

NASHVILLE

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. BRENTWOOD HOME (NASHVILLE) - NIGHT

A warm glow from the windows of a beautiful home on a gated two acre lot in the Brentwood section of Nashville.

From somewhere in the house, the SOUND OF THE TV turned up loud, the Vandy/Alabama game.

INT. BRENTWOOD HOME - NIGHT

Pandemonium as two little girls DAPHNE (6) and MADDIE (8) run laughing and squealing down a hallway. Their mother, RAYNA JAMES (40), in curlers and a dressing gown, marches purposefully behind them. She is halfway made-up but totally beautiful. She's in full mom hollering voice.

RAYNA
Girls! I mean it! Get in the bath right now! Mama's got to get to work! Teddy, I need a little help here. I can't be late.

Rayna's handsome husband, TEDDY CONRAD (40's) intervenes.

TEDDY
(to Rayna)
I got it, babe.

RAYNA
Thank you!

Rayna splits off to her room.

TEDDY
(to the girls)
Because somebody's got to work in this family-- and I want you in that tub NOW!

Maddie stops and turns to her dad.

MADDIE
Why does she have to work? I thought we were rich.

TEDDY
We are, but now we're a different kind of rich called cash poor, and it's bad manners to talk about money.

INT. RAYNA'S BEDROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Rayna is frantically pulling curlers out of her hair.

TEDDY (O.C.)
I'm counting! One, two...

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. GRAND OLE OPRY STAGE - NIGHT

Rayna is on stage with her band, glittering like a diamond in full Country Music Queen regalia, belting out a country song, thrilling the full house with her big, gorgeous voice.

 RAYNA
 (singing)
COWBOYS HAVE TO FALL IN LOVE,
GET HURT AND ALL THAT BIT,
LET THEIR HEARTS HANG OUT,
SO THEY CAN WRITE YOU ALL A HIT.
SO LADIES IF THEY ASK, YOU DON'T REFUSE.
LET'S ALL HELP THE COWBOY SING THE BLUES.

Rayna's got a thousand-watt stage presence. DEACON CLAYBOURNE (43), her strikingly handsome lead guitar player, can't take his smiling blue eyes off of her. He's the guy that all the women want to be with and all the men want to be. As he plays and sings harmony, he smiles at Rayna. Their flirty rapport charms the crowd.

The song ends to a standing ovation, and as the crowd roars--

 RAYNA (CONT'D)
On bass guitar, Dan Emory! Steel
guitar, Mitchell Dean! On Fiddle,
High Lonesome Stewart Gunn! On
drums, Freddy Miles! And on guitar,
the man with wings on his fingers--
Deacon Claybourne! I'M RAYNA JAMES!
AND GOD BLESS WATTY WHITE!

They leave the stage waving to the crowd. Deacon puts his hand on Rayna's shoulder, and she covers his hand with hers in a familiar, affectionate and intimate gesture.

The ANNOUNCER steps to the stage right podium.

 ANNOUNCER
The reigning Queen of Country,
Rayna James! Coming to you from
Music City, USA, and WSM it's the
GRAND OLE OPRY celebration of
legendary producer and songwriter,
Watty White! Stay tuned for
Juliette Barnes, the Del McCoury
Band, Brad Paisley and Lady
Antebellum!!

INT. BACKSTAGE WINGS - GRAND OLE OPRY - NIGHT

The wing of the stage is crowded with friends, family and fellow country music stars. Deacon whispers to Rayna--

DEACON
One down, fifty-four to go.

RAYNA
(sings)
ON THE ROAD AGAIN...

She walks into the arms a smiling WATTY WHITE (70), flowing white hair neatly swept back.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
Watty, I love you. Who knows where
I'd be without you.

Watty sings in a beautiful tenor--

WATTY
JUST A BIRD IN A GILDED CAGE--

Before Deacon knows what's happened, he's being hugged by a young woman, SCARLETT O'CONNOR (early 20's), whose face is flushed with excitement.

SCARLETT
Uncle Deacon! That was GREAT. Thank
you so much for getting us in!

Now that he knows who he's hugging, he gives a big hug back.

DEACON
Hey, no problem. Rayna, c'mere!

Rayna turns as Deacon steers Scarlett to her. Rayna wears her meet-and-greet smile.

DEACON (CONT'D)
You remember my niece, Scarlett.

Rayna's eyes widen in surprise. She takes Scarlett's hands in hers and looks her over.

RAYNA
No way. Oh, my gosh, hello! This is
not possible. Last time I saw you,
you weren't even talking yet.

Scarlett is smiling, overwhelmed.

DEACON
She's livin' here now. Working at
the Bluebird.

RAYNA
Wow! The Mecca.

SCARLETT
I think someone pulled some strings.

Deacon looks away, feigning innocence.

RAYNA
Are you a songwriter?

Scarlett gets shy, being asked about herself.

SCARLETT
Oh! Me? No! I mean, I write poems,
but no. My fiancé is, though.

She turns to AVERY DAVIS (23) to introduce him.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)
This is Avery Davis.

Avery, a dead sexy East Nashville hipster who patterns himself after Kings of Leon, tries to play it cool, but even he is a little nervous in the presence of the legend.

AVERY
Pleased to make your acquaintance,
Ma'am.

RAYNA
And congratulations to you.
(to Scarlett)
Got yourself a looker there.

SCARLETT
Miss James, I promised myself I
wouldn't do this, but I have to
tell you that I have worshipped you
since I was a little girl, and not
just because of Uncle Deacon. I
know every one of your songs by
heart, and I love your voice and I
just-- don't know what to say.
You're so GREAT!

Rayna gives her a hug, truly charmed.

RAYNA
Aren't you sweet? Now if you need
anything you let me know. Ya, hear?

Rayna is looking at Deacon as she says--

RAYNA (CONT'D)
We're all family here.

EXT. GRAND OLE OPRY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Two idling tour busses sit, emblazoned with the dewy face of JULIETTE BARNES (19), her loopy, schoolgirl signature painted beneath her picture and the name of her tour, "American Angel."

INT. JULIETTE'S TOUR BUS - NIGHT

A gorgeous, sequined, mini-skirted young country vixen, Juliette is being touched up by her hair and make-up people, while a wardrobe person kneels at her feet, strapping on some ridiculously high heels.

ASSISTANT

-- the New York itinerary is coming together. Good Morning America, The View and the Vogue shoot are locked in.

On a table, an array of beauty products and prototype perfume bottles with Juliette's signature in gold are laid out for her approval. She inspects them and picks one up and sprays it. She wrinkles her nose.

JULIETTE

What? That doesn't smell like anything. What the hell is wrong with those people?

An assistant cautiously delivers the news--

ASSISTANT 2

They're just the prototypes. You're supposed to choose the ones you like. They're all filled with water.

JULIETTE

I can't tell without smelling the perfume which one I'm gonna--

A RINGING CELL PHONE cuts her short. ASSISTANT 2 finds it on the table. She answers it and suddenly looks stricken. She covers the mouthpiece, mouths the words--

ASSISTANT 2

It's your mom.

Now Juliette is the one who looks stricken. She's frozen for a second. Then she reaches out for the phone--

JULIETTE

Hello?

We hear a woman's REEDY VOICE on the other end. Juliette pretends there's no sound.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)

(interrupting)

Hello? Hellohellohello?--
There's no one there.

The VOICE INTENSIFIES as she ends the call. Juliette holds the phone like a live rat or an unpinned grenade.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)

How'd she get this number?

No one knows, but they're all frozen in fearful submission.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)

Oh. So she just got it out of thin air. Is that what I'm supposed to believe? Isn't that part of your job, to make sure she doesn't have my number?

ASSISTANT 2

This is a new number. I just changed it.

Juliette flings the phone into the trash can.

JULIETTE

Well, change it again.

A KNOCK at the door startles them. The door opens and Juliette's manager, GLENN GOODMAN (late 40s) steps in.

GLENN

It's time.

He reaches his hand up to help her out.

EXT. GRAND OLE OPRY PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Juliette steadies herself on Glenn's arm as she teeters across the parking lot on four-inch heels.

GLENN

This is important. Be nice.

JULIETTE

I'm always nice.

Glenn's eyebrow says otherwise.

GLENN

Well--be extra nice.

JULIETTE

And this benefits me how?

GLENN

It's not for you. It's for the label. She's royalty. Just kiss the ring and tell her you're a big fan.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - GRAND OLE OPRY - NIGHT

Rayna makes her way through, greeting old friends, shaking hands and smiling for pictures with star-struck relatives of the performers.

The FLASH from an iPhone releases her, and she turns to greet a tall distinguished African-American man, COLEMAN CALDWELL (40s) who's there with his wife ANITA and their three children. Rayna is thrilled to see them.

RAYNA

Hey, Cole! Hello, Anita! I didn't know you were gonna be here! Can I hug the next Mayor of Nashville?

ANITA

You sure can-- I hope you're right about that!

COLEMAN

I'm announcing my run officially next Monday. You in town? If you could do a song it would mean the world to me.

RAYNA

I think so. I'll check with Bucky. I'm so proud of you!

COLEMAN

Is your father here tonight?

