

WAITING FOR A TRAIN

The Jimmie Rodgers Musical

by

Richard F. Hamre

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>Aged Ralph:</u>	A male in his early 60s
<u>Engineer:</u>	A man in his mid 40s
<u>Jimmie:</u>	A Man in his early 30s
<u>Carrie:</u>	A woman in her early 30s
<u>Anita:</u>	A pre-teen juvenile
<u>Young Ralph:</u>	A male in his mid 30s
<u>Doctor:</u>	A male in his mid 40s
<u>Mrs. Bedell:</u>	A woman in her late 40s

Note: If so desired, the Engineer character and the Doctor character can easily be portrayed by the same actor.

SPECIAL TALENT REQUIREMENTS

<u>Aged Ralph:</u>	Singing and light dancing
<u>Engineer:</u>	None
<u>Jimmie:</u>	Singing, yodeling & light dancing
<u>Carrie:</u>	Singing, yodeling & light dancing
<u>Anita:</u>	None
<u>Young Ralph:</u>	Light dancing
<u>Doctor:</u>	None
<u>Mrs. Bedell:</u>	Light dancing

PLACE

Various locations across the South and Northeast

Time

For the narrator: 1958

For all others: 1920-1933

MUSICAL NUMBERS

KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE	Aged Ralph
SOMEWHERE DOWN BELOW THE DIXON LINE	Jimmie
PEACH PICKING TIME DOWN IN GEORGIA	Jimmie
YOU AND MY OLD GUITAR	Jimmie & Carrie
MY CAROLINA SUNSHINE GIRL (*)	Jimmie
THE SOLDIER'S SWEETHEART	Jimmie
BLUE YODEL #1	Jimmie
WAITING FOR A TRAIN	Jimmie
ANY OLD TIME	Aged Ralph
IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW	Jimmie
EVERYBODY DOES IT IN HAWAII	Jimmie
BLUE EYED JANE	Jimmie
BLUE YODEL #9	Jimmie
T.B. BLUES	Jimmie
DADDY AND HOME	Aged Ralph
WHEN THE CACTUS IS IN BLOOM	Jimmie
MISSISSIPPI MOON	Jimmie & Carrie
MY OLD PAL	Jimmie
ROLL ALONG KENTUCKY MOON (*)	Carrie
MISS THE MISSISSIPPI	Jimmie
YEARS AGO	Jimmie
DOWN THE OLD ROAD TO HOME	Jimmie
TRAIN CARRYING JIMMIE RODGERS HOME (*)	Carrie & Cast

(*) Certain minor liberties have been taken with the lyrics of this particular song in order that we might help facilitate the storyline.

SET-UP

The layout of the stage will feature two "separate stages." STAGE 1 (at stage right) will be the smaller portion and permanently set as the office of AGED RALPH. Ideally, this portion will be elevated with adequate room and safety precautions to allow for a bit of walking and light dancing beside, or in front of, the desk. The lighting for STAGE 1 will be separate. STAGE 2 (at stage left) will contain the remainder of the performance, set as each scene requires. The lighting for STAGE 2 will also be separate.

ACT 1

The overture, an instrumental version of "Waiting For A Train" begins.

The overture ends.

CURTAIN RISES

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH is sitting behind a rather ornate desk. He is wearing a light-colored plantation suit, a dark shirt and a light tie.

A slender vase containing a single camellia sits on one corner of the desk, while a stack of folded newspapers sits on the other corner. A telephone is on the desk as well as a Dictaphone machine.

(AGED RALPH appears to be reading a business letter. He lays the letter down, picks up the Dictaphone machine's microphone, clears his throat, and begins to speak.)

AGED RALPH

Dear Sirs, I am in receipt of you letter dated

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

August 19, 1958 in which you have put forward a query regarding the 1957 Buddy Holly composition, "Everyday". I'm pleased to inform you that each of our standard licensing agreements can easily be adapted to suit just about any project you may have in mind, ...

(AGED RALPH notices the audience and pauses.)

Oh, ... hi there folks, I'm sorry, ... I didn't see you come in. My apologies. Please, give me a moment.

(AGED RALPH place the microphone back on the machine and turns toward the audience.)

There, ... alright, ... first of all, I want to thank you for stopping by. I know your time is valuable and I sincerely appreciate your interest in being here.

And now, if I may, I'd like to formally introduce myself.

My name is Ralph Peer. Ralph S. Peer that is, formerly of Independence, Missouri. Which is of course, the very same place our 33rd President of the United States spent much of his youth. And of course, that would be Harry S. Truman. Funny thing you know, President Truman's middle name was simply S. It really stood for nothing at all. Mine too is simply "S.", but that empty "S." of mine has been more of a, uh ... what I might call a personal preference. A choice if you will. Now, I suppose that could be because my "S." actually stands for, ... Sylvester.

Anyway, with your indulgence, I'd like to take a few moments and tell you about one James Charles Rodgers, better known in most circles as Jimmie Rodgers, the man often recognized as, the undisputed "Father of Country Music."

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

Many years ago, Jimmie worked the railroads earning himself the nickname, "The Singing Brakeman," and his very unique yodeling skills resulted him in becoming known worldwide as, "America's Blue Yodeler."

Back when I was younger, I worked as a field engineer and talent scout for the Victor Talking Machine Company. My job was to roam the southern states, along with a crew and portable recording studio, and try to locate new musical talent, in particular, the kind I felt was good enough to make records for Victor.

Well, 1927 was a very busy year for me. It also turned out to be the year I first met Jimmie Rodgers. In fact, I met him in an old hat factory in downtown Bristol, right on the Tennessee - Virginia border. That's where I spent a couple weeks or so that summer making field recordings of singers and musicians from the nearby hills.

(AGED RALPH stands and walks to the side of the desk.)

Some of you may even recall, I first recorded the famous Carter Family there, just a couple days before I met Jimmie.

(AGED RALPH stares out at the audience.)

Really now, I'm sure you must all remember the Carter Family's music.

(pause)

Not that much? Hmmmm, well, how very interesting, and how very lucky for you!

(AGED RALPH take a pitch pipe from his pocket, searches for the right spot and blows once to set his starting note.)

(glaring)

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

Alright, alright, ... give me a break here, don't forget, I'm a music publisher, not a stage performer.

Dang it all, see that? Now you made me lose my note.

(AGED RALPH blows on the pitch pipe once again and begins to sing "Keep On The Sunny Side", a capella.)

THERE'S A DARK AND A TROUBLED SIDE OF LIFE.
THERE'S A BRIGHT AND A SUNNY SIDE TOO.
THOUGH YOU MEET WITH THE DARKNESS AND STRIFE,
THE SUNNY SIDE MAY ALSO FIND YOU.

KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE,
ALWAYS ON THE SUNNY SIDE,
KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE OF LIFE.
IT WILL HELP US EVERY DAY,
IT WILL BRIGHTEN ALL THE WAY,
IF WE KEEP ON THE SUNNY SIDE OF LIFE.

(AGED RALPH clears his throat, smiles as if he's a bit embarrassed, and then returns to his desk.)

You know, these days I like to think I probably understand Jimmie Rodgers as well as anyone else. Well, maybe not as much as his dear, sweet wife, Carrie, but certainly as much as anyone else you're liable to come across still living today.

Bottom line, he was a very unique man. Now I mean no disrespect whatsoever, but when people ask, I most often describe Jimmie as a dreamy-eyed boy who got himself caught up in the worn-out body of an unhealthy man. A man who just happened to have an extraordinary talent. A talent that allowed him to express himself with an appealing voice, a few clumsy guitar chords, and some very well-chosen lyrics. Oh, and the yodels, we can't forget them yodels.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

However, I'd never say Jimmie was the greatest vocalist I ever heard. Nor was he the finest musician I ever worked with. Not by a long shot. But, he very well may have been the best entertainer I ever came across. And by the way he crafted his songs, well, it was certainly clear to me, he understood exactly what his audience wanted to hear.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

A professional recording studio is dimly lit, as if to protect sensitive eyes from glare.

The ENGINEER sits "frozen" at a table which is situated behind a simulated glass partition. Much of the table is covered by recording gear.

The ENGINEER's arm is raised with his elbow bent and his hand pointing to the ceiling.

"Frozen" as well, JIMMIE sits in a stuffed chair, a microphone and stand before him.

Behind the chair, a cot is visible through a pair of semi-open drapes.

As the ENGINEER speaks, both he and JIMMIE become "unfrozen".

ENGINEER

May 24th, 1933. Victor Recording Studio Number 1, New York City. Jimmie Rodgers. Somewhere Down Below The Dixon Line. Recording BS76331. Take 2.

(The ENGINEER points offstage, the music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing

"Somewhere Down Below The Dixon Line".)

JIMMIE

GOODBYE, NORTHMAN, I'M ON MY WAY.
TUESDAY'S MY BUSY DAY.
GRIP'S ALL PACKED AND, I'M FEELING GAY,
HERE'S ALL I CAN SAY.

DROP ME DOWN IN CAROLINE,
CAROLINE, THAT WOULD BE FINE,
ANY PLACE BELOW THE DIXON LINE.
ALABAMA OR TENNESSEE,
SURE ENOUGH, LOOKS GOOD TO ME,
I KNOW I'LL FIND SOME,
KINFOLKS THERE OF MINE.

BEEN AWAY TOO LONG, UP WITH THE ICE AND SNOW.
SO, NOW I CRAVE TO TRAVEL BACK,
WHERE WARM, WARM BREEZES BLOW.
BUT, FROM NOW ON, WHEN WRITING ME,
IF NOT HERE, JUST FORWARD PLEASE,
SOMEWHERE DOWN BELOW THE DIXON LINE.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(More than once, JIMMIE covers his mouth as if to cough, but stifles it each time. The ENGINEER watches closely with genuine concern.)

IT AIN'T NO USE, ME TELLING YOU,
THE MANY THINGS I CRAVE.
IF YOU WILL COME, ALONG WITH ME,
YOU'LL KNOW JUST WHAT I'LL SAY.

DROP ME DOWN IN CAROLINE,
CAROLINE, THAT WOULD BE FINE,
ANY PLACE BELOW THE DIXON LINE.
ALABAMA OR TENNESSEE,
SURE ENOUGH, LOOKS GOOD TO ME,
I KNOW I'LL FIND SOME,
KINFOLKS THERE OF MINE.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

BEEN AWAY TOO LONG, UP WITH THE ICE AND SNOW.
SO, NOW I CRAVE TO TRAVEL BACK,
WHERE WARM, WARM BREEZES BLOW.
BUT, FROM NOW ON, WHEN WRITING ME,
IF NOT THERE, JUST FORWARD PLEASE,
SOMEWHERE DOWN BELOW THE DIXON LINE.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.
He waits for the ENGINEER to speak.)

ENGINEER

Okay, Jimmie, that's a good one. Great job.

JIMMIE

(weakly)

Yep, I think I liked it too.

(wheezing)

I still have one more I wanna do, but I'm gonna
need a few minutes, okay?

ENGINEER

Absolutely, Jimmie. You take all the time you
need. I've got a few things to get ready anyhow.

(JIMMIE slowly struggles up out of the chair.
He gives a slight wave offstage.)

JIMMIE

Thanks boys, that was really fine. I certainly
appreciate it. I really do.

(The ENGINEER fiddles with his equipment as
the lighting on him goes black.)

(JIMMIE slowly turns to the curtains behind
the chair, slides them open, fully exposing
the cot. JIMMIE halfheartedly mumbles over
his shoulder.)

Just a few minutes, that's all I need.

(JIMMIE leans down onto the cot, sits for a
moment, and then turns to lie down, his head
elevated on a mound of pillows. He clumsily

reaches down and drags an afghan up across his body. A number of red stains are visible on the afghan. He pulls the cover up to his neck and closes his eyes.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Now, of course, Jimmie's story doesn't really start toward the end. Not many good stories do. So, for us to truly understand how things are going to end for Jimmie, we need to go back a bit in time, to before I ever met this remarkable man.

Jimmie was born near Meridian, Mississippi during the fall of 1897. His mother died when he was fairly young. I'm not exactly sure when, but he was probably five or six years old at the time.

His father's name was Aaron, and he worked the railroads. A man who did his very best to raise Jimmie and the two older boys. But, as you might imagine, working the rails in those days often meant long stretches of time away from home.

And that's just how it was with Jimmie's father. In fact, that's how Jimmie ended up spending so much of his youth living with various friends and relatives all across the Mississippi-Alabama region.

As a teen, Jimmie was often attracted to the day's popular entertainment venues. The kind of places most parents hoped their children might avoid. Places like traveling circus shows, vaudeville tents, pool halls and dance clubs. But, Jimmie's fascination with music attracted him right toward those very establishments. In fact, I imagine those escapades played a very big part in developing Jimmie's love for music.

Still, he managed to survive, and in the process, met a very lovely girl by the name of Carrie Williamson.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

Now, Carrie's father was a preacher, right there in Meridian, so Jimmie, being the scamp he was, didn't really draw the favor of the Williamson clan. Except for Carrie, that is. Because, as we used to say in the day, Carrie Williams was quite smitten with Mr. Jimmie Rodgers.

And what was the year 1920 like for them? Let's just say, it was a very special year for these two youngsters.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE and CARRIE sit on an outdoor park bench, just below the glow of an old street lamp.

CARRIE

Exactly, Jimmie! That's exactly what makes me so nervous. You're off in Ohio one day and the next time I hear from you, you're way up in Maine, or somewhere out in Texas. I just never know where you are, or when you might be back.

JIMMIE

But, I'm tellin' ya, Carrie, that's one of the best things about this wonderful life called the railroad. It's the travel. The sights. The surprises. Hell, my father's done it all his life and I don't see why I can't do the same damn thing.

(CARRIE glares at JIMMIE.)

Okay, okay. I'm sorry, no more swearin. But that certainly don't mean I can't take care of you like I should, ya know. We'll be fine, girl, I know we will. It's like I told you a hundred times before. When the time feels right, that's when it's best to make a move. And I feel we should be makin' our move right now.

