finally made it.

HANK
 (bashful grin)
 Yep, been throwin' a lot of
 pitches, Pappy. Finally got one
 across the plate.

CUT TO:

EXT. KWKH STUDIOS - DAY

Hank's Packard and trailer are parked outside the eleven-story white Commercial National Bank Building at the corner of Market and Texas. In 1948, the KWKH studios were on the second floor.

INT. KWKH STUDIOS - DAY

The Louisiana Hayride section closes with an abbreviated recreation of the "Johnny Fair Show," Hank's morning radio show. The 15-minute morning radio show was a staple of southern life for over fifty years. The show's format was fixed by time-honored convention: it mattered little who was the host or sponsor, or what city it was broadcast from.

The large clock reads 6:15 inside the small broadcast studio. The red light flashes "On The Air."

The Drifting Cowboys, looking worn and tired, stand in front of an advertisement for Johnny Fair Syrup. Audrey, wearing a new cowgirl outfit, stands with them.

The SOUND ENGINEER signals Hank and he steps up to the mike and says:

HANK
 "When I die bury me deep,
 In a bucket of Johnny Fair
 From my head to my feet, Put a cold
 biscuit in each of my hands, And
 I'll sop my way to the Promised
 Land."

Hank speaks in his radio voice, a slow, friendly drawl:

HANK
 (continuing)
 Good mornin', friends and
 neighbors, this is the old Syrup
 Sopper Hank Williams for Johnny
 Fair. I hope you'all done et your
 biscuits this morning 'cause if you
 hain't, well, I'll talk about that
 later. First, let's start it off
 with a song.
 (MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

This here's a new tune I recorded for M-G-M records 'bout a po' feller who got a invitation. It's a sad, pathetic sort of little song and I hope you never have to go through anything like this. Me and the boys have to do it quite often. Boys, let's give 'em a little "Wedding Bells Will Never Ring For Me": "I have the invitation that you sent me, You wanted me to see you change your name, I couldn't stand to see you wed another, But dear I hope you're happy just the same."

As Hank wraps a shortened version of "Wedding Bells", the Cowboys burst into applause. Hank is a natural salesman. He was selling patent medicines from the back of a flat-bed truck when he was 14, and has been selling something or other ever since.

HANK

(back at the mike)

Why, thank ya very much. Those old wed-ding bells. The other morning me an' the Cowboys was on the road and I was watchin' Lum York, he's the short feller over here what plays the bass fiddle, I was watchin' Lum et his breakfast. And ol' Lum would take a biscuit right in his hand and then bore a big hole right in the middle of it with his thumb. Then he'd set that biscuit down and fill it up with that delicious Johnny Fair Syrup. It jus' looked so good I couldn't stop myself, and between us we et up all those biscuits -- and I can taste 'em yet. Um-mm. And sticks to yer bones, too. 'Specially when you're on the road so much like me and the boys. Tonight we'll be over at Rob's Place in Robstown, Texas. I know that's a mighty long spit from hereabouts, but if you've got any friends down that way, you might tell 'em Old Hank's coming down tonight to do some pickin' and singin'.

(looks at clock)

Lookin' up at that old clock, I can see it's time to move along.

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

Right now I'd like to bring out a young lady that can sing mighty fine -- and pretty too. I think you know who I'm talkin' about, Miss Audrey. Hello, Audrey.

Hank and the Cowboys applaud as Audrey joins Hank at the mike.

AUDREY

Howdy, Hank.

HANK

I think you folks know Audrey's my wife, but you may not know, she's also the mother of a big baby boy. That's right, me an' Audrey had a boy a couple weeks back and I'm mighty proud.

(the Cowboys applaud)

Audrey's gonna join me an' the boys to sing a tune I wrote a little while back. Some folks like to think I write this song for this one, or that song for that one, but I don't write 'em for anybody particular. I just write 'em to be writin' 'em. The title of it is "If You Mind Your Own Business You Won't Be Mindin' Mine":

Audrey and Hank crowd around the mike. Fred is right: Audrey's singing is godawful. Her timing is wrong, her voice off-key.

Despite their many quarrels, despite Audrey's singing, it's clear Hank loves her. And the words of his song leave no doubt what anybody else can do about it:

"If the wife and I start fussin', Brother, that's our right, Cause me and that sweet woman's got a license to fight.

Why don't you mind your own business, Cause if you mind your own business, You won't be mindin' mine."

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

THE GRAND OLE OPRY

Summer, 1949

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - EVENING

A long line of patrons stretches down Fifth Avenue waiting to get into the Saturday Night Opry. It's a hot summer night, but no one seems to mind. They've waited, saved and planned for months to come to the Grand Ole Opry.

The red-and-white brick facade of the Ryman Auditorium has a stately, righteous quality about it, and, in fact, the Ryman was built in 1892 as a revival tabernacle. WSM's "Grand Ole Opry" show, which had outgrown two previous homes, moved to the Ryman in 1941.

CUT TO:

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The Grand Ole Opry is an entertainment phenomenon. In 1949, two hundred thousand persons paid to travel and wait in line to watch a radio show. They sat on hard pews in an uncooled sweatbox and bought hand fans decorated with advertisements. They watched a show constantly interrupted by commercials and played in front of billboard-like advertisements. The artists who attracted these crowds were paid scale: \$30 a week. Yet no one complained: the artists were proud to belong; and the patrons, like good guests, were polite and cleaned up after themselves. It was -- and continues to be, in Opryland -- a near perfect money-making machine.

The three-hour Saturday night Opry was divided into twelve segments, each with a separate host and sponsor. Each host sang three songs and introduced three guests, usually a comedian, a singer and a bluegrass group. Each act was pre-timed for air time requirements, and the whole show ran like clockwork.

On stage, Roy Acuff and his Smoky Mountain Boys are pickin' and grinnin'. Roy balances the bow of his fiddle on his nose and a few rebel cheers go up from the "Confederate Gallery" (balcony). In 1949, country music and the Opry were still "hillbilly": the audiences were younger, poorer and openly chauvinistic. There was no Opryland, no Music Row and no national image to worry about.

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

A cheer goes up from the crowd inside. Hank, Audrey, Fred and Wes Rose walk up Fifth and turn into the alley beside the Ryman.

Audrey wears a two-piece suit with a pleated skirt. Hank, nervous, carries his guitar case and glances at his watch.

They stop at the backstage door.

CUT TO:

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Backstage is bedlam. The Ryman was never intended as a concert auditorium; there are only three closet-sized dressing rooms for the fifty-plus performers who appear on Opry night. Artists stand in every possible spot, tuning their instruments, checking their appearance and swapping small talk. One object brings order to this chaos: the typed schedule which states which artists appear in which show at what time.

Hank, Audrey, Wes and Fred elbow their way through the crowd. Most of the artists nod hello to Fred, a few recognize Hank.

Fred introduces Hank to JIM DENNY, manager of the Opry. Denny says a few words and moves on.

Hank takes out his guitar and finds a nook in which to wait.

ON STAGE, the painted "Prince Albert Tobacco" backdrop is lowered signaling the Red Foley 9:00-9:15 segment. The Stoney Mountain Cloggers, a square dance team dressed in gingham and plaids, do bluegrass turns as GRANT TURNER, the announcer, introduces the Prince Albert segment.

To the right of the stage, behind a glass window, WSM technicians monitor the broadcast. On stage, the atmosphere is intentionally informal. Performers walk back and forth setting up their instruments. Friends of WSM and the performers sit in two pews against the backdrop. A large clock -- time is critical -- hangs on the side of the announcer's podium.

RED FOLEY, dressed in a dark suit and light Fedora, steps out, introduces his Cumberland Valley boys and starts to sing "Tennessee Saturday Night."

BACKSTAGE, Hank nervously puffs on a cigarette. The bare lightbulb on the low ceiling is just inches above his head.

AUDREY

Are you nervous?

Hank shakes his head. Audrey straightens his hand-painted tie.

AUDREY

You'll do fine.

HANK

It's just another show.

Minnie Pearl's familiar voice echoes from the stage:

MINNIE PEARL (O.S.)

...I've got to go now, but you know, Red, a long time ago, the first time I got Brother to town, all t'other boys got to pointin' at him. "What's wrong with that ole boy, he got the Small Pox? He's got spots all over his face." "No," I says, "We jus' been teachin' him how to eat with a fork!"

The Cumberland Valley Boys "fiddle" Minnie off stage as the audience applauds.

Hank snuffs out his cigarette and pulls his tie off-center.

RED FOLEY (O.S.)

Now I'd like to bring out an Alabama boy from down Montgomery way. This boy hasn't been on the Opry before, but he's got a pretty big song on his hands, "Lovesick Blues." Come on out, Hank Williams!

Hank walks out on stage. His new white western suit glistens in the footlights. His hat is pulled tight against his forehead.

There is a polite smattering of applause, then it dies out. Nobody knows who he is.

Hank looks back to the band and they strike up "Lovesick Blues."

HANK

"I've got a feelin' called the blue-oo-oo-oo-ues, Oh Lord, Since my baby said good-bye..."

The audience responds in a roar, then a standing ovation. They knew the song, but not the singer. Hank's eyes flash and his thin lips break into a smile as his nervousness disappears. He buckles his knees, leans into the mike and begins to sway: "I don't know what I'll do-oo-oo, Oh Lord, All I do is sit and cry..."

TIMECUT: Finishing the song, Hank walks off stage to a massive ovation and cries of "More!" Fred wildly signals Hank to turn around. Foley calls him back for an encore.

The applause is undiminished. All Hank can do is sing "Lovesick Blues" again.

TIMECUT: Hank walks off again, but the audience won't let him go. Foley has to call him back on stage.

TIMECUT: the Sound Engineer stands in the booth, pointing to his watch. All Foley can do is shrug.

TIMECUT: ten minutes later, the audience is still calling for another encore. Grant Turner, Jim Denny and the Sound Engineer are all gathered around the podium, trying to figure out how to get Hank off stage.

Finally, as Hank leaves, Foley walks out and tries to wave the crowd quiet. He is only partially successful. He shouts:

RED FOLEY

That's wonderful folks. My, my.
We've got to keep the show going.
(many shouts of protest)
Alright, folks, we'll bring him out
here one more time. Hank, come over
here, boy.

Hank, who has already removed his double-breasted jacket and loosened his tie, walks out in his sweat-stained shirt. Foley tries to calm the crowd:

RED FOLEY

My, my, you created quite a stir,
boy. I can't right remember anybody
getting five encores. Got the
sponsors all agitated. You know any
other songs, Hank?

HANK

Yeah, I do, Mr. Foley. But I think
I'll just stick with this one here.

The crowd goes wild again and Foley steps back:

RED FOLEY

All right then, take it away.

Hank, on top of the world, leans over and lets out a long throbbing wail which brings the house down:

HANK

"I've got a feelin' called the blu-
oo-oo-ues, O Lord..."

It is June 11, 1949. Oldtimers say it was the most memorable night in the Grand Ole Opry's history until Richard Nixon came to the opening of Opryland in Spring, 1974.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Hank and Audrey have moved into a red brick ranch house on Franklin Road. Although the house is not the "estate" Audrey claimed, it certainly ain't a shack either.

A new yellow Cadillac convertible stands in front.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Hank's new success as an Opry star has allowed he and Audrey to indulge their whims. Hank's taste ran to things like guns, horses and spacious cars; Audrey's gaudy jewelry, furs and oriental decor. Hank's fantasies were fulfilled by icons of the "West,"; Audrey's by symbols of the "East" -- New York and Tokyo.

Hank, Audrey and Lilly stand in the newly-decorated living room. Audrey wears a forties dress with a diamond brooch, Hank blue western slacks and a loose shirt.

The decor is simply awful. Nouveau riche, unauthentic, inorganic -- all the words which make designers wince. The carpet is pink, the piano white, the curtains black with a yellow-and pink oriental pattern. Chinese figurines and miniature trees stand on the mirrored mantel and bookshelves.

Lilly, wearing her black sack with a lace insert, looks like she's stepped off on the wrong planet. Audrey shows her a porcelain figure of a Chinese dancer:

AUDREY

This dancer is over two thousand years old -- not really this dancer, but this kind.

Lilly looks around, impressed. Hiram has made the big time.

HANK

Come out here, Momma, and look at this.

Hank opens the front door for her.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Hank walks Lillian over to the new Cadillac.

HANK

Four thousand bucks. I bought it
for Audrey.

(opens door)

Go on, Momma, sit inside.

Hank and Lilly sit in the back seat of the open Cadillac.
Hank, happy as a little kid, puts his blue leather boots up
on the front seat. Lillian seems a little worried:

LILLIAN

Hiram, can you really afford all
this?

HANK

Don't worry. Audie takes care of
everything.

That's exactly what worries Lilly.

LILLIAN

She's spending a lot of money.

HANK

I'm makin' a lot, Momma. I'm big
now. We get \$600 a show, four shows
a week plus two nights at the Opry.
Plus the records and song rights. I
got \$1200 in my pocket right now.
(gestures)

I'm livin' in high cotton.

LILLIAN

I just don't think it's right. All
this, and your poor Momma still
running a little boarding house.

HANK

You don't have to do that.

LILLIAN

No, no, waste not, want not, the
Lord says. There's a bigger place
for sale on McDough Street. If I
had that house...

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Audrey rocks the baby as Hank sets his suitcases and guitar out for the next morning. Lilly walks toward the bedrooms:

LILLIAN
I'm going to bed now, Hiram.
Audrey.

AUDREY
Goodnight.

HANK
Night, Momma. I'll be gone by five
in the morning.

LILLIAN
I'll be up. I wouldn't miss that.

Lilly hesitates a second, then walks off. Audrey waits for the bedroom door to close.

AUDREY
Hank, I have to talk to you.

HANK
What?

AUDREY
Did you give your Momma any money?

HANK
(lying)
No, Audrey.

CUT TO:

INT. GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lilly lies in the darkened bedroom listening.

AUDREY (O.S.)
You're a goddamn liar, Hank
Williams.
(a beat)
Don't walk off. Stay in here.

HANK (O.S.)
I'll do what I damn please.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Like Hell you will. Besides, I hid
the liquor what was in your room.
How much did you give her, Hank?

HANK (O.S.)
She needs to get another boardin'
house.

AUDREY (O.S.)
Like Hell she does.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUSTICE OF THE PEACE - DAY

It's morning. Fred Rose drives his blue Cadillac into Lake Charles, a Cajun town of 50,000 in Southwestern Louisiana.

Fred pulls up to a house with a sign reading "R. Thibodaux, Justice of the Peace." Don Helms and JERRY RIVERS, a crewcut boy about 18, tired and still wearing their Drifting Cowboy outfits, meet Fred as he gets out of the car.

FRED
Hello, Don.

DON HELMS
Hank's been bent for a couple days,
Mr. Rose.

FRED
Can he continue on tour?

DON HELMS
He wasn't in shape to come out at
all last night. Then later, he got
to claimin' he was George Morgan.

Fred shakes his head as he walks inside with Don and Jerry.

CUT TO:

INT. JUSTICE OF THE PEACE - DAY

Hank sits mildly beside a uniformed Police Officer in the small office. His white fringed jacket with blue piping and rhinestones is wrinkled and dirty.

The JUSTICE OF THE PEACE looks up as Fred enters.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
Mr. Fred Rose?

FRED
Yes.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
Do you represent Acuff-Rose, Mr.
Williams' legal representatives?

HANK
(interrupting)
George Morgan.

FRED
Yes.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
Are you willing to take custody of
Mr. Williams?

FRED
Yes.

Hank starts singing George Morgan's hit, "Candy Kisses":

HANK
"Candy kisses, wrapped in paper,
Mean more to you than my love,
dear..."

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
Mr. Williams.

The Police Officer removes Hank's cowboy hat and stands him
up.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
Calcasie Parrish hereby fines you
\$100 for Disturbing the Peace and
remands you to the custody of Fred
Rose, of Acuff-Rose.

Fred pays the Justice as Don and Jerry take Hank out the
door. The Justice of the Peace takes a hundred dollar bill
from his desk and gives it to Fred.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
You better take this. Mr. Williams
gave it to me this morning. I
didn't want to see him get in any
more trouble.

FRED
You're an honest man, your honor.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE
No, just smart. He was giving them
out to everybody last night.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUSTICE OF THE PEACE - DAY

Fred meets up with Hank, Don and Jerry outside. Fred walks
with Hank for a couple steps before saying anything:

FRED
You didn't last very long, did you
Hank?

HANK
Me and this ole boy was working on
a tune last night, Pappy. You want
to hear it?

FRED
No.

Hank pulls up his sleeve and tries to make out the words
scribbled over his shirt cuff.

HANK
It goes like this. Let's see...

CUT TO:

EXT. KENTUCKY LAKE - DAY

Hank and VIC McALPIN, 29, a song-writer, sit "nigger fishing"
in a small rowboat. Hank is wearing jeans, a fancy western
shirt and his baseball cap.

Hank sets his pole down and turns toward Vic:

HANK
McAlpin, whatja think of this?

VIC
What?

Hank stands and paces across the rocking boat.

HANK
Here's the story. This ole boy and
his gal have split up. He ain't
seen her for a bit. Then, he's
walking down the street and he sees
her comin'.

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

"Today I passed you on the street,"
he says. What comes next?

VIC

You're rocking the boat.

HANK

What comes next?

VIC

(thinking)

"And I smelled your rotten feet?"

HANK

No, boy.

VIC

"And I beat my meat?"

HANK

Christ, boy, you got a foul mind.

