

SCENE 2

Once again, AGED RALPH sits at an elevated ornate desk, high above the stage floor. A potted camellia sits on the corner of the desk. He's wearing a white plantation suit with a dark shirt and white tie.

STAGE 1 is set as in the previous act.

Lights up on STAGE 1.

AGED RALPH

Jimmie Rodgers was a lucky man. He was more fortunate than most. Maybe that's because he had so many people he loved. His wife CARRIE, and his daughter ANITA for sure. Before Jimmie took to working the railroads, his Aunt Dora helped raise him. He adored her.

But it's possible the one person JIMMIE loved the most was his father, Aaron W. Rodgers. A quiet railroad man who did his very best to keep JIMMIE on the straight and narrow after JIMMIE's mother died young. JIMMIE was barely six years old at the time.

Jimmie often talked about his father and visited him as often as he could.

Did I ever tell you JIMMIE actually made a short film for Columbia Pictures back in 1929? Yes indeed! Right here in Camden in fact. Later on, some folk would say that movie short was the very first country music video ever made.

Anyway ... JIMMIE was quite adamant about one tune which simply had to be included in that three-song film. It was one he'd written along with Elsie McWilliams especially for his father.

AGED RALPH rolls his chair out to the corner of the desk and leans forward. Music plays as he begins to sing.

AGED RALPH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*AGED RALPH sits back in his chair, one elbow on the
 armrest, his chin resting in that hand.*

AGED RALPH

So once JIMMIE rested a while, nearly three months if I
 recall, he decided he just had to go visit his father.

When he got back from that visit, ... well, he had quite
 the surprise in store for both CARRIE and ANITA.

Lights down on STAGE 1.

Lights up on STAGE 2.

*CARRIE and a twelve-year old ANITA are sitting on the
 porch of their home, waiting for JIMMIE to arrive home
 from the train station. CARRIE is on a bench while
 ANITA sits on the floor beside her playing Cat's
 Cradle with some string. ANITA sees the offstage cab
 pull up first, drops her string and jumps to her feet,
 running halfway down the porch steps..*

ANITA

Momma! There he is! Daddy's home!

The sound of a cab door closing and the vehicle pulling away is heard from offstage. JIMMIE walks up to the porch bench where CARRIE is sitting. ANITA runs to him and hug her father tightly around the waist.

ANITA

Daddy! I missed you so much!

JIMMIE

Well, isn't that a coincidence. I missed you too little girl.

JIMMIE puts his suitcase down and leans over to give the girl a big return hug.

Then JIMMIE steps up onto the porch toward CARRIE and gives her a loving kiss on the cheek.

JIMMIE

And how's my big girl been? Everything been good Mother?

CARRIE

Absolutely Jimmie.

(hesitantly)

And how was your father? Is he well? Was it a fine visit?

JIMMIE

Twass perfect is what it was. I sure do miss that old man. It was good for me to see him.

And we talked about lots of things.

JIMMIE glances at ANITA and then hesitates a bit. Understanding her husband well, CARRIE turns to ANITA.

CARRIE

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

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

JIMMIE

(smiling and rubbing his belly)
Yes Mother, I certainly would. Now be a good girl now Anita
and do as your mother asks.

*ANITA slowly stands up, sullenly hangs her head and
begins to head into the house.*

ANITA

Alright ... I'm going ... but I sure hope I hear some music
later daddy, will I?

JIMMIE

(laughing)
Heck, I'd be surprised if you didn't little girl. I'd be
quite surprised.

*ANITA goes into the house, gently closing the screen
door behind her.*

*CARRIE knows JIMMIE has something to say and moves
over on the bench to give him room to sit. JIMMIE sits
down.*

CARRIE

What is it Jimmie?

JIMMIE

Well, Daddy and I talked quite a bit about lots of things.
The family ... my music ... my health ... and, ... well,
growing old.

CARRIE pats JIMMIE tenderly on his knee.

And you see, it just seems that I need to make some
decisions about things. Things about me and you and Anita
... things that will be best for us all.

CARRIE

(nervously)
What have you decided Jimmie?

JIMMIE

(looking directly into CARRIE's eyes)
I've decided we're moving on ... to Texas ...
(smiling)

So throw your things together kid, we'll be moving on out
of here real soon.

CARRIE

But Jimmie, Texas? Why so far away? Our families will be so lost without us. Your father, what will he do?

JIMMIE

He'll be fine. My Daddy's the one who really helped clear things up in my head.

C'mon now girl, you know I've always loved Texas, and besides, you know the weather would be so much better for me. And besides, it's just so doggone pretty there. Cheer up. You'll love it.

CARRIE begins to smile broadly and throws her arms around JIMMIE's neck.

CARRIE

Oh Jimmie, I don't need to cheer me up none. Why this couldn't be any happier news for me to hear! I'm so glad we'll finally be able to take care of you proper ... and in Texas we're sure to get you feeling better. I just know it.

JIMMIE

Well, I guess can't help but do that then Mother. They say Texas can be like God's medicine for that ol' T.B., especially when the cactus is in bloom ... I know you'll love it. Heck, we'll all love it!

JIMMIE takes CARRIE's hands into his and their hands "dance" together as music begins to play.

JIMMIE

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

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

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

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

CARRIE gets up and begins to dance around the stage.

----- yodeling interlude -----
 ----- instrumental interlude -----

*CARRIE returns to JIMMIE and kneels on the floor
 beside him.*

WE DON'T HAVE COLD WEATHER,
 IT NEVER SNOWS OR RAINS.
 THAT'S WHERE THE SUN SHINES BEST,
 OUT ON THE WESTERN PLAINS.

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

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

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

----- yodeling interlude -----

Lights down on STAGE 2.