CARRIE

Oh really? And what is it that makes you think now is such an ideal time, Jimmie?

JIMMIE

Ahh, don't you worry none about that, Carrie. You just trust me and accept it as fact, 'cause I really do know. You see, that happens to be one of my very many talents. I always seem to know just when the time is right.

(The music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing. "Peach Picking Time In Georgia".)

WHEN IT'S PEACH PICKIN' TIME IN GEORGIA,
APPLE PICKIN' TIME IN TENNESSEE,
COTTON PICKIN TIME IN ALABAMA,
EV'RYBODY PICKS ON ME.

WHEN IT'S ROUND-UP TIME IN TEXAS,
THE COWBOYS MAKE "WHOOPEE",
AND DOWN HERE IN OLD MISSISSIPPE,
IT'S GAL PICKIN TIME FOR ME.

THERE'S THE BLUEGRASS UP IN KENTUCKY,
VIRGINIA'S WHERE THEY DO THE SWING.
CAROLINA, I'M A-COMIN',
PRETTY SOON TO SPEND THE SPRING.

ARKANSAS, I HEAR YOU CALLIN'
I KNOW I'LL SEE YOU SOON,
THAT WHERE WE'LL DO A LITTLE PICKIN'
UNDERNEATH THE OZARK MOON.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(JIMMIE stands and takes CARRIE by the hand. They dance briefly. CARRIE sits back down while JIMMIE goes on one knee before her.)

WHEN THE PICKIN' MAN HAS PICKED ALL THE COTTON,
I'LL PICK YOU OUT A WEDDING RING.
THEN WE'LL GO TO TOWN, AND BUY A FANCY GOWN,
FOR THE WEDDING IN THE SPRING.

I HOPE THE PREACHER KNOWS HIS BUS'NESS,
I KNOW HE CAN'T FOOL ME,
WHEN IT'S PEACH PICKIN' TIME IN GEORGIA,
IT'S GAL PICKIN' TIME FOR ME.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

CARRIE

Well, I guess there's really only one thing I can
say to all that, Mr. Rodgers.

JIMMIE

Oh yeah, kid? What's that?

CARRIE

Why, ... I say yes, of course!

(CARRIE leans forward to hold JIMMIE's face
and kisses him firmly on the lips.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

And so, quite secretly, on April 7th of 1920, Jimmie and Carrie were married and soon headed off to New Orleans for their honeymoon trip.

But, when they returned, they were completely caught off guard by the intensity of the Williamson family's marital objections. Carrie's parents were beside themselves. They were absolutely convinced the two youngsters had gone and jumped into a very premature elopement.

The newlyweds, however, remained strong and steadfast in their love, choosing to set up their very first home right there in Meridian. In fact, they found a small house not far from where Carrie's parents lived. I can't help but wonder if Jimmie may have picked that home on purpose.

The following year, the Rodgers were blessed with the birth of their first daughter, Anita.

Jimmie and Carrie were thrilled with family life and their happiness was enormous. Their fortunes? Not so much.

Life seemed to drop more than its fair share of challenges on this new Rodgers family. Jimmie would work the rails, and then get laid off. Next he'd try working a few odd jobs, but they never lasted very long, and the money, ... the money was far less than pitiful.

In 1923, Carrie gave birth to another baby girl, June Rebecca. But sadly, this child died at six months of age. Jimmie and Carrie were heartbroken.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

Maybe it was the untimely passing of their youngest daughter, or maybe it was just some sort of desperate need for a mental distraction, but Jimmie found himself driven more and more toward his musical ambitions.

Why, he actually organized his own traveling troupe, "The Jimmie Rodgers Entertainers". Trouble was, no one wanted to hire them much, so once again, Jimmie fell back to doing what he could do best, working the rails. But, as was often the case, after a while he'd simply get laid off yet again.

In time, Jimmie started getting sick, but avoided going to the doctor. Mostly due to a lack of money I suppose, but maybe it was partly due to a lack of courage, courage to face what he may have already begun to suspect.

Through it all, Jimmie continued to love Carrie, Carrie continued to love Jimmie, and oh, my goodness, how they both simply adored little Anita.

By 1927, the family had moved to Asheville, North Carolina, where Jimmie continued to embrace his love of music.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

CARRIE is in the kitchen, wearing a plain pocketed apron, busily reheating dinner and clearing away one of three place settings.

The kitchen is just off the living room.

A stuffed chair, side table and guitar are visible in the living room.

(JIMMIE enters through a door at stage left, drops a well-worn satchel to the floor, and closes the door behind him.)

JIMMIE

Well, hello there, Mother. How's my girl?

(JIMMIE lets out a slight cough, while CARRIE excitedly crosses the room to greet him with a hug and kiss.)

CARRIE

Jimmie! You're so late. I was starting to get worried. And yes, I'm wonderful, I'm always wonderful whenever you get home, you know that. But you tell me. How are you feeling? Is everything okay? Have you been coughing much? What about your breathing? Tell me, Jimmie, is it any better? Did you find any work? Are you really okay?

JIMMIE

Whoa now, slow down there, girl. Yes, fine is just how I am, as you can see ...

(JIMMIE inhales and exhales deeply and slowly without coughing.)

There. See? I'm breathin' just fine. I keep tellin' you, it's nothin' but a dang cold that won't let go of me. And as for work, no, nothin'. At least nothin' that really helped much. I was able to clean out Miler's market most every night, and I drove a few runs in Percy's cab, but no tips hardly worth mention'. Three dollars for more than a week's work. I sure wish I could have brought home more than that.

(CARRIE returns to cleaning the table. JIMMIE pulls three bill from his shirt pocket, peels off two and lays them on the table, slipping the third back into his pocket.)

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

I tell you, Mother, I sure do miss the money from workin' them rails. But I also know that gettin' laid off might have been the best of blessin's in disguise. And of course, that's because I truly believe things happen for a reason. They always do.

(JIMMIE sits down at the kitchen table.)

(CARRIE places a plate with bread and butter on the table in front of JIMMIE. She reaches down for the two dollar bills, folds them and slips them into her apron pocket. She stands and listens.)

In fact, just today I heard word about a brand-new musical opportunity. A record man. Seems he's signin' up new acts and performers and givin' 'em a chance to make test records. And, if he likes what he hears, well, he actually pays them in cash, right there on the spot! Facts is, he's gonna be doin' that for at least another week.

CARRIE

(suspiciously)

And?

JIMMIE

And, it's not too far away, just up in Bristol. Not a hard drive at all. Percy says I can use that old Speed Wagon of his he keeps out behind the garage. All I have to do is give him a full day's work in trade. I told him that was a fair deal, a very fair deal.

(JIMMIE takes a piece of bread and butters it. He does his best to talk while trying to eat at the same time.)

So, I say, throw some things together kid. You, me and Anita, we're all gonna be headin' outa here. Fact is, we're headin' out first thing in the

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

mornin'. With a bit of luck, we're liable to be there before midnight.

(CARRIE lightly rolls her eyes, shakes her head and crosses her arms in pointless defiance.)

Now, Mother, you know I'm gonna do this. So, don't you even start tryin' to fight me about it. And you also know I don't wanna be late. That ol' record man's liable to think he's heard all the good ones even before he gets 'round to hearin' from me and the boys. At first light, now. That's when we're leavin'.

(Shaking her head, CARRIE exhales a puff of air, turns and goes back to cleaning the kitchen.)

And who knows, this just might be that big break we've been waitin' for. Don't you think? Maybe? Trust me, girl, there ain't no need to worry. I never do.

(JIMMIE wags his finger at CARRIE.)

And I do mean that, there just ain't no reason for you to be a-worryin'.

(JIMMIE gets up, crosses to the living room and sits down in the stuffed chair.)

Come here, Carrie, and hand me that old guitar.

(With a mock sigh, CARRIE wipes her hands on her apron, pulls over a kitchen chair, hands JIMMIE his guitar and sits beside him.)

(The music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing "You And My Old Guitar".)

I COULD NEVER BE LONELY,
I COULD NEVER BE BLUE.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

AS I GO THROUGH LIFE, IF ONLY,
I HAVE MY GUITAR AND YOU.

WHY SHOULD I EVER WORRY?
WHY SHOULD I BE SAD?
WE TRAVEL THROUGH LIFE IN A HURRY,
SHARING THE GOOD AND BAD.

WHENEVER I'M UP YOU'RE NEAR ME,
GIVING ME HAPPINESS.
AND WHEN I'M DOWN, YOU CHEER ME,
NOTHING IS BETTER THAN THIS.

----- YODELING -----

(JIMMIE and CARRIE sing together.)

JIMMIE & CARRIE

HERE WE GO, JUST WE THREE,
OH, HOW HAPPY WE WILL BE.
I'LL HOOK MY LADDER TO A SILVER STAR,
AND CLIMB WITH YOU AND MY OLD GUITAR.

----- YODELING -----

(CARRIE sings alone.)

CARRIE

ALL AROUND WE WANDER,
FIRST, WE'RE HERE, THEN THERE.
BUT, I NEVER STOP TO PONDER,
IF CLOUDS ARE DARK OR FAIR.

IN A ONE-HORSE TOWN OR CITY,
NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE.
I'M HAPPY IF I HAVE WITH ME,
YOU AND THAT OLD GUITAR.

WE'LL TRAVEL THE ROAD TOGETHER,
LEADING TO LANDS AFAR.
NO MATTER WHAT THE WEATHER,
STRUMMING MY OLD GUITAR.

(JIMMIE and CARRIE sing together.)

JIMMIE & CARRIE

HERE WE GO, JUST WE THREE,
OH, HOW HAPPY WE WILL BE.
I'll HOOK MY LADDER TO A SILVER STAR,
AND CLIMB WITH YOU AND MY OLD GUITAR.

----- YODELING -----

(JIMMIE and CARRIE stop singing and the music ends.)

(CARRIE stands, walks behind JIMMIE's chair, leans down and wraps her arms around his neck. She kisses him warmly on the cheek, then stands up and places both hands on JIMMIE's shoulders.)

CARRIE

Mr. Jimmie Rodgers? I sure hope you know how much I love you.

(JIMMIE pats one of Carrie's hands.)

JIMMIE

(smiling)

I think I do, Mother, I think I do.

(CARRIE takes JIMMIE's guitar, puts it away, crosses the room and returns to setting out the rest of the meal.)

Tell me, is Anita sleepin'?

CARRIE

Yes dear, almost a half-hour now.

JIMMIE

Okay, I'll be right back then. I need to kiss my sweetheart right now, even more than I need your fine cookin'. I mean it, I sure am hungry for that little girl.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Folks? Believe me when I tell you, and I can say this as an absolute fact, because I saw it with my very own eyes. There was never a doubt how much Jimmie Rodgers loved his daughter, Anita. He loved her more than life itself. She was the very source of his greatest happiness. She was his angel, his pride and his joy.

Sometimes, I think he spent more energy trying to impress Anita than anyone else. Well, maybe except for his father, but that a different story for another time.

With the unfortunate death of June Rebecca, Anita was Jimmie's baby girl, his total responsibility and his truest love.

And, if he had anything to say about it, Jimmie was going to make sure that little girl was as happy as she could possibly be, for the rest of her natural life.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

*In ANITA's dimly-lit bedroom,
JIMMIE sits in a bedside chair.*

The moon shines in through the open curtains of a window illuminating the faces of both JIMMIE and ANITA. He looks serenely happy. She looks angelic.

ANITA gives the appearance of being about six years old and has the bed covers pulled up to her chin.

(ANITA begins to stir, rolls a bit toward JIMMIE and starts to rub her eyes.)

ANITA

(groggily)
Daddy? Is that you?

JIMMIE

Yes, baby girl, it's me. You really should be asleepin', you know?

ANITA

Yeah, I was, Daddy, but I think I heard you and Mama singing, and so I started listenin' for a bit, but then, I, ... I don't know, ... I think I musta fallen back down to being' asleep again.

JIMMIE

(chuckling)
Well, I'm glad you went back to sleep, sweetheart.

(JIMMIE leans in and kisses ANITA on the cheek.)

Guess what? I have some really big news for you!

ANITA

What, Daddy? What's the news?

JIMMIE

Well, it seems we're headin' out on a very special trip in the mornin'.

(ANITA sits up quickly, but a bit clumsily.)

ANITA

Where, Daddy? Where are we going? To the railroad yards? To see Papa Aaron? Where, Daddy? Are we leavin' here for good? I sure hope not. I like it here in Corlina, Daddy.

Whoa there, girl. That's way too many questions asked way too fast.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

(laughing)

You're getting' more like your Mama every day.

And yes, baby, I like it here too. But, all we're doin' is takin' us a short trip up into Tennessee. Your daddy's gonna go see a music man and see if he wants me to make him some records.

ANITA

You mean like the kind you play on the Victry-ola?

JIMMIE

(chuckling)

Exactly, just like that. Now, get yourself back to sleep, because you, me and Mama are all leavin' bright and early in the mornin'.

(Plopping here head back down on the pillow, ANITA closes her eyes in a highly exaggerated fashion.)

ANITA

Yes, sir, Daddy! I will. In fact, I'm almost asleep right now.

(After a short pause, ANITA slowly peeks out of one eye.)

Ummm, Daddy?

JIMMIE

(suspiciously)

Yes, Anita?

ANITA

(grinning devilishly)

Well, I been thinking. I bet I could fall asleep a lot faster if I heard a bedtime song. 'Member? Like you did when I was just a little girl?

JIMMIE

Oh, Lord, child! You'll always be my little girl.

[MORE]

(Chuckling. JIMMIE leans forward to kiss her on the forehead. Then he leans back in the chair and searches across the ceiling for a song idea. As he recalls the one he wants, he smiles.)

JIMMIE (cont'd)

Hmmm ... let me see.

(pause)

Okay, I think I know a good one.

(The music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing "My Carolina Sunshine Girl".)

MOON, MOON, I CAN SEE YOU SINKING LOW,
YOU MAKE ME THINK OF A SWEETHEART,
A LITTLE GIRL THAT I LOVE SO.
AFTER I'VE WORKED HARD,
THE WHOLE NIGHT THROUGH,
WOND'RIN' IF YOU THINK' OF ME,
I REALLY DO GET LONESOME,
WHILE THINKING OF SOMEONE,
'CAUSE I'M ALWAYS THINKING OF YOU.

