

MILLION DOLLAR QUARTET

Written by

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Based on the stage musical "Million Dollar Quartet"

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1 ESTABLISH. APARTMENT BLDG - NIGHT 1

Superimpose: Lauderdale Courts, 1950s Memphis.

2 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT 2

Arthur Crudup's "That's Alright Mama" plays on a battered Philco. ELVIS PRESLEY (16) on his bed in an under-vest, holds a guitar, soaks up the music, figuring out the chords.

Parents arguing, Elvis turns up the radio to drown them out.

Mother GLADYS (38), walks in, places her hand over the neck of the guitar rendering it silent.

GLADYS PRESLEY

"For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!"
That music, pum'kin. It gits people hopped up the wrong way. I seen it.

ELVIS

Awww, momma, ain't nuthin' but a diddy ol' song.

VERNON (O.S.)

...if I got half the attention you give Elvis... Y'know what, goddamn it all!

Gladys looks at her perfect creation then walks out.

3 EXT. APARTMENT ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS 3

Door slams... Elvis scampers out the window with his guitar.

Perched on the roof, he sees Vern push Gladys aside, then drive off. Gladys charges after the car. Cries.

Elvis, under the stars, helpless, furious, quietly serenades Gladys with "That's All Right, Mama."

4 EXT. SHANTY TOWN, MEMPHIS - NIGHT 4

A late 1940s Buick sputters in an all black neighborhood. BECKY PHILLIPS (25), nervous, tense, turns to her husband SAM PHILLIPS (28), Energetic, Dreamer...

BECKY

What are we going to do if we run out of gas HERE?

SAM PHILLIPS
 (charming/calming)
 I will then surely walk to a
 fillin' station and fill 'er up.

BECKY
 In this neighborhood?! I told you
 we should have filled up back at
 the Flying A.

Sam slows the car down at a roadhouse.

SAM PHILLIPS
 Hey, hun, look. Dewey Phillips.

BECKY
 Some kin of yours?

Sign: A white man holds 78 RPM records in both hands: DEWEY
 PHILLIPS--MIDNIGHT RAMBLE--TOPS IN R&B--BEST BBQ--EVERY
 SATURDAY NIGHT.

The music from the club is intoxicating to Sam.

SAM PHILLIPS
 Ain't no tellin'. *Cashbox* just done
 a big write-up on him. When he
 jumps on a record, man, get outta
 the way... C'mon!

Sam jumps out of the car, leads them into the club. Afraid,
 Becky drags their son KNOX(6), following Sam inside...

DEWEY PHILLIPS (PRELAP)
 (hillbilly speed rap)
 Oh, yassur good people. It's Daddy-
 O Phillips. Hottest cotton pickin'
 thang in the country.

5 INT. ROADHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

5

The Saturday crowd's HOT, chanting, banging table tops.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS
 Daddy-O, Daddy-O

DEWEY PHILLIPS (30s), white hipster, at the microphone, a
 blues combo sets up on stage...

DEWEY PHILLIPS
 Awright, listen up, I got me a new
 sponsor. Daz detergent. (waves box)
 "Daz duz it."

DRUNK AUDIENCE MEMBER

Daz duz it!

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Man, there's someone jes' washed
out his drawers. Must be the
weekend. Sure hope Daz Duz it,
'cause their competitor, Fug Soap's
slogan's gonna be "If Daz Dudn't Do
It -

(pause)

Then Fug It."

Audience roars with laughter. Becky, horrified, sees Knox
laughing without understanding the joke.

A loud screech... Sam to the rescue jumps on stage, adjusting
the mic, eliminating the feedback. Becky tears a napkin to
make earplugs for herself and Knox.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Man, we got us an e-lec-trician in
the house.

Sam's family, the only white people, attract stares.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

You saved our hearin', cuz. What
little we got left.

(Looks around)

You ain't from 'round here.

The audience howls... The band starts a vamp.

SAM PHILLIPS

Naw, we loaded outta Nashville this
morning ta open up a studio.
Memphis Recording Service.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

What's yer name?

SAM PHILLIPS

Sam Phillips. This is my wife --

DEWEY PHILLIPS

--Phillips! Man, I knew I liked
you. D'ya reckon we're related?

SAM PHILLIPS

Hell, I got kissin' cousins all
'cross north Alabama.

Drummer slaps a rimshot. The audience titters...

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Tell us all 'bout this studio
a'yours.

SAM PHILLIPS

We gonna record personal discs for
anyone crazy to know how good they
sound. Three ninety eight and you
walk right home with it.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Do I get my money back if I sound
like a durn ee-jit?

Another rim shot... The audience laughs.

SAM PHILLIPS

Hah! And I got portable equipment.
We record anything, anywhere,
anytime... Weddings, funerals...

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Make sure they pay you upfront on
the funerals, man!

A rimshot with bass drum kick.

Becky loudly whispers to Sam over the music. The band stops,
so the entire club hears her yell,

BECKY

We need to GO!

Mortified, Becky drags out a reluctant Sam and Knox.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Don't be skeered, L'il Lady! If you
here, you family. Take it away
fellas!

The band wails "Catfish Blues."

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

It's Red Hot and Blue on WHBQ.
Ever' weeknight eight 'til
midnight. Ever' Saturday night I'm
right here... 'til the PO-lice
comes.

A rotund COLONEL PARKER (40s), huckster, Bible in hand,
waddles quickly, knocks on MRS. LEWIS' (70s) door.

PARKER

Howdydo, Good day. I'm looking for Mr. Ronald Lewis.

MRS. LEWIS

Mister Lewis is--

PARKER

--I spoke to him just last week. He said I could catch him at home... You see, we were both military men. He served in the Great War. France, I believe...? I myself was wounded. Shrapnel, Normandy Beach. He--

MRS. LEWIS

--He passed on...

PARKER

Oh my goodness gracious! My name's Colonel Tom Parker. I told Mr. Lewis that since VE Day I've been called to serve Our Maker as a purveyor of hand-embossed Bibles and, fine man that he was, he was good enough to order one from me.

MRS. LEWIS

He didn't mention... anything...

PARKER

Please excuse my intrusion. I had no idea of his recent passing. I just now drove down from Nashville especially to see him. He asked me to place this complimentary bookmark at his favorite verse.
(Hands bible, turns to go)
Please accept my condolences.

MRS. LEWIS

Did he, did he pay you already?

PARKER

(slowly turns back)
No, ma'am. I trusted him implicitly.

MRS. LEWIS

How much--?

PARKER

(unctuously)

It's the ten dollar Bible because it's pure 18-karat gold leaf. He insisted on the 18-karat. But, ma'am, in light of your bereavement, eight dollars covers most of my cost.

Mrs. Lewis goes inside, returns with her purse, counts out eight dollars, some of it in change. She chokes up.

MRS. LEWIS

Perhaps he knew...

PARKER

"Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death." No truer words, ma'am. No truer words. Bless you.

The Colonel returns to his car, checking off his list.

7

INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - DAY

7

Energy fills the studio. A band sets up, the players tune up, plug in...

Amidst the commotion, Sam bursts in, dragging patch cords and speaker tubes. He rearranges piles of acoustic tiles.

SAM PHILLIPS

I tested it all last night. I think we're good.

In the control booth, Phillips' assistant, MARION KEISKER (33), smart, pretty, resourceful, hits the talkback button.

MARION

Hey fellas. Whose dime we on this beautiful morning?

BAND LEADER

Arkansas Rural Electric. They got us on sixteen stations, so we'll need sixteen copies and a spare.

The band plays an energetic warm-up tune.

SAM PHILLIPS

You guys sittin' on ready?

The leader hands a page from his guitar case to Phillips.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Marion, hit that red button on
count of three, will ya?
One, two, three.

(reads copy)

The Arkansas Rural Electrification
Project. Nature's Power Harnessed
for You-- proudly presents the
Skunk Hollow Boys. This goes out
with a special howdy to all our
sick and shut-in friends. Now take
it away, fellas, and have a blessed
morning, everyone.

The Band plays "Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy"

8

INT. CONTROL ROOM - INTERCUT

8

Sam pops in front of the console adjusting input levels, his
enthusiasm wanes, contrasted by Marion's ebullience.

MARION

Isn't this exciting? Our inaugural
session!

SAM PHILLIPS

Who'd a'thought I'd come from
Nashville and my first job would be
hillbilly music? Third rate
hillbilly music, in fact.

MARION

You're too hard on them. Don't be a
sourpuss.

SAM PHILLIPS

(sarcastic)

They say music tempts women. Are
you tempted? Is this doin' it for
you, Marion?

Song ends. Band leader rushes to the control room.

BAND LEADER

Whaddya think, mistuh Phillips?

SAM PHILLIPS

Uh yeah, good job, son. You'll make
folks mighty glad they got e-lec-
tricity!

BAND LEADER

D'ya reckon you might could use us
on some sessions?

SAM PHILLIPS

Uh--

Marion tears a sheet off the invoice pad.

MARION

--We'll have those seventeen discs
ready for you tomorrow. So bring a
check for sixty-eight dollars for
the discs and eleven for studio
time. That's seventy-nine.

BAND LEADER

Yes, ma'am. I'll be here just as
soon as I git off work.

The band exits... Marion locks the door, turns, unbuttoning
her blouse.

SAM PHILLIPS

God, Marion, we said if you joined
me here, it would be business. We'd
leave what happened in Nashville
behind...

(resisting her seduction)

Sometimes I think you got more
faith in me than I do.

Marion adjusts the tilt on the venetian blinds, pulls her
skirt up to her waist...

MARION

It's a little more than faith, Sam.

9

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET, MISSISSIPPI - DAY

9

Middle class homes and manicured lawns.

Parked, the Colonel circles a name in an obituaries column,
pulls a Bible from a box full, embosses the name on it, walks
to the front door, knocks.

PARKER

Ma'am, is Mr. Johnson home? It's
Colonel Parker calling for him.

MRS. JOHNSON

Did he owe you money or somethin'?

PARKER

No ma'am. He ordered this specially embossed Bible from me. You see--

MRS. JOHNSON

--We got three Bibles sittin' around here, and if they was waitin' on Elwood, they'd have an inch of dust on 'em. Lemme see.

(puts on granny glasses)

You got his name out the goddamn paper. They spelled it ELM-WOOD and you spelled it just the same.

PARKER

Ma'am, allow me...

MRS. JOHNSON

I'm gonna git my gun and if you ain't outta my yard by then, you grave-robbin' son-of-a-bitch, I'm gonna shoot your lard-ass.

Colonel retreats briskly, Bible sailing past his head.

10 EXT. RAILROAD JUNCTION. MEMPHIS ARKANSAS BRIDGE - DAY. 10

Elvis, in jeans and t-shirt, races down the road riding an Indian motorcycle, girlfriend DIXIE (16) arms wrapped around his waist.

DIXIE

Slow down! I'll fall off!

ELVIS

Hold on tighter then. Tighter!

Enjoying the squeeze, Elvis zips up onto a railroad track, the bike bouncing as it drives over the wood ties.

DIXIE

(Laughing/screaming)

You're crazy!

Elvis pulls over, shuts off engine. Dixie jumps off, playfully punches Elvis on the arm, chest.

ELVIS

(twirls Dixie)

Close your eyes. I brought you to my secret spot.

Railroad tracks stretch east and west to the horizon.

ELVIS (CONT'D)

They stretch all the way to the Atlantic AND the Pacific... Ever wonder what's out there?

DIXIE

(punching Elvis again)
You some kind of hipster now? You readin' that 'Catcher in the Rye' trash?

ELVIS

Why people always scared of somethin' new? New way a thinkin's all it is...

DIXIE

(Reprimanding)
It's banned.

ELVIS

(Chuckling)
You know I don't read that stuff...
(Gets on bike)
Pick a direction... We'll follow the tracks 'til we end up in an ocean... Let's go!

DIXIE

Take me home for supper.

ELVIS

New York, Hollywood... There's a whole wild world waitin'... Let's do somethin' with our lives.

Dixie nervous, unsure if he's serious... Elvis revs bike.

ELVIS (CONT'D)

Aintcha' comin'?

DIXIE

ELVIS AARON PRESLEY! You get back here right this minute!

Elvis skids to a stop, looks back smiling.

SAM PHILLIPS

Listen up... Keep your ears open.
See if anything moves ya...

Sam and Marion hustle down a busy sidewalk, unconcerned it's primarily all Black... Sam, excited, focuses on all the different music emanating from various clubs and diners.

MARION

I know you love your boy, but, Sam,
I truly believe we were destined to
be together. This sounds so--

SAM PHILLIPS

--Now, Marion, we said we'd leave
it in the past. We didn't. God
knows we didn't. I promised Becky a
fresh start if she'd get behind the
studio. She's done everything I
asked of her. I cannot now go to
her and say, "I'm leavin' you."
(hears music)
Man, that band sounds HOT!

12

INT. BBQ JOINT - CONTINUOUS

12

JOE HILL LOUIS (25), wearing ill-fitting clothes, is a one-man-band: Electric guitar, bass drum with a kick pedal and harmonica around his neck.

SAM PHILLIPS

Holy cow, Marion, wont'cha look at
that!

Joe's throwing himself into his performance.

MARION

That's a lot of music from one man.

Heads turn, anxious, as the white couple walk in.

SAM PHILLIPS

Why y'all actin' surprised? We jes'
came to listen to music.

MARION

Those pork sandwiches do smell
good.

SAM PHILLIPS

(checking coins in pocket)
We're gonna hafta split one.
Waiter, gimme one of them, plenty a
red sauce.

MARION

Sam... I don't know how much longer we can continue like this.

SAM PHILLIPS

(distracted)

Like what?

Joe finishes, empties his kitty. Sam walks over.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Man, that was a hell of a set. Walkin' by, I coulda sworn I heard a four-piece in here.

JOE HILL LOUIS

Thank you, suh. Glad you enjoyed it.

SAM PHILLIPS

What's your name?

