

LOUIE AND THE PREACHER

An original screenplay
based, in part, on the life of Mike Massey

Written by

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EXT. TENNESSEE COUNTRYSIDE - SPRING - 1955 - EARLY DAWN

A SERIES OF ANGLES

A pale moon hangs above the hilly horizon in a twilight sky. Light glistens from a dew-dampened tin roof that extends over a large front porch of an old unpainted house. A rooster is standing atop an outhouse. FLAPPING his wings and CROWING.

A swing, made from a tire and rope, hangs from a tall pine tree that stands in an eroded front yard. Underneath the tree, a jalopy pickup truck, with no tires, sits on blocks of wood. A 1940 Ford and a blue dented panel truck are parked in the dirt driveway.

Two Heinz 57 Mutts are lying on the front porch. To the left of the porch, light shines through the kitchen window. We HEAR MUFFLED VOICES coming from inside the house.

INT. - DINING ROOM

MOVING through the window, we see a naked light bulb hanging above a small dining table. The room is a mess. In a corner, three large grocery bags are overflowing with trash from an all-night poker game.

ANGLE ON TABLE

Ashtrays are running over with cigarette butts; and beer cans, money, a Prince Albert tobacco can, rolling papers, and playing cards are cluttering the table.

UNSEEN POKER PLAYER'S POV

Three MEN in their early thirties are studying their poker hands. PLAYER #1 has a pair of sevens showing. PLAYER #2 has a pair of kings up, and PLAYER #3 has a pair of fives.

A wrinkled five dollar bill is thrown into the pot by the UNSEEN PLAYER. The betting hand is showing a 3 of clubs, 4 of diamonds, 6 of hearts, and 7 of spades, with one mystery card that's face down.

PLAYER #1 BUFORD has a roll-your-own cigarette dangling between his lips. It forces him to squint and peer through a smokescreen. He is wearing overalls, and has the ruddy complexion of a farmer.

BUFORD

I think yer trying ta bluff the kings out. I call.

He shoves a five dollar bill into the pot.

BUFORD (cont'd)
 And if I wutten broke, I'd raise,
 jist ta see ya tuck yer tail batwixt
 yer lags and run like a yeller dog.

MOVING TO PLAYER #2.

JUSTIN, has a James Dean hair style, and he's wearing a t-shirt with a tailor-made pack of cigarettes rolled up in his left shirt sleeve. He pushes two bills and a pile of change into the pot.

JUSTIN
 I think yeer both bluffing, my kings
 are gonna win this pot. I call.

The THIRD PLAYER is wearing a service station uniform with a name tag that reads, "MANFRED." He flips a five dollar bill into the air that floats down into the pot.

MANFRED
 I call.

He turns over another five, now showing 3 fives.

MANFRED (cont'd)
 If you caught my other five fer a
 dad-blasted inside straight, I'll
 never play another damn hand of poker
 with you as long as I live.

Players 1 and 2 fold as we HEAR a SLEEPY SOUNDING WOMAN'S VOICE coming from another room.

MRS. HARPER O.S.
 Yawl watch yer mouth in thair. This
 here ain't no pool hall.

We see a very small hand turn over the 5 of diamonds that fills a 7-high straight. Then two small arms and hands reach out and start raking in the pot.

WINNING PLAYER-CLOSE

Eight-year-old, MAX HARPER, wearing a beanie cap, with a propeller on top has a grin from ear to ear, with a lit cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth.

As Manfred RIPS his 3 fives into shreds, we hear a rooster CROWING.

MANFRED

(to Buford)

He's luckier than a two-peckered billy goat. I hope God strikes me dead if I ever play poker with the little shit agin.

MAX

I'd druther be lucky than good any time. Yes siree, I'm rough, tough, and do not bluff.

He blows a smoke ring and laughs as he neatly stacks his money.

Buford rises from the table.

BUFORD

I'm going home. It's time ta start milking the cows and slopping the hogs.

Justin forces an ashtray to hold one more cigarette butt.

JUSTIN

If the rest of you boys are quittin, thair ain't no way that I'm gonna butt heads with the lucky little bastard.

MRS. HARPER O.S.

I don't wanna have ta tell yawl agin. Watch yer language around Max!

JUSTIN

Sorry, Mrs. Harper.

The men gather their remaining change and cigarettes, guzzle their last beer, and throw the cans toward the bags in the corner. On their way out, they MUMBLE about Max's luck.

Max stuffs the bills and the coins into his pockets as we hear the outside door SLAP shut against the door facing. The dogs are barking as MRS. HARPER walks into the room tying her apron strings.

MRS. HARPER

Land sakes! Look at this mess. Clean the table off, and take all this trash out right now, Max. I'll fix some breakfast.

