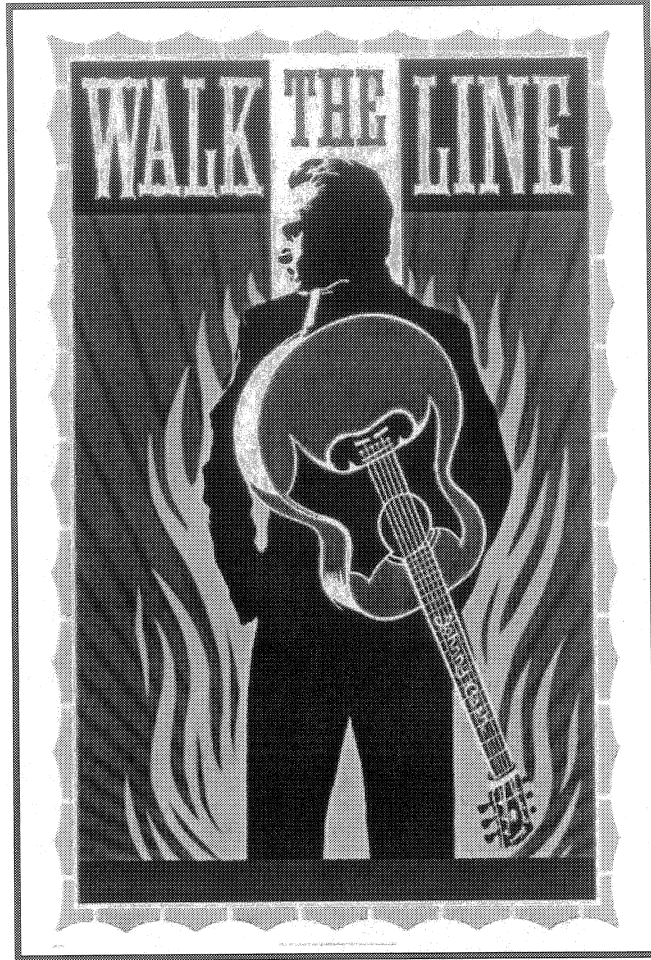


WALK THE LINE

Joaquin Phoenix Reese Witherspoon



by

**Gill Dennis
&
James Mangold**

**DRAFT
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WALK THE LINE

PRODUCERS:
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DRAFT 12.8.03*

SCREENPLAY BY
Gill Dennis &
James Mangold

1968. An immense stone fortress
set in shallow hills of scrub.
a dry wind howls razor wire fence.
a metal sign swings to and fro.
Folsom - creak - State - creak - Prison
a tower guard leans on his elbows, staring at
a bluebird tour bus parked at the gate
beyond the gate, beyond the walls
the yard deserted. a crow picks at a butt can.
suddenly, the bird turns, hearing
a beat, coming from the fortress.
WE CUT INSIDE - AND THE BEAT RISES
the cell block is empty. no prisoners.
BUT THE BEAT RISES-- boom chicka boom
Two guards move rapidly down a hall
Hands on batons, we follow them past
a hand-painted arrow, pointing to the cafeteria
THE BEAT GETS LOUDER AS WE APPROACH THE DOORS
WE HEAR THE WHOOPS AND HOLLERS OF MEN
AND AS WE CUT INSIDE: THE THUMPING BASS SMACKS US.
LUNCH TRAYS QUIVER. A BOLTED P-A SHAKES ON ITS MOORINGS.
AND A THOUSAND BIG HANDS CLAP IN TIME. BOOM CHICKA BOOM.
A GUARD in a high wire cage watches, edgy, as below--
A SEA OF INMATES in green fatigues are on their feet.
They want an encore. Bad.
On the stage, THE BAND PLAYS - BUT WITHOUT A FRONT-MAN.
Their eyes drift to A SIDE DOOR THAT READS -- WOOD SHOP

CUT TO:

2

A MAN IN BLACK (37) OUT OF BREATH, LEANS ON A TABLE SAW.

2

His face etched with hard living. His brow wet. His eyes dark, staring at-- A FEROCIOUS SAW BLADE. Jagged teeth gleam.

WE ARE IN THE PRISON WOOD SHOP. The beat of the band throbs through the walls. *boom chicka boom...* In the corner, THREE ENGINEERS sit before a mix board, recording the show.

Hands clasped, A WARDEN (55) APPROACHES THE MAN IN BLACK.

WARDEN

...Mr. Cash. If you go back out...
'Might I suggest you refrain from performing any more tunes that remind them... the inmates, that is... that they're... well... in prison.

The Man in Black (JOHN 'J-R' CASH) looks up.

CASH

'think they forgot?

WARDEN

...Perhaps you and your wife might do another spiritual.

The Warden gestures to-- A BEAUTIFUL AUBURN-HAIRED WOMAN AT THE DOOR, TUNING A GUITAR. (JUNE CARTER, 38). She plays a short lick. J-R meets eyes with her.

CASH

That's not my wife, Warden.

WARDEN

Oh...

CASH

I keep asking her. And she keeps saying no. 'Been like that for ten years.

June gives Cash a look and he chuckles, straps on his black Martin and grabs A WATER GLASS FOR A SIP but notices-- THE WATER IS CLOUDY AND YELLOW.

CASH (CONT'D)

You ever drink this, Warden?

WARDEN

(smiles)

Oh, no. I'm a Coca-Cola man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASH nods and takes June's hand, moving to --
THE THROBBING DOOR. A ROAR ERUPTS.

CUT TO:

3

A MOTHER OF PEARL PICK STRIKES JANGLING STRINGS.

3

CASH

... 'Hope I'm still in tune here.

THE INMATES CHEER. THE BAND KEEPS THE BEAT CHUGGING, laying tracks. JUNE CARTER plugs in her guitar and starts to pick, adding to the groove. CASH LEANS INTO THE MIC.

CASH

Gentlemen. My apologies. You been a fine audience. And standing back there, catching my breath in your shop, I've come to admire you even more. See, I've never done hard time like you, but I have, on occasion, got myself busted.

(they cheer)

Once in El Paso for...

(they cheer again)

--You been locked up there too?

(they laugh)

They cuffed me to a bench. I don't know why. I was already behind bars; two sets if you include the ones in my head.

(another cheer)

Anyways, I sat there, watching a cockroach run around. I counted bars. Sixteen across, nine vertical, by the way. I felt tough, you know. Like I had seen a thing or two, you know?. Well. That was till a minute ago. Cause I gotta tell you,.. my hat's off to you now--

(holding up cloudy glass)

'Cause I never had to drink this yellow water you got here at Folsom.

THE INMATES LAUGH HYSTERICALLY. CATHARTICALLY-- THE DRUMMER CRACKS THE SNARE-- CASH GRINS AND SUDDENLY LETS LOOSE:

Early one morning while makin' the rounds, I took a shot of cocaine and I shot my woman down. I went right home and went to bed/ I stuck that lovin' '44 beneath my head.

The microphone nearly topples with it. The force of his voice. Like gravel and stone. Like a bonfire. Inside a man.

Got up next morning and grabbed that gun. Took a shot of cocaine and away I run.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE INMATES ROAR!

Made a good run, but I run too slow. They overtook me down in Juarez, Mexico.

CASH GRINS at the ravaged faces before him. He savors the moment, letting the beat build; BOOM CHICKA BOOM... until... --AN INMATE LEAPS ON A CHAIR AND SHOUTS THE NEXT LYRICS:

IMPATIENT INMATE
WHEN I WAS ARRESTED
--I WAS DRESSED IN BLACK!

CASH LAUGHS-- AND FOLLOWS THE INMATE INTO THE SONG :

...When I was arrested/ I was dressed in black/ They put me on a train/ And they took me back/ Had no friend to go my bail/ So they slapped my dying carcass in the county jail!

THE PRISONERS STAND, SCREAMING, STOMPING, AND WE CUT TO:

4 SUDDEN SHOCKING SILENCE.

4

Shimmering stars. A crescent moon in a coral blue sky. The distant line of woods is black. Cotton fields, white tufts quivering in the summer breeze. A razor straight dirt road stretches as far as the eye can see.

FADE ON TITLE: WALK THE LINE

As our ears adjust from the roar of the previous scene, we hear the fluting of frogs and buzz of cicadas.

WE ARE : NIGHT DYESS COLONY, ARKANSAS, 1944

A SMALL PLANK HOUSE with a slant roof sits atop a rise. One light glows inside ...we hear a sound... coming from the house... low... scratchy... the squawk of a radio...

AS WE MOVE CLOSER-- WE SEE AN OAK TREE. FOUR FEET UP THE TRUNK, A CRUDE SIGN-- "Water up to heer -- 1937"

5 INSIDE THE PLANK HOUSE NIGHT

5

We hear more clearly the gaggle of slipping stations as someone twists a tuner-- fragments of news ("Rome captured by Allied 5th Army"), Music ("Lonesome Yodel Blues"), Sports ("Clyde Shoun no-hits Braves"), and drama ("Lights Out").

WE HEAR THIS AS THE CAMERA ROAMS THE HOUSE. Chipped plates stacked for drying. A crucifix on the wall. A can of Prince Albert beside a chair. A clock reads eight-thirty. A

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

thumbworn music book "Heavenly Highway Hymns" sits on a dilapidated piano. A beat-up guitar leans against it.

As the off-screen radio finds a "Negro" blues, THE CAMERA SETTLES ON A BOY'S SHOE. IT BEGINS TO TAP. WE TILT UP TO--

A SEARS ROEBUCK RADIO on a table, dial glowing, a wooden "Eveready Air Cell" (size of a car battery) beside it.

MISSISSIPPI JOHN HURT (ON RADIO)
All you ladies gather 'round
The good old candy man's in town.

WE PAN TO-- A BOY'S FACE (12), chin on table, (J-R 'JOHN' CASH). He grins at the idea of a blues tune about candy.

I heard what sister Johnson said
She takes a candy stick to bed.

J-R blinks, realizing this song might not be about candy. His eyes flick to--

JACK (14), his brother (2 years older), reading A BIBLE by lantern. He too looks up, perplexed by the lyrics.

J-R
I think he's singin' about his pecker.

Jack glances toward-- THEIR PARENTS' CLOSED BEDROOM DOOR.

JACK
Change it, J-R.

J-R TWISTS THE BAKELITE TUNER passing static and stations, landing on A LIVE NASHVILLE SHOW.

A thump against the wall. A gruff voice from the bedroom:

DADDY (O.S.)
...J-R! Turn it off! Get to sleep.

JACK
Turn it off, J-R.

CLOSE ON -- J-R AS HE TURNS THE RADIO DOWN not off, his attention caught by a girl singing an auctioneer-fast version of "Polly Wolly Doodle". Big applause as she finishes.

J-R
Guess which Carter that is.

JACK
...Anita.

J-R shakes his head, grinning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ROY ACUFF (ON RADIO)
Ladies and Gents, June Carter of the
Carter Family! --Junie, you're only
thirteen, how do you sing so fast?

LITTLE JUNE (ON RADIO)
Well, I been doin' this awhile, Mr.
Acuff, so's I just keep my hat on and
stay cool as a cumber bun!

J-R smiles. Laughter on the radio.

ROY ACUFF (ON RADIO)
I think you mean cucumber, June.
'Cool as a cucumber.'

The radio audience laughs again. So does J-R,
Another THUMP on the wall.

DADDY O.S. MOTHER O.S.
DO I HAVE TO COME IN THERE? Ray-- please--

SUDDENLY, A SET OF HANDS DISCONNECT THE BATTERY. The radio
falls silent. J-R looks up, startled. JACK stands over him.

JACK
...Let's get to bed.

CUT TO:

6 A SMALL BEDROOM WITH A SINGLE PANE WINDOW.

6

J-R AND JACK move past their brother TOMMY, (5) asleep in the
smaller of two narrow beds. They climb into the other bed
together. J-R tries to settle against his pillow. Jack
carefully closes his bible and blows out the lantern.

J-R
...It's hot.

JACK
'Gonna be hotter tomorrow.

J-R
...Maybe Daddy'll quit us early and
we can go fishing.

JACK
We'll go fishing Saturday.

J-R sighs and rolls over facing the moon.

JACK (CONT'D)
...Daddy needs a good day from us
tomorrow, J-R.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
I know...
(after a beat; low)
...Jack?

JACK
Hm?

J-R
How come you're so good?

JACK
I'm not so good.

J-R
You pick five times more than me.

JACK
I'm bigger than you.

J-R
You always do your chores.

JACK
Not always.

J-R
You know every story in Scripture.

JACK
You know every song in Momma's hymnal.

J-R
That's not the same. Songs are easy.

JACK
Not for me.

J-R
There's more words in the Bible than in
"Heavenly Highway Hymns".

JACK
If I'm gonna be a preacher, I gotta know
the Bible, J-R. Front to back.
(beat)
...You can't help somebody if you can't
tell them the right story.

J-R blinks, thinking about this... Jack closes his eyes and
lies back, facing the ceiling, going to sleep.

CUT TO:

7

EXT. CASH FARM --- HOT MORNING-- DAY

7

In stifling heat, the CASH FAMILY works, slanted over rows of cotton, dragging heavy sacks slung over shoulders. The only sound; the drill of cicadas.

MOTHER (36), pauses, cleaning cotton from her hair. She is tough but handsome woman. She wipes her brow and darts a look at her smallest, TOMMY, (5) and JOANNE, (3) beneath a tree.

DADDY (38), picks like a machine, grabbing cotton between his fingers and, in the same motion, flinging it in his huge sack. He is faster than anyone else in the field.

REBA (9), sweet and determined, works slowly, a child in searing heat. Wiping sweat from her brow, she glances at--

J-R, who picks aimlessly, eyes on A BIPLANE OVER HEAD as he shrugs his sack forward. He looks to--

JACK'S SWEAT-STAINED BACK, two rows ahead.

MOTHER

...They said it was gonna be a hundred by noon.

DADDY

...Them race stations say anything to get the niggers off.

JACK

Maybe Reba and J-R can go back till the sun's low.

J-R

...or we can all come back on Monday.

Jack makes a face at J-R, imploring him to stay out of it.

DADDY

You want to quit, J-R? Go ahead.

J-R

No, sir. I was just--

DADDY

Go ahead. Go fishin', while your brother picks up your slack.

Eyes dark, Daddy spits tobacco and turns back to work.

J-R just looks downward, scolded. He wipes bloody fingertips on his shirt and shrugs his sack, going back to picking. He

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

stops when he hears a voice rising over the buzz. He looks up. Its Mother, singing as she picks.

MOTHER QUIETLY SINGS

...I am a soldier of the cross/
a follower of the lamb... (continues)

You see the sadness leave J-R. He joins with his Mother, singing softly then rising, climbing a ladder of harmony around her. His voice is beautiful. Mother gets louder, pleased she's drawn out J.R..

J-R & MOTHER SING

On the sea (the sea, the sea) Of Galilee
(of Galilee) Jesus is walking on the sea

WIDER ON-- The Cash family, bent-over in the waving heat. They continue to sing but never slow their work. Nor do they grin at each other like a show biz family. They simply sing soulful music, letting the tune carry them.

CUT TO:

8

CASH HOUSE -- AROUND THE TABLE -- NIGHT

8

COINS POUR INTO A CALOUSED PALM. Daddy stands by the stove, HOLDING A MASON JAR SORTING THROUGH PENNIES AND NICKLES. Disgusted, he puts the bottle down.

DADDY

Maybe we'll unload that piano.

MOTHER passes with a pan, BABY JOANNE in her arms.

MOTHER

We are not pawning my Daddy's piano.

DADDY

We could buy it back after we get paid for the crop.

(Mother does not respond)

Hank says Garnet brings in the wash now, teacher's wash, worth two dollars a week--

MOTHER

Hank and Garnet don't have little ones to run after.

REBA CARRIES FOOD TO THE TABLE-- a skillet-meal (eggs with a mash of vegetables) that makes a little go a long way.

DADDY

You're not listening, Carrie. We need money for supplies.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

I am listening, Ray. I'm just trying to put supper on the table at the same time.

J-R SETS DOWN A TRAY OF BISCUITS. Concerned, he looks to JACK'S CHAIR, then to Tommy, his eyes asking "Where's Jack".

TOMMY

...tending chickens.

MOTHER

We doing best we can, Ray. I'm not the one in Bardstown every Saturday.

DADDY

What's that mean.

MOTHER

...means if we saved what doodlum you spend drinkin', it'd be more than I'd--

DADDY SLAMS HIS HAND against the counter, startling J-R and the other children. At that moment, JACK steps inside, hands wet from the pump. He exchanges looks with J-R.

JACK

Daddy, if you can spare us, me and J-R gonna cut posts for Coles tomorrow. Make us a couple toward supplies.

J-R

But you said...

(Jack squeezes J-R's hand)

...Ow.

Daddy nods to Jack, moved by his son, and takes a seat at the table. Mother sits. J-R watches Jack with admiration as he takes Reba's hand and leads grace.

JACK

...Most Holy, Righteous and everywhere present God, we ask thy blessing upon this food tonight. Bless the good hearts and hands that provide the same.

Head bowed, J-R glances up, watching Daddy's anger unwind. He takes Reba's other hand. Mother takes Tommy's hand.

...These favors we ask in the name of Christ, our Great Redeemer. Amen.

EVERYONE

Amen.

CUT TO:

9

EXT. ACCESS ROAD #3 NEW DAY

9

Locusts whir. The sun beats on a large sign which declares--

**ACCESS ROAD THREE -- TOWN OF DYESS-- FARM COOPERATIVE
ESTABLISHED 1934 USG F.E.R.A.**

Rods jouncing on shoulders, JACK AND J-R alternately run and walk past telephone poles. The first one to the next pole shouts "What's up Doc!", then both walk till the new pole, then run again. J-R wins this one by a nose (Jack lets him).

J-R

"What's up, Doc!"

They laugh, panting for air. Then Jack notices--

JACK

Hey. Look.

THEIR SHADOWS LAY PERFECTLY ATOP OF ONE ANOTHER. MAKING ONE. They try to walk in unison, keeping their shadows in sync. They laugh. A distant rooster crows.

JACK

... 'What'd was it that rooster said in the cartoon... you know, ..when he was all blown up with T.N.T. and pickin' his feathers up outside that hen house?..

J-R smiles and busts out with a 'Foghorn Leghorn' impression:

J-R

"F-F-ortun-ately boy, I keep my feathers numbered for just such an emergency..."

The brothers laugh again and as they walk down the road, WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL THE COMMUNITY OF DYESS ARKANSAS. All roads converge, like spokes of a wheel, moving toward THE TOWN CENTER (a strip of low buildings) a few miles off.

CUT TO:

10

INT. DYESS WOOD SHOP -- DAY

10

A belt spins furiously. JACK OPERATES A HIGH-POWERED SAW, CUTTING A THICK PIECE OF TIMBER OVER A HUGE BLADE. Its startling to watch a boy working this heavy-duty machine.

J-R SITS ON A BOX, tying up posts in bundles. He looks out a door and whistles, coaxing A BLACK PUPPY from the steps of DYESS MERCANTILE. The dog starts toward J-R, when--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KACKAKA! THE PUP SCATTERS-- J-R TURNS-- JACK'S LOG BUCKS WILDLY ON THE SAW-- THE BLADE HAS SEIZED ON A SPIKE IN THE WOOD. Jack appears overwhelmed. Sparks fly.

J-R rushes in, hits A RED EMERGENCY SWITCH with his palm. THE SAW SHUTS OFF.

He attempts to give Jack a hand, putting the half split timber back down on the table.

JACK
...I got it. I got it.

J-R backs off, feeling a bit scolded. Jack is embarrassed, focused on locking down the blade bolt.

J-R
(does Foghorn again)
"Fortun-ately, I's keeps my feathers numbered for just such an emergency!"

Jack does not react. He finishes resetting the big saw.

...Can we go soon?

JACK
Mr. Coles gave me a dollar to cut the whole pile, J-R. Not half.

J-R
I tied every post.

JACK
Then go on. Go. I'll see you in an hour.

J-R watches as Jack flips on the saw --vvrRRMM! --and re-feeds the log, holding tight this time as sparks fly.

J-R grabs his pole and moves to leave but turns back.

J-R
Hey. Jack! ...Jack!

Jack can't hear him-- or doesn't want to. J-R exits.

CUT TO:

11 EXT. DRAINAGE DITCH NEAR WOOD BRIDGE -- SUNSET

11

Like a wall, a thicket of willows and cottonwood reaches along the banks.

J-R SITS, holding his pole, slapping the water with his line.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
...worm on a hook ...drop it in a brook.
Things goes right. You fry fish tonight.

J-R smiles at his rhyme. He lies back, listens to the crows.

caw... caw...

CUT TO:

12 EXT. ACCESS ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

12

The sun is low as J-R regains the road.
Concerned, he looks toward town for Jack.

A MODEL-A approaches from the opposite direction, grinding
gears. J-R sees--

DADDY WITH THE PREACHER behind the windshield. The Preacher
pulls to a stop and Daddy, his face pale, glares--

DADDY
...Where you been?!

CUT TO:

13 INT. CORRIDOR-- DYESS HOSPITAL NIGHT

13

BLOOD-SOAKED CLOTHES ON AN EXAM TABLE. Walking past them,
DADDY, THE PREACHER AND J-R (terrified and pale) move down a
dim hall into--

14 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM (CONTINUOUS)

14

JACK LIES IN BED, BLOOD SEEPING THROUGH THE GAUZE THAT RUNS
THE LENGTH OF HIS TORSO. Shaken by the sight, J-R stops in
the door, his eyes moving to--

MOTHER, who prays at the head of the bed, holding JOANNE,
whose hands are clasped. Mother looks up at J-R for a moment,
her face red from crying, then back to Jack.

REBA, TOMMY AND A DOCTOR (in a white coat) also kneel on the
floor, all praying. The Preacher joins them.

DADDY takes J-R to the near side of the bed, opposite mother.

JACK struggles to breathe. His eyes land on J-R, who offers a
trembling hand. Jack takes it, looking deep into his eyes...

SUDDENLY JACK HAS A SEIZURE, GRIPPING J-R'S HAND. His eyes
are open but now dart about as if his sight were failing.

JACK
--Momma... I hear them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Daddy looks to the Doctor, who stands.

MOTHER
Let it go, honey. God's taking you.

J-R stares back at Jack, writhing.

JACK
ohh... Can you hear them? ...listen,
J-R,.. they sound so pretty...
(locks eyes with him)
Listen, J-R...

J-R
I am.

J-R closes his eyes tight. He tries to hear them. ...Nothing.

JACK
Do you hear them?..

MOTHER
I hear them, Jack. ...They're beautiful,
honey. ...Beautiful angels.

JACK
...it's loud, Momma!..

Tremors take over Jack's body. His hand becomes limp.

J-R
...Jack! JACK! No!

J-R turns to the Doctor. But the Doctor simply joins hands with Mother and the Preacher and the kids, eyes closed.