JOE HILL LOUIS

Joe Hill Louis. Buts they call me the Be-Bop Boy.

SAM PHILLIPS

Sam Phillips. I got a recordin' set-up, corner of Union and Marshall. How'd you like to come by, see if we can't get somethin' down on you.

JOE HILL LOUIS

Yes suh, but first, I gotta gets me somethin' to eat.

(leans into Phillips)

That's how I git paid here.

As Marion tucks a napkin into her blouse, Sam intercepts her pork sandwich, hands it to Joe, drops the change.

SAM PHILLIPS

Eat this, Be-Bop. We gonna make us some records.

13

INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - NIGHT

13

Marion cuts the crust on Wonder Bread then spreads mayo on Oscar Meyer bologna and Velveeta Cheese sandwiches.

Joe Hill runs down a few licks. Sam adjusts the levels.

JOE HILL LOUIS
 Mistuh Phillips. Folks really go
 for that "Chattanooga Shoe Shine
 Boy."

SAM PHILLIPS
 It's bin did. Tell ya what, gimme
 somethin' I ain't never heard.

JOE HILL LOUIS
 (apprehensive)
 You wanna booty-shaker?

SAM PHILLIPS
 Yeah, man, gimme a booty shaker!

Joe Hill plays "Gotta Let You Go." Sam is galvanized!

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)
 Wo, wo, fella, I gotta git this
 down! Marion, call Becky, tell her
 I'm gonna be late. Real late.
 This is it, Marion! By God, this is
 it!

Marion watches calmly, eating her sandwich, sipping BubbleUp.

MARION
 What's he singing about?

SAM PHILLIPS
 It ain't about the damn words!

MARION
 There's no melody, either.

SAM PHILLIPS
 Damn right there's no melody. He's
 jus' throwin' down!

JOE HILL LOUIS
 (finishes song)
 You like that didja?

SAM PHILLIPS
 Damn right I liked it. Lemme see
 what I can get goin' here.

Joe packs up his guitar and leaves...

MARION
 That's what you're looking for,
 isn't it, babe?
 (arms around Sam)
 (MORE)

MARION (CONT'D)

Hey, why don't you go visit that Dewey fella? See if ya can get the song on the radio.

SAM PHILLIPS

That's a good idea.
(pulls Marion closer)
But I got a better one.

Sam kisses Marion. They undress each other.

14 INT. STUDIO - MORNING 14

Shafts of light. Eyes pop open! Frantically, Sam disentangles himself from Marion, pulls his pants on, wipes lipstick smudges, tumbles to the door, grabbing an acetate on the way out.

15 EXT. RANCH STYLE HOUSE. FRONT PORCH. EARLY MORNING 15

SAM drives up, strips down to his boxers and socks.

A PAPERBOY, on his bicycle tossing the morning paper, curiously watches Sam.

PAPERBOY

Um? Mornin' Mr. Phillips.

16 INT. PHILLIPS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 16

Sam quietly sneaks onto the couch as Becky comes in.

BECKY

Have you been out all night?

SAM PHILLIPS

(pretending to sleep)
No No. Just didn't wanna wake ya.

BECKY

You know, the doctor told you to take it easy, or you could have another... episode.

Sam puts the acetate on the record player in the TV console.

SAM PHILLIPS

(energetic, enthused)
Wait til you hear what we got!

The doorbell rings...

BECKY

Knox, Mrs. Patrick's here. Time for school. Come on, quick!

Sam dances to the record, Knox joins him.

SAM PHILLIPS

THIS is what's gonna get me right.

Door bell rings again. Becky opens the door. Mrs. Patrick taken aback, stares at Sam dancing in his underwear.

BECKY

(embarrassed)

Don't keep Mrs. Patrick waiting.

KNOX

Bye, daddy.

SAM PHILLIPS

(dancing wildly)

Mornin' Mrs. Patrick. Lovely day!

Becky, mortified, closes the door.

BECKY

It's... lively. It's very lively.

SAM PHILLIPS

It's jumpin' outta the damn grooves, Becks!

BECKY

Don't swear, there's no need...

SAM PHILLIPS

When this kid started playing, I swear I heard the heavens open up.

BECKY

Was he singing spirituals?

SAM PHILLIPS

Hah! No! He was singing about his girlfriend, whuppin' her ass and goin' to jail...

Disheartened, Sam sees Becky doesn't get it, stops the music.

BECKY

We have to talk about Vacation Bible School. They fill up--

SAM PHILLIPS

--No, goddamn no! THIS

(waving record)

is what I wanna talk about, today,
tomorrow, the rest of my life. Make
this music, find some way to sell
it. Trust to God, I can make us
some kinda livin' at it. I want a
better life for you and Knox.

BECKY

We had a good living in Nashville!

Sam grabs a vial from his pants, dry-swallows pills, stomps
off to the bedroom and slams the door!

Becky is upset with herself for not being supportive.

17

EXT. RAY CASH'S FARM, DYESS, ARKANSAS - DAY

17

A truck pulls into a farmyard, a black family gets out, JED
(50s), bank agent, nails a "SOLD" sign to a post.

RAY CASH

Hey, Jed, c'm here.

Seething, RAY CASH (50s), with a bull whip, marches over,
accompanied by his son JOHNNY (19).

JED

Mornin', Mr. Cash.

RAY CASH

Them people tenantin' or ownin'?

JED

They bought it offa the bank.

RAY CASH

Whaddya mean, bought it? There
wasn't meant to be no colored here.
You damn well know that.

BANK AGENT

You coulda bought it. It's been on
offer for two years near 'bout.

Ray grabs Jed by the lapels.

RAY CASH

I ain't got no two thousand
dollars. But that ain't the point.

JED

I dunno what to tell you. Bank
don't see black and white so much
as green.

Johnny breaks his father's grip on Jed.

JOHNNY CASH

Daddy! Them folks got a right to
make a livin' here same as anyone.

RAY CASH

You ain't got a goddamn lick of
sense, Johnny Boy. One nigger comes
in, then...

(waves around him)

...gonna be worth less ever' year.

JOHNNY CASH

It ain't worth less 'cause you got
Negroes movin' in. It's 'cause it's
played out.

RAY CASH

If Jack was here--

JOHNNY CASH

--He'd be livin' any place but
here, I'd betcha that!

RAY CASH

He'd still BE livin' if you bin
with him as you was s'posed to be.
Instead of fishin' and singin' your
damn fool life away.

Johnny grabs his father and now Jed intervenes.

BANK AGENT

Don't make me call the law.

Ray cracks his whip... The black family, Johnny and Jed are
frozen in a standstill. Tension fills the air.

Disgusted, Ray walks away.

COLONEL PARKER (PRELAP)

C'mon folks! You seen grandmaw
dance when she's had her a belt,
but you ain't never seen dancin'
ducks! No way...no how.

18

EXT. CARNEY MIDWAY, ALABAMA - NIGHT

18

Lights, crowd, music... people playing carney games... A crowd of rubes gather. The Colonel collects admissions.

A sign: "Colonel Parker's Dancing Ducks."

COLONEL PARKER
(collects admissions)
Five cents gets you somethin'
you're gonna talk about the rest of
your life! Alabama ain't seen
nuthin' like this. You shoot 'em,
you eat 'em, you chase 'em round
the yard, you seen 'em floatin'
'round the pond, but you ain't
never seen 'em dance.

The Colonel winds a spring-operated Birch victrola, the ducks begin to dance... The spring breaks on the phonograph, the music slurs to a halt... The crowd gets restless.

RUBE #1
I want muh damn money back.

EDDY ARNOLD (25) walks by, sees what's happening, plays a brisk melody on his guitar... ducks dance. Crowd loves it.

COLONEL PARKER
Tell your friends!

As the crowd exits, Colonel Parker turns to Eddy.

COLONEL PARKER (CONT'D)
You saved the Colonel's ass, son.

EDDY ARNOLD
Bin wonderin', how d'ya get them
ducks to dance?

Crowd gone, the Colonel brushes straw off the mini boxing ring revealing a hot plate making the straw catch on fire.

COLONEL PARKER
If it gets TOO hot, I got dinner!

They laugh. The Colonel hands Eddy a few nickels.

EDDY ARNOLD
Colonel, I just signed with RCA
Victor. I sure could use a good
front man.

COLONEL PARKER

I think the Colonel would be interested. In fact, I'll tell you what. When you drive into town, you'll see your face on every lamp pole, you'll hear every drunk singing your song, and you'll have the best looking hooker waitin' on you at the hotel.

EDDY ARNOLD

(shakes hands)

Man, that sounds like a deal!

19 INT. CHURCH, FERRIDAY, LOUISIANA - DAY

19

An empty church. JERRY LEE LEWIS (16) and his cousin, JIMMY LEE SWAGGART (16), sneak in through an open window.

Chasing each other, Swaggart jumps on the lectern.

JIMMY LEE SWAGGART

I'm just a messenger, just a voice, tellin' you what God ... LISTEN TO ME NOW, tellin' you what GOD! has told me.

Jerry Lee, at the piano, accompanies him with a boogie riff of "My God Is Real."

JIMMY LEE SWAGGART (CONT'D)

Leave the loose women alone, leave the dancehalls alone, touch not thyself, Jerry Lee Lewis. Above all, leave that sinful music alone--

20 EXT. CHURCH - INTERCUT

20

Drawn by the music, Preacher (60s) cuts a hickory switch.

JERRY LEE LEWIS (SINGING)

-- Swaggart, man, you're so damn full of it. You can preach it, you can teach it. But Jerry Lee can sing it and Jerry Lee can play it--

PREACHER (O.S.)

--What in God's name are you two heathens doing here?

Standing in the doorway is the Preacher. Nonplussed, Jerry Lee finishes with a glissando.

JERRY LEE LEWIS
 Tryin' to bring a poor sinner -
 (nods to Swaggart)
 HOME!

The Preacher cracks his switch. The boys quickly scurry out the window.

PREACHER
 I better see you two back here on
 Sunday. Hearts full of repentance.
 And I wanna see some coin twinklin'
 in the offerin' plate!

21 EXT. CHISCA HOTEL - EVENING 21

Sam pulls up, listening to Dewey on the car radio.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (O.S.)
 Yassur, good people, it's Daddy 'O
 Dewey. Comin' atcha from the Chisca
 - Red, Hot and Blue on 56 WHBQ...
 Hottest cotton pickin' thing in the
 country.

22 INT. CHISCA MEZZANINE - CONTINUOUS 22

Dewey PERFORMS his broadcast, smoking away.

DEWEY PHILLIPS
 Did they boost us to fifty thousand
 watts yet, Diz?
 (slurred, older voice)
 Not yet pod'ner.
 Well, gosh-durn, you can hear us
 clear 'cross Arkansas if the wind's
 blowin' just right.
 (spins record)
 Now we gonna slow it down. If you
 wanna make a move with your lady-
 friend, now's the time to do it to
 "New Orleans Blues."

Sam appears, Dewey waves him over...

SAM PHILLIPS
 How's it goin' Dewey?

DEWEY PHILLIPS
 Man, the pills are hittin' good
 tonight. I might be up til Tuesday.
 What day is it today, cuz?

SAM PHILLIPS

Friday all day--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

--Friday. Pay day. Bath day.
 (flips "on air" switch)
 So what makes a white boy come all
 the way to Memphis to listen to
 colored music?

SAM PHILLIPS

Way I see it, music's got no color.
 If ya open your soul to it,
 it'll... make ya feel--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Like walkin' down Beale Street on a
 Saturday night--

SAM PHILLIPS

--Zackly! It gits you. It gits
 me... I reckon it'll git the whole
 world... I wanna find songs I can
 feed to one 'a them big record
 companies.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

I got me a song, "Git off the
 Turntable, Mable, You're Too Old to
 Be Runnin' 'round." Good people, we
 bin talkin' with Mistuh Sam
 Phillips. Memphis Recording
 Service.

Sam realizes he's live on-air... Dewey spins a record.

SAM PHILLIPS

Son-of-a-gun! You shoulda told me
 we was live. Holy cow!

DEWEY PHILLIPS

I knew you wouldn't say nuthin'
 dirty. So, how's it goin'?

SAM PHILLIPS

(pulls out record)
 I got this here record. Marion and
 me was hopin' you'd give it a spin.
 See what your listeners think.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Don't work that way, Slick.
 (lights a cigarette)
 Chesterfield? Tell you what.
 (MORE)

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

There's a fella comin' here next week all the way from Los Angeleese. Joe Bihari, Modern Records to record a new fella, Git-tar player - Plays his black ass off. B.B. King. Maybe I can put somethin' together where you lay down the track for him, and then we'll lean his ear to the speaker while you spin that record 'a yours.

SAM PHILLIPS

Man, I'd appreciate that.

23

EXT. FARM HOUSE PORCH - DAY

23

RADIO NEWS REPORT

"U.S. and U.N. Troops have gathered in Pusan... General Ridgeway says the campaign against the North Koreans is not to seize ground but to halt the Communist insurgence."

Ray swigs a Pabst Blue Ribbon, Carrie sweeps.

RAY CASH

They oughta just drop one of them nuke-u-lar bombs on 'em like the Japs. Stop wastin' American lives.

Johnny walks out the screen door, turns off the radio.

JOHNNY CASH

Mom, dad, this probably ain't the time, but I gotta tell you I joined the Air Force.

CARRIE CASH

No! You're gonna git blown to bits over there in that Korea.

JOHNNY CASH

Nah, they give me a choice. Alaska or Germany. Livin' in Dee-troit was cold enough, and Alaska's WAY up from there, so I'm pickin' Germany.

RAY CASH

Your ass'll be on the front line if the Commies invade, Johnny Boy.

JOHNNY CASH

Ain't no guarantees in life...
 Daddy. Look, this here land don't
 make but a bale an acre in a good
 year and there ain't bin a good
 year in a while. Come another
 flood, we're all gonna end up in
 the Gulf. Every kid in my class is
 gettin' out them fields some darn
 way... I'm settin' out with 'em.
 You best do the same. I'm gonna
 miss y'all... Hell.