Rayna's eyes stop smiling, but not the rest of her.

RAYNA

Dad come hear Hillbilly music?

COLEMAN

Not even for Watty? The Pope of Nashville?

RAYNA

Daddy doesn't worship at this particular church. We'll be ice skating in hell before he ever sets foot in this place.

COLEMAN

He doesn't know what he's missing.

RAYNA

Yes he does.

And she moves on down the hall.

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY/DOOR- GRAND OLE OPRY - NIGHT

A security person opens the door. A blazing hot Juliette steps into the crowded hallway, still on Glenn's arm. The energy shifts palpably. Even among the country music elite Juliette receives a special deference. She owns the place and greets everyone with a smile and a super-friendly--

JULIETTE

Hi, hon, how you doin'?

-- as if she actually cared. Glenn plays it with cool aplomb.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Deacon is talking to some of the members of the DEL MCCOURY BAND when Juliette spots him. She lets go of Glenn.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
Deacon Claybourne?

Deacon's caught off guard for a second, and Juliette is suddenly the star-struck teenager.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
Oh my gosh! I'm sorry to interrupt!
I'm Juliette Barnes. I just love
your songs, and your playing. I
have your very first record on
vinyl and I love it.

DEACON
Yes, you can still find them in
antique stores here and there. I'm
glad you liked it. That makes you
and my mom.

JULIETTE
That one song, "Been and Gone" was
the most beautiful-- Oh my gosh,
I'm so sorry-- I just think you're--
amazing! Nice to meet you! Sorry!

And she's gone. Deacon turns back to the grinning McCoury's.

DEACON
She probably says that to all the guys.

Their eyes sparkle with mirth.

RONNIE MCCOURY
She never said it to me.

The merciless ribbing begins.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Juliette is back on Glenn's arm, continuing down the hall.

JULIETTE
I hope I didn't make a fool of
myself. I just love him so much.

GLENN
He's the best there is.

JULIETTE
(sharply)
Then why isn't he in my band?

GLENN
He's been with Rayna for twenty-
something years, but hey, if you
can get him--

The "good luck" goes unsaid.

Scarlett and Avery come around the corner and Avery bumps
smack into Juliette. Glenn catches her, but Avery has also
grabbed her to break her fall.

AVERY
Oh my God! I'm so sorry!

Juliette is pissed, until she gets a good look at Avery. She
obviously likes what she sees. She quickly recovers.

JULIETTE
That's okay. We should try that
again sometime, only slower.

And gives him a wink over her shoulder as Glenn pulls her
away. Scarlett's jaw drops in disbelief. She whacks Avery on
the arm, like it's his fault.

INT. RAYNA'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Rayna's Producer RANDY ROBERTS (40s), her manager BUCKY
JENKINS (a boyish 50), and two guys from her record label,
ZACH (35) and STEVE (40s), speak in hushed tones.

Rayna and Watty come in and the guys freeze. Something's
going on, something not good, and she reads it instantly.

RAYNA
What? Somebody die?

No one wants to answer. It falls to her manager.

BUCKY
Nothing we need to talk about now.
Let's wait 'til Monday. Hey, Watty.
What a night, huh?

RAYNA
Why? Talk about what?

Before anyone can speak, the dressing room door opens again,
and Glenn ushers Juliette into the room, all sequins and legs.

GLENN
Hi, folks, Rayna. Hope I'm not
interrupting. I wanted to introduce
you to Juliette Barnes. She's a big
fan of yours and wants to meet you.

Juliette all but rolls her eyes at this and goes straight for
Watty, a major diss to Rayna. Watty clocks it.

JULIETTE
Mr. White, it's such an honor for
me to get to sing for you tonight.

WATTY
It wouldn't be if you knew me
better. You met Rayna yet?

Rayna smiles as they size each other up, but Juliette shows none of the enthusiasm or reverence she showed Deacon.

RAYNA
Oh, I know who you are. You're
burning it up out there, girl!

JULIETTE
Oh... thank you. My mom was one of
your biggest fans. She said she'd
listen to you when I was in her
belly.

Darting eye contact between the guys. They're not off to a good start. Rayna doesn't blink, but there's now a faint razor sharp edge in her tone.

RAYNA
Well, bless your heart. What a
charming story. You're going on in
a minute. Don't you want to go find
your pants?

The guys cut it short and Glenn hauls Juliette out before she can do more damage. Rayna looks at her team.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
What the hell was that?

INT. BACKSTAGE HALLWAY - GRAND OLE OPRY - NIGHT

Long-suffering Glenn leads Juliette towards the stage door.

GLENN
We've obviously got some work to do
on that "be nice" deal.

A sly smile on Juliette's lips. She knows exactly what she's doing.

INT. RAYNA'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The mood remains grim as the bad news is laid out to Rayna.

BUCKY
Indianapolis. Three years ago we
put 16,000 tickets on sale they
were gone in an hour. Now, same
venue, we've sold 2800. Austin,
same thing.

(MORE)

BUCKY (CONT'D)
 20,000 on sale, we've sold 4000,
 and we put them up a month ago.
 Overall, we're at barely a third of
 where we'd hoped to be by now.

Rayna is distressed.

RAYNA
 So what does this mean? I mean, I
 did all that radio and press--

RANDY
 We talked about this. There wasn't
 a strong single. I brought you
 three songs I was sure could chart
 and you said no to all three. We
 came on the charts at twenty and
 we're falling.

RAYNA
 Are you guys still working it?

STEVE
 We're doing the best we can. We're
 in transition with Marshall Evans
 coming in, so the money's not
 flowing like we'd like--

RAYNA
 Well what's the plan, guys? I don't
 wanna just stand here and go down
 in flames. Let's work it. Is there
 a plan?

Nobody wants to say. It falls to Bucky. He begins carefully.

BUCKY
 Well, one idea is that you combine
 tours. With Juliette Barnes. You
 can co-headline. You'd save several
 hundred thousand in production
 costs--

RAYNA
 Co-headline? You're kidding, right?

They're not.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
 That's why you brought her in here?
 Was there a turnip truck that drove
 through here you think I fell off
 of?

ZACH
 Miss James, it would expose you to
 a whole new generation of fans, a
 younger demographic that's --

RAYNA
 The one that doesn't buy records?

ZACH
They buy Juliette's records. She's
the number one crossover artist in
the--

RAYNA
(interrupting)
Who goes on first?

No one says anything. This is an unprecedented proposal.
Madonna opening for Lady Gaga.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
You're not seriously suggesting
that I become Juliette Barnes'
opening act? For that half-talent
little snipe? No. No way.

The guys look at Bucky. It's his job to break the news.

BUCKY
Then we'll have to cancel the tour.
I know you don't want to play in
half empty venues and that's what
we're looking at. If you don't cut
down production costs, and that
means dates and people including
musicians, you're going to lose
money. A lot of money.

Now Rayna is the one who's silent.

STEVE
Rayna, you are very, very important
to Hyperion records. And we want to
support you the best way we can. We
believe putting Rayna James and
Juliette Barnes, our two most
important artists, together is a
historic event and a way to solve a
very big problem for you. You can
hop onto a tour that's sold out
every arena and most stadiums from
New York to L.A., or you're gonna
be facing a pretty tough decision.
It's a no-brainer really--

RAYNA
Of, course. Who's the genius that
came up with this idea?

STEVE
Marshall Evans. The new head of the
label.

This is not good news and she's obviously shaken.

RAYNA
(to label guys)
Um, okay guys, could I have a
little privacy? Thank you.

STEVE
Rayna, Marshall wants your decision
by next Monday.

They go. Bucky, Randy and Watty stay. Rayna collects herself.

RAYNA
I've got the most powerful manager,
the best producer, and a record
company that I've been with for
twenty years and this is the best
anyone can come up with? I have one
record that doesn't perform and
suddenly I'm an opening act?

WATTY
Peaks and Valleys are what make a
career. Often we are tested.

BUCKY
I know this is tough, but think how
it'll make you look. You'll come
off looking like the bigger person.

Rayna is stoic, but she's in pain.

WATTY
Girl, the business has changed. The
good part's gone, but the part that
sucks is still thriving.

INT. GRAND OLE OPRY STAGE - NIGHT

Juliette prances charmingly across the stage in her spangled
mini-dress. The young people in the audience are now at the
foot of the stage singing, clapping and dancing with her.

JULIETTE
(singing)
I'M A MEAN GIRL AND I MEAN IT,
YOU CAN ASK, THEY'VE ALL SEEN IT.

Deacon watches from the wings. She's a superstar, no doubt
about it.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
BUT FOR YOU I'M AS GENTLE,
AS A YELLOW BUTTERFLY--

INT. RAYNA'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Rayna's alone now. Sad, angry, confused. Rayna watches
Juliette's performance on a monitor hanging from the ceiling.

RAYNA'S POV of Juliette, dancing for her fans, workin' it.

JULIETTE (ON MONITOR)
I'LL BE SOFTER THAN A LAMB,
AND SWEET LIKE CHERRY PIE--

Rayna picks up the remote and points it like a gun at the monitor.

RAYNA
Oh shut up.