VIC

Sit down, Harm. You're gonna flip
this thang.

HANK

It's my back. I can't sit still
long. It starts hurtin'.

(to himself)

"Today I passed you on the street."

VIC

Did you come to fish or did you
jus' come to watch the fish swim
by?

HANK

Hey, that's good, Vic.

VIC

What?

HANK

"Did you come to watch the fish
swim by?" What comes after that?
Let's see...

VIC

"I went to the river to watch the
fish swim by..."

HANK

"I went down to the river to watch
the fish swim by, but the river was
dry..."

Vic is now up on his feet pacing too. Seen from the distance,
they stand walking in the boat, both animatedly talking and
gesturing.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE STUDIOS - DAY

WSM's live radio shows originated from Castle Studios in the
Tulane Hotel, which seated 200 persons. These shows, usually
fifteen minutes long, featured a mixture of songs, jokes,
folksy talk and relentless commercial plugs. They were known
just by the name of the sponsor: the Jefferson Island Show,
the Martha White Show, the Royal Crown Cola Show.

Hank's show, the Mother's Best Show, aired every morning from
7:15-7:30. (When traveling, which was all the time, Hank and
the Cowboys would record four or five shows at a time.)

A Mother's Best Enriched Flour advertisement is tacked
against the sound-proofed wall behind the band. Sacks of
Mother's Best Cow Feed, Hog Ration, Laying Mash and Growing
Mash are set out for the audience to see.

Hank, at the mike, wears his new western jacket, a pale blue
gabardine with a navy suede fringe and switched collar.
Behind him, wearing checkered slacks, white shirts and ties,
are the latest version of The Drifting Cowboys: Don Helms,
steel guitar; Jerry Rivers, fiddle; Bob McNett, lead guitar;
and HILLOUS BUTTRAM, bass fiddle and comedian.

Audrey, standing with the boys, wears a dark two-piece
cowgirl outfit with white fringe. Rhinestone "A"'s are
stitched along the hem and yoke.

Hank looks at LOUIS BUCK, the announcer:

HANK

Thank you, Cousin Louis, for those
wise words about new "phosphated"
Mother's Best Flour.

Hank looks at the clock as Don starts a soft wail on the
steel guitar, indicating that:

HANK

Friends, it's hymn time on the show, the time when me an' the boys gather 'round the mike, take our hats off, and do one of the old hymns. This morning I'd like to do a song I wrote a while back. It's one of those "Mama" songs everyone seems to like so well, and rightly so. I'm going to ask Miss Audrey and the boys to help me on the chorus. We're gonna do a song I wrote a while back. There's a lot of meaning in this song and it's called, "Take a Message to My Mother."

The steel guitar intros and Hank leans over the mike. He does not remove his hat:

"The tears and sorrow I have caused
her, How I wish I could repay, But
tell her I'll be waiting for her,
We'll meet in heaven some glad day.

Audrey and the boys crowd round for the chorus. Hank leans closer to minimize the sound of Audrey's voice:

"Take this message to my mother, It
will fill her heart with joy, Tell
her that I've met my Saviour God
has saved her wanderin' boy."

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

THE OPRY TOURS

Summer, 1950

The "Opry Tours" section is a montage of people, places and events interwoven with the words and lyrics of "Ramblin' Man."

"I can settle down and be doin'
just fine, 'Til I hear an old train
rollin' down the line, Then I hurry
straight home and pack. And if I
didn't go I b'lieve I'd blow my
stack, I love you, Baby, but you
gotta understand, When the Lord
made me He made a Ramblin' Man."

-- A new green Cadillac, pulling a silver tear-drop trailer, speeds down a two-lane highway.

-- Hank and the boys arrive in a small Midwestern town in the afternoon and stop in front of the main hotel.

-- Hank, wearing a new grey outfit with red fringe, performs in an auditorium with the Drifting Cowboys.

-- Three in the morning. The Cowboys pack their instruments into the trailer outside the auditorium. Hank curls up on the back seat.

-- The Cadillac limousine speeds through the night.

INT. ADOLPHUS HOTEL - AFTERNOON

The Cowboys, car-sore, straggle into the Adolphus Hotel in downtown Dallas. Jerry Rivers talks to the DESK CLERK.

JERRY RIVERS
We're with Hank Williams.

The Clerk checks the register:

DESK CLERK
I'm sorry. There's no Hank Williams registered here.

JERRY RIVERS
That's impossible.
(calls Don Helms)
Hey, Don, they ain't got Hank registered here.

LATER, the Cowboys stand in the lobby beside their instruments, not quite sure what to do. The HOTEL DETECTIVE walks over to them:

HOTEL DETECTIVE
You boys lookin' for Hank Williams?

DON HELMS
Yeah.

HOTEL DETECTIVE
The singer?

JERRY RIVERS
He's supposed to be here.

HOTEL DETECTIVE
He checked in alright. He's up in room 506. He's using another name. Herman P. Willis.

CUT TO:

INT. ADOLPHUS HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Don knocks on the door to room 506. Hank, drunk and bleary-eyed, wearing his undershirt, opens the door.

DON HELMS

Hank, what the shit you doin'? You scared us.

HANK

What do you want?

DON HELMS

Let us in.

Don and Jerry push their way in.

HANK

Who you lookin' for?

JERRY RIVERS

You. Hank Williams.

HANK

I don't know anybody by that name.
I'm Herman P. Willis.

They both look at him: he's serious.

JERRY RIVERS

Com'on, Hank.

HANK

What are you talkin' about? Who's
this Hank Williams?

DON HELMS

He's a singer who's gotta sober up
so he can do a show at eight
tonight.

HANK

Never heard of him. I'm Herman P.
Willis.

DON HELMS

If you ain't Hank Williams, then
how come you're wearin' his gun
belt?

HANK

Huh?

Don turns Hank's black hand-tooled gun belt with double holsters around so he can see the large inscription, "Hank Williams." Hank seems befuddled.

HANK
This ain't mine.

DON HELMS
We're in real trouble, Mr. Willis.
This Hank Williams is supposed to
perform tonight. Do you think you
could fill in for him?

HANK
Maybe.

Don and Jerry relax; Hank's starting to come around. Helms picks a fifth of Jack Daniels off the bureau and pours it down the drain.

DON HELMS
What's the "P" stand for, Hank?

HANK
(arrogant)
Presswood, by gum.

CUT TO:

INT. DALLAS AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

An unhappy ANNOUNCER looks at his watch and walks to the mike. Behind him the DRIFTING COWBOYS wrap up an instrumental. He looks over the large crowd:

ANNOUNCER
I want to thank you good folks for
waiting to see this man. He hasn't
been feeling too good...

A voice calls from the audience:

HECKLER
You mean he's drunk!

ANNOUNCER
...not feeling so well, but he's
going to make it anyway
(a loud cheer goes up)
and I'm sure he won't...

The Announcer turns and sees why the cheer has gone up: Hank, tired and a little groggy, strolls out on stage.

His coat is wrinkled and his tie loose. He gives the band no time for its usual fanfare.

HANK
Thank you, hoss.
(turns to Jerry)
Burrhead, give me that guitar.

Hank takes the guitar from Rivers and slips the strap around his neck. The Cowboys look worried: Hank doesn't even seem to know where the audience is.

But this is just part of his act. Rivers breathes a sigh of relief as Hank tugs his hat down an inch, stands in front of the mike and tightens his knees.

HANK
Howdy, friends. They tell me you
good folks been waiting four hours
to see Old Hank. I appreciate it. I
hain't been feelin' too well...

HECKLER
You mean you've been drunk!

Hank looks over the audience then points out the Heckler:

HANK
Did you folks come to hear him or
me?

Many cries of "You, Hank."

HANK
Then would somebody get a shovel
and some sand and move that out of
here?

Ten burly farm boys climb from their seats and drag the Heckler out of the auditorium.

The audience loves it. Hank's antics only add to his popularity.

HANK
(satisfied)
I wanna do a little tune I jus'
wrote, then me an' the boys will
play whatever you want for as long
as you want.
(cheers)
This one's about a fella whut's in
love with a woman with a "Cold,
Cold Heart." Boys, get me started.

Hank closes his eyes, grits his teeth and sets into a soulful moan that makes "the hair grab at the back of your neck."

HANK

"I tried so hard, my Dear, to show
that you're my ev'ry dream, You're
afraid each thing I do is just some
evil scheme. A mem'ry from your
lonesome past keeps us so far
apart, Why can't I free your
doubtful mind and melt your cold,
cold heart..."

The audience listens in rapt silence. "You could hear a pin drop when Hank was working," Little Jimmy Dickens said wistfully, "He just seemed to hypnotize those people."

CUT TO:

-- Strains of "Ramblin' Man" blend with those of "Cold, Cold Heart."

-- The long, green Cadillac speeds through the night.

INT. CADILLAC LIMO - DAY

Hank hunches over his Martin, writing and humming to himself.

The car hits a pothole and Hillous, at the wheel, cusses:

HILLOUS BUTRUM

Goddamnit all.

Hank looks up and says sharply.

HANK

That tears it, Mule. Pull over.
Right up here.
(gestures)

Hillous pulls in front of a country store and Hank walks out and goes in.

A MOMENT LATER, he returns with an empty cigar box. He gets back in without saying anything as he cuts a hole in the top of the box. Hillous drives back onto the road.

Hank shows the boys the box.

HANK

I don't want to hear any more
cussing or taking the Lord's name
in vain. Anybody whut does has got
to put two- bits in the box.

DON HELMS
Which words you mean, Harm?

HANK
You know, any that use the Lord's
name.

DON HELMS
How'bout other words? My mouth
ain't no prayer book, you know.

HANK
There's two words I don't like to
hear.

HILLOUS BUTRUM
I know "shit" is one of them.

Hank recoils as if struck by a stick.

HANK
Ooh, don't say that word, Mule.

DON HELMS
What's the other one?

JERRY RIVERS
Does it start with F?

Hank does not answer.

DON HELMS
Is it "fuck?"

HANK
Ooh, ooh, Shag -- don't say that
word!

Hank gives the box to Jerry and settles against the seat with
a triumphant air.

CUT TO:

-- Hank sits backstage somewhere working on a song. His hat
is pulled over his eyes and his legs are folded atop each
other. He looks like a man wrapped in his own cocoon.

-- A GUN SHOP OWNER shows Hank a pair of pearl-handled
revolvers.

-- Hank makes a long distance call from his hotel room. There
is no answer.

-- It's late afternoon and the Caddy speeds down those never-ending roads. Hank, pissed and a little drunk, makes a crack from the back seat. Hillous quickly turns around and hands him the cigar box. Hank pulls out a five-dollar-bill and stuffs it in as if to say, "So there."

EXT. MADISON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Don Helms drives the Cadillac through the gates of the "Madison Hospital" and stops in front.

Hank, wedged between Hillous and Jerry in the back seat, is dead to the world.

DON HELMS
Harm, we're home.

Jerry shakes Hank.

HANK
(waking up)
Huh, you said we wuz gonna git
sumptin' to eat. We gotta play
already?

JERRY RIVERS
We ate six hours ago. We're back in
Nashville.

Hank, very drunk, looks out his window:

HANK
This ain't home. Let me alone.

JERRY RIVERS
Com'on, Hank. We're getting out.

Jerry nods to Hillous who helps him pull Hank out of the car. Hank looks around and recognizes the hospital.

HANK
Oh no, it's the hut. No sir, you
hain't takin' me to the fuckin'
hut. I won't go.

DON HELMS
I called Audrey. She said not to
bring you home in bad condition.
Jus' to bring you straight here.

Two white-coated HOSPITAL ATTENDANTS walk toward them. Don nods to the first. The Hospital Attendant takes Hank's arm.

1ST HOSPITAL ATTENDANT
Com'on, Mr. Williams. Let's get
some sleep.

HANK
(pleading)
Burrhead, Mule, don't let 'em take
Old Hank. Not to the hut again,
please.

The Attendants pull Hank off as Don calls:

DON HELMS
See you tomorrow, Harm.

The Cowboys turn and get back into the Cadillac.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Hank, Audrey and the Drifting Cowboys pose for publicity
photos in the pasture behind Hank and Audrey's house.

The Cowboys, wearing black western shirts and white ties,
lean to their right against the white slat fence. Hank and
Audrey stand at the end of the row. Hank wears his brown
double-breasted, white Stetson and a broad grin.

The STILL PHOTOGRAPHER takes several shots. Hank poses on his
quarter-horse, Hi-Life. He rides around a bit, then holds his
back and grimaces in pain. Don and Audrey help him dismount.

HANK
Dam that back.
(to photographer)
Let's git a picture of Bocephus.
Where's that boy? Get Miss Raglin,
hon.

Audrey walks back to the house.

Hank poses with his chubby 1 1/2-year-old son. Hank Jr. wears
jean overalls and a 99¢ plastic guitar around his neck. There
was never a more bewildered child -- nor a prouder father.

MISS RAGLIN, the stout governess, watches in her white
uniform.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Hank stands in the KITCHEN with Don and Jerry. The kitchen and breakfast nook are lined with the latest copper-plated built-ins: dishwasher, oven, stove.

Hank taps out a tune on the counter top:

HANK

"...If you're lovin' me like I'm
lovin' you, BA-BY, we're really in
love..."

Don laughs.

HANK

Go 'head and laugh, hoss, you jus'
watch. We'll sell a million songs.

Hank hears Audrey, Bob and Hillous walk in.

HANK

Com'on into the living room. I got
a suprise for you.

Hank, Don and Jerry walk into the living room and join the others.

HANK

(to Audrey)

Get Bocephus. I want him to hear
this.

Hank takes an MGM 78 out of a drawer and puts it on the Hi-Fi. The Cowboys sit on the sofa as Audrey and Miss Raglin walk in with Hank Jr.

HANK

(calling)

Lycretia! Jugghead, git on in here.

Audrey sits on the piano bench with Hank Jr. as Lycretia, now 10, joins them. Hank turns on the record player.

HANK

Listen to this!

There's a scratchy silence, followed by a lush string orchestration and the mellifluous voice of Tony Bennett: "I've tried so hard my dear, to show you're my every dream..." To any lover of Hank Williams and country music, Bennett's schmaltzy pop "cover" seems like the worst sort of bowdlerization, but Hank didn't see it that way.

It was proof that he was more than a hillbilly writer -- his songs had "crossed over."

HANK

Pappy got Columbia to cut "Cold, Cold Heart." Listen to that. Tony Bennett doin' one of Hank's songs. Isn't that something?

(to Hank Jr.)

Fred says if this is popular, I can sell more songs. Old Hank's done crossed over. Ain't that the damndest thing?

CUT TO:

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - EVENING

The faithful wait in line for the Saturday Night Opry.

CUT TO:

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Red Foley stands in front of the Prince Albert "The National Joy Smoke" backdrop and introduces:

RED FOLEY

"...I think you all know who I'm talkin' about, 'The Gossip of Grinder's Switch,' Cousin Minnie Pearl!"

Minnie bustles out wearing her familiar puffed sleeves, pouch bag and straw hat with a \$1.69 tag.

MINNIE

How-dee! I'm so proud to be here...

BACKSTAGE, Hank sits in one of the closet-sized dressing rooms with HANK GARLAND and COWBOY COPAS. Red and Minnie's voices occasionally echo backstage.

HANK

Whatja think of this, Copas? I've been thinkin' 'bout writin' something for you to record:

(sings)

"If you're lovin' me like I'm lovin' you, Baby, we're really in love, If you're happy with me like I'm happy with you, Old Cupid just gave us a shove..."

Copas listens with great interest. Although 48-years-old, Cowboy Copas has just had his first hit and would love to record a Hank Williams song. Hank Garland was then one of the masters of country guitar. It's apparent from their attitudes that Hank already commands the respect of his elders at the Opry.

COPAS

That's great, Hank.

Hank pulls a whiskey "miniature" out of his boot and takes a swig. He offers a drink to Copas, who accepts.

HANK

You like it, boy, it's yours.

COPAS

I think maybe you should work in some more instrumentation. A few guitar licks. Garland, show 'im some "Fingers on Fire."

Garland just laughs, but Hank takes it personal.

HANK

You think that fast-fingered shit is so great? Here, I'll show you some real pickin'.

Hank opens the door and calls into the crowded backstage area.

HANK

McNett, git on over here.

Bob McNett breaks away from the other Cowboys and walks in.

HANK

This here's Bob McNett. Got him off a mountain in Pennsylvania. McNett, this is Cowboy Copas and Hank Garland.

McNett is impressed -- and worried. Hank is unpredictable.

HANK

Play a little "Sally Goodin," boy.

BOB MCNETT

(embarrassed)

I've only been playing lead for a year, Mr. Garland. I'm not really...

HANK

Don't give us that. Play it.

McNett, scared shitless, plays a few rudimentary chords. He makes no attempt at frills -- he's not good enough to impress anybody.

Hank stands and turns triumphantly to Copas and Garland.

HANK

(points to McNett)

See that, Copas, now there's a boy
who can play country and play all
the notes at the same time.

Hank turns and walks out, leaving McNett to apologize.

ONSTAGE, Red looks at the clock and says to Minnie:

RED FOLEY

Now, Minnie, I'd like to bring an
old friend of ours out here, and a
mighty popular one he is too. It's
that tall drink of water from
Montgomery, Alabama, Hank Williams!

Hank waits a moment for effect, pulls his tie to the side,
and strolls out.