Max goes to the sink, wets a washcloth, and wrings it out. Then he finds an empty grocery bag, opens it, returns to the table and begins emptying ashtrays and wiping trash into the bag.

Max stretches across the table, reaching for some trash.

MRS. HARPER'S POV.

She notices the corners of a couple of playing cards sticking out of Max's hip pocket.

MRS. HARPER (cont'd)
Have you been cheatin', Max?

Max swirls around, almost snapping to attention, with guilty wide eyes.

MAX
Aw, come on, mom. I'm yer boy.

The rooster CROWS for the third time.

INT. POOL HALL - KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE - SIX YEARS LATER - NIGHT

A smoky pool hall has six pool tables in use. We hear the CLICKING of pool balls, and the SLAPPING SOUND of balls hitting the back of the pockets.

A SERIES OF ANGLES

Elevated benches line the wall with spittoons spaced on the floor about 10 feet apart. To the left of the front counter, TWO ELDERLY MEN sit at a card table playing dominoes. Behind the counter, a large board displays recent baseball scores.

JINGLES, the rack boy is running from table to table racking balls, collecting change, and putting the money into an apron tied around his waist. A table brush also swings from his belt.

A small crowd has gathered around the first pool table watching 14-year-old MAX HARPER pocket balls at a very fast pace.

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS

between the spectators, Max, Max' opponent JESSE, and the pool table. Jesse is about 25 years old and casually dressed. He nervously watches Max shoot the 1 ball into the corner pocket and draw the cue ball the full length of the table for position on the 2 ball.

Spectators give positive nods to each other as Max shoots the 2 ball in another corner, sending the cue ball two cushions for position on the 3 ball in the side pocket. Max pockets the 3 ball and stops the cue ball for a 4-9 combination in the corner pocket.

Jesse throws his arms out to his side and slaps his thighs.

We hear the DOUBLE-CLICKING SOUND of the combo and see the 9 ball HITTING the back of the pocket.

Max quickly starts taking balls out of the pockets and rolls them to the end of the table to be racked.

MAX

OK, Jingles, rack 'em

Jesse shakes his head and places his cue stick in the wall rack.

JESSE

That's too good for me, I quit.

Jesse hands Max a twenty dollar bill as Max looks around the room.

MAX

Where's all the 9-ball players? I'll spot anybody in the house the 8 ball for twenty dollars a game.

The spectators make negative gestures, shaking their heads and waving Max off. Then, one of the spectators, ROBERT, makes a suggestion to his friend, JIM.

ROBERT

You should take him up on it, you'll have two money balls to his one. I think you might beat him that way.

JIM

My mamma didn't raise no fool.

BUCKY, a TEENAGER, about the same age as Max, runs up and SLAPS Max on the back.

BUCKY

You just beat the best in town; none of these guys want to give their money away.

Max pulls a wad of cash out of his pocket and shows it to his friend.

MAX

We just won four hundred dollars, I feel like celebrating, let's go to Sally's whorehouse.

FADE IN:

INT. SMALL BAR - AMARILLO TEXAS - NINE YEARS LATER - NIGHT

Up tempo country music BLASTS from a worn Wurlitzer jukebox. A sharply dressed twenty-six-year-old LOUIE YATES stands at the bar watching a long-haired, Tarzan-looking, twenty-three-year-old, MAX HARPER, doing the Texas two-step, with a cue stick as his partner.

Max does an awkward twirl, faces the pool table and bends over to make an easy shot in the side pocket on the 9 ball. He collects a \$100 bill from a disgruntled cowboy and staggers toward Louie.

Two angry cowboys ART and BRANDON stand by the pool table watching Max fall onto a bar stool next to Louie.

MAX

Another bar...beertender!

Louie turns to face the bar and speaks low to Max.

LOUIE

How much are we up, partner?

Max takes a sip of beer before speaking.

MAX

Fourteen hundred, too bad they quit.

Louie glances at Art and sees him hanging up his cue.

LOUIE

I know they've got more cash and I also know how we can get it.

MAX

How's that?

LOUIE

Stick your finger down your throat and start puking your guts out... they'll think you're sick and might want to play some more.

MAX
You can't be serious, if I do that I
will be sick.

LOUIE
(shrugs)
Could be worth a couple of more Gs.

MAX
Well, in that case...

Max lowers his head and cradles it into his left elbow. While sticking his right index finger down his throat, he gags and throws up all over the side of the bar and the floor.

The bartender and the cowboys turn their heads in disgust. Louie grabs Max by the arm and pulls him off the bar stool.

LOUIE
You've had too much to drink, I'm
taking you home.

Louie leads Max toward the door and Art approaches from behind holding a cue stick.