CUT TO BLACK:

END OF ACT 1

ACT II

EXT. SCARRITT-BENNETT CONFERENCE CENTER - DAY

A chauffeur-driven SUV pulls up in front of the Gothic Building where two black-suited SECURITY GUARDS wait.

MAYOR (V.O.)

In my two terms as Mayor of Nashville, I have come to regard Lamar Hampton as more than a friend, more than a captain of industry, more than a benefactor to countless charitable causes, but as a titan of philanthropy--

A Security Guard opens the door and Rayna hops out, and is escorted quickly into the building.

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

A full banquet room celebrating NASHVILLE PHILANTHROPIST OF THE YEAR. The Mayor at the podium continues his remarks. The recipient, LAMAR HAMPTON (late 60s), sits at a table surrounded by family and cronies. To his right sits his oldest daughter, the handsome and regal TANDY HAMPTON (42) and to her right, her nattily dressed husband, MICHAEL WINSTON CARLISLE (46). To Lamar's left, an empty seat with the place card that reads RAYNA JAMES.

LAMAR

(whispering to Tandy)
Where the hell is she?

TANDY

She should be here any minute.

A murmur rises from the tables as Rayna hurries into the room, security in tow. Camera flashes spark throughout the hall. The Mayor sees Rayna making her way through the room.

MAYOR

--and of course we can't forget Lamar's priceless contribution to country music by way of his daughter, the great Rayna James!

Rayna smiles and waves as she reaches the table. The audience claps and whistles. Her father rises, a brief kiss on the cheek and they sit. It's tense and icy.

As the mayor continues--

LAMAR

Unbelievable.

TANDY

She's here now, Daddy. Let it go.

LAMAR
You wouldn't be late for a show.

RAYNA
At least I showed up. That's more than you can say.

LAMAR
I ask for so little.

RAYNA
Oh, for God's sake.

MAYOR
May I present to you our esteemed honoree for Nashville Philanthropist of the Year-- Lamar Hampton!

The room rises to a standing ovation. As a smiling Lamar stands, he hisses to Rayna--

LAMAR
Try to look happy, dear.

Rayna, Tandy and the rest of the table stand and clap as Lamar glad-hands his way to the podium.

LATER - ANOTHER ANGLE

Lamar and the Mayor stand together as they are photographed holding the award. Lamar smiles and whispers to the Mayor--

LAMAR
Two terms, five million dollars in campaign contributions, and all I got was this lousy award.

MAYOR
It's overdue. And I can't thank you enough for your invaluable support.

LAMAR
Oh, you didn't thank me enough. I asked for only one thing, one lousy permit. You got something against bringing major league baseball to Nashville?

The mayor waves the photographers off and aides clear the area, giving the two men their space.

MAYOR
You know that's not the case, Lamar. You know that particular piece of land--

LAMAR
 What I know is that I have a billion dollar property that's been rendered worthless because you wouldn't push one permit through for me.

From the outside, this exchange looks like two old friends.

MAYOR
 That permit falls under the purview of the Director of Public Works--

LAMAR
 A mayoral appointee whom you could have replaced at any time. And yet you chose not to, a decision I will see to it you regret as you return to life in the private sector.

The blood has drained from the Mayor's face.

MAYOR
 Well. I wish you better luck with my successor.

He nods in the direction of Coleman Caldwell who's being photographed with Rayna.

LAMAR
 Hell, he's even more of a tree hugger than you are.

EXT. SCARRITT-BENNETT CENTER - DAY

The event is over and Tandy walks Rayna to her waiting car.

TANDY
 Thank you for coming. He won't say it, but it means a lot to him.

RAYNA
 You know I didn't come for him. I came for you.

TANDY
 Well, then, it means a lot to me. But still I'm sorry I had to ask. I tried to talk him out of it, but you know how it is with him. You win one, you lose ten.

RAYNA
 Funny thing about Daddy. He's always there when he needs me. Don't ask me again for a while, okay? I've got enough problems.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Through the glass into the studio we see Juliette singing to the up-tempo bubble-gum country/pop track.

JULIETTE (O.S.)
 YOU THINK YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN I KNOW MYSELF,
 THAT YOU'VE READ ME LIKE A PAPERBACK YOU FOUND
 UPON YOUR SHELF,
 BUT YOU DON'T KNOW MY STORY,
 YOU CAN'T READ BETWEEN MY LINES--

A red-faced Randy Roberts is on the phone. Juliette's manager, Glenn, sits on a sofa, reading Billboard. The ENGINEER is at the board.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
 What?! How?! She can't make more
 than she did when we were together.

The engineer lowers the tracks except for Juliette's voice. It's not great. Out of tune. Randy covers the mouthpiece with his hand.

RANDY (CONT'D)
 (to Glenn)
 Don't worry. We can fix that.

Without looking up from the magazine--

GLENN
 Thank God for auto-tune.

RANDY (ON PHONE)
 Well, to use his phrase, that's an
 absolute non-starter.

He hangs up.

RANDY (CONT'D)
 That bitch couldn't balance a
 checkbook when we were married, now
 all of sudden she can do advanced
 calculus.

His attention returns to Juliette, singing her heart out. She sees him watching and gets very flirty, blows him a kiss. Randy smiles.

RANDY (CONT'D)
 (re: Juliette)
 Heartbreaker.

From the sofa--

GLENN
 Money maker.

RANDY
 Maybe I ought to marry her.

GLENN
Take the money and run.

Off Randy looking at Juliette--

EXT. LOVELESS CAFE - DAY - ESTABLISHING

The LOVELESS CAFE neon sign, a Nashville landmark, promises hot biscuits and country ham, and it still makes good on that promise.

RAYNA (O.S.)
I am sick to death of talking about money.

INT. LOVELESS CAFE - DAY

Rayna and Bucky at a table deep in conversation, oblivious to the turned heads of the other patrons. They drink coffee.

BUCKY
You'd be more sick to death of not having any. Now I don't want you to overreact to this. You still have over a million fans on Facebook. But if you cancel this tour, you're burning a lot of bridges, not just with the promoters but with radio, too. And if you think the record is stiffing now, just wait till you piss those guys off. Love her or hate her, I'm gonna be blunt, Juliette Barnes is the biggest thing to come along since, well, you. And anything we can do right now to keep you relevant--

A woman holding the hand of a six-year old girl approaches the table, stopping Bucky.

WOMAN
Miss James, I'm so sorry to interrupt but I couldn't let this chance go by. I am such a huge fan. Could I get a picture of my daughter with you?

Rayna acts like she's been waiting all day for this opportunity.

RAYNA
You sure can. What's your name, darlin'?

LITTLE RAYNA
Rayna.

RAYNA
 It is? That's my name, too!
 (to the girl)
 What do you want to be when you
 grow up?

LITTLE RAYNA
 A star.

A nano beat while Rayna processes that.

RAYNA
 Well, you're sure pretty enough.
 Rayna puts her arm around the little girl and smiles.

WOMAN
 I love your new record. But I've
 loved all your records.

BUCKY
 (to the woman)
 Here. I'll take the picture. You
 get in there.

The woman can't believe her luck. Bucky shoots, looks at it.

BUCKY (CONT'D)
 Beautiful. Y'all have a good day.

He hands the camera to the woman, who is overwhelmed.

WOMAN
 Thank you. Thank you so much.

Rayna and Bucky resume.

RAYNA
 It wasn't all that long ago that I
 was the future of country music.

EXT. ENSWORTH SCHOOL - DAY

The former future of country music waits in the carpool line.
 Her daughters hop into the backseat of the car.

RAYNA
 Seatbelts.

MADDIE
 Mama, when do you leave?

RAYNA
 That's a nice hello.

Rayna pulls out.

DAPHNE
Maddie's gonna be in the talent
show.

RAYNA
You are? Maybe I can fly back for
it. Do we know what day of the week
that is?

Rayna knows she'll be on tour then. So do the girls. Maddie
is already dealing with the disappointment. She's used to it.

MADDIE
It's a Friday.

Rayna's definitely got a show on Friday.

RAYNA
Maybe we could move something.

MADDIE
You can't. It costs too much money.
You missed it last year, too.

RAYNA
But Daddy sent me the video. I
watched it over and over on the
bus. I thought you were great.

Rayna checks the rear view mirror. Both girls are silent,
staring out their respective windows. She turns the radio on.
Juliette Barnes' song MEAN GIRL is playing, the one she sang
at the Opry. The girls are immediately animated.

MADDIE
Turn it up!

Rayna turns it up and endures as long as she can, four more
seconds, then snaps the radio off. The girls wail.

DAPHNE
Nooo! Why?

RAYNA
Mama's got a headache.

Rayna looks out the window and something catches her eye.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
There's the first place I ever
played.

From Rayna's POV, we see the Bluebird Cafe-- the tiny
unassuming little club with its famous blue awning.

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - DAY

Sound check is underway. GUNNAR SCOTT (27) handsome in a clean cut way, mans the sound board, checking levels, as four musicians play acoustic guitar, bass, fiddle and mandolin. The fiddle player, JESSIE (25), is the sole female in the band.