24 EXT. DIRT ROAD, DYESS, ARKANSAS - SUNSET 24

In silhouette, Ray, Carrie, and Johnny, guitar case in hand,
 walk down their dirt road. A bus arrives, Johnny boards it.

SINGING VOICE (PRELAP)

*Well, I'm tired of being all alone
 and livin' in misery...*

25 INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE, STUDIO - DAY 25

B.B. King sings with his band... Sam waves "cut."

SAM PHILLIPS

Bee, man, you sound like you're
 singing this sucker for the ten
 thousandth time. I wanna feel like
 it just now happened to you. Tell
 ya what, lay off tryin' to play
 them fills. Let the sax do it. One
 more time...

B.B. does the song again, embodying Phillips' suggestions.

Marion enters with JOE BIHARI (30s), LA-slick, observing.

JOE BIHARI

Soundin' great. Most engineers,
 this is like space music to 'em.
 They got no idea.

SAM PHILLIPS

If you got talent, I'll pull it
 outta your ass.

MARION

Sam this is Joe--

SAM PHILLIPS

I know who this is.

JOE BIHARI

Looks like a great setup you got here.

SAM PHILLIPS

I got five inputs, and I got all new RCA 77 DXs. And we're set back so far offa the road, you don't hardly ever get no noise.

JOE BIHARI

Last time I was in Memphis, we cut in a room down at the King Cotton Hotel. Got near the end of a pretty good take and this gal comes screamin' her ass off, running down the hall. Naked man, his privates floppin'.

(to Marion)

Sorry honey, chasing after her. Ruined the whole session. Turns out she was a hooker. Took his billfold, I guess.

MARION

This is why Mr. Bihari, Sam here oughtta handle all your sessions. It saves you from such traumatic ordeals, AND a plane ticket!

B.B. Enters the control booth.

JOE BIHARI

Smart dame, but then I wouldn't get to meet this talented gentleman...

(to B.B.)

Dewey's been singing your praises. And damn if he's not right.

B.B. KING

If'n you say so... I'm pleased to agree with ya.

Everyone chuckles.

JOE BIHARI

I got a one-year deal, standard terms. You don't need to read it. You work with Sam Phillips here to find the songs and get 'em down.

(MORE)

JOE BIHARI (CONT'D)
(filling in contract)
What does B.B. stand for?

B.B. KING
Blues Boy. Riley's my given name.

JOE BIHARI
How about I make it care of Mr.
Phillips, 'cause I know you fellas
move around a lot.

SAM PHILLIPS
You from here?

B.B. KING
Come up from Indianola,
Mississippi. Hopped a flatbed
haulin' onions to Memphis.

JOE BIHARI
Well, now you're a Modern recording
artist. Sign here...

B.B. signs the contract. Bihari peels off dollar bills.

JOE BIHARI (CONT'D)
Here's ten Hamiltons. Go get
yourselves some new threads, and
let's make some hits.

Beaming, B.B. flashes the cash to his band and leaves... Joe
turns to Sam.

JOE BIHARI (CONT'D)
I figure we'd give you recording
costs plus one point of retail for
records you cut here.

SAM PHILLIPS
One point meaning what?

JOE BIHARI
Records sell for 89 cents, you get
89 cents every hundred copies sold.

SAM PHILLIPS
Man, that's a hard road to a
million bucks, ain't it?

JOE BIHARI
Tough for you, tough for us, baby.

Joe gets up to leave, Sam plays Be-Bop Boy...

SAM PHILLIPS

Mr. Bihari, I got somethin' for you
I think you're gonna like.

Sam jacks up the volume. After four bars, Bihari motions to take it off.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

(excited)

That was my reaction, man. Thirty
seconds, I was sold!

JOE BIHARI

Nah, man, I can't sell that.

SAM PHILLIPS

Whaddya mean?

JOE BIHARI

The Negroes that got outta here...
Last thing they want to be reminded
of is sweating their asses off out
in the damn cotton fields. That's
what THIS is.

26

EXT. RED LIGHT DISTRICT. HANEY'S CLUB, FERRIDAY - NIGHT 26

Jerry Lee and Jimmy are walking past prostitutes.

JIMMY LEE SWAGGART

Sinner, let not the sun go down on
you on Fourth Street...

JERRY LEE LEWIS

Man, if I had some money I'd get
HER to go down on me on Fourth St.

A boogie woogie pianist pounding out a song from Haney's Big House catches their attention. Jerry Lee and Jimmy sneak a peek at the door... The joint is jumpin!.

JERRY LEE LEWIS (CONT'D)

That cat's shakin' on down.

(sings along)

*Wine, wine, wine, blackberry,
Pass that bottle to me..."*

A towering Black man, HANEY (40s) collars the boys.

HANEY

What the HELL are you doin'?

JERRY LEE LEWIS

Checkin' out the music.

JIMMY LEE SWAGGART

Our uncle, Lee Calhoun, owns this place.

HANEY

And what would he say if HE caught you, 'stead of me?

JERRY LEE LEWIS

He'd say, "Jerry Lee, go on in, git you a beer, have one on me."

HANEY

It's Wednesday night you boys should be at church supper.

JIMMY LEE SWAGGART

Mr. Haney, we jus' come from church. "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin!"

JERRY LEE LEWIS

He's fixin' to be a preacher. Cantcha' tell?

HANEY

Well then, y'all gonna make more money than alla us. Now git!

Running away, Jerry Lee turns back.

JERRY LEE LEWIS

And 'nother thing. I can play pianner better'n that fool.

HANEY

(Shakes his head)

Both of you are destined for a world a'trouble, I guarantee ya.

27

EXT. MAIN STREET, MEMPHIS - NIGHT

27

Sam and Dewey, drunk, stoned, wobbling, pass a flask.

SAM PHILLIPS

I gotta tell you, man, it's HELL at home right now. Becky - best woman you'll ever meet. Best mother. Heart of gold.

(MORE)

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

I'm s'posed to be at a prayer
supper with her right now.
Longest day she lives, she'll never
git this music.

(leans in)

But I'll tell ya, man, I bin
sneakin' around with Marion.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

I figgered you was...

SAM PHILLIPS

She gits ME! But she wants me so
bad, it scares me to death, man.
I'm s'posed to be at the flicks
seein' ANNIE GET YOUR GUN at the
Memphian with her right now. Can
ya imagine?

Sam stops outside a fancy restaurant...

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Man, we uptown 'bout as far as you
can git.

SAM PHILLIPS

I owe you for Bihari. Really
'preciate it.

28

INT. FLOYD'S STEAKHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

28

Sam and Dewey pass tables, escorted by the maitre'd.

SAM PHILLIPS

Bihari said Negroes don't want that
back porch sound.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Sam, man, you're a music guy tryin'
to figger out the bid-ness. They're
bid-ness guys tryin' to figure out
the damn music. My money's on you.

Passing a diner...

DINER

I would appreciate it if you two
would not swear--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

--so damn much.

Laughing at their own joke, Sam and Dewey sit in a booth.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Tell ya what, Slick, let's press up
Be-Bop Boy our own selves and prove
Bihari wrong...

SAM PHILLIPS AND DEWEY PHILLIPS

(pounding empty glasses)
Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!

The diners at the nearest table move away.

Sam sketches a label logo design.

SAM PHILLIPS

I got a label name for ya!
IT'S THE PHILLIPS. See, "It's"
small, then THE PHILLIPS, big.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

(sipping flask)
I'll play the crap out of it. We'll
show Joe goddamn Bihari how to sell
some goddamn records. How many d'ya
reckon we should goddamn press up?
One million? Two million?

SAM PHILLIPS

About three hundred... Hungry?

DEWEY PHILLIPS

(waving empty flask)
Thirsty! Let's split!

They leave, passing the waiter bringing their menus.

29 EXT. STREETS, TULSA, OKLAHOMA - DAY

29

"Cattle Call" plays on a loudspeaker. "COMING SOON--EDDY
ARNOLD, THE TENNESSEE PLOWBOY" emblazoned on a van.

The Colonel parks, opens his van, revealing a bunk bed. He
grabs a roll of posters, splashing glue onto a wall, he posts
"Eddy Arnold Coming Soon".

30 INT. FIVE AND DIME STORE - DAY

30

The Colonel walks up to the clerk in the record area.

COLONEL PARKER

Eddy Arnold's coming here next
Tuesday and Wednesday...

STORE CLERK

Eddy Howard?

COLONEL PARKER

Eddy Arnold. "Cattle Call."

STORE CLERK

Oh yeah, somebody asked for that.

COLONEL PARKER

He's playin' two nights at Big Doin's, so make sure you got plenty of stock on-hand. Here's an RCA order blank.

(Reaches in pocket)

50 copies keep you covered. Got a stamp?

The Colonel places all the Eddy Arnold records in front of the bins.

TOP RAIL TOM (PRELAP)

...and the mark the merc makes at the tip top of the time and temperature tower is 76 big degrees here at KTUL. Heart of Oklahoma.

31 INT. KTUL DJ BOOTH - DAY

31

Colonel, waving a 78 to the dee-jay, tucks a five dollar bill inside.

TOP RAIL TOM

This here's Top Rail Tom, and we're gonna hear the newest hit from -

(squints at label)

- Eddy Arnold. It's "Cattle Call."

(turns down fader)

You know how to make a friend, friend.

(listens)

Pretty good. Unusual. But good.

COLONEL PARKER

What's your favorite poison?

TOP RAIL TOM

White Horse.

COLONEL PARKER

Look for Eddy Arnold and a bottle of White Horse, Tuesday, two PM.

(reaches in his pocket)

(MORE)

COLONEL PARKER (CONT'D)

Here's two pairs of tickets for give-aways. Don't sell 'em... Trust me, Eddy's gonna be the biggest thing in Folk and Western music. We won't forget who got us going in Tulsa!

32 INT. BEER HALL, GERMANY - NIGHT

32

Octoberfest, Bratwursts sizzling, Germans in lederhosen. Bavarian band plays polka.

HELGA (16), beautiful bar maid, carries steins of beer to a rowdy group of uniformed American GI's. FRANKIE (18), and CARMINE (18) from Bayonne, New Jersey.

FRANKIE

Those Krauts can put it away...

CARMINE

Yeah, if the war'd bin a drinking contest, we'd a lost.

FRANKIE

We had prohibition. We got out of practice.

BEAU (19), strong southern accent, walks over with Cash.

BEAU

No one got outta of practice where we come--

FRANKIE

--Bet your sister looks mighty pretty after you had a few...

Beau leaps for Frankie, Cash pulls him back. Helga puts beers in front of Frankie and Carmine.

BEAU

Helga! Over here.

FRANKIE

(Flirting with Helga)
She's busy right now.

BEAU

(To Cash)
Do "The Thing." That'll git her attention.

Helga strolls over.

BEAU (CONT'D)
 Helga my beautiful fraulein,
 (mysteriously) do you know "The
 Thing?"

Unsure, Helga shrugs. Beau nods at Cash.

BEAU (CONT'D)
 Get him to do it.

FRANKIE
 (Overhearing)
 DO IT? Do WHAT?

BEAU
 "The Thing."

CARMINE
 Hell if he's gonna do it. I'LL do
 it... Uh... What thing?

BEAU
 Ya dense boy? "The Thing!"

FRANKIE
 Listen to me, you fried rabbit
 eating swamp dog.

BEAU
 Who you talkin' to, you spaghetti-
 slurpin' greaseball?

Everybody anticipates a fight, until they hear a guitar. Cash is on stage singing Phil Harris' song "The Thing."

The crowd loves it, the beer hall joins in, banging tables with their mugs. Beau, arms around Helga, sways to the music... Frankie and Carmine storm out.

33

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE, MORNING

33

Sam and Becky are sitting with his physician.

BECKY
 Starting the studio has been very
 stressful for Sam. It's affecting
 all of us now. I told him he must
 see the doctor. He's drinking,
 staying out late, taking all those
 pills--

SAM PHILLIPS

--They stop me from thinkin' too much...

DOCTOR

No pill makes thoughts go away.

SAM PHILLIPS

I ain't had another episode, but it's like I'm only half here, my mind always so fuzzy.

DOCTOR

As I said before, some people find psycho-analysis helps...

SAM PHILLIPS

Aw, hell, no. Ever'one I know who's been to a shrink is bat-shit crazy. I ain't got the time and I ain't got the money.

DOCTOR

There is another option. Electro-Convulsive Therapy..

BECKY

Sam, no!

DOCTOR

It sounds worse than it is. The brain has electrical impulses, and ECT short-circuits the brain waves that cause this anxiousness --

SAM PHILLIPS

I've gotta get my head straight. Thing is, I drink to relax then I do ungodly stupid things. One night, me and a buddy had a little too much and we agreed to press up three hundred records and damn if we ain't got two-eighty-nine left... Here, a souvenir.
(Reaches into briefcase)
OK doc... cure me or kill me.

BECKY

You are not having your brain zapped! That's final, Mr. Phillips.

SAM PHILLIPS

Well then, you heard Mrs. Phillips.
Just gimme some more of those
pills.

34

EXT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - DAY

34

A 1949 Olds 88 pulls up, a string bass and amplifier lashed
to the top. IKE TURNER (19), zoot-suit, slick gets out.

IKE TURNER

(To his bandmates)

Straighten yerselves up. If we
don't act professional, how we
gonna ace this deal?

Neighboring racist business owners walk over, WILLIE (30s)
and CLAUDE (40s).

WILLIE

Well ain'tchu the cock 'o the walk
for a pickaninny?

The mood shifts dramatically. Ike and the band say nothing.

CLAUDE

Willie boy, this chocolate-covered
marshmallow struttin' around like
he belongs here...

WILLIE

He's in the wrong part 'a town for
sure... There's laws boy.

IKE TURNER

I come to make a hit record.