ART
Hoss, you don't want to be going home
now. We can play some more 9-ball.

Louie and Max stop and look at each other with a slight knowing smile. Louie jerks Max around to face the sucker.

LOUIE
Can't you see he's too drunk to play
pool. He'd be looking at two 9 balls.

ART
Hey dude, I'm drunk, too. He can hit
'um with the two cue balls I'd be
using.

Louie turns Max around.

LOUIE
He's drunk and sick, I'm taking him
home.

Max pulls his arm free.

MAX
I feel better now...really I'm OK it
was those damn pickled eggs I ate.

ART
 You'll be fine...come on, we can play
 for two hundred a game.

MAX
 You've got a bet, rack 'um up.

Louie throws his hands into the air.

LOUIE
 OK! OK! Stay here and lose your ass
 like you always do, I'm going home.

MAX
 Hey, look pal! Go anywhere you want,
 if I wanted someone to tell me what
 to do, I'd get a wife.

ART
 He ain't built right for that, if he
 was I'd kiss him good night for you,
 then...maybe we could play some pool.

LOUIE
 Ha! Ha! That's real funny.
 (to Max)
 Don't bother calling me tomorrow, I
 don't want to hear it.

Louie takes long strides as he swiftly walks away, slamming
 the door behind him.

Max staggers toward the pool table with Art.

INT. HOTEL SUITE - LATER

Louie prepares drinks for himself and two lovely ladies,
 MARY and CATHY.

MARY
 Are you sure Max will be OK alone
 with them two cowboys?

LOUIE
 Don't worry about Max, he'll be
 struttin' in here any minute now,
 ready to party.

As soon as the word party comes out of Louie's mouth Max
 coolly comes through the door grinning from ear to ear.

MAX

Louie, you're a genius. We took that long, tall Texan and his sidekick for another 26 hundred.

Max and Louie meet in the middle of the room to high five each other.

LOUIE

We're the greatest team that ever lived. With my brains and your stroke, there's a million suckers walking around just waiting for us to bust them.

Max kisses Mary as he takes her drink.

MAX

You said it, pal. I'll drink to that.

Max and Louie CLINK their glasses together and drink a toast.

LOUIE

Max, I've been thinking what our next move should be.

Max sits on the sofa next to Mary and gestures toward Louie.

MAX

The man with the plan, always scheming. What's our next move, Louie?

Louie lights a joint, takes a hit, and hands it to Max.

LOUIE

We should go to Lawton, Oklahoma and match up with CHEROKEE HANK.

MAX

Sure, Louie, has it skipped your mind?! That Indian had rather eat live scorpions than to lose to a pale face. I wouldn't...

LOUIE

Hear me out, Max, he has a standing offer to play anyone...anyone! A 20-thousand-dollar freeze-out on his home court.

MAX

Yeah, we take his money, and him and his tribe take our scalps. Excuse me if I don't get too excited about our end of the deal.

LOUIE

Relax, your hair is safe. Remember BUCKTOOTH BILLY?

MAX

Yeah, what about him?

Max hands the joint back to Louie.

LOUIE

He owns the place where Hank plays. He likes you, Max, and you know everyone around there is scared shitless of that big Apache... Including Hank.

MAX

So, you're saying he'll be on our side, if we have to circle the wagons?

LOUIE

If we cut him on...say, 10 percent of our action...why he's been known to throw jukeboxes at people for less.

Max picks up the guitar that's leaning against the sofa and starts strumming.

MAX

(to Mary)

A regular fountain of information, I could write a song about this

(singing)

If we take out an insurance policy with Bucktooth Billy,
We can walk away with eighteen grand and that ain't silly.

LOUIE

That's right, partner, eighteen big ones, that ain't a bit silly.

MAX

(to Mary)

Sweet thang, how about rolling another one...

(MORE)

MAX (cont'd)

(to Louie)

The man with the plan, when do you want to go?

LOUIE

Now you're talking! Let's show these ladies a real good time tonight and leave tomorrow.

Max strums and sings another verse.

MAX

Tonight, I'm going to have some fun with my honey, tomorrow, I'm going to take Cherokee Hank for all his money.

FADE TO:

INT. BUCKTOOTH BILLY'S BAR - NIGHT

Small bar in low rent district. It's smoky, dirty, and dimly lit. It's also crowded and most of the people are Indians. Some are construction workers still wearing their work clothes and a few are wearing hard hats.

Max and Louie are sitting in a booth across from Hank, who is sandwiched between two of his working girls - CHULA, a little red-haired, big-bosomed, Indian girl, and VALERIE, a blonde knockout about thirty years old.