Scarlett drops menus and coasters on the tiny tables, preparing the room for the upcoming show, grooving to their sound. Scarlett and Gunnar acknowledge with eye contact that it sounds great. The song wraps up and Gunnar removes his headphones.

GUNNAR
(to the band)
Once the room's full it won't sound
so bright.

JESSIE
(wryly)
How about if the room's half full?

SCARLETT
You sell the place out every time.
Y'all are great. Gunnar, tell 'em.

GUNNAR
You guys should be playing bigger
venues.

GUITAR PLAYER
(to Gunnar)
So should you. As long as we're
handing out compliments.

GUNNAR
My time'll come.

The door opens flooding the room with sunlight. In sails Avery, happily waving a CD. Gunnar deflates a little at the sight of him while Scarlett's reaction is the opposite.

AVERY
Looky what I got-- fourteen songs.
Just finished mixing. Hot off the
pro-tools.

SCARLETT
It's done? Are you happy with it?
I'm so proud of you. I can't wait
to hear it.

AVERY
Maybe if you like it, you'll give
it to your Uncle Deacon.

SCARLETT
Maybe? You know I'll love it.

JESSIE
 Uncle Deacon. Deacon Claybourne?
 Are you kidding? That's your uncle?

Scarlett nods.

GUITAR PLAYER
 Hell, then give him our demo, too.

AVERY
 I think I deserve a beer. It's five
 o'clock somewhere.

GUNNAR
 Here. It's five o'clock here.

AVERY
 So it is.

Avery heads to the bar to help himself.

JESSIE
 Isn't Deacon doing the Writers-in-
 the-Round here this week?

SCARLETT
 He is. It's sold out--but I know
 somebody could get you in...

JESSIE
 That would be so totally awesome,
 thanks!

Avery takes a seat at the bar, faces the room. Scarlett goes
 to the bar, and leans against Avery. Gunnar arranges mic
 stands on the stage.

SCARLETT
 (to Gunnar)
 Gunnar, can we play Avery's demo?

GUNNAR
 (a little too fast)
 Can we not-- right now? I need to
 give my ears a break for awhile.

Scarlett makes a frowny face at Avery.

AVERY
 You don't know what you're missing.

As Avery kisses Scarlett, Gunnar's expression says, in fact
 he does know, on several counts.

INT. RAYNA'S BEDROOM - DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Rayna sits at her dressing table. She inspects her face for
 wrinkles, seeing if a face lift might help. Teddy enters.

TEDDY
 Don't do that. You're beautiful and
 if you ever get a face lift I'll
 leave you.

Rayna puts her head in her hands.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 I was kidding.

Teddy realizes Rayna is crying.

TEDDY (CONT'D)
 Babe, are you crying? What's wrong?

RAYNA
 Everything. The record's a flop,
 the tour isn't selling. They want
 me to open for Juliette Barnes.

TEDDY
 Who does?

RAYNA
 The label. Marshall Evans.

TEDDY
 Open for her? Are you sure?

RAYNA
 "Co-headline" they called it.

TEDDY
 Well, now. Let's think about this.
 Is it really such a terrible idea?

RAYNA
 Teddy! Yes, it's terrible idea. I'd
 have to lie and pretend like I like
 her music.

TEDDY
 You've lied for a lot worse than
 her. That's not the reason.

RAYNA
 I might have to cancel the tour.
 They've given me 'til Monday to
 make a decision. I'm set to lose a
 bundle if I don't. I've been over
 every detail with Bucky.

Teddy proceeds with caution.

TEDDY
 You know, you don't have to put
 yourself through this. You could
 quit and just walk away--

RAYNA
Not if you like living in this house I can't.

TEDDY
Rayna, look, I know I've let you down and I'm sorry as hell about it. I'm not the first guy to go bust and I'm working on some deals that'll put us in better shape. But in the meantime, there's a trust fund just sitting there doing nothing but racking up interest. You could do whatever you wanted--

RAYNA
No. I would be breaking the one promise I made myself, that I would never put myself in a position to rely on my father again. And that isn't going to change. I'll wait tables first.

TEDDY
But you won't share a bill with the hottest act in Country music. Interesting logic.

RAYNA
Just look at Tandy. She's practically his handmaiden.

TEDDY
She's gonna take over the damned family business, Rayna. She's the grande dame of Nashville. And when he dies, she'll be the most powerful woman in the state. She's hardly running errands for him.

RAYNA
That's not the point. The point is--

TEDDY
The point is she's never gonna have to worry for one second about paying a bill. Now look, I get it, he was a lousy father, a son of a bitch and still is. Mine was a drunk. But it doesn't change the color of his money. You could look at it like he owes you, instead of depriving yourself the freedom to do whatever you want.

RAYNA
Please, Teddy, you think you know him, but you don't.

TEDDY
Okay. Okay. I just hate to see you being put through this.

RAYNA
 Me, too. But that's how it is.
 We're just gonna have to figure out
 something else.

INT. RANDY'S PENTHOUSE - NIGHT

A LOUD KNOCKING on the door. Randy, pulling on a robe, goes to answer it. Platinum Albums and photos of Randy with mega-stars and Presidents line the walls.

RANDY
 (muttering)
 Who the hell is beating the damn
 door down? I'm coming!

He peers through the peephole. Shocked to see Rayna, he opens the door to let her in.

RANDY (CONT'D)
 Rayna? What the hell? Is everything
 okay?

RAYNA
 Can I come in? Did I wake you?

RANDY
 No. I-- was just--

Rayna's on a tear, talking fast.

RAYNA
 You were right. I should've cut
 something dead commercial but hell,
 after a dozen albums, you'd think
 people would get the picture. I
 mean I love the record. But you
 were right and now I think we ought
 cut one of the three, I think that
 Bob DiPiero one could do it--

RANDY
 All three of those songs have been
 recorded. Martina, Sarah and-- one
 other--

RAYNA
 Well, can you find another one? You
 found those three. You always find
 great songs.

RANDY
 After a year of sifting through
 hundreds. I can't just snap my
 fingers and find a song that'll
 chart.

RAYNA
 I know. I'm sorry. I'm in a fix
 here and I'm asking for some help.

RANDY
And I want to help you but I have
to finish Juliette before she goes
out in two weeks.

RAYNA
You're doing her record?

This is news to Rayna and Randy looks caught.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
Is that who cut that third song?

Randy acknowledges, and begins speaking very quietly.

RANDY
You know what I'm going through
right now. I'm in no position to
say no to anything. Ex-wifestyle's
a bitch.

RAYNA
Stop getting married. Try dating.
(re: Juliette)
God, I can't believe people like
that phony adolescent crap. She
sings like a feral cat.

INT. RANDY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

RAYNA (O.C.)
Why does everyone keep pretending
she's good?

Juliette lies in Randy's bed, hearing every word, eyes
narrowed. Game on.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

The tiny club is having its famous "Writers in the Round" night. Four Nashville songwriting legends sit in a circle, the audience surrounding them. Deacon sings a heartbreakingly beautiful song of unrequited love and loss.

DEACON
(Singing)
THE TV'S TIRED OF WATCHIN' ME.
I'M HERE, LONELY AS A MAN CAN BE.

Scarlett gingerly makes her way through the sold out room, delivering drinks, picking up empties. The audience is quiet.

Gunnar mans the sound board. Scarlett catches his eye. He mouths the word "WOW" and she smiles. Avery sits at the bar, listening intently, Jessie next to Avery, mesmerized.

In a darkened corner, a funky/chic, dressed-down Juliette sits mesmerized. Her posse gives her good cover. She quickly wipes a tear.

DEACON (CONT'D)
(Singing)
HE MADE A LIFE AND FAMILY,
LIVED EVER AFTER, HAPPILY.
THAT'S THE STORY OF EVERYMAN,
EVERYMAN BUT ME.

The song ends to huge APPLAUSE. Deacon smiles.

DEACON (CONT'D)
Thank you.

FRED SCHUYLER (50s), next up in the circle, tunes his guitar.

FRED
The late, great Deacon Claybourne,
folks. Believe it or not, I have a
song that will make you want to
kill yourself even more.

The audience and Deacon laugh. Still tuning.

FRED (CONT'D)
This song is not about my first
wife, no matter how much it sounds
like her-- I'm required by court
order to make that clear.

DEACON
Is this the song that got you the
George Strait patio?

FRED
No, this is one I wrote in the
Garth Brooks Billiards room.

(MORE)

FRED (CONT'D)

The one in the house where my first wife currently resides. With her boyfriend.

The audience laughs again. He begins playing.

LATER

The room is mostly empty. Deacon and Scarlett catch up.

DEACON

If she wants to come for Thanksgiving, she can stay at my place. I don't know why she's so stubborn about it.

SCARLETT

She just doesn't want to put you out.

DEACON

She's my sister for cryin' out loud. She's still weird. I mean--

Avery appears.

AVERY

Hey, Deacon, did you get my demo?

Deacon's manner is disarming, and even barbs are delivered with a smile that almost makes it feel like an honor to be slapped around by him.

DEACON

I did. What kind of music?

AVERY

Kind of alt/country/punk.

DEACON

You know, around here punk is code for not being able to play at all.