CLAUDE

Only hit you gonna get is upside
the head.

Sam and Dewey drive up.

SAM PHILLIPS

Claude, Willie. Mighty fine day--

CLAUDE

--Sam, this part a'town ain't for
colored. You damn well know that--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Aincha heard the news? We're all
God's people--

WILLIE

--We are, and God meant for them to be over there (points), and us here.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

But I bet you do like watermelon. Same as me, same as them...

CLAUDE

(Laughing)

Got you there, Willie. You do love your watermelon...

Willie and Claude walk away.

WILLIE

Next time, Sam, the coloreds use the back door, understand?

SAM PHILLIPS

(To Dewey)

Goddamn jackasses.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

It's a crazy world, cuz. Catch ya on the flipside...

Dewey drives off... Marion walks out.

Ike points to the side of his car - "KINGS OF RHYTHM"

IKE TURNER

Ike Turner. Hottest group anyplace around Clarksdale. We come here to get on records, man.

Sam pulls Marion aside.

SAM PHILLIPS

These guys look like they could chew up the whole mornin' and half the afternoon. I ain't slept in God knows how long. I gotta pile up some z's.

MARION

Gentlemen. It's pay to play. Three-ninety-eight.

Ike gets in his car.

IKE TURNER

I'm comin' back. Then you be glad
Ike Turner drove up from
Clarksdale.

35 INT. LUNCH COUNTER, BEALE STREET - DAY

35

Ike saunters in... sits at the counter, beckons a waitress,
WANDA(20s), pretty, black, unenthusiastic, droll.

IKE TURNER

Hey, babe, remember me--

WANDA

I remember you... You was gonna
make me your singer AND your wife.

IKE TURNER

How you know I didn't come here to
propose?

WANDA

Cause I read my horror-scope, and
it said a no-good lyin' snake of a
man be comin' through that door
today.

IKE TURNER

You know what I seen? MISS WANDA
SINGING WITH THE KINGS OF RHYTHM.

BOSS (BEHIND GRILL)

Get back to work! Customers
waitin'.

WANDA

You notice I got a job, kinda like
you never had...

IKE TURNER

We're cuttin' our first record
right here in town. Why don't you
come down and sing with us--

WANDA

--Uh huh. What's the catch?

IKE TURNER

No catch. It's legit, Babe! We're
all kickin' in 4 bucks--

WANDA

--THAT'S the catch.

Wanda hands a cold coffee from the counter to Ike.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Here, BABE, on the house.

She goes off...Ike sees the tip jar, looks quickly both ways, stuffs several fistfuls of change into his pockets.

36 EXT. DINER - CONTINUOUS 36

Ike jumps into the car...

The boss runs out with a cleaver, Wanda following.

IKE TURNER

Floor it!

The amp falls off the roof. The car screeches to a halt. Ike runs back, grabs it, slams the door and speeds off.

37 INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE. RECEPTION - DAY 37

Marion reviewing bills, writing checks...

MARION

Look, I've got twenty left after rent. You can pay me back from the next Arkansas Electric check.

Sam spread out on the couch, pulls a vial, pops a pill.

MARION (CONT'D)

Stop taking those!

SAM PHILLIPS

Either I suck on these or I get the shock treatments.

MARION

Electro-shock? You are crazy!
(catches herself)
No, I didn't mean that...

Ike busts in... he counts out four dollars in change.

IKE TURNER

I pay, I play.

MARION

Sam we got paying clients!

Lethargic, Sam gets off the couch.

IKE TURNER

Get ready, Mister Record Man, the
Kings 'a Rhythm gonna rock your
world.

Ike moves to the piano and plays a few chords.

A wildly distorted fuzz-tone blares... The guitarist rushes
to disconnect his amp cord.

GUITAR PLAYER

Shit man, it's busted up bad. And I
still owes money on it.

SAM PHILLIPS

Nah, man, leave it. Sounds good.
Fact, turn it up.

They all look at each other. Sam enters the booth.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

(over talkback)

One-two-three... HIT IT!

Ike sings Rocket 88... Sam perks up, motions "cut."

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

That song's cookin'! Ike, you're a
hell of a pianna player, but I ain't
gonna bullshit you, man. You just
cain't sing.

The other Kings of Rhythm burst out laughing.

GUITAR PLAYER

We bin tryin' to tell him that for
two years!

IKE TURNER

G'head, laugh, fool. I'm takin'
this here four dollars outta your
pay. Laugh on that!

SAM PHILLIPS

There's five of you cats. One of
you gotta be able to sing a lick.

Sam has each guy step up to the mic. Encouraging them one by
one, they sing "You know women have heard of jalopies."

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Try it. Bust loose. Next. Ok, good.
Give it EVERYTHING you got... Yeah,
man. Yeah! That's it!

JACKIE BRENSTON's good, the band joins in and wails.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Right there's my hit! Marion - hand me one of those standard contracts.

MARION

Don't make your move too soon, Sam. Keep your cards close.

Sam composes himself... walks in with a contract.

SAM PHILLIPS

Awright. Not bad. I'll sign ya up 'n see what I can do, if anything.

IKE TURNER

No, man, Kings of Rhythm has Ike Turner singin'.

SAM PHILLIPS

Okay. How about Jackie Brenston and the Clarksdale Cats? the Delta Cats?

JACKIE BRENSTON

Yeah, I like that. Delta Cats.

IKE TURNER

That ain't no kinda nuthin' name. An' not for nuthin', I paid the damn 4 dollars!

Ike pissed, leaves. The band following... Once they are gone, Sam, ecstatic, jumps up and twirls Marion.

SAM PHILLIPS

Did you hear that?

MARION

The whole block heard it!

SAM PHILLIPS

That's a damn hit. We got one!

MARION

I'll call Bihari right away.

SAM PHILLIPS

Not so fast. Leonard Chess is down at the Claridge. He's shippin' tonnage on Muddy Waters. He must know somethin' about somethin'.

38 EXT./INT. CLARIDGE HOTEL LOBBY - NIGHT 38

Sam and Marion stroll in.

MARION

Mr. Bihari's been good to us. He promised to--

SAM PHILLIPS

--It can't hurt to have options, Marion. That's just good business.

MARION

But--

SAM PHILLIPS

--No buts.

39 INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS 39

Sam and Marion follow the sounds of Muddy Waters' "Hoochie Coochie Man" coming from down the hall.

40 INT. HOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS 40

The door is open, raging party! Women dancing, booze, cigarettes. Sam wanders in... Marion hangs back.

SAM PHILLIPS

Which'a y'all is Leonard?

Another record drops; The Moonglow's "Sincerely".

DRUNK GUY

We're all Leonard.

LEONARD CHESS(40s), Polish immigrant, girl seated on his lap.

LEONARD CHESS

I'm Leonard. Whatta you want?

SAM PHILLIPS

I got somethin' to play you.

LEONARD CHESS

Make an appointment.

MARION

It's a party, ain't it? Let's liven it up!

Marion takes "Sincerely" off the turntable, replacing it.

LEONARD CHESS

Hey! That's my record!

"Rocket 88" is infectious. Everyone in the room begins dancing. Marion beams at Sam... This is the one!

LEONARD CHESS (CONT'D)

I like it. You wanna deal?

SAM PHILLIPS

Naw, I was just passin' by. Course I want a deal.

LEONARD CHESS

I have a standard deal. Two points of retail. One hundred upfront. You cover the union.

SAM PHILLIPS

Buddy, you're on.

Marion spots Joe Bihari walking in. He immediately sizes up the situation. Alarmed, she tries to signal Sam.

LEONARD CHESS

Maybe I should have beat you down.

SAM PHILLIPS

Maybe I shoulda held out for three.

Bihari yells out as they shake hands.

JOE BIHARI

That handshake's worth nothing. I got a deal with this guy.

SAM PHILLIPS

(stunned)

We didn't say nuthin' 'bout exclusive.

JOE BIHARI

We didn't say anything about you whoring out everything you got, either. I handed you a lifeline. This is how you treat me?!

SAM PHILLIPS

(dissembling)

You said you'd maybe pay if, if, and if. I can't eat off that many ifs.

LEONARD CHESS

Sloppy Seconds, Joe. Grab a beer.

JOE BIHARI

Screw you and your brother, Chess.

(To Phillips)

And when B.B. King is the biggest Negro act, you'll be thinking, "I coulda had a point of that if I hadn't been so damn stupid."

Bihari storms out... Chess pumps up the volume.

LEONARD CHESS

Guess he don't like to lose. This is a damn hit!

Marion twirls Sam. They take over the dance floor and let loose... The party rages!

41 INT. GRAND OLE OPRY, NASHVILLE - EVENING 41

HANK SNOW is performing "**I'm Movin' On**"

The song ends to rapturous applause.

42 EXT. RYMAN AUDITORIUM STAGE DOOR. NIGHT. 42

Parker stands with assistant BOBBIE (22). He points to the gathering young girls, fans.

COLONEL PARKER

Make sure your camera's ready.

Hank Snow passes by.

HANK SNOW

You're Arnold's manager, aint'cha?

COLONEL PARKER

Indeed. I found him playing midways in Florida.

HANK SNOW

Tell me, are you looking to take on new clients?

COLONEL PARKER

It's not the Colonel's way to steal artists, but the Colonel thinks you could be as big as Eddy Arnold.

(Cagey)

(MORE)

COLONEL PARKER (CONT'D)

If I may ask, how many songbooks
and photos you selling a night?

HANK SNOW

(boasting)

Twenty, thirty of each maybe.

COLONEL PARKER

Sorry to hear that... We sell a
couple hundred songbooks, photos,
hand-held fans a night. Let me give
you some free advice. And the
Colonel doesn't do free. Hold the
show for a half-hour in the summer
so they get good'n thirsty. Sell
'em a drink and a fan. Tell 'em
another 2 bits gets 'em a songbook
or a signed photo. Some nights we
make more on the songbooks and
photos than we make from the gate.

Eddy Arnold walks out, Bobbie snaps, flash bulbs pop.

BOBBIE

(cueing the girls)

Oh my God! Can I get your
autograph?

The girls swamp Arnold. The Colonel breaks into the crowd,
handing Arnold a telegram for a photo op.

COLONEL PARKER

A telegram from Steve Sholes, of
RCA Records, congratulating you on
your 15th straight number one
record!

Arnold drives off. Hank walks over.

HANK SNOW

You've done a hell of a job.

COLONEL PARKER

It's the manager's job to be
thinking about their artist first
thing every morning and last thing
every night.

Elvis listening to Dewey, slaps the dash, sings along.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

...third week at Number One.
Recorded right here in Memphis,
Tennessee by Mister Sam Phillips,
it's "Rocket 88" by Jackie Brenston
and the Delta Cats.

He pulls up to Dixie's house. Dixie and her friends LAURA LEE
and BETSY all jump in the car.

Dixie immediately changes to a gospel station. Elvis smoothly
transitions and sings "Church in the Wildwood."

ELVIS

This is gonna be SO good. An all
night gospel sing!

LAURA LEE

Where are your friends at?

BETSY

Why didn't you bring any boys?

DIXIE

He's the loner type.

Dixie points to a poster: "THE FABULOUS BLACKWOOD BROTHERS
SING "ROCK MY SOUL" AND ALL YOUR FAVORITE GOSPEL HITS."

DIXIE (CONT'D)

That's gonna be my Elvis in a year
or two. Second tenor with the
Blackwood Brothers.

Elvis, resigned, just listens, drives.

BETSY

His name's not Blackwood, silly.

DIXIE

They're not all Blackwood. They're
from Mississippi down near his kin.

LAURA LEE

We'll need to cut his hair!

The Delta Cats are riffing in the studio. Brenston is drunk.

In the booth, Sam disgusted, vents to Marion...

SAM PHILLIPS

We'll never get another hit outta
Brenston. Hell, we'll never get
another SONG outta him.

Ike Turner barges into the studio.

IKE TURNER

Where my royalties at?

SAM PHILLIPS

I paid Jackie for the band. He
sung lead.

IKE TURNER

Bullshit - he drunk it all up.

JACKIE BRENSTON

(stumbles up)

I ain't drunk, I'm jus' drinkin'.

IKE TURNER

You ain't bin sober since I knowed
you. Shoulda canned your ass a year
ago.

(to Phillips)

Now you're seein' what Ike Turner's
all about. He ain't nuthin' without
me! You know who else sees what Ike
Turner's all about? Mister Joe
Bihari. 'Cause Ike Turner cut BB
King's "3 o'Clock Blues", an'
THAT'S what you'll be singin'.
Comin', boys?

The band walks out with Ike, leaving Jackie behind.

MARION

Forget him.

Marion consoles Sam, running her fingers through his hair.

SAM PHILLIPS

Marion, that's the last thing on my
mind right now. I expect you
noticed the Chess draw check didn't
come in this month.

MARION

I called him 'bout it but he's
always out.

45 INT. CHESS OFFICES, CHICAGO - DAY

45

Chess and staff review cover art for Muddy Waters...

SECRETARY (O.S.)
It's Mr. Phillips again.

LEONARD CHESS
I'm not here!

SECRETARY
He's threatening to drive to
Chicago if you don't pick up.

LEONARD CHESS (O.S.)
Yes, Sam.

46 INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - INTERCUT

46

Agitated, Sam paces.

SAM PHILLIPS
Why don't you take my damn calls?

LEONARD CHESS
'Cause I don't owe you no money,
and these artists you been sending
me are a piece a'junk. All of them.

SAM PHILLIPS
I gave up Bihari to work with you.

LEONARD CHESS
Good move, but Brenston's a one-hit
guy and a no-show. I got promoters
calling me for refunds. I've got
one of my guys going out as
Brenston. No one knows what he
looks like.

Sam's POV: Brenston passed out in the studio.

SAM PHILLIPS
Smart. Real smart. But that doesn't
solve MY problem.