J-R is alone looking into his brother's blazing eyes as death comes down. Such stillness.

CUT TO:

15

INT. DYESS CHURCH DAY

15

A small box of a church, but well cared for. Everyone in the town is there. Working people. Farm people. Rugged people.

JACK LIES IN THE OPEN COFFIN beneath the pulpit, looking to J-R just like the boy he slept beside all his life.

MOURNERS SING
We shall gather by the river...

J-R stands among family-- MOTHER, REBA, JOANNE, TOMMY, AND HIS OLDER BROTHER AND SISTER, ROY AND LOUISE. They all sing, tears staining their cheeks. J-R looks to--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DADDY, who's eyes burn a hole in him.

J-R looks back to the casket. He tries to sing but chokes on the words. Suddenly, he spins on his heels, running down the aisle and out the tall doors-- clattering-- scrambling--

CUT TO:

16 EXT. ACCESS ROAD #3 -- DAY

16

He runs from CHRUCH, buggies and trucks out front. Past a small graveyard. Birds fly in a bunch across the field --

CUT TO:

17 INT. CASH HOUSE -- THAT NIGHT

17

REBA dries the last dish. She glances at-- MOTHER, motionless on the porch rocker, in her black dress. On the radio,

J-R IS HUNCHED BY THE RADIO, listening to Rosetta Tharpe sing "Didn't it Rain" while he gouges at the pine table it sits upon with a knife. He stares at-- JACK'S BIBLE.

A SCREEN DOOR SLAMS. DADDY ENTERS THE KITCHEN, UNSTEADY. He pulls open cupboards, looking for something.

DADDY

--'where's my Albert.

MOTHER

You're out.

MORE FOOTSTEPS and Daddy stands before J-R, holding AN EMPTY PRINCE ALBERT TOBACCO CAN. He gestures to the radio.

DADDY

...You know what that is, J-R? Coming out of that? You know what that is?

J-R shakes his head, knowing whatever he says will be wrong.

DADDY (CONT'D)

It's nothin. See. It's a song. Nothin. By a nigger. Nothin. In the air. Nothin.

(rattles fingers in can)

That's what that is.

And that's what you are.

MOTHER

Ray! Stop it!

DADDY

He was my best. He was my best boy. All the best parts of me. And now he's gone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R folds up, staring down at the floor. Ray hurls his tobacco can at the piano. It bounces and clangs.

MOTHER
(crossing to Daddy)
...Ray! Leave him alone. He didn't do this. God did this. God took Jack.

DADDY smacks Mother. She stumbles backward. Reba and Joanne cry. Daddy's eyes are wild with grief.

DADDY
And what'd I ever do to Him?!
Tell me that, Carrie!

Mother puts her hand to her mouth. Tommy also starts to cry--

Everything I done, I done for my family!

DADDY FLINGS JACK'S BIBLE ACROSS THE ROOM. He turns and wipes his arm across the counter sending DISHES TO THE FLOOR.

TAKE IT ALL, LORD! WHY NOT?!

J-R SPINS AND RUNS INTO--

18

THE BOYS' ROOM

18

HE SLAMS THE DOOR AND FALLS ON THE BED. HE HOWLS AND COVERS HIS MOUTH WITH THE PILLOW. Something has broken inside him.

WE MOVE AROUND HIM, till we are looking at him through the iron bars of the headboard.

J-R
...come back... please... I can't... hear them, Jack... I can't hear no angels...

Off screen, Mother and the children wail. More things smash.

DADDY (O.S.)
I WANT EVER'ONE QUIET!

WITH A SHUDDER, J-R draws his grief inside. Stifles it. Smears his tears with a fist. It's as if he swallowed his soul. EVERYTHING IS HUSHED BUT HIS BREATH.

THEN OUT OF THE SILENCE--- KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

19

1952-- WE ARE INT. CASH HOUSE-- BOY'S ROOM-- DAY

19

A YOUNG WOMAN (15) PUSHES OPEN THE DOOR. THIS IS REBA. SHE HAS A BABY IN HER ARMS. SIX YEARS HAVE PASSED. DAY. 1951

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

REBA

Better get a move on, J-R.
Daddy's gettin' restless out there.

J-R LIES FACE UP ON HIS BED. HE IS 18 YEARS OLD, TALL,
HANDSOME AND DRESSED IN AIR FORCE BLUES. He rises, grabs a
duffle and ducks under the door into-- the main room

The radio on the table has been replaced by A PLUG-IN MODEL.

RADIO NEWS

...Communist troops have been driven out
of Seoul, Korea by U.S. forces--

J-R snaps it off as he heads for the door.

CUT TO:

20 EXT CASH FARM HOUSE AUTUMN DAY -- 1951

20

The leaves have fallen. The land is brown. More tilled than
we've seen. THE FAMILY STANDS ON THE FRONT STOOP.

REBA JOINS HER YOUNG HUSBAND, JOE (17). TOMMY, (11) kicks the
dirt, hands in pockets. MOTHER, hair salt and peppered, takes
J-R's hand. JOANNE (9), watches, clinging to Mother's skirt.

MOTHER

(re: his name tag)
You look handsome, 'John' R. Cash.
You're gonna be a good soldier.

She presses "Heavenly Highway Hymns" into his hand.

J-R

(smiles, embracing her)
...Thank you, Momma. Take care.
(turns to Reba)
See you, Reeb. Bye, Joe.

J-R kisses Reba on the cheek, then, he looks to--

DADDY (older and grayer, now) who nods without looking him in
the eye. Then the man turns and leads his mule to the field.

J-R

...okay.

CUT TO:

21 HIGH ANGLE DOWN ON -- ACCESS ROAD #3 -- AUTUMN DAY

21

A FIGURE WITH HIS BAG, J-R walks the long dirt road that
leads to Dyess. A dry wind blows leaves. caw... caw...

THE HISS OF BUS BRAKES AS WE CUT TO:

22 1968-- INT./EXT. BLUE BIRD TOUR BUS / STUCKEY'S-- NIGHT

22

JOHN CASH (37) SITS UP WITH A START. The shirt he wore at the Folsom concert is unbuttoned now. He blinks, disoriented.

THERE IS NO ONE ON BOARD. HUGE PIECES OF ANTIQUE FURNITURE CROWD THE BACK. You'd think this was a moving van or antique store. J-R peers out the window. The bus is parked at --

A STUCKEY'S ON THE INTERSTATE. THE BAND IS SEEN INSIDE, heading in and out of bathrooms, getting coffee. Eating pie.

MAN'S MUFFLED VOICE (O.S.)

Hey, Johnny... Y'in there?!

A MAN AND A WOMAN, on pavement outside, look up, searching. They can't see through the bus windows.

MAN

If you're in there, we love you!

WOMAN

He's not in there.

MAN

(indicating Stuckey's)

Well, he's not in there.

-- Hey, Johnny!

They leave. CASH lights a cigarette, eyes drifting--

TO THE DINER WINDOW-- JUNE CARTER makes counter customers smile and laugh as she tells a funny story, arms flapping.

CUT TO:

23 1952-- INT. BROOKS AFB-- BARRACKS-- DAWN

23

CLOSE ON-- A MUSIC MAGAZINE FEATURING PHOTOS OF JUNE (only younger, at 21). She stands with A DAPPER YOUNG MAN WITH A GUITAR. The headline reads:

JUNE CARTER MARRIES CROONER CARL SMITH

REVERSE ON-- J-R (19), on the upper-bunk in his barracks. He stares dreamily at the pictures.

Inset photos chronicle June's life; child star with the Family singing Gospel on radio (6), teenage singer with sisters Anita and Helen (15) and on her own as a musical comedy act (20). Beautiful, young and Christian.

SUDDENLY, J-R WORLD FLIPS UPSIDE DOWN. HE'S FALLING AND THE FLOOR SLAMS INTO HIM.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SARGENT (O.S.)
CASH! MOVE IT! MOVE IT!

A SARGENT TOWERS OVER HIM, TOSSING BOOTS AT J-R'S HEAD.

SARGENT
I wouldn't wear those into COMBAT!
(to the others)
I WANT TO SEE ELBOWS AND ASSHOLES!

The trainees scramble, pulling on uniforms. J-R struggles just to get off the floor, the mattress on top of him.

CUT TO:

EXT. BROOKS AFB-- SAN ANTONIO-- HOT DAY

J-R, SWEATING, DOES PUSH-UPS AMONG HUNDREDS OF TRAINEES in the sun. He watches as--

A PILOT TRAINEE greets his FAMILY in the parking lot. THE PILOT'S DAD GIVES HIS SON A BIG HUG.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. AIR FORCE BUS - LATE AFTERNOON

RIDING WITH TWENTY SPIFFED-UP TRAINEES on Saturday passes, J-R stares out the window as a sign slides past--
ENTERING SAN ANTONIO --Home of the Alamo--

AN ODD LOOKING TRAINEE with super-slicked hair sits beside

J-R, muttering the same come-on line over and over--

KANE
...Hey, baby. My name's Kane. I'm not sugar, but I'm the next thing to it.

CUT TO:

INT. SAN ANTONIO ROLLER RINK -- NIGHT-- 1951

Yellow Rose of Texas plays. J-R SITS AT A BOOTH, popping nuts, sipping beer, sleeves rolled-- think James Dean; brooding, folded, cool. He watches people whiz past on the rink: trainees, teenagers and families, the clumsy and the graceful. Among them--

KANE, skating with A SKINNY GIRL WITH A POINTY CHIN (26). A perfect match. J-R smiles, then his eyes find--

A RAVEN HAIRED GIRL (VIVIAN, 18) SKATING BACKWARDS. Tight bodied, in white boots and a pleated skirt, SHE SWIVELS FRONT-WAYS AGAIN holding eye contact with him. She laughs with A GIRLFRIEND, then skates to a railed rest area near J-R.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN
Put on some skates! Please!

J-R
No thanks. I like watching you.

VIVIAN
You were skating when we met.

J-R
I gave it up. For Lent.

Vivian's GIRLFRIEND (ANNE, 18), rides up beside Viv.

ANNE
Hey. What's that stand for on your arm?

J-R
'Signal Intelligence. That's why I'm going to Germany.

VIVIAN
He's listening to the Russians.

ANNE
And how'd a hick like you get that gig?

Vivian shoves her friend.

J-R
(shrugs, sips)
I had an aptitude.

CUT TO:

27 INT PONTIAC SAN ANTONIO STREET-- NIGHT

27

VIVIAN'S DAD'S PONTIAC IS PARKED IN AN OILFIELD OPPOSITE A RESIDENTIAL STREET. J-R and VIVIAN are making out, softly lit by a Standard Oil Billboard. Her top is off. Her collarbone glistens. He kisses her there. Tenderly. Silent. Intense

VIVIAN
...say something... you're too quiet...
say something... you're scarin' me...

But J-R says nothing. Just kisses her. Undresses her. Undoes her. She's incredibly beautiful. But beginning to resist...

...No... John... I... can't...

He doesn't stop. Suddenly, Vivian pulls away. sits up.

I can't... I can't. I'm sorry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R is fevered. She is so damned hot.

J-R
Please, baby...

There is intense emotion in J-R's eyes. He looks off.
He cannot find the words.

VIVIAN
...what.

J-R
I need to know you're gonna be here when
I get back. I can't lose you.

VIVIAN
I've only known you for a month, John.
We've had eight dates.

J-R lies back and looks up at her.

...You're gonna meet a lot of pretty
girls in Germany.

J-R
Curl up with me here.

She shakes her head, no.

I could be killed in action, Viv.

VIVIAN
The war's in Korea, John.
You're going to Germany.

J-R smiles, crooked. Vivian smiles back and falls onto the
seat with him and kisses him like its going somewhere.

CUT TO:

28 A RECONNAISSANCE PLANE FLIES LOW IN WINTER NIGHT SKY. 28

CHAIN-LINKED FENCES TOPPED WITH BARBED WIRE. Barracks.
Radar disks. Frosted tree tops. A tiny German village.

29 INT. HIGH SPEED INTERCEPT ROOM-- LANDESBERG, GERMANY- NIGHT 29

Tikka tik tik tik tikka tik... A LARGE ROOM FILLED WITH RADIO
CONSOLES. A DOZEN OPERATORS sit before them, transcribing
intercepted messages. It looks like a 50's style air traffic
control. Maps of Nothern Europe. And a SUPERVISOR PACING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R LISTENING ON HEADPHONES to a stream of clicks coming through static -- tikka tik tik tik tik... His eyes on -- A PICTURE OF VIVIAN TACKED TO HIS TUNER.

NEARBY-- KANE WATCHES HIM, concerned.
The Supervisor is approaching.

KANE
(whispers)
Cash! What 'you doing? Write something!

J-R puts up a finger --shhhh. The clicks cease. Now J-R mumbles to himself and taps the edge of the console with his thumb, repeating the syncopation, musically.

J-R
Tikka tik tik tikka tik tik tikka...

THE SUPERVISOR ARRIVES AND STANDS OVER JOHN.
Intensely focused, J-R transcribes the comunique--

Aircraft #3408, departs Leningrad at 0200.

--and hands it to the Supervisor.

SUPERVISOR
(examining it)
Good work, Cash.

The Supervisor exits. J-R grins at Kane.

CUT TO:

30

INT. AIRCRAFT HANGER--LANDESBERG, GERMANY-- NIGHT

30

A BLACK AND WHITE IMAGE ON A MOVIE SCREEN --A SCENE FROM A 'B' MOVIE -- "**INSIDE FOLSOM PRISON.**"

HUDDLED AGAINST THE COLD WITH A HUNDRED AIRMEN IN WINTER GEAR ON FOLDING CHAIRS, J-R ignores the film, instead writing in the dark-- A LETTER, using Mother's hymnal as a tablet.

Viv -- I miss you. I want to kiss you everywhere.

He glances up at the screen. A CONVICT stares longingly through mesh at HIS VISITING GIRLFRIEND. Tears stand in her eyes. A GUARD grabs the convict's shoulder --

GUARD
...Let's go, Bucholtz...

THE CONVICT IS SHOVED BY GUARDS INTO THE MESS HALL. HE PACES, ANGRY AT THE WORLD. ANOTHER INMATE BANGS HIS CUP. He is joined by others. BANG, BANG. SUDDENLY IT IS AN UPRISING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R notices that-- THE AIRMEN AROUND HIM HAVE BEGUN TO TRAMP THEIR BOOTS IN UNISON. (REMINDING OF THE PRISONERS IN SC.1.)

ON-SCREEN-- A TABLE IS OVERTURNED, CHAIRS ARE THROWN, AND THE HANDSOME CONVICT STABS THE GUARD --

THE AIRMEN CHEER! J-R smiles.

CUT TO:

31 INT. MUSIC SHOP-- LANDESBERG, GERMANY-- SNOW-- DAY 31

Instruments hung on pegboard walls: ACCORDIANS, VIOLINS, UKELELES AND TEN GUITARS. Archtops, Gibsons, Martins and Gretch. They glow in the soft light of the shop.

A SHOPKEEPER watches like a hawk as J-R, in his Air Force greatcoat, checks price tags. His eyes are bright.

CUT TO:

32 EXT. LITTLE MUSIC SHOP-- LANDESBERG, GERMANY-- SNOW-- DAY 32

J-R COMES OUT OF THE SHOP WITH A NEW GUITAR CASE ON HIS BACK. He walks down a block of buildings covered in snow, heading for the base. As he walks past a German Newstand, his eyes catch-- A HEADLINE.

THE HERALD TRIBUNE-- JANUARY 1 1953:

COUNTRY KING, HANK WILLIAMS DEAD AT 29-- OVERDOSE.

J-R blinks, standing there-- shocked. He looks about this serene village. A GERMAN TRAIN chugs past, whistle howling.

CUT TO:

33 INT BARRACKS - NIGHT 33

J-R, on his bunk, gently plays HIS NEW GERMAN GUITAR. HIS MOTHER'S HYMNAL IS OPEN, but he's turned from it--

J-R GENTLY SINGS
...when I was ...just a baby...
(making up the words)
...my Momma told me, son, always be a
good boy. Don't ever play ...with guns.

PLUCKING CONTINUES AS WE-- CUT TO:

34 INT. HIGH SPEED INTERCEPT ROOM-- NIGHT 34

KANE AND OTHER OPERATORS write messages on their pads-- AS J-R, HEADPHONES AROUND HIS NECK, scrawls lyrics. He stares at PICTURES OF VIVIAN ON HIS CONSOLE--

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Hey Porter, hey porter,
please open up my door.

CUT TO:

35 INT. GERMAN BEER HALL-- NIGHT

35

DRUNK SERVICEMEN CLAP FOR--

J-R (on guitar) AND TWO OTHER AIRMEN (bass and drums) PLAYING A HANK WILLIAMS TUNE ON A SMALL STAGE with the unlikely addition of A FAT GERMAN ACCORDIAN PLAYER. They bring it to a rousing close.

...I hear that lonesome whippoorwill.
He sounds too blue to fly. The midnight
train is whining low. I'm so lonesome I
could cry...

GERMAN BARTENDER

(grabs a mic)

Letties unt jentlimen, Ze Landesburg
Barbarians!

CUT TO:

36 INT. ORDERLY ROOM -- NIGHT

36

WE MOVE PAST AN N-C-O, PAST DESKS WITH AIRMEN ON PHONES-- UNTIL WE COME UPON AN EMPTY DESK AND-- J-R ON THE FLOOR, beneath it, reading on the phone from "STARS & STRIPES".

*Hey porter, hey porter! Open up the door.
When they stop this train I'm gonna get
off first 'cause I can't wait no more.
Tell that engineer, "Thanks a lot. I
didn't mind the fare. I'm gonna set my
feet on Southern soil. And breathe that
Southern air." -- by J. R. Cash.*

VIVIAN'S VOICE

Did you know they were gonna print it?

J-R

I just sent it in. And then yesterday
Kane comes running, waving it.

VIVIAN'S VOICE

That's great, John.

J-R

Marry me, Viv. ...Come out and Marry me.
I saw this church in Dusseldorf. 'Made of
limestone. Big as a train station. We can
get married there and go to Venice for
the weekend. That's in Italy. The streets
are made of water.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Silence on the line. J-R glances at the other men waiting. THE N-C-O is looking at J-R. He points to his watch.

VIVIAN'S VOICE

My Daddy says its easy to get along with someone who isn't there. Its been almost two years since I saw you--

J-R

You tell your Daddy you're gonna marry me, Viv. Tell him we're gonna make a family. Tell him I got a sales job lined up in Memphis. That's where we're gonna live, baby, in a big house. I'm gonna be playing on the radio and we're gonna live like kings. You tell your Daddy that too.

CUT TO:

37 1955-- INSIDE A CRAMPED, CHEAP MEMPHIS APARTMENT -- DAWN 37

First light through blinds. This is a cheap, small apartment. J-R AND VIVIAN SLEEP, her arm across him-- THEN A BABY CRIES.

VIVIAN SITS STRAIGHT UP. She looks tired, thinner. She climbs out of bed and crosses to THEIR NEWBORN.

J-R OPENS HIS EYES and watches as Vivian grabs a shirt from the door and settles in an old soft chair to nurse.

VIVIAN

Here you go, Roseanne... Momma's here...

J-R glances at the clock on the table. Five-thirty. He sighs, staring at -- A BRIEFCASE WITH STENCILED LETTERS ON THE SIDE

--HOME EQUIPMENT COMPANY., MEMPHIS SALES.

CUT TO:

38 EXT. J-R ON THE WAY TO WORK-- MEMPHIS-- EARLY MORNING 38

Carrying his black case, wearing a frayed jacket, tie skewed, J-R hustles along a ditch, under a railroad bridge.

He holds-- A SALES "ASSIGNMENT" CARD READING-- WALNUT GROVE.

Coming out from under the bridge, J-R sees-- DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS. Tall buildings. Mist runs off the river. A sign points an arrow toward Walnut Grove.

However, J-R stuffs the "assignment card" in his pocket and goes the opposite way, toward a lower slung part of town.

CUT TO:

39

EXT. UNION AVENUE / SUN-- MEMPHIS-- MINUTES LATER

39

A TROLLEY CLATTERS DOWN THE AVENUE dragging sparks from overhead wires, revealing--

J-R, jacket on his shoulder, carrying his case, eyes on a small storefront on the next corner. He slows as he approaches it. This is clearly a place he likes to pass.

A yellow sign says: "SUN RECORDING CO." "MAKE YOUR OWN RECORD!" says another. Photos taped to the glass feature A WHITE GUY WHO LOOKS LIKE A MATH TEACHER WITH HIS ARM AROUND MUSICIANS, MOSTLY BLACK-- *Howlin' Wolf, Little Junior, etc.*

J-R is about to move on when he hears-- TWO MEN MAKING GLORIOUS HARMONY. J-R FOLLOWS THE SOUND. He looks around the corner. The voices get louder.

TWO BLACK MEN (singing) AND THE WHITE GUY FROM THE PICTURES approach, carrying take-out bags. The black guys are clearly rehearsing the backing part of some Rythm and Blues tune.

J-R follows as the men head down an alley at the back of Sun Recording. A *beat grows, with a gospel-style vocal that sounds wild, sexy and very black.*

The three men disappear through -- A BACK DOOR, WIDE OPEN.

J-R takes a step so he might see inside. He catches sight of a tiny studio, no bigger than a garage.

Amid cables and microphones A BASSIST AND DRUMMER REHEARSE "MILK COW BOOGIE" WITH A YOUNG VOCALIST (ELVIS PRESLEY). THE TWO BLACK MEN put down their burgers and join in, under the eye of the "math teacher."

PRESLEY & COMPANY

--if y'see my milkcow, please help her
home. Ain't had no milk since that cow--

Suddenly, the door is shut by an unseen hand. KLUNK.
The sound reduced to a throb.

CHUBBY MAN (O.S.)

Hey! Cash! That you?!

A CHUBBY MAN IN SEERSUCKER WAVES FROM ACROSS THE STREET (FERLIN, 28). He too carries a battered black case as he approaches. J-R lets out a sigh that signals doom.

FERLIN

'What you doing on Union?! I thought my old man sent you to the Grove.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R

I'm making my way there.

J-R lights a cigarette and heads down the block. Ferlin follows. NOTE: Ferlin's talking, BUT THE CAMERA STAYS ON J-R.

FERLIN

'Funny I run into you. I begged the old man to bump you from the Grove. I said, "Why give it to him? He couldn't sell ice water in hell. But Daddy says no. So I says "Pops, I'm not wastin' time on the mound when we know t'ain't no nigger market for applicances." I says, "When they got money, which is never, they don't give it to a fool in seersucker." And he says, "So don't wear the suit." And I says, "Daddy, if you're sold on the door to door nigger market, I suggest you hire yourself a door to door nigger!"