Flashbulbs flare from every part of the auditorium as a cheer goes up. Opry visitors dash to the stage, take snapshots and go back to their seats. Lewis Crook, the Opry's oldest member, recently recalled that "it was Hank that started the flashbulb and screamin' thing. There wasn't too much of it before him."

HANK

Howdy Red, Minnie.

MINNIE PEARL

(mock-spoony)

Oh, there's that Hank Williams.

(to audience)

Don't he look like something?

HANK

You're pretty good lookin' yerself,
Minnie. For two cents I'd just haul
off an' kiss you.

MINNIE PEARL

Anybody got change for a nickel?

Minnie makes a big show of puckering up, and Hank, blushing, leans over and pecks her on the cheek.

The crowd loves it -- and most of all the women. They watch with open mouths and "bedroom eyes." Many of Hank's mannerisms, the blushing, the crooked tie, the rocking and moaning, were calculated to appeal to the ladies. "The sexual thing was there alright," Minnie Pearl later said, "but most of the women just wanted to mother him." Hank turns to the audience with his little boy smile.

MINNIE PEARL

Wait 'til they hear 'bout this at
the Switch.

The Cumberland Boys strike up as Minnie runs offstage.

RED FOLEY

I hear you've been doin' some
travelin', Hank?

HANK

That's right. We've been out to the
midwest part of the country.
Oklahoma, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio.

RED FOLEY

Some mighty fine folks out that
way.

HANK

That there are, Red.

RED FOLEY

What song they been askin' for
lately, Hank?

HANK

Well, mostly Red, they've been
asking for that new song I've put
out on the M-G-M label called "I
Can't Help It If I'm Still in Love
With You."

RED FOLEY

Well, don't let me stop you.

Foley steps aside as the Drifting Cowboys hit the opening chord.

HANK

"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..."

CUT TO:

-- The lyrics of "I Can't Help It" turn again to those of
"Ramblin' Man":

"Some folks might say that I'm no
good, That I wouldn't settle down
if I could But when that open road
starts to callin' me, There's
somethin' o'er the hill that I
gotta see, Sometimes it's hard but
you gotta understand, When the Lord
made me, He made a ramblin' man."

-- Hank's Cadillac and trailer speed across a wide expanse of
desert.

-- Hank sits in the back seat jotting notes on scraps of
paper. Tears roll down his cheeks.

INT. HANK'S ROOM - ROSSMORE HOTEL - DAY

Hank, sitting on the edge of the bed, talks over a bad long
distance connection:

HANK

Hello, Momma?

(a beat)

It's Hiram. I'm in Los Angeles.

(a beat)

That ain't so. I've been singing
every night. You must not of been
home. Have you seen little
Bocephus?

(a beat)

Don't go saying that. How you been?

CUT TO:

INT. ROSSMORE HOTEL HALLWAY - DAY

NUDIE Cohn, 48, Hollywood's "Rodeo Tailor," walks toward
Hank's room. Although Nudie became a character in his own
right in later years, affecting outlandish styles of
"western" dress, in 1950 he was just a transplanted Brooklyn
schneider trying to make a buck.

CHARLIE SANDERS, a private guard hired by WSM, stands at the door to Hank's room.

NUDIE

Hi, Charlie. Hank in?

CHARLIE SANDERS

Yep.

NUDIE

Hank wanted to talk about some clothes and go for a ride.

CHARLIE SANDERS

Okay, I'll tell him. Now, he's gonna be in your keepin', Nudie. If he shows up drunk or causes any trouble, you're gonna have to answer to Mr. Denny.

NUDIE

We're just gonna drive around.

CHARLIE SANDERS

Okay.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROSSMORE HOTEL - DAY

Hank and Nudie get into Nudie's white 1950 Hudson (with water buffalo horns on the hood) and drive off. Hank wears a wrinkled western shirt and dark Stetson.

CUT TO:

INT. NUDIE'S CAR - DAY

Hank turns to Nudie:

HANK

Nudie, last night I wuz working on this song. I thought it might be good for Little Jimmy Dickens. What do you think of this:

(beats tune on dash)

"If you're lovin' me, like I'm lovin' you, Baby we're really in love."

NUDIE

You can't fool me, Hank. You already recorded that song.

HANK
What do you mean?

NUDIE
I heard it on the radio.

HANK
Oh. Well, what do you think of
this...

Hank starts to beat another tune on the dash when he sees a store out the window.

HANK
Pull up over here, hoss, I want to
get myself some Co-Cola.

Nudie slows down and looks at the small market.

HANK
It's just a reg'lar market. They
don't sell no booze. My mouth's
dry.

NUDIE
(pulls to curb)
Alright.

HANK
I'll be right back.

Nudie waits a moment while Hank runs inside and buys a six pack of Coke.

Hank gets back into the car and they head out Sunset toward the ocean. Hank opens a Coke on the "horseshoe" door handle and takes a drink:

HANK
I swear, boy, you're about as
suspicious as that goddamn Audrey.

NUDIE
I don't want to get WSM on my ass.

HANK
Don't worry about them.

NUDIE
How is Audie?

HANK
Awh, I tried to call her again.

Hank looks away, despondent.

NUDIE
She gone out again?

HANK
What business is it of yours?

NUDIE
Who's asking?

HANK
It don't take much to stay around
the house, would you think, boy? Is
your wife always out?

NUDIE
It ain't my business, Hank.

HANK
Damn straight.

Hank opens a second Coke and takes a long swig.

NUDIE
You want to meet some girls
tonight? Audrey don't have to be
the only one.

HANK
(testy)
You saying something against
Audrey?

NUDIE
Nope.

HANK
If anybody says anything against
her, it'll be me. That bitch.

NUDIE
What's she got for you?

HANK
She's the only one I care about.
These squirrels don't do shit for
me.

(opens another Coke)
Audie taught me everything. When I
met her I was just a boy. I'll tell
ya, when I ain't with her I miss
her so much it's almost as bad as
being with her.

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)
(maudlin)
Her and little Hank.

Hank has started to slur his words. Nudie sniffs the air and looks over. Hank props his knees against the dash and pushes his hat over his eyes.

NUDIE
You feelin' alright, Hank?

HANK
Yeah, why?

NUDIE
(suspicious)
Could I have a sip of your Coke?

Hank finishes the bottle.

HANK
It's empty.

NUDIE
Open another for me, Hank.

HANK
It ain't much good. We'll save it
for later.

Nudie pulls to the side of the road and opens one of the cola bottles.

HANK
What you doing?

Nudie takes a swig and spits the contents out the window.

NUDIE
Shit. What is this? Half rot-gut?

HANK
(innocent)
What are you talking about?

NUDIE
You know what. This here's more
booze than soda. How the hell you
get this?

Hank reaches in his shirt pocket and pulls out several large bills.

HANK

Here you go, boy. Let's go to some
hamburger joint.

Nudie tosses the remaining bottles out the window. Hank watches them a moment, then pulls his hat over his eyes and curls up.

HANK

Jus' leave me alone. Why can't
anybody do that?

CUT TO:

INT. RIVERSIDE RANCHO - NIGHT

In the late Forties and early Fifties, the Riverside Rancho was the country and western club, a watering hole for Cliffie Stone and Spade Cooley and a must waystop on every major tour.

The room is packed from wall-to-wall. Eager young faces hang over the stage, their wide eyes fixed on their idol. Sammy Pruett has rejoined the band, replacing Bob McNett.

Hank sports his new Nudie outfit -- a white doublebreasted suit with large black quarter notes down the legs, sleeves and across the yoke -- as he rips through the last chorus of "Howlin' at the Moon":

"I know there's never been a man in
the awful shape I'm in, I can't
even spell my name, my head's in
such a spin, Today I tried to eat a
steak with a big old tablespoon,
You got me chasin' rabbits, walkin'
on my hands and howlin' at the
moon.

LATER, Hank is standing with Nudie and the MANAGER by the door. A SNUFF QUEEN eyes him from across the room. He turns to the Manager and says secretively:

HANK

Hey, boy, who is that filly whut's
been givin' us the bedroom eyes?

MANAGER

Com'on, I'll introduce you.

The Manager leads Hank across the room and introduces him.

LATER, Hank pulls Jerry aside:

HANK

Burrhead, I'm going up the road a piece to a place called the Court Motel. Get the boys and pick me up in about a half hour.

Jerry shrugs and nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. COURT MOTEL - NIGHT

The Cowboys, silent and tired, wait in the Cadillac outside the Court Motel.

After a moment, a door slams. They all turn.

Hank dashes from a bungalow putting on his shirt and straightening his half-cocked hat.

The Snuffie, wearing only a bra and panties, stands in the door behind him.

SNUFF QUEEN

You fuckin' one-way bastard!

Hank jumps in the car.

HANK

Let's git.

CUT TO:

INT. CADILLAC LIMO - NIGHT

Hank and the boys ride along silently. Nobody knows what to say.

Finally, Jerry breaks the silence:

JERRY RIVERS

What all was that, Hank?

HANK

Nothing.

DON HELMS

(teasing)

What you mean, nothing? Some Snuffie comes running after you in her underthings. What did you do to her?

HANK

I didn't do nothing.

DON HELMS

That's cause 'nuff right there.

HANK

Go ahead. Get funny, Shag.

(pause)

That was a very crazy girl. I
didn't know what she was doin'.

Everyone's curious now.

HANK

We go into this motel, you know,
and she takes her clothes off. I
take my clothes off and we fool
around a little bit. Then, just
when we was going to make love, she
crawls right up on me and shoves
her pussy right in my face. I
didn't know what the fuck she
wanted, so I got my ass out.

It takes a little while for this to sink in. Jerry ventures a
comment:

JERRY RIVERS

Well, Hank, you kinda like it when
a woman does that to you, you know,
goes down on you?

HANK

(thinks)

Yeah?

JERRY RIVERS

Well, maybe women like that too.

HANK

(a beat)

I never quite looked at it that
way.

CUT TO:

INT. BALTIMORE HIPPODROME - DAY

Strains of "Ramblin' Man" are heard as a long line waits in
front of the Hippodrome. A large sign proclaims:

HANK WILLIAMS

Grand Old Opry Show

Four Shows a Day

Plus moving picture feature

CUT TO:

INT. COWBOYS' ROOM/BALTIMORE HOTEL - DAY

The Cowboys, wearing their stage clothes, sit around an unkempt hotel room. The instruments stand nearby. Sammy Pruett plays solitaire on the bureau.

JERRY RIVERS

If you hear snorin', it'll be Don
at steel.

Don motions to the next room.

DON HELMS

If he can make it, I can.

HILLOUS BUTRUM

I saw Rodney crackin' jokes to the
curtain yesterday.

JERRY RIVERS

Twenty-eight shows in seven days. I
never thought it would be like
this.

HILLOUS BUTRUM

Jim Denny sent for Miss Audrey to
see if she can get Hank into shape.

DON HELMS

That sure is bringing fat to the
fire.

JERRY RIVERS

Old Charlie Sanders gonna catch
hell. He was supposed to watch over
Hank.

HILLOUS BUTRUM

(imitates Duke of Paducah)
"I'm goin' back to the wagon. These
shoes are killin' me."

INT. HALL/BALTIMORE HOTEL - DAY

Jim Denny confronts Sanders outside a hotel room.

CHARLIE SANDERS

I checked everything, Mr. Denny. It just seems like he can get drunk leaning out the window. I took his guns.

Audrey walks down the hall toward them.

JIM DENNY

Hello, Audrey. Sorry to ask you to fly up here like this. It isn't right for audiences to see an Opry star like this. He hurts the whole Opry. And we can't drop him 'cause he's the headliner.

AUDREY

Let me talk to him.

CUT TO:

INT. HANK'S ROOM/BALTIMORE HOTEL - DAY

Hank jumps up as soon as he hears Audrey at the door. He grabs the bottle of Dewar's from the table, takes a swig and stashes it in the toilet tank.

Hank is fiercely drunk -- out of control, unlike anything we've seen before. His eyes veer erratically from left to right, spittle drips from his mouth. "It didn't take much to put him out of commission," Sammy Pruett recalls, "I've seen him drunk to where he couldn't even hold water in his stomach. He'd be foaming at the mouth like a goddamned mad dog."

To anyone unfamiliar with the extremes of alcoholism, it is a terrifying sight. Jim Denny's jaw drops as he opens the door. Audrey just grimaces; she's been through this before. Hank staggers toward them. He has little idea where he is or what he's doing.

AUDREY

Hiram! What are you doing?

HANK

(to Denny)

Why you bring her to me? Why can't I get out of my room?

(to Audrey)

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

They got me locked up, Audie, like some animal.

AUDREY

How you been getting the booze?

HANK

What are you doing here? Where's my boy, where's Bocephus? What you done with him?

AUDREY

He's at home, Hank.

HANK

You whore! How come you're never home? Do I have to have every DJ telling me about some picker who's been a-screwin' my wife? Pulling out the back seat of the car and going into the woods.

Audrey doesn't hesitate: she hauls back and takes a swing at him.

Hank grabs her by the throat and starts choking. Audrey's screams bring the Cowboys running in from the next room.

Sanders pulls Hank away from his wife's throat. Audrey rubs her neck as she staggers toward Denny. Jerry just stares: "It was a shock to all of us in the band because none of us had seen him drunk for a long while. But he was as bad that time as I ever saw him later."

AUDREY

(to Denny)

It's just the liquor talking.
There's nothing I can do.

Denny turns to the band as Sanders wrestles Hank to the bed.

JIM DENNY

There's no use trying to get him in shape. Take him back to the hospital in Nashville.

CUT TO:

EXT. MADISON HOSPITAL - NIGHT

As Hank's Cadillac and trailer pull up the drive to Madison, we hear the sounds of "Ramblin' Man" echoing from a distance. There is no other sound:

(MORE)

JIM DENNY (CONT'D)

"I love to see the towns a-passing
by, And to ride these rails 'neath
God's blue sky, Let me travel this
land from the mountains to the sea,
'Cause that's the life I b'lieve He
meant for me, And when I'm gone and
at my grave you stand, Just say
God's called home your ramblin'
man."

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

THE HADACOL CARAVAN

Fall, 1951

The Hadacol Caravan was the strangest and most extravagant traveling variety show in American history. In August and September of 1951, Louisiana State Senator Dudley LeBlanc assembled a menage of performers and show-biz types to promote Hadacol, his 24-proof cure-all and elixir.

The Hadacol regulars included Dick Haymes and the Tony Martin Orchestra, Cesar Romero, Jack Dempsey, Carmen Miranda, Minnie Pearl, Ted Evans ("The Tallest Man in the World"), Emile Parra ("The Man Who Skates on His Head"), Sharkey's Dixieland Band, the Chez Paree chorus line, colored comics Pork Chops and Kidney Stew, Candy Candido ("The Man of a Thousand Voices") -- and Hank Williams and the Drifting Cowboys. Special one-night guests included Milton Berle, Bob Hope, Mickey Rooney, Burns and Allen, Jimmy Durante and Arthur Godfrey.

The sales of Hadacol (\$1.25 for eight ounces) had begun to lag and "Couzan Dude" devised the "Caravan Good Will Tour" to revive interest. The show traveled on a seventeen-car train supplemented by six trailer trucks through Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Ohio and Iowa, until, in Dallas, LeBlanc ran out of money and called the whole thing off. Admission was one Hadacol box-top.

Few of the performers were actually paid the money promised them, but, looking back, none regret joining the Caravan. It was the last medicine show, the last vaudeville tour, the first variety program -- and one hell of a good time.

Hadacol also marked a turning point in Hank Williams' life. He was at the height of his career and popularity (making upwards of \$1200 a night). Hadacol proved he wasn't just a hillbilly singer, but a national star. His act overshadowed those of TV and movie entertainers like Hope and Berle. His songs were covered on the pop charts by artists like Bennett, Rosemary Clooney, Frankie Laine and Jo Stafford.

Yet success only aggravated Hank's insecurity and paranoia. During the Hadacol days, he let his marriage and friendships fall apart, established a reputation as a no-show, and became increasingly dependent on drink.

EXT. THIBODAUX STREET - DAY

The Hadacol section begins August 16th on the main street of Thibodaux, Louisiana. On arriving in each new town, the Caravan sent its performers and equipment down the main drag to advertise that night's show.

An odd assortment of Packards, DeSotos and Cadillacs lead the way. Alongside walk chorus girls, clowns, magicians and a cowboy doing rope tricks. A midget and Ted Evans, the 7'3" giant, wear signs identifying themselves as "Before" and "After" consuming Hadacol. The Dixieland band follows, playing the "Hadacol Boogie." Six tractor trailers bearing the legend "Hadacol: Men-Women-Children" and a calliope bring up the rear.

Hank, Don and Jerry sit in back on an open DeSoto bearing a sign reading, "Hank Williams and the Drifting Cowboys." Hank waves to the crowd.

CUT TO:

INT. THIBODAUX AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The banner above the stage reads: "Hadacol for a Better Tomorrow." Two large cardboard cut-out bottles of Hadacol flank the stage.

Clowns work their way through the crowd, keeping everyone in a festive mood. One clown, dressed as a policeman, carries a large bottle of Hadacol. Every time he takes a drink, his glasses light up.

The Chez Paree girls dance off stage as the HADACOL ANNOUNCER steps out.

HADACOL ANNOUNCER

Couzan Dudley LeBlanc and the folks at Hadacol are proud to continue the Good Will Caravan. Coming up tonight we have Dick Haymes, Carmen Miranda, Cesar Romero, Hank Williams, Minnie Pearl, and George Burns and Gracie Allen. A little later in the tour such nationally known entertainers as Bob Hope, Milton Berle and Jimmy Durante will be joining the Caravan.