MY CAROLINA SUNSHINE GIRL.
YOU SURE MAKE ME DREAM OF HOME.
MY CAROLINA SUNSHINE GIRL,
YOU SURE MAKE MY HEART FEEL WARM.

I WONDER WHY, I SIT AND CRY,
WHEN I REALLY SHOULD LAUGH,
AT YOUR PHOTOGRAPH,
'CAUSE YOU'RE THE SWEETEST ANGEL,
IN THIS WORLD AND I LOVE,
LOVE, LOVE YOU,
MY CAROLINA SUNSHINE GIRL.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(As the musical interlude plays, JIMMIE stands to tuck her in, closes the window curtain and continues to sing.)

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

I WONDER WHY, I SIT AND CRY,
WHEN I REALLY SHOULD LAUGH,
AT YOUR LITTLE OL' PHOTOGRAPH,
'CAUSE YOU'RE THE SWEETEST ANGEL,
IN THIS WORLD AND I LOVE,
LOVE, LOVE YOU,
MY CAROLINA SUNSHINE GIRL.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

(ANITA has dozed off to sleep. JIMMIE reaches down and smooths her bed cover, leans in and kisses her once again on the forehead.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

And so, off to Bristol they went.

They drove up there in Percy McAllister's old REO Speed Wagon, just like Jimmie said. It took them a while, and it sure was one beat up old truck, but it never broke down. Not even once. Maybe that was meant as a sign of changing fortunes for the Rodgers family.

And, true to Jimmie's form, he went and wrangled his way into one of the best hotels in downtown Bristol. It was located just across the street from that closed-down hat factory where I'd set up my recording studio.

Now Jimmie certainly didn't have much money in those days, but what little he ever had, he'd always go out of his way to spend, just as if it would keep on flowing forever.

Billy Burkes, a fine musician I used on several of Jimmie's recordings, helped me understand Jimmie's way of thinking about money.

"I don't give a damn about how much money I got in my pocket," Jimmie told Burkes. "If I only got a dollar, and I want a steak dinner that costs a dollar, ... well, goddammit, ... I'm gonna go ahead and get it! I'll eat it and I'll enjoy it!"

Yes sir, that sure sound like the Jimmie I knew.

Now, even though Carrie would often talk to him about his loose hold on money, it didn't really do much good. Jimmie knew how he liked to spend. I guess that's why he always gave most of his money

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

to Carrie whenever he got paid. I suppose he figured she'd tuck most of it away for a rainy day.

Not that Jimmie ever expected to worry about rain, because he'd clearly made up hi mind. Jimmie Rodgers was going to become a famous recording star!

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE and CARRIE sit on chairs in a nice hotel room. Anita kneels on the floor using a bed as her desk while she doodles with crayons.

JIMMIE

Well, Mother, this is it. A fine hotel in a brand new city, and the man from Victor Records just waitin' me for to sing my songs. Can't hope for much better than that, I guess.

I sure hope you know I'm gonna give this all I got.

Did I tell you this man is paying fifty dollars to record just one song?

(CARRIE's eyes and her attention are quickly raised.)

(JIMMIE stands to pat ANITA in the head, but she seems oblivious to everything. He kisses CARRIE on the cheek.)

Well, alright then, girls, wish me luck.

CARRIE

(smiling)

Jimmie? I know you'll do fine. And of course, the

[MORE]

CARRIE (cont'd)

money would be a dream come true, but I tell you, that's the least of it. Just seeing you this happy, well, it truly makes my heart bubble over with joy. I mean that, Jimmie, I really do.

JIMMIE

Well, old girl, I'm happy that you're happy.

(JIMMIE kisses CARRIE again and exits through the door.)

(CARRIE stands and crosses over to where ANITA is coloring, as a cough is heard offstage. CARRIE turns back toward the door and ponders, slowly stroking the hair of a still oblivious ANITA.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Now, when Jimmie first got to Bristol, he'd planned to meet up with some other young men, a few fellows he'd played music with before. They'd never done anything big, just a few small barn dances and roadside cafe dates.

Well, these boys, they called themselves the Tenneva Ramblers. It sounds like an odd name, but it actually made some good sense. You see, two of them were from Tennessee and the others came from Virginia, so the name became Tenneva, get it?

Anyway, the boys and Jimmie were supposed to meet up and audition together, but it seems they had one heck of a knock-down, drag-out battle about, ... now get this, ... they couldn't agree on what to call themselves as a recording group.

Hell, I hadn't decided to even let them audition, and I certainly hadn't made up my mind about them making any records. At least not before I ever heard them.

In any event, they ended up arguing so much that Jimmie finally told them to forget it. He was going to audition all by himself.

And I'll be damned, that's exactly what he did.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

YOUNG RALPH, dressed in dark pants and a white shirt with sleeves rolled up, is standing in a nearly-empty room.

The ENGINEER sits at a small table toward the back of the room, with a few pieces of recording equipment stacked about. A simulated sheet of glass stretches across the table front.

(YOUNG RALPH leans in toward a stand-mounted microphone out in the center of the room.)

YOUNG RALPH

How's this?

(The ENGINEER fiddles with a dial.)

ENGINEER

Again.

(YOUNG RALPH leans in more toward the microphone.)

YOUNG RALPH

Better?

ENGINEER

Yep, that's it. That's fine, Mr. Peer. Perfectly fine.

(A solid knock is heard at the door and JIMMIE, carrying a guitar, enters without waiting for a response.)

JIMMIE

Hello? Mr. Peer?

(YOUNG RALPH looks toward the door and nods as he moves a stool near the microphone.)

Well, hi there. I'm Jimmie Rodgers and I'm here to make you some hit records.

YOUNG RALPH

Ummm, ... hold on there a minute my friend.

[MORE]

(JIMMIE stops dead in his tracks.)

YOUNG RALPH (cont'd)

Let me explain something to you. Yes, my name is Peer, and I'm the one in charge. So, I'm more than happy to listen to what you can do. But for us to make any records, well, I'm going to have to really like what you've got.

So, go ahead and play a song or two, and if I like what I hear, ... well, I'll be happy to pay you for your time. On the other hand, if I'm not at all impressed, you'll get to go back to wherever it is you came from with one of my famous "no-charge thank-yous". Understood?

JIMMIE

I sure do understand, Mr. Peer. Completely. But it won't much matter, 'cause you're gonna like what I do. No doubt about that. You see, I got me one of them voices that just about everybody likes.

My Aunt Dora used to say I sounded like an angel when I sang. Of course, then she'd add on somethin' like about my halo bein' busted a bit, but still, she really did like my singin'.

(YOUNG RALPH shakes his head a bit, walks toward the ENGINEER and exhales a mildly frustrated puff of air. The ENGINEER simply shrugs his shoulders. YOUNG Ralph steps back out of the way.)

YOUNG RALPH

Alright then, I think we're pretty much ready for you. What's your choice?

JIMMIE

Well, I thought I'd sing one of them old love ballads, Mr. Peer. Somethin' I remember hearin' a few years back. It's called, "The Soldier's Sweetheart".

(YOUNG RALPH looks to the ENGINEER, who nods).

YOUNG RALPH

Alright then, Jimmie. Whenever you're ready.

(JIMMIE moves aside the stool and takes a small step toward the microphone.)

(The music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing, "The Soldier's Sweetheart".)

JIMMIE

(timidly)

ONCE I HAD A SWEETHEART ...

(The ENGINEER looks down at his equipment and then out toward JIMMIE.)

ENGINEER

(interrupting)

Hold on there, son.

(Abruptly, the music and JIMMIE stop.)

I'm going to need you to be a lot closer to that microphone. My equipment is sensitive, but it will never grab your voice from way back there. Move on up.

(Unsure, JIMMIE steps a bit closer.)

JIMMIE

Like this?

ENGINEER

A bit more.

JIMMIE

Here?

ENGINEER

Yep, much better. Okay, go ahead.

(The music begins to play again and JIMMIE starts to sing a second time.)

JIMMIE

(more confidently)

ONCE I HAD A SWEETHEART,
A SWEETHEART, DARK AND TRUE, ...

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music stop.)

Dang it all. Sorry, Mr. Peer. Can I start again?
Please?

*(YOUNG RALPH pauses, looks over to the
ENGINEER and takes a deep breath.)*

YOUNG RALPH

Sure, Jimmie, ... try again, ... and don't let
yourself get all nervous. There's no need to be
scared, okay? Sing it like you did, ummm. ... why
don't you just sing it like you would for your
dear Aunt Dora?

(Pausing with a head nod, JIMMIE smiles.)

*(The music begins to play yet again and
JIMMIE starts to sing once more.)*

JIMMIE

ONCE I HAD A SWEETHEART,
A SWEETHEART BRAVE AND TRUE.
HIS HAIR WAS DARK AND CURLY,
HIS LOVING EYES WERE BLUE.

HE TOLD ME THAT HE LOVED ME,
AND HE OFTEN PROVED IT SO.
HE OFTEN CAME TO SEE ME,
WHEN THE EVENING SUN WAS LOW.

BUT THEY TOOK HIM AWAY,
TO THAT AWFUL GERMAN WAR.
AND WHEN HE CAME TO SAY GOODBYE,
MY HEART DID OVERFLOW.

HE TOOK A GOLDEN FINGER RING,
AND HE PLACED IT ON MY HAND.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

SAID, "REMEMBER ME, LITTLE DARLING,
WHEN I'M IN NO-MAN'S LAND."

HE PROMISED HE WOULD WRITE TO ME,
THAT PROMISE HE KEPT TRUE.
I READ HIS FIRST LOVE LETTER,
AND WISHED THE WAR WAS THROUGH.

HIS SECOND LETTER, WARNED ME,
A BATTLE LAY AHEAD.
THE THIRD ONE WROTE BY HIS CAPTAIN,
MY DARLING DEAR WAS DEAD.

I KEPT ALL HIS LOVE LETTERS,
I KEPT HIS GOLD RING TOO.
AND I'LL ALWAYS LIVE A SINGLE LIFE,
FOR THAT SOLDIER'S LOVE SO TRUE.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends. He
waits for instructions.)

(YOUNG RALPH stands with his arms crossed,
starting out toward JIMMIE's feet. For
several moments he says nothing, and then
half-looks over his shoulder toward the
ENGINEER.)

YOUNG RALPH

Get it?

ENGINEER

(nodding)

Yep.

(YOUNG RALPH slowly steps toward JIMMIE,
extending his hand.)

YOUNG RALPH

Jimmie Rodgers, is it?

(JIMMIE nods.)

[MORE]

YOUNG RALPH (cont'd)

Well there, Jimmie Rodgers, you just earned yourself fifty dollars! Yes sir, that was pretty good. Simple and sweet. And wonderful too. In fact, I think maybe we ought to try another one. You interested?

JIMMIE

Anything you say, Mr. Peer, anything you say!

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

When I got back from Bristol I had a slew of sides to work with. I recorded some twenty or so different acts down there and quite a few were very good.

Jimmie's record was one of the first ones we released. Not the very first, but certainly it was issued sooner than most of the others.

It took a while to get things rolling. I never expected Jimmie to get so impatient, but he did. You see, he really didn't understand how the record business worked. It seems he had this unrealistic notion he was destined to become an overnight sensation, and a millionaire shortly after that.

I could have told him I thought his dreams were a bit premature, maybe even unachievable, but I doubt that would have changed his thinking at all. Jimmie Rodgers was already convinced he knew better than me.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE and CARRIE sit in chairs in their comfortable Meridian living room. The sun shines in through a window.

(CARRIE is quietly knitting while JIMMIE is aggressively flipping through a stack of mail. He quickly slaps the stack of mail across his knee.)

JIMMIE

Dang it all! Still nothin' yet. I wonder if Mr. Peer's forgotten me. It's been almost three months now and my record's been out nearly four weeks. I can't believe it ain't sellin' well enough for him to be callin' me. He must have forgotten.

CARRIE

Jimmie, this kind of thing must be very complicated, and it probably takes a lot more time. I think you need to be more patient. Remember, you said Mr. Peer was quite happy with your songs. Though, for the life of me, I still don't know what you didn't play him that Thelma one. It's so catchy, Jimmie. I bet he would have liked that one even more.

JIMMIE

No, Mother, absolutely not. It just wasn't the right time. Besides, it still needs more work.

(JIMMIE stands and walks to the window, pausing and pondering.)

Okay, so here's the plan. I'll give him two more weeks. If I don't hear from him by the, I'm gonna go see him.

(CARRIE abruptly stops her knitting and looks over at JIMMIE.)

CARRIE

You mean up in New York?

JIMMIE

Of course, New York is exactly what I mean. I can't let this end here. Not after all we've done. Not after all I've been through.

(JIMMIE pauses and stares out the window again.)

I don't have the time.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

(JIMMIE rubs his hand across his chest.)

I just don't have the time to waste.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 8

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Now, back then, Jimmie had no idea what was really going on. In reality, his record was actually selling quite well.

It wasn't what you'd call a monstrous hit, but the initial sales receipts, ... well they indicated to me it was just doing fine. Let me put it this way, ... it was certainly doing a lot better than most of the others.

The problem was, Jimmie imagined he was my only business interest. He couldn't comprehend I had dozens of established artists already under legal contract. And on top of that, I was busy juggling a fair number of new prospects as well.

So, believe me, all along, my plan was to get Jimmie back in the studio once his first record had sold a bit more.

After all, he'd been patient this long, so I didn't see how a few more weeks would do any harm.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

For this portion of the scene, a split set on STAGE 2 is required.

One half is for JIMMIE in a hotel room, the other half is for YOUNG RALPH in his office.

JIMMIE sits on the side of a bed with a small table and telephone nearby.

YOUNG RALPH sits at a desk, going through papers, which is littered with papers, a desk tray and a telephone.

Dim lighting prevails, but stronger lighting alternates to focus on whichever speaker is "active" at the time.