Avery ribs him right back.

AVERY

You need to hear what the kids are playing these days, old timer.

DEACON

Alright, alright, I promise not to use it as a coaster. In the meantime, you keep working on being good enough for my favorite niece.

SCARLETT

I'm your only niece.

DEACON

What a happy coincidence!

Gunnar brings Deacon his guitar case. Avery follows Scarlett back to the bar, grabs his beer, then takes a table by the window and checks his phone.

GUNNAR
That was a great show. A couple of those songs I'd never heard. That one, "Wildest Dream"? Killer.

DEACON
It won't be too long before you're sittin' in that circle. Heard a couple of your demos. You're sounding good, boy. Real good.

A compliment from Deacon is as good as it gets. Gunnar can barely respond.

GUNNAR
That's-- thank you.

Deacon looks at Avery, sitting by the window.

DEACON
What do you think of that guy? Is he good enough for my niece?

GUNNAR
I guess I'm just naturally suspicious of anyone that confident.

DEACON
Keep an eye on her for me, will ya?

Gunnar, with a smile, as charming as can be --

GUNNAR
It's kind of hard to take my eyes off her.

Deacon claps him on the shoulder.

DEACON
Well, son, she's got the family curse. We always pick the one who'll break your heart. That one just doesn't strike me as the marryin' kind.

Deacon takes his guitar case and heads out the door.

EXT. BLUEBIRD CAFE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Deacon opens the car door and puts his guitar on the back seat. When he turns back around, Juliette is standing there.

DEACON
Well! Hello.

Juliette's posse waits outside her Escalade on the other side of the parking lot.

JULIETTE
That last song you did. Has that
ever been recorded?

She stands close to Deacon, gazing up at him.

DEACON
Only by me, so that pretty much
damns it to obscurity.

JULIETTE
I want to record it.

DEACON
You do.

JULIETTE
I do. This week. Will you come play
on it?

Deacon is unnerved by her unabashed admiration. And unless he's wrong, and he's not, she's flirting with him.

DEACON
Well, I could, depending on when.
We're rehearsing all week.

JULIETTE
With Rayna? I heard that tour might
be off.

DEACON
What? No. Not to my knowledge. I
haven't heard anything like that.

JULIETTE
Maybe I'm wrong then.

Now she's just smiling at him. He's a little at a loss.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
Why don't you come take over for
Buddy as my band leader? His wife's
baby is due two weeks into the
tour. I'm gonna to have to replace
him anyway.

DEACON
I can't.

JULIETTE
Why not?

DEACON
I can't do that to Rayna.

JULIETTE
I'll pay double whatever she pays.

DEACON
And why would you do that?

JULIETTE
I want the best. You're the best.

Deacon is trying to figure her out her angle.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
We could write together.

Now he's interested, but doesn't let it show.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
(suggetively)
I'll bet you and I could have a lot
of fun on the road.

Her white Escalade comes rolling up.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
I'll schedule the session around
you. Think about it.

The car stops.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)
Rayna's not the only woman in the
world, you know.

DEACON
You're a girl.

JULIETTE
That, too.

The back door opens and she climbs in and is gone.

DEACON
(to himself)
What the hell was that?

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

Avery has watched Deacon and Juliette through the window.
Gunnar and Scarlett go about their work, but they're aware of
Deacon and Juliette in the parking lot.

AVERY
Think there's something going on
there?

SCARLETT
She sure looks different when she's
dressed regular. Kind of gives me
hope.

GUNNAR
He's way too cool for her.

Scarlett wipes down tables and Gunnar coils cable. Avery puts his feet up and leans back in the chair.

AVERY

Why didn't he and Rayna ever hook up?

SCARLETT

Did you ever hear his song, "She Was Mine to Lose"?

GUNNAR

That's about Rayna?

SCARLETT

Among others. Like, "You and Everything After", "Buy This Broken Heart a Drink". They were together for a while in the early days.

AVERY

Who dumped who?

SCARLETT

Mom said Rayna would have married him, but he was drinking. A lot. Big partier back then. All the girls wanted him. So she married that other guy. The rich one. Teddy. That about knocked the stuffing out of Deacon.

AVERY

Ouch. Remind me never to let that happen to us.

SCARLETT

Sobered him up. Too late, but it worked. Mom thinks he still --

She lets the sentence drift away.

GUNNAR

At least he got a lot of great songs out of it, I guess.

AVERY

No hits, though. Speaking of hits, will you make sure Deacon listens to my demo?

SCARLETT

Yeah, but I don't want to bug him.

AVERY

But that's what family is for! To bug you, drive you crazy--

He leaps up and play tackles Scarlett.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 So bug him for me, don't let up!
 It's your job as his only niece!
 Say, "I'll bug my Uncle!" Say it!

She squeals with delight as he play mauls and tickles her.

SCARLETT
 (laughing)
 Okay, stop-- I'll bug him about it!

AVERY
 (to Gunnar)
 Can you believe she does me like
 this? Woman, why you gotta treat me
 so mean?

The play softens to affection, then passion.

SCARLETT
 'Cause you're a mean old daddy and
 a bad, bad man.

On Gunnar's face, as he tries not to watch, odd man out.

EXT. PROJECT SITE - DAY

In a wide open, overgrown expanse of land, a few empty brick warehouse skeletons dot the neglected site. Lamar, Tandy, and FOUR BUSINESS ASSOCIATES/ADVISORS, stand in the stiff breeze.

DENNIS
 One civil servant making twenty
 grand a year can deny a permit and
 hold up a billion dollar ballpark.
 That's incredible.

TANDY
 It's not gonna get any better when
 Coleman Caldwell's the mayor.

HENRY
 Lamar, why don't you run someone
 against that SOB so we can get this
 thing done?

A pause while Lamar considers it.

TANDY
 It's not an idea without merit. If
 we found someone credible, someone
 well known, business friendly, who
 fits nicely in your pocket--

ALBERT
 How 'bout Teddy Conrad?

Tandy shoots a look to Lamar, alarmed, about to object but --

LAMAR
Keep talking.

ALBERT
Maybe we say-- it skipped a generation. Ted, Sr. was a rake, but Teddy got it together. I mean, after he blew through his trust fund. But his grandfather was mayor, then congressman. Great grandfather was a judge and a four-term senator. He's smart. Knows a lot about development. Great people skills and photogenic as all get out.

HENRY
How the hell do you know so much about Teddy Conrad?

ALBERT
I was his big brother when he pledged Kappa Sig.

HENRY
You don't think it'll look a little sketchy if he helps push a deal through for his father-in-law?

ALBERT
Lamar Hampton is nobody's father-in-law. No one's gonna question how he gets things done.

TANDY
Except Rayna.

ALBERT
A beloved star of Country Music for a wife sure as hell doesn't hurt.

They all check each other, then Lamar.

LAMAR
Crazy enough, it just might work.

Tandy's look to Lamar is unequivocal. It's a bad idea.

ALBERT
Let's run it up the flagpole. Can't hurt.

They head to the waiting cars, Lamar quietly asks Tandy--

LAMAR
How bad do you expect Rayna's gonna try to screw this up for us?

TANDY
She's gonna lose it, Daddy. She's going to absolutely lose it.

INT. REHEARSAL STAGE - DAY

An undressed stage except for a few risers. Rayna is rehearsing with her band. Bucky is also there. Rayna and Deacon sing an up-tempo song together.

RAYNA & DEACON
 YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE FOR ME,
 YOU'RE THE APPLE OF MY EYE,
 THAT CROOKED LITTLE SMILE YOU DO,
 MAKES ME WANNA DIE --

Rayna abruptly stops, yanks her in-ear monitors out of her ears and throws them on the floor.

RAYNA
 Why the hell is my voice distorted?

She looks over to the monitor guy, who looks like a deer in the headlights.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
 Are these the new ones?

The monitor guy nods.

RAYNA (CONT'D)
 Well they suck, too!

She crushes the ear pieces with her foot and walks off the stage. Bucky watches the whole scene.

BUCKY
 (to himself)
 There goes twelve hundred bucks.

DEACON
 (stating the obvious)
 And... that's a wrap.

The techs scurry onto the stage, gathering instruments, etc.

BUCKY
 It's sounding great!

RAYNA
 Not to me it's not. Talk to him before he makes me deaf. And did you see the wardrobe they pulled? It's crap!

BUCKY
 I know. They're in New York shopping now. Don't worry.

RAYNA
 (to band and crew)
 Sorry, guys! Diva dip. Haven't eaten.
 (then to Bucky)
 (MORE)

RAYNA (CONT'D)

I'm so far beyond worried it's not even funny. I'm staving off full-blown panic attacks.

BUCKY

It's not time for panic yet. I'll let you know when it is. Meantime can we talk about a couple of things?

RAYNA

Go.

BUCKY

I told Caldwell's campaign guy that you could do two songs at the announcement, so just let me know what songs and who you want.

RAYNA

Okay. Let me think about it.

BUCKY

Now. There's a meeting Monday morning at the label. Marshall Evans. He's going to want to know your decision.

Rayna nods, but obviously doesn't want to talk about it. She catches Deacon's eye and heads toward the door.