(MORE)

HADACOL ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

I'd like to take just a second to read a testimonial about Hadacol, the dietary supplement to give you pep, strength and the energy of buoyant health. An 80-year-old man from Mississippi writes: "I was disable to get over a fence, disable to get up out of a chair without help, but after I took eight bottles of Hadacol, I can tie my own shoes and feel like I can jump over a six- foot fence and getting very sassy"...

BACKSTAGE, Hank, Jerry and Hillous are sitting with ROCHESTER, Jack Benny's sidekick, and one of the Chez Paree girls.

HILLOUS

"Eight bottles!" I'm surprised the old codger ever came down.

Hank slouches back in a folding chair, his hat low on his forehead. His eyes pan up the long legs of the plumed showgirl. She gives him a flirtatious wink.

JERRY

(to Hank)

You riding back with us tonight, Hank?

HANK

Nah, Burrhead, I'm gonna fly back with Minnie and Henry. My back's botherin' me again. This plane ridin' is the best thing ever happened. I should buy me one of those things.

ROCHESTER

You boys drive back to Nashville tonight?

JERRY

Yeah, Rochester. Hank's gotta go to the Saturday Night Opry.

HILLOUS

Get off this here merry-go-round for a day.

The Hadacol Announcer's voice grows louder:

HADACOL ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 And here's a boy you all been
 waiting for. The number one
 hillbilly artist in America
 today...

Hank and the boys get ready.

HADACOL ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
 ...The Lovesick Blues Boy, Hank
 Williams!

Don and Sammy crowd around as they prepare to go out. Hank
 turns to them:

HANK
 Let's hit 'em real hard tonight.

Hank gives a final wink to the chorus girl and walks ON
 STAGE.

Hank steps up to the mike and limbers his shoulders.

HANK
 Thank you, cousins. Couzan Dude
 been taking me 'round your part of
 the country here, and I've got
 mighty partial to it. Went out
 t'other day -- after we'd had our
 Haddycol --
 (laughter)
 to a picnic and a goat killin'. And
 I wrote a song about it. Little
 tune I call "Jambalaya On the
 Bayou":

The crowd starts cheering and doesn't seem to stop.

HANK
 "Goodbye, Joe, me gotta go, me oh
 my oh, Me gotta go pole the piroque
 down the bayou, My Yvonne, the
 sweetest girl, me oh my oh, Son of
 a gun, we'll have big fun on the
 bayou."

A LITTLE LATER, Hank and the Cowboys walk backstage to a
 thunderous applause.

They immediately start packing their gear. DICK HAYMES waits
 for the cheering to die down.

The Announcer tries to quiet them. Chants of "Hank, Hank."

Hank, guitar case in hand, steps over to Haymes:

HANK
Hey, Haymes, think you can beat
that?

Hank turns and walks away before Haymes can respond. "It just tickled Hank pink when a 'popular' star couldn't follow him on stage," Jerry Rivers remembers about the Hadacol tour. "He'd get that crowd all excited, then just sit back and grin."

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - NIGHT

A sedan drops Hank off in the driveway. He waves goodbye and walks toward the front door with his guitar case. He wears a long white western trench coat with black piping.

CUT TO:

INT. HANK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hank, a grin spread from ear-to-ear, whirls his two-year-old son in his arms. Miss Raglin watches on disapprovingly. Audrey has dyed her hair platinum blond.

AUDREY
Maybe you ought to let him get back
to sleep.

Hank looks at Bocephus -- he is already sleeping.

HANK
Awh, I want my son to know his old
man. I'm gonna buy him a baseball
bat and mitt.

AUDREY
He's only two.

MISS RAGLIN
I think he's already asleep.

Hank gives Bocephus to Miss Raglin and she carries him toward the bedroom.

Hank plops on the sofa and stretches out. He removes his hat and tie and throws them on a nearby chair. His hairline continues to recede.

HANK
Had a big week, hey baby?

AUDREY
Not 'specially.

HANK
Been doin' some travelin'?

Audrey tries to appear innocent -- although she isn't even sure of what Hank is going to accuse her of.

HANK
Couldn't get you on the phone
Tuesday or Wednesday.

AUDREY
I was just out. I tried to get you
at the Hotel Fredrick in New Iberia
but you were never in.

HANK
I just took a look at the car,
Audie. You put three hundred and
fifty miles on the speedometer.
Where'd you go?

AUDREY
I went nowhere, Hank. Don't talk to
me that way.

HANK
Where you gonna go fifty miles a
day?

AUDREY
It's ten miles just downtown.

HANK
I wouldn't try that righteous stuff
on Old Hank. Ev'rybody in Nashville
knows about you but me.

AUDREY
Shut your filthy mind.

Hank fumbles in his pocket and pulls out a handful of cigarette butts. He lines them up on the coffee table.

HANK
Lookee-here, Audrey. I found these
in the ashtray. There ain't but two
of 'em that's got any kind of
lipstick on 'em at'all.

AUDREY

I'm supposed to ride in the car
alone all the time?

(calling out)

Lycretia, come in here. Miss
Raglin, get Lycretia.

HANK

(standing)

Don't you get Lycretia up. Just so
you don't have to account for
yourself.

AUDREY

I won't listen to any more of this,
Hank Williams.

Lycretia, rubbing her sleepy eyes, appears at the door.

HANK

(kind)

Go back to bed, Lycretia.

AUDREY

(holds out arms)

Come over to Momma.

Hank points at Audrey:

HANK

You either put Lycretia back to bed
or I'm gonna take you out in the
garage.

Audrey, angry, goes to the closet and grabs her coat.

AUDREY

Don't bother, Hank. I'm going out.

HANK

Go ahead and leave. Leave.

(as she does)

If you don't leave me, I'll find
somebody that will!

Audrey slams the door behind her. Miss Raglin walks in to
take Lucretia back to bed.

MISS RAGLIN

Miss Audrey leave?

Hank pulls a thick wad of dollar bills out of his pocket and
throws them on the kitchen table.

HANK

Don't worry. She'll be back. She forgot to take my money.

Hank opens the cabinet and looks around for a whiskey bottle.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE STUDIOS - DAY

The Duckhead Overalls Show was one of WSM's Saturday Night Opry "warm-up" shows. Each Saturday one of that night's Opry stars would host a 5:00 - 5:15 segment, do a few songs, plug Duckhead, plug the Opry and plug himself.

Hank hunches over the mike finishing "Men With Broken Hearts," one of the pathetic recitations he did under the name of Luke the Drifter. When asked about the "true" Hank Williams, his closest friends often refer the inquirer to the recitations and hymns. "Listen to that morbid, sentimental stuff," said Vic McAlpin. "That was the real Hank Williams."

HANK

(recitation)

Life sometimes can be so cruel that
a heart will pray for death, God,
why must these living dead know
pain with every breath, One
careless step, a thoughtless deed,
and then the misery starts, And to
those who weep, death comes cheap,
These men with broken hearts.

Tears form in Hank's eyes as he finishes the song. He looks out over the audience. Several women are dabbing their moist eyes with handkerchiefs.

Hank steps back as Don wrings the last tearful chord out of the steel guitar:

HANK

Take it on the turnaround, Shag.

Helms starts "Broken Hearts" up again as Hank walks back to the mike and resumes the recitation. Jerry and Hillous look quizzically at Don.

CUT TO:

INT. MOM'S - NIGHT

Mom's was the favorite hang-out of the Opry entertainers; it had a back room where a performer could drink undisturbed, and its rear door was only a five-second sprint from the Ryman stage exit. In 1960, Tootsie Bess bought Mom's and renamed it "Tootsie's Orchid Lounge." For many years, Tootsie's was a Country and Western institution, then it became a shrine, soon it will be a relic.

Hank, Red and Don sit around a table. Red and Don are drinking beers, Hank a Coca-Cola. Hank lights a cigarette as Lefty Frizzell sings "Always Late" on the "coin machine."

DON

Why'd you go through "Broken
Hearts" again, Harm? We 'bout ran
outta time.

HANK

Well, damn it, Shag, did you look
out at the audience? Wasn't enough
cryin'. Jus' a couple ladies
dabbing at their faces. That
recitation got to bring out the
crying.

HUGH CHERRY, 29, a local DJ, walks past with a beer.

HANK

Hey, Cherry, come here, boy.

Cherry steps over.

CHERRY

Yeah, Mr. Williams.

HANK

Cherry, I hear you got a kid born
whut's got a hair lip, a cleft
mouth?

(gestures)

CHERRY

Yeah.

HANK

How much it cost to fix up your
kid?

CHERRY

Two-three thousand dollars.

HANK
You got that kind of money?

CHERRY
No.

HANK
I'll tell you what to do. You go to a doctor and get that kid all fixed up. Don't spare no expense. And send Old Hank the bill.

Cherry is flabbergasted. He starts to protest:

HANK
I don't want to hear no refusin'. You jus' take care of that boy. That's all. If you don't take my money I won't talk to you again.

CHERRY
(effusive)
Thank you, Hank. It's...

HANK
And come by later backstage and see me. You know?

Hank's demeanor indicates he wants Hugh to bring him a drink backstage -- something Red Foley doesn't miss.

RED FOLEY
That was white of you, Hank.

Red Foley's "Peace in the Valley," then a hit, comes on the jukebox. Hank listens to the opening chords:

HANK
I sure like the way you sing that song, "Peace in the Valley." I don't think I've ever heard singing as beautiful.
(pause)
I wanna ask you a favor, Foley.

RED FOLEY
Anything, Hank.

HANK
You know, if a feller does some drinkin', like you and me, it don't mean he don't believe in God.

RED FOLEY
I know that.

HANK
Will you sing that song "Peace in
the Valley" at my funeral?

Foley just looks at Hank:

RED FOLEY
(flabbergasted)
What are you talking about, Hank?

HANK
If I go before you, I wondered if
you'd sing "Peace in the Valley" at
my funeral.

RED FOLEY
Why, Hank, I'll be gone long before
you. How old are you, 29?

HANK

RED FOLEY
I got a lot of years on you. I'll
be singing for God by the time you
die.

HANK
Yeah, maybe.
(a beat)
Just the same, Foley, I'd...
'preciate it.

Hank's mood casts a morbid glow over the table.

CUT TO:

EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Hugh Cherry, wearing a top coat, walks over to the rear door.
Charlie Sanders stands guard.

CHARLIE SANDERS
Hey, Cherry. Put up yer arms a
minute.

Cherry raises his arms as Sanders frisks him.

CUT TO:

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Cherry and Hank crowd into the small MEN'S ROOM. A single bulb illuminates the narrow wedge-shaped closet. A long trough of soldered tin serves as a urinal.

Hank turns Cherry around, lifts up his coat and pulls a pint of Jack Daniels from Hugh's waistband.

HUGH CHERRY

Jim Denny'd kill me if he found
out.

HANK

(taking a drink)
Don't worry about him boy.

LATER, Hank stands alone as Pee Wee King and his Light Crust Doughboys sing "Slow Poke" on stage.

Hank walks over to STEVE SHOALS, 40, ERNEST TUBB, 37, EDDIE ARNOLD, 33, and RED FOLEY, 42. Shoals was a record executive for RCA.

HANK

(ornery)
Hey, Shoals.

They all turn.

STEVE SHOALS

Yeah, Hank.

HANK

Hank Snow said that you wouldn't
let him record my song for RCA. You
said it was low class.

Hank is het up to fight -- the last thing anybody wants.

STEVE SHOALS

(defensive)
We didn't think it was right for
Hank.

HANK

Since when is a Hank Williams' song
too low class for you?

RED FOLEY

Now, Hank.

Hank lifts his guitar over his head like a club.

HANK

I oughta break your fuckin' head
open right now, you goddamn Jew
bastard.

Red lunges over and grabs Hank's guitar. Tubb and Arnold
restrain him.

HANK

Shoals, you take these boys here,
Red Foley, Eddie Arnold, Ernest
Tubb, you go out on the street and
stack up their new records, then
you stack up a stack of new Hank
Williams records, and see which one
people will buy first. You just
see.

Hank turns to the others for confirmation:

HANK

Which one would they buy?

Foley, Tubb and Arnold -- the three most prestigious names in
country music -- all murmur assent ("They'd buy yours, Hank")
and look at each other. Nobody wants to tangle with Hank,
although the implications of his statement are somewhat
staggering: it would be as if Norman Mailer, at the age of
had insisted that Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Faulkner all
jointly agree that he was the best American novelist.

Shoal's eyes catch Jim Denny's as Denny walks over.

JIM DENNY

What's the problem, Hank?

Denny walks off with Hank, leaving Foley, Arnold, Tubb and
Shoals to shrug and shake their heads.

HANK

It's nothing.

JIM DENNY

You're drunk again, Hank.

HANK

Yeah, but I got reason to be.

JIM DENNY

What's that?

HANK

She's standing right over there.

Denny turns and sees Audrey dressed in a white, sequined gown. Her hair whirls in a bouffant style above her head.

JIM DENNY

Oh, no. Audrey ain't going on the Opry tonight. You gave me your word, Hank. You said she'd never be on the Opry again.

(Hank just shrugs)

She can be on the Duckhead Show, but not the Opry.

HANK

Well, hoss, you gotta look at it this way. Either she goes on the Opry tonight or I can't go home.

JIM DENNY

This is the last time.

HANK

I swear it, Mr. Denny. As God is my witness, I swear it.

LATER, Hank and Audrey stand next to Red Foley in front of the Prince Albert backdrop.

RED FOLEY

...later Grant Turner will tell us a little about Hank and Audrey's Corral. You opened up a store, huh Hank?

HANK

Yeah, see if you can sell somethin', Red.

RED FOLEY

But right now, I want you to do that song that you got up there on the charts. It always seems like you've got one song or another up there.

HANK

Yeah, this one's called, "Hey, Good Lookin', what you got cookin', how's about cookin' somethin' up with me."

RED FOLEY

And you've got somebody pretty good lookin' to sing it with.

HANK

That's right. Miss Audrey's gonna
hep me out on this song. As pretty
and fine a wife as any feller could
want -- and got a mighty pretty
voice, too. So, c'mon, hon, let's
sing 'em that song.

Hank and Audrey step over to the mike. As the Cowboys start
to play, Hank twists the microphone to favor his voice:

HANK AND AUDREY

"Hey, Good Lookin', whatcha got
cookin', How's about cookin'
somethin' up with me."

CUT TO:

INT. FRED ROSE'S ATTIC - DAY

Hank, pen in hand, sits at Fred's desk. Rose paces across the
room.

HANK

I got to get on the road, Pappy.
The Caravan's in Augusta tonight.

FRED

First you'll write this apology to
Steve Shoals. Why did you call him
a "Jew bastard?"

HANK

I'm sorry, Pappy. I was drunk.

FRED

He ain't even Jewish.

HANK

I didn't know.

FRED

What's wrong with you, Hank? Can't
you moderate yourself at all?

HANK

That's my business.

FRED

Mine, too.

HANK

I'm gettin' better. I'm takin'
these pills now.

FRED

I was the worst drunk in the whole music business until I found Christian Science.

HANK

I may be just a drunk, but you should of seen my Daddy. Now there was a drunk.

FRED

You've got to control yourself. You're in trouble, Hank.

HANK

I can't help it, Pappy. It's that goddamn Audrey and Momma. They're pullin' me apart from separate sides. I can't sleep. They're at me. They both need the money. If I quit for two weeks I'd be broke.

FRED

That's not true.

HANK

It's like they're pulling right at my body, Pappy. I'm in pain.

FRED

You've got to have that back operation.

HANK

I'm in that kinda pain, too.

FRED

I'll warn you. The Opry is very upset. Henry Stone himself called me. You're giving WSM a bad reputation.

HANK

They're just jealous.

FRED

Who?

HANK

Everybody. And those business executives, they're the worst of all. You've been to New York, Pappy, you know what I'm talking about.

FRED
(confused)
They treat you great in New York.
You've got Mitch Miller, Columbia,
MGM all pushing your songs...

HANK
That's not what I'm talking about.
You know what I mean. You go to New
York and they look down on you like
some hillbilly. Don't matter how
many records you sell. On the
Caravan, I can shut down any act:
Hope, Berle, you name it. But they
still look down on you.

FRED
Who?

HANK
Everybody.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONTGOMERY - DAY

The Hadacol motorcade heads up Perry Street past the red
brick Municipal Auditorium.

Hank and Lilly ride in the back of an open white convertible.
A poster on the side of the car reads: "Montgomery's Hank
Williams" and "Mrs. Williams."

Hank, wearing his white fringe and rhinestone jacket, waves
to the crowd.

W.A. Gayle, the "Mayor of Montgomery," rides in a dark
Packard followed by the majorettes and the marching band of
Sydney Lanier High School.

CUT TO:

INT. MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The orange-and-white Hadacol banner stretches across the
stage, flanked by the now-battered Hadacol bottle displays.

The Hadacol Announcer stands at the mike with Hank, Lilly and
JAMES WORTHINGTON, an officious man in a brown double-
breasted suit and bow tie. Lilly wears her black dress, lace
collar and short "bubble" hair-do.

Hank slings his guitar to the side as Worthington reads an
official proclamation:

WORTHINGTON

"...therefore I, James E. Folsom,
Governor of the sovereign state of
Alabama, do hereby designate Hank
Williams an official Good Will
Ambassador from the state of
Alabama."