J-R offers no response, noticing--

A SHOESHINE STAND ACROSS THE STREET. A BLACK BOY (13), skinny arms a blur, works a man's shoes at high speed. The rag cracks and snaps in his blurred hands as if playing spoons. *chickity chack*. Ting. Infectious. Rhythm.

FERLIN (CONT'D)

That's what I said and then I walked out. And here you are --with the Grove wasted.

J-R

Like I said, I'm headed there--

FERLIN

Hey. That's 'tween you and Pops. But I say we get swanky and do the Grove in tandem. You know what that means? They use that word in Dogpatch?

J-R knows what it means. Nothing could sound less appealing.

CUT TO:

40

WALNUT GROVE -- AN HOUR LATER -- HOT DAY

40

A nice neighborhood. Handsomely painted houses on rose covered two acre plots. J-R LEANS ON A MAILBOX, smoking as he scrawls lyrics in his sales ledger. He glances up as --

FERLIN KNOCKS ON A DOOR across the street. Hat in hand, he cheerfully engages AN ELDERLY HOMEOWNER.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R looks down at his worn out shoes on the sidewalk.
He takes a drag and mutters to himself.

J-R
...costs a dime, a nickel a shoe
...does a million dollars good for you...

J-R scoffs and flicks his butt in the street, embarrassed by his rhyme. He figures he can't put work off any longer.

CUT TO:

41 A DOOR OPENS TO REVEAL J-R, HAT IN HAND, SHY. 41

J-R
Hello, Mam. I'm from the--(SLAM)

CUT TO:

ANOTHER DOOR OPENS TO REVEAL--

J-R
Hello, sir. I from the Home Equipment
Company over on Sumner--(KLUNK)

CUT TO:

42 ANOTHER DOOR OPENS-- J-R HOLDS OUT A PIECE OF STEEL 42

J-R
Sir. This is the galvanized we make our
washin' machines--(SLAM)

CUT TO:

43 J-R KNOCKS ON ANOTHER DOOR -- IT OPENS. 43

A PRETTY BLACK MAID IN AN OUTFIT (19) stands before J-R.

HOUSEKEEPER
...May I help you?

AN OLD WOMAN'S SCREAM comes from the bowls of the house--

SHRIEKING OWNER
LUCRETIA!

The housekeeper winces and looks at J-R.

J-R
Missus don't want nothing, does she?

Lucretia shakes her head and GENTLY CLOSES THE DOOR.

Across the street, FERLIN's having a fine time: AN OLD LADY
COUNTS CASH INTO HIS PALM. He grins at J-R across the street.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
(lighting a cigarette)
...Well, ...there you go.

CUT TO:

44 EXT. BENCH AT BARBECUE STOP-- LATER THAT DAY

44

J-R and FERLIN sit and finish two bottles of soda. Ferlin sees his Trolley coming. He rises.

J-R
Hey. Thanks for the soda pop, Ferlin.

FERLIN
That's alright. Hey. Here.
(pulls 2 invoices)
Take these. I didn't sign 'em yet.

J-R looks at the invoices, stunned by the generosity.

J-R
...I can't take these.
There's good commisions on these.

FERLIN
You've been workin' for Pops six months, Cash, and you've sold squat. You're the worst salesman I ever seen. Bar none. But 'know what? I like you anyway.

Ferlin smiles and hops on his trolley.

CUT TO:

45 EXT. MEMPHIS-- AREA AROUND UNION AVE.-- LATE AFTERNOON

45

The sun low, spirits high, J-R walks up the street, his jacket on his shoulder, carrying his case.

J-R
...Shoeshine boy never gets low down...
He's got the dirtiest job in town.

He passes Sun Recording Company. He steps up to the door-- but there's a "CLOSED" sign. Dark and quiet.

CUT TO:

46 EXT. LUTHER PERKINS'S PORCH-- DUSK --LATER

46

A sweet single story house on a block of many others. This is not a wealthy Memphis street like Walnut Grove, but its worlds nicer than John and Viv's neighborhood.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The sky is like the lining of an oyster shell. Fire flies out. A streetlight comes on. People on porches calling children in.

J-R tunes up his guitar with LUTHER (deadpan, tall and dry, also on guitar) and MARSHALL (open faced and cheerful, on a battered stand-up bass). They sit on Luther's porch. Both Marshall and Luther wear mechanics' overalls.

Marshall is sticking pieces of tape on the neck of HIS BASS, charting out notes (A, B, C, etc.) at each fret.

INSIDE-- through the screens, VIVIAN plays Canasta with ETTA AND BEASIE (LUTHER'S AND MARSHALL'S WIVES). The Baby sleeps on the couch behind her.

J-R looks at Viv, trying to coax a smile out of her but she just stares at her cards.

NEIGHBORHOOD VOICES

Frank!... Loulabelle! Time to come in!
Jack! Jack! Get in here! ...Jack!

J-R hears his brother's name and turns--

MARSHALL

John. Can I see the book a second.

J-R

(snaps out of it)
...yeah.

J-R hands Marshall his well travelled copy of the "Heavenly Highway Hymns". Marshall flops it open to--

LUTHER

Galilee?

J-R nods and starts to strum his guitar: But Marshall's not ready. We watch as he rearranges the tape on his bass.

MARSHALL

Oh. Shoot. A sec, here.

Boom chucka boom goes Luther's guitar, joining in with J-R.

J-R

Sounds like a train, Luther.

MARSHALL

He's got to do that when we play--

LUTHER

Shut up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MARSHALL

--songs with changes to F, cause--

LUTHER

--Shut. Up.

J-R

(smiles)

I like it.

J-R and Luther enjoy the groove. Marshall still fixing.

J-R (CONT'D)

You ever hear of Sun Recording out on Union?

(Luther shakes his head)

Little place. 'Been putting out Blues; people like Chester Burnette.

MARSHALL

Howlin' Wolf.

J-R

I saw they've took up recording a white guy now. Anyways, I was looking at their roster. They haven't got no gospel band.

The moment slips as Marshall slaps his bass and joins in the groove with them. Their feet begin to thump on the porch.

J-R SINGS

Am I a soldier of the cross. A follower of the lamb. On the sea.

LUTHER AND MARSHALL

--the sea, the sea.

J-R SING

Of Galilee.

LUTHER AND MARSHALL

--of Galilee.

They don't sound that good but nonetheless J-R smiles at--

Vivian through the screen. She meets his eyes AND INSTANTLY BREAKS OUT CRYING. SHE RUNS DOWN THE HALL TO THE BATHROOM, SLAMMING THE DOOR. J-R stops playing and runs after--

47 INT. LUTHER'S HOUSE / HALL / BATHROOM-- CONTINUOUS

47

J-R WAVES BACK ETTA AND BEASIE as he crosses to the bathroom, signalling that he'll handle it. He comes upon the locked bathroom door and jiggles the knob.

J-R

Baby. Open the door.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN
(sobbing from other side)
No!

J-R
(quietly)
Viv. Don't embarrass me.
...Come on, now.

The door unlocks. J-R twists the knob and steps into-- THE BATHROOM-- VIVIAN SITS ON THE CLOSED TOILET. Head in her hands. She pulls tissues from her purse.

VIVIAN
...I want to go home... I want to see my
Daddy... Please, John... please...

BACK OUT FRONT-- ETTA turns up the radio to give J-R and Vivian some privacy. She exchanges glances with Luther.

BACK IN THE BATHROOM--

VIVIAN
My Daddy has a job just sitting in San
Antone waiting for us!

J-R
My band is here, Viv. Here in Memphis.

VIVIAN
(hushed)
Your band is two mechanics who can't
hardly play.

J-R
Shhhhh!

VIVIAN
Are you deaf?! Can't you hear the
difference between you and--
(re: the song on the radio)
--that?

For a moment, J-R listens to Webb Pierce sing "Why Baby Why?"

J-R
Well, for starters, they got drums.

VIVIAN
This is not funny, John.
(gestures about the room)
Look at all the nice things Etta's got.
Look at the clothes they got for their
kids. You got a wife and baby in a dump,
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2) VIVIAN (CONT'D)

John, another one on the way, and we can't even make rent!

(pulls yellow paper from purse)

Take a look at that! Look at it.

J-R looks at-- AN EVICTION NOTICE-- absorbs it.

J-R

How long you been sitting on this?

VIVIAN

...couple days...

J-R

(sighs)

Well, looki-here.

(pulls Ferlin's invoices out)

Look what I'm sitting on. That's forty dollars in commisions right there.

Vivian takes the invoices from him, wiping her eyes.

VIVIAN

...You sold something.

CUT TO:

48

INT. CASH APARTMENT-- LAUNDRYROOM-- MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

48

J-R lies on the floor of the the laundry room, propped on a pillow, strumming his guitar. He sings from a crumpled slip.

J-R SINGS

...You'll call for me, but I'm gonna tell
you bye, bye, bye/ When I turn around and
walk away you'll cry, cry, cry.

Vivian stands in the doorway. J-R stops playing, startled.

VIVIAN

You hate me.

J-R

No, ...I don't.

VIVIAN

That's a mean song.

J-R

Stupid is what it is.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEMPHIS-- UNION STREET-- EARLY MORNING

J-R KNOCKS AGAIN ON THE DOOR OF THE SUN RECORDING COMPANY. A 'closed' sign hangs in the window but the lights are on and there's a Cadillac parked out front.

He sighs and sits down on the curb, waiting. Droplets start to hit the pavement. It starts to rain. J-R just sits down on his case watching the rain. Then, he sees--

"THE MATH TEACHER" (SAM PHILLIPS) walking up the street with a take-out breakfast, and an umbrella. J-R crosses to him.

J-R
...Excuse me, sir.

PHILLIPS
...Can I help you?

J-R
My name's J.R. Cash. I'm a singer and a songwriter.

A weary look comes over Phillips. He heads inside.

PHILLIPS
See my secretary when she gets back from the salon. She'll set you up with an audition.

J-R
When?

PHILLIPS
Next month.

J-R
I can't wait that long.
I need something sooner.

PHILLIPS
Excuse me?

JOHN
I can't wait a month.

PHILLIPS
...Is that so?

CUT TO:

INT. CASH APARTMENT-- DAWN

ROSEANNE CRIES AS-- VIVIAN digs through the dresser. She holds up a checked red shirt, a bit tattered.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN

What about this? I can iron it.

J-R

...No.

J-R buttons up A BLACK SHIRT.

VIVIAN

You can't wear that, John. It's black.

J-R

What's wrong with a black shirt? Every body has a black shirt. It's the only color we all got.

VIVIAN

It looks like you're going to a funeral.

He grabs his guitar and heads for the door--

J-R

Maybe I am.

CUT TO:

51 INT. SUN RECORDING COMPANY-- CRAMPED STAGE-- DAY

51

Mics to one side. A Coke machine. A control room where SAM PHILLIPS sits, reading, feet up.

J-R, LUTHER and MARSHALL scramble, pulling out instruments, tuning up. Adhesive tape still marks the neck of Marshall's bass. He plucks, sounding flat. They're tense and clumsy.

PHILLIPS

Pretend I'm not here. Elvis sings to that Coke machine.

J-R catches his reflection in the Coke machine and forces a chuckle. He turns to Luther and Marshall and counts off.

J-R

...okay... one, two, three, four,...

And they start-- and J-R SINGS:

...There's a land that is fairer than
day/ and by faith we can see it afar...

SAM PHILLIPS sits on up on his stool, listening, deadpan.

In the sweet bye and bye/ We shall meet
on that beautiful shore/ In the sweet--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Phillips waves his hands.

PHILLIPS
Hold on. Hold on.

THEY STOP PLAYING.

I hate to interrupt, but do you got
something else?

The moment hangs there. J-R blinks at Phillips, his fingers
holding the last chord. Luther and Marshall look to one
another. They appear ready to leave.

I'm sorry. I can't market gospel no more.
Marion should've told you that.

J-R feels a rush of defiance. His eyes go dark.
PHILLIPS does not blink. A bus rumbles past outside.

J-R
So that's it?

PHILLIPS
Unless you got something else.

J-R
Or we pay you twenty to record it.

PHILLIPS
That's right.

J-R
So is this how you do things? Get people
in for an audition and then--

PHILLIPS
You can leave anytime you want, Mr.
Cash. 'Cause I'll tell you how I don't do
things. I don't put out my own money to
record tired material. Gospel don't sell
no more. Once it ruled. That day's over.

MARSHALL
Let's go, J-R.

J-R
So is it the gospel,
or is it the way I sing it?

PHILLIPS
Both.

There is danger in the air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

J-R

What's wrong with the way I sing it?

Phillips smiles plainly.

PHILLIPS

I don't believe you.

John's head cocks. Fire-eyed.

J-R

...You saying I don't believe in God?

Marshall rises, moving toward the door with his bass.

MARSHALL

Let's go, John.

J-R

No. I want to understand. We make an appointment. We come down. We sing for ten seconds and then he tells me I don't believe in God..?

Phillips smiles like a cat. He likes this boy.

PHILLIPS

You know exactly what I'm telling you, son. You've heard that song before, right? A hundred times. Just like that. Just like how you were singin' it. Right?

J-R says nothing. Phillips continues:

Well, so have I.

J-R

...You didn't let us bring it home.

PHILLIPS

If you was hit by a truck and lying in the gutter dying and there was time to sing one song, one song people will remember before you're dirt, one song that tells God what you thought about your time here on earth, one song that sums up what you are; are you telling me that's what you'd sing? Hm? The same thing everyone sings? You'd sing about silver spray of rivers you never saw and saints gathering in misty places you never been? Or would you sing about something you felt. Something you touched. Cause, I'll tell you now, that's

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

the kind of song people want to hear.
That's the kind of song that saves
people. It don't have nothing to do with
believing in God, Mr. Cash, it has to do
with believing in yourself.

Luther and Marshall look to J-R who is staring at his shoes
the same way he would when Daddy would yell at him.

J-R

(looks up after a long beat)

...I got a couple songs I wrote in the
Air Force. ...Y'got anything against
the Air Force?

PHILLIPS

Nope.

J-R

Well, I do.

J-R barks a laugh. The dimmest of smiles crosses Phillip's
face. Anger is appealing in this young man. J-R finds a chord
on his beat up guitar, poised to start. Luther and Marshall
look to him, clueless about what comes next.

MARSHALL

(very low)

...J-R, whatever you're about to play, we
ain't never practiced it... we ain't
never even heard it...

J-R jangles his guitar.

J-R

Come after me with that choo choo, Luth.

Luther nods, calm, unflappable. And then--

JOHN QUIETLY SINGS

I hear a train a'comin/ it's rolling
round the bend/ And I ain't see the
sunshine/ since I don't know when.
I'm stuck in Folsom Prison/ And time
keeps draggin' on/ But that train keeps
a' rollin'/ On down to San Antone.

Luther and Marshall feel their way into the song. They're not
polished, but the music is raw and J-R's vocals are fierce.

...When I was just a baby/ my momma told
me, son/ always be a good boy/ don't ever
play with guns/ But I shot a man in Reno/
Just to watch him die/ When I hear that
whistle blowing, I hang my head and cry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

John's eyes fall on Luther-- And Luther spontaneously picks out a solo. Primitive, cool. He smiles. They all smile.

Phillips sits motionless. Sparks behind his eyes.

CUT TO:

52

INT. MEMPHIS APARTMENT - NIGHT

52

J-R steps in from the rain, soaking wet. He finds -- VIVIAN sitting in a chair, the baby asleep in her arms.

VIVIAN

... 'Where you been?!

J-R says nothing. Water dripping from his head. It looks as though he ran all the way home in the rain.

'Are you drunk?

J-R shakes his head.

What happened?

J-R

...He didn't like our gospel.

VIVIAN

(sighs) ...Oh.

J-R steps toward her, holding out-- A FIFTY DOLLAR BILL. Vivian looks at it, in awe.

J-R

So I played him the stuff I wrote. And we made a record.

VIVIAN

Oh my Lord!

Tears come to Vivian's eyes. Holding the baby, she takes J-R into her arms.

CUT TO:

53

INT. MEMPHIS RADIO STATION -- MORNING

53

J-R SITS IN THE LOBBY OF A RADIO STATION, gripping A MANILA ENVELOPE. He taps his feet, nervously. A wall speaker pipes a slick "Nashville Sound" ballad coming to a end.

Curious, J-R undoes the clasp and peers into THE ENVELOPE.

INSIDE-- A GLISTENING BLACK 45-- newly cut and lustrous. A plain white label at the center has handwriting on it--

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BOB-- Take a listen.-- S.P.

Through a window, J-R CAN SEE-- A BURLY D-J (BOB NEAL) as he fades the tune and leans over a mic.

D-J (BOB NEAL)
--You're listening to "The Tennessee Farm
Hour" and here's one from Patsy Cline!

The song kicks in over the feed. There is a rapping on the glass and J-R looks up. BOB NEAL WAVES HIM IN.

CUT TO:

54 INT. MEMPHIS STUDIO-- SOUND BOOTH-- MOMENTS LATER

54

Headphones round his neck BOB NEAL sizes up J-R.

BOB NEAL
Phillips sure is revved 'bout you. 'Says
Elvis is the pepper and you're the salt
and no table can be without neither.

J-R
All I know, Mr. Neal, is my wife and I,
we like your night time show a whole lot.

BOB NEAL
Uh huh--

Bob Neal pulls on his headphones and drops the needle on the single. We hear "Hey Porter" through his set-- the Webb Pierce tune still plays (on the air) in bg. J-R stands there, watching Neal, waiting to see a reaction.

BOB NEAL
... 'like that slapback. I'm the one who
sold Sam that echc box, he tell you that?

J-R
No, sir.

BOB NEAL
'Like the way you choke the strings--

J-R
(smiles)
--That's Luther.

BOB NEAL
Good lyrics. You write it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
'Won a poetry prize in Stars and Stripes.
That was before I set it to music.

BOB NEAL
'That so.
(crossing to the console)
Flip that over, will you?

Bob Neal fades the on-air song as-- J-R flips his single but becomes tangled in some cables.

The record slips and-- SMASHES ON THE FLOOR. J-R GOES WHITE.

BOB NEAL
...Oh. ...shoot.

CUT TO:

55 EXT. PAYPHONE NEAR RADIO STATION-- MOMENTS LATER

55

Panicked, J-R grips the phone tightly.

J-R
I broke it, Mr. Phillips. I broke it!

PHILLIPS (ON PHONE)
...Broke what?

J-R
He played "Hey Porter" and was about to play "Cry cry cry" and then I dropped it. And its smashed, man. Worst thing is, I think he liked it. Oh, man.

PHILLIPS (ON PHONE)
(sighs) ...Come back here, John.

CUT TO:

56 CLOSE ON -- CORRUGATED FLAPS PULL BACK TO REVEAL--

56

HUNDREDS OF JOHNNY CASH "CRY CRY CRY / HEY PORTER" 45'S, each in a white sleeve striped with radiating rays of yellow.

PULLING BACK -- WE ARE: INT. SUN RECORDS --"DAY

PHILLIPS hands J-R a handful of them. A piano plunks in bg.

PHILLIPS
You broke the test press, John. The factory sends me that one before we do a run of a thousand.

Color begins to come back to J-R's cheeks. He notices Marion in the corner, slipping singles into mailers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

YOUNG MAN (O.S.)
He's pullin your chain, Mr. Phillips!
No way he's that dumb!

A LOUISIANA BOY WITH A SHOCK OF HAIR STANDING STRAIGHT UP has
been plunking a pianc in the studio. (JERRY LEE LEWIS, 20)

PHILLIPS
Leave it be, Jerry.

JERRY LEE
What you think, boy? 'You think every
station in the world gonna share one
bitty copy of your song?

J-R
(smiles) ...Guess I did.

JERRY LEE howls with laughter.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN AND VIVIAN'S BLOCK-- TWILIGHT.

J-R RUNS DOWN HIS STREET WITH A STACK OF RECORDS IN HIS
HANDS, ALONG WITH A JUG OF WINE AND BOUQUET OF ROSES.

He sees VIVIAN on the porch with ROSEANNE. He breaks into a
sprint waving the records.

J-R
Baby! Look! I got em! LOOK!

CUT TO:

58 INT. CASH APARTMENT BEDROOM-- LATER-- NIGHT

58

Flowers and wine sit bedside. ROSEANNE sleeps in her crib as--

VIV KISSES J-R as he lies there, proudly listening to the
radio. MID-KISS, J-R LEAPS FROM BED--

J-R
He's playin' it again!

--AND TURNS UP THE RADIO AS "CRY, CRY, CRY" 'STARTS--

BOB NEAL ON RADIO
--another listen to "Cry, Cry, Cry".
The folks at Sun tell me Johnny starts a
four state tour next week!

Vivian wraps herself in a blanket and crosses toward John,--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN
John, turn it off. You're waking
Roseanne.

J-R
I turned it down.

VIVIAN
I said off. You've played it fifty times.
It's late. We got a baby sleeping.

J-R, hurt, complies-- but as soon as he snaps off the radio,
his spirits are lifted--he can still hear his song, through
the window, from other people's radios...

VIVIAN
...John. When are we gonna talk about how
this tour is gonna work.

J-R
Oh my Lord... Viv... listen!

On J.R.'s face-- more happiness than we've ever seen. He runs
out to the porch leaving Vivian-- a picture of loneliness.
A beat rises as we--

CUT TO:

59 1955. INT. BACKSTAGE- MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM, TEXARKANA-- NIGHT 59

JERRY LEE LEWIS, sleeves rolled, playing a piano as though it
were some kind of bull to be wrestled. We watch him through a
corridor of red velvet and rope. Hot lights shine.

YOUNG MAN
My name is Jerry Lee Lewis/
I come from Louisiana/ I'm gonna do
a little boogie on this piano!

LUTHER and MARSHALL STAND IN THE WINGS, HOLDING THEIR
INSTRUMENTS. Mouths open.

LUTHER
'never seen nobody play like that.

MARSHALL
We're gonna put these people to sleep.

J-R STANDS RIGHT BEHIND THEM, DRESSED IN A ELACK SUIT AND
TIE, LOOKING HANDSOME, A NEW GIBSON AROUND HIS NECK.
He isn't watching Jerry Lee. Because he's transfixed by:

JUNE CARTER (25) IN A FLOWING DRESS, just arrived amid the
pulleys and scenery. She hugs a stage hand like a relative,
then, warming up, pratfalls and kicks at the ceiling with

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ivory legs. Switching gears, she pantomimes chatter with an invisible partner, rehearsing (one must assume) her act.

J-R grins, mesmerized. There is something magical about a woman who is both sexy and a goofball at the same time.

STAGE MANAGER O.S.

Boys, give us a little room, here!

THE STAGE MANAGER moves J-R and his band back as-- THE CROWD ROARS. A STAGEHAND PULLS A ROPE, THE CURTAIN LOWERS THEN RISES-- AND JERRY LEE BOWS. J-R's eyes go back to--

JUNE, WHO LECTURES SOMEONE IN A HURRY-- A GUY WITH SLICKED HAIR AND A SEQUINED SHIRT. IT'S ELVIS PRESLEY. She gestures to her watch. She appears annoyed. We hear only snippets:

JUNE

...Are you outta your mind? We're on in ten! Its called a duet for a reason! No!