The lighting increase on YOUNG RALPH as his phone rings.

YOUNG RALPH

Hello, Ralph Peer speaking.

JIMMIE

Mr. Peer? Jimmie Rodgers here.

YOUNG RALPH

Well, hello there, Jimmie, it's nice to hear from you. How are you doing? How's your family?

JIMMIE

Just fine, Mr. Peer, we're all doin' just fine.

YOUNG RALPH

Well, that's great to hear. Funny thing, I was just going over some of your sales receipts this morning. Not doing too badly, I'd say. Your first record's selling much better than I expected. You should be quite happy, Jimmie.

JIMMIE

Well, I'm sure glad to hear that, Mr. Peer, real glad. Fact is, I was callin' to find out when you wanted me to make some more records for you.

YOUNG RALPH

(pausing)

Well, ... I suppose we might be able to plan something again kind of soon.

(stalling)

[MORE]

YOUNG RALPH (cont'd)

Uhhm ... but, to be perfectly honest, Jimmie, I'm not quite sure when I could get back down your way again. Maybe sometime after New Years'. How does that sound?

JIMMIE

Oh, ... there's no need to wait that long, Mr. Peer. Hell, We could do new songs right away. Today even. You see, I just happen to be here in New York City. Now, how about that, huh?

YOUNG RALPH

(surprised)

Really? You're in New York?

JIMMIE

Yep, I sure am. I'm staying over here at the Manger hotel.

(chuckling)

And I tell you, Mr. Peer, they're all treatin' me just like the famous Victor recording star I am. Well, ... they did once I got around to tellin' 'em who I was.

YOUNG RALPH

(pausing)

Ummm, ... give me a moment, Jimmie.

(YOUNG RALPH places the receiver down on the desk and picks up the sales receipts from the desk tray. He flips through them a bit and takes a few moments to think, then picks up the phone again.)

Tell you what, Jimmie, ... if it's okay with you, ... and if you're still in town, ... we can probably plan something for, ... let's say, early next week. But, you'll have to come over and meet me in Camden. I can have one of my people get in touch with you and go over the arrangement, ... and I'll be sure to send a car over to get you. Fair enough?

JIMMIE

Sure is, Mr. Peer. That sounds just about perfect.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 9

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

I do have to admit, I was actually kind of glad Jimmie called like that.

Not because I was desperate to have him record more songs right away, no, but, ... maybe it was because I found him to be such a likable fellow.

I mean, his voice was fine, and even though his guitar playing could sound a bit rough at times, he still had that unique quality I found so darn appealing. So, I figured there wouldn't be much harm in seeing what he had up his sleeve for me this time. After all, he'd already taken care of his own traveling expenses.

Besides, who knew? Maybe we'd get lucky and make ourselves a special record that might sell really big.

Of course, that didn't happen very often. But, it wouldn't have been the first time I got lucky and made a record that sold fifteen or twenty thousand copies.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE, YOUNG RALPH and the ENGINEER are in a well-lit, professional recording studio in Camden, New jersey.

A microphone stands in front of JIMMIE who sits patiently on a stool.

YOUNG RALPH sits on a small sofa.

The ENGINEER is seated behind a simulated partition of glass in a neatly organized recording area.

YOUNG RALPH

Okay Jimmie, that one wasn't bad at all. What else you got?

JIMMIE

Well, Mr. Peer, this next one's a favorite of mine. Carrie likes it a lot too. It's something I've been working on for quite a while now.

I guess you could say it kind of a bluesy number, but with a bit of folk and jazz all mixed up in. I think it makes for one hot little tune. And best of all, I think you're gonna like it.

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing, "Blue Yodel".)

T FOR TEXAS, T FOR TENNESSEE.
T FOR TEXAS, T FOR TENNESSEE.
T FOR THELMA,
THAT GAL THAT MADE A WRECK OUT OF ME.

----- YODELING -----

IF YOU DON'T WANT ME MAMA,
YOU SURE DON'T HAVE TO STALL.
IF YOU DON'T WANT ME MAMA,
YOU SURE DON'T HAVE TO STALL.
'CAUSE I CAN GET MORE WOMEN,
THAN A PASSENGER TRAIN CAN HAUL.

----- YODELING -----

I'M GONNA BUY ME A PISTOL,
JUST AS LONG AS I AM TALL.
GONNA BUY ME A PISTOL,
AS LONG AS I AM TALL.
I'M GONNA SHOOT POOR THELMA,
JUST TO SEE HER JUMP AND FALL.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

----- YODELING -----

I'M GOING WHERE THE WATER,
DRINKS LIKE CHERRY WINE.
I'M GOING WHERE THE WATER,
DRINKS LIKE CHERRY WINE.
'CAUSE THIS GEORGIA WATER,
TASTES LIKE TURPENTINE.

----- YODELING -----

I'M GONNA BUY ME A SHOTGUN,
WITH A BIG OL' SHINY BARREL.
GONNA BUY ME A SHOTGUN,
WITH A BIG OL' SHINY BARREL.
I'M GONNA SHOOT THAT ROUNDER,
THAT STOLE AWAY MY GAL.

I'D RATHER DRINK MUDDY WATER,
AND SLEEP IN A HOLLOW LOG.
RATHER DRINK MUDDY WATER,
AND SLEEP IN A HOLLOW LOG.
THAN TO BE IN ATLANTA,
AND TREATED LIKE A DIRTY DOG.

----- YODELING -----

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends as he awaits a response from the ENGINEER and YOUNG RALPH.)

ENGINEER

Done, Mr. Peer.

(YOUNG RALPH pops up from the sofa and rushes toward JIMMIE, obviously excited.)

YOUNG RALPH

Damn, boy! Why in hell's name did you ever make me wait all this time to hear that one? And where did you ever learn to yodel like that? I swear. I never heard anything like it before.

[MORE]

(YOUNG RALPH half-turns to the ENGINEER and speaks very slowly and deliberately.)

YOUNG RALPH (cont'd)

Tell me Floyd, ... tell me you go that, ... tell me you got it all.

(Leaning back in his chair, arms crossed against his chest, the ENGINEER grins broadly at YOUNG RALPH and nods.)

ENGINEER

Yeah, boss, I got it. Every damn bit of it.

YOUNG RALPH

(beaming)

Jimmie Rodgers? I'd say it's about time for you to buckle up your britches, son, be cause you, sir, you are about to take the ride of your life!

(happily flustered)

Damn, ... I've got calls to make.

(YOUNG RALPH hurriedly exits the recording studio.)

(The ENGINEER walks out from behind his work station and strolls slowly over to JIMMIE.)

Jimmie? Umm, ... in case you didn't realize it, ... Mr. Peer kind of liked that one.

(The ENGINEER laughs heartily.)

JIMMIE

(chuckling)

Yeah, I guess he sort of did. Now, if I can just get him to never tell Carrie how much he wishes I'd played it for him sooner, ... I'd be even happier.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 10

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Well, that was a very important recording session for Jimmie, and to be perfectly honest, important for Victor as well.

What I mean is, once we paired "Blue Yodel" with another song of Jimmie's called, "Away Out On The Mountain", well, the record sales took off like gangbusters.

We recorded many more of Jimmie's songs over the next several months.

And, over the next couple of years, well, ... we all became more acutely aware of Jimmie's health issues. It seems consumption was pretty much affecting lots of folks in those days, from all walks of life. Now, T.B.'s not a simple battle for anyone to win, but Jimmie? Well, Jimmie truly was a fighter.

Fact was, he'd try any new potion that came out. He'd rest in the warm weather when he could, and, ... well, let's just say he enjoyed his regular treatments of "medicinal whiskeys."

Even while working hard to keep his health in check, Jimmie could still be found touring up and down the east coast, playing to enthusiastic crowd wherever he went.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

Dimly lit, JIMMIE stands with his guitar before a microphone on a raised circular platform. A "simulated audience" is silhouetted

near the footlights, their backs to the theater audience. This "simulated audience" claps and cheers as a spot shines on JIMMIE.

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing, "Waiting For A Train".)

JIMMIE

ALL AROUND THE WATER TANK,
WAITING FOR A TRAIN,
A THOUSAND MILES AWAY FROM HOME,
SLEEPING IN THE RAIN.

I WALKED UP TO A BRAKEMAN,
JUST TO GIVE HIM A LINE OF TALK,
HE SAID, IF YOU'VE GOT MONEY,
I'LL SEE THAT YOU DON'T WALK.

I HAVEN'T GOT A NICKEL,
NOT A PENNY CAN I SHOW.
"GET OFF, GET OFF, YOU RAILROAD BUM."
AND HE SLAMMED THE BOXCAR DOOR.

----- YODELING -----

WELL, HE'D PUT ME OFF IN TEXAS,
A STATE I DEARLY LOVE.
WIDE, OPEN SPACE ALL AROUND ME,
THE MOON AND STARS ABOVE.

NOBODY SEEMS TO WANT ME,
OR LEND ME A HELPING HAND.
I'M ON MY WAY FROM FRISCO,
GOIN' BACK TO DIXIELAND.

MY POCKETBOOK IS EMPTY,
MY HEART IS FILLED WITH PAIN.
I'M A THOUSAND MILES AWAY FROM HOME,
JUST WAITING FOR A TRAIN.

----- YODELING -----

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

(The simulated audience cheers loudly,
clapping and whistling.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Aged Ralph sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

And so, things were going well, Jimmie kept recording new songs, including more of his very popular Blue Yodels, and we kept selling records all across the country, ... and beyond!

Occasionally, I'd push Jimmie to move out Of his comfort zone, step away from recording songs just by himself, and start working with other musicians and singers. Why, he even recorded a side or two with Sara Carter of the famous Carter Family.

Jimmie was easily outselling popular artists of the day such as Gene Austin and Fran Crummit, and as a result, it wasn't long before Jimmie became know as the toast of the entertainment crowd, right there in our nation's capital!

Once, Jimmie wrote me asking when he could record again. I wrote back to him, in a bit of a teasing way, paraphrasing one of his bigger hits, ... "Any time, Jimmie, ... any old time at all."

(AGED RALPH stands beside his desk and picks up the vased camellia, holding in front of his face as if it were a microphone.)

(The music begins to play and AGED RALPH starts to sing, "Any Old Time".)

WHEN I RECEIVED YOUR LETTER,
YOU WERE DOWN AND OUT YOU SAY.
AT FIRST I THOUGHT I WOULD TELL YOU,
JUST TO TRAVEL ON THE OTHER WAY.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

BUT IN MY MEMORY LINGERS,
ALL YOU ONCE WERE TO ME,
SO, I'M GONNA GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHANCE,
TO PROVE WHAT YOU CAN BE.

ANY OLD TIME,
YOU WANT TO SING ME A SONG,
JUST DROP ME A LINE,
AND SAY YOU WON'T BE LONG.

YOU'LL GET THE CHANCE,
TO PLAY THIS GAME FAIR,
BUT IF YOU KEEP ME WAITING,
YOU'LL NEVER GET A RIGHTFUL SHARE.

IF YOU SHOULD GET DOWN,
I'M GOING TO STICK BY YOU.
YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO SAY,
THAT YOUR ROAMING DAYS ARE THROUGH.

YOU'LL FIND ME HERE,
LIKE THE DAY YOU LEFT ME ALONE,
ANY OLD TIME,
YOU WANT TO COME BACK HOME.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE WITH LIGHT SOFT SHOE -----

IF YOU SHOULD GET DOWN,
I'M GOING TO STICK BY YOU.
YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO SAY,
THAT YOUR ROAMING DAYS ARE THROUGH.

AND YOU'LL FIND ME HERE,
LIKE THE DAY YOU LEFT ME ALONE,
ANY OLD TIME,
YOU WANT TO COME BACK HOME.

(AGED RALPH stops singing and the music ends.)

(AGED RALPH puts the vase down, straightens his tie, and returns to his chair.)

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

(chuckling)

Anyway, ... things kept getting better for Jimmie's musical career.

Here, just listen to a few of these reviews from across the country, ...

(AGED RALPH picks up a stack of folded newspapers from the desk and begins to read through them.)

San Angelo, Texas - Singing sensation, Jimmie Rodgers, America's Blue Yodeler, wowed the crowds at the Municipal Auditorium for two straight nights with a wide variety of exceptionally entertaining songs.

And this one, ...

Birmingham, Alabama - During a recent week-long engagement at the Ritz Theater, Victor recording star, Jimmie Rodgers headlined a wonderful show featuring several songs, dance and comedy. Rodgers' tunes alone were worth the price of admission.

And another, ...

Norman, Oklahoma - The Will Rogers Red Cross Benefit Tour visited the University of Oklahoma on February 3rd, to a packed house. Attendees were not only treated to America's favorite humorist, but also to the likes of renowned singing entertainer, Jimmie Rodgers. Also appearing was champion roper, Chester Beyers and world-famous aviator, Frank Hawkes.

Folks, the clippings and positive reviews just went on and on.

(AGED RALPH drops the stack of newspapers back on his desk.)

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

All during this time, I worked hard at trying to keep Jimmie and his music fresh. I tried different approaches and experimented with a variety of new and unique sounds.

LIGHT DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE stands on the same raised circular platform as before.

(The music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing, "In The Jailhouse Now".)

JIMMIE

I HAD A FRIEND NAMED RAMBLIN' BOB,
HE USED TO STEAL, GAMBLE AND ROB,
HE THOUGH HE WAS THE SMARTEST GUY AROUND.

WELL, I FOUND OUT LAST MONDAY,
THAT BOB GOT LOCKED UP SUNDAY,
THEY'VE GOT HIM IN THE JAILHOUSE WAY DOWNTOWN.

HE'S IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW.
HE'S IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW.
WELL, I TOLD HIM ONCE OR TWICE,
QUITE PLAYING CARDS AND SHOOTING DICE,
HE'S IN THE JAILHOUSE NOW.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

(AGED RALPH sits at his desk.)

AGED RALPH

And it's been well-proven in the music industry, over a number of years, there's always been a rather active market for novelty tunes. So, since everyone else was doing them, I figured why not, maybe we should try our hand at it as well.