The Announcer leads the applause. Hank smiles and shifts his
shoulders.

HANK

Thank you very much, Mr.
Worthington.

Lillian looks at Hank adoringly. He leans over and kisses
her. No mother was ever closer to Heaven than Lilly Stone at
that moment.

HADACOL ANNOUNCER

Say something to the folks, Hank.

HANK

Well, hoss, hain't got too much to
say. Jus' to thank the Guv'ner and
the folks here in Montgom'ry.

HADACOL ANNOUNCER

Then maybe you'll sing a song for
us.

(many cheers)

HANK

Be glad to, boy. I'd like to do a
new song I jus' wrote, a sad little
thing called, "What Can I Do, You
Win Again."

(to band)

Let's hit it, boys.

Hank chooses this moment to sing one of his most personal and
melancholy songs. His voice leaves no doubt that the "I" of
the song is none other than the Good Will Ambassador himself,
Hank Williams:

HANK

"The news is out all over town,
That you've been seen a-runnin'
'round, I know that I should leave,
but then, I just can't go, you win
again.

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

This heart of mine could never see
what ev'rybody knew but me, Just
trusting you was my great sin, What
can I do, you win again."

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Christmas decorations and lights are strung along the bushes and railings. A cardboard Santa Claus, his sack bulging with gifts, has one foot already in the chimney. His faithful reindeer wait on the roof.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

The Williams' BEDROOM is decorated in Audrey's progressively tasteless style. Her white "antiqued" Louis Seize bedroom set has no relation to Hank's life or tastes.

Hank, wearing a back brace, sits up in bed reading a "Vault of Horror" comic. Hank Jr., wearing a western-styled jumper, plays on the floor with large blocks. A radio, a glass of water, several vials of medicine (one labeled "morphine") and a surgical syringe sit on the night table. Little Jimmy Dickens sings "They Locked God Outside the Iron Curtain" on the radio.

Hank looks over his comic book at his son. He sets his comic aside, placing it atop a dozen or so other comics -- all of the grotesque E.C. horror series.

HANK

Hey, Bocephus.

Hank Jr. continues playing.

HANK

Come here. Come over to Daddy, Bo.

Hank Jr. doesn't seem to hear him. Like many men raised without a parent or in poverty, Hank idolized his son. He wanted Bocephus to have everything he didn't.

Hank tries to reach over and touch his son, but is restrained by his brace.

In the LIVING ROOM, ROSE SHAPIRO shows Audrey her new diamond bracelet. Rose Shapiro, a close friend of Audrey's is draped with expensive jewelry. Mrs. Shapiro, of Shapiro's Jewelers, encouraged and cultivated Audrey's taste for "fashion design" jewelry and clothes.

Brightly-wrapped presents have been placed around the Christmas tree. A plastic guitar is placed atop the tree in place of the traditional star.

Hank calls out from the bedroom:

HANK

Audie!

Audrey calls to Miss Raglin.

AUDREY

Miss Raglin, see what he wants.

Miss Raglin walks into the BEDROOM to find Hank half-stretched out on the floor.

HANK

Help me up.

MISS RAGLIN

(helping him up)

You shouldn't be trying to get out of bed yet, Mr. Williams.

HANK

I just wanted to hold Bocephus.
Bring him over.

Miss Raglin picks Hank Jr. up and places him beside his father.

MISS RAGLIN

How you feeling?

HANK

(playing with Bo)

I don't think I've ever been this happy. I'm feeling so good I haven't written a song in two weeks. Where's Audie?

MISS RAGLIN

She's in the living room with Mrs. Shapiro. Should I get her?

HANK

Nah. I don't like that Mrs. Shapiro. She puts the wrong ideas in Audrey's head -- and that ain't hard.

(gestures)

Open that drawer there.

Miss Raglin turns to the dresser.

MISS RAGLIN

Here?

HANK

Yeah, the second drawer. I wanted to give Bo one of his toys.

MISS RAGLIN

Before Christmas?

HANK

I'll buy him another. I'll get him a train.

Miss Raglin pulls out the drawer. This is clearly "Hank's drawer": an unsorted collection of clothes, souvenirs, guns, and money -- two or three thousand dollars in loose bills are scattered among the other objects.

MISS RAGLIN

You know that Hank Jr. isn't old enough for a train yet.

Hank looks disappointed. "I always regret I never let him buy that train," Miss Raglin said twenty-five years later. "Because I knew he didn't want it for Hank Jr., he wanted it for himself."

HANK

There's a toy gun set I got in Charleston in there.

Miss Raglin picks up a hand-tooled chrome-plated Colt .44.

HANK

No, that's a real one.

She finds the toy holster set. She gives it to Hank who puts it on Hank Jr. A smile breaks across his face.

CUT TO:

INT. JERRY RIVERS' HOUSE - NIGHT

JUNE RIVERS, Jerry's wife, answers the phone. Open Christmas presents are spread under their tree.

JUNE RIVERS

Yeah, Hank.

(a beat)

You want to talk to Jerry?

(a beat)

(MORE)

JUNE RIVERS (CONT'D)

No, that's alright.

(a beat)

What's wrong?

(a beat)

Where's Audrey?

(a beat)

Where's Miss Raglin?

(a beat)

Don't you have anybody to cook anything for you?

(a beat)

Look, I'll come over and make some soup.

(a beat)

No, no, Hank. We'll be right over.

She hangs up and turns to Jerry.

JUNE RIVERS

There's something wrong with Hank.

Let's go over.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - NIGHT

Jerry and June pull into the drive. Hank, barefoot, is drunkenly wandering around the front yard in his pajama bottoms and back brace.

Gifts and food have been thrown all over the yard. A large Christmas ham, several pistols, and a pair of women's shoes lie on the grass. Hank bends over and picks up a mink coat.

Jerry and June rush over to him.

JERRY RIVERS

(supporting him)

What's wrong, Hank?

HANK

Just leave all this other shit. I was gonna just leave the coat, but I figur'd I paid for it, so I better get it.

JERRY RIVERS

Where's Audrey?

HANK

I don't know. She left. Miss Raglin's on vacation. What kind of woman would throw a mink coat out on the lawn like this?

JUNE RIVERS
You've got to get back in bed.

Jerry motions to June to open the front door as he helps Hank back inside.

JERRY RIVERS
(to June)
Make some strong coffee.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Hank pulls his new baby blue Cadillac convertible in front of the house. "Auld Lang Syne" plays on the car radio.

Hank gets out stiffly and notices Audrey's yellow Cadillac in the garage. He walks over and examines it.

He straightens his Stetson and walks inside.

CUT TO:

INT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Hank walks in and sees Audrey sitting with Rose Shapiro and DORIS DAVIS. All three are overdressed for the holidays.

Anger flashes across Hank's face.

HANK
There you are.
(points to Rose)
And you too. Get out of my house,
Rose.

AUDREY
Shut up, Hank.

HANK
(to Rose)
Jus' 'cause you screw around on
your husband don't mean you can go
around telling everybody else to. I
don't want you in my house.

AUDREY
Hank Williams, you bastard!
Apologize.

Hank walks into the bedroom, leaving three angry women in his wake. Audrey looks at Rose Shapiro as if to say, "He won't get away with this."

A moment later, Hank walks back in with his cannon-sized Colt revolver.

HANK

Get out of my house! You bitch!

Hank fires a shot into the ceiling. The women scream and scramble for the front door.

He fires two more shots over their heads as they leave.

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

END OF THE OPRY

Summer, 1952

EXT. MADISON HOSPITAL - DAY

Hank walks out of the sanitarium with Don Helms and RAY PRICE, He is wearing a single-breasted navy sport jacket and grey fedora.

Price walks alongside Hank with fawning admiration. Williams first heard Price on the Big D Jamboree in Dallas, took him on tour, helped him get a recording contract and a spot on the Opry.

Williams and Price get into Hank's blue Cadillac, wave goodbye to Don and drive off.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Price drives slowly past Hank's old house. Hank, slouching in the seat, looks to see if there are any strange cars in the driveway. There are.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Price parks in front of the two-story red brick house Hank has rented on the outskirts of Nashville.

They get out and walk inside.

CUT TO:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Hank's house looks as if two hillbilly singers live there. Clothes, guitars, guns, sheet music, awards, photos and clippings are generously spread around the room. A crooked painting of the Grand Tetons hangs over the sofa. Hank finally has a house he can decorate any way he chooses. And he's made a mess of it.

Hank plops down and dials the phone:

HANK
(on phone)
Hello, is this...?

There's a long pause as Hank cups the receiver and looks away with disgust. Audrey -- on the other end of the line -- won't speak to him.

HANK
(on phone)
Miss Raglin?
(a beat)
Is Momma there? Put her on.
(a beat)
Yeah, Momma. It's alright. You
bringing Bo over?
(a beat)
I'll send Ray to pick you up.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Hank waits as Price drives up with Lilly and Hank Jr. He greets his mother with a kiss as he takes Bocephus into his arms.

They walk toward the house; Price drives off.

CUT TO:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Lilly opens a box wrapped in pink paper as Hank plays on the sofa with his son.

Lilly removes a mink fur piece. Hank watches her a moment, then says drolly:

HANK
Happy Mother's Day, Lilly.

Lilly, in her own Marjorie Mainish way, is overcome with emotion:

LILLIAN

Oh, Hiram. This is so beautiful.
Too beautiful for me.

HANK

Trade it in. At least Audie didn't
get it. She got ev'rything else. I
thought if I gave her half, she'd
come back.

Lilly sits down beside Hank and Bo. The years of performing, hustling and drinking have taken their toll on Hank's body. Each year his eyes seem to sink further into his head. His clothes hang loosely on him, his hairline has receded another inch. His smile is less contagious than before; each grin seems to take more effort. He's been on the road fourteen years, more than half his life.

LILLIAN

Don't let it trouble you. You're
better off now, Hiram. She ain't
worth it. Some women are good for
their husbands, other women don't
seem to care at all.

HANK

I came by the house and she
wouldn't let me see Bo.

Lilly looks at an autographed photo of Hank and Perry Como taken on the set of Como's CBS TV show.

LILLIAN

Look on the bright side. There
ain't ever been an Alabama boy did
well like you.

Lilly telling Hank to "look on the bright side" has the persuasive force of Niobe advising Jeremiah to "cheer up." Hank just nods.

LILLIAN

(continuing)

You'll always have your Momma.
They'll never take your love from
me.

(a beat)

What is Perry Como really like?

Hank's mood brightens as he massages Hank Jr.'s head.

CUT TO:

INT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Hank stands at the WSM mike wearing his white Stetson, navy blue western suit with yellow arrow epaulets and red-and-silver hand-painted tie. He waits for this cue from the steel guitar, slips a tear into his voice and finishes the final chorus of his new hit, "Half as Much":

HANK

"If you missed me half as much as I
miss you, You wouldn't stay away
half as much as you do, I know that
I would never be this blue, If you
only loved me half as much as I
love you."

Hank tips his hat, takes his guitar by the neck and ambles off stage.

As he steps BACKSTAGE, he passes Ray Price, who waits nervously in the wings.

HANK

(to Price)

Got 'em real prime for you, boy.

RED FOLEY (O.S.)

I want to bring out a Texas boy
that you've come to like. That
young fella from Dallas, Ray Price.
Come out here, boy...

As Ray walks out, Hank spots a pretty red-headed girl sitting in the pew at the rear of the stage. She gives Hank the eye. He runs his eyes over her, then walks over to the radio booth where Minnie Pearl is sitting.

ON STAGE, Ray sings his first hit, "Talk to Your Heart."

IN THE BOOTH, Hank steps over to Minnie:

HANK

Say, Minnie, you see that gal over
there?

(gestures)

Ain't she the prettiest thing?
Who's she here with?

MINNIE PEARL

I don't know, Hank.

Hank nods and walks over to the girl, BILLIE JEAN JONES ESHLIMAR, 19. Billie Jean, the daughter of a Bossier City, La., policeman had quit high school the year before to marry Harrison Eshlimar, a soldier. The marriage hadn't worked out and she was now working as a switchboard operator in Nashville. She was, by the accounts of her contemporaries, a sight to behold: "so pretty you could hardly look at her." Billie Jean offers a more blunt description: "I had the biggest tits in Bossier City when I was 12. I was what they call an early bloomer."

Price is at the mike as Hank strolls over to Billie Jean. The ON STAGE Opry atmosphere is informal: Hank talks to Billie Jean in full view of the audience.

HANK
(cock-of-the-walk)
Hey, girl.

BILLIE JEAN
Me?

HANK
What's your name?

BILLIE JEAN
Billie Jean Jones.

HANK
You married?

BILLIE JEAN
No, sir.

HANK
Who you here with?

BILLIE JEAN
Faron Young.

Billie points to where FARON YOUNG is standing.

HANK
You gonna marry him?

BILLIE JEAN
No, sir.

HANK
Well then, Old Hank jus' might
marry you. You're about the
purtiest thing I ever seen.

Hank smiles and ambles across the stage. Billie Jean watches with great interest.

Hank steps over to Faron BACKSTAGE.

HANK
You that Faron Young boy?

FARON YOUNG
(awed)
Yessir, Mr. Williams.

Faron Young, then 20, was a Shreveport native who had come up from the Hayride for a guest spot on the Opry. "Hank was my idol," Faron remembers, "I would have laid on the floor just to have him walk over me."

HANK
(gestures)
That your gal?

FARON YOUNG
Yessir, Mr. Williams.

HANK
Me an' Don and a big ol' gal I met
from Philadelphia gonna go out
after the Opry. Why don't you join
us?

CUT TO:

EXT. NOCTURNE CLUB - NIGHT

A blue neon cocktail glass lights up the entrance. Hank's Cadillac is parked out front.

CUT TO:

INT. NOCTURNE CLUB - NIGHT

Don and HAZEL HELMS, Faron, Billie Jean, Hank and a well built GIRL IN A RED DRESS sit at a table inside the night club. A small combo plays pop music as couples dance.

Faron, seeking Hank's approval, speaks impulsively. Hank only listens with his ears; his eyes are all over Billie Jean.

FARON YOUNG

You wouldn't remember, but one night me and a couple of friends from high school were hanging out by the back steps of the Hayride and you came out and I yelled, "Hank, someday I'm gonna be a singer like you."

HANK

Yeah, I think I do remember that, boy.

(to Billie Jean)

Where you from, Billie Jean? You from Shreveport, too?

Billie gazes back into Hank's eyes with all the innocence she can muster. Billie Jean says she was "just a barefoot girl who didn't know didley-squat about sophistication" when she met Hank. Perhaps she didn't know much about sophistication, but she knew plenty about men: she was well-known around the Officers' Clubs in Shreveport, had sported with many of the Hayride stars, and was now being kept by Faron in Nashville.

But she doesn't need any wiles to win Hank. He couldn't see through her if she was a pane glass window.

BILLIE JEAN

(nods)

Bossier City. Me and my Momma and Daddy used to live right down the street from you and Audrey in Bossier. We lived at 912 Modica. Of course it wasn't as high-tone as your place. It was across Rat's Alley. I used to stand at the window and watch you drive down the gravel in your long blue Packard.

Hank is hooked.

HANK

You lived on Modica? By damn.

BILLIE JEAN

I used to ride to school with Lycretia. The bus'd come right down the street. She didn't know me, of course, 'cause I was older, but I knew who she was.

Hank, already a little tipsy, stands and announces:

HANK

Why don't y'all come over to my place. Me an' Ray Price rentin' this little place on Natchez Trace. Ray's probably out roaring with the billies. Let's go on over.

Faron and Billie Jean can hardly believe it. They've just met the crown prince of country music, and he's inviting them to his home.

DON HELMS

Me and Hazel got to get home, Harm.

FARON YOUNG

Sounds great.

CUT TO:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - NIGHT

Hank has opened a large suitcase and spread it across the coffee table. Inside are rows and rows of fancy pistols.

Billie Jean picks up a Lugar by the barrel:

HANK

That's a German Lu-gar. Bought that in Germ'ny when we were entertainin' the troops.

Faron pours himself another drink and hands one to Hank. Hank's date looks docilely on. The only thing Helms, Young and Billie Jean remember about her was that she had big breasts and a red dress.

Billie puts the Lugar back and takes out a Colt .44.

BILLIE JEAN

Is this a .38?

HANK

No, hon, that's a Colt .44 like in the movies. That's the kind they used to shoot the Indians with.

Faron walks over to Hank's new 45 rpm record player.

FARON YOUNG

Hey, you got some of these 45's.
(looks at records)
What you got? Let's put something on.

Hank looks across the room at Faron cross-eyed:

HANK

Hey, Young, come over here.

Hank walks into the bedroom. Faron puts one of his own songs ("I Knew You When") on the player and follows Hank.

Faron walks into the BEDROOM to find the large barrel of a Colt pistol pointed squarely in his face.

Hank, holding the pistol with both hands, weaves from side-to-side.

FARON

Hank!

HANK

Close the door.

(Faron does)

I'm in love with that girl out there, Faron. I'm gonna marry her.

FARON YOUNG

(scared)

Put the gun down, Hank.

HANK

How hooked on her are you, son?

FARON YOUNG

It's alright, Hank. We ain't been getting along as it is.

HANK

Let's go down to the Midnight Jamboree. You put Billie Jean in the back seat and I'll sit with her. Then you drive.

FARON YOUNG

Okay. Put the gun down, Hank.

HANK

You won't hit me if I put the gun down, will you, boy?

FARON YOUNG

No.

HANK

Promise?