THERE IS A COMMOTION FROM THE STAGE AND J-R TURNS TO FIND-- Jerry Lee strutting off, sizing up Luther and Marshall.

JERRY LEE

Get some pine boxes, boys, cause you be dead! Nobody follows "The Killer"!

OUT ON THE APRON AN M-C WORKS THE CROWD

THE M-C

--These next performers just put out their first record "Cry, cry, cry" and its selling like hotcakes!

J-R and Marshall and Luther look at each other AND PANIC! J-R lunges for the stage but-- THERE'S A RUSH OF AIR AND A SMASH AS JUNE CARTER RUNS INTO HIM, HEADING FOR THE APRON--

JUNE

--Oh. Dang! Excuse me!

--BUT NOW HER DRESS IS TANGLED IN J-R'S GUITAR.

J-R

Oh. ...I'm sorry.

JUNE

(LOUD, out to the apron)

-- HEY, BILL! WAIT! BILL! HOLD ON!

OUT ON THE APRON-- THE M-C reacts to June's voice with improvisation. She's supposed to be out there by now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THE M-C ONSTAGE

--Oh my folks, I think I hear June Carter! Now where could she be?!

The crowd cheers.

BACKSTAGE-- JUNE AND J-R are still hooked, J-R feverishly trying to disengage them. He is flustered. June is too close and too beautiful, her eyes too dazzling. The stage manager flaps his arms. Luther and Marshall stare.

JUNE

(UNBELIEVABLY LOUD)

I'M A COMIN' BILL. HOLD ON OUT THERE!

(to J-R, intimately)

You're Johnny Cash, aren't you?

J-R

Yes mam.

JUNE

(loud, out to audience)

I HAD A LITTLE ACCIDENT, BILL.

I'LL BE RIGHT OUT!

(intimately, to J-R)

Take your time, honey. 'If you rip that dress, I'm up a creek.

(out to audience again)

ALMOST THERE, BILL!

(back to J-R)

Don't worry. I can keep this funny for at least four minutes.

ONSTAGE-- THE M-C stomps about putting his hand to his ear.

MC ONSTAGE

Where am I hearing your voice from?!

June-- WHERE ARE YOU, DARLIN'?!

BACKSTAGE-- J-R still struggles to untangle them.

JUNE

(to the stage, loud)

I'M ALMOST THERE, BILL. I GOT TANGLED!

MC ONSTAGE

IN WHAT, JUNE-BUG?

JUNE (TO THE STAGE)

--JOHNNY CASH'S GUITAR STRAP! WHICH HAPPENS TO BE ATTACHED TO JOHNNY CASH!

A BURST OF LAUGHTER FROM THE CROWD! J-R blinks, startled. As he finishes untangling the strap. June yells to the apron.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JUNE (CONT'D)

--I'LL TELL YOU WHAT, BILL. HE'S A STRAPPING BOY, THAT JOHNNY CASH. AND HIS GUITAR STRAP IS PRETTY STRAPPING, TOO!

More laughs in the audience. June smiles at J-R--

JUNE

'Love that "Cry, Cry", by the way.

J-R

Thanks.

--and bolts into the lights of the apron. A BIG CHEER!

THE M-C

Ladies and Gents!-- JUNE CARTER!

ONSTAGE-- June bows and curtsies several times, quickly, out of breath. Its impossible not to fall in love with her.

JUNE

Bill, I'm sorry I had to interrupt you, but I had to tell you... I had to come out here and tell you...

M-C

Catch your breath, Junie...

JUNE

(gasping, faking it)

See. What I wanted to say was-- was I was aiming to sing. I was. And it was real nice of you to put me up on your marquee de sade. But I can't sing now--

M-C

Why not, June?

JUNE

I got the croup. (coughs)

The audience laughs.

BACKSTAGE-- So does J-R. The Stage Manager taps him.

STAGE MANAGER

Get out there.

J-R, MARSHALL AND LUTHER LEAP FOR THEIR INSTRUMENTS. They move on stage behind the curtain and find their positions.

The curtain in front of them has not quite closed. THERE IS A CRACK THROUGH WHICH J-R CAN SEE -- JUNE ON STAGE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

JUNE

See, I just got back from the U-S-O. I was over there a-singin' for the soldier boys and I took a running go and jumped in one of those wolf-holes --

THE M-C

-- not a wolf hole, June.

JUNE

Oh, yes it was. I jumped right into one of them wolf holes --

More laughter from the audience.

THE M-C

June, that's called a foxhole. On maneuvers, soldiers got foxholes.

JUNE

I don't know about that, Bill. A fox mighta' dug the thing, but there sure was a wolf in it when I got there!

BIG LAUGHTER. J-R laughs loud. She hears him.

THE M-C

Ladies and gents - Miss June Carter.

Applause. June curtsies and runs off, hobbling like an old lady. More laughter as she kicks high and pinwheels her arms.

...June's gonna sing later...Her family's here tonight. But these boys up next...
(continues)

FACING THE BACK OF THE WAFFLING CURTAIN, J-R takes a deep breath and looks to Luther, who nods. J-R's eyes catch-- JUNE, in the wings, laughing with the Stage Manager.

THE M-C

...so here they are, folks, more passengers on the Sun Rockin' Railway...
JOHNNY CASH AND THE TENNESSEE TWO!

THE CURTAINS RISE AND J-R FINDS HIMSELF FACING-- GIRLS; beautiful and plain, in dresses, mostly teens, skin glistening, eyes wide. There are boys too, but they recede as girls reach out, screaming. Some hold J-R's new record.

GIRLS

Johnny! Oh my God, look-at-him!

J-R's eyes move from girl to girl. He leans to the mic:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

J-R
...Hello. I'm Johnny Cash.

They cheer! *That was easy.* J-R sees June Carter watching from backstage. He nods to Luther, who picks a lick (he's gotten better). Marshall jumps in laying a beat (also better) and--

J-R SINGS
Hey! Get rhythm when you get the blues/
A jumpy rhythm makes you feel so fine/
Shake the trouble from your worried mind.

CLOSE ON-- J-R GLANCES BACK TO THE WINGS-- JUNE IS GONE.

60

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY-- LATER THAT NIGHT

CUT TO:

60

Music throbs down the narrow corridor. On stage-- A BUG EYED, MOP TOPPED KID WITH THICK GLASSES (ROY ORBISON) SINGS.

ORBISON SINGS
--Oh, I love that hair, long and black
hangin' down the middle of you back...

Hair wet, J-R talks excitedly into a PAYPHONE at a dark bend in the backstage hall.

J-R
--it's better than any show we ever done,
Viv. Hell. I'd say it's better than any
show I ever seen!
(holds up phone to music)
'You hear Orbison singin' your song? He
made it a two-step.

VIVIAN'S VOICE
...I can't hear it.
-- Oh-- dammit!

J-R can hear-- *Roseanne now crying in the background.*

*She run her head into the table. ...Here,
Roseanne... ..talk to Daddy.*

J-R
...Hey, darling, don't you cry. It'll
stop hurtin' in a--

She cries all the louder. Screams.

VIVIAN'S VOICE
Good work, John. Look. I have to go.
Dinner's ready. Where are you? I can
hardly hear you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
I'm backstage at the-- uh--
(reading it from the wall)
Texarkana Municipal Auditorium.
(beat)
Baby. I miss you.

VIVIAN'S VOICE
--What?

Suddenly, the phone swallows J-R's change and disconnects--
J-R stands there, inconsolable for a moment. Music pounding.

JUNE O.S.
Hey, Momma! Hey Aniti!

JUNE CARTER bounds up the narrow hall. She's got a different
dress on, also beautiful. She kisses HER SISTER ANITA who
holds the stage door for the rest of THE CARTERS.

JUNE (CONT'D)
(backpedaling)
I'm on in a second. Momma, you come on
first encore so you got fifteen. Y'all can
say Hi to Johnny Cash. That's the boy who
wrote "Cry, Cry, Cry!".
(hurries round the corner)
E1111-vvvvvviiiis!

Since they appeared, J-R has not stopped gawking, at the
Carters-- MOTHER MAYBELLE (short and stout), EZRA (big,
amiable), HELEN and ANITA.

MOTHER MAYBELLE
How ya doing, Johnny Cash?

J-R
Good. Heck. I'm great, Mother Maybelle.

EZRA reaches out and warmly shakes John's hand.

EZRA
Hello John. I guess you know Maybelle.
That's Anita, and Helen. I'm Ezra!

J-R
...I know all of you. You're-- I-- You
were my radio family... Is that too
strange to say?

MAYBELLE
Too kind is what it is, Johnny.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

EZRA

'Good to meet you, son.

ANITA

HELEN

Bye.

Bye.

THEY HEAD INTO JUNE'S DRESSING ROOM.

J-R turns, crossing with his guitar case toward the stage, ending up in a dark corner of the wings. He sees the red light of the exit but turns, watching as--

JUNE CARTER in the spot, belts out a song. She's sexy, cool and the girl next door all at once.

MAN O.S.

Y'sounded great tonight, Cash.

J-R turns. It's ELVIS PRESLEY. He sits on a stool in a dark corner of the wings with a bottle of Coke and a take-out bag.

ELVIS

You want some chili fries?

J-R

...No thanks. ...I guess June found you.

ELVIS

Yeah. Frosted my ass and jumped on stage. ...I was getting dinner.

J-R's eyes are riveted as June does a shuffle step in clompy shoes, skirt hiked, showing a fine piece of leg.

ELVIS (CONT'D)

...That girl's been in the spot since you and me was biting ankles. They say she had a crib at the Ryman so's Mother Maybelle could pull her out let her whoop and hollar and pop her back. ...Carl Smith should be shot for cheatin' on her.

J-R looks back to the stage-- June is finishing her ballad.

JUNE CARTER SINGS

Let me go, lover. Let me be. Set me free.
You made me weep. Cut me deep. I can't
sleep. I was cursed the day that I fell.

CUT TO:

61

INT. MOTEL ROOM-- SAME EVENING

61

J-R finishes packing his bags. He hears the sound of men laughing. He looks out as-- A CARAVAN OF CARS PULLS INTO--

62 THE MOTEL PARKING LOT -- NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

62

BOYS FROM THE TOUR are drinking. From a convertible --

MARSHALL SHOUTS
'Leavin' in an hour, John!

Watching from the door of his room, J-R looks toward--
A DINER in an island of light, a block away.

CUT TO:

63 INT EMPTY DINER NIGHT

63

J-R pushes inside. There are a couple of truckers in a booth.
He's about to sit at the end of the counter when he spots--

JUNE CARTER, her back to us, on a payphone at the rear. Then
he notices-- A Vogue magazine and a cup of coffee at the far
end of the counter.

J-R takes a seat near June's things. A WAITRESS arrives --

WAITRESS
Coffee?

J-R
And some toast, please.

June arrives at her seat. He steals a glance at her. Her
auburn hair. Freckled nose. Fine skin. Her eyes meet his.

J-R
...Y'mind?

JUNE
Not at all, John.

J-R rubs his chin, feeling the whiskers there.

JUNE
...tired?

J-R
...yeah. ...I guess.
(beat)
Where'd your family go?

JUNE
On the road again. They have to wake up
in Nashville for a radio appearance.
(John nods)
My Daddy wants to know how you boys found
that sound?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
--what sound?

JUNE
The one everyone's talking about.

J-R
We was trying to be a gospel band, but since we weren't too slick with our instruments, it come out different.

June laughs. THE WAITRESS sets a coffee in front of J-R.

WAITRESS
Uh. I gotta close the register.

J-R
...Oh. Sure.

He pulls out his wallet, hands the waitress a buck, then turns, showing June -- A SNAPSHOT OF VIVIAN AND ROSANNE.

J-R
...That's my wife, Viv. And our baby, Rosanne. 'Another one on the way.

JUNE
(studies photo)
I got a little girl. Carlene. 'Was just talking to her on the phone.

J-R
...When I was in the service, I used to look at pictures of you. In magazines.

JUNE
When was this?

J-R
In the Air Force. In Germany.

JUNE
...uh huh.

J-R
(blushes, back-tracks)
...No. It wasn't like that. ...I mean, I liked,.. I listened to your music and you were,.. are,.. I mean, of course you're pretty,.. beautiful, and I- I kept track of you,.. you and your family. I mean, I feel like I been listening to you since I was-- I grew up with you on the other end of a wire, you know?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Through all his stumbling, June's eyes sparkle. What she sees is what Phillips saw; that this dark young man in black is filled to the brim with kindness, honesty and a deep kind of pain. One that touches you. His coffee and toast arrives.

J-R
(adds wistfully)
...Me and my brother Jack always loved
your singing.

JUNE
Well, you and Jack are the only two then.

J-R
What' you talking about?

JUNE
I'm not much of a singer, John. I give it
my all, I got sass, but my sisters got
the real pipes. I'm a little tone deaf.

J-R
That's crazy. Who told you that?

JUNE
My Pa. My Mama. That's why I learnt to be
funny. So's I had something to offer.
They used to make me stand a yard from
the mic so my sisters could drown me out
when I went off-pitch.

J-R
Parents aren't always the best judge of
things, 'you want my opinion.

JUNE
(smiles)
After tonight, I'm off the road for a
month, playing the Opry on the radio.
...Tell your brother Jack to tune in.
I'll sing something for him.

J-R
...Oh. No. He... passed.

June studies J-R. Her face calm and attentive.

JUNE
You were real close, huh.

Tears suddenly come to J-R. It shocks him. He pushes it away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

J-R
I'm sorry. *What was that?*
(pulling it together)
Huh. Things moving too fast, I guess.

June smiles kindly and stands. She places a hand on his. It is a warm and simple gesture.

JUNE
It'll slow down, honey. ...I'll see you in a month or so. I gotta go pack.

Stilled by her, J-R can do no more than nod. She exits.

CUT TO:

64 EXT. MEMPHIS-- A MONTH LATER -- DAY 64

The leaves are brown and the trees are bare. We are on a handsome suburban Memphis street. A MOVING VAN parked in front of A PRETTY TWO STORY HOME.

CUT TO:

65 INT. NEW HOME / KITCHEN -- DAY 65

Her belly swollen, VIVIAN sorts silverware in a new kitchen. In the bg., REBA CASH unpacks pots and pans. MOVING MEN cross through frame. Roseanne (bigger) plays at their feet.

VIVIAN
When was the last time you heard him moving around up there?

CUT TO:

66 INT. UPSTAIRS STUDY -- DAY 66

VIVIAN OPENS THE DOOR and finds J-R ASLEEP ON A COMFY CHAIR. Sealed boxes lie all around him. There is a little some pills on the cushion of his chair. She looks at one of them.

VIVIAN
I thought you were gonna help me today.

J-R
(wakes, looks around)
Oh... I'm sorry.

She steps forward and sits in his lap.

VIVIAN
...You head out tomorrow.

J-R
...So.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN

So you better start living life with us
when you come home before you have to
leave again.

J-R

...Maybe I'll get Bob to push my dates.
(touches her hair)
I'm happy when I'm here with you.

VIVIAN

You sure about that?

J-R stands, leaving Vivian in the chair. He crosses to the
window, looking out at the Mayflower truck.

VIVIAN

See those bags, John?

TWO LARGE MAIL BAGS lie slumped in the corner of the room.

Those letters in there are ten to one
from girls. Ten to one. And they're
obscene. Reba's been trying to answer
some of them.

J-R laughs.

Half of them ain't even seventeen! And
they're sending pictures for you to look
at while you're "doin' time" at Folsom!

J-R

(chuckles)

Man. There was this night when we was in
Biloxi when this girl comes up to Carl
Perkins and--

VIVIAN

I got something in the oven and I don't
want to hear about the tour, okay?

(smiles)

That's my new rule. When you come home,
we get right down to talking about
regular things.

J-R

(spins, angry)

MAN ALIVE! GET OFF MY BACK, WOMAN! You
don't appreciate NOTHING! You get all the
money. You bought your dream house. You
got the car. What do you want from me?!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Vivian runs from the room, slamming the door.

CUT TO:

67 INT/EXT. BIG CAR-- TEXAS TOUR-- NIGHT-- RAIN

67

Eyes tired in the wash of dashboard lights and scraping wipers, J-R DRIVES, following the ghostly tail lights of THE TOUR CARAVAN AHEAD. Rain pours. Lightning dances beyond black fields. He glances back at--

A PAIR OF FINE ANKLES IN BOBBY SOX propped on the seat. They belong to JUNE CARTER, slumped in the back, her feet up. She is sleeping beside MARSHALL, who wraps tape around SOMETHING THE SIZE OF A BASKETBALL. CARL PERKINS sleeps next to him.

J-R looks back at the road-- then at June's ankles. Riding shotgun, JERRY LEE LEWIS grins, watching J-R.

JERRY LEE

'got your mind on something?

Jerry Lee laughs. Then nods at Marshall--

What's he doin' back there?

J-R

...He's building a bomb.

JUNE sits up. J-R catches her eye in the mirror.

CARL

Where we going again?

J-R

Tyler. George Jones Show.

CARL

Where was it we just was?

JUNE

That was Lubbock, where you picked me up. Say, John, did you see the new Billboard? "Cry, Cry, Cry" is number fourteen. I got one in my bag.

Jerry Lee stares as the lights pass over --
A DEAD FAWN ON THE SHOULDER.

JERRY LEE

Wherever we been, I can tell you where we're going. Everyone in this car is going to hell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R

What about the cars up there?

JERRY LEE

We're all going to hell for the songs we sing. And the people who listen to 'em are going to hell, too.

MARSHALL

Shut up with that.

JERRY LEE

Y'can't save souls singin' about sin. Y'can't take people to hell and lead 'em to heaven. God gave us a BIG APPLE. And he said 'DON'T TOUCH THAT.' He didn't say touch it once in a while. He didn't say take a nibble when you're hungry. He said DON'T TOUCH IT. Don't THINK 'bout touchin' it, don't SING 'bout touchin' it, and don't SING 'bout THINKIN' 'bout touching it.

JUNE

What about me, Jerry? Am I going to hell?

JERRY LEE turns -- looks at June. Considers.

JERRY LEE

No... You're beautiful, June...

JUNE

Sleepy is what I am.

JERRY LEE

(to J-R)

She's making me fall in love with her.

(off June)

You think I'm kidding? Feel my heart.

Feel it. It's gonna explode.

J-R notices -- THE CARS AHEAD ARE BLINKING THEIR LIGHTS -- SUDDENLY, JERRY LEE STARTS TO CLIMB OVER THE BACK SEAT.

Gimme your hand, June. Here, feel it.

JUNE

Stop it, Jerry Lee.

J-R

Jerry Lee! Sit your ass down.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

J-R FOLLOWS THE CARAVAN through the rain into a small Texas town. They pull into-- A MOTEL OF LITTLE BUNGLALOWS.

68

INT/EXT MOTEL COTTAGE -- LATER-- FIRST LIGHT

CUT TO:

68

J-R opens the door, finds the light: dimly revealing a bed, dresser, drapes, a drab painting of ducks on the wall. He places June's bags by the bed.

JUNE stands in the doorway, half asleep, clothes crumpled, makeup smudged. There is a red thread on her coat. J-R reaches and picks it off

JUNE

Oh. The magazine.

She crosses to a bag, unzips it and digs through a bunch of books, hardcover. She grabs Billboard magazine and a book.

J-R

'got a library in there.

JUNE

Here you go-- I circled it up.

J-R stares at the page from billboard.

--and I finished this, if you want it.

She hands him a copy of "The Prophet" by Gilbran. June's name is written in the jacket.

J-R

Oh, you don't have to--

JUNE

When I'm done with a book, I give it away. Lightens the load.

J-R looks at the book, touched-- flips pages. Their eyes meet. J-R pitches forward to kiss her--

JUNE

No, honey.

(puts up her hand)

I just got through a divorce. I got a world of judgment on me. And its none of my business, but it seems like you got a real nice family.

J-R

...It just happened.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUNE
It just happened...

J-R
...yeah.

JUNE
So you wear black cause its all you have,
you found your sound 'cause you can't
play no better, and you tried to kiss me
cause 'it just happened'?-- You should
try taking credit for something once in a
while.

(beat)
We pick the puddles we step in, honey.

J-R takes that in, more in love with her than if they had
kissed. June eases him out the door and closes it.

CUT TO:

69

INT./EXT. MOTEL COTTAGES-- RAIN-- CONTINUOUS

69

J-R stands under the overhang outside June's door. He sighs,
dazed, watching the rain come down. He sees Jerry Lee further
down the overhang, smoking, watching him. He smiles at J-R.

JERRY LEE
"He who troubleth his own household
shall inherit the wind."

J-R
Shut up, Jerry Lee.

Jerry Lee cackles. J-R shoves June's book under his jacket
and walks down the motel walkway to AN OPEN DOOR--

INSIDE THE ROOM-- MARSHALL CHECKS THE TAPED-UP ORB on the
bed. CARL PERKINS, ROY OBISON, LUTHER AND OTHERS ARE
DRINKING, LAUGHING, some through a connecting door.

J-R crosses and grabs a beer.

J-R
Let's blow something up.

CUT TO:

70

EXT TEXAS HIGHWAY NIGHT

70

MUSICIANS PILE FROM CARS AS THEY SCREECH TO A STOP, HOLDING
BEERS AND JACKETS OVER THEIR HEADS, RUNNING TO THE COVER OF
AN ABANDONED SHED. Many seem buzzed. A few sing incoherently.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARSHALL CARRIES HIS TAPED-UP ORB THROUGH THE RAIN, a jacket draped on it, heading to a field-- lightning shakes the sky.

J-R joins LUTHER under the shed.

JOHN
How you holdin' up?

LUTHER
...All right. That boy Roy sure likes to talk pussy. That's all I heard since Lubbock.

A MUSICIAN standing beside them downs a few pills.

MUSICIAN
'You want some?

J-R
What are they?

MUSICIAN
They make you want to drive all the way to Jacksonville and enjoy yourself after you get there. Elvis takes 'em.

The musician pours a few into J-R's hand. Then Luther's. J-R looks at THE PILLS-- White with little crosses.

MARSHALL
Hey! John! Get out here!

MARSHALL is twenty yards away in the field by A HUGE DEAD TREE. Lightning spasms in the sky.

LUTHER
He wants you to light it.

CUT TO:

71 DARK FIELD / HUGE DEAD TREE-- MOMENTS LATER

71

CLOSE ON-- MARSHALL SECURES HIS "BOMB" IN THE HOLLOW BASE OF THE TREE. He hands a Zippo to J-R, who kneels at the fuse.

J-R
How long I got after I light this?

MARSHALL
'minute a foot.