LEONARD CHESS
YOU solve YOUR problem. Cut me a
hit record. I still like ya, but
anyone can get lucky ONCE.

Sam looms over Marion, leafing through the ledgers...

MARION

(whispers)

As of right now, we have less'n
fifty bucks.

SAM PHILLIPS

I NEED a draw to operate.

LEONARD CHESS

(hanging up)

I NEED HITS!

MARION

I'll keep on putting in twenty from
my pay, and go back to the night
shift at WARQ.

Marion moves close, Sam becomes edgy and panicky.

SAM PHILLIPS

Marion, I just can't deal with
this. Chess is dead, the Bihari
deal's dead. No one else is gonna
touch me. Tex-Off-the-Street-
Nobodies are no kinda business. And
every time I walk away from you, I
swear I'm gonna stay gone, but I
cain't do it.

MARION

Darling, we'll get through it. We
always do...

She moves closer... The phone rings.

SAM PHILLIPS

No, Marion, no!

(answers phone)

Dinner'll have to wait, BECKY!

(ranting)

Dinner'll hafta goddamn wait.

A full panic attack. Sam clutches his chest, reaches for his
pills, knocks back two with a tumbler of whiskey... Marion
comforts him, he pushes her away. Sam storms out.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Go home, Marion. Just go on home. I
can't deal with any of it right
now! None of it!

47 EXT. STREET COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT 47

A clear night. Stars above... Speeding, woozy from pills and alcohol, Sam nearly passes out listening to Dewey.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (V.O. RADIO)

It's only nine o'clock, but he's got the "Three O'Clock Blues." Our own Beale Street Blues Boy, B.B. King. Recorded by Mister Ike Turner right here at the Colored YMCA.

A car comes straight for him. Sam crashes into a tree...

48 INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - DAY 48

Sam being pushed on a gurney.

49 INT. WAITING ROOM - INTERCUT 49

Marion and Dewey rush to Becky.

MARION

Where's Sam?

BECKY

They've taken him in.

MARION

God, no. Becky. You must stop this!

DEWEY PHILLIPS

I'll talk some sense into him.

BECKY

I prayed on it, Marion. More than anything I want Sam back. He's here physically, but mentally he's a million miles away. He came home last night not knowing where he left his car...(crying) he insisted on this.

MARION

He's been under tremendous stress. I've tried--

BECKY

--We are both so thankful to have you in our lives...

Marion, ashamed, avoids Becky's eyes.

50 INT. TREATMENT ROOM - CONTINUOUS 50

Sam's temples are swabbed. The doctor places the paddles on.

SAM PHILLIPS

Maybe there's a hit in there.

A nurse places a hard rubber block in his mouth. The machine set to 200 volts... Phillips convulses violently. A brief pause, the doctor increases the voltage, turns it on again.

51 INT. DRESSING ROOM, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT 51

Eddy Arnold getting dressed for a performance. A knock, The Colonel enters.

COLONEL PARKER

You demanded to see me?

EDDY ARNOLD

I want you to look me in the eye and tell me sumpin'. You double-dippin' on my records?

COLONEL PARKER

What do you mean?

EDDY ARNOLD

I heard ya takin' kickbacks for getting songs on my sessions.

COLONEL PARKER

Are you accusing the Colonel of impropriety?

EDDY ARNOLD

I'm asking the Colonel for a straightforward answer to a straightforward question.

COLONEL PARKER

You ARE accusing the Colonel!

EDDY ARNOLD

Enough with the Colonel bullshit! I'm ASKING YOU, TOM, for a straightforward--

COLONEL PARKER

--Bobbie!

Bobbie and 3 men enter with boxes, dropping them at Eddy's feet... The Colonel opens one, tossing papers...

COLONEL PARKER (CONT'D)
Contracts, receipts, ledgers. Check
for yourself... We're done!

Colonel leaves slamming door.

52

EXT. BACK STAGE, RYMAN AUDITORIUM - CONTINUOUS

52

Distraught, The Colonel pulls out a cigar. Bobbie lights it.

COLONEL PARKER
How much longer does Arnold's deal
run?

BOBBIE
'Bout ten months.

COLONEL PARKER
Keep tabs on everything. Every
single receipt. He's gonna get a
helluva whopper of a bill.

Hank Snow exits the side door.

HANK SNOW
Another big night, huh?

COLONEL PARKER
(cool/composed)
Of course... Routine by now...

Eddy briskly walks out, avoiding eye contact, gets in his
car... The Colonel smiles, pretending nothing has changed...

COLONEL PARKER (CONT'D)
Night Eddy my boy. Great show!

HANK SNOW
--Hell, you know I want you to
manage me. Let's make some
greenbacks.

COLONEL PARKER
I should tell you that my fee is
twenty-five percent of total gross,
including records.

HANK SNOW
TWENTY-FIVE! Why don't you screw my
wife, too.

The Colonel takes a slow deep drag on the cigar.

COLONEL PARKER

Would you rather have eighty-five percent of a hundred or seventy-five percent of a million?

53 INT. LANDSBERG AIR BASE MESS HALL - NIGHT

53

POSTER: INSIDE THE WALLS OF FOLSOM PRISON STARRING STEVE COCHRAN... GI's walking out... Beau leaves, followed by Frankie and Carmine.

FRANKIE

That hick probably thought that was a home movie...

In the darkness, a struck match lighting a cigarette illuminates Cash's face, as he overhears Frankie.

Seething, staring at the poster, Cash strums his guitar.

JOHNNY CASH

(singing)

*When I was just a baby, my mama
told me Son, Always be a good boy,
don't ever play with guns.
But I shot a man in Reno just to
watch him die... I'm stuck in
Folsom prison, and time keeps
dragging on...*

54 INT. REC ROOM. CHURCH. FERRIDAY, LOUISIANA - DAY

54

Door opens, Jerry Lee pulls a giggling DOROTHY (16), Reverend's daughter, into a closet, kisses her.

DOROTHY

No. Not here.

JERRY LEE LEWIS

Dor'thy, I ain't felt this way
'bout no other girl. This here's
the onliest way I can show you
what's in my heart.

Kissing her ardently, the door flies open.

JIMMY LEE SWAGGERT

Then when lust has conceived, it
brings forth sin: and sin, when it
is finished, brings forth death!

JERRY LEE LEWIS

(Annoyed)

Scram! Git outta here--

JIMMY LEE SWAGGERT

--Be a virtuous woman, Dorothy.
Marry me, and I'll join your
daddy's ministry.

JERRY LEE LEWIS

You just jealous 'cause she likes
me better.

DOROTHY

You serious? You wanna marry me?

JIMMY LEE SWAGGERT

As serious as death...

JERRY LEE LEWIS

I'll marry ya today!

55 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

55

Sam wakes, groggy. Becky is beside him.

BECKY

The doctor says you are cleared to
go home. AND even better news - I
just spoke to cousin Jim. They'll
definitely hire you back.

SAM PHILLIPS

It's come to that, has it?
Birmingham ain't too bad a place to
live, I guess.

BECKY

(tenderly)

And raise a family. We got friends
there, and...

Marion and Dewey enter.

BECKY (CONT'D)

How nice of you to visit. I've got
to go pick up Knox.

(kissing Sam)

I'll let you tell them the good
news.

Marion making sure Becky's gone, leans over, kisses Sam.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

You wanna fry that pea brain a yours! I'll get me a fryin' pan and wap you upside the head... 'An all over a few stupid records!...

MARION

What was Becky talking about?

SAM PHILLIPS

Her cousin is Program Director at WJLD, Birmingham. He's offerin' me the morning show.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

"Rocket 88" was the biggest blues hit of 1951! That proves you can make hits. Why give up on your own self?

Sam, conflicted, closes his eyes, lost in thought...

SAM PHILLIPS

Just before they zapped me, Dewey... I had a thought--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

--Hit me.

SAM PHILLIPS

There's white kids listenin' to your show--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

--I know it, I take the calls.

SAM PHILLIPS

Here's the thing, they ain't buyin' the records. Don'cha think it would be a hell of a thing if I could find me a white boy who could really shake it on down with the blues? Then I could sell me some damn records.

Marion pulls a doodle of a Sun logo design from her purse.

MARION

I found this on your desk. SUN RECORDS. You'll never make it working for others. You need your own label...

SAM PHILLIPS
 (Staring outside)
 Sun.

MARION
 (sits Sam up)
 Sam, look, Every day we have one,
 two, three people coming in.
 Yesterday we had one named Howlin'
 Wolf. Funny name...

DEWEY PHILLIPS
 I know him. He's a bad ass...

MARION
 Every day's a new day. A new
 beginning. Don't give up on your
 dreams. I won't give up on you...
 Now let's get you outta here.

56 EXT. DRIVING. LOUISIANA ROADS - DAY

56

The Colonel and Snow are in the back of the car. Opening fan
 mail, The Colonel pockets fifty cents inside every envelope.

COLONEL PARKER
 Okay, "To Mary, My Best Always Hank
 Snow."

CHARLEY autographs a photo.

CHARLEY
 "To Mary, I'm picturin' my dick in
 your mouth..."

COLONEL PARKER
 How's about my fist in your mouth?

HANK SNOW
 Charley, don't screw with the
 Colonel or you'll be walking back
 to Nashville.

The Colonel shows Snow sketches for a standee.

COLONEL PARKER
 Hank, approve these. The new
 campaign: "Snow All Year." We're
 making five hundred six foot cut-
 outs--

CHARLEY
 --Hey Snow, you're finally tall...

Snow looks sourly, pulls his hat over his eyes.

CHARLEY (CONT'D)

Hell, none a'you can take a joke.

57 EXT. STREET, MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - DAY 57

Elvis, hair dripping with oil, holding a battered guitar case, walks up to the door... Turns away, again. Then again.

58 INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - INTERCUT 58

Marion watches Elvis, charmed by his indecision.

MARION

Sam, come look at this.

Sam, dressed very casually, looks through the blinds.

Elvis opens the door, standing half in half out...

SAM PHILLIPS

Spit it out, son. You'd think this was the dentist.

ELVIS

I was thinkin' I shouldn't oughta spend the money, but I wanna make a record for my momma.

MARION

Three-ninety-eight, you can walk home with it. A beautiful gift--

SAM PHILLIPS

--That she will treasure always.

MARION

What's your name?

ELVIS

Elvis Presley.

MARION

(gets out log book)

A-L-

ELVIS

No ma'am. E-L-V-I-S. P-R-E-S-L-E-Y.

SAM PHILLIPS

You tuned up and ready to go?

ELVIS

Yessir.

SAM PHILLIPS

You ain't never heard yourself,
have you?

ELVIS

Nossir, never have.

Amused, Sam leads Elvis into the studio, points him to a
microphone, sets another mic at guitar level.

SAM PHILLIPS

Sing in there. Don't swallow it.

Elvis blurts out singing "**That's Amore**"--

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

(sits at console)

Now hold on. Gotta push Record.
Okay, son, let's hear whatcha got.

Elvis tries to be suave, flubs a couple of changes.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Don't rush it, now. Take it slow
as molasses. One more time.

Gaining confidence, Elvis gets playful substituting "old
Tennessee" for "old Napoli." Marion is charmed.

MARION

Dean Martin?

SAM PHILLIPS

(laughs)

Yeah, but there is something so
damn appealing about the kid.
(Over talkback)
Here it comes. Git ready now...

Elvis, taken aback by the sound of his voice, winces at the
flubbed chord change... gets goofy, harmonizing with himself.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Pretty good, son.

ELVIS

Sir, d'ya think I... can git on
records?

SAM PHILLIPS

Not right today. But maybe so...
Listen, Elvi. Why not sing
somethin' more your own style?

ELVIS

Whatever you say, Mr. Phillips.

Elvis thinks, then sings "My Happiness."

Becky, annoyed, barges into the sound booth, distracting Sam.

BECKY

I've been calling and calling...

SAM PHILLIPS

Becks, can't you see I'm in the
middle of--

BECKY

--Jim wants you to call him at WJLD
right now. You can start next
week!...

Sam hits the mute button, Elvis keeps singing. Pretending to
watch Elvis, Marion eavesdrops on the conversation.

SAM PHILLIPS

Sit down, please... I had a come to
Jesus with myself, and I'm sure in
my mind what I gotta do. You just
gotta keep the faith with me awhile
longer. Please.

Becky springs up, moves to Marion, startling her.

BECKY

What do YOU care? YOU'RE behind
this!

Becky bolts out, Marion and Sam flustered... Elvis finishes
singing, opens booth door.

ELVIS

How'd ya like it?

Backyard Barbeque. Elvis, Dixie, Gladys, Vernon and the
Lockes are still in their Sunday-Morning-Go-to-Church
clothes.

DIXIE

Attention everyone. Elvis is going
to sing a song!

Elvis sings "My Happiness" with guitar.

MRS LOCKE

He's so talented.

GLADYS

He always loved to sing, even
before he could speak.

Dixie goes to the phonograph, puts the stylus on the record
and leads the family in singing along while slowly turning up
the volume and syncing up with Elvis.

Elvis stops playing the guitar. Everyone is confused... Then
he stops singing... The music continues!

DIXIE

It's Elvis. He's on the record!

Realizing the ploy, everybody laughs.

ELVIS

Here you go Mama. Happy birthday!

Elvis hands the record to Gladys. She cries.

VERNON

(grumbling)

Where'd you get the money for such
foolishness?

60

INT. PHILLIPS' HOUSE - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

60

Sam, Knox, Becky, Marion, Father Dunavant, are seated around
the dining table.

BECKY

Who's going to say blessing?

SAM PHILLIPS

(checking his watch)

Good bread, good meat, good God,
let's eat.

BECKY

Sam!

FR. DUNAVANT
(laughing)
I think we've been blessed!

BECKY
Father, what was the inspiration
for your sermon today?

FR. DUNAVANT
Temptations come our way. How we
deal with them speaks to who we
are.

BECKY
(looking at Marion)
But we all have weaknesses...