FARON YOUNG
I promise, Hank.

CUT TO:

EXT. ERNEST TUBB'S RECORD SHOP - NIGHT

Faron drives down Broadway toward the famous yellow guitar-shaped sign. Post-Opry crowds stand outside the brightly lit store.

INSIDE THE CAR, Hank is kissing Billie Jean as Faron parks the car. Ernest Tubb's familiar bullfrog voice, live from the "Midnight Jamboree," comes over the car radio.

FARON YOUNG
This car here squeaks, Hank.

HANK
Yeah, I bet you'd like to have one
that squeaked like this.

They get out of the car and push their way toward the store.

From 1941 to 1976, each Saturday night when the Opry signed off at midnight, the faithful would move down the block to the original Ernest Tubb Record Store for another hour of live radio music. The store had no stage. The staff simply pushed back the record racks to make room for the performers. Tubb himself was the Master Of Ceremonies when he was in town. When he wasn't, another Opry regular could be relied on to take the stage. Like the Opry, the "Midnight Jamboree" survives in a sanitized version at the new Ernest Tubb Record Store #2 off Music Row.

Faron spots Hank turning slowly in circles and pulls Hank's arm over his shoulder to support him.

Several people recognize Hank as they squeeze their way inside.

CUT TO:

INT. ERNEST TUBB RECORD STORE - NIGHT

Ernest Tubb wraps up a song and drawls into the WSM mike:

TUBB

Mighty glad to do that for you.
That's "Missing In Action"
available here at the Ernest Tubb
Record Shop, 417 Broadway,
Nashville, Tennessee on Decca 78
number 46389 and 45 rpm number
46389.

A rumble of excitement goes through the elbow-to-elbow crowd.

TUBB

Looks like we got an old friend
comin' up to see us. It's Hank
Williams and that young feller from
Shreveport... ah... Far-on Young.

Hank takes Faron's arm from around his shoulders:

HANK

(to Faron)

Take your arm off me, boy. These
folks'll thing Old Hank's drunk.

Hank and Faron walk over to Tubb. Hank steps directly to the
mike:

HANK

Howdy, friends, this is Old Hank
comin' out of your radio. I got my
old friend Faron Young with me and
we're gonna do that number you've
all been requestin'. Boys, git me
started.

There's an awkward pause. Tubb leans over:

TUBB

What song is it, Hank?

HANK

(confused)

Yeah. It's that old favorite...
"Kaw-liga" and if you don't know
it, boys, it starts in C and if you
get lost, just go to G and wait.

Tubb and Young join in:

HANK, FARON AND TUBB

"Kaw-liga was a wooden Indian
standing by the door..."

CUT TO:

EXT. TENNESSEE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Hank and Billie Jean ride through the green hills of middle Tennessee. The top of Hank's baby blue Cadillac is down and Billie's long, dark red hair flies in the breeze.

Hank wears a white shirt and baseball cap. Billie, bare-footed, wears "shorts a size too small and a shirt a size too small tied up in the middle."

Billie slurps at a vanilla ice cream cone as the ice cream blows on her face, in her hair and over her clothes.

Billie puts her feet on the dash and wiggles her toes in the wind. Hank keeps turning his head to look at her. He's as happy as a kid in a candy store.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL TOWN 5 & 10 - DAY

Hank waits by the car outside a Five-and-Ten.

Billie Jean walks out wearing new shorts and tying the tails of her new size-too-small shirt across her smooth, brown stomach.

They get into the car and drive down the main street.

CUT TO:

EXT. TENNESSEE COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Hank's tapping the dash with his right hand as he looks over to watch Billie Jean licking on a chocolate cone. The ice cream spatters on her new shirt. Hank looks over, beaming.

HANK

Tell you one thing, babe, Old Hank
could never be ashamed of you.

He gets an idea:

HANK

You know what I'm gonna do? Old
Hank's gonna write you a song. Get
a piece o' paper an' pencil outa
the glove compartment there and
take this down for me. Ain't got
time to do it myself.

Hank starts beating out the tune of "Your Cheating Heart" on the dash. Hank pretends to improvise the song as he goes.

He isn't much of an actor. Fortunately for him, Billie Jean is easily and willingly fooled.

HANK

You know I wuz telling you about that Audrey -- about her cheatin' heart. Well, that's what I'm gonna write about. You take this down for Old Hank. "Your cheatin' heart will make you pay" -- no, "weep, will make you weep. You'll cry and cry and try to sleep." You like that, hon?

Billie Jean, very much impressed, writes as fast as she can. Hank is quite impressed with himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Hank and Billie Jean get out of the Cadillac and walk toward the house.

The storm door is broken and ajar. Broken glass lies on the steps.

CUT TO:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

A pair of high heels sit on the living room chair.

HANK

(looking around)

That damn Reba's moved herself in.
I'll git her out.

Billie, confused, watches as Hank storms upstairs. A moment later there are the sounds of fighting and screaming.

Hank, his spindly arms and legs flying every which way, comes tumbling down the steps. He pulls himself up and charges back.

Another moment later, REBA STEWART, wife of country singer Red Stewart, comes crashing down the steps followed by Hank.

HANK

Get your country ass outa here.

REBA STEWART

I ain't leavin', you bastard! You promised.

Hank takes a swing at her as she kicks him. Billie yells:

BILLIE JEAN
Who is this, Hank? There ain't
gonna be no fish fry tonight. I'm
going home!

Hank turns to Billie Jean and says angrily:

HANK
I ain't done nuthin'.

BILLIE JEAN
Don't lie to me, Hank. I can see.

HANK
Oh, yeah? Who you gonna believe?
You gonna believe Old Hank or are
you gonna believe your own goddamn
lying eyes?

Reba takes another swing at Hank and he hauls her kicking and screaming out the front door.

BILLIE JEAN
(following them)
I ain't ever gonna be second! You
get rid of her, Hank. I ain't
comin' back 'til you get rid of
her!

CUT TO:

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Hank turns to grab Billie as she walks away. As he does, Reba makes a dash back inside. He grabs her by the arm and throws her off the stoop.

Reba gets up and yanks Hank off the stoop. Falling to the ground, he takes a wild swing at her.

Billie Jean disappears around the corner and keeps going.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN DIEGO AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Assorted cars, vintage 1952, park along a row of palm trees. The San Diego Auditorium announces the "Grand Old Opry Show: Minnie Pearl, Ernest Tubb, Hank Williams"

CUT TO:

INT. SAN DIEGO AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Minnie Pearl says "Thank-ee kindly" and scoots off stage holding her straw hat and pouch bag.

BACKSTAGE, Minnie passes the Drifting Cowboys as they carry their instruments on stage. Don Helms looks worried:

DON HELMS
Minnie, you'd better go see Harm.

MINNIE PEARL
What's wrong?

DON HELMS
(futile gesture)
You know.

Minnie heads toward the dressing rooms.

Inside Hank's DRESSING ROOM, she finds this chilling sight: Hank, curled in a fetal position, hides under a small lamp table. The STAGE MANAGER and his ASSISTANT pull at his spindly legs and arms.

Yellow vomit has dried on the front of his white suit. His whole body shakes. He looks at Minnie and cries:

HANK
(pleading)
Tell them, Minnie. I'm sick. I
can't work. Tell them I can't go
out, Minnie. Please.

Minnie screams and pounds her fists against the Assistant's back.

MINNIE PEARL
You can't make him go out like
that! Leave him alone!

The Stage Manager and Assistant pull Hank from under the table and set him upright.

MINNIE PEARL
He can't play!

The Stage Manager puts Hank's hat on his head and straightens his tie as they lead him out of the room toward the stage.

A.V. BAMFORD, the tour promoter, walks in as they leave.

MINNIE PEARL

Don't let them take Hank out there
like that, A.V. Don't.

Bamford tries to console her. Applause echoes through the room as the announcer intros Hank.

A.V. BAMFORD

What can they do? They got five
thousand people out there who have
paid three dollars each to see Hank
Williams.

MINNIE PEARL

I know, but...

A.V. BAMFORD

Hank brings this on himself. He
didn't play at all in Bakersfield.
If he misses any more dates, I
won't be able to book him at all.

Minnie and Bamford walk BACKSTAGE. They watch Hank from the wings.

Hank hunches in front of the mike in a parody of his former style. His is not simulated suffering, this is real. "During the last six months," says Minnie, "he became a different person. He was no longer the Hank Williams I once knew."

A huge cheer goes up from the crowd as the Cowboys lead off with the familiar chords of "Lovesick Blues." Hank instead sings "Crazy Heart." The band quickly adapts.

HANK

"You thought she cared for you so
you acted smart, Go on and break
you crazy heart."

But after a line, Hank, confused, slips in "Lost Highway." Don shakes his head as he again changes chords:

HANK

"I was just a lad, nearly twenty-
two, Neither good or bad, just a
kid like you, And now I'm lost too
late to pray, I've paid the cost on
the lost highway."

Hank's come a long way from the Slocumb Schoolhouse. Bamford turns to Minnie as Hank sings:

A.V. BAMFORD

Minnie, why don't you stay with him between shows? Maybe you can sober him up -- at least keep him from getting any worse. He'll go with you. You and Maxine drive him around.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN DIEGO - NIGHT

A CHAUFFEUR and MAXINE BAMFORD sit in the front of Hank's dark green Cadillac limo. Hank and Minnie are in back.

Hank scrunches into the corner of the seat, his legs folded at eye level. Maxine and Pearl lead Hank in singing:

MAXINE BAMFORD AND MINNIE PEARL

"I saw the light, I saw the light,"
c'mon, Hank.

Hank joins in for a couple lines, his cheek pressed to the window pane, "and then," says Minnie, "he turned around and his face just broke up. His voice was like the cry of a child or a wounded animal:

HANK

That's the problem, Minnie. I don't see no light.

(looks out window)

There just ain't no light. There ain't no light.

CUT TO:

EXT. MADISON HOSPITAL - DAY

Helms walks out of the sanitarium with Williams. Hank's drying-out sessions always gave him a false appearance of health. He wears a black single-breasted sport coat and striped tie.

They get into Hank's blue Cadillac and drive off.

CUT TO:

FRANKLIN ROAD HOUSE - DAY

Don pulls into the drive and waits as Hank goes to the door.

Hank rings the bell. A moment later, Miss Raglin comes to the door.

Hank speaks with her a moment, then turns and walks back to the car. He punches his fist against his thigh as he steps over to Don's window:

HANK
(repressed anger)
Damn her. Take me home, Shag.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Ray Price loads a cardboard box of his personal things into his car and walks back inside.

CUT TO:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Price picks up another box as Hank walks into the LIVING ROOM. Hank, wearing a torn shirt and baseball cap, looks tired.

HANK
You don't have to go, boy.

RAY PRICE
I called Jimmy from your Western store. He came over and checked out all your outfits and boots -- to make sure I didn't take anything.

HANK
Since when do I care about that crap? Take it all if you want it.

RAY PRICE
You don't know how you get when you're drunk.

HANK
It ain't that bad.

RAY PRICE
I can't take it anymore.

HANK
Don't leave me. I'm gonna be alright.

RAY PRICE
I got to.

Ray turns and carries the box outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - NIGHT

A number of cars are parked along the road. Party noises come from inside.

Jim Denny gets out of his car and walks in.

CUT TO:

INT. NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - NIGHT

A motley assortment of hillbilly hangers-on party in the dimly-lit living room. Margaret Whiting's cover of "I Can't Help It" plays on the record player.

Denny walks past the partiers looking for Hank.

He finds him in the KITCHEN, drunk, hanging over the table. His grey Stetson is crooked.

JIM DENNY

Hank, they told me you were putting
on a bender.

Hank is barely coherent. He holds his stomach as if sick.

HANK

Them bones done riz again, Mr.
Denny. I got this back problem.

JIM DENNY

The Opry won't put up with you
anymore, Hank. The Opry audience
are like guests in the singer's
home.

Hank doesn't answer.

JIM DENNY

Do whatever you want to yourself
this week, but I expect to see you
sober for the Friday Night Opry. If
you ain't there, you're fired from
the Opry.

HANK

Don't worry. I'm jus' feelin' a
little sick jus' now. I'll be
there.

CUT TO:

NATCHEZ TRACE HOUSE - DAY

Hank dials the phone. The LIVING ROOM is a mess. Hank,
brutally hung-over, runs his hand through his thinning hair.

HANK

Hello, Mr. Denny. This is Hank.

(a beat)

I'm alright. I wanted to...

(a beat)

I know I didn't make it last night.

I'm sorry...

(a beat; apologetic)

I was sick and I wanted to come,
but I looked at my watch and it was
too late.

(a beat; contrite)

I woulda called, honest. I got
confused, you know, Mr. Denny. I'll
be there tonight.

(a beat: unbelieving, sad)

You can't do that to Old Hank. He's
the star of the Opry. He don't need
the Opry, the Opry needs him.

(a beat)

I'm sorry.

Denny says something and Hank starts to cry. Large tears run
down his cheeks.

HANK

(on phone)

I promise, Mr. Denny. I'll do
anything. I'm getting better. I
swear to God. Just my word between
you, me and God. I swear on my own
soul in Hell that I'll never miss
another show.

(a beat)

Please, please, don't do this to
me. This'll kill Old Hank. I'll
never be late again.

CUT TO:

INT. JIM DENNY'S OFFICE - DAY

Denny sits at his desk on the phone. Tears are also flowing down his cheeks.

JIM DENNY

I'm sorry, Hank. There's nothing I can do about it. Come down to the station and talk to Mr. Stapp.

(a beat)

I'm sorry.

Denny hangs up and slowly wipes the tears from his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. WSM PARKING LOT - DAY

Hank's Cadillac, the top up, sits in the WSM parking lot.

Fred Rose notices Hank slouched in the back seat and walks over. Hank looks up. He is emotionally rung dry. No longer crying, he's cold, almost distant from his own life.

HANK

Well, Pappy, they fired Old Hank.

FRED

I know. I met with Denny and Stapp this morning. I couldn't do anything.

HANK

I don't blame you. It's my own fault. My own goddam drinking. I gotta straighten myself out.

FRED

What are you gonna do now?

HANK

I'm going back to Shreveport. The Hayride will take me back. I'm breaking up the band. No sense makin' the boys work cheap. I told 'em if they can get good money, to work for somebody else.

ROSE

Are you sure you should stay on the road? Maybe you should stop working for a while.

HANK
(feigns indifference)
Don't worry, Pappy, don't worry
about anything -- nothin's gonna be
alright anyhow.

They just stare a moment at each other.

FADE OUT TO A TITLE READING:

THE LAST DAYS

Winter, 1952

EXT. MONTGOMERY - DAY

Lum York, three years older, turns the corner at the
Jefferson Davis Hotel and walks up the street.

He stops at the barber shop window, looks inside and opens
the door.

CUT TO:

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

Hank, having his hair trimmed, looks up as Lum enters.
Wildroot and Prince Albert signs hang on the white plank-
wood wall.

LUM YORK
Hank.

HANK
Hey, boy, what you got to say for
yourself?
(gestures)
Sit down.

LUM YORK
Your muther said you were back in
town.

Lum takes a seat in the chair next to Hank. The colored
shoeshine boy walks over, but Lum waves him off.

HANK
I'm goin' back to the Hayride. Who
needs the Opry? I'm gettin' a new
bunch of boys together. You can
start this week.

LUM YORK
I'm working for Frizzell now.

HANK

Lum, 'member when I told you you'd
always have a job with Old Hank?

Lum thinks, but doesn't remember Hank's offer. On the
barbershop radio, a local news commentator lauds the "great
work" being done by Senator McCarthy and his Committee on
UnAmerican Activities.

LUM YORK

How much you gonna pay me, Harm?

HANK

Seventy-five a week.

LUM YORK

I'm makin' \$95 with Lefty right
now.

HANK

Well then, forget it. I couldn't
afford to pay you the seventy-five
anyhow.

(suspicious)

Where'd you see my mother?

LUM YORK

She called me.

HANK

(more suspicious)

Why'd she do that?

LUM YORK

(evasive)

I dunno.

HANK

Don't lie to me, boy. What'd she
say?

LUM YORK

She jus' said you wuz thinkin' of
gettin' married and she wanted me
to try to talk you outta it.

HANK

What did you tell her?

LUM

I tol' her it wasn't none of my
business.

HANK

That's right. Besides, I'm gettin' myself straight. I've got a doctor takin' care of me now. He jus' works with alcoholics. I'm alcoholic, which means my blood needs to maintain a certain level of alcoholic fluid. When the alcohol dries out, you start to cravin' it. That's why I take these pills from this doctor I met in Oklahoma. They maintain the alcoholic fluid. If you drink any more, you jus' puke it up.

Lum listens to this baloney, then nods.

LUM YORK

I'm glad to hear you're finally gettin' some good treatment, Harm.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN SHREVEPORT - DAY

Hank, alone in his blue convertible, drives down a Texas street and parks in front of the Commercial Bank Building. It was just four years earlier that he had arrived here with Audrey, Lycrecia, Lum and a mattress tied atop his old Chrysler.

The billboards for Truman and Dewey have been replaced by ones promoting Eisenhower/Nixon or Stevenson/Sparkman. Earl Long is running for Governor again.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Crowds line up outside the Auditorium for the Saturday night Hayride.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUISIANA HAYRIDE NIGHT

A tremendous ovation goes up as Horace Logan introduces "Hank Williams and the Drifting Cowboys." Hank crosses in front of the familiar Hayride barnyard backdrop, barely looking at the audience.