J-R looks back at the men under the shed, making sure he can get there. He lights the fuse --and it's going.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marshall and J-R walk briskly back to the others, trying not to run. Roy Orbison stands beside Luther and Jerry Lee.

ORBISON
'You light it?

MARSHALL
J-R did.

Everybody turns to the tree. Nothing happens.

JERRY LEE
Good work, Johnny-boy.

Somebody laughs. Suddenly--

KA BOOM! THE SHOCK OF IT KNOCKS EVERYONE BACK.

AND THE TREE LIFTS OFF THE GROUND, the whole tree levitates!

VOICES
hell fire...sheeit...boy howdy

Then, with a rush IT CRASHES-- SHATTERING-- KAWAAMMM!-- AND EMBERS RAIN DOWN ON THESE CRAZY MEN.

J-R
Moses Jehosophat...
LUTHER
...great god almighty.

JERRY LEE
Shit, man!

All these men are laughing, howling, some in each others arms. Flying embers and rain dazzle the sky. There is A FLASH OF LIGHTNING and we--

CUT TO:

72

INT. MEMPHIS HOUSE-- J-R'S WORKROOM -- MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT

72

Guitars lie about. So does June's book beside an ashtray and a smoking cigarette. J-R SITS SLUMPED ON THE FLOOR IN THE MOONLIGHT, his head sideways on a box. Without lifting his head, he pops a pill in his mouth, staring, half-lidded at--

A CRUMPLED LYRIC on a swatch of paper. He sings it quietly.

J-R SINGS
*I go out on a party... to look for a
little fun... but I find a darkened
corner... but I find a darkened corner...*
(stumped)
...shoot.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R CLOSES HIS EYES. There is a sound. Crickets.
He opens his eyes to see--

JACK, LYING BESIDE HIM ON THEIR MATTRESS BACK HOME.
Jack turns and smiles. Gentle and true.

CUT TO:

73 INT. BEDROOM -- NIGHT -- CONTINUOUS

73

J-R stumbles through them, finding the bed. He lays his head
against the pillow. He finds himself facing--

BABY ROSEANN, awake in Vivian's arms. The toddler stares at
J-R in the soft light. She reaches out her little hand.

J-R smiles and extends his finger to Roseanne. She takes it.
His eyes travel up from Roseanne's face to --

JUNE CARTER ASLEEP IN HIS BED, holding Roseanne--
where Viv used to be.

HORRIFIED, J-R BOLTS UPRIGHT, NEARLY FALLING FROM THE
MATTRESS. ROSEANNE CRIES. VIVIAN wakes, looking at J-R.

VIVIAN
...What's wrong? You okay, baby?

J-R
I'm fine.

CUT TO:

74 INT. BARREN BATHROOM-- NIGHT-- MOMENTS LATER

74

J-R FLUSHES A HANDFUL OF PILLS DOWN THE TOILET.

J-R
Dammit!

AND WE TRANSITION TO:

75 1968-- THE BLUE BIRD TOUR BUS RAINY NIGHT

75

CASH OPENS HIS EYES. HIS HEAD LEANS AGAINST THE WINDOW
RUNNELLED WITH RAIN. It takes him a moment to get his
bearings. Smoke winds down the aisle. Thunder groans...

Where is everybody? For a moment he sees no one. Somebody
whispers... the radio up front ...slipping through stations
stopping on Mozart's Clarinet Concerto...

CASH pulls himself into the aisle. Cigarette smoke coils and
diffuses in the light of a passing truck.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUTHER is asleep, curled like a soldier in a foxhole. A cigarette smolders between his fingers. Cash removes it and steps on it. MARSHALL sleeps, hunkered in the next seat.

BUS DRIVER

She's in the back, Mr. Cash.

Cash nods and makes his way, hands moving from seat to seat, to THE TALL ANTIQUE FURNITURE IN THE BACK. There's a rocking chair, ghostly, with the movement. SHADOWS SLIDE ACROSS TWO LARGE DRESSERS.

CASH

June?

June's bags are on the back seat, but no June. A CEILING-HIGH ARMOIRE JUMPS IN THE LIGHTNING. One of its doors is loose and makes a dim sound like wood chimes.

J-R eases open the door. June's finery on hangers. On the floor of the armoire-- JUNE IS WRAPPED IN BLANKETS. LIKE A CHILD, ASLEEP. Her face streaked with light. Mozart soars.

J-R grabs a blanket and sits in the rocker. *He sits and watches his love sleeping through the storm...*

CUT BACK TO:

76

1956-- PORCH-- MEMPHIS-- DAWN -- DECEMBER 1955

76

Christmas decorations are up around the neighborhood. J-R SITS ON A ROCKER on the porch of his new house, a blanket around his shoulders. He plucks the guitar quietly...

J-R SINGS

I go out on a party... and look for a little fun... but I find a darkened corner...

(beat)

'cause ...I still miss someone.

J-R blinks, unnerved. He sings it again.

J-R SINGS

...I still miss someone.

CUT TO:

77

INT. EXT. J-R'S NEW CADILLAC / FANCY RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

77

J-R AND VIVIAN are pulling up to the Valet for a RESTAURANT. J-R seems distracted, distant. He mutters something.

VIVIAN

What are you thinking?..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
(lies)
...I was thinking about how I'd get back here if your water broke, you know.

VIVIAN
...Oh.

J-R
You gotta have these things planned.

Knowing he's a full of shit bastard, Vivian looks away as J-R pulls the car to a stop and crosses to hold the door for her.

CUT TO:

78 INT. FANCY RESTAURANT -- LADIES ROOM -- NIGHT 78

VIVIAN primps her hair and checks her mascara in the mirror. She lets out a sigh, grabs her purse and crosses into--

79 THE RESTAURANT DINING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS 79

This is the kind of joint with mirror covered walls. As VIVIAN rounds a corner, SHE CATCHES A SIGHT IN THE MIRROR--

J-R, DRUMMING WITH BREADSTICKS ON WATER GLASSES AT THEIR TABLE. He could not appear happier, HAMMING IT UP, FOR TWO HOT GIRLS, WATCHING FROM A BOOTH.

Vivian stands there, heart sinking. A beat rises from off-screen, and as we hear THE CRACK OF A SNARE--

WE CUT TO:

80 INT. STAGE-- NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY-- AMORY, MISS. (DEC. 1955) 80

J-R PERFORMS 'ROCK AND ROLL RUBY'. HARD AND SEXY. LIKE NOTHING WE'VE HEARD HIM DO BEFORE. WITH A SANTA HAT ON.

J-R ROCKS
Ruby started 'bout one o'clock/ And when she started rockin', she wouldn't stop/

81 WE ARE: INT. THEATER NIGHT 81

YOUNG WOMEN PRESS AGAINST THE STAGE. CRAZY-EYED.

She rocked on the table and she rocked on the floor --

J-R'S EYES settle on-- the face of A LISSOME GIRL

'Everybody yellin' Ruby rock some more!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUTHER and MARSHALL have been joined by FLUKE, A DRUMMER. The crowd goes wild-- and they slam out of it. AND THE AUDIENCE ERUPTS, CLAPPING, SCREAMING-- "JOHNNY! JOHNNY!" J-R AND THE BOYS BOW. AND THE CURTAIN FALLS.

M-C
Johnny Cash and the Tennessee Three!

J-R lights a butt as the crowd cheers from beyond the waffling curtain. Smiling, he looks to --

JERRY LEE, in the wings, whistling through his fingers.

JERRY LEE
(slaps Elvis on the back)
'better get out and wiggle your ass,
Elvis! Johnny's got drums! He's a ROCKER!

ELVIS laughs and nods respectfully to J-R as they pass.

ELVIS
'You kicked it good, John.

J-R
Thanks.

JERRY LEE
That's right, Elvis! KISS HIS ASS!

J-R
(approaching Jerry)
...Does your mamma know you're out?

JERRY LEE
Oh, Johnny, she knows. ...Gimme that.

Jerry Lee snatches J-R's cigarette as -- THE CURTAIN RISES -- CHEERS AND SCREECHING-- AND ELVIS PRESLEY GRABS THE MIC.

ELVIS
Hey. What about that Johnny Cash!?

THE CROWD ROARS. PRESLEY'S BAND (SCOTTY & BILL) LAY A BEAT AS

WE CUT TO:

82 INT. TINY DRESSING ROOM -- ARMORY-- NIGHT -- CONTINUOUS 82

J-R turns on the spigot and watches water purl in the sink. HE POPS TWO PILLS and gulps water from a cupped hand. We hear Elvis in the bg, singing Old Time Religion:

Give me that old time religion/ Give me
that old' time a-heartfelt religion!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- suddenly, knock, knock...

STAGE MANAGER O.S.
(with distaste)
Uh. Mr. Cash,.. there's a Miss Alice
Parks here to see you.

J-R
(doesn't know the name)
...Who?

STAGE MANAGER
Alice. Parks.

J-R opens the door and there stands --THE LISSOME GIRL.
The stage manager smiles and exits. *Elvis continues singing.*

J-R
...You want to come in?

Alice looks directly at him. J-R is uncertain what is
expected. He offers to shake her hand. But Alice steps
forward, rises on her toes and KISSES HIM DEEPLY. He takes
her face and returns the kiss. She moves her body into his.

J-R LOCKS THE DRESSING ROOM DOOR while dragging the tail of
her blouse out of her skirt's waistband and they fall back
and suddenly we are--

83-85 INT. BACK HOME IN MEMPHIS CHRISTMAS-- (MUSIC CONTINUES) 83-85

THE GIRL IS GONE and in her place is-- VIVIAN, BEAMING,
SERVING CHRISTMAS DINNER. As soon as Grace is finished, an
exhausted J-R shuffles past the disapproving eyes of his
MOTHER AND DADDY (looking older) to the bathroom and, as he
opens the door--

86 J-R EMERGES FROM A BACKSTAGE DOOR-- NIGHT (MUSIC CONTINUES) 86

ON TOUR AGAIN, J-R'S ARMS ARE WRAPPED AROUND A PAIR OF
LAUGHING GIRLS WITH TEASED HAIR. As they stumble from the
theater toward a car, John spots--

JUNE CARTER arriving, signing autographs. Her eyes find him.

J-R
...shoot...

CUT TO:

87 INT. A LARGE FIVE AND DIME WHEELING, W.VIRGINIA MORNING 87

JUNE shops briskly. She has a list and knows what she's
after, pulling pretty things; doilies, candles, napkins,
tissues. People in the aisles greet her. Recognize her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADY IN AISLE

You're June Carter ain't you? Oh my!

JUNE

That's me. What's your name, mam?

LADY IN AISLE

Betsy Purvis. I'm coming to the show tonight.

(pulling over man)

This is my husband Lloyd.

JUNE

Glad to meet you, Lloyd. Say, you wouldn't know where they keep the fishing tackle, would you? *

LLOYD

'Back of them footballs on the corner.

JUNE

Thank you.

(moving off)

'Hope you have fun tonight, Betsy. If you got any requests, just hollar.

Struggling to hold onto her armful of niceties, June zigzags a few more aisles, nodding hellos to folk who recognize her.

JUNE

Hello. howdy. How you doing? *

That's when she spots--

J-R, HUNG-OVER, STANDING FROZEN IN THE TOY AISLE, scratching unruly hair. She moves closer yet. He is scrutinizing PAPER DOLLS, tortured with indecision.

June chuckles to herself and moves on, heading into SPORTING GOODS. She grabs a cheap rod and reel and as she turns to head for the register, she runs into A MANAGER IN AN APRON, AN OLDER LADY WITH WHITE HAIR who gives June the once over.

JUNE

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking I cleaned your store out of doilies and candles. And well, I did, but the rooms over at the hotel are so dank. I need my klediments. You know what they are?

MANAGER

I know what Klediments are.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JUNE

What I'm really looking for is fine lace.

MANAGER

Sewin' store on Saticoy got lace.

JUNE

Thank you, dear.

June starts to move on but gets turned around by the Manager.

MANAGER

Your Ma and Pa are good Christians in a world gone to pot.

JUNE

That's nice. I'll tell them you said so.

MANAGER

I surprised they still speaking to you. After that stunt with Carl Smith. Divorce is an abomination against God. Marriage is for life.

JUNE

(shaken by this)

I'm sorry I let you down, mam.

June moves on, dazed. She walks for a moment, lost in the aisles. She stops herself, tears falling and tries to breath them away. She puts on her sunglasses, rounds a corner and finds herself facing--

J-R, still standing with the paper dolls in exactly the same position we last saw him. June lets loose with a laugh.

J-R

What's so funny?

JUNE

You haven't moved since I saw you ten minutes ago standing in the same spot holdin the same Pretty Polly-book. You look like the world's coming to an end.

J-R is happy to see June but wishes he looked less shabby.

J-R

I can't figure which one Roseanne'd like more. She's got brown hair, which makes me think this one--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JUNE

I got that same one for Carlene.
And she was very happy.

J-R

...I missed her birthday. I'd like to
send something more, y'know, like one of
these doll houses. But I don't know how
to get it out to her.

JUNE

...Honey...

CUT TO:

88 FRONT OF STORE-- MINUTES LATER

88

JUNE holds her bag as J-R FILLS OUT A PACKING SLIP and hands
it to the Manager. THE BIG DOLL HOUSE SITS ON THE COUNTER.

MANAGER

It should be there in five workin' days.

J-R

(looks grateful to June)
That's great. Thank you.

CUT TO:

89 EXT. BANK OF CREEK-- AFTERNOON

89

Both carrying rods and a can of bait, JUNE AND J-R make way
through underbrush along the wide stream. J-R limps.

JUNE

There's a run of gravel I saw up here.
(re: his gait)
You got a hitch in your giddyup.

J-R

(blushes) ...yeah.

He's not going there.

CUT TO:

90 GRAVELBAR-- LATER--

90

J-R and JUNE stand on either end of the bar, casting.
J-R is having a hard time. JUNE's casts are smooth as silk.

JUNE

...I forgot how much I like this.

J-R

...dog-gone. I never used one of these
spinning rods before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUNE
What'd you use, a saplin'?

J-R nods. JUNE crosses to him, lays down her rod.

JUNE
Here... My Daddy taught me this.

She stands behind J-R, gently touching his arm and back, guiding him through a cast.

JUNE
You just throw it out there...

J-R
Sidearm?

She is very close to him. Her breasts brush him. The next cast is better.

JUNE
Hey, now. ...There you go.

She returns to her end of the gravel bar and casts. Without speaking again, the two of them cast and reel as low late afternoon sunlight ribbons the trunks of trees.

CUT TO:

91

INT BACKSTAGE/CAPITOL MUSIC HALL-- W. VIRGINIA NIGHT

91

In the wings, JUNE watches J-R, LUTHER, MARSHALL AND FLUKE (DRUMMER) bring it to an end. They have become a great band.

Just around the corner there's heartache/
Down the street that losers use/ If you
can wade in through the teardrops/ You'll
find me at the home of the blues.

J-R bows, waves to the audience, now quite the pro himself. He spots JUNE and holds up a hand for quiet.

J-R
...Ladies and gentlemen. Let's get June Carter out here.
(to June)
Hey, June, come on out and sing with me.

She shakes her head.

Come on, June, I never sing with you.
(to audience)
I never done that in my whole life.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They applaud. June gives J-R a serious look. She points at her feet-- she's in slippers-- she got out of her stompers.

J-R

They don't care if you got slippers on.
Come on, it's the shank of the evening.

June folds her arms and looks off.

Let's hear it now.
(into mic, softly)
...june...june...june...

The audience begins to chant --AND IT GROWS IN VOLUME, June can't help but smile a little.

J-R

Come on, Junie. Prove Elvis Presley wrong. He says you can't do nothing that isn't written in your calendar.

JUNE wheels (maybe she's leaving, but no). She grabs her autoharp from a chair, and stomps out onto--

THE STAGE -- as the packed hall of miners, farmers, tradesman and their families --all standing -- CHEER THE SIGHT OF HER. J-R raises a hand and silence falls.

J-R

See. They want to see us together.

JUNE

Hello again, folks. My oh my. I hope you don't mind my slippers. I thought I was done for the evening.

(to J-R)

See. John. Where I come from you ask the lady directly.

J-R

These folks were my go-betweens.

JUNE

I see.

J-R stands there, grinning, an irrepressible boy.

JUNE

So, what are we singing, Johnny? You git me out here. Is this where the plan ends?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

J-R

I heard you sing "Times a'Wastin" a bunch a times on the radio. That was always a nice duet. Let's do that one.

The audience cheers. June is stricken.

JUNE

(whispers, off mic)

John. Not appropriate. I did that with Carl. I recorded that with my ex-husband.

(off his look)

It's not appropriate.

J-R

(whispers back)

No better way to put it behind you.

JUNE

Please, John. Its like reminding people--

Ignoring, her, J-R nods to Luther who kicks it off with a lick and forces June's hand--

J-R SINGS

I got arms.

JUNE SINGS

(reluctantly)

And I got arms.

J-R AND JUNE SING

Let's get together and use those arms.

Let's go, Times a'wastin.

JERRY LEE, CARL PERKINS, WANDA JACKSON AND OTHERS gather backstage and watch June and J-R from the wings, charmed.

CLOSE ON-- JUNE AND J-R SPARING, trading lyrics, looking in each others eyes, swapping places with the mic, making something great out of the heat and friction between them. The push-pull of this duet becomes a lovers' tango.

THE AUDIENCE CLAPS AND STOMPS their feet as June and J-R share the mic, inches from each other, working up a sweat with the chorus. Grinning ear to ear.

I got lips. And you got lips. Lets get together and use those lips! Let's go, Times a'wastin!

AND THEN IT HAPPENS, IN A MOMENT. Like a light switching off. June catches herself. She spots that Manager from the Five and Dime in the audience staring, judging. And she blinks, pulls back-- reflexively. As Luther starts his solo, June stands there, undone, THEN RUNS FROM THE STAGE, leaving J-R standing there at the mic...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

J-R RUNS AFTER HER. The band keeps playing unsure what else to do. And as J-R runs past Jerry Lee And Wanda in the wings--

J-R
Get out there and finish it.

CUT TO:

92 INT. DRESSING ROOMS/ BACKSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

92

With Jerry Lee and Wanda singing in the bg.,
J-R BANGS ON THE DOOR TO JUNE'S DRESSING ROOM.

J-R
June! Open up. Open it!

JUNE (O.S.)
(upset)
Please stay away from me.

J-R
I can't do that.

JUNE (O.S.)
Please!

J-R twists the locked knob, kicks at the door.

J-R
It's just a damned song woman!

JUNE (O.S.)
Leave me be! Please leave me--

J-R FORCES THE THIN THE DOOR. And now he can see how upset she is. Terrified. Crumpled. As he approaches, she begs--

JUNE (O.S.)
Let me be! Please! Go away! Please! You have to. You need to. GO AWAY!

Heartbroken, J-R turns and walks away to--

CUT TO:

93 INT. J-R'S DRESSING ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

93

J-R
Goddam! ...Goddam!

J-R trashes his dressing room, hyperventilating, looking for something-- finding A PINT BOTTLE, half full of something amber. He drains it. Then he storms out.

CUT TO:

94 INT. JUNE'S HOTEL ROOM FIRST LIGHT

94

JUNE CARTER wakes. One eye looks at bands of light falling through shades and then settles on a framed picture of her little girl. This is good example of a dingy hotel room that June has made warm and hospitable with her candles and other niceties. Hearing distant music, June rises to her window.

She can barely make out-- *the sound of men singing.*

CUT TO:

95 INT. HOTEL LOBBY-- WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA MORNING

95

The elevator's cage-door opens and JUNE steps out. There's a CLERK at the front desk.

JUNE
You seen the boys?

DESK CLERK
I don't think they come in, Miss Carter.

96 EXT. TOWN SQUARE-- WHEELING WEST VIRGINIA MORNING

96

JUNE emerges from the brick hotel and listens for a moment.

THE DISTANT BOYS
Candy Man/ Ooooooh, Candy Man!

June sets off across a park, past the empty band shell... As she swings round the court house she comes upon a large red L-shaped barn of a building. A marquee reads --

WHEELING AUDITORIUM PRESENT
JOHNNY CASH AND THE TENNESSEE THREE
with JERRY LEE LEWIS and JUNE CARTER
Sat and Sun: two & eight o'clock

The singing is louder now.

J-R SINGS
Thought I heard Sister Johnson said/
She always took a candy stick to bed.

ALL THE BOYS
Candy Man/ Ooooooh, Candy Man!

June climbs metal stairs, finds doors open, pushes into--

97 INT. THEATER MORNING (CONTINUOUS)

97

Hundreds of chairs. The empty stage, mics and drums still in place, the floor strewn with programs. June crosses down the

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

aisle towards the singing. She pushes through a backstage door and comes upon--

J-R, JERRY LEE, LUTHER, MARSHALL, CARL PERKINS and a new guy, skinny with a guitar, WALYON JENNINGS, 19 are lying about the stage. Wasted. The floor is strewn with bottles. Someone coughs. We hear their laughter, a guitar and a banjo...

THE SHIT-FACED BOYS
...Don't stand close to the Candy Man/
Candy Man! Ohhhhh, Candy Man!

JERRY LEE is the first to spot her.

JERRY LEE
You're the Pied Piper, Johnny!

J-R's eyes rise. He glances at June for a second. He knows he's in for it and goes back to singing.

J-R SINGS
*...This stick of candy don't melt away/
Just gets better so the ladies say!*

The song unravels as the men are undone by June's presence. They clear throats, sip beers, and reach for cigarettes.

MARSHALL
...Wanna beer, June?

JUNE
(stepping forward)
How you doin', John?

J-R squints into the light.

J-R
O-kay. How you doin', June?

JUNE
I surmise you never been to bed.

Some swallowed laughter from the boys.

JUNE
We got a show at two. A Matinee.
You know that, right?

J-R tilts his bottle, drains it.
Reaches for another, pops it with a church key.

JERRY LEE
Come on and set down, June.
It's slick here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JUNE
Not today, Jerry Lee.

JERRY LEE
Why not?

JUNE
Because you're drunk.

WAYLON
You reckon?

J-R
We didn't do it quick.

CARL
It took some time.

JERRY LEE
Johnny started it.

They chuckle and grin up at June from the floor.

LUTHER
(slurring)
We didn't need... to go anywhere 'cause
we knew we'd be back here now ...when now
came to get us.

JERRY LEE
(they clink, a toast)
Amen brother.

J-R
Have a beer, June. Come on.

JUNE
I'm goin' home tonight after the show.
I am not here to keep after you.

J-R drains his bottle, THEN LOBS IT. As it flies through the
air, backwash spatters June. Smash... She brushes the stain.

J-R
You're not?

The boys cackle.

JUNE
You got someone to do that, John.
You got a wife somewhere, don't you?

J-R
What if I didn't?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JUNE

Too many "ifs" in that sentence.

J-R

Only one, actually.

The boys cackle again. June starts to walk away.

J-R

'only one "if" in that sentence, June!