MARION
That is our challenge in life. What
do we do?

FR. DUNAVANT
Keep the faith. Faith is the sword
to fight those challenges.

SAM PHILLIPS
Faith has nothing to support it
except faith, which is its
strength.

FR. DUNAVANT
Why Sam, you could be a theologian.

MARION
Only if they put it to music,
Father - he's in.

Becky zeroes in...

BECKY
When temptations threaten to
destroy the family, surely we must
fight them--

SAM PHILLIPS
--Oh my goodness. I forgot to call
that Elvi kid. Scotty and Bill will
be waiting. C'mon Marion.

BECKY
It's Sunday... Marion, I swear you
see more of Sam than I do. If I
didn't know better, one could have
a suspicious mind...

Marion smiles nervously, avoiding Sam's eyes.

BECKY (CONT'D)

Oh, Marion, you're like family. In fact, Sam, we should tell her the good news.

MARION

What news?

BECKY

I'm pregnant.

61 INT. PRESLEYS' APT - EVENING

61

Elvis, on the floor glues "E-L-V-I-S" onto his guitar. Gladys and Vernon play checkers. The phone rings.

VERNON

Presley. Yup, he's here.

Cups phone. Holds it toward Elvis.

ELVIS

Hullo.

Poleaxed, Elvis hangs up... Gladys is alarmed.

GLADYS PRESLEY

You okay, son? What's the matter?

ELVIS

I'm gonna git on records f'real, mama.

GLADYS PRESLEY

Don't get took.

VERNON

We ain't got another four bucks!

ELVIS

Daddy, if'n you git on records, they pay YOU.

62 EXT. MANASSAS AVE. - EVENING

62

Elvis, guitar in hand, running and running, misses a bus.

63

INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE. NIGHT.

63

Elvis bursts in with his guitar, out of breath.

SAM PHILLIPS

Didja save some breath for singin',
son?

Elvis starts to tune his guitar.

SCOTTY MOORE (GUITAR)

Kid, you might oughta tune to us.

BILL BLACK

You ain't never played with no one
before, have you?

ELVIS

No sir.

SCOTTY MOORE

Sir! Ain't no one called him Sir in
forever. I'm Scotty Moore. This
here's Bill Black.

Elvis nods nervously. Scotty plays open High E.

BILL BLACK

Tune to Scotty's High E.

Elvis tunes up. Sam hands out sheet music to "I Love You
Because."

SERIES, QUICK CUTS: TIME LAPSE

Elvis tries to figure out the chords. He sounds stilted and
forced, and struggles with the song. Sam coaches him.

SAM PHILLIPS

...Elvi, feel the song, seduce
it... You sound like you're
screamin over a marching band....
Close your eyes and let the lyrics
flow... Imagine you're tellin' a
story... Gentle, like you're
whispering a secret...

Hours pass: Elvis' shirt stained with sweat. Bill down to his
under-vest, Scotty slouched on a stool.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Let's take five.

Scotty and Bill walk into the booth.

BILL BLACK

Nice kid, Sam, but this ain't
happenin'.

SCOTTY MOORE

We gotta call it quits, man. I'm on
the early shift tomorrow.

Elvis fools around on the guitar... Sam's ear perks up.

ELVIS

*Well that's all right mama,
That's all right for you,
That's all right mama, any way you
do,*

SAM PHILLIPS

God in Heaven, THAT'S what I wanna
hear!

Scotty and Bill look at each other.

64 EXT. MEMPHIS STREETS - NIGHT 64

Sam racing... Doris Day's "A Guy Is A Guy," is on the radio.

65 INT. WHBQ STUDIO - EVENING 65

Station Manager CLARENCE (50s), conservative, stands over
Dewey.

CLARENCE

For God's sake Dewey. Stop mangling
the ad copy. I've got sponsors
refusing to pay their bill because
you are screwing up their spots.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

They're jus' stiffin' you to stiff
you. Ain't 'bout me--

CLARENCE

--Remember somethin' like "if Daz
don't do it, then fug it."

DEWEY PHILLIPS

My ratings are better'n anyone!
Thing is, I'm pulling in kids and
Negroes, and your advertisers don't
want none of 'em.

Clarence hands Dewey a record.

CLARENCE

Here's what they want. Play this

Clarence leaving as Sam bursts in, waving Elvis' acetate.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

My crowd don't wanna hear THAT.

CLARENCE

Your sponsors do! Don't Fug it up.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Yassuh, good people. Now we got somethin' you ain't gonna believe. It's the singin' cardigan himself, Mister Perry Como... Whatcha' got there, man?

SAM PHILLIPS

D'ya remember I told ya if I could find me a white kid who could git behind a blues song, I'da found me a million bucks.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

I remember you promisin' me half.

SAM PHILLIPS

Well, I got me one. I know it don't work this way but--

DEWEY PHILLIPS

--Well, let's hear it, man.

Dewey runs the stylus across the Como record.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (ON AIR) (CONT'D)

Awww, good people, it looks like Perry just won't play on the Red, Hot and Blue turntable. Whaddya think, Diz?

(slurred voice)

I think we gonna git fired. This jus' offa the press. Still warm--

(sniffs loudly)

--smells like a hit.

(plays demo/listens)

Dunno what it is 'cause there ain't nuthin' on the label.

(Lowers faders)

Man, that's diff'rent. It's that ol' Arthur Crudup song, 'cept it's kinda jumped-up hillbilly style.

Clarence storms back in as the phones light up.

CLARENCE

What the HELL!

DEWEY PHILLIPS

(phones light up)

It's... Holy crap, man!

Red, Hot and Blue. Who is it? I dunno.

Sam whispers in Dewey's ear.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Alvin Presney.

(clicks line)

WHBQ I'm diggin' it, too.

(eyeballing Bob)

Daddy O Dewey. Durn tootin' we'll play it again, we'll play it til it's plumb wore out.

Exasperated, Clarence surrenders. Sam goes to another phone.

SAM PHILLIPS

Operator, can you get me Metro 2-2913. Marion, are you listenin' to 'HBQ? Turn it on! Go find Elvis and bring him to the Chisca!

66 INT. ROSEWOOD MOVIE THEATER - EVENING

66

Marion stumbles in the dark, spots Elvis and Dixie watching *From Here to Eternity*, two straws sipping a Nehi.

MARION

Elvis, your record's on the radio.

Shocked, Elvis jumps up, annoyed moviegoers shush him.

ELVIS

I'M ON THE RADIO! I'M ON THE RADIO!

67 INT. WHBQ - EVENING

67

As soon as Marion and Elvis enter, Sam grabs him...

SAM PHILLIPS

Don't say nuthin' dirty and don't stop talkin' for a heartbeat.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Good people, Elvis either got more relatives than anyone I ever knowed, or he's got the Number Record in Memphis. Where you from, son?

ELVIS

(freezes, stiff)

Well, sir, me and my folks come up from Tupelo, Mississippi, fall of '48.

MARION

(whispers to Dewey)

Ask him where he went to school so they'll know he's white.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Where'd ya go to school?

ELVIS

Humes.

(clumsily)

We give three cheers for those happy years at ole Humes High...

DEWEY PHILLIPS

What'cha doin' now, 'sides makin' hit records?

ELVIS

I drive for Crown Electric, sir.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

(pushes sound EFX "zzz")
Figure they gonna be SHOCKED to hear they got a recordin' star haulin' for 'em?

Elvis tongue-tied... Awkward silence... Dewey jumps in.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Elvis Presley folks! Thanks for stoppin' by. We're gonna play "That's All Right" one more time.

ELVIS

I'm so sorry Mr. Dewey, uh, Mr. Phillips... uh, Mr. Sam... uh, Mr. Phillips--

SAM PHILLIPS

--Calm down son. You're jittery as a Junebug.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Cuz, you gotta get this young fella out there! He's gonna be a star!

SAM PHILLIPS

Get your toothbrush and change your shorts, El-vi. We hittin' the road.

BEGIN MUSIC MONTAGE

-Sam, Marion and Elvis on the road, driving... Elvis plays guitar...

-OVERLAY: Station call letters, cities: WTUP, Tupelo. KFFA, Helena. KRLA, Little Rock. WCMA, Corinth...

POP DEE-JAY

Every record I played this afternoon, got 45 pieces. This -
 (points to record)
 - sounds like a three-piece. I haven't played a three-piece record all year.

-Marion unwraps wax paper, passes out sandwiches. Elvis drives, Sam sleeps...

R&B DEE-JAY IN STUDIO

...this ain't no kinda rhythm,
 ain't no kinda blues.

-Sam tries to sell a storeowner a box of records... No sale.

-Pass billboards: Piggly Wiggly, Hamm's Beer, Easy Way Food Stores, Whites only housing, Three Little Pigs BBQ...

COUNTRY DEE-JAY

Sounds like a colored woman.

-MOS: Elvis sings on the sidewalk in front of a store, Sam hands a girl a record, Marion collects the money...

-Marion drives. Elvis and Sam sleep in the back...

WESTERN DEE-JAY

A white boy? Get out!

-Sam, lost, Marion studying a map, Elvis plays guitar...

-Elvis now sings to a large group of girls, but now store owner buys the box of records and takes them into the store.

END MONTAGE

68 EXT. RADIO STATION PARKING LOT - DAY

68

Rain, Sam, Marion, and Elvis dash into the station.

INT. RADIO STATION. CONTINUOUS.

Elvis' black boot polish drips from his hair, down his forehead. DJ (30s) stares at Marion's blouse, see-through wet. Sam waves the record.

SAM PHILLIPS

Andy, ain't gonna waste your time--

Sam notices DJ staring at Marion's breasts, nudges her...

MARION

We're getting unbelievable repeat orders from the jukebox jobbers. They say kids are playing it ten, twenty times in a row.

DJ

Lemme see that thing.

(flips record over)

"Blue Moon of Kentucky." Izzat the Monroe song?

ELVIS

Yessir, but we goosed it up some.

DJ

Well, it being so close to ... some kinda holiday.

Sam pulls out Jim Beam... Instantly DJ goes live.

DJ (CONT'D)

Friends and neighbors, a young kid jus' made his first record. His name's Elvis Presley. He tells me he's goosed up Bill Monroe. (flips off air switch) Dear God, what kinda mess is that? Bill's gonna whup your ass clear 'cross the country.

(Phones ring. Andy answers)

Shuh 'nuff, we'll play it again...

(MORE)

DJ (CONT'D)

Elvis, son, lean on over. Don't be shy...

ELVIS

Howdy folks. I'm pleased to be comin' to you on WTUP.

DJ

Anythin' else you wanna add?

SAM PHILLIPS

Tell 'em to buy the damn record.

ELVIS

Yup, and I'd be mighty proud if you'd buy my record.

DJ

That's right. It ain't like he needs the money, but the folks he owes it to need it awful bad. Let's get back to "Blue Moon of Kentucky." (takes a swig) Don't that beat all.

DJ sneaks one last peek at Marion's wet blouse.

69

INT. DIXIE COURT MOTOR LODGE - EVENING

69

Sam and Marion check in.

SAM PHILLIPS

Two rooms, please.

MOTEL CLERK

Here ya go, 201, 202...

Elvis enters with bags. Clerk passes two keys.

SAM PHILLIPS

I said three rooms.

ELVIS

Mistuh Phillips, you bein' short on cash 'n'all, you 'n' me can share a room. Marion can have mine.

Sam and Marion exchange glances.

SAM PHILLIPS

I snore too damn loud. I wouldn't wish that on anyone.

(MORE)

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)
 (flips him a coin)
 Go grab yourself a Coca Cola.

Elvis goes out to the Coke machine... Sam turns to the clerk.

SAM PHILLIPS (CONT'D)
 (quietly)
 Make that two rooms, friend.

70

INT. ELVIS' MOTEL ROOM - EVENING

70

The three are eating fried chicken and fixins. Elvis bangs out a Bo Diddley-type rhythm on the back of his guitar.

ELVIS
 (sings/raps)
Didn't get no joy at WJOI..

SAM PHILLIPS
*Florence, Alabama, muh home town
 shot me down.*

ELVIS
*And Muscle Shoals shot us fulla
 holes...*

SAM PHILLIPS
*'LAY's gonna want sump'n from me
 one day, and they ain't gonna git
 it!*

ELVIS
*Couldn't make no noise with the
 Biscuit Boys...*

SAM PHILLIPS
*Drove way the hell to Helena fr'
 nuthin'!*

ELVIS
*But I'm the hometown boy on WTUP,
 And buddy they was good to me...*

MARION
 That's how it'll have to be: City
 by city, station by station.

SAM PHILLIPS
 We gotta book Elvis some dates. I
 can really shift some product off
 the back'a them. And we got to get
 you a manager.

ELVIS

Why don't y'all manage me?

SAM PHILLIPS

'Cause you gotta know what you're doin'. You gotta know who to call.

ELVIS

How's 'bout Dewey?

SAM PHILLIPS

He can't hardly manage his ownself.

MARION

The morning fella on WMPS. Bob Neal. He books shows.

SAM PHILLIPS

Call him. Guys, I gotta get me some shut-eye. I'm blitzed.

Marion and Sam leave... Elvis notices Sam's cigarettes.

71 EXT. DIXIE COURT - CONTINUOUS 71

Elvis, cigarettes in hand, watches Sam and Marion enter the same room. Sam hangs a "Do Not Disturb" sign. Elvis falls back.

72 INT. MESS HALL. LANDSBERG AIR FORCE BASE - DAY 72

BEAU flips through the dial on the radio. "That's All Right Mama" comes on.

BEAU

Tell ya one thing, hillbilly music done gone to hell since I got over here. That's some piece a'crap.

JOHNNY CASH

I dunno I kinda like it. You can't keep doin' the same stuff over.

CARMINE and FRANKIE walk up..

CARMINE

"Momma she DONE told me." It's not even English.

BEAU

It is where I come from, Yankee.

CARMINE

Don't fight the Union, Peckerwood.