The "Drifting Cowboys" -- an assortment of unemployed musicians from the Shreveport area -- take the stage. Billie Jean's brother, SONNY, 21, plays guitar.

Gone are the matching uniforms and the camaraderie. Their ages vary greatly. The new Drifting Cowboys are more like the day-to-day bands Hank assembled when he played the schoolhouses and honky-tonks.

Hank steps up to the KWKH microphone. Gone also is the Montgomery fireball who tore down the Hayride roof four years before. He moves and stands like an old man. His face is drawn and without expression. His eyes are empty black holes.

He marshals his strength and smiles. He looks backstage:

HANK

C'mon out here, honey. C'mon, and
let the folks have a look at you.

He waves at Billie Jean, who bashfully clings to the curtain backstage.

HANK

C'mon, baby.

Billie Jean, wearing a day dress and white shoes, walks on stage. Hank puts his arm around her.

HANK

(to crowd)

Ain't she something'? You know I've
been singing about that "Yvonne"
what lives on the bayous? Well this
here is my Yvonne. Old Hank's been
robbin' the cradle.

(applause)

Me an' Billie Jean's gonna get
married in New Or'lons and y'all
are invited to come.

There's more cheering. Billie Jean smiles "thank you" and hurries off stage. The steel player intros "I Can't Help It."

CUT TO:

EXT. MODICA STREET - DAY

The steel guitar version of "I Can't Help It" continues as Hank and Billie Jean play catch on the dirt road outside her mother's house.

Hank is wearing dirty western pants, cowboy boots, an old white shirt and a baseball cap. Billie Jean is barefoot in shorts and a size-small man's shirt.

An old stand-up Zenith radio has been pulled on the porch at Modica. The N. Y. Giants and Brooklyn Dodgers are playing the World Series. DiMaggio is at bat.

Hank uses an old mitt while Billie catches barehanded. All things considered, their skills are about equal.

Billie Jean tosses the ball awkwardly. It bounces off Hank's mitt, hits his head and knocks off his cap.

HANK
(childish)
You're trying to hit Old Hank.

Hank steps over with an impish smile, then playfully throws the ball at her. Billie Jean laughs and ducks.

Billie, barefooted, could easily outrun Hank if she wanted to -- but she doesn't want to. Instead, she pretends to run and trips Hank as he passes. Laughing, Hank grabs her foot.

They fall onto the grass together, wrestling like a couple of grade school kids. Hank is all bones; Billie provides the padding. They roll over and over.

A couple of neighbor kids watch from across the street.

CUT TO:

EXT. OKLAHOMA CITY AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The sign advertises Hank Williams and the "stars of the Louisiana Hayride."

CUT TO:

INT. OKLAHOMA CITY AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Hank, on stage, wears his Nudie-tailored suit with quarter notes running down the sides.

HANK
(to audience)
Now I've got a little surprise for you folks. Miss Audrey flew all the way here from Nashville so I could see my son, Bocephus.
(beaming)
Boys, bring little Bocephus out here.

A couple members of the band head Hank Jr., wearing a suit, on stage.

HANK

I started calling him Bocephus
right after he was born and it got
to be so he won't answer to
anything else.

Hank lifts his son up and shows him off. Bo, frightened by the noise and lights, starts crying. Hank unsuccessfully tries to soothe him.

Hank, surprised, turns to see Audrey coming on stage.

HANK

(recovering)

Here's Miss Audrey now.

Audrey waves hello to the crowd and takes Bo from Hank. Although Audrey (never a good actress) tries to appear friendly and casual -- "show business" -- her ill-temper seethes just below the surface.

She walks off with Hank Jr. without speaking directly to Hank. He watches her a second, then motions to the band to continue.

HANK

Alright, boys, let's set those
woods on fire:

(sings)

"Comb your hair and paint and
powder, You act proud and I'll act
prouder, You sing loud and I'll
sing louder, Tonight we're settin'
the woods on fire."

CUT TO:

INT. OKLAHOMA AUDITORIUM BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Hank plays with Bo between shows. Audrey, sullen, just watches them.

Audrey has flown to Oklahoma City for a purpose -- and it wasn't to make Hank happy.

AUDREY

(after a moment)

I've got to fly back to Nashville
in a couple hours.

HANK

(surprised)

Why?

AUDREY

Got to work on my singing.

HANK

You ain't got no singing. I ain't seen Bo in three months. Why'd you come here if you were jus' gonna rush him away? I gotta go back on stage in a hour.

AUDREY

Maybe if you were more of a father, you'd see your son more.

HANK

What's that supposed to mean?

AUDREY

You know what I mean.

HANK

See that feller with the black bag backstage? That's Dr. Marshall. He's got my drinkin' under control.

AUDREY

If you came to Nashville more often, a son might even know he had a father.

(a beat)

Instead of blowing all your money on little whores saying you gonna marry 'em.

Hank catches on.

HANK

You flew all the way here to keep me from marrying Billie Jean, didn't you, Audrey?

AUDREY

I don't know what her name is.

HANK

(angry)

Well, I love that little girl.

AUDREY

(incensed)

That ain't love, Hank -- and it sure ain't that other thing 'cause you ain't no good at the other thing.

(MORE)

AUDREY (CONT'D)

You just want someone to treat you
like a baby and let you drink.

(stands)

You marry that little bitch, Hank
Williams, I'll go to New Orleans
with Bocephus. See what you think
of that.

Audrey grabs Hank Jr. by the arm and storms out.

CUT TO:

INT. OKLAHOMA CITY BAR - NIGHT

Hank steps up to the bar. Sonny dutifully follows. Hank pulls
out a ten-dollar bill and slaps it on the counter.

The BARTENDER brings a Jax.

SONNY

(reaches in pocket)

Here. I'll pay for it.

BARTENDER

(holds \$10)

I'll take it out of this.

SONNY

No.

BARTENDER

What's this for then?

Hank tries to get the beer into his stomach as quick as
possible. As soon as he does, it comes flying up again. Hank
pukes all over the bar. Sonny now gives the Bartender the ten-
dollar bill.

SONNY

It's to clean up after him.

TOBY MARSHALL, 43, walks into the bar. Dressed in a black
suit, he carries his ever-present "little black bag."

Horace R. Marshall first became acquainted with alcoholics
when he was arrested for forging checks while representing
himself as working for Florida A.A. He bought a diploma from
a magazine salesman and devoted himself full-time to
"alcoholic therapy." His treatment included, by his own
admission, Dextro-amphetamine sulphate, Seconal and Chloral
Hydrate, a "knockout" sedative. It also included, by the
testimony of others, heroin. Marshall was investigated by the
State of Oklahoma when, shortly after Hank's death,
Marshall's own wife died of a mysterious overdose.

At the time he was treating Hank, Marshall had already served a term in San Quentin for armed robbery, and was on parole from the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, McAlester on a forgery charge. Later in life, he went on to serve prison terms in El Reno, Oklahoma, and La Tuna, Texas.

SONNY
 (to Marshall)
 You're too late.
 (looks at Hank)
 We've got to be on stage in a half-hour.

Marshall sets his bag on the bar and looks into Hank's eyes.

MARSHALL
 He'll make it.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Again Saturday night. Again the Hayride.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUISIANA HAYRIDE - NIGHT

Hank exchanges a few words with Horace Logan as Logan walks on stage.

HORACE LOGAN
 (at mike)
 And here he is again, that boy
 you've been waitin' for, Hank
 Williams!

The audience applauds, Logan throws out his arm, but Hank just stands still. Logan tries again:

HORACE LOGAN
 That Grand Ole Opry Star with that
 big hit "Jambalaya" on the charts
 right now, Hank Williams!

Still, not a move from Hank.

HORACE LOGAN
 (thinks)
 Yes, that Montgomery boy that
 everybody's proud of, Hank
 Williams, also know to his friends
 as Herman P. Willis!

Hank nods and saunters out. As he passes Logan, he says:

HANK
At least you got it right this
time.

He steps over to the mike:

HANK
I wanna do a little tune here I
wrote t'other night, a song about a
man with a woman with a "Cheatin'
Heart":
(sings)
"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."

CUT TO:

EXT. MILAN CAFE - NIGHT

The Milan Cafe, across the street from the Auditorium's rear exit, doubled as a hang-out for Hayride performers between performances.

CUT TO:

INT. MILAN CAFE - NIGHT

PAUL HOWARD, a western dance band leader, sits across a small table from Hank sipping coffee. He notices something on the right side of Hank's head.

PAUL HOWARD
What's this, Hank?

HANK
(shrugs)
Awh, just some scratches.

PAUL HOWARD
How'd you get that?

HANK
It's that goddamn Audrey. Audrey
and Lilly. They were here a couple
nights ago.

PAUL HOWARD
Audrey was here with your Momma? I
thought they hated each other.

HANK

It's this marriage thing. It's brought them together.

PAUL HOWARD

What do you mean?

HANK

They don't want me to marry Billie Jean. Audrey clawed the Hell outta me. They'll go to any lengths to stop this thing. She's gonna be in New Orleans tomorrow. She'll stop the wedding.

PAUL HOWARD

How can they stop a wedding?

HANK

You don't know Aud'ry and Momma.

PAUL HOWARD

You want to marry Billie, don't you?

HANK

(nods)

I love Billie. She's the only one who showed me any consideration. She's the only one who took care of me.

PAUL HOWARD

Then you can go off and get married right now. Just go out and get a J.P. Then if Audrey comes down to New Orleans tomorrow and tries to stop the wedding, you'll already be legally married.

HANK

That's a good idea. You're my best man, Howard. We'll go after the Hayride.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS - DAY

A poster nailed to a telephone pole reads:

Jambalaya Wedding - October 19
 Rehearsal 3:00 P.M.
 Wedding 7:00 P.M.
 Each Show \$1.50
 New Orleans Municipal Auditorium

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW ORLEANS MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Young boys huckster "Jambalaya Wedding" programs as the crowds file into the Auditorium.

YOUNG BOY
 Get your programs while they last.
 Only one dollar. It's the souvenir
 of a lifetime. Hank Williams'
 wedding!

CUT TO:

INT. NEW ORLEANS MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The dressing room is crowded with friends and hangers-on. Hank and Sonny sit on a small sofa. The lamp table is littered with empty champagne bottles and glasses.

An announcer's voice echoes from the stage:

DISC JOCKEY (O.S.)
 Here's that "Wild Man from Texas,"
 Billy Walker!

Hank's face is strangely puffy. His cheeks seem bloated and -- extraordinary for him -- his stomach is slightly potbellied. Instead of giving Hank an air of health, this extra weight makes him look sicker.

All the members of the wedding party wear tuxedos except Hank. He wears his black-and-green fringed western suit.

SONNY
 You'd better change into your tux,
 Hank.

HANK
 Nah, Herman. I don't...

SONNY
 Cut that out. Don't call me Herman.
 I'm Sonny. Your brother-in-law.

HANK
(kidding)
I know you're Sonny. Where's Dr.
Marshall?

SONNY
He ain't here.

HANK
I pay him \$300 a week, and he ain't
around when I need him. Did that
Audrey come in?

SONNY
She ain't comin'.

HANK
Why not?

SONNY
You said you'd kill her if she
came. Besides, you're already
legally married.

HANK
You wanna hear a song? It's gonna
be a hit.

OSCAR DAVIS, a promoter, interrupts:

OSCAR
They're getting ready for the
weddin', Hank.

Hank, buoyed, stands and smiles:

HANK
Well, boy, let's get married.
(to Davis)
How much am I making on this
weddin'?

OSCAR DAVIS
About \$13,000.

HANK
That sounds purty good. I may just
get married again next month.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW ORLEANS MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM STAGE - NIGHT

Sonny, singer BILLY WALKER, 20, REV. SHELDON and others stand around the WBOK microphone. Potted palms decorate the stage.

The band strikes up the "Wedding March" as Billie and her FATHER walk down the aisle.

Hank sees Billie coming down the aisle and steps off the stage. Her father looks worried.

Hank steps up to them, lifts Billie's veil and kisses her. The faithful ooh and awh.

Then Hank turns, smiles and waves to the crowd.

CUT TO:

EXT. BROWNSVILLE - DAY

Hank's entourage pulls up in front of the main hotel in Brownsville, Texas.

Billy Walker, Sonny and several other musicians drag-ass out of an Oldsmobile and trudge into the hotel.

Toby Marshall tucks his black bag under his arm and helps Hank out of the Cadillac. Hank's white suit is filthy and wrinkled. Toby takes his upper arm and walks him to the hotel door.

Hank is becoming increasingly schizophrenic. Sometimes, he is his old arrogant self; at other times, like now, he is dependent and pre-senile. He likes Marshall to lead him from place-to-place. He wants someone else to take responsibility for his life: he's given up.

"He didn't care how he lived at that point," Oscar Davis told a journalist. "He couldn't cut out the drugs and booze. I'd tell him, 'You ought to think of the boy,' and he'd cry and ask for another drink."

CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSVILLE HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

Sonny, Walker and the others wait at the front desk to check in.

Marshall escorts Hank through the lobby and into the elevator. Hank doesn't bother to look up.

CUT TO:

INT. BROWNSVILLE HOTEL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Hank, now full of pep and braggadocio, entertains a couple sidemen in the corridor outside his room.

HANK

If you boys plan to drink any beer tonight, you'd better get it in bottles. I've played this club before. I know these ol' boys. They like to fight.

Hank gestures as he walks off.

HANK

There was a boy name a' Arby Williams -- no kin to me -- from South Alabama who always carried a knife and loved to cut folks up...

Toby Marshall steps into the doorway as Hank walks off. Billy Walker steps over to him.

Walker was then just a green and unknown singer (his first hit, "Charlie's Shoes" came ten years later), but he was smart enough to be suspicious. "I didn't know anything about drugs back then, but I knew this doctor wasn't helping Hank none. Looking back, I realize Hank was a junkie."

BILLY WALKER

(tentative)

Dr. Marshall?

TOBY MARSHALL

Yeah, Billy?

BILLY WALKER

(curious)

What do you give Hank that peps him up so?

TOBY MARSHALL

Why? You feelin' tired?

BILLY WALKER

No. I was just curious.

TOBY MARSHALL

I give him vitamins. Vitamins and injections.

BILLY WALKER

What kind of injections? 'Cause they really get him goin'.

(MORE)

BILLY WALKER (CONT'D)
I swear most nights he won't make
it, then all a' sudden he'll be all
afired.

TOBY MARSHALL
I give him straight adrenaline.

BILLY WALKER
Is that those red pills?

TOBY MARSHALL
No, that's Chloral Hydrate. It's
for alcoholism.

BILLY WALKER
Billie's upset. She took four of
them things like Hank did and puked
out her guts.

TOBY MARSHALL
(shakes his head)
She doesn't understand anything
about medicine or alcoholics. She's
just a child.
(tries to explain)
Alcoholics need special treatment.
Most people won't take the time to
care about an alcoholic. Most
people won't put up with 'em.
That's why I've devoted my life to
the treatment of alcoholics.
They're not like other people. They
need someone to take care of them.

CUT TO:

EXT. MODICA STREET - DAY

Hank and Billie have moved into 915 Modica, a small one-story
white house across from Billie's parents.

The front window is open. Two large boots stick out the
window.

CUT TO:

INT. 915 MODICA - DAY

Hank sits in a hard-backed chair, his feet on the window-
sill. He wears a sleeveless T-shirt, pajama bottoms and his
embroidered eagle boots.

Hank's atypical puffiness has vanished. In fact, he's
dramatically lost weight. He's wasting away.

But, for the moment, Hank feels no pain. He sits in a stupor, an idiot's grin spread from ear-to-ear.

In the background, a radio plays Hank's current hit, "I'll Never Get Out of This World Alive."

A car pulls in front of the house and Sonny and his brother AL get out. Hank checks the pistol in his waistband as he watches them walk toward the house.

HANK
(calling)
Billie Jean.

Billie Jean walks into the room as Sonny and Al near the door. Hank looks over and smiles:

HANK
Billie, would you get Old Hank his hat? It looks like he's a-goin' to the horse-pital again.

Hank looks with resignation out the window.

Sonny and Al walk in as Billie places Hank's hat on his head. Sonny reaches over, removes Hank's gun and gives it to Al who sets it aside.

Sonny, bending over to pick up Hank, feels something unusual. He walks toward the bathroom.

SONNY
Billie, you got some towels?

BILLIE JEAN
(following him)
Why?

SONNY
He's pissed on hisself again.

BILLIE JEAN
He ain't crapped, has he?

SONNY
No.

Billie hands Sonny a stack of towels.

BILLIE JEAN
Sonny, you got some money?

SONNY
A little.

BILLIE JEAN
For the hospital.

SONNY
Don't you have any?

BILLIE JEAN
Not a cent. Hank's broke. They
don't give him any money.

SONNY
Not even the wedding money?

BILLIE JEAN
He ain't seen any of it yet. They
jus' give him enough to keep him in
booze.

SONNY
(walking back)
Jesus.

Sonny dries Hank. He and Al bend down and pick Hank up in
their arms.

They carry him out the front door. Gone also is the Hank
Williams who had to be dragged kicking and screaming into
Madison Hospital. He now goes to Hyland Hospital as
compliantly as any lobotomized out-patient.

CUT TO:

EXT. 915 MODICA - DAY

Sonny and Al carry Hank to the car as Billie watches from the
door. Hank sings as he goes:

HANK
"Goodbye Joe, me gotta go, me oh my
oh, Me gotta go pole the piroque
down the bayou..."