June suddenly veers from the exit and moves to the rack of beer near the door, GRABS A BOTTLE-- AND THROWS IT-- AS HARD AS SHE CAN -- DIRECTLY AT J-R-- just missing him. Because its full there is a real explosion: KA-CHUUNGGGG!

J-R

...Ahhhh...

THE BOYS FLUSH LIKE QUAIL, lurching, scattering, reeling-- --AS JUNE GRABS MORE BOTTLES AND HURLS THEM-- a hail of bottles-- she is emptying the goddam rack--

ALL

No no no...June, No! ...godamighty
...Please...Mercy mercy, June... Jesus!

Waylon falls on his face. Gangly, Luther has spread his feet far as possible to keep his balance, trying to run...

J-R

Stop it, June.

A BOTTLE ZINGS PAST HIS EAR. He falls backwards into a table

J-R

Damn! We surrender, June! We surrender!

CRASH! KA-CHUNG!

JUNE

What was I thinkin'? I must be crazy!
You're just like the rest of them. You
don't care. You're all gonna blow the
tour. You can't walk no line.

JERRY LEE

June-bug-- we ain't blowin' the tour!

CRASH! KA-CHUNG!

JUNE

I -- am -- not -- gonna be that dutch boy
with my finger in the dam! No more!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

June wheels about and strides from the hall, over the floor slick with beer and broken glass, through the drifting smoke.

J-R

You're lying to yourself, honey, if you think this is about a tour!

He tries to stand on the beer soaked floor and falls. Lying on his side, he watches her go.

O.S. A GUITAR JANGLES: CHKACHKACHKU. HMMMMMMMMMMMMMM.

J-R SINGS O.S

I keep a close watch on this heart of mine

98 MONTAGE-- AS YEARS PASS-- ON STAGE AT A STATE FAIR J-R SINGS: 98

I keep my eyes wide open all the time

WE CUT TO: J-R IN A PARKING LOT, TRYING TO GET TO A BUS, MULTITUDES WANT AUTOGRAPHS-- FACES-- LAUGHING-- HUNGRY -- ADORING -- QUIVERING WITH EAGERNESS-- THE FEELING OF DUMB SUSPENSION AS HE SIGNS HIS NAME OVER AND OVER... FLASH!

I keep the ends out for the tie that bind
Because you're mine, I walk the line.

A photo taken of J-R with pressing fans. FLASH! A middle-aged women kisses him, another grab his waist FLASH!

As sure as night is dark and day is light/

FOLLOWED BY A MAYFLOWER VAN, J-R, VIVIAN (PREGNANT AGAIN) TWO GIRLS AND A BABY, DRIVE IN A CADILLAC UP A DRIVE TO A SPRAWLING RANCH HOUSE ON AN ARID MOUNTAIN. Vivian takes a picture of them all out front. FLASH!

I keep you on my mind day and night

J-R, VIVIAN AND FAMILY IN THEIR LUXURIOUS NEW HOME. The girls play in the pool. Vivian smiles at J-R, sipping iced tea. J-R covers his eyes from the sun hitting the water; FLASH, FLASH!

And happiness I've known proves it's right/
Because you're mine I walk the line.

J-R SIGNS HIS NAME TO A CONTRACT, STANDING BETWEEN FINELY DRESSED MEN IN A ROOM OF GLASS. HE HOLDS AN OVERSIZED MILLION CHECK... FLASH! FLASH! (HE'S SIGNED WITH COLUMBIA RECORDS)

J-R PUSHES THROUGH A HOTEL DOOR. REVOLVING GLASS FLASHES-- SWALLOWED BY DOORS, RESTAURANT DOORS, CAB DOORS, AND ALWAYS ON THE OTHER SIDE, HORDES AWAIT AND ALWAYS THE--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MANY VOICES

Wonderful, Johnny...Would you sign...
magnificent... we love you... Great!

NIGHT. J-R WANDERS THE NASHVILLE STRIP, hands in pockets,
breath condensing, dark glasses on. He passes a STACK of
COUNTRY MUSIC TRADES-- THE COVER OF ONE READS:

JUNE CARTER MARRIES RIP NIX.

FANS FILE INTO THE OPRY. ON THE MARQUEE-- CASH IN CONCERT!

Yes, I'll admit that I'm a fool for you/
Because you're mine I walk the line.

THE CAMERA PANS, REVEALING, NOT FIFTY FEET AWAY--

J-R IN AN ALLEY, DRINKING FROM A BAG, kneeling, folding,
crumpling, into a ball.

WE HEAR A BIRD CALL, THE MUSIC STOPS COLD AND WE CUT TO:

99 1964-- J-R'S FACE (32) GAUNT, SHRUNKEN. HE OPENS HOLLOW EYES. 99

A FLOCK OF GULLS CIRCLE OVERHEAD. Streaks of sunlight through
black rolling clouds. Lightning flickers. Distant thunder. A
breeze picks up. The sound of laughing children rises. It
takes him a moment to realize he's on a hammock in --

THE BACKYARD OF HIS DESERT RANCH HOUSE-- DAY-- 1964

J-R HAS LOST FIFTY POUNDS. Clothes hang from him. Gone is the
powerful, bold young star.

HIS THREE GIRLS (ROSANNE, KATHY, AND CINDY) PLAY IN THE YARD
with a garden hose in bathing suits.

J-R's lips are dry. He kicks his feet off the hammock.
Thunder. He looks up at the darkening sky.

J-R

Kathy, listen to it! Rosanne!

His voice strains as if he had a cold. They stop to listen.

ROSANNE

What?

J-R

Listen!

They do. And they hear a sound, the slapping of distant rain,
coming toward them --up the hill --across the yard. A rush of
rain moving their way. The girls' faces light up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rain spatters J-R's face and shoulder. The girls giggle, getting wet, hands out.

VIVIAN O.S.
Dinner! Come on, everybody.
It's raining for Pete's sake.

Standing at the back door, Vivian is also thin. Her face, care-worn. The girls run inside, laughing.

ROSANNE
Come on, Daddy!

J-R
I'm not hungry, Roseanne.

VIVIAN
You need to eat, John.

J-R opens his mouth to the rain. He tastes it. Smiles. A memory of June. THUNDER AS WE--

CUT TO:

100

INT. CASITAS SPRINGS HOUSE-- KITCHEN (CONTINUOUS)

100

J-R enters, soaked. MOTHER and DADDY are there, much older and better dressed, sitting at an OAK TABLE WITH THE GIRLS watching "Name That Tune". VIVIAN GIVES THE BABY HER BOTTLE.

MOTHER
You should know that one, Ray.
It's from that show with Mary Martin.

DADDY
...South Pacific.

J-R laughs to himself derisively. He crosses to the sink, drinks from the tap, and wipes his mouth with his hand. Vivian holds up AN AIR SICKNESS BAG COVERED WITH SCRAWL.

VIVIAN
What's this?

J-R
That's a letter I wrote on the plane to Bob Dylan. I gotta put it in the mail.
(changing subject)
You made up your mind, Viv? About tonight? You coming?

VIVIAN
Since you're askin' so nice.
(to Mother)
The Grammys.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER

You should eat something, J-R.

J-R notices Daddy staring at him.

J-R

What you looking at?

DADDY

'was thinking you should try sleeping at night. Maybe eating. Maybe both.

J-R laughs, pops a beer from the fridge. A phone RINGS.

J-R

I got it.

He lunges from the room, crashing into a chair, heading --

101 DOWN THE HALL TO -- HIS OFFICE--

101

--where he grabs the phone. The pine walls of this room are lined with GOLD RECORDS, AWARDS, ANTIQUE GUNS, POSTERS OF FOREIGN TOURS. There is one picture of June, small on his desk. He stares at it. He is still dripping wet.

J-R

Hey, Bob. Wait a minute. Hold on.

J-R fumbles with a drawer. There's a pistol ...not what he wants... he grabs A BULGING SOCK from way in the back. Shakes fifteen... oh well... twenty pills onto the desk. These are no longer just speed but uppers, downers, tranquilizers, etc. J-R plucks a specific combo and washes it down with old beer.

J-R

Hey. Tell them Grammy people we'll come. But tell'm if June Carter shows, I want her seated near me.

CUT TO:

102 INT. SHRINE AUDITORIUM -- NIGHT

102

As an orchestra plays an overture and 'awards show' dancers leap about-- J-R, RUBS HIS CHIN, sitting beside VIVIAN, who stares at the stage. J-R's attention is fixed on--

JUNE CARTER, who takes a seat a row in front of him, her hair big and teased. A few years have passed, but June's no less radiant. She appears alone, the seat beside her empty. Vivian notices her-- and turns to J-R, surprised.

VIVIAN

...John...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Holding Vivian's hand, J-R leans forward.

J-R
Hey, June.

JUNE
(startled, turns)
Oh! ...Hello, John.

J-R
'Saw you got married.

JUNE
(flustered)
Yes, John. I did. Hello, Vivian.

VIVIAN
Hello. Congratulations.

JUNE
Thank you.

J-R
I thought you were gonna wait for me.

The orchestra crescendos-- June isn't sure she heard him--

JUNE
....What--?

J-R
I was surprised you got married cause I
thought you were gonna wait... for me.

JUNE
(looks to Viv, embarrassed)
Oh stop, John!

June turns away, disgusted. Vivian jerks her hand from J-R.
Everyone claps as a Presenter comes to the stage. Lights dim.

SUDDENLY, JUNE BOLTS, using the darkness to run up the aisle.

J-R SPINS-- HE CAN SEE JUNE TALKING TO AN USHER.
Obviously asking for new seat. HE TAKES OFF AFTER HER.

VIVIAN
...John!

June sees J-R coming and runs into the lobby, leaving the
Usher in mid sentence.

CUT TO:

103 INT. SHRINE LOBBY / RESTROOMS-- MOMENTS LATER -- NIGHT

103

JUNE runs through the lobby in heels, holding up her dress, upset, trying to keep her mascara from running.

Out the glass doors --A BATTERY OF PHOTOGRAPHERS. Seeing J-R coming into the lobby, she makes a bee-line for RESTROOMS.

THE DOOR TO THE LADIES ROOM OPENS ONTO--

TEN PRIMPING LADIES STARING AT THEMSELVES IN A BRIGHTLY LIT MIRROR. June spins, panicked, and finds J-R upon her. June dives into the ladies room, running for a stall.

AND J-R BUSTS RIGHT IN AFTER HER-- Ladies squeal--

J-R

June. Wait.
(to the other women)
Sorry ladies. You mind?

THE LADIES SWARM FOR THE DOOR, exiting. J-R moves to June.

JUNE

...You look like a cadaver.

J-R

So where's your Truck driver?

JUNE

Stock car driver... You'll be happy to know things aren't going so well for us.

J-R

That don't make me happy.
...Well, a little it does.
(touches her hair)
I want to tour with you again.

JUNE

I got two girls, now, John. I can't:

J-R

Just ten days a month. That's all! Ten days. You work for me. You don't worry about bookings, agents, publicity, nothing. And if one of your girls gets a cold, you stay home, I pay you anyway.

June has no idea what's right anymore... J-R smiles tenderly and wipes a tear from her eye with his finger.

CUT TO:

104 INT. BACKSTAGE WINGS/STAGE HOLLYWOOD BOWL NIGHT 104

JUNE is alone on the stage of the Hollywood Bowl, under the hot lights, plucking her autoharp. Pure sweet sounds --

JUNE SINGS

My baby's left me/ 'Even took my shoe/

Backstage (standing with LUTHER, MARSHALL, AND FLUKE) J-R WATCHES JUNE, NEEDING HER.

Enough to give a girl these doggone
worried blues!

THE SONG ENDS. APPLAUSE. LONG APPRECIATIVE APPLAUSE: A HUGE CROWD. June holds up her hands. The crowd quiets.

JUNE

Now you sit down, squat down, or lie down, but make yourself at home, 'cause here's the one and only Johnny Cash!

J-R LEADS HIS BAND onstage. Thunderous applause. This is a larger crowd than we've seen: More than three thousand. And not just kids. Grown ups. Families. Old folks.

J-R checks his guitar, the boys, and clears his throat. He turns to the microphone and meets eyes with --

VIVIAN AND THE KIDS (wearing white dresses), MOMMA AND DADDY sit in a VIP section. LITTLE KATHY waves to J-R. He smiles.

J-R

Hello, I'm Johnny Cash.

CHEERS, SHOUTS, APPLAUSE. Guitars jangle and --

J-R SINGS

Go away from my window/ Leave at your own
chosen speed/ (continues)

J-R glances from his family to-- JUNE who joins him at the mic-- And with eyes locked on one another--

J-R AND JUNE SING

It ain't me babe. No, no, no. It ain't me
you're looking for, babe.

CUT TO:

105 INT. BACKSTAGE HOLLYWOOD BOWL NIGHT 105

J-R AND JUNE make their way through MUSIC BUSINESS PEOPLE and WELL-WISHERS. Costly clothes and tanned skin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RECORD EXECUTIVE
Brilliant, Johnny. Great, June.
What's next?

JUNE
We got a nice stint in Vegas.

J-R spots-- HIS MOM, DAD, VIVIAN, ROSEANNE, KATHY AND CINDY standing in a corner. He leads June to them. J-R tousles the hair of his girls-- picks up Cindy.

J-R
June, this is my Momma and Daddy.

JUNE nods to DADDY and MOTHER, turns to the girls.

JUNE
It's great to meet you.

MOTHER
How do you do.

Daddy says nothing to June, barely looks at her. June looks at J-R's daughters all in white.

JUNE
I've heard about you ladies.
--What lovely dresses you have.

VIVIAN
Stay clear of my children.

J-R
Vivian --

JUNE
I've got children of my own, Vivian.

VIVIAN
You heard me. Get away from them.

June smiles politely at J-R, nods to his family, and walks away. J-R glares at Vivian and feels her hatred.

CUT TO:

1964-- INT. LAS VEGAS-- THEATER AT THE MINT-- NIGHT

THE SOUND OF SUSTAINED APPLAUSE! SCREAMS OF "JOHNNY! JOHNNY!"
Huge ventilation fans spin above a packed house.

THE STAGE IS FILLED WITH COLORED LIGHTS. J-R AND JUNE pounce on the next tune, PILING INTO THE SONG. Her beautiful eyes fall upon him-- radiant. They're having an affair-- on stage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

J-R AND JUNE

We got married in a fever hotter than a
pepper sprout/ We been talking about
Jackson ever since the fire went out!

CUT TO:

106 INT LOBBY/ CASINO /ELEVATOR-- THE MINT VEGAS NIGHT

106

THE WHOOP AND CLATTER OF VEGAS SLOTS.

UNDER A BANNER-- WELCOME STATE SHERIFFS, J-R, JUNE (carrying groceries), LUTHER (six-pack in hand) AND THE BOYS enter the casino, triumphant. Sheriffs, in cowboy hats, mill about.

THEY JUMP ABOARD AN ELEVATOR. J-R presses two buttons. Then, quite suddenly, they crushed back by TEN SHERIFFS. THESE ARE BIG SILENT MEN IN CRISP UNIFORMS WITH GUNS AND HATS.

The elevator lurches upward. It is quiet. Too quiet. The band and ten cops. They do not meet eyes. J-R smirks, listening to the slither and rattle of cables lifting.

LUTHER

...Say, Officer. How do you get your shirts to stay like that? So ...stiff.

FAT SHERIFF

Just starch.

LUTHER

...huh ...Nice.

Ding! The doors open and THE SHERIFFS LEAVE. Doors close. Looks are thrown to Luther.

MARSHALL

You are out of your rabbit-assed mind.

THEY ALL BUST OUT LAUGHING. DING! Doors open. But JUNE has the giggles and can't stop. They hold the door for her, and J-R gives her a hand and they stumble into--

THE CORRIDOR

LUTHER

(to J-R, offering beer)

You wanna couple?

J-R nods. LUTHER hands him two. Offers one to June. She shakes her head. The elevator doors start to close.

BOYS

Night... See you...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUNE AND J-R
Night... Sleep tight.

J-R walks JUNE to her door.

J-R
(offers beer)
You sure you don't want one?

JUNE
No thank you, John.

She moves to unlock her door,

J-R
June.

...and she turns-- her face coming to him... and like that they are in each others arms, fluttering hands, her lips on his face and mouth... his mouth on her hair, her neck, her lips, ... bodies drawn... surrendering... his hand reaches the keys... finds the knob... and they fall into the room and J-R's foot comes back to kick the door-- SLAM.

CUT TO:

107

INT. JUNE'S ROOM-- MINT HOTEL-- EARLY MORNING

107

J-R and JUNE, after love, on her hotel bed. J-R laughs and rolls over and reaches into a bowl of peanuts on the bedside table. HE SHELLS A NUT and turns back, holding it, tantalizingly, above June's lips...

She parts them in anticipation... J-R studies her, then, thinks better of it,... AND EATS THE NUT HIMSELF.

JUNE
John.

J-R
(chuckling) ...No, no, no, here.

She waits while he shells another nut. He holds it above her lips. She is not sure. He waits. She parts her lips to receive the nut. AND HE EATS IT.

JUNE
John!

He barks a laugh. He hasn't been this happy in long time. She has to laugh, but wants it to stop.

JUNE
...JOHN!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
Wait a minute! ...wait a minute!

JUNE
You're mean.

J-R
No, I'm not.

JUNE
Yes, you are.

J-R
I'm not mean, baby. I love you.

JUNE
Then give me a nut.

J-R is overcome with laughter.

JUNE
See. You're a mean man. But I knew that.

J-R
No. Wait, wait. Here. Open your mouth.

JUNE
I don't trust you.

J-R
Honey, don't say that.

JUNE
Yeah, well.

J-R
Put your head down, baby.

She does so. She has to smile at how bad he is. He holds the peanut above her lips. Waits for her to part them. She doesn't. He gives her the tenderest, most winning smile.

JUNE
You.

She parts her lips. He cocks his head. HE EATS THE PEANUT.

AS SHE BEATS HIM WITH HER FISTS, THEY BOTH LAUGH --

THE PHONE RINGS. June freezes. Turns. Answers it.

JUNE
...Hello? Oh, honey. What's wrong? Tell Momma. Oh Carlene, I'm sorry...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

J-R feels the intruder. He grabs his clothes to dress.

No. Of course you can make pancakes. You tell Linda to pull out that Bisquick I got in the pantry. That's right. Uh huh.

He exits softly.

CUT TO:

108 NEXT MORNING -- J-R ON PHONE IN HIS HOTEL ROOM 108

He waits as it rings and rings on the other end.

CUT TO:

109 J-R AT THE DOOR TO HER HOTEL ROOM 109

Waiting. Nobody comes.

CUT TO:

110 IN HIS BATHROOM-- PACING LIKE A CAGED ANIMAL 110

J-R takes all the pills he can find.

CUT TO:

111 AT THE MINT -- THAT NIGHT -- AUDITORIUM 111

JUNE is finishing a song, covering for J-R's absence, her eyes darting backstage. She hears a crash. J-R HAS ARRIVED. He stumbles to the stage, high.

J-R
(to band)
I got Stripes! I got Stripes!
(to crowd)
Hey folks! I'm Johnny Cash!

JUNE watches in horror as J-R struts across the stage, wild-eyed. He TRIPS ON A MIC CABLE. Cackles at his clumsiness. BOOM CHICKA BOOM... June looks to Luther. ...They're waiting for him to sing. Realizing this, J-R lunges for the mic.

On a Monday... 'got my strip-ped britches
...On a Tuesday, 'got my ball and chain
On a Wednesday, ...I'm diggin' ditches...
On a Thursday, I begged'em ...not to
knock me... down a-gain.

He holds a note, his lungs clutching for air. As if to anchor himself, he looks to JUNE.

I got stripes. Stripes round my shoulders.
I got chains. Chains around my feet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Suddenly, J-R's legs buckle and HE FALLS HARD. June runs to him. Her mouth moves but nothing is heard. J-R looks up at her. dazed. THE WORLD IS UNDERWATER. SUDDENLY: SLAP! SLAP!

THE CURTAINS DROP IN A RUSH AS -- LUTHER SMACKS J-R'S FACE.
--JUNE, MARSHALL, AND THE REST OF THE BAND HOVER OVER HIM.

FROM THE STAGE FLOOR, J-R looks about, bleary and suddenly smiles at his friends, doing a Foghorn Leghorn impression:

J-R
--Fortun-ately, I's keep... my feathers
numbered ...for just such a...
(passes out)

CUT TO:

112 INT. HOTEL ROOM EL PASO, TX DAY

112

J-R LIES IN BED ravaged. He screws his eyes shut. Opens them. He is alone. Tick, tick, tick goes the TRAVEL-ALARM. ON THE TABLE, BOTTLES, PILLS, AND A BURNING CIGARETTE. A KNOCK.

J-R
...yeah.

MARSHALL
(enters, stands there)
We're canceling the tour.

J-R
...who says?

MARSHALL
I got you a ticket home, John. Tomorrow.

He places it on the dresser.

You see where I'm putting it?

J-R NODS, CLOSES HIS EYES. BLACKNESS.

113 AND SUDDENLY, JUNE IS STANDING OVER HIM

113

Her hand lies on his forehead. (Marshall is gone). She wears an embroidered overcoat. J-R grins at her, crooked.

JUNE
You're burnin' up.

J-R
I got hotter places than my forehead.

June withdraws her hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
Tell me you don't love me.

JUNE
I don't love you.

J-R
You're a liar.

JUNE
Well, I guess you ain't got no
problem, then, do you?

J-R blinks. Instinctively, he reaches for his pills -- BUT
THEY'RE GONE. The beer bottles too. And the ashtray is clean.

JUNE
...I flushed 'em all.

J-R LUNGES OUT OF BED. He catches himself with one hand
against the wall and stumbles to the air conditioner. HE RIPS
OPEN THE COVER. He looks into a crevice. ...nothing.

JUNE
I got 'em all.

J-R
(exploding)
I need them pills, June! Those are my
prescriptions! ...How could you do this!?
If you were a man, I'd kill you!

JUNE
...You'd miss me.

And with that, she exits. Slam.

CUT TO:

114 J-R, POSSESSED, RAKES HIS ROOM, LOOKING, SEARCHING -- 114

J-R
Come on, baby, you left Johnny somethin'!

J-R PULLS DRAWERS FROM THE DRESSER, RUNS HIS HANDS OVER THEIR
INSIDES... YANKS THEM OUT, FLINGS THEM... CRASH!

CUT TO:

115 INT. PICK-UP TRUCK / NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE-- DAY 115

JUNE drives her truck fast, bouncing down a country road, her
bags in the back. There are tears in her eyes behind her
shades. She is muttering to herself, half singing, half
crying, and stumbles upon a song--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUNE SINGS QUIETLY
...love burns, love turns... its a
burning thing... a burning thing...
that makes... a firey ring...

June sees HER GIRLS a quarter mile off, waving from the porch of her powder puff house. She hits the breaks hard before the drive, stopping to dry her eyes.