FRANKIE

You already lost once.

BEAU

Swim back to Italy, then your buddy
can follow the grease slick...

Frankie and Carmine charge Beau. Cash comes to his defence. A brawl erupts. MP, "That's All Right Momma" plays.

73

INT. OVERTON PARK SHELL, MEMPHIS - EVENING

73

Poster: BOB NEAL PRESENTS THE WMPS JAMBOREE FEATURING SLIM WHITMAN, ADDED ATTRACTION: "ELVIS PRESLEY," SCOTTY & BILL.

Slim Whitman on stage performing "**Indian Love Call**" exits to huge applause. BOB NEAL (40s) walks out.

BOB NEAL

Slim Whitman, folks. He'll be back in the second half. Right now, neighbors, he's got the hottest record in Memphis. This is his first ever appearance. Please welcome Elvis Presley with Scotty and Bill.

Terrified, Elvis walks on stage. The crowd is silent.

ELVIS

(To audience)

...I'm as nervous as a frog on the highway with his hopper busted.

The crowd remains quiet...

SCOTTY MOORE

Sing your song, kid.

ELVIS

Here's a song me 'n' the boys worked up. Goes sump'n like this.

Elvis twitches as he sings "Good Rockin' Tonight." Girls get excited, move up front. Middle-aged country fans shaking their heads.

REDNECK

Damn race music is all it is.

Backstage, Sam and Marion stand with BOB NEAL (40s).

SAM PHILLIPS
He's a bit twitchy...

BOB NEAL
What's he doing?

MARION
The girls sure are likin' it.

The more the girls like it, the crazier Elvis gets...

SAM PHILLIPS
Bob, the kid needs a manager. I'm
dumb in spots but I ain't so dumb
to think I can do it.

BOB NEAL
It's hard as hell getting a new act
offa the ground. Look at him
shaking like a boy about to lose
his virginity. So much work to make
fifteen percent of nothing.

SAM PHILLIPS
Pappy Covington at the Louisiana
Hayride promised the kid a regular
spot seein' how we're selling in
north Louisiana. He's an old pal.

BOB NEAL
The Hayride, huh?

SAM PHILLIPS
Fifty thousand watts. You'd book
him clear 'cross Texas, Oklahoma,
New Mexico, Louisiana offa that
alone.

Bob watches older customers walk out.

REDNECK #2
Them bumps and grinds. It's dirty.
They shouldn't oughtn't have him on
a family show.

Teenage girls shrieking, Elvis plays to them. A hick throws a
beer bottle at the stage, his pals boo.

BOB NEAL
This may be the dumbest thing I've
ever done... Bring him by tomorrow.

74 INT. HALL. DIXIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT 74

Dixie, flipping through "Teen Parade" flirts on the phone.

DIXIE'S MOM (O.S)
Dixie, off the phone! You've been
on over an hour. I mean it!

DIXIE
MOM! When you comin' home? I miss
you!

75 INT. CAPTAIN SHREVE MOTOR COURT ROOM. INTERCUT 75

Elvis, shirtless, on his bed.

ELVIS
I'm so lonely baby... I could -
(hears a knock)
Hold on...

Three girls are at the door. Elvis beckons them in...

ELVIS (CONT'D)
Dixie honey, my manager's here.
Didn't I tell you...? Mr. Bob Neal.
Gotta go. See ya Tuesday, Honey.

Scotty and Bill pass the open door, spot the girls.

SCOTTY MOORE
Kid's gittin' more ass'n a toilet
seat.

Elvis winks at them as he closes the door.

CROWD (PRELAP)
WE WANT ELVIS! WE WANT ELVIS!

76 INT. WINGS, LOUISIANA HAYRIDE - NIGHT 76

Kids going wild, Girls swooning... Elvis bowing.

The Colonel stands with Hank watching.

HANK SNOW
It's just squid-jiggin' around.
That ain't talent.
(bumps and grinds)
Damn! Damn! Damn!
(MORE)

HANK SNOW (CONT'D)
(tweaks back, limps out)
Ain't he great folks!

COLONEL PARKER
(sotto voice)
Yeah, anyone can do it.

HANK SNOW
I'd like to sing for you my latest
hit, "A Fool Such as I."

The crowd's energy wanes... slowly disperses.

77

INT. BACKSTAGE. CONTINUOUS.

77

Bob Neal towels off a buzzed Elvis.

ELVIS
Man, that was wild...

BOB NEAL
Great show, my boy. You got the
girls creaming their jeans. Get
changed. I'll drive you back to the
hotel.

As Bob leaves, conveniently the Colonel appears.

COLONEL PARKER
Son, you have a million dollars of
talent, and if you play your cards
right, you'll end up with a million
dollars.

ELVIS
I hope so, sir. My folks have had
it awful rough--

COLONEL PARKER
--Colonel Parker... Hank Snow's
manager.

ELVIS
(impressed)
My folks are huge fans of Mr. Snow.

COLONEL PARKER
You're from Memphis, right?

ELVIS
Yessir.

COLONEL PARKER

We'll be there soon. I'll get front-row seats for 'em. What's your address and phone?

ELVIS

Wow. It's, uh, 462 Alabama, MU7-4103. Much obliged.

As they separate, the Colonel pulls Elvis back.

COLONEL PARKER

Son, here's some free advice, and the Colonel NEVER does "free." Get some new duds. Lose those hillbilly outfits. And make the label pay, alright?

ELVIS

Yessir. Thank you sir.

Elvis leaves. Hank storming offstage, toupee slipping...

HANK SNOW

I can't follow the little shit.

COLONEL PARKER

Fix your rug.

78 EXT LANSKY'S CLOTHING STORE - DAY

78

Sam and Dewey smoking, Dewey finishing a funny story...

DEWEY PHILLIPS

...and then I said, put the hooker in the back seat!

Elvis walks out, awkwardly displaying colorful clothes.

DEWEY PHILLIPS (CONT'D)

Nice threads, kid.

ELVIS

Seven-eighty for the jacket, four ninety-eight for the pants, three dollars the shoes, 1.25 the tie and fifty cents for the kerchief, Mistuh Phillips. Whaddya think?

SAM PHILLIPS

Pretty wild...

Sam reluctantly counts out twenty dollars. Like a kid in a candy store, Elvis runs in to buy the outfit.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

What's with the long face? You're in Fat City, aintcha?

SAM PHILLIPS

Man, I wish! Them distributors are nickel and dimin' me to death. It's like all of 'em got together and said, If 'nough of us shortchange this fool, he'll go outta business and won't none of us have to pay.

DEWEY PHILLIPS

Shoot, that's rough.

SAM PHILLIPS

I remember Bihari telling me the worst thing that can happen to you is a hit, and damn if he wasn't right. I'm gettin' creamed. (looks at watch) Ooh, gotta split. I'm late for an appointment. Tell Elvi I'll catch up with him later.

MARION (PRE-LAP)

Twenty dollars for clothes! I haven't spent that much all year!

79

INT. PLANTERS' BANK, MEMPHIS - DAY

79

Sam and Marion walk past teller cages...

SAM PHILLIPS

We owe Elvis back royalties. Don't forget that...

Loan officer MR. ENOCH REED (35), tight-ass banker, smitten with Marion.

MARION

Enoch, thanks so much for seeing us on such short notice.

ENOCH

Why of course. Anything for you, Miss Marion. I believe you've changed your hair.

MARION

Sweet of you to notice--

Sam plops his ledger down on Enoch's desk.

SAM PHILLIPS

--Mr. Reed, I won't waste your time. You can see here we're owed nearly eighteen thousand dollars.

ENOCH

That's quite impressive. Very good.

MARION

Thing is, Enoch, the pressing plants and the freight companies want to be paid much quicker than the distributors pay us.

ENOCH

We've never had a record company on our books before...

SAM PHILLIPS

Presley's selling like crazy. A line of credit would help us focus on promotion. We need to get the kid on TV. We can make him a regular singing Marlon Brando.

MARION

The girls go crazy for him.

ENOCH

(Skeptical)

It appears that it all hinges on the kid--

SAM PHILLIPS

--The kid is going to change music.

ENOCH

Unless he's a one hit wonder, then you'll get pennies on the dollar. I'm sorry Marion. We could possibly arrange a small bridging loan if you have collateral...

MARION

My car. It's fully paid for.

SAM PHILLIPS

I don't want a damn bridging loan--

MARION

--if that's the best you can do, thank you Enoch.

Sam and Marion get up to leave.

ENOCH

I'll draw up the papers.
See you at Tuesday Bingo, Marion?

SAM PHILLIPS

I'll pay you back, every last cent.
I swear I will.

80

EXT. DRIVE-IN BURGER - NIGHT

80

Dixie is with her girlfriends. A car drives up.

DIXIE'S FRIEND #1

Who dresses like THAT?

DIXIE'S FRIEND #2

I didn't know there was THAT much
grease in the WORLD.

REVEAL: Elvis, greased hair, duck tail, in his loud new
outfit.

DIXIE

Good grief, it's Elvis!

Elvis hugging Dixie looks at the tag on her blouse.

DIXIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

ELVIS

Checking to see if you were made in
Heaven.

Her girlfriends snicker. Dixie groans.

ELVIS (CONT'D)

Man, that line worked for Tony
Curtis.

Elvis pulls Dixie into his car.

ELVIS (CONT'D)

Dee-jay said he was gonna play muh
record in a minute.

DIXIE

See you girls later.
(Sees lipstick on seat)
Whose lipstick is this?

ELVIS

Oh, uh, Marion's. I give her a ride one time.

DIXIE

Don't lie to me. What's happened to you, Elvis? When we met, you were the sweetest, humblest guy.

ELVIS

It's still me, babe. I just got this chance given to me, don't no one hardly get.

DIXIE

God gave you the gift for a reason.

Elvis' song starts playing on the radio.

ELVIS

I know it and believe me I'm grateful.

DIXIE

This weekend there's an All Night Gospel Singin'. Why don't--

ELVIS

--I gotta play the Hayride then, you know that.
(unwraps candy)
Bit-O-Honey?

DIXIE

Tell me, those girls who come to see you after the show, do you go all the way with them?

ELVIS

(looks down)
No, hun. 'Course not.

Dixie pulls a pad from her purse, reads as she writes.

DIXIE

"For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep doing."

Dixie tears out the page, hands it to Elvis.

ELVIS

If I need a preacher, I'll find me one!

DIXIE

You've changed out of all
recognition. For THIS!

Dixie blares the radio, slams the door... Elvis guns the car.

81 INT. NIGHTCLUB. JACKSON, TENNESSEE. NIGHT. 81

On stage CARL PERKINS(23) performs "Matchbox." His bassist points out a kid on the floor who won't let anyone dance near his new blue suede shoes. The band laughs at this...

82 EXT. CLUB PARKING LOT - LATE NIGHT. 82

TRAILER: "CARL PERKINS-TOPS IN HILLBILLY MUSIC, WDXI, WEEK-DAYS, 6-6:30 AM." The club owner lays his baseball bat down, pays the band.

CLUB OWNER

I booked a feller last week played
that same kinda hillbilly bop y'all
play.

CARL PERKINS

(distracted, counts money)
Yeah, who's that?

CLUB OWNER

Don't recollect his last name...
Uh, Elvis somethin'. Girls got
their panties all up in a twist--

FLUKE HOLLAND

--Yeah, Carl, you know... the kid
who jazzed up Monroe's "Blue Moon
of Kentucky" from 3/4 to 4/4.

CLUB OWNER

He's on that Sun Records outta
Memphis.

CARL PERKINS

(suddenly interested)
A record company in Memphis!
Hellfire!

83 ESTABLISH. DOWNTOWN MEMPHIS - DAY 83

The glamorous Peabody Hotel, down the street, the Commercial Traveler's Rooming House.

COLONEL PARKER (PRELAP)
 Mrs. Presley. Col. Parker. Hank
 Snow's manager. How are you this
 fine day? I saw your boy in
 Shreveport. Quite the show he put
 on.

84 INT. COMMERCIAL TRAVELER'S ROOMING HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 84

Colonel is in the lobby phone booth with a stack of dimes.

COLONEL PARKER
 Just a moment.
 (pretending)
 I ordered the filet rare and it's
 well done. Take it away will you...
 What's happened to the standards at
 the Peabody...? Hello, Mrs.
 Presley, please forgive the
 interruption. You know I managed
 Eddy Arnold...

85 EXT, KATZ'S DRUG STORE, MEMPHIS - DAY 85

Sign: "Grand Opening, Katz's newest location, Rivergate
 Plaza. See Elvis Presley and Scotty and Bill."

Cash and his brother Roy are passing by.

JOHNNY CASH
 Hey, I know this hillbilly...

Elvis signs autographs as he walks through the crowd to the
 flat bed stage.

JOHNNY CASH (CONT'D)
 I heard your records overseas, man.
 They're pretty good.

ELVIS
 Thank yuh.

JOHNNY CASH
 Almost lost a tooth stickin' up for
 ya--

ELVIS
 --Then I'd hate to see the other
 guy. I'm playin' a proper set at
 The Eagle's Nest. Come see me
 there. My compliments.

Elvis and the Blue Moon Boys perform.

ELVIS (CONT'D)

Okay folks, thanks to Mister Katz for invitin' us. I bought some powerful good soap here last week, discovered two layers of underwear never knew I had.

Weak laughter from the crowd, Scotty leans in...

SCOTTY MOORE

I'm tellin' ya stop them dumb jokes, son. Stick to music.

ELVIS

Awright, ever'one. I'd like to dedicate this to the US Army.

Cash, Roy, listen to "Mystery Train." Cash pays close attention.

JOHNNY CASH

That boy can play...

ROY CASH

Man, you sing better'n that.

JOHNNY CASH

But I can't jiggle around. That's what's gettin' 'em frothed up.

86 PEABODY HOTEL LOBBY - EARLY EVENING

86

The Colonel signals a bellhop.