RAYNA

Deacon! Wait. You gotta second?

DEACON

For you I do.

BUCKY

And... meeting's over.

EXT. CUMBERLAND RIVERWALK - DAY

Rayna and Deacon walk together. Rayna has told him everything. Almost.

RAYNA

I mean, I feel like I'm in my prime. I don't think I've ever sounded better. But the way they say "forty" makes it sound like I should be in a wheelchair. If I'm such an old hag, then why would I open for Juliette Barnes? What is she, fifteen?

DEACON

Nineteen. And don't talk crazy.

Deacon folds her into his arms, in a comforting way.

RAYNA
Am I crazy? Do you understand why I
can't do it?

They resume walking.

DEACON
I do. We've been doin' this for
twenty-one years. Can you believe
that?

This makes her laugh.

RAYNA
No. That's absolutely impossible.

DEACON
You've been sayin' for a while you
don't want to do as many dates now
that the girls are in school--

RAYNA
Yeah, but I want it to be my
choice.

DEACON
You can leave any way you want and
come back anytime you want. You're
not some overnight sensation.
Although you are sensational
overnight, to the best of my
recollection.

She smiles, but isn't going there.

RAYNA
I still love it. I just don't feel
ready to hang up the rhinestones.

DEACON
They're not the only record company
in the world. You don't owe them any
records. You could blow them off,
call off the tour, pretend the whole
thing never happened. You'd be
snapped up in heartbeat, and start
over with a new label who'll bust
their asses and feel lucky to have
you.

RAYNA
But all the guys and the crew,
they've planned their whole year
around the tour. I have hundreds of
people depending on me. They have
families. No one understands that
pressure. I can't leave everybody
hanging. Especially not you.

Deacon realizes that he has to tell her, now.

DEACON
In that vein, here's something kind
of strange that happened. Juliette
Barnes asked me if I wanted a job.

RAYNA
She asked you? As what?

DEACON
Lead guitar. Band leader. Her guy
is leaving in a few weeks.

Rayna looks like she's been punched in the stomach.

RAYNA
Oh. What did you say?

DEACON
Nothing. I mean, I'm not available
until otherwise notified.

RAYNA
Randy's doing her record, she wants
you in her band, what, is she
comin' for my house next?

DEACON
She wants to write with me.

RAYNA
Wow. She went straight for your
soft spot.

He acknowledges that it's his weakness.

DEACON
I've always wondered why you never
cut more of my songs.

RAYNA
I don't know. Felt weird, like they
were all about me.

DEACON
They were. Are, I guess.

Rayna nods. He knows this is pure pain for her.

DEACON (CONT'D)
Rayna, you know I would never do
anything-- if you don't want me to--
I won't leave you hanging either.

Rayna is far away.

RAYNA
Sometimes, I wish I could go back
and do the whole thing over again.

DEACON
What would you change?

RAYNA
Everything. I'd do it all
different.

DEACON
That makes two of us.

She looks into his eyes. She wants to kiss him, but she
won't. He wants the same thing, but he won't either.

RAYNA
I need a drink. Walk with me to Tootsies?

DEACON
Ha, can't. Got a meeting.

Really? Then she gets it.

RAYNA
Oh, that kind of a meeting. Do you
ever miss the wild old days?

DEACON
Everyday. Except the headaches. I
don't miss the headaches.

She smiles.

RAYNA
I'd never stand in your way. I want
you to be happy.

DEACON
Babe, you know good and well
there's only one thing that could
have made me happy and I lost that
a long time ago.

Not much to say after that.

END OF ACT III

ACT IV

INT. CAPITOL GRILL - DAY

A stately dining room, known for its power lunches. Lamar, Tandy, Henry, Albert and a few other POLITICAL TYPES dine at in the corner with all eyes on Teddy, who shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

TEDDY

You don't think my fiscal disasters are gonna be an issue? Particularly this last one?

HENRY

Everyone lost their shirts. We'll say you lost yours through unscrupulous mortgage lenders. People can certainly relate to that.

ALBERT

We can definitely spin that to our advantage. Between your family's political legacy and the machine you'll have behind you, a failed business is the least of your worries. And the trust fund we write off as youthful indiscretion.

TEDDY

Cole's got that gorgeous wife, and those great looking kids. He's gonna be almost impossible to beat.

HENRY

Your wife's pretty easy on the eyes, too.

TEDDY

His record is spotless.

ALBERT

No such thing as spotless in politics.

LAMAR

Do you understand what you're being offered? This isn't an honorary position in some backwater hamlet. This is a thriving, prosperous city, an industrial and cultural juggernaut. We're asking you, no, telling you to take a seat in the most powerful office in the city. Do you understand the kind of power you'll have and where that power can lead?

TEDDY

I have a sum total of zero experience. You think anyone will believe I'm qualified?

LAMAR

Hell, yes, son. You're a Conrad, born and bred. And whatever afflictions your father suffered have blessedly not been visited on you. But I can tell you, it is on you to rehabilitate the good name and reputation your forefathers built. We are handing you your life back on a silver platter. Now if there is some compelling reason that you can't run, some dark secret that will further damage the integrity of your family, speak now.

TEDDY

I'd like to not have my ass handed to me a third time. I can't take one more thing to live down.

It's frank and Lamar is impressed by his candor.

LAMAR

That's a brave admission. I guarantee that will not be the result of our efforts. After you've served a couple terms as Mayor, you can write your own ticket. You won't have to depend on your wife anymore.

Checkmate.

TEDDY

You have to promise me you won't hurt Cole Caldwell. I've seen what happens to people who go against you. No dirty tricks, no "rumors", no "unnamed sources." If I'm going to run I have to do it without destroying his reputation or ruining his family. He's a good man.

Everyone looks to Lamar to answer that one. Is Teddy really that naive? Lamar looks him in the eye.

LAMAR

Agreed.

Tandy's eyes flash a moment of incredulity.

HENRY

Coleman Caldwell's official announcement is Monday.

ALBERT

We should announce at the same time.

TANDY

What about Rayna?

TEDDY
Who's gonna tell her?

LAMAR
You are. Your first order of
business as a mayoral candidate is
to grow a pair.

TAMMY WYNETTE'S VOICE
(singing)
KEEP GIVING ALL THE LOVE YOU CAN.
STAND BY YOUR MAN.

INT. WATTY WHITE'S SATELLITE RADIO STUDIO - DAY

Rayna and Watty both wearing headphones.

WATTY
(into mic)
And we're here with mega-superstar
Rayna James and her Top Ten Desert
Island Death Row Last Country Song
You Hear Before You Die list. That
was the great Tammy Wynette with
the classic "Stand By Your Man." Is
that a philosophy you ascribe to?

RAYNA
Well, I guess so, as long as he
stands by you.

WATTY
What's next? Number 8.

RAYNA
This is the song that made me want
to sing country music. "Rose
Colored Glasses". When I was a
little girl, I'd sing it for my
Mama over and over. One of her
favorites, too.

WATTY
And you lost your Mama when you
were how old?

RAYNA
Twelve.

WATTY
So this song is a beautiful memory
for you, too.

RAYNA
Bittersweet.

WATTY
By the great John Conlee.

He starts the record, turns the mic off and they take their headphones off. They pick up where they left off.

RAYNA
I'm still in shock that the label
would hang me out like this.

WATTY
Labels are irrelevant now. You
gotta figure your next move.
Reinvent yourself.

RAYNA
Run away with the circus?

He sees she's in turmoil.

WATTY
You used to love the smaller
venues.

RAYNA
Watty, I can't go back to playing
fairgrounds and casinos.

WATTY
You could do a club tour, something
intimate. On your own terms.

RAYNA
What would you do if you were in
the same position?

WATTY
I'm one of the original outlaws,
girl. I'd do whatever I damn
pleased, long as I could face
myself in the mirror.

RAYNA
You think Juliette Barnes is a
flash in the pan?

WATTY
Nope. I'd take the long view on
that one. She's gonna be around
awhile.

As Rayna thinks...

RANDY (O.S.)
Well, where the hell is she?

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

Randy is impatiently waiting for Juliette. Her nervous assistant comes in.

ASSISTANT
She's here. She just--she got a phone call.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - DAY

Juliette is in a closet filled with cables and recording components. She is fighting tears. She's on her cell. A desperate voice on the other end--

JULIETTE

No, mom. I can't give you money--
I can't -- Because you're using--
I can hear it -- I can tell by your
voice--

EXT. ALABAMA TRAILER PARK OFFICE - DAY

A once beautiful face, ravaged by drugs and poverty, with trembling hands, holds the payphone handset for dear life. JULIETTE'S METH-TWEAKED MOM (34) begs, lies and cries.

MOM

I'm not, though. I've stopped. I
told you that.

A greasy, hollow eyed man watches her, full of hope and chemical desperation.

INT. STORAGE CLOSET - DAY

A knock at the door.

JULIETTE

I have to go, Mom. I'm at work--
I'll call you later-- tomorrow.

She hangs up, puts her phone in her pocket and dries her eyes.

JULIETTE (CONT'D)

Who is it?