LIGHT DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE stands on the same raised circular platform as before.

(The music begins to play and JIMMIE starts to sing, "Everybody Does It In Hawaii".)

JIMMIE

NOW, TALK ABOUT HAWAII,
I DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS SO GRAND.
I PICKED ME OUT A HULA, HULA GIRL,
BEFORE MY SHIP COULD LAND.
EVERYBODY DOES IT IN HAWAII.

NOW, SHE'S GOT IT HERE,
AND SHE'S GOT IT THERE.
HER LIPS ARE RED,
HER FEET ARE BARE.
SHE'S SHY ON CLOTHES,
BUT I DON'T CARE,
'CAUSE EVERYBODY DOES IT IN HAWAII.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

(AGED RALPH sits at his desk.)

AGED RALPH

And let me tell you, we worked hard to compete with some of the more popular ensemble singers, and all the show band crooners.

LIGHT DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE stands on the same raised circular platform as before.

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing,
"My Blue-Eyed Jane".)

JIMMIE

THE SWEETEST GIRL, IN THE WORLD,
IS MY BLUE-EYED JANE.
WE FELL IN LOVE, LIKE TURTLE DOVES,
WHILE THE MOON WAS SHINING DOWN.

I ASKED HER THEN, I ASKED HER WHEN,
THE WEDDING BELLS WOULD RING.
SHE SAID, "OH DEAR, IT SEEMS SO QUEER
THAT THIS COULD HAPPEN HERE."

YOU ARE MY LITTLE PAL,
AND I'VE NEVER KNOWN A SWEETER GAL,
MY BLUE-EYED JANE,
I LOVE YOU SO.

AND WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN,
AND THE SHADOWS CREEPING ALL OVER TOWN,
JUST MEET ME IN THE LANE,
MY BLUE-EYED JANE.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Hell, we even went and recorded a real jazzy tune,
out on the West Coast. That's when I brought in
some new sounds and some, ... well, ... a very
different kind of musician.

LIGHT DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

*JIMMIE stands on the same
raised platform as before.*

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing,
"Blue Yodel No. 9".)

JIMMIE

STANDING ON THE CORNER,
I DIDN'T MEAN NO HARM,
ALONG COME A POLICE,
HE TOOK ME BY THE ARM.

IT WAS DOWN IN MEMPHIS,
CORNER OF BEALE AND MAIN.
HE SAYS, "BIG BOY,
YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL ME YOUR NAME."

----- YODELING -----

I SAID, "YOU'LL FIND MY NAME,
ON THE TAIL OF MY SHIRT.
I'M A TENNESSEE HUSTLER,
I DON'T HAVE TO WORK."

LISTEN ALL YOU ROUNDERS
YOU BETTER LEAVE MY WOMAN ALONE.
'CAUSE I'LL DO WHAT I HAVE TO,
AND RUN ALL YOU ROUNDERS HOME.

----- YODELING -----

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

(AGED RALPH sits at his desk.)

AGED RALPH

You know, that recording actually featured a young colored boy by the name of Louis Armstrong. He played a pretty mean trumpet, ... don't you think? And if I do say so myself, it also seems like he ended up doing pretty well for himself after that.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

(beaming proudly)

Yep, he most certainly did!

Anyhow, ... the point is this, ... Jimmie was being very creative and he stayed quite busy. Some might say a bit too busy, but he knew what he was capable of. He knew his own strength and he knew his own energy level better than anyone else.

Or so we thought.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 11

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE lies in bed, a blanket pulled up to his chin. A dim light stands on a table at the far side of the bed. On the near side, another table stands with towels and a water basin. A second basin sits on the floor beside the bed. A medical bag sits on the foot of the bed.

(JIMMIE fades in and out of sleep.)

(CARRIE and the DOCTOR stand and talk in lowered voices.)

DOCTOR

Mrs. Rodgers? I meant it. If he doesn't start doing what he has to do, there's no telling how bad this disease will affect him.

So, that means rest. Lots of it. And a better climate. A dry one that will help his lungs breathe. I'm telling you, Mrs. Rodgers, this is serious business, ... deadly serious!

CARRIE

(tearfully)

I understand, Doctor, I really do, but you know him. He's just not an easy man to convince. It's like he's on some sort of a, ... I don't know, ... some sort of mission or something.

DOCTOR

Well, somehow, some way, you've got to find a solution. It's as simple as that, Mrs. Rodgers. I'll be in touch with you soon. Good day.

CARRIE

(meekly)

Yes, Doctor, ... I understand.

(The DOCTOR gathers his medical bag, turns and glances down at JIMMIE.)

DOCTOR

And may God bless your husband.

(The DOCTOR exist the room.)

CARRIE

Thank you, Doctor.

(CARRIE closes the door behind the DOCTOR and turns to look at JIMMIE. She walks over toward him and sits on the edge of his bed.)

(CARRIE watches JIMMIE quietly for a few moments and then reaches for a towel. She dips it into the water basin and rings it out, gently daubing his forehead.

See, Jimmie? You just need rest, that's all. The doctor says you'll be perfectly fine. He just told me so. But, it only works if you get more rest. He said that too. I know you'll get better, darling, I just know it.

(JIMMIE stirs and begins to waken, but starts to cough. Lightly at first, then more pronounced. Eventually he has to sit halfway up, leaning on one hand while his other hand covers his mouth in the midst of a violent coughing attack.

Breathe slowly, Jimmie. The doctor says it's the slow breathing that will help most.

(JIMMIE's chest begins to spasm as she hands him a clean, bunched up towel. Carrie then reaches for the floor basin and holds it under his chin.)

(JIMMIE coughs long and hard into the towel. As the most violent coughing occurs, spots of

[MORE]

red begin to seep through the towel, onto his hand in down into the basin.)

CARRIE (cont'd)

(sobbing)

Oh, Jimmie! Dear, God, ... please help him. Please, God, ... please help us all!

THE LIGHTS GO BLACK

CURTAIN FALLS

END OF ACT I

ACT II

CURTAIN RISES

The same bedroom is dimly lite and staged as it was at the close of Act I.

SCENE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE lies in bed, propped up on a series of pillows with his eyes closed. There a numerous spots of red on the upper portion of the bed coverings and the uppermost pillow.

As JIMMIE slowly turns his head and opens his eyes, a dim spot focused on his face, which appears drawn and gray. He simply "looks old and haggard", with hardly a sign of energy.

(The music begins with a beat reminiscent of a New Orleans funeral march and JIMMIE starts to sing, "T.B. Blues".)

JIMMIE

(feebly)

MY GOOD GAL'S TRYING,
TO MAKE A FOOL OUT OF ME.
MY GAL'S SURE TRYING,
TO MAKE A FOOL OUT OF ME.
TRYING TO MAKE ME THINK,
I AINT GOT THAT OLD T.B.
I GOT THE T.B. BLUES.

WHEN IT RAINED DOWN SORROW,
IT RAINED ALL OVER ME.
WHEN IT RAINED DOWN SORROW,
IT RAINED ALL OVER ME.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

MY BODY IT RATTLES,
LIKE A TRAIN ON THAT OLD S.P.
I GOT THE T.B. BLUES.

----- WEAK HUMMING/YODELING INTERLUDE -----

I'VE BEEN FIGHTIN' LIKE A LION,
LOOKS LIKE I'M GOIN' TO LOSE.
I'VE BEEN FIGHTIN' LIKE A LION,
LOOKS LIKE I'M A-GOIN' TO LOSE.
'CAUSE THERE AIN'T NOBODY EVER,
WHIPPED THEM OL' T.B. BLUES.
I GOT THE T.B. BLUES.

GEE, BUT THAT GRAVEYARD,
IT SURE IS A LONESOME PLACE.
YEAH, THAT OL' GRAVEYARD,
SURELY IS A LONESOME PLACE.
THEY PUT YOU DOWN ON YOUR BACK,
AND POUR THAT DIRT ALL OVER YOUR FACE.
I GOT THE T.B. BLUES.

(JIMMIE stops singing, rolls his head back
and begins to sleep.)

(The "funeral march music" continues on with
a deliberately long fade out.)

LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY TO BLACK

SCENE 2

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

Once again, AGED RALPH sits at his desk, which is arranged as it was at the close of ACT I.

AGED RALPH

Now folks, this may seem difficult to understand, but believe me when I tell you, Jimmie Rodgers was a very lucky man. More fortunate than most, in fact. And that's because he was surrounded by so many people who loved him. People he loved back in return, as well.

Jimmie's wife, Carrie, and his daughter, Anita, they loved him for sure.

Before he took to the railroads, Jimmie's Aunt Dora helped raise him. She adored Jimmie and he loved her deeply.

The one man Jimmie may have loved most was his father, Aaron W. Rodgers. He was a soft-spoken railroad man who did his very best to keep a young Jimmie on the "straight and narrow", especially after Jimmie's mother had died.

Jimmie often talked about his father and visited him as frequently as possible.

Did I ever tell you he made a short film for Columbia Picture back in 1929? Jimmie, I mean, ... not his father. And yes, he most certainly did, right here in Camden as a matter of fact.

And as the years passed, lots of folks would say that innovative movie short was likely the the very first country music video ever made. Yes sir, they certainly did say that.

Anyway, ... Jimmie was quite adamant about one song

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

which simply had to be included in that short film. It was a special tune he'd written with his sister-in-law, Elsie McWilliams, ... a song they wrote together, especially for Jimmie's father.

(AGED RALPH rolls his chair out to the corner of his desk and leans out toward the theater audience.)

(The music begins and AGED RALPH starts to sing, "Daddy And Home".)

I AM DREAMING TONIGHT OF AN OLD SOUTHERN TOWN,
AND THE BEST FRIEND THAT I EVER HAD.
FOR I'VE GROWN SO WEARY OF ROAMING AROUND,
AND I'M GOING HOME TO MY DAD.

YOUR HAIR HAS TURNED TO SILVER,
AND I KNOW YOU'RE FAILING TOO.
DADDY, DEAR OL' DADDY,
I'M COMING BACK TO YOU.

YOU MADE MY CHILDHOOD HAPPY,
BUT STILL, I LONGED TO ROAM.
I'VE HAD MY WAY, BUT NOW I'LL SAY,
I LONG FOR YOU AND FOR HOME.

----- SHORT MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(AGED RALPH stands up beside his desk and continues to sing.)

DEAR DADDY, YOU SHARED ALL MY SORROWS AND JOYS,
YOU TRIED HARD TO BRING ME UP RIGHT.
I KNOW YOU'LL STILL BE ONE OF THE BOYS,
I'M STARTING BACK HOME TONIGHT.

YOUR HAIR HAS TURNED TO SILVER,
AND I KNOW YOU'RE FAILING TOO.
DADDY, DEAR OL' DADDY,
I'M COMING BACK TO YOU.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

YOU MADE MY CHILDHOOD HAPPY,
BUT STILL, I LONGED TO ROAM.
I'VE HAD MY WAY, BUT NOW I'LL SAY,
I LONG FOR YOU AND FOR HOME.

I'VE HAD MY WAY, BUT NOW I'LL SAY,
I LONG FOR YOU AND FOR HOME.

(AGED RALPH stops singing and the music ends.)

(AGED RALPH sits back in his chair, and ponders for a moment or two.)

Now, it wasn't long before Jimmie began to follow his doctor's order. He did rest a bit. He enjoyed nearly three months of quiet time, if I recall. That's when he decided he needed to go visit his father.

And when Jimmie got back from that visit, well, ... he had another surprise for Carrie and Anita.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

CARRIE and an eight-year-old ANITA are sitting on the porch of their home, waiting for JIMMIE to return from the train station.

(CARRIE sits on a bench, reading, while ANITA sits on the floor practicing Cat's Cradle with some yarn.)

(ANITA is the first to see the offstage cab pull up. She drops her yarn and jumps to her feet.)

ANITA

Mama!

[MORE]

(The sound of a cab door closing is heard from offstage.)

ANITA (cont'd)

(pointing offstage)

Mama, he's here. Daddy's home!

(JIMMIE enters carrying a stylish suitcase and walks briskly toward the porch. ANITA runs to him and wraps her arms around his waist.)

Daddy! I missed you so much!

JIMMIE

Well, if that isn't just the biggest coincidence of all, because guess what? I missed you too, little girl.

(JIMMIE puts his suitcase down, picks up ANITA and gives her a return hug. As he lowers ANITA back to the ground, JIMMIE steps up onto the porch and gives CARRIE a tender kiss on the cheek.)

And, how's my big girl been? Everything fine?

CARRIE

Absolutely, Jimmie. And what about your father? Is he well? Was it a good visit? Are you okay?

JIMMIE

(grinning)

A perfect visit is what it was. He's fine and so am I, Mother. I tell you Carrie, I sure have missed that old man. It was good medicine for me to see him. Good medicine for him as well, I expect.

And, ... we talked about a lot of things.

(JIMMIE glances at ANITA and then hesitates.)

(Understanding her husband well, CARRIE turns

toward ANITA)

CARRIE

Anita, dear, please go set the table for dinner. I think your daddy would like to eat real soon.

(ANITA looks to CARRIE and then to JIMMIE, hoping for an option other than leaving the porch.)

(JIMMIE smiles and rubs his belly in an exaggerated fashion.)

JIMMIE

Yes, Mother, I certainly would. So, be a good girl now, Anita, and do as your Mama asks.

(ANITA slowly walks toward the door, sullenly hanging her head.)

ANITA

Alright, ... I'm going, ... But, I sure hope I get to hear some music later, Daddy. Will I?

JIMMIE

Heck, I'd be downright surprised if you didn't, little girl. Yes, I'd be quite surprised.

(ANITA enters the house, gently closing the screen door behind her.)

(CARRIE senses JIMMIE has something to say, so she moves over on the bench, giving him room to sit down.)

CARRIE

What is it, Jimmie?

(JIMMIE smiles at CARRIE and rests a hand on her knee.)

JIMMIE

Well, ... Daddy and myself, we talked quite a bit

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

about lots of things. The family, my music, my health, and, ... well, we both talked about growin' older.