COLONEL PARKER

Hand me any key and say that "The Colonel Parker suite is ready."

BELLHOP

Yes, Colonel.

Seeing the Presleys enter, The Colonel turns to Snow.

COLONEL PARKER

Hank, go grab a scotch... Come on over when I give you the nod... Making an entrance will make a better impression...

The Presleys sit.

COLONEL PARKER (CONT'D)

Glad you could make it. I'm a big fan of your boy.

VERNON

Yes sir.

COLONEL PARKER

I'll get right to the point. I'm quite concerned. The major labels, RCA, Columbia, Decca, Capitol, they've already gotten wind of Elvis, and right now as we speak they're all grooming one of their artists to copy him. Case in point. Ever hear of Gianni Rubino?

The Presleys shrug. Elvis becoming anxious.

ELVIS

Can't say that I have--

COLONEL PARKER

--A guinea crooner. Same as Sintara, before Sinatra. Better voice than Sinatra. But no one remembers him because he was on a nothing label...

VERNON

We git it, Colonel, but we're so grateful to Mistuh Phillips for takin' a chance on our boy--

COLONEL PARKER

--Bob Neal can't pull strings to get Elvis on national television. I'm certain I could, but what's the point if his records are only available down here in Dixie?

ELVIS

Mistuh Phillips really believes in me, Colonel. He's got big plans--

COLONEL PARKER

--Does he have plans for an LP? Very much the coming thing. There are no LPs on Sun because they don't have the money to get them pressed. There should be an Elvis Presley LP in production now!

GLADYS PRESLEY

(Fretting)

We'd have to get an LP player.

ELVIS

If I quit Sun, will Mistuh Phillips
come out okay?

COLONEL PARKER

He'll get lots of money, son. (nods
to Snow) I promise. I've had my
attorneys draw a little agreement
that gives Mr. Snow and myself the
right to approach Mr. Phillips
about getting Elvis off Sun. And
the option to take over Elvis's
management when Mr. Neal's term is
up. Elvis is under twenty-one, so
it will take everyone's signature
to accomplish this.

Vernon pretends to look it over. Hank approaches.

HANK SNOW

Mr. and Mrs. Presley. So nice to
meet you. As promised, here are two
front row tickets to my show...

GLADYS PRESLEY

Oh my.

COLONEL PARKER

Hank loves Elvis so much he wanted
to drop these off personally.

HANK SNOW

Your boy has a mellifluous voice.

VERNON

Colonel, I git the feelin' you and
Mr. Snow are honorable men and I
trust you to do what's best for our
boy.

HANK SNOW

Welcome to the team.

Vernon signs. Passes it to Gladys, who signs.

VERNON

Don't dawdle. SIGN it, Elvis.

Elvis, pressured, uncertain, signs.

87 INT. SMOKING PARLOR - DAY

87

Southern atmosphere, Confederate flag. Shooting pool, Bob smokes big stogie.

BOB NEAL

Rack 'em up. You said you wanted to talk about the Presley boy.

The Colonel smokes a bigger stogie.

COLONEL PARKER

I'm very close to Janette Davis.

BOB NEAL

Don't know her.

COLONEL PARKER

I felt sure you would. She's the coordinator for Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts, just the show Elvis needs to be seen by a national audience. I could call her...

BOB NEAL

Save a dime. He's strictly hillbilly, Colonel. Probably a flash-in-the-pan, too.

COLONEL PARKER

(sinks a ball)

You're selling the boy short, Bob. Look, all you're doing is booking him into lowlife joints.

(Runs the table)

Drinks on you. Waiter, another round. Rack 'em up. Where is he tonight..?

BOB NEAL

National Guard Armory. Iuka, Mississippi.

COLONEL PARKER

My point precisely. And you'll clear how much?

BOB NEAL

That's my business. We get good bookings off of the Hayride.

(boasting)

Plus we renewed for two hundred.

COLONEL PARKER

(breaks)

Gott in de hemel! Good bookings?
Two hundred?

(running table again)

What about Chicago, Cleveland, Los
Angeles, Philadelphia?--

BOB NEAL

(irritated)

No one's calling me from there.

COLONEL PARKER

Are you an answering service or a
manager? I have a proposal... I
collect the standard manager's fee
for my bookings, and pay you an
override.

BOB NEAL

If you want to make bookings, do
it, but the agreements will be with
ME as manager, and YOU collecting
the override.

COLONEL PARKER

Another thing. He needs to be off
Sun...

BOB NEAL

Sam Phillips was the guy who got me
in on the this deal. You want me to
double-cross him?

88

INT. MEMPHIS RECORDING SERVICE - DAY

88

Marion's writing checks... Carl Perkins' band enters.

CARL PERKINS

Ma'am, could we see Mister Sam C.
Phillips?

Sam comes into reception area.

SAM PHILLIPS

See me 'bout what?

CARL PERKINS

Mr. Phillips, I'm Carl Perkins,
this here's my brothers Jay B. and
Clay, and that there's our drummer,
W.S.

(MORE)

CARL PERKINS (CONT'D)

We got us the same kinda jumped up hillbilly deal as the Presley boy, so--

MARION

--you figgered if he likes that--

CARL PERKINS

--he'd need us. We're playin' down at the Roadhouse. You can pay fifty cents tonight or see us for free right now.

SAM PHILLIPS

Show me what'cha got.

89

INT. CONTROL ROOM - TIMECUT

89

Sam settles into his chair... Carl intros Blue Suede Shoes...

CARL PERKIND

This here song we wrote drivin' down from Jackson... *That's one for the money, Two for the show...*

Marion interrupts, alarmed.

MARION

Bob Neal calling. Says it's urgent.

SAM PHILLIPS

Hey, Bob.

(hangs up)

--Gotta go boys. I'll catch ya tonight. Sorry. (Rushing out)
Marion, get hold of Elvis, tell him to meet me at the Sharecropper Club.

90

INT. SHARECROPPER CLUB LOUNGE - EVENING

90

The Colonel surveys the room, sees Sam sipping a Gin Rickey.

COLONEL PARKER

Mister Phillips? Colonel Parker.

SAM PHILLIPS

Where's Elvis?

COLONEL PARKER

Mr. Phillips, business is best handled by business men. Wouldn't you agree?

SAM PHILLIPS

We're not in business together.

COLONEL PARKER

There's only one thing standing between Elvis and the success he deserves, and that's Sun Records.

SAM PHILLIPS

Considerin' he hadn't sung no place outside his bedroom when I found him, how'd ya figure I'm standin' in his way?

COLONEL PARKER

You have no national distribution and at least one pressing plant has you on hold for non-payment...

SAM PHILLIPS

Who told you that?--

COLONEL PARKER

--Someone less well disposed than the Colonel would sue on the boy's behalf for unpaid royalties, then if Sun went into bankruptcy, his contract would be auctioned off--

SAM PHILLIPS

If you're a Colonel, I'm the general's daughter--

COLONEL PARKER

--The point is that Elvis needs so much right now. New publicity photos--no more of that hillbilly get-up. An LP--

SAM PHILLIPS

--LPs don't sell.

COLONEL PARKER

--Country LPs don't. Pop LPs do--

SAM PHILLIPS

--Pop stations tell me he's so country he shouldn't be played after milkin' time--

COLONEL PARKER

--Kids in the South go crazy for him, so will kids up north, out west. If he's on national TV, LPs will sell.

SAM PHILLIPS

It's not my job to get him on TV--

COLONEL PARKER

--There's no point in getting TV if there's no product out there! That's your job--

SAM PHILLIPS

--The fact of the matter is this. I have a contract that has twenty months to run--

The Colonel pulls out his new Presley contract...

COLONEL PARKER

I have Elvis' assent. With your assent, I'll sell your contract to a major label - then you can use the money to clear your debt - Word gets out that you discovered Presley - other artists will flock to you. Now you will have the means to properly promote them... That's how you MAKE Sun Records... Or go bust, and take Presley down with you.

91

INT. JUKE JOINT - NIGHT

91

A white crowd in a half-full joint... Stark contrast to the R&B clubs! Country music plays, darts, sawdust covered floor.

Marion smokes, nursing a highball. Sam appears, railing...

SAM PHILLIPS

That pimple-poppin' greasy-haired sonofabitch! Brutus! I make Elvi outta goddamn nuthin' and he lets Hank Snow's fatass manager stab me in the back!--

MARION

--Dear God... Slow down. Stab you how?

SAM PHILLIPS

In twenty months, Elvis' deal is up
- then he's gone and I get squat.

MARION

We'll make more records before
then--

SAM PHILLIPS

--But I don't know that I can git
the money 'tween now and then to
make anything outta him.

MARION

How much would you get for his
contract?

SAM PHILLIPS

Columbia gave Mercury twenty
thousand for Frankie Laine, and
Laine has a stack of pop hits.

MARION

Sam, don't go for the short play.

SAM PHILLIPS

Colonel said if I had the money I
could clear my debt, get on the
mound and throw pitches to another
batter...

MARION

I say hang on to Elvis.

SAM PHILLIPS

I could pay you back!

Carl comes stage, spots Sam...

CARL PERKINS

Howdy, Memphis.

(singing)

Well It's one for the money, Two
for the show, Three to get ready--

MARION

Elvis is the future. I don't care
what paper he signed. You go to
Elvis... He will stick. He loves
you.

As Carl sings "Go cat go", he sees Sam walk out again.

92 INT. WESTERN UNION OFFICE. NIGHT. 92

Sam startles a sleepy clerk behind the gate.

SAM PHILLIPS

Send this... To Colonel Parker.
Stop. Pay a non-returnable deposit
of \$5000 immediately. Stop. Pay an
additional \$30,000 by 7pm October
31. Stop. Clear \$5000 in back
royalties. Stop. Presley can leave
Sun. Stop.

93 INT. PHOTO STUDIO. DAY 93

Snow wearing loud-colored western clothes posing for
publicity stills... He reads Sam's telegram.

HANK SNOW

Is he out of his peapickin' mind?
This kid ain't sold Record One
outside the South. Who's gonna
front THAT kinda money? We ain't
got the five grand for the deposit.
PLUS we don't even get it back if
we don't sell him.

The Colonel paces in deep thought.

COLONEL PARKER

The Colonel has it covered.
(to photographer)
Time to change outfits. And his
rug's coming loose, fix it.
(to assistant)
Bobbie, take this down. "Colonel,
We want Presley." Have Western
Union send that to me from Capitol,
Decca, all the majors. Oh, and vary
'em a little, would ya?

94 EXT. RCA RECORDS BUILDING, NASHVILLE - DAY 94

The Colonel marches in.

INT. OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Colonel barges in on Steve Sholes' (50s) call.

STEVE SHOLES

Someone walked in. Call you back.

The Colonel moves to sit down.

STEVE SHOLES (CONT'D)

Don't sit down. You're not staying that long.

The Colonel sits.

COLONEL PARKER

Steve, it's time for us to move on from whatever bad feelings you had over Snow's renewal.

STEVE SHOLES

You goddamn held me to ransom. New York gave me hell over that.

COLONEL PARKER

"It Don't Hurt Anymore" is Number One how many straight weeks, and counting?

STEVE SHOLES

What do you want?

COLONEL PARKER

Have you heard of Elvis Presley?

STEVE SHOLES

Little girls pee their drawers, their boyfriends want to slice his nuts off. Oh yeah, and the ol' country crowd WALKS OUT.

COLONEL PARKER

The older crowd doesn't buy records. You told me that yourself. Steve, this kid is the future...

STEVE SHOLES

Christ, the number of times I've been told that!

COLONEL PARKER

Never from the Colonel. Until now.

STEVE SHOLES

Get to where you're going to tell me how much.

COLONEL PARKER

Forty thousand.

STEVE SHOLES

Shut the door on your way out.

COLONEL PARKER

Listen to me...

STEVE SHOLES

I can't sell that to New York.

COLONEL PARKER

I'm here out of loyalty.

The Colonel tosses the phony telegrams on Sholes' desk.

STEVE SHOLES

(exasperated)

I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll try to get the forty if I can recoup any unrecouped balance after one year from Snow's royalties.

COLONEL PARKER

No deal. This is between the Colonel and RCA. Hank is not a part of it.

STEVE SHOLES

That's not what he thinks.

COLONEL PARKER

He's mistaken. Presley belongs on a major label. If RCA doesn't want him, (points to telegrams) I'll take my pick!

STEVE SHOLES

(mumbling)

God knows, some months twenty-five percent of RCA's billing is MY product.

COLONEL PARKER

With Elvis, fifty, sixty percent will be your product. Presley will leave Como, Belafonte, Eddie Fisher, all of 'em in the dust.

STEVE SHOLES

They'll have my guts for garters if it doesn't work out.

COLONEL PARKER

You'll be company president if it does. One more thing, Steve, we want a five point royalty.

SHOLES

FIVE! Eddy Arnold's the only country guy getting five and he's sold 48 million records.

COLONEL PARKER

If I were still representing him, he'd get ten... One last thing. This is NOT a drawn out negotiation. Payment in full, no counter offers, October 31.

SHOLES

Be careful Tom. You threaten deadlines, this deal could turn into a pumpkin.

95 EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

95

Trick-or-treaters running around. Knox dressed like Hopalong Cassidy, baby on Sam's shoulders.

BECKY

It's so nice for us all to be doing something as a family.

Sam looks anxiously at his watch. 5:30PM.

INSERT: Sam's house phone rings.

SAM PHILLIPS

I gotta go Becks. The Colonel's run outta time.

BECKY

What's that mean?

SAM PHILLIPS

I gotta get Elvis back in the studio makin' us hit records.

96 INT. PEABODY HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

96

Sam at the bar, nursing a drink. Bartender answers phone.

BARTENDER

Peabody Bar. Yes Sir, he's here.

(passes phone)

For you, Mr. Phillips...

Marion enters, tries to read Sam's face. Sam hangs up.

SAM PHILLIPS

We lost Elvis.