The door opens. Randy stands there, not knowing what to do. She looks at him, tear-stained face, like a little girl. She pulls him into the closet by his shirt, violently, kissing him, tearing at his clothes. This is how she kills the pain.

INT. SCARLETT'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A tidy, clever, eclectic place, "vintage" as one would expect on a waitress' salary. Avery plays guitar, sips Jack Daniels. Scarlett writes in a spiral notebook. He's onto something, sounding good.

SCARLETT

You know, you should get out and
play more. Come do the open mic
night on Monday. Uncle Deacon says
playin' in front of people scares
you into being good.

AVERY
You think I'm afraid?

He puts his guitar down and pulls her over onto his lap.

AVERY (CONT'D)
I'm not afraid of nothin'.

SCARLETT
Why don't you write me a love song?
One you can play me at the wedding.

AVERY
I don't write love songs. My thing
is more cerebral.

She starts kissing him.

SCARLETT
You think too much. Maybe you just
need a little inspiration.

She kisses him more passionately.

AVERY
Tell you what. I'll leave the
poetry to you, but I'll take you up
on the inspiration.

He lies down on the sofa, pulling her on top of him.

INT. RAYNA'S HOUSE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Floor to ceiling bookshelves, filled mostly with Grammys, CMAs, and photos of Rayna with every celebrity that's ever lived. Rayna is clearly upset and Teddy is trying to placate her. Their discussion is heated.

RAYNA
Mayor?! Since when did you want to
be Mayor?! You hate politics.

TEDDY
No, I don't hate politics. I hate
talking about politics.

RAYNA
It would be one thing if it was
your idea, but it wasn't!

TEDDY
That doesn't mean it wasn't a good
one.

RAYNA
Teddy, you don't know what you're
getting into. You do not want to be
owned by him. You'll regret it, I
promise you.

TEDDY

Did it ever occur to you that maybe he's trying to help me? And that I could use a little help right about now? If I serve a term or two as Mayor, I'll be able to write my own ticket. You can stop working--

RAYNA

That's not what I want. Is that what you want for me? Put everything on hold to stand on the side of the stage, smiling and shaking hands--

This strikes a chord and Teddy gets mad.

TEDDY

You think you're gonna tell me something about standing on the side of the stage that I don't already know?! I know I'm not your first choice. You settled for me. But I have been there for you. How 'bout helping me put my life back together? How 'bout just once letting me step into the limelight?

She has no reply. He's got her dead to rights.

RAYNA

(quietly)
I told Cole I'd perform at his announcement.

TEDDY

Well-- what are you gonna do?

She honestly can't answer.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

I'm gonna go check on the girls.

He leaves her standing alone.

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

It's after hours. Scarlett and Gunnar are alone in the club. He reads from the spiral notebook, clearly enjoying himself.

GUNNAR

These are songs. Are they about someone in particular?

SCARLETT

They're poems. Avery and I broke up for awhile. I guess nothing calls the muses more than a broken heart. Great for weight loss, too.

GUNNAR
 Hmm. Truth be told, other than
 heartbreak and drunken sex, I'm not
 one hundred percent sure what you
 see in him.

SCARLETT
 (laughing)
 Isn't that enough?

GUNNAR
 For awhile maybe, but a whole life?

SCARLETT
 He's an artist. It's just one of
 those things. I've tried being
 without him. I can't. He's just --
 the one. I'm hopeless.

GUNNAR
 I don't believe in that. The one.
 There's always another one.

SCARLETT
 Hmm. Sounds like you've had a
 little heartbreak of your own.

Their eyes meet. A moment between them. He changes the
 subject.

GUNNAR
 These poems are good. Have you
 thought about putting them to
 music?

SCARLETT
 I mean, sometimes I hear music when
 I'm writing, but they're just--

She reaches to take the notebook back. He playfully keeps it.

GUNNAR
 Hang on a minute. Do you play?

SCARLETT
 Not well. I know basic chords and
 you know, I'd play when I was
 learning songs for choir.

He folds it open to a page and hands it to her, and then
 tries to hand her the guitar.

GUNNAR
 Here. Play what you heard when you
 wrote this.

SCARLETT
 I can't.

GUNNAR
 Okay. Then you sing and I'll play.

She is smiling, but reticent. He strums a chord.

GUNNAR (CONT'D)
Like this? Tell me when I'm close.

EXT. HYPERION RECORDS BLDG. - DAY

A gleaming high rise glass monument to the boom years of country music.

INT. HYPERION RECORDS OFFICE - DAY

Rayna, tastefully dressed, waits with Bucky. A giant one-sheet for Juliette Barnes' AMERICAN ANGEL album covers an entire wall. An ASSISTANT leads them into Marshall Evans' office.

INT. MARSHALL EVANS' OFFICE - DAY

The label president's office is a shrine to adolescence: basketball hoops, model car collections in glass display cases, etc.

Steve, Zach and MARSHALL EVANS (40s) all leap to their feet as Rayna comes in, her superstar persona turned up to eleven.

RAYNA
We haven't met yet. I'm Rayna James.

MARSHALL
Of course. A pleasure. I'm a big fan.

RAYNA
Thank you. I'm glad to meet you, too. I want to discuss our current situation and see if we can come up with a mutually agreeable solution.

MARSHALL
Nothing would please me more. We want you to be happy.

Rayna uses all her charm and charisma to make her case.

RAYNA
I know you're new here, but Hyperion records has been my home since my first album came out and went triple platinum. Followed by a dozen more. I've given this label more consecutive number one singles than any other artist, along with nine Grammys and eleven CMAs. When I signed with Hyperion it was in a little run down house on Music Row, so you could say I built this building.

(MORE)

RAYNA (CONT'D)

I have been, if you'll forgive the expression, a cash cow for this company for twenty-one years.

MARSHALL

Miss James, no one's going to argue that you've had an unparalleled career. And I have no doubt that will continue. As much as you, I wish the new record was performing better. We've spent millions promoting it, but radio isn't interested. Unfortunately, I'm in a tough spot. The older business models are irrelevant. We believe that you and Juliette together will be a huge event that will give you a chance to re-boot your great career.

RAYNA

I understand that, but I have more than held up my end of the bargain. I've been loyal while every other label tried to woo me away and now all I'm asking for is support for a record I'm very proud of, and the tour that will help sell it. I'm at the top of my game and I'm willing to do whatever it takes and I'm asking the same from you.

MARSHALL

If you want to continue, you're going to have to find your place in a new market. This is a solid marketing plan that reflects the harsh realities of our business. I know that's not what you want to hear.

RAYNA

So after twenty-one years at this label, if I don't open for your little ingenue who wouldn't make the cut as one of my back-up singers, you won't support me?

MARSHALL

Those are your words, but still, I need to know your decision.

She stares unflinchingly into his eyes for a moment.

RAYNA

You can kiss my decision as it walks out the door.

She turns and leaves. Bucky wordlessly follows her out.

END OF ACT IV

ACT V

EXT. LAMAR'S HOUSE - DAY

Rayna's car in the huge driveway, and Rayna waiting for the massive front door to open. The look on the housekeeper's face tells us this is the last person she expected to see.

INT. LAMAR'S HOUSE - DAY

Tandy walks quickly with Rayna through the hallway.

TANDY

I think this is a mistake. This is not how you get what you want from him.

RAYNA

Tandy, I know you can't go against him and I'm not asking you to.

Tandy stops Rayna. They speak in harsh whispers.

TANDY

I can go against him, and I will for you. But is this a battle you want to fight? 'Cause it's gonna be a tough one. Please wait--

RAYNA

I have waited. I've spent every minute since Teddy told me trying to figure out how not to do this. But here I am. Don't worry. I won't be here long. This place still makes my skin crawl.

INT. LAMAR'S HOUSE - DAY

A fuming Rayna paces while Lamar lectures. Tandy referees.

LAMAR

I know you can't conceive of me actually helping a member of my own family, and you will continue to punish me for my dereliction of paternal duties 'til I'm six feet under, but I think you're being unduly harsh--

RAYNA

(interrupting)

Save the speeches, Daddy. All I want to know is, what exactly is it you want Teddy to do for you?

LAMAR

I want him to pick himself up, dust himself off, and get back in the game.

(MORE)

LAMAR (CONT'D)

And if in doing that, it works to our mutual benefit, what's the harm in that?

RAYNA

None, except I know you're wholly incapable of an act so pure.

TANDY

This could be good for you and the girls or I wouldn't support it. It could restore Teddy's confidence and his standing in the community.

RAYNA

Stop! Tandy, please.

(to Lamar)

Did you offer him money? We won't accept that. I won't accept that.

LAMAR

Oh, I know. You're too proud to accept anything from me. You prefer to delude yourself into thinking your success was all your own doing, that I had no hand in it whatsoever. You can go on believing that as long as it gets you through the night, but every dime you ever earned is because of me.

RAYNA

What are you talking about?

TANDY

Daddy, calm down.

LAMAR

Who do you think paid for your first record? That pissant little record label? I want you there by his side tonight-- at your best. This is an important night for him to say the least.

Rayna isn't sure if Lamar's telling the truth about the label, but it has knocked her off her game.