(CARRIE tenderly covers JIMMIE's hand with her own.)

And you know, Mother, it just seems to me I really need to be makin' some good decisions about some important things. Things about me, and you, and Anita, ... things that will be best for all of us, for a long time to come.

CARRIE

(cautiously)

What kind of things, Jimmie? I know you well enough, and so I know you've probably already made these decisions. So, what are they? Just tell me, please? What is it you've decided?

JIMMIE

(grinning)

Well, ... I've decided, ... we're movin' on, ... to Texas! So, throw your things together, kid, we'll be headin' outa here real soon.

CARRIE

What? Oh, Jimmie, ... Texas? Why so far away? Our families will be lost without us, and I'll be lost without them. Oh, ... and your father, Jimmie, what about him? What will he ever do?

JIMMIE

Now, now, ... he'll be fine. Heck, Carrie, it was my daddy that helped me figure this all out.

C'mon now, girl, you know I've always loved Texas, and besides, the weather will be better for me there. Oh, and the country, Carrie, that part of the country is just so doggone pretty.

So, cheer up, Mother, you'll love it there. And so will Anita. I know you both will love it.

(CARRIE's unable to hold back her smile, and wraps her arms around JIMMIE's neck.)

CARRIE

Oh, Jimmie, I don't need to cheer up none. Why, in some ways, this couldn't be any happier news for me, I suppose. I mean, I'm thrilled we'll finally be able to take care of you properly, ... and in Texas? I'm sure we'll get you feeling much better, ... of that I'm positive.

JIMMIE

Probably so, Mother, it certainly should do that. They say Texas is kinda like God's medicine for the ol' T.B., especially when the air's nice and dry and the cactus blooms. I know you're gonna love it there, Carrie, heck, ... we're all gonna love it there!

(JIMMIE takes CARRIE's hands into his and holds them up high. Their hands "dance" as the music starts. JIMMIE THEN places her hands in her lap and he begins to sing, "When The Cactus Is In Bloom".)

WELL, THE CATTLE PROWL AND THE COYOTES HOWL,
OUT ON THE GREAT DIVIDE.
NEVER DONE NO WRONG, A-SINGING MY SONG,
AS DOWN THE TRAIL I RIDE.

THE RATTLESNAKES RATTLE AT THE PRAIRIE DOGS,
YOU CAN HEAR THAT MOURNFUL TUNE.
IT'S ROUND-UP TIME, A-WAY OUT WEST,
WHEN THE CACTUS IS IN BLOOM.

----- YODELING -----

DAYLIGHT COMES AND THE COWHANDS YELL,
THEY CALL OUT EV'RY MAN.
I THROW MY SADDLE ON MY OLD COW HORSE,
AND DRINK MY COFFEE FROM A CAN.

THE SUN GOES DOWN ON THE CATTLE TRAIL,
I'M A-GAZIN' AT THE MOON.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

IT'S ROUND-UP TIME, A-WAY OUT WEST,
WHEN THE CACTUS IS IN BLOOM.

(CARRIE get up to dance lightly around the stage.)

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(CARRIE returns to JIMMIE and kneels down
beside him.)

WE DON'T GET MUCH COLD WEATHER,
EVEN THOUGH IT SOMETIMES RAINS.
THE SUN IT SHINE, MOST OF THE TIME,
OUT ON THE WESTERN PLAINS.

SOME OF THE BOYS HAVE GONE AWAY,
BUT THEY'LL ALL BE BACK HERE SOON.
'CAUSE IT'S ROUND-UP TIME, A-WAY OUT WEST,
WHEN THE CACTUS IS IN BLOOM.

----- YODELING -----

DAYLIGHT COMES AND THE COWHANDS YELL,
THEY CALL OUT EV'RY MAN.
I THROW MY SADDLE ON MY OLD COW HORSE,
DRINKIN' COFFEE FROM A CAN.

THE SUN GOES DOWN ON THE CATTLE TRAIL,
I'M A-GAZIN' AT THE MOON.
IT'S ROUND-UP TIME, A-WAY OUT WEST,
WHEN THE CACTUS IS IN BLOOM.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

ANITA

(offstage)

I heard that!

(pausing)

Thank you, Daddy!

(JIMMIE grins as CARRIE lovingly rests her
head on JIMMIE's knee.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 3

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

It was the summer of 1929 when Jimmie made the decision to move his family to Kerrville, Texas, ... a move they made just months before the stock market crashed and the entire country fell into what's now become known as The Great Depression.

The main reason Jimmie picked Kerrville was because it was home to one of the most famous tuberculosis centers in the nation, the Thompson Sanatorium, founded in 1917 by Dr. Sam Thompson. Jimmie figured that if was good enough for Dr. Thompson, it was certainly good enough for him.

Within just a couple weeks of moving, and then leasing a short-term place to stay, Jimmie made a bold, public announcement. He happily told the world he was going to build a brand-new home for his family and become a full-time, permanent resident of Kerrville.

He intended to call his new home, the "Blue Yodeler's Paradise," and was going to be built for a reported cost of nearly \$20,000, - a monstrous amount for those days when you realize fancy new homes back then typically cost less than \$4,000.

Some time later, I scheduled a major recording session for Jimmie in Dallas. The declining economic conditions had already started to make times tough for everyone, ... all across the country, ... and Jimmie's record sales, ... well, they'd already begun to suffer drastically.

Still, I figured Jimmie's popularity could "weather the storm" and overcome such obstacles. After all, lots of folks were still buying

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

records. They still craved entertainment. They just couldn't afford to buy as many records as before. So, I put a plan in place to make sure the public would want to buy his.

Just as his Dallas sessions were about to begin, I made it a point to stop by and visit Jimmie in his brand new home.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

CARRIE and JIMMIE sit in a rather fashionable living room.

ANITA sits reading at a small table.

(A knock is heard at the door.)

ANITA

It's him, he's here! I'll get it.

(ANITA springs from her seat and rises to the door. As she opens it, YOUNG RALPH enters while hiding something behind his back.)

(JIMMIE and CARRIE both stand.)

YOUNG RALPH

Well, hello there, young lady. And who might you be?

ANITA

Mr. Peer! It's me, Anita!

YOUNG RALPH

(feigning astonishment)

What? That's impossible. I know Anita. Why, she's just a little thing, barely big enough to stand up past my knees.

ANITA

(with hands on hips)
Mr. Peer, ... I'm a big girl now!

(YOUNG RALPH pulls a doll from behind his back and hands it to ANITA.)

YOUNG RALPH

Well, I hope you haven't grown too big for this.

ANITA

(with a grown-up attitude)
I most certainly have not!
(beaming)
Thank you, Mr. Peer, I love her!

(ANITA stands on tippy toes to give YOUNG RALPH a big hug.)

Mama? Can I go play with her? Please?

CARRIE

(*smiling*)
Certainly, dear.

(ANITA scurries offstage.)

(YOUNG RALPH laughs aloud, while JIMMIE chuckles and CARRIE smiles.)

(YOUNG RALPH walks over to CARRIE and she greets him with a kiss on the cheek.)

(JIMMIE reaches out to shake YOUNG RALPH's hand.)

(The three of them take seats.)

YOUNG RALPH

Well, Jimmie all ready for next week?

JIMMIE

I sure am, Ralph. I've got me some real dandies all lined up for you.

YOUNG RALPH

Great, Jimmie, that's great. I've arranged for the Burke Brothers to join us. I'm hoping to get some new sounds behind you. Generate some new appeal Give the audience what they want, you know?

(JIMMIE nods.)

CARRIE

Can I get you a cool drink, Mr. Peer? Some nice lemonade perhaps?

YOUNG RALPH

That sounds wonderful, Carrie, thank you.

(CARRIE gets up and heads offstage.)

JIMMIE

Yep, absolutely, Ralph, let's give 'em what they want. In fact, that's exactly why I wrote another Blue Yodel.

YOUNG RALPH

Excellent! So, tell me, Jimmie, how are you feeling?

JIMMIE

Me? Heck, I'm doin' just fine. This Texas weather has been a blessin'. A pure blessin', I say.

(JIMMIE gets up, does a turn-around and a little skip-jump, peeking back over his shoulder, as if to prove to YOUNG RALPH he's feeling just fine.

Want to hear one of the new tunes?

YOUNG RALPH

Sure, Jimmie. You know I always like to hear what's coming my way.

JIMMIE

Well, this is another one me and Elsie wrote back

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

some time ago. I've just been waitin' for the chance to fit it on in.

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing, "Mississippi Moon".)

I'VE HEARD ALL ABOUT THE TUNE,
THAT'S CALLED THE ALABAMA MOON,
BUT THE MISSISSIPPI MOON IS JUST AS BRIGHT.
AND I CAN'T FORGET THE TIME,
WHEN I ASKED YOU TO BE MINE,
FOR THE MOON WAS SHINING ON THAT HAPPY NIGHT.

AND YOU PROMISED ME THEN,
YOU WOULD WED ME IN JUNE,
WHAT'S WHY I LOVE THE MISSISSIPPI MOON.

OH, THE MISSISSIPPI MOON,
IS SMILING DOWN TONIGHT,
AND LOVE JUST SEEMS TO FILL THE AIR.
THE WHIPPOORWILLS ARE FLITTING
IN ITS MELLOW LIGHT,
AND CALLING TO THE LOVERS THERE.

LET US STROLL ONCE AGAIN,
DOWN THAT DEAR OLD LOVER'S LANE,
WHERE NATURE SEEMS TO SOFTLY CROON.
OUR HEARTS WILL BE SO LIGHT,
AS WE WANDER THERE TONIGHT,
UNDERNEATH THE MISSISSIPPI MOON.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(Just as the interlude begins, CARRIE enters with a tray of drinks. YOUNG RALPH takes the tray from CARRIE, places it on a small table, and begins to dance with her until the interlude ends. They then stand side-by-side watching JIMMIE sing.)

MANY YEARS HAVE COME AND GONE,
SINCE I MET YOU THERE ALONE,
BUT TONIGHT, I'M THINKING JUST AS MUCH OF YOU.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

AS I DID, WHEN HAND-IN-HAND,
WE WANDERED IN THAT MAGIC LAND,
WHERE WE GAVE OUR PLEDGE TO LOVE EACH OTHER TRUE.
COME AND GO BACK WITH ME,
TO THAT SPOT IN MEMORY,
JUST TO SEE AGAIN, THAT MISSISSIPPI MOON.

(CARRIE crosses over to JIMMIE who puts his arm around her. CARRIE and JIMMIE sing together.)

JIMMIE & CARRIE

OH, THE MISSISSIPPI MOON,
IS SMILING DOWN TONIGHT,
AND LOVE JUST SEEMS TO FILL THE AIR.
THE WHIPPOORWILLS ARE FLITTING
IN ITS MELLOW LIGHT,
AND CALLING TO THE LOVERS THERE.

LET US STROLL ONCE AGAIN,
DOWN THAT DEAR OLD LOVER'S LANE,
WHERE NATURE SEEMS TO SOFTLY CROON.
OUR HEARTS WILL BE SO LIGHT,
AS WE WANDER THERE TONIGHT,
UNDERNEATH THE MISSISSIPPI MOON.

(JIMMIE and CARRIE stop singing and the music ends.)

YOUNG RALPH

(clapping)

Bravo! Very good, Jimmie. And you too, Carrie. I really enjoyed that one.

JIMMIE

Thanks, Ralph. I'm glad you like it.

(YOUNG RALPH bows to CARRIE with a grin.)

YOUNG RALPH

And thank you, young lady, for such a pleasurable dance.

(CARRIE playfully curtsies.)

CARRIE

Oh, no, thank you kind sir.

(JIMMIE, CARRIE and YOUNG RALPH all chuckle.)

YOUNG RALPH

You know, Jimmie, you should make sure to use that one on your next tour. The crowds will love it.

(JIMMIE nods.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 4

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

And, as you might imagine, that's exactly what Jimmie did. He played that song and so many more of his other hits.

I don't think there was ever a song Jimmie was ashamed of. He was always so proud of each and every one.

Now, during the next several months, Jimmie toured quite a bit, but mostly around Texas. San Antonio, Jacksonville, Longview and Lufkin, ... places like that.

They weren't what you'd call big events, but they were always sold-out shows.

He'd play in local clubs and halls, cafes and cabarets, theaters, whatever, ... Jimmie would play them all.

Why? Because no matter where he was, Jimmie Rodgers loved the attention of an enthusiastic audience, which is exactly what he always found.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

On a dimly-lit stage, a "crowd" is standing around a more highly elevated platform than the one used in ACT 1, upon which JIMMIE stands patiently before a microphone with his guitar.

The crowd "cheers" loudly as a spot begins to shine on JIMMIE.

JIMMIE

Well, thank you folks, thank you. Thank you all very much. I'm sure glad you liked that one.

(More "cheering" and "clapping".)

(Finally, JIMMIE has to hold up his hands to quiet the crowd. Smiling broadly, he waits for quiet, which eventually comes.)

Thank you. Now then, this next one is a real favorite of mine. It reminds me of a dear, sweet friend I used to know back in Mississippi, and I hope you enjoy hearing it.

Fact is, I'm guessin' you probably will, because, ... well, ... I think we've all had one of those dear old pals we just can't see to forget, don't you think?

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing, "My Old Pal".)

I'M THINKING OF YOU, TONIGHT, OLD PAL,
AND WISHING THAT YOU WERE HERE.
I'M DREAMING OF THE TIME,
AND THE DAYS GONE BY,
WHEN YOU FILLED MY HEART WITH CHEER.

I REMEMBER THE NIGHTS, WHEN ALL ALONE,
WE SANG, "SWEET ADELINE".
NO OTHER FACE CAN TAKE YOUR PLACE,
IN MY HEART, OLD PAL OF MINE.

NOW, THE OLD PALS ARE ALWAYS THE BEST, YOU SEE,
NEW FRIENDS YOU CAN FIND EV'RY DAY.
BUT THEY CAN'T FILL THE PLACES, OR EVER BE,
LIKE THE OLD PALS OF YESTERDAY.