CUT TO:

116 INT. TAXI CAB-- EL PASO, TX BORDER STATION AFTERNOON 116

J-R sits in the back, a guitar on his lap, plucking, trying to curb shakes and sweats. THE U.S. BORDER STATION SLIDES PAST. A UNIFORMED GUARD watches as they pass. Ahead a sign--

WELCOME TO MEXICO

CABBIE

'Just a few more minutes, pal.

117 INT/EXT PARKED TAXI MEXICO AFTERNOON 117

J-R, slumped low in the back seat, waits in front of-- A SEEDY MEXICAN BAR, waiting for his driver to return. Then, he notices--

A GINGER HAired MAN IN A SUIT on the corner. He stares, watching. Sweating, J-R leans lower yet into his seat..

J-R

...Come ...on.. man.

SUDDENLY THE DOOR OPENS --

CABBIE

--here you go --

AND HE HANDS J-R TWO BAGS. J-R frantically looks inside.

HUNDREDS OF BLACK PILLS WITH WHITE CROSSES FILL THE BAGS. The driver starts the car, as J-R crams a handful into his mouth and looks out the window as --

THE GINGER-HAired MAN COMES INTO VIEW-- BIG-- ON THE CORNER WHERE HE'S BEEN WATCHING. J-R stares at him through the back window as-- THE MAN RECEDES, eyes never leaving J-R.

CUT TO:

118 INT. AIRPLANE AT GATE -- EVENING 118

Passengers are seated. The doors about to be closed. J-R, by a window, dips fingers in his pocket and comes up with pills.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN

Johnny Cash. Where's he sitting?

THE GINGER-HAIRED MAN STEPS INSIDE THE CABIN

CUT TO:

119 INT. CELL EL PASO JAIL NIGHT. 119

J-R, ALONE IN A CELL on a dirty blanket over springs. His face is tight as a fist. He is going to keep himself together. He watches as--

A SINGLE ROACH CROSSES THE FLOOR.

CUT TO:

120 EXT. JAILHOUSE -- DAY 120

POLICEMEN AND THE LAWYER HURRY J-R DOWN THE STEPS THROUGH MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS. J-R's world slows. He will never reach the courthouse door. FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!

CUT TO:

121 EXT. CASITAS SPRINGS NIGHT 121

VIVIAN, in a robe, stands at the open front door, smoking a cigarette as J-R stumbles out of A BLACK LIMOUSINE.

CUT TO:

INT. THE FRONT HALL OF THE HOUSE

J-R drops his bags, leans his guitar against the wall and looks to VIVIAN. They each wait for the other to speak.

J-R

Everyone asleep I guess?

John's voice is wasted. She nods. Her gaze makes him nervous.

VIVIAN

I kept'em out of school.

J-R

...So they know about this?

VIVIAN

Of course they do, John. It's in all the papers. Front page. On the tube.

(off his look)

Your Momma was here. Your Daddy too.

J-R

....What'd he say?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN

'said now you won't have to work so hard
to make people think you been to jail.

He has to laugh. She turns and walks off.

CUT TO:

122 INT. CASITAS SPRINGS HOUSE -- KIDS' BEDROOMS -- NIGHT 122

Shuffling down the hall, J-R gently pushes open a door --
KATHY'S ROOM. She's a lump under the covers.

IN A SECOND ROOM, J-R CHECKS IN ON-- CINDY sleeping in a tiny
bed. TARA in a crib.

J-R LOOKS INTO-- ROSEANNE'S ROOM. A small hand hangs over the
side of the bed. She looks up.

ROSEANNE

...hey, daddy... you okay?..

J-R

(smiles) ...hey, darlin'... yeah...
I'm fine... I'm great...
(tears coming)
'See you in the mornin'.

CUT TO:

123 VIVIAN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT 123

J-R tries to make out VIVIAN in bed. He kicks off his boots.
They make a loud noise. She sighs. loud.

J-R

I just pay a fine. That's all. I don't go
to jail. Those pills are legal.

He unbuckles his pants, trying to pull them off, falls. BAM!

VIVIAN

...John, you're gonna wake --

On the floor, J-R laughs, trying to get out of his pants.

Oh, God, please go away!

J-R

shhhh....shhhh...

His pants off, J-R moves toward the bed.

Baby. It's okay... Don't be mad...

J-R climbs into bed, to hold her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VIVIAN
Go to sleep, J-R.

J-R
No. I love you, June. I need you, baby.

VIVIAN HITS HIM HARD IN THE CHEST WITH BOTH HANDS.

VIVIAN
WHAT DID YOU JUST CALL ME?!

J-R doesn't know... She snaps on the light. J-R squints.

You called me June!

J-R
I did not call you June!

VIVIAN
You sleeping with her now?

J-R
No.

VIVIAN
Bullshit. Liar.

J-R
I ain't sleepin' with nobody, Viv. I
don't wanna sleep with nobody but you.

VIVIAN
Look me in the face... Look me in the
face and tell me you ain't sleeping with
June Carter.

J-R
I ain't sleeping with June Carter.
(adds)
I mean, I wanted to. I asked her even.
But she said no. She wouldn't.

VIVIAN HITS HIM HARD AGAIN-- and jumps out of bed.

J-R
She wouldn't cause she knows I love you.
She knows that.

Vivian glares at him as hard as she can. Ice cold. John
stomps from the room. Exits, stomping down the hall.

J-R
...what's the point...

CUT TO:

124 INT OFFICE/HOUSE CASITAS SPRINGS NIGHT LATER

124

IT IS FOUR IN THE MORNING AND J-R POUNDS NAILS INTO THE WALL--
BANG! BANG! He's hanging FRAMED PHOTOS OF JUNE AND HIS BAND.
VIVIAN, in her nightclothes, appears in the doorway.

VIVIAN

What the hell are you doing?!

BANG! BANG!

You're gonna wake the kids!

BANG! BANG!

John. Stop it!

BANG! BANG! BANG!

STOP IT! JOHN! STOP IT!

J-R

They can't hear me.

BANG! VIVIAN GRABS THE HAMMER FROM J-R AND RUNS.

J-R

Viv! Shit! Give me that!

J-R runs after her into -- THE DARK KITCHEN. He corners her
by the fridge. She's trapped. She hisses at him :

VIVIAN

...don't you dare...

J-R

Give me the damned HAMMER!

Vivian shakes her head, resolute. J-R LEAPS AT HER, GRABBING
IT --HE YANKS HER OFF HER FEET. But she holds on. And he
drags her, feet flapping, twisting, back into -- THE OFFICE

J-R

I AM GONNA FINISH MY WORK!

J-R WRENCHES THE HAMMER FROM HER. VIVIAN, SHRIEKING, GOES FOR
HIS EYES, clawing. J-R stumbles, OUT A BACK DOOR INTO--

THE GARDEN

VIVIAN HITS HIM, her arms a whirling blur...

VIVIAN

GO TO HELL, BASTARD! GO TO HELL!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R pivots, grabs the garden hose. TURNS THE SPIGOT UP--
DRENCHES HER. SHE SCREAMS-- and runs back into-- THE DEN--
tripping on the top step, sprawling to the floor.

VIVIAN
(picking herself up)
You pathetic excuse for a man! Some good
Christian soul should call up June Carter
and warn her! She's going down!

HE TRAILS HER INTO THE HOUSE, HOSING HER, SOAKING THE ROOM.

J-R
SHUT UP, BITCH. SHUT UP!

Vivian crumples, sobbing. The children watch through a door
from down the hall. Scared. Seeing their frightened faces,
tears come to J-R's eyes. His shoulders fall. He remembers
the house in Dyess. He turns and drags the hose out into --

125 THE BACKYARD 125

He shuts off the water. He is bleeding where Vivian gouged
his face. He pants for air as-- doors slam in the house.

J-R
...What are you doing, John?
(answers)
Oh, I don't know.

He crosses the yard and heads up the stairs into --

126 HIS DEN 126

The house is oddly silent. He crosses into --

127 THE LIVING ROOM 127

Nobody. The front door is open. He hears A CAR DOOR SLAM.

J-R
(realizing)
NO! LEAVE THEM OUTTA THIS! VIVIAN!

J-R sprints out the front door into --

128 THE YARD AS -- 128

VIVIAN climbs behind the wheel of her Cadillac and slams the
door. CRYING CHILDREN ARE PILED IN BACK.

VIVIAN!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Vivian reaches frantically around the car, LOCKING THE DOORS.

What are you doing, Viv?!

VIVIAN
(to the kids, hysterical)
LOOK AT HIM! YOU LOOK AT HIM! CAUSE
YOU'RE NEVER GONNA SEE HIM AGAIN!

Kathy blinks at J-R from the backseat. She's in pajamas.

J-R
Kathy, Roseanne, open the door for Daddy.

Kathy is terrified. Cindy wails beside her. The baby too.

Open the door, Kathy. Open it now!

VIVIAN
DON'T YOU DARE, YOUNG LADY!

KATHY
STOP IT! STOP IT! I HATE BOTH OF YOU!

J-R
OPEN THE DOOR!

KATHY PUTS HER HANDS OVER HER EARS AND SCREAMS.
The faces of his children are contorted in pain.

KATHY
I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!

J-R's face moves sideways as if struck by a two by four.
HE BECOMES CALM. He reaches to touch the window, but THE
CADILLAC LURCHES FORWARD AND SLEWS OFF DOWN THE DRIVE.

J-R
(quietly) ...goodbye, Viv.

J-R stands in front of his vast house, alone, listening to
the drone of insects. He closes his eyes. WE HEAR THE sudden
HISS OF TIRES ON A WET HIGHWAY AND WE--

CUT TO:

129 1968-- INT. BLUEBIRD TOUR BUS-- NIGHT-- 1968

129

CASH, in the rocking chair on board the tour bus, still
wearing his clothes from the Folsom concert, wrapped in a
blanket. His eyes fixed on the sleeping June... He lights a
cigarette, takes a drag, rises... and steps to her.

CASH
...Hey. June. ...June.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On the floor of the armoire, June opens her eyes. Groggy.

JUNE
...What's wrong, John?

CASH
Bad dreams...Memories. I don't know.

JUNE
Get some rest. You did good tonight. That was a good show. But we got another one tomorrow, honey.

CASH
Yeah. Listen. Thing is. I think it's time now. I think it's about time, you know.

JUNE
'time for what?

CASH
'for you and me. To get married.

JUNE
Baby, go to sleep.

CASH
I want to marry you.
I'm telling you, it's the time.

JUNE
(looks up, eyes narrow)
Well I'm tellin' you, John, with a hundred percent confidence, that it is definitely not the time. It's not about time. It's not the right time. It ain't even quarter to the right time.

CASH
Come on, baby.

JUNE
Except for a honeymoon you haven't even thought about what you're asking."

CASH
I have too. I thought about it a lot.

JUNE
Alright. So how's it gonna work, John. Where we gonna live? What about my girls? What about your girls? How's it gonna work with your parents?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CASH
That stuff takes care of itself.

JUNE
No. Other people take care of it for you
and you think it takes care of itself.

CASH
Your problem is you're scared.

JUNE
My problem is it's two a-m! My problem is
I'm asleep. I'm on a tour bus with eight
stinkin' men! Rule number one, don't
propose to a girl on a bus. You got that,
John?! Rule number two, don't tell her
it's cause you had a bad dream.

CASH's eyes are intense. So are hers. Locked.

CASH
That's the last time I'm asking.

JUNE
Good. I hate re-runs.

CASH storms back to his seat down the aisle. He flops down
and stares at the passing night, pissed, muttering. A man's
voice rises, *singing softly, accompanied by a guitar.*

I'm a long way from home and so all alone/
homesick like I never thought I'd be.

CUT TO:

130 1967-- A ONE ROOM APARTMENT-- NASHVILLE-- MORNING-- 1967 130

Rain patters out the window like gravel.

I'm a long way from home and everything
is wrong/ someone please watch over me.

J-R OPENS HIS EYES. Light dances on a thousand bits of dust
floating in the air. Outside its pouring rain. J-R is in bed
in his clothes. Patches under his eyes almost like bruises.

On the bedside table, under pills and bottles is A FOLDED
NEWSPAPER. We can make out the headline --

WIFE OF JOHNNY CASH SUES FOR DIVORCE
extreme cruelty cited

J-R sits up. The muscles of his neck are stiff and tender.
Two beds fill the small room. The singing stops. Footsteps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WAYLON JENNINGS (32) appears in the door. He is tall and dark. He sits down on the end of his bed, puts down his guitar and snorts a line of coke from a tea table.

WAYLON

Thirty hours.

J-R's not sure what he means.

You 'been asleep for thirty hours.

J-R's only reaction is to pop one of his white pills and wash it down with Pepsi.

J-R

...Did June call?

Waylon shakes his head. J-R crosses to the phone.

WAYLON

They turned it off yesterday.

J-R picks up the receiver. It's dead. He slams it down, starts padding himself, looking for something.

J-R

Where' my keys, Waylon?

WAYLON

...You don't remember?

JERRY LEE (O.S.)

The car's at Rankin's.

J-R looks up. JERRY LEE LEWIS has emerged, hungover from the bathroom. He looks ragged like J-R and Waylon. He grins.

You had a fender bender. You need a new door. And a windshield. And an axle rod.

J-R

How is it, I got my tenth record on the charts and no phone and no car?

WAYLON

Contradictions. Life's filled with 'em.
(crossing to kitchenette)
How 'bout I make us some brownies?

J-R grabs a jacket and is out the door into the driving rain.

CUT TO:

131 INT. NASHVILLE BANK - DAY - RAIN

131

J-R, unsteady, stands on line. He pushes soaked hair from his face. He shudders against the chill of the rain in his clothes. CUSTOMERS throw him glances.

TELLER

Next!

J-R shuffles to THE TELLER, fumbling in his pockets.

How can I help you?

J-R finds A CRUMPLED COLUMBIA RECORDS CHECK. He smooths it out on the counter.

J-R

Uh ...I'd like to cash this.

TELLER

(looks over check)

Oh. I'm sorry sir, I can't do that.

J-R

...Why not?

TELLER

The bank puts an automatic hold on checks like this. It's a large amount.

J-R

Twenty four thousand dollars?

(the teller nods)

So, if it were five hundred, would you put a hold on it?

TELLER

No. Five hundred I could cash.

J-R

Then pretend it's a check for five hundred. Put the rest on hold.

TELLER

I'm sorry sir. I can't do that.

J-R

Okay. Then cash five hundred and keep the rest for yourself.

TELLER

Sir... I...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
Are you a Christian?

TELLER
Yes, sir.

J-R
(leans in, humble)
See, I'm a little behind. I need this to
turn my phone back on. I need to talk to
my woman. I'm in love with a woman. And I
need to talk to her. You understand?

TELLER
That's none of my business.

J-R
I've got to get my car outta the shop so
I can see her. She lives way out there on
the edge of town. It's the Bataan Death
March to get there.

TELLER
I'm sorry, Mr. Cash.

J-R
So you know who I am.

TELLER
Yes, sir.

J-R
Then cash my check.

The Teller doesn't know what to say.

I worked for this money. A long time.
It's supposed to mean somethin'.

TELLER
It does, I'm sure, sir.

J-R
No. This check ain't no good.

J-R calmly rips the check in half.

TELLER
Sir...

J-R
You won't cash it. It's nothin.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TELLER

...Please -- don't --

J-R rips it again, tossing the pieces in the air. He struts to the exit, past gawking customers --

J-R

Why not? WHY NOT!? It's NOTHING!

CUT TO:

132 INT KITCHEN JUNE'S HOUSE MORNING

132

JUNE sits at the kitchen table, head on her hands, sleeping. The world outside drips. On a piece of paper, she's written--

it burns burns burns

LITTLE GIRLS O.S.

Mommy, Johnny's here! Mommy!

She wakes.

LITTLE GIRLS O.S.

Johnny Cash is here!

Surprised, JUNE folds the piece of paper and stuffs it in her apron, rising.

MAYBELLE O.S.

Hey, John. You gonna come in?

Her mother stands in the open front door talking to someone outside. When June reaches the door, she sees J-R standing unsteadily by the front gate. Rail thin. June's girls are eagerly showing him their new swingset.

JUNE

You go back inside, Momma. John and I need to talk.

MAYBELLE

Well, you could invite the man in at least.

J-R takes a step toward June as if his limbs were not his own. He trips on some toys in the yard.

JUNE

Not today, Momma.

(moving toward him)

What I should do is call the nutwagon.

(to her daughters)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JUNE (CONT'D)

Girls, go out back!
Big John and me need to talk.

Water drips from the trees. There are Jack-o'-lanterns on the porch, crepe-paper witches in the windows.

J-R

You know, I tried to call you, June, but something's wrong with your phone.

JUNE

Look at you. Have you looked in a mirror? We're on the road in a month, you idiot. How you gonna sing. You can't talk!

J-R

I got the "croup"
(grins)
'Member?
(then; impeccably timed)
Marry me, June. Please.

June blows out air, disgusted. She stares at him, her lips parted, thinking twice before --

JUNE

You know. I don't know where my friend John went. I guess he got high or went into hiding,.. I do not care for this man, Cash. Not one bit.

J-R

...Oh, man. I'm not hiding. June, I'm right here. You see. ...I'm here.

She looks at the street.

JUNE

Where's your car?

J-R

...It's in make-up.

JUNE

You walked here?..

J-R

Walking's good for you. See, I'm getting in shape. It cleans your system. It's a spiritual thing. I'm on a love walk. The June Carter Love Walk... ..Immemorial.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JUNE

Please do not blow another tour. I'm supporting more than just myself these days and I--

J-R

Love is more important than a tour, June.

JUNE

Is that right?

J-R

Yes it is.

June turns and storms into the house. Slam.

J-R

(yell-croaks at house)

June, you get the phone on... June. Do that...so you can call. When you feel better. Meanwhile, I'm gonna keep walking here. I'm gonna walk until you love me, babycakes. 'Walkin' my way to heaven.

J-R stumbles on down the road.

CUT TO:

133 INT. RURAL BAR AFTERNOON

133

J-R is trying to light one cigarette from another while sitting at the bar listening to a --

DRUNK

...Say, "I want you, baby." You gotta do that with women. ...They like that. Say, "I want you, baby." ...You done that?

They are both ripped. J-R gives him a severe, burning look.

And nothin'?

J-R lets the smoke pour from his nose.
A familiar voice sings from the juke box.

JUNE AND J-R SING

It ain't me, babe, no no no, it ain't me,
babe, it ain't me you're looking for...

J-R

...damn...

The DRUNK leans into him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DRUNK

Times like this, you know, .. I say,
"Jack, what would the Baby Jesus do?"
(laughs)

John lifts his hand slowly and resets it on the bar's edge as if he might push away.

J-R

'That your name?... Jack?

DRUNK

Uh huh. Jack. Shit. I need another drink.
"I am led up of the spirit..."
(laughs)

Yes sir. Jack needs another drink. You?

J-R shakes his head and grabs his change, backing away from the bar, knocking into things, pressing for the door.

CUT TO:

134 EXT TWO-LANE ROAD OUTSKIRTS NASHVILLE AFTERNOON 134

J-R lurches into the rain. Fields and woods ahead. He flicks his cigarette and heads for the country.

CUT TO:

135 EXT. FARMLAND DAY TO EVENING 135

The world is wet. Huge dark clouds. J-R, exhausted, a black shape moving like a shadow across the fields.

He slows to watch crows lifting out of a tree -- CAW! CAW!

CUT TO:

136 EXT. WOODS AND RIVER LATE AFTERNOON 136

Rain batters J-R as, soaked to the skin, he comes to a stop. Through the black trees he sees -- rain stucco a large surface of water. And it is then that his eyes find --

A HOUSE. NEWLY CONSTRUCTED. STONE AND HAND HEWN TIMBERS SET INTO A CLIFF OVERLOOKING THE LAKE. THE ROOF COVERED WITH SOD.

IT IS A BIG AND RUGGED HOUSE. WONDERFUL. J-R LOOKS AT THE PROMISED LAND. There is a parked bulldozer. And --

A FOR SALE SIGN.

CUT TO:

137 EXT ROAD ABOVE HOUSE ON LAKE -- ANOTHER DAY 137

J-R is standing by the side of the road - THE GREAT HOUSE below him (the bulldozer and For Sale sign gone). He has cleaned himself up, but is very thin, the skin drawn tight over his face. Frogs chirrup like birds.

-- AN EL CAMINO COMES INTO VIEW. J-R flicks his cigarette and pulls a wad of bills from his pocket as the car glides up.

A window rolls down. J-R hands THE PILL MAN the wad in exchange for JARS OF PILLS.

CUT TO:

138 INT ROUND BEDROOM AT TOP OF HOUSE ON LAKE DAY 138

J-R, kneeling, pours pills from one jar into his hand and pockets them. The only furniture is a large round bed.

A CAR HONKS! from the road above. J-R hurriedly hides the jar with others at the back of a floor cupboard.

CUT TO:

139 EXT. HOUSE ON LAKE DAY 139

J-R runs from the house and up the long path to JUNE AND HER DAUGHTERS who are climbing from a Cadillac.

J-R
(hoarse, nearly inaudible)
Hey, girls... Thanks for coming.

GIRLS
Hey, John...Hi...

He tousles their hair.

JUNE
'Pretty easy to find.

CUT TO:

140 INT HOUSE ON LAKE AFTERNOON 140

J-R is showing JUNE the inside of the house. He takes her through the honeycomb of rooms. There is no furniture.

J-R
I bought it for us.

This both touches her and burdens her. She says nothing.

They walk past rough timber and stone. Through sliding glass doors, he can see -- June's little girls playing down on the dock. The dazzle of the sun on the water. He turns to June.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
I invited my Momma and Daddy, my sister
Reba, and Tommy for Thanksgiving.

June spots a GREEN TRACTOR in mud near the waters edge.

JUNE
How that get there?

J-R
It got stuck.

JUNE
That's nice new tractor, John.
You gonna leave it there?

J-R
Marry me, baby.

JUNE
(about tractor)
Can't be good for it. Right off the water
like that. It's gonna rust.

Moving away, she gestures to a dozen large sacks of mail in a
corner of the living room.

JUNE
A few unanswered how d'ya do's, huh?

She smiles edgily and goes outside through the glass doors
and down steps to get the girls.

CUT TO:

141 INT. KITCHEN HOUSE ON LAKE A COLD DAY 141

J-R is on the phone. His clothes look as if he's been in them
for a week. He can see through the wide door --

HIS DADDY AND MOTHER, REBA, AND TOMMY milling around the
empty living room. They are all in their Sunday best, the men
in clean white shirts and ties.

J-R
(rasping into phone)
--but I got everybody here, you know, and
nothin' to eat... June?... You there?

JUNE ON PHONE
...yeah...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R
I got a table and chairs, but I don't got
plates. Or chairs, really. Not enough.

JUNE ON PHONE
'Where they sleeping?