RAYNA

I'm not for sale, Dad. Not for sale.

LAMAR

How's it going to look if you're not there for your own husband? I can't believe you would further humiliate him after all he's done for you. Especially as it relates to Maddie. Imagine how he would feel if he knew--

Rayna's eyes go wide. Tandy intervenes.

TANDY

Daddy-- that's enough!

He drops that point. Tandy grabs Rayna by the hands and pulls her out of the chair. Rayna's been worked over pretty good.

RAYNA
(to Tandy)
I'm not doing it. I won't be there.

TANDY
I know.

LAMAR
Your absence will not go unnoticed, I can assure you of that. I will see to it.

TANDY
Stop it. You don't need to threaten her.

Tandy leads her away, Lamar continues, calling after her--

LAMAR
It's alright if you see me as your enemy.

EXT. RAYNA'S CAR - SUNSET

Rayna sits in her car, high on a hill overlooking Nashville. Storm clouds are piled over the city. Lamar's words continue--

LAMAR (V.O.)
But don't be foolish enough to make
that a two way street. My enemies
do not fare well--

A crack of lightning. Rain begins to pound the windshield.

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

Rain falls against the window of the Bluebird on Open Mic Night. Scarlett waits on a few brave souls. On stage, a very drunk Avery is beating the hell out of a vintage guitar.

AVERY
(singing)
I STEPPED OVER THE BLOOD IN THE HALL,
SAW YOUR NAME WRITTEN ON THE WALL,
I DIDN'T ANSWER WHEN YOU CALLED,
I JUST WALKED AWAY AND LEFT IT ALL,
WALKED AWAY AND LEFT IT ALL.

The small audience is underwhelmed, and the lukewarm reception pisses Avery off. He stumbles off the stage. Scarlett comes over to him.

SCARLETT
Babe, that was so good!

AVERY
I know.

He puts his guitar in the case. She goes to put her arms around him and he pushes her away.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Thanks for the great advice. This place sucks.

He heads out into the rainy night. Gunnar watches. He looks over to Scarlett, who is hurt and embarrassed.

EXT. JULIETTE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The rain continues. A security guard waves Randy Roberts through the gates to Juliette's starter mansion.

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

The audience is even thinner. The MC picks up the clipboard, flips it to the next page. Blank.

MC
Well this is a first. That's all she wrote. Anybody else want to go?

Gunnar watches Scarlett, picking up empties.

GUNNAR
Scarlett O'Connor. Sing one.

Shocked, she freezes. The audience claps and whistles.

SCARLETT
Unh-unh. No way.

GUNNAR
She's good! Don't let her say no!

Her resistance spurs them on. They pound on the tables. As she acquiesces, she looks at a smiling Gunnar--

SCARLETT
I'm gonna kill you!

GUNNAR
I'll do it with you. I won't throw you out there alone.

SCARLETT
(to the audience)
I've only ever sung in church. And I hate to tell you how long it's been since I saw the inside of one. I have a standing appointment with God out at Radnor Lake.

A huge flash of lightning.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)
Or maybe he just cancelled it.

Gunnar sets up a mic stand. Scarlett nervously adjusts it.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)
I've never sung into a mic. Forgive
me Lord, I know not what I do.

The door opens and a drenched Watty White comes in, shaking
off the rain. Scarlett realizes she can't wait on him.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)
Mr. White, I'm sorry. They're
making me sing. But if you tell me
your order I'll bring it quick.

The audience is charmed by her and so is Gunnar.

WATTY
I can make it for a few scarce minutes
without a drink. Contrary to popular
opinion.

SCARLETT
Okaaay. This is gonna be
interesting. This is a poem I wrote
and Gunnar helped me put it to
music. So if it sucks, blame him.

Gunnar begins to play and Scarlett sings. She really sings.

SCARLETT (CONT'D)
(singing)
I WOKE UP THIS MORNING,
WITH A CLOUD ABOVE MY BED.
I WISH YOU WERE WITH ME,
BUT YOU'RE WITH HER INSTEAD.

It only takes a moment for everyone to realize that the magic
for which the Bluebird has become legend is taking place. Watty
White knows instantly, too. Gunnar sings harmony, and the
feeling is electric. It's not just the singing, it's the song.

THIS SONG PLAYS OVER THE REMAINING SCENES--

SCARLETT & GUNNAR (V.O.)
AND I GO 'ROUND AND 'ROUND,
I GO 'ROUND AND 'ROUND AND 'ROUND--

EXT./INT. JULIETTE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Randy knocks on Juliette's door. Finally he hears it unlock.
Juliette is surprised to see him. Not in a good way.

RANDY
Hey, doll.

He reaches out to touch her face.

JULIETTE
What are you doin' here?

RANDY
What do you mean?

Randy doesn't know how to react. She's ice cold.

JULIETTE
Don't come here without calling.

She closes the door in his face.

INT. JULIETTE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

She walks into the living room where Deacon sits with his guitar and some papers. She stands in front of him, takes the neck of the guitar from Deacon's hands and puts it aside. She climbs onto his lap, straddling him, and begins kissing his face. His hands stay at his side, but he lets her go on.

INT. RADISSON HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

A huge COLEMAN CALDWELL FOR MAYOR banner hangs. Rayna's band's equipment is set-up on stage. The room is packed. Caldwell's family is with him. He smiles warmly and shakes hands. An aide whispers in his ear. He smiles and nods.

INT. PARKED CAR - NIGHT

Avery sits in the driver's seat, lost in thought, watching the raindrops as they splatter on the windshield. The car door opens and a woman gets in-- Jessie, the fiddle player from the Bluebird.

JESSIE
I thought you'd never call.

He leans in, kisses her-- she resists not at all, not ever.

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFÉ - NIGHT

Scarlett and Gunnar are lost in the song. And each other.

SCARLETT
AND THE FIRST TIME I SAW YOU,
I GUESS I WAS JUST BLIND,
I TURNED MY BACK ON YOU,
THINKING YOU WERE NOT MY KIND--

Watty takes a blackberry out of his pocket...

SCARLETT & GUNNAR
BUT THAT WAS SUCH A LONG TIME AGO,
HOW WAS I TO KNOW, THAT YOU'D BE
WITH HER, AND I'D JUST BE ALONE.

INT. HERMITAGE HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

The ballroom is packed and TEDDY CONRAD FOR MAYOR swag is everywhere. Teddy is at the podium, remarkably at ease. Off to the side we see Tandy, tense as a cat.

TEDDY

I will work to protect people of this great city from the problems that I arrogantly thought would never be mine.

Teddy has an endearing charm and self-deprecating style.

TEDDY (CONT'D)

Unfortunately, too often my lessons have been learned the hard way, but to quote Booker T. Washington --

INT. PRESIDENTIAL SUITE - HERMITAGE HOTEL - NIGHT

Lamar watches on closed circuit TV, with a room full of business associates, advisors and partners.

TEDDY

-- success is to be measured not so much by the position we have reached in life, but by the obstacles we have overcome while trying to succeed.

He's impressed with Teddy's performance. He smiles, satisfied.

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rayna is led by a female campaign worker and escorted by security. A make-up artist powders her as she walks. They stop at a closed door and wait. Her iPhone RINGS. It reads "WW".

RAYNA

Hey, Watty. I'm just getting ready to--

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

Watty covers his mouth as he whispers into the phone.

WATTY

Rayna. Listen--

He holds the phone out towards the stage.

SCARLETT

WALLS CRUMBLE TO THE GROUND,
THEY DON'T MAKE A SOUND,
BUT I'M STILL BREATHIN'...

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rayna covers her other ear, straining to hear. She hears it. She also knows she's hearing something remarkable.

RAYNA
Watty, who is that?

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

Watty holds the phone out, then puts it to his ear.

WATTY
(whispering)
Did you hear that?

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

Rayna waves off the make-up artist and turns away.

RAYNA
Yes! I heard. What's that song?

INT. BLUEBIRD CAFE - NIGHT

WATTY
Call me later. I've got an idea.

SCARLETT & GUNNAR (V.O.)
AND I GO 'ROUND AND 'ROUND,
I GO 'ROUND AND 'ROUND AND 'ROUND--

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - NIGHT

The make-up artist does last minute touch-ups. Rayna slips her phone back into her pocket, transported. At the last minute, another handler brings Maddie and Daphne to her.

INT. HERMITAGE HOTEL BALLROOM - NIGHT

Rayna enters the crowded room to a cheer. A path clears for her and the girls to make her way to the stage.

TEDDY
And many of you already know my wife, my better half, the love of my life, the mother of my two beautiful daughters, Maddie and Daphne, the great, the one, the only-- Rayna James!!

As she steps onto the stage, the room explodes into thousands of flashes of light. Joining Teddy, Rayna turns on her megawatt smile. She waves to the cheering crowd. She kisses Teddy like a loving wife.

Tandy stands on the side of the stage. Rayna sees her and Tandy nods to say you made the right choice.

Rayna turns back to the audience, her hands on the shoulders of her daughters. CAMERA FLASHES light the room. They are all smiles like a happy family. The crowd cheers.

END OF SHOW

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