----- YODELING -----

I'M WOND'RING JUST WHERE YOU ARE TONIGHT,
AND IF YOU EVER THINK OF ME.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

IT WOULD MAKE MY WEARY HEART,
SO LIGHT, SWEETHEART,
YOU FACE, AGAIN TO SEE.

BUT IN MY CHECKERED LIFE I FIND,
NOTHING COMES RIGHT, IT SEEMS.
STILL, YOU'LL ALWAYS BE A PAL OF MINE,
THOUGH IT MAY ONLY BE IN DREAMS.

----- YODELING -----

THE OLD PALS ARE ALWAYS THE BEST, YOU SEE,
NEW FRIENDS YOU CAN FIND EV'RY DAY.
BUT THEY CAN'T FILL THE PLACES, OR EVER BE,
LIKE THE OLD PALS OF YESTERDAY.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

(The "stage audience" bursts into
enthusiastic applause.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 5

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

And so, ... Jimmie kept right on doing that dangerous balancing act of his, ... a couple weeks of touring, followed by a couple months of rest and recuperation.

Whenever he started feeling better, he'd begin planning his next tour. And when he was too tired to tour, he'd quit for a while and head back home.

By this time though, home was in San Antonio.

Between sluggish record sales and the cost of addressing Jimmie's health, to everyone's dismay, the "Blue Yodeler's Paradise" had to be sold. Times were tough for everyone, even for "The Singing Brakeman".

In between Jimmie's tours, Carrie began to make her feelings known. She'd lecture her husband about his responsibilities as a father and husband. She'd remind him he had no right to jeopardize everything for which they'd both worked so long.

Now, Carrie wasn't trying to be a nag, but she'd simply run out of ways to get Jimmie's attention. Nothing else seemed work anymore, so she had to resort to the most unfair of wifely techniques, ... she started to badger him.

Of course, everyone knew how much she loved him.

She loved him so much that she was willing to put herself in the most uncomfortable of positions, ... one where Jimmie might actually begin to despise her.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

Those were just some of thoughts crossing Carrie's mind when Jimmie was hospitalized in early 1933 with an advanced case of pneumonia. It kept him in bed for almost two full months.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE lies in bed, the covers up to his chin, a cold cloth on his forehead. His eyes are closed as he appears to be asleep.

A matronly MRS. BEDELL, dressed in a classic nursing uniform, sits in a bedside chair, reading a book.

A side table stands next to JIMMIE's bed. On the table are a lamp, a small school bell and a telephone.

A second table holds several towels and a water basin.

An oxygen tank is tied to the foot of the bed, with a face mask dangling from its top.

(CARRIE quietly enters the room.)

(JIMMIE flicks one eye open but then quickly shuts it again. Neither CARRIE nor MRS. BEDELL seem to have noticed.)

(Both women speak in very low voices.)

CARRIE

Cora? Is he sleeping?

MRS. BEDELL

On and off, Ma'am, yes.

(CARRIE walks to the front of the bed and examines the oxygen tank.)

CARRIE

What's wrong with the oxygen? Have we run out again?

MRS. BEDELL

No, Mrs. Rodgers. He just wouldn't have any part of it. I'd put it on and he'd just tear it off again. The struggling alone was taxing his breathing so much I just felt he's be better off without it for a while.

CARRIE

(thinking)

Alright, ... I suppose so.

(pause)

I have lunch all prepared, Cora, ... downstairs in the kitchen. Would you like to join us for a bite?

(MRS. BEDELL glances over at JIMMIE.)

MRS. BEDELL

Well, ... I suppose it would be alright. I mean, he does have his bell if he needs me, so I guess it would be alright, ... okay, ... yes, Ma'am, thank you. I'd like that very much.

(MRS. BEDELL stands and lays her book on the chair. She and CARRIE exit the room quietly, leaving the door open just a tiny bit as they exit.)

(With the door is nearly closed, JIMMIE turns his head, opening one eye to verify he's actually alone. He sits up just a bit, leans toward the table and grabs the telephone. He dials a number and waits.)

JIMMIE

(quietly)

Hello, is he in?

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

Jimmie Rodgers. ...

Thanks. ...

Ralph, it's Jimmie. ...

I'm doin' great, how about you? ...

Wonderful. ...

(JIMMIE glances toward the door and refocuses his attention to the phone call.)

Ralph, I wanted to finalize our plans for next month. ...

I don't know, ten, maybe twelve, I'm really not sure. ...

Great, I'll be there by the 15th. ...

Yes, the Taft. ...

No, not this time. A nice cruise out of Galveston would be better. It's the perfect time of year to enjoy the ocean. ...

Thanks, Ralph. My best to your family. ...

You too. Bye, now.

(JIMMIE hangs up the phone and ponders a bit. He coughs mildly a couple times, stares off into the space and sighs.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 6

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Now folks, let me make one thing perfectly clear. Ralph S. Peer is nobody's fool. I want each and every one of you to fully understand that I knew exactly what was going on.

And Jimmie Rodgers? Well, he was no country bumpkin either.

He was smart enough to know his contract was coming up for renewal at the end of May.

He also knew his records weren't selling all that well and Victor still had fourteen sides already recorded that hadn't even been released yet.

So, I'm guessing, in Jimmie's mind, it all added up to a very weak position for him to negotiate a new contract, ... that is, if he'd even be given a new contract.

Still, I could sense Jimmie was hungry to record again. Now, whether that was because his contract was expiring, or a simple, but more immediate need for cash, ... a need to provide for his family, ... at the time I had no way of knowing. Even today, I'm still not completely sure.

LIGHTS DOWN STAGE 1

LIGHT UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE stands beside a writing desk in the household living room, staring out a window.

CARRIE sits on the sofa folding laundry.

JIMMIE

Mother?

(Hearing no reply, JIMMIE turns toward CARRIE.)

Mother?

CARRIE

Yes, Jimmie?

JIMMIE

I'm going to New York

CARRIE

(in shock)
What???

JIMMIE

(curtly)
I need to finish up my recordings for this year's contract. It's as simple as that. And then, I need to work with Ralph on the terms for next year's contract.

CARRIE

Jimmie, you're in no condition to be traveling all the way to New York City. Why, you've barely been out of bed for two weeks now. And besides, you know my brother needs my help right here in Texas. He can't possibly care for himself, and we surely can't put him up in any hospital while we go all that way up north. We just can't afford it.

JIMMIE

Nope, you're right. I know that. That's why you won't be goin' to New York, Carrie, just me.

CARRIE

Absolutely not!

JIMMIE

It's done, girl. I've made up my mind.

CARRIE

Jimmie, you're in no condition. You need care. You need attention. You still need your oxygen at times.

JIMMIE

I'll be fine. No matter, they have plenty of doctors up in New York if I need one.

CARRIE

And how do you expect to get there? You can't even drive to Dallas, let alone all the way to New York City.

JIMMIE

I'm goin' by ship. Sailin' out of Galveston in the mornin'.

(CARRIE works hard to fight back her tears.)

CARRIE

No, Jimmie, ... please, ... no.

JIMMIE

(firmly)

I said, it's done.

CARRIE

(dejectedly)

At least take Mrs. Bedell with you, at least do that much for me, won't you? Please, do it for me, ... and do it for Anita? Please, Jimmie?

(JIMMIE pauses long enough to quell his growing anger.)

JIMMIE

Fine. I'll take her along, but it's a complete waste of our money and a total waste of her time. I certainly hope you understand that.

(JIMMIE storms out of the room as CARRIE begins to sob.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 7

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Now, in those days, things weren't the very best between Jimmie and Carrie, but they weren't the worst either.

Sure, money was tight and Jimmie's health was unpredictable. Record sales were on the dismal side and the country's economy was still in one hell of a mess.

Life in general was just one challenge after another, even for the family of America's beloved, "Blue Yodeler".

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

In the same living room as the previous scene, CARRIE sits on the sofa, comforting ANITA.

CARRIE

I told you already, Anita, time and time again, all day long, ... they had to leave this morning. Trust me, he'll be back before you know it.

ANITA

(tearfully)

But, he didn't even say goodbye, Mama!

CARRIE

Yes, he did, sweetheart. He came up to your room, early this morning, even before the sun came up. He gave you a big hug and a wonderful kiss. I saw him. He did it while you were still sleeping. You know your daddy would never, ever leave

[MORE]

CARRIE (cont'd)

without saying goodbye. So, please, no more of this. It's getting late and you need to be in bed. Go wash up and put on your pajamas. I'll come tuck you in shortly.

(ANITA slowly sulks offstage as CARRIE sits at her writing desk, staring out the window.)

(The music begins and CARRIE starts to sing, "Roll Along, Kentucky Moon".)

WHERE'S THAT OLD MOON OF KENTUCKY?
THERE'S SOMEBODY LONESOME AND BLUE,
WITH NOTHING IT SEEMS,
BUT HEARTACHES AND DREAMS,
SENDING THIS MESSAGE TO YOU.

DAY IS DONE, AND HERE AM I,
ALONE AND YOU KNOW WHY.
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.
SHED A RAY OF SILV'RY LIGHT,
ON ONE I LOVE TONIGHT,
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.

YOU WERE WATCHING ON HIGH,
AS HE WHISPERED GOODBYE.
'T WAS A PARTING THEN ENDED TOO SOON.
SO, WHEREVER YOU MAY BE,
PLEASE, SEND HIM BACK TO ME,
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.

AT DAWNING KIND FOLKS WILL COME CHEER ME,
BUT THIS HOUR BRINGS SORROW ANEW,
AND NIGHT FINDS ME HERE,
THE WORLD, SAD AND DREAR,
SENDING THIS MESSAGE TO YOU.

DAY IS DONE, AND HERE AM I,
ALONE AND YOU KNOW WHY.
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.
SHED A RAY OF SILV'RY LIGHT,
ON ONE I LOVE TONIGHT,
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.

[MORE]

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

CARRIE (cont'd)

AT DAWNING KIND FOLKS WILL COME CHEER ME,
BUT THIS HOUR BRINGS SORROW ANEW,
AND NIGHT FINDS ME HERE,
THE WORLD, SAD AND DREAR,
SENDING THIS MESSAGE TO YOU.

DAY IS DONE, AND HERE AM I,
ALONE AND YOU KNOW WHY.
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.
SHED A RAY OF SILV'RY LIGHT,
ON ONE I LOVE TONIGHT,
ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.

ROLL ALONG, ROLL ALONG, KENTUCKY MOON.

KENTUCKY MOON.

(CARRIE stops singing and the music ends as
she rests her head down on the desk.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 8

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

Well, Jimmie, as always, was a man of his word. The S.S. Mohawk pulled into New York harbor on Maybe 14th, and Jimmie was at my office the very next morning.

I must admit, I was absolutely stunned when he arrived. He looked ten years older than when I saw him last and he appeared more drawn and more sickly than ever.

I told him I wasn't going to record a single note until he got at least a couple days rest. So, I sent him back to his room at the Taft Hotel. In fact, I had one of my office boys, a trustworthy fellow named Castro, standing by on call, twenty-four hours a day.

Jimmie had told me he'd brought his nurse along, but I was pretty she wasn't going to be the type to gather up whiskey or whatnot if needed, ... that's the kind of thing Castro could certainly help with.

Jimmie had no choice but to follow my orders. He knew who he worked for.

On Tuesday, the 17th, we started recording. After two long and strenuous days, we'd managed to record just seven sides.

Looking back, it's a wonder he was able to record at all. As we found out later, his chest was constantly fill with pain, his lungs nearly torn to shreds, and his body was barely surviving under a deepening stupor of heavy medication.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

By the end of the second day, Jimmie was so weak he had to be half-carried to a cab in order to get him back to his hotel.

Now, I had need to be out of town for a bit, so my staff, bless them all, they stalled Jimmie off from any more recording until Saturday. But even with that extra rest, he was only able to complete two more sides that entire day.

Everyone insisted he'd have to take even more time off if he still wanted to record. Without much of an argument, he agreed.

Remember, I told you before I felt Jimmie was a pretty smart fellow. I still believe that to this day.

He most certainly knew what was going on. He had to have known how sick he was. He had to have realized what was coming, ... what could easily happen to him very soon.

Possibly as a way to take his mind off things, Jimmie schedule a short trip up into New England. He wanted to take some time and enjoy the pleasant Cape Cod weather.

So, accompanied by his nurse, Mrs. Bedell, Jimmie baked a bit in the sun and enjoyed the ocean view, all with the hope of gaining back some of his strength.

It also gave him time to do a bit of thinking.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

JIMMIE sits in a period-style wheelchair by the beach, decked out in some lightweight street cloths and a straw hat. The sun is just beginning to set.

The gentle crash of the waves and an occasional seagull would break the silence. A folded blanket rests across his lap.

MRS BEDELL rolls JIMMIE into a position so he can better view the sunset and then takes her place behind the wheelchair.

MRS. BEDELL

There, is that better, Mr. Rodgers? Can you even begin to believe that gorgeous sunset? This was certainly worth the trip, I'd say.

(lightly shivering)

Although, it does seem it might soon get a bit chillier.

(MRS. BEDELL walks around to the side of the wheelchair and spreads the blanket out across JIMMIE's lap and down over his legs.)

(JIMMIE says nothing. He simply waves her off with a weak hand gesture as MRS. BEDELL returns to her position behind the wheelchair.)

(The music begins and JIMMIE starts to sing, "Miss The Mississippi and You".)

JIMMIE

(mournfully)

I'M GROWING TIRED OF THE BIG CITY LIGHTS,
TIRED OF THE GLAMOUR AND TIRED OF THE SIGHTS.
IN ALL OF MY DREAMS I AM ROAMING ONCE MORE,
BACK TO MY HOME ON THE OLD RIVER SHORE.

I AM SAD AND WEARY, FAR AWAY FROM HOME,
MISS THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU, DEAR,
DAYS ARE DARK AND DREARY, EVERYWHERE I ROAM,
MISS THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU.

ROLLING THE WIDE WORLD OVER,

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

ALWAYS ALONE AND BLUE, SO BLUE.
NOTHING SEEMS TO CHEER ME, UNDER HEAVEN'S DOME,
MISS THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU.