J-R
...Motels, I think.

He hears her sigh.

CUT TO:

142 EXT. ROAD ABOVE HOUSE AFTERNOON

142

J-R lights one cigarette from another. The silent lake is behind him through dark trees. HIS FAMILY moves around the dock and the patio below.

TOMMY and DADDY are poking around A GREEN TRACTOR near the water's edge. One big wheel is sunk in the mud.

J-R hears a motor -- AND A PICK-UP TRUCK COMES INTO VIEW, SLOWING AS IT NEARS. He can see -- JUNE, MAYBELLE and EZRA CARTER, lined-up behind the truck's dirty window.

CUT TO:

143 EXT PATH TO HOUSE AFTERNOON

143

EVERYONE CARRIES FOOD FROM THE TRUCK TO THE HOUSE.

J-R
Momma, this is Mother Maybelle and Ezra.

MAYBELLE
And how is everybody this fine day?

J-R
And June you know.

They all exchange greetings. J-R looks for DADDY.

DADDY
(indicating tractor)
What happened down there?..

J-R follows his Daddy's gesture to -- THE GREEN TRACTOR.

J-R
'Got stuck.

DADDY
So you're leavin' it there? In the rain?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R blinks. He turns and tries to resume the introductions, but he's shaken by the power his old man still has over him.

CUT TO:

144 LATER -- AT DINNER

144

FOUR EMPTY BEERS AT J-R'S FEET. TILT UP TO FIND -- J-R, swigging his fifth. He hasn't touched a scrap of food.

DADDY, EZRA CARTER, MOTHER, JUNE, MAYBELLE, REBA AND HER SON ALL SIT AT THE TABLE. One place is empty. The place next to J-R. Everyone else eats, talks, easy with one another. All but J-R. He waits for DADDY to look at him.

Daddy knows J-R's eyes are on him. Nonetheless, he focuses on EZRA, talking about fishing for bass. J-R interrupts, his voice a raspy whisper:

J-R
So. Daddy. What do you think?..

DADDY
'bout what?

J-R
'bout the house.

An uncomfortable pause as Daddy finishes buttering his roll.

EZRA CARTER
It's a fine big house, John.

DADDY
...not as big as Jack Benny's.

EZRA CARTER
You been to Jack Benny's, Ray?

DADDY
'saw it on TV.

J-R takes another swig of beer and glances toward -- REBA, at the end of the table. She eats quietly, head down, as if she were alone. Beside her, her boy salts his beans.

Then J-R's eyes flick to JUNE, who listens as MAYBELLE talks:

MAYBELLE
You'd be surprised, how many musicians can't read shaped notes. My husband's uncle, E. M. Bayes, he taught me from hymnals...What about you, John?
You know how to read shaped notes?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R still stares at Daddy. He doesn't hear Maybelle.

JUNE

John... Momma asked you a question.

J-R raises his hand to June... takes a swig of beer. Daddy's dull eyes slide over to him. J-R toasts Daddy.

J-R

'glad you could come tonight, Daddy...
...to dinner. I appreciate that.

Daddy smells a set-up.

Not everybody's here...

(indicating empty chair)

Jack's not here. Where is he? Huh?

(waits for answer)

"Where you been?" That's what you said to me. I'm twelve years old and Jack's dying and you say, "Where you been?"

Daddy's tongue comes out and wets his lips. J-R re-folds his napkin. June watches from the other side of the table.

DADDY

...I stopped drinking, J-R. Long ago.
What about you? You still takin' pills?
That'll kill you, y'know?

J-R

So will a car wreck.

Daddy chuckles.

DADDY

...You sittin' on a high horse, boy... I never had talent. I done the best I could with what I had. Can you say that? Mr. big-shot. Mr. pill-poppin' rock star... Who are you to judge? You got nothin. A big empty house. Nothin. Children you don't see. nothin. A big ol' tractor stuck in the mud. nothin.

John is trembling, eyes burning with tears, but he tries to contain himself. He speaks very quietly.

J-R

Did you hear the angels, Daddy? Did you hear Jack's angels singing?

Daddy stares at him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

J-R
Cause, I'll tell you, I didn't.

MAYBELLE
Don't you think, John, that sometimes
Jesus picks us up and forgives us and
sets our feet back on the path?

Tears stream J-R's face. His chair SCREECHES on the floor as he rises, heads for the door, then turns back to grab Jack's chair, takes it outside beyond the French windows, and flings it toward the lake. Everyone stares, ashen.

CUT TO:

145 EXT HOUSE DUSK LIGHT RAIN

145

J-R sits atop the green tractor, cursing feverishly, trying to get it started. HIS FAMILY and JUNE'S PARENTS trudge up the hill to their cars in the waning light and misting rain. They are like shadows, close to darkness.

J-R pauses to watch his parent's station wagon drive off. The surface of the half-frozen water behind him is like lead.

STANDING AT HER TRUCK -- JUNE watches as J-R turns back to his tractor, cramming the clutch, cursing. She looks to her father, EZRA behind the wheel.

JUNE
That's okay, Daddy, I'll drive.

But he doesn't move over. His eyes are on J-R below.

The tractor has coughed to life.

EZRA
What's he doin'?

JUNE
I think the tractor's stuck in reverse.

MAYBELLE
He should wait till mornin'.

EZRA
He's gonna be in the lake if he's not careful.

JUNE
Well, common sense has never been his strong suit, Momma. Move over, Daddy.

The tractor below has backed up to the very edge of the lake. We can hear J-R cursing it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAYBELLE

You should go down to him.

JUNE

Momma --

MAYBELLE

He needs you. Go to him. He's mixed up.

JUNE

I've got children, Momma. I can't--

EZRA

Get him inside, June. We'll wait here.

And June is out of the truck, heading down through the trees toward the lake. For a moment, she can't see J-R.

-- Then she does.

THE TRACTOR'S HALF IN THE LAKE, J-R RIDING IT, SCREAMING, SLIDING BACKWARDS IN THE MUD. IT IS TOPPLING OVER.

June begins to run.

JUNE

..Jesus...

The tractor is slanting to one side -- creaking, pitching over, sinking AND J-R IS GOING DOWN WITH IT.

JOHN!

HE HAS DISAPPEARED IN THE ICY WATER. And she is running.

JOHN!

THE TRACTOR IS ON ITS SIDE. One huge black wheel breaking the surface. AND J-R'S HEAD COMES UP.

J-R

AHHHHH! ...SHIT!

JUNE

JOHN!

HE IS SINKING INTO THE WATER, TRYING TO GET UP. CAN'T. There is ice in his hair.

JUNE SPLASHES INTO THE ICY WATER.

J-R's teeth chatter. His face is turning blue. The water rubbing his chin.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

John!...John!

She tries to get him to his feet, He is shaking violently from the cold.

J-R
...help me...

JUNE
Oh, John, what have you done?! Get up!

J-R
(voice all but gone)
Help me.. oh God,.. June, help me...

She gets him to his feet, holds him, shaking. The rain falls.

J-R
(smiles, weak)
I thought you left.

JUNE
We got to get you to the house...
Come on, John. ...Come on.

She gets him to the shore.

J-R
...you came back...

JUNE
...yes, John...

J-R
...I'm cold...

JUNE
I know... Come on. Come on...

Her parents come running down out of the darkness and help June lead him up the slope to the lights of the house.

CUT TO:

146 INT. ROUND BEDROOM - NIGHT

146

J-R lays on the bed, breathing heavily. Liquid moonlight plays on the walls. HE SHUDDERS AWAKE, sweating. A MAN WITH GRAY HAIR has his hand on his shoulder. JUNE is behind him.

JUNE
This is Nat Winston.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAN

...I'm a doctor, John.

J-R FINDS -- JUNE'S EYES -- THEN CLOSES HIS.

J-R OPENS HIS EYES -- Out the window, dawn's light seeps through a veil of rain. J-R shakes, in pain. His lips are baked. Suddenly, HE PULLS HIMSELF FROM BED, nearly falling.

He searches the pockets of his topcoat. Nothing.

Desperate, J-R LIFTS THE ROUND MATTRESS. ...Nothing. HE SCRAMBLES, trying the other side. ...Nothing. In a sudden fury, J-R RIPS THE WHOLE BED APART.

HE THROWS OPEN THE BUILT-IN DRAWERS, yanking them to the floor. He nearly topples.

Out the window -- EZRA CARTER sits on a stump at the bottom of the driveway, fishing -- A SHOTGUN at his side.

CUT TO:

147 J-R LAYS BENEATH THE MATTRESS (WHICH IS OFF THE BED)

147

HE HAS A VERY CLOSE VIEW OF -- A CLOTH KNOB sewn into the mattress. He can see the threads of cotton wrapped tightly around the swollen button hanging over him --

HE CLOSES HIS EYES and finds himself in his round bed again. Soaked with sweat. The world pulsing around him. And through the haze, he begins to make out JUNE.

J-R CRIES AND REACHES OUT TO HER -- but suddenly writhes in pain, GRABBING HIS ARM. He looks in utter horror as -

WOOD SPLINTERS WRIGGLE OUT THROUGH THE PORES OF HIS ARM. J-R screams himself raw as slivers of wood push themselves out from the inside of his face - his scalp - his wrist.

AND SUDDENLY, HIS BODY SPLITS DOWN THE MIDDLE -- like a gutted fish,.. blood seeping, a spreading chasm, through the sheets. screams... screams... howling screams...

BLACKNESS.

148 J-R OPENS HIS EYES. BLEARY.

148

He finds himself tucked neatly in bed. No blood. And the drawers are all in place.

June sits nearby, watching him. J-R looks to her, trembling.

J-R

...Are there any left?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

June shakes her head. J-R lies his head back on the pillow.

JUNE
Should I have saved some?
...Would that make it easier?

J-R closes his eyes, lays back his head.

J-R
No.

BLACKNESS.

149 J-R OPENS HIS EYES, HEARING VOICES OUTSIDE. He is soaked with sweat, his face drawn. It's early evening. 149

JUNE (O.S.)
You get out of here now. You get!

EZRA CARTER (O.S.)
GET YOUR ASS OUTTA HERE, BOY!

J-R RISES and stumbles to the window -- JUNE is backing THE PILL MAN up the driveway. SHE HAS A BUTCHER KNIFE.

MOTHER MAYBELLE and EZRA are halfway up the hill behind their daughter. EZRA HAS HIS SHOTGUN LEVELED.

PILL MAN
Jesus. Put down the gun, old man!
I'm leaving!

MOTHER MAYBELLE
Take your poison with you!

JUNE
JUST GET THE HELL OUT!

The pill man scrambles behind the wheel of his El Camino, slams the door and spins out on the gravel, driving off.

At the window, J-R ALMOST SMILES -- AND CLOSES HIS EYES.

BLACKNESS.

150 J-R WAKES. SHAKING. GROGGY. 150

JERRY LEE sits at his bedside.

JERRY LEE
...Hey, rocker. How ya doin'?...

J-R smiles weakly. He takes Jerry Lee's hand. But he can't keep his eyes open against the daylight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AND AS AFTERNOON DRIFTS TO NIGHT -- WE PULSE FROM DARKNESS -- TO SEE MORE VISITORS -- HANDS TAKING HIS -- BASHFUL SMILES -- LUTHER AND MARSHALL-- ROY ORBISON -- WAYLON JENNINGS.

ALL THERE. ALL HIS BROTHERS.

BLACKNESS.

152 DAWN'S LIGHT FROM THE LAKE MOVING ON THE WALLS.

152

JUNE

John...

She sits in the chair by the bed.

...I'm here.

J-R fades again, closing his eyes. He hears June singing sweetly as he drifts away...

JUNE SINGS

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine...

BLACKNESS.

153 JUNE SITS ON THE FLOOR, HER HEAD AGAINST THE BED, ASLEEP.

153

It's the middle of the night and the crickets are singing.

J-R watches her, half-lidded, a faint smile on his parched lips. She looks like Sleeping Beauty. He struggles to touch a strand of her long fine hair with his shaking fingertips.

J-R

...June.

June opens her eyes. She looks about, startled It takes her a moment to realize where she is. Her eyes settle on him.

JUNE

Hey.

J-R

I'm hungry.

CUT TO:

154 INT. ROUND BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER - DAWN

154

JUNE comes through the door, carrying A BOWL OF STRAWBERRIES AND MILK. There is a large silver spoon.

J-R eats them. Devours them. When he looks up for air he sees--Tears dropping from June's eyes. He smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She smiles and laughs and wipes her cheek.

J-R goes back to eating, finishing them. June stands.

JUNE
I'll get you some more.

J-R
No. Stay.

Looking at her there with the sun on the water lighting her hair, J-R's eyes fill with emotion.

J-R
...You're my angel.

JUNE
I'm no angel, John.

All of a sudden, it pours from J-R like a volcano. A lifetime of pain. He looks out at the sun, his body shaking, tears streaming. June sits down at his bedside and tries to calm him but he is too frightened to look at her as the next words trip from him--

J-R
I done bad things, June...

JUNE
You've done a few, that's true.

J-R
...I think I killed my brother...

JUNE
No, honey, no, you didn't do that.

J-R
I left him. I just split, man. I left him there to die. He held my hand... when he,.. there was nothing I could... he was there and then there was... nothing...

JUNE
You were a boy, John.

J-R
I wished it was me on that saw, June. I wished it every day of my life...

June takes his hand.

JUNE
John.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

He sobs. Spasms of sadness wring through him.

John!

His eyes find hers. He holds his breath, shuddering.

Don't be a fool.

CUT TO:

155 EXT. COUNTRY CHURCH-- OUTSKIRTS OF NASHVILLE, TN-- DAY 155

June's Cadillac pulls into-- THE LOT OF A COUNTRY CHURCH
CROWDED WITH CARS AND PICK-UPS

Away from the house it is clear how thin J-R has gotten. He
is a spindly twig of a man behind mirrored shades, and JUNE
unwind from the car. John peers over his glasses at a sign
with stick on letters announcing today's sermon --

"SCORE TOUCHDOWNS WITH A FAITH-BALL"

J-R

I don't know about this.

She drags him toward the white clapboard building and the
sound of a passionate preacher's voice--

PREACHER (O.S.)

*--Faith is the substance of things hoped,
the evidence of things not seen.*

It is a packed church. At the door, J-R looks to June.

JUNE

...Go on.

156 INT. COUNTRY CHURCH-- DAY 156

J-R and JUNE find seats at the back of the congregation. J-R
keeps his shades on until June takes them off for him.

PASSIONATE PREACHER

*By faith, Noah prepared. By faith,
Abraham searched. And by faith, Abel
offered God a better gift than his
brother Cain. Better by faith. (continues)*

J-R's dark eyes move over the backs of those in front of him;
the necks and haircuts of working men, women, young and old,
the strong, the wizened, the thin, the good looking, the shy,
parched and rugged people on whom life has taken its toll.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R feels the eyes of AN OLDER GENT a few rows up. The man takes a look at J-R over his shoulder, (clearly recognizes him) and offers a nod before turning back to the--

PASSIONATE PREACHER

...It was Cain who left God, not the other way! Cain who fell from faith, Cain who went out from the Lord's presence and dwelt in the land of Nod on the East of Eden.

EVERYONE

Amen.

The congregation stands and sings.

Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling/

GRATEFUL, J-R REACHES HIS THIN, SHAKING HAND TO JUNE'S and takes it. Then he feels something and turns--

THE STRANGER BESIDE HIM HAS TAKEN HIS HAND. This moves J-R deeply. The whole of the congregation has joined hands as they sing. J-R takes a deep breath of something in the air, something nourishing... and we--

CUT TO:

INT DOWNSTAIRS LIVING ROOM-- HOUSE ON LAKE AS SNOW FALLS

J-R sits alone at his kitchen table. Looking a bit healthier, he gingerly sips coffee, looking at the snow falling over his lake. Then, his eye catches --

Five huge sacks mail: U.S. POST OFFICE on their side. And a parcel with a return address of FOLSOM PRISON.

J-R sits on the bare floor of the big empty room reading letters from convicts. Words fade in and out of one another--

Dear Johnny... buddy... hope... change...
give me reason... your songs ...please...
singing ... this joint... wrong... bad...
we need ... you.. not guilty.... I was...
... would mean... songs ...please
...Sincerely. Regards.. Bye, Bro "...Love

He puts the last letter down and gazes out, moved.

CUT TO:

157 FALL 1967 INT. COLUMBIA RECORDS BUILDING -- NASHVILLE-- DAY 157

It looks like Republican National Headquarters; Big hair on receptionists. Men in dark suits with wide ties. Flags.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

J-R IN SHADES strides the lobby. He looks healthier.

CUT TO:

158 INT. COLUMBIA RECORDS--NASHVILLE OFFICE -- DAY

158

J-R sits on a couch, surrounded by --
SEVERAL WELL-DRESSED A & R MEN AND A MANAGER.

A&R MAN #1

What about the Tropicana?
What about the Opry?

MANAGER

He was banned after he broke the
footlights.

A&R MAN #2

He breaks all the lights at Folsom,
they'll keep him there.

J-R smirks. A&R MAN #1 addresses J-R's Manager.

A&R MAN #1

Bob, while he's been "recuperating", the
world's changed. Dylan's electric now.
Everything's electric now. I wanted to
give him a fresh sound and all he says is
he wants to cut a live album with the
same old crowd at a prison.

J-R

You can talk to me, by the way.

A&R MAN #2

His core fans are clean people,
Christians. They don't want to hear him
singing in front of a bunch of murderers
and rapists, trying to cheer 'em up.

J-R

Then they're not Christians.

A&R MAN #1

Live fine. But prison no.

J-R

(stands)

January 13, I'm at Folsom with June and
the boys. Listen to the tapes. 'If you
don't like em, toss 'em.

John walks out.

A HISS OF BRAKES AS WE CUT TO:

159 1968. INT. TOUR BUS / EXT. ONTARIO THEATER-- DAWN

159

JOHN CASH (37) OPENS HIS EYES. He's still in his seat on the tour bus. The bus has just pulled to a stop outside --

THE "LONDON GARDENS ARENA" in ONTARIO. A marquee reads -- THE JOHNNY CASH SHOW. He watches as his band files off, then turns to the back in time to see--

JUNE approaching, carrying her bag. Not looking at him.

CASH
June. Hey. June. June. Look.

She walks right by and off the bus. J-R groans.

CUT TO:

160 INT. DRESSING ROOM-- ONTARIO THEATER-- NIGHT-- LATER

160

We hear the familiar muffled thump of a baseline onstage. CASH sits in a well appointed dressing room watching "Laugh In". It should be funny but it isn't. He looks to--

A CRACKED CONNECTING DOOR through which he can see -- JUNE moving in and out of view, getting ready for the show.

J-R crosses to the connecting door. Pushes it open.

J-R
...June.

JUNE
(turns)
You are not to talk to me tonight. The only place you're allowed to talk to me is on that stage, you understand?

CASH
Come on, baby.

JUNE
Come, on baby. Baby. Baby, baby.

CASH
June.

JUNE SHUTS THE DOOR ON CASH. Klunk. For a moment, he's a lousy salesman again. He sighs.

CUT TO:

161 INT. ON STAGE-- THEATER -- CANADA -- NIGHT - 1968

161

Standing in the center of the big stage, JOHN CASH SINGS, strumming his black Martin. He glances to --

JUNE plucking her autoharp along with the band. She can feel his eyes upon her. And she glares at the floor.

CASH SINGS

And it burns burns burns the ring of
fire, the ring of fire.

THE SONG ENDS. THE AUDIENCE CHEERS.

CASH

I don't know if you all know who wrote that song. June Carter wrote that song. This long legged gal over here.

(applause)

I don't know where she got the idea from.

A few laughs and cheers. J-R turns and looks at June.

June. You gonna stand back there, starin' at your shoes all night, or you gonna come up here and sing with me?

Another cheer from beyond the lights. June grabs a mic.

JUNE

I'll sing with you. I just thought you was gonna wax poetic a little longer.

CASH

I'm done with that.

How 'bout we hop a train to Jackson?

THE AUDIENCE CHEERS. AND THE BAND KICKS IN - a familiar lick - AND J-R AND JUNE TAKE THEIR MICS.

CASH AND JUNE

We got married in a fever hotter than a
pepper sprout/ We been talking about
Jackson ever since the fire went out.

Sweet rough music. People clap in time. As June turns back to sing with Cash she finds--

--he isn't with her at the mic. Boom chicka boom... Cash is staring at her. June turns to Luther, Marshall and Fluke. They keep the beat going but look worried.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CASH

June. I gotta ask you something before we finish this song.

JUNE

What's that, John?

CASH

...Will you marry me?

June freezes. A stricken look comes over her. The audience cheers, still clapping with the beat. *Boom chicka boom...*

JUNE

(tense)

Let's sing, John.

CASH

No, darlin'.

JUNE

Finish the song.

CASH

I can't do this song no more if you're not gonna marry me. It'd just be a lie.

June throws Cash a deadly look. Cash grins.

JUNE

But, John, the people are all revved up.

J-R

I've asked forty different ways, June. It's time you come up with a fresh answer.

The clapping begins to die out, replaced by a murmur. Luther valiantly tries to keep the beat going.

JUNE

...please sing, John.

CASH

I'm askin' if you'll marry me, June.

SOMEBODY IN AUDIENCE

OTHERS

Say yes!

Say yes! SAY YES!

More join in. They are screaming to the rafters. June looks into J-R Cash's eyes. They are filled with everything a woman could ever hope to see. Humility. Friendship. Love. Courage.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CASH

I love you, June. All want is to take
care of you. You done that for me. Let me
return the favor. Please, June. Marry me.

(smiles)

I won't leave you like a dutch boy with
your finger in the dam.

Tears fill June's eyes. She nods.

JUNE

...alright...

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE. J-R TAKES JUNE INTO HIS ARMS. They kiss
under the lights... the band playing but June and J-R never
breaking to finish the song, instead listening as --

THE AUDIENCE SINGS

We got married in a fever/
hotter than a pepper sprout...

FADE OUT.

John and June were married in 1968.

In fall of 1969, John sold 250,000 copies per month of his *Folsom Prison* and *San Quentin* albums, more than any other artist including the Beatles. John and June lived in Hendersonville, Tennessee for the next thirty-five years, raising children, touring and recording music.

By 1992, John was the only artist ever inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Songwriter's Hall of Fame. He has sold more than 50 million records and recorded more than 1,500 songs found on over 500 albums. He has won 11 Grammys, his most recent in 2003. Also in 2003, at the age of 71, he was nominated for six MTV Music Awards for his hit single "Hurt" from his 2002 gold record, "The Man Comes Around".

John and June shared their artistry, compassion, wisdom, humor, lives and love with the entire worlds. When they both died this last year, 4 months apart, their loss was felt from pool halls to Carnegie Hall, from CBGB to the Grand Ole Opry and also by the people involved in this film who were lucky enough to know and love them and hear their stories.