CUT TO:

EXT. MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

Hayride night.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUISIANA HAYRIDE - NIGHT

Hank, seriously drunk, stumbles around the stage. His white hat falls off his head. Stooping down to pick it up, he almost trips.

The band just plays segue riffs, waiting for Hank to start a song -- any song.

The audience snickers and laughs. There are several hoots from the rear -- then a few boos.

Hank doesn't realize that they are not laughing with him, but at him:

HANK

You like that, huh? Pretty good,
huh? Well, Old Hank's gonna sing
you another one jus' like it.

The crowd breaks up in derision and ridicule. Horace Logan standing at the side of the stage, has had about as much of this as he can take.

Horace rushes on stage and puts his arm around Hank to support him. Holding Hank in this manner, Logan says into the mike:

HORACE LOGAN

(angry)

You folks been entertained by this
man for hours and weeks and years.
You have seen and felt this man's
genius and ability. When he's
straight, you all know how great he
is. But when he's having problems,
I will not stand for you laughing
at this man.

Horace leads Hank off stage to where Toby Marshall and Lillian are waiting.

CUT TO:

INT. MILAN CAFE - NIGHT

Lilly sits with Horace Logan.

LILLIAN

They've taken him to dry out again.
My boy's real sick.

HORACE LOGAN

He's losing weight. For a while he seemed to be getting better.

LILLIAN

That little whore claims she was feeding him up.

HORACE LOGAN

It was just bloat.

LILLIAN

He don't keep food down. He needs full-time medical care. I'm a lay nurse.

HORACE LOGAN

Just water retention.

LILLIAN

I'm paying Dr. Marshall now. Hank can't take care of his expenses anymore.

HORACE LOGAN

We'll put him on temporary release from the Hayride right now. As soon as he finishes the South Louisiana tour, he's got to straighten up.

LILLIAN

I'll take care of him.

CUT TO:

EXT. BAYOU ROAD - DAY

Hank, Billy Walker and another musician are squeezed into the back of Hank's blue Cadillac. Hank, wearing blue pants, an old shirt and baseball cap, looks like a mess. "Nobody took care of him at that time," Walker remembers. "His clothes were always a mess and he stank."

Hank pulls a pill bottle out of his pocket, shakes a "yellow jacket" out and pops it into his mouth. Walker watches disapprovingly.

HANK

It's my chest, Herman. I can't hardly breathe. It's all squeezed.

BILLY WALKER

You know that Doctor ain't no good for you.

HANK

(confidential)

I'm goin' back on the Opry, son. I talked to Jim Denny on the phone last night. It's all a secret. It's going to be a surprise comeback. I've got to play out this tour -- to show 'em I'm in shape -- then get some rest. I'm goin' to the Bahamas. You ever been there, Herman? The sun shines there all year. You jus' lay around. When I get there, I'll be alright. I got a whole head full of songs. Gotta get 'em down. I'm gonna write one jus' for you, boy. Gonna get rid of all these squirrels hangin' around me: that quack, Billie Jean...

BILLY WALKER

But Billie loves you, Hank.

HANK

She's jus' like Audrey and Lilly. All they want is my money. They'll do anything to keep me working. It's like I'm some goddamn nigger slave.

BILLY WALKER

That's great news about the Opry.

HANK

Yeah, me an' Miss Audrey gonna get back together. I called her yesterday. I'm gonna be a father to my son again. Stop playing these honky-tonks. I hate these clubs. I'll never play them again.

BILLY WALKER

You seen 'em all.

HANK

(nods)

When I was jus' a boy, twelve years old, Momma would book me in the tonks 'round Greenville so I'd send the soldier boys over to her boarding house afterwards.

This conversation, recounted by Walker, was very unusual for Hank.

Not only was he open and frank, he was also critical of his mother in the presence of an "outsider." Although most of Hank's friends have heard about Lilly's "boarding houses," Walker is the only one who heard Hank admit that his mother was a lay Madam as well as a lay nurse.

BILLY WALKER

You'll be alright.

HANK

Yeah. I'm gonna go to them Bahamas.

CUT TO:

INT. LAKE CHARLES CLUB - NIGHT

Hank, drugged and drunk, stands before the large Cajun dance crowd.

HANK

We're gonna slow it down a little bit now, hope you don't mind. Jus' get close and close your eyes. A sad little thing... I wrote, oh, some time ago called "Take These Chains From My Heart and Set Me Free."

Hank, sinking fast, starts through a halting, pathetic rendition of "Take These Chains From My Heart."

"Take these chains from my heart
and set me free, You've grown cold
and no longer care for me, All my
faith in you is gone but the
heartaches linger on, Take these
chains from my heart and set me
free."

Once or twice, Hank sinks his head back, gets woozy and struggles to stay on his feet. After the final chorus, Hank turns and walks off stage.

The band is startled. The Cajuns yell for him to come back.

The CLUB OWNER leads Hank back by the arm. "Lovesick Blues, Lovesick Blues," the cry goes up.

The Club Owner has made a mistake. Hank is in no condition to continue. He looks at the hostile crowd and says to the Owner:

HANK

Screw 'em.

And walks off.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE CHARLES CLUB - NIGHT

A dozen or so drunk local "coon-asses" attack Hank's blue Cadillac. They rock the car, thump the hood and yell Cajun curses.

Inside, Hank cringes on the floor in the back seat. Billie huddles against the seat, screaming:

BILLIE JEAN

Get going, Sonny. These coon-asses
gonna kill us!

HANK

I ain't gonna sing "Lovesick
Blues," Billie. I ain't gonna sing
"Lovesick Blues."

Sonny, behind the wheel, gets the car in gear and drives away from the crowd.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWNTOWN MONTGOMERY - DAY

The Jefferson Davis Hotel looking down Katoma.

CUT TO:

EXT. LILLY'S MCDOUGH BOARDING HOUSE - EVENING

Lilly now lives in the boarding house Hank bought her at 318 N. McDough. A Christmas wreath hangs on the door.

Hank's blue Cadillac stands at the curb.

CUT TO:

INT. MCDOUGH KITCHEN - EVENING

It's a familiar scene around the table in Lilly's kitchen: some old faces, some new -- the same unpleasant ambience. Mr. Stone sits Sphinx-like alongside Lilly's new boarders. Billie passes a bowl of potatoes to Hank's Waterhead Cousin. Lilly stands watch by the stove.

Christmas carols play on Lilly's old radio.

Hank, wearing his grey Stetson, pokes lethargically at a tough piece of meat.

LILLIAN
Eat up, Hiram.

Billie spoons a dab of her mashed potatoes onto his plate.

BILLIE JEAN
Here, Hank.

Lilly flashes her cold eyes at Billie -- Billie flashes back.

Hank reluctantly places a forkful of potatoes in his mouth. The reaction is just as he feared: his face pales as the food passes down his esophagus.

He grabs his stomach, hurries into the water closet and closes the door behind him.

The boarders try to eat despite the sounds of retching which come from the bathroom. Billie wants to run to Hank's side, but is afraid to confront Lillian.

CUT TO:

INT. MCDOUGH HALLWAY/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hank, still wearing his hat, sits on the edge of the bed as his mother rolls up his sleeve. She prepares a syringe, rubs alcohol on Hank's emaciated arm and gives him an injection.

Billie, standing in the corridor, watches through the ajar door.

She waits for Lilly to step outside, then closes the door behind her.

Down the hallway, behind Billie Jean, a decorated Christmas tree is lit up in the living room.

BILLIE JEAN
What are you giving him?

LILLIAN
(hostile)
Large vitamin doses. They're
prescribed by Dr. Marshall.

INSIDE THE BEDROOM, Hank's face relaxes as pain-killing relief fills his tortured body. He curls up on the bed, pulls his hat tight over his eyes and tries to block out the conversation outside the door:

BILLIE JEAN (O.S.)
Did he promise to buy the boarding
house across the street?

LILLY (O.S.)
That's none of your business. He's
my son.

BILLIE JEAN (O.S.)
When?

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - DAY

St. Jude's is a large Catholic Church on Fairview Ave.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - DAY

Hank and Billie sit together in the back of the nearly empty church. A parishioner kneels in front, crosses himself, and walks out.

During the last week of his life, Billie Jean says, she and Hank sat in St. Jude's most everyday. Although nominally a Baptist, he spent his final days in a Catholic church. Perhaps it was because St. Jude's was open every day, perhaps it was because they didn't make Hank take off his hat.

In either case, it was revealed after Hank's death that he had given five thousand dollars to St. Jude's the last year of his life.

Hank shakes hands with the priest as they leave.

CUT TO:

EXT. MCWILLIAMS, ALABAMA - DAY

Billie watches as Hank, Christmas present in hand, knocks on the door of a small backwoods house.

After several unanswered knocks, Hank gives up.

BILLIE JEAN
He's not home?

HANK
He's probably on a drunk somewhere.

BILLIE JEAN
I wanted to meet your father.

HANK
Yeah, I shoulda known he wouldn't
be home.

(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

(a beat)

We'll leave the present at my
cousin's house.

They walk back to Hank's waiting Cadillac.

HANK

Old Hank's goin' back to the Opry.
We're gonna build a big house in
Nashville -- jus' for you and me.

BILLIE JEAN

(excited)

That would be wonderful.

HANK

First I'm goin' to the Bahamas and
rest up. I got some new songs.

CUT TO:

INT. SKIPPERS' HOME - DAY

Hank stands by the Christmas tree in the Georgiana home of
Taft Skipper, his first cousin.

Neighbors and relatives have gathered 'round to see Hank and
hear him sing. Hank's present for his father sits on the
table.

Hank, unaccompanied and completely sober, plays an old hymn,
"How Can You Refuse Him Now?" His voice is straight, simple
and sincere -- for a moment the old energy returns.

He is one with the words of the song. His voice aches as he
sings:

HANK

"As they nailed His hands, He cried
they don't understand, As the blood
flowed from His side. How can you
refuse Him now? How can you refuse
Him now? How can you turn away from
His side? With tears in His eyes on
the cross there He died, How can
you refuse Him now?"

CUT TO:

INT. HANK'S MCDOUGH BEDROOM - NIGHT

The words of "How Can You Refuse Him Now?" bleed into the
bedroom where Billie lies awake. The bedstand clock reads
2:00 a.m.

Hank, wearing his pajamas, bounces on the balls of his feet, shadow boxing.

BILLIE JEAN
Come to bed, Hank. You've got to
catch a plane in the morning.

HANK
I can't sleep, Billie.

BILLIE JEAN
Try again.

Hank sits on the edge of the bed, starts to lie down, then sits up again.

HANK
I can't sleep, Billie. I'm afraid.

Hank stands and paces around the small room.

BILLIE JEAN
Afraid? Afraid of what?

HANK
I don't want to sleep. I can't
sleep, Billie.
(walks over to her)
Ev'ry time I lie down and close my
eyes, I see the Lord comin' down
the road. Comin' after me.

Billie reaches out and takes his hand.

BILLIE JEAN
You're just lonely, Hank. Take some
pills. You need to sleep.

Billie gestures to the bottle on the dresser.

HANK
(walking over)
I already took a couple.

Hank shakes four red capsules of Chloral Hydrate out of the bottle and swallows them.

He crawls in bed and lies alongside Billie Jean, nestling his head in her breast like a baby.

CUT TO:

INT. HANK'S MCDOUGH BEDROOM - MORNING

Hank, already dressed in his white double-breasted suit, wakes Billie Jean up.

HANK
Billie?

BILLIE JEAN
Huh?

HANK
The planes are fogged in. I've hired a driver. Maybe I'll be able to pick up a plane to Charleston if it clears. Toby'll meet me there.

BILLIE JEAN
(waking up)
Driver?

HANK
Momma got one for me.

Billie Jean looks at her negligee, then sniffs. She touches her negligee and sniffs her fingers. She runs her fingers across her matted hair:

BILLIE JEAN
(panic)
I got piss all over me! Hank, why'd you do this?

Hank, embarrassed, cringes.

BILLIE JEAN
You pissed all in my hair.

HANK
(defenseless)
I can't help it, Billie.

Billie Jean gets out of bed, opens the dresser drawer and throws some of her clothes on the floor dramatically.

BILLIE JEAN
Hank Williams, you have pissed on me for the last time. Go off to Charleston and Canton, but don't expect me to be waiting when you come back. I'm goin' back to my Momma and I don't know if I'm gonna come back.

HANK
Oh, Billie, don't treat me like
this.

BILLIE JEAN
Go on. Don't miss your ride.

Hank turns sadly and walks out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. MCDOUGH BOARDING HOUSE - MORNING

CHARLES CARR, an 18 year-old Montgomery taxi driver, stands
alongside Hank's blue Cadillac convertible.

Hank kisses his mother goodbye, then, thinking, goes back
into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. HANK'S MCDOUGH BEDROOM - MORNING

Billie Jean stands looking in the mirror, her back to Hank,
as he walks in.

Hank sits on the edge of the bed and looks at her. Billie,
without turning around, says:

BILLIE JEAN
What do you want, Hank?

HANK
Old Hank jus' wanted to look at you
one more time.

Billie Jean refuses to turn around.

After a moment, Hank gets up, steps behind her and kisses her
on the side of the cheek. She doesn't look at him.

Hank turns and walks out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. MCDOUGH BOARDING HOUSE - MORNING

Hank gets in the back seat of the Cadillac as Charles Carr
starts the engine. Lilly kisses her son goodbye.

The blue Cadillac drives away.

CUT TO:

EXT. KNOXVILLE - NIGHT

Hank's car is parked outside the foggy Knoxville airport.

Carr shrugs and gets back into the driver's seat.

CHARLES CARR

We ain't gonna get a plane tonight,
Mr. Williams.

Hank jots lyrics down on a scrap of paper.

HANK

Alright, let's drive on to Canton.
We'll never make Charleston anyway.

Carr puts the Cadillac in gear and drives off.

HANK

There's a doctor on t'other side of
Knoxville. I want you to stop there
and wait. I need a shot. My back's
killin' me. My bones are risin'
again.

CUT TO:

EXT. KNOXVILLE DOCTOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Hank, rubbing his hand, walks out of the doctor's office (to this day, Carr claims to have forgotten the doctor's name or address) and gets back into the car. His legs are wobbly.

The Cadillac pulls away. Light snow is falling.

Hank slumps into the back seat. He takes out his bottle of Chloral Hydrate and swallows several pills.

His hand is bandaged where he has received the injection.

Guy Lombardo's band plays "Auld Lang Syne" on the car radio as the New Year's ball falls in Times Square.

Hank pulls his hat over his eyes and tries to sleep.

CUT TO:

U.S. 11 - NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1952 - NIGHT

Light snow falls in the Smokeys as the Cadillac speeds north on old U.S. 11.

Near Rudledge, a Tennessee Highway Patrol car pulls Carr to the side of the road.

About 2:00 a.m. State Highway Patrol Cpl. SWANN KITTS gets out of his flashing squad car and walks over to the Cadillac.

He pulls out his ticket book and writes a speeding fine.

CPL. SWANN KITTS
That'll be twenty-five dollars.

Cpl. Kitts hands Carr the ticket and Carr gives him twenty-five dollars.

Kitts, curious, looks at Hank sleeping in the back seat. Hank's hat is pulled over his pale face.

CPL. SWANN KITTS
(to Carr)
That guy looks dead.

CHARLES CARR
He's just sleeping.
(a beat)
He ain't dead. He's Hank Williams.

Cpl. Kitts, satisfied, walks away.

Charles Carr puts the Cadillac in gear and drives into the snowy night.

The camera closes in on Hank's half-obscured face. The red veins bulge from his white cheeks: he is dead.

His frozen face does not have the distant peace of an icon. Instead it is locked in grotesque passion, like the face of one suspended on a gothic crucifix.

FADE OUT:

BEGIN FINAL CREDITS

FADE IN:

Hank, age 26, at the height of his success, stands on the Grand Ole Opry stage at the Ryman Auditorium.

Behind him, the Drifting Cowboys -- Don, Jerry, Sammy, Hillous, Bob -- lead into "I Saw the Light."

Hank, full of energy and passion, jumps into his best-known hymn:

HANK
"I wandered so aimless, life filled
with sin, I wouldn't let my dear
Saviour in.
(MORE)

HANK (CONT'D)

Then Jesus came like a stranger in
the night, Praise the Lord, I saw
the light."

FINAL CREDITS - CONT.

As Hank and the Cowboys sing, they are joined by the actors who portray those who have played an important role in the film: Minnie Pearl, Roy Acuff, Ernest Tubb, Faron Young, Billy Walker, Ray Price, Billie Jean, Wesley Rose, Lum York, Grant Turner, A.V. Bamford, Oscar Davis, Little Jimmie Dickens, Hugh Cherry, Nudie, Vic McAlpin, Hank Jr., Lycrecia and Miss Raglin.

"Just like a blind man I wandered
alone, Worries and fears I claimed
for my own, Then like the blind man
that God gave back his sight,
Praise the Lord, I saw the light."

Then, behind each actor, steps his or her real life counterpart. Minnie Pearl steps behind the actress who portrays her. Don Helms behind his actor, Acuff behind his and so on. They all join in the singing.

Before long, the wide Panavision screen is filled with musical legends: fifty years of country music in a single frame.

This is how his friends chose to remember him: Hank Williams dressed in white, at the peak of his powers -- the living legend.

HANK'S APOTHEOSIS:

"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.

END FINAL CREDITS

FADE OUT:

THE END