----- BRIEF YODELING -----

----- MUSCAL INTERLUDE -----

(MRS. BEDELL gracefully dances about the stage, stopping and returning to her place behind JIMMIE, just as the interlude ends.)

ROLLING THE WIDE WORLD OVER,
ALWAYS ALONE AND BLUE, SO BLUE.
LONGING FOR MY HOMELAND, MUDDY WATERS SHORE,
MISS THE MISSISSIPPI AND YOU.

----- BRIEF YODELING -----

MISSISSIPPI AND YOU

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 9

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH is sitting at his desk, talking on the phone, seemingly unaware of the theater audience.

AGED RALPH

Hello, Mrs. Washburn? ...

This is Ralph Peer., ...

Well, I'm President of the American Camellia Society. ...

Yes, Ma'am, that Ralph Peer. ...

I'm happy to be speaking with you too. ...

Well, Mrs. Washburn, I wanted to congratulate you on your award. ...

Yes, Ma'am, yours was the very best of this year's entries. ...

Absolutely, yes, the pinks were simply vivid beyond prescription, I agree, ...

(AGED RALPH suddenly becomes aware of the theater audience.)

Oh, ... I'm sorry, Mrs. Washburn, I have to go right now, but I'll call back shortly. ...

Yes, Ma'am, I will. Goodbye.

(AGED RALPH hangs up the phone and refocuses his attention on the audience.)

My apologies, folks, I'm really very sorry.

Alright now, ... where was I, ... oh, yes, ...

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

So, when Jimmie and Mrs. Bedell returned to the city, I had Castro check in on Jimmie and he reported back that all seemed to going fairly well. At least as well as could be expected.

As a result, we started recording again on Wednesday, May 24th, and surprisingly, Jimmie arrived at the studio with a certain degree of energy.

He seemed calm and composed, and we managed to cut six sides that day.

The session began with a broad variety of songs including, "The Yodeling Ranger", Mississippi Delta Blue", and a very sweet ballad called, "Old Love Letters".

By mid-afternoon we'd finished five of the six songs, including one of my favorites, "Somewhere Down Below The Dixon Line".

After that recording was finished, Jimmie decided to take a well-deserved rest and retired to a makeshift cot that was set up for him right there in the recording studio.

Anything we could do to make things easier for Jimmie. It seems that was one of our primary purposes that day.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

With the same lighting and set arrangement on STAGE 2 as found in ACT 1, SCENE 1, JIMMIE lies covered on a cot, partially hidden by drapes. The ENGINEER is seated at his table.

(JIMMIE slowly wakes from a rather light sleep and sits up, swinging his legs over the

side of the cot. He takes a deep breath, opens the drapes and stares over at the ENGINEER.)

JIMMIE

Okay, ... I think it's time.

(JIMMIE stands, walks toward the stuffed chair and nudges it aside with his hip. He raises up the microphone on its stand and picks up his guitar off the chair.)

We ready?

ENGINEER

On your cue, Jimmie.

(JIMMIE nods his head toward offstage. The music begins and JIMMIE starts to yodel, then begins to sing, "Years Ago" while strumming his guitar, with what appears to be a renewed sense of confidence.)

JIMMIE

----- YODELING -----

I WAS HAPPY, OH, SO HAPPY,
DOWN IN MISSISSIPPI WAY.
I WAS LIVIN', WITH MY PAPPY,
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO TODAY.

WHEN I LEFT HIM, IN THE GLOAMIN',
I RECALL I HEARD HIM SAY,
YOU'LL BE SORRY, THAT YOU'RE ROAMIN',
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO TODAY.

----- YODELING -----

MET A SLICKER, FROM THE CITY,
AND HE LED MY LIFE ASTRAY.
HOW HE FOOLED ME, WAS A PITY,
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO TODAY.

[MORE]

JIMMIE (cont'd)

HE SAID I COULD, MAKE A FORTUNE,
IF I DID AS HE WOULD SAY.
BUT WE ENDED, UP IN PRISON
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO TODAY

----- YODELING -----

NOW I'M SITTIN', BY MY OWN SOME,
FOR MY ERRORS I MUST PAY.
I RECALL I, WASN'T LONESOME,
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO TODAY.

----- YODELING -----

(JIMMIE stops singing, hanging his head low
as the music ends.)

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 2

SCENE 10

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

(long pause)

And that my friends, ... that was the last recording ever made by Jimmie Rodgers.

Damned, if he wasn't a strong soul, ... rising up from his sickbed, pushing aside that chair, and standing up so straight and tall as he recorded the final song of his short, but brilliant career.

I tell you, folks, it's certainly not something I could have ever done. No sir, ... not by a long shot.

Jimmie ended his recording career the same way it began, ... a simple man with a haunting voice, accompanied by nothing more than the strumming of a few simple guitar chords.

In a pure and unpretentious way, it truly was a fitting end.

Before leaving New York, Jimmie had made plans to do a bit of gift shopping, which he did. He'd also made plans to relax a bit at Coney Island's beach, which he also did.

Following that visit to Coney Island, Jimmie experienced some walking difficulties on his return trip to the hotel. He actually needed physical assistance just to make it to his room. He knew he needed to rest.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 2

In a dimly lit room, JIMMIE sits on the edge of a bed, while his hands

grip the mattress side for support. JIMMIE studies the floor as the music begins and he starts to sing "Down The Old Road To Home", quite mournfully.

JIMMIE

DEAR, I'M THINKING OF YOU,
WHILE HERE ALL ALONE,
I'M WISHING AND LONGING,
FOR YOU AND FOR HOME.
AND I'D GIVE THIS WHOLE WORLD,
IF I COULD ONLY SAY,
I'M CLIMBING THAT HILL, HEADED YOUR WAY.

WITH A TROUBLED MIND,
AND A HEART FILLED WITH PAIN,
I'VE SEARCHED THE WORLD OVER,
FOR FORTUNE AND FAME.
BUT, I'M LONGING TO BE,
WITH YOU ONCE AGAIN,
SO WE COULD STROLL DOWN,
OLD MEM'RY LANE.

THERE'S A LITTLE RED HOUSE,
ON TOP OF A HILL,
NOT VERY FAR FROM,
AN OLD SYRUP MILL.
I'M SO LONESOME AND BLUE,
FOR SOME PLACE TO ROAM,
AND I WISH IT COULD BE,
DOWN THE OLD ROAD TO HOME.

YES, I'M LONESOME AND BLUE,
FOR SOME PLACE TO ROAM,
HOW I WISH IT COULD BE,
DOWN THE OLD ROAD TO HOME.

(JIMMIE stops singing and the music ends.)

(After a brief pause, JIMMIE turns to lie down on the bed, but before he can do so, he begins to cough, ... mildly at first, but then, it turns much more aggressively.)

(As the lights begin to slowly go down,
JIMMIE's cough grows event more intense.)

(The coughing continues for several seconds,
even after STAGE 2 goes black, but then,
mercifully, the coughing abruptly stops.)

PERUSAL SCRIPT
Production Use Not Allowed

SCENE 11

LIGHTS UP ON STAGE 1

AGED RALPH sits at his desk.

AGED RALPH

(reverently)

And that was the end, ... such a sad and lonely death for such a kind and elegant man.

Jimmie Rodgers died when he was just thirty-five years old, yet, he had a most powerful influence on all aspects of American music, which in reality, began that very first day back in Bristol Tennessee.

In just seventeen studio sessions, held in nine different cities, James Charles Rodgers created on-hundred and ten memorable recordings.

His overall impact on the world of music cannot possibly be calculated.

Since his death in 1933, the accolades Jimmie has received seem almost unimaginable, ... just listen to this, ...

(AGED RALPH picks up a sheet of paper from his desk and begins to read proudly.)

In 1961, Jimmie Rodgers was part of the inaugural inductee class to the Country Music Hall of Fame.

In 1970, he was inducted to both the Songwriters Hall of Fame and the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame.

In 1978, the U.S. Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp featuring Jimmie Rodgers as the first of its honorees in their Performing Arts Series.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

In 1985, the Grammy Hall of Fame Award was presented in Jimmie's name for his song, "Blue Yodel", most often remembered as, "T For Texas".

In 1986, Jimmie was inducted as a Founding Father into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 1987 he was presented the W.C. Handy Award by the Memphis Blues Foundation.

In 1993, Jimmie was inducted to the Alabama Music Hall of Fame and presented with the John Orr Pioneer Award.

In 1997 he was honored with the American Music Masters award by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

In 2007, Jimmie was recognized as the first recipient outside the Mississippi Delta with a Mississippi Blues Trail Marker.

Also in 2007, the Grammy Hall of Fame Award was presented for Jimmie's song, "In The Jailhouse Now".

In 2009, Jimmie Rodgers was honored with the inaugural star on the Mississippi Walk of Fame.

In 2010, a marker on the Mississippi Country Music Trail was erected near his grave site.

In 2011, Folk Alliance International honored Jimmie with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

In 2013, A North Carolina historical marker was dedicated on Haywood Street in Asheville, North Carolina.

In 2014, Jimmie was honored with the President's Award by the Americana Music Association.

[MORE]

AGED RALPH (cont'd)

G In 2017, The Recording Academy, overseers of the rammys, voted to recognize Jimmie Rodgers with its Lifetime Achievement Award.

And, in 2023, Jimmie was inducted to the Mississippi Songwriters Hall Of Fame.

Above and beyond these, and other, significant honors and awards, the inscription found on Jimmie's Country Music Hall of Fame induction plaque probably sums up his career best, ... it reads as follows:

"The name of Jimmie Rodgers stands foremost in the country music field, ... as the man who started it all."

The night Jimmie died, I had the sad duty of contacting Carrie, and I was charged by her with the task of making the necessary arrangements for the transportation of Jimmie's body.

It was Carrie's wish, and only fitting, that he be returned home to Meridian, Mississippi.

And so, a special baggage car was added to the Southern's Washington-New Orleans run. Jimmie's pearl-gray casket, covered in lilies, rode on a raised platform in the very center of that bunting-draped car.

Thousands upon thousands of fans lined the tracks all along the mighty Southern's route. Hundreds more were waiting in the dark of night as the train pulled into Meridian's Union Station.

Three days later, James Charles Rodgers was permanently laid to rest in Meridian's Oak Grove Cemetery.

LIGHTS DOWN ON STAGE 1

SCENE 12

The entire stage is black and empty.

Each of the cast members, except for JIMMIE are dressed completely in black.

As they enter, each of them, except for JIMMIE carry a single, long-stemmed white rose, as if holding a funeral procession candle.

(CARRIE stands alone at center STAGE 2.)

(As the music begins, a spot slowly rises on CARRIE and she starts to sing, "The Train Carrying Jimmie Rodgers Home". The spot widens appropriately as others join her on stage.)

CARRIE

COME ALONG, MY DEAR,
THE TIME IS DRAWING NEAR,
WE'LL HAVE TO WALK OUT,
WHERE THE FIELD IS OVERGROWN.
CONSUMPTION HAS CLAIMED HIS LIFE,
AND WE DARE NO MISS THE SIGHT,
OF THAT TRAIN CARRYING JIMMIE RODGERS HOME.

WELL, WE'VE HAD SOME HARD TIMES,
THE LAST FEW YEARS,
LOST OUR HOME, ALMOST LOST OUR SPIRIT TOO.
BUT, IT'S THE STRANGEST THING,
WHEN THAT MAN BEGAN TO SING,
WELL, WE KNEW, WE KNEW SOMEHOW,
WE'D MAKE IT THROUGH.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(The ENGINEER/DOCTOR and MRS. BEDELL enter from the sides and stand with CARRIE. They sing together.)

CARRIE, ENGINEER/DOCTOR, & MRS. BEDELL

WELL, I CAN HEAR THAT WHISTLE BLOW,
THAT OLD TRAIN IS ROLLIN' SLOW,
SOUNDS LIKE IT'S CRYIN'
FOR THE SINGIN' BRAKEMAN, TOO.
BACK TO THE SUNNY SOUTH HE'LL GO,
AND HE'LL NEVER ROAM NO MORE,
HERE COMES THAT TRAIN,
OH, HOLD ME CLOSE, SWEETHEART DEAR

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(CARRIE gently sways in place to the music.)

(The ENGINEER/DOCTOR and MRS. BEDELL make room as AGED RALPH, YOUNG RALPH and ANITA enter from the sides to stand with CARRIE.)

(ANITA waits patiently for CARRIE to begin singing. As she does, CARRIE extends her hand to ANITA and ANITA moves in next to CARRIE.)

CARRIE

COME HERE, MY LITTLE GIRL,
AND LOOK UPON YOUR WORLD.
YOU'LL REMEMBER THESE WORDS,
WHEN YOU ARE GROWN.
HOW YOUR MAMA LOVED YOUR DAD,
SO PROUD, BUT OH, SO SAD,
WATCHIN' THAT TRAIN,
CARRYING JIMMIE RODGERS HOME.

----- MUSICAL INTERLUDE -----

(JIMMIE, dressed completely in white, enters from the rear, wearing a white cowboy hat and carrying an all-white guitar. JIMMIE uses both hands to hold the guitar by its neck, as a priest might carry a processional cross.)

(The ENGINEER/DOCTOR, MRS. BEDELL, AGED RALPH and YOUNG RALPH make room so CARRIE and ANITA can open a space for JIMMIE to stand between them. JIMMIE does not sing.)

ALL BUT JIMMIE

WELL, I CAN HEAR THAT WHISTLE BLOW,
THAT OLD TRAIN IS ROLLIN' SLOW,
SOUNDS LIKE IT'S CRYIN'
FOR THE SINGIN' BRAKEMAN, TOO.
BACK TO THE SUNNY SOUTH HE'LL GO,
AND HE'LL NEVER ROAM NO MORE,
HERE COMES THAT TRAIN,
CARRYING JIMMIE RODGERS HOME.

(The singing stops.)

(CARRIE yodels hauntingly.)

(CARRIE stops yodeling and the music ends.)

LIGHTS GO BLACK

THE FINAL CURTAIN FALLS