Cherokee Hank has long shoulder length straight black hair with a silver streak running through the middle from his forehead to the end. He's wearing a purple headband, that matches his suit. He's wearing flashy jewelry and has his alligator cue case lying in front of him.

LOUIE

(to Hank)

The word is out you'll play anyone even up on your home court. Now, you're saying you need a two game handicap in race-to-nine.

Louie points at the pool table.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Playing you on that piece of junk is a tremendous handicap.

Louie gets out of the booth and walks a few steps to the pool table.

LOUIE (cont'd)
Look at this, naked rubber on the
points of all the pockets...

He pulls the cloth up off the table a couple of inches.

LOUIE (cont'd)
...and here's a place with bare slate
the size of a half dollar. Please!
Give me a break, we didn't just fall
off a watermelon truck.

HANK
Yeah, but your man's a pool shark...

Hank points at his hookers with both thumbs.

HANK (cont'd)
...and as you can see, I'm a business
man. Pool is just a hobby for me.

Hank takes a huge roll of money out of his pocket and lays
it on the table.

HANK (cont'd)
However, I've got gamble and a lotta
heart. You guys ain't got no heart.

BUCKTOOTH BILLY, a big fat, curly-haired, bucktoothed Indian
is standing behind the bar seemingly entertained by the
conversation.

LOUIE
If you had any heart you'd play even
up.

Louie lays his hand on Max's shoulder and bends down to
speak to him.

LOUIE (cont'd)
I like your game, if you had to play
him on asphalt...Go ahead and put the
kind of 9-ball on his ass that'll
turn the rest of his hair gray.

Louie motions for Bucktooth Billy to come over.

LOUIE (cont'd)
(to Hank)
Let's post the cash...we didn't come
all the way just to jaw and
socialize.

HANK

Ante up and let's quit talking and start chalking.

They both hand Bucktooth a stack of money.

All eyes are on Max, Louie, and Hank. Max takes his cue out of his thin leather case, and Hank screws his fancy cue together.

Valerie is standing with her back to the table where their drinks are. With her hands behind her, she nonchalantly drops a couple of tablets into Max's drink.

Max flips a half dollar into the air.

HANK (cont'd)

Heads, I break.

The coin lands on the pool table and ends up tails.

MAX

Tails, I break.

Hank slides two white beads to the center of the score counting string that is hanging overhead above the pool table light.

HANK

Man, this is a helluva gift and it's not even close to Christmas yet.

Hank reaches up and takes the wooden triangle that's hanging on the end of the pool table light off, lays his cue on the table and starts racking the balls.

HANK (cont'd)

You've heard how that white-eye Custer got drilled...

Hank finishes racking the balls and picks up his cue.

HANK (cont'd)

...this is not a bow, but I'm going to shoot your nuts off with it...if you got any.

Max downs the last part of his spiked drink and smarts back.

MAX

You look right at home on that end of the table, and that's where I'm going to keep you, racking and yakking.

Hank glares at Max with a challenging grin.

Max leans over and crushes the balls with his powerful break, balls scatter all across the table with two of them finding a pocket.

MONTAGE OF POOL MATCH

-- Assortment of pool shots by a confident Max.

-- Max marking his score.

-- Hank angrily racking the balls.

-- GASPS of astonishment from the spectators.

-- Louie looking pleased.

-- Max making fantastic shots.

-- Max marks his fourth game.

-- Max misses an easy shot on the 9 ball.

-- Louie flinches with surprise.

-- Hank makes the 9 ball.

-- Hank making shots.

-- Max missing shots.

-- Louie looking concerned.

-- Hank marks his score, he's leading 6-4.

BACK TO REAL TIME

Max shoots a straight-in shot on the 9 ball and misses. Louie can't take it anymore and speaks up.

LOUIE

What the hell's wrong, Max, you never miss shots like that?

Max stares at the table in utter disbelief while Hank makes the 9 ball.

HANK

Hey Bucktooth! You got any gravy train on your menu? After I rob Rover over here the least I can do is buy him dinner.

Max fumbles with the triangle trying to rack the balls.

Bucktooth, still behind the bar, intently studies Max then Hank.

Both hookers drink and giggle as they watch Max rack the balls.

Louie has a genuine look of concern as he watches Max.

Hanks breaks and makes the 9 ball on break.

HANK (cont'd)
Yeah, man! That's what I'm talking
about. The Great Red Pool God is here
tonight!

Max looks pale and nauseous as he starts racking again.

Hank marks his score to eight and walks over to the booth and speaks to his girls.

HANK (cont'd)
After tonight, I might give you
ladies a day off.

Valerie responds with a wink and a slight smile.

Hank breaks, making a couple of balls, and leaves himself an easy layout. He makes the 1 ball, then the 2 ball getting easy position on a 3-9 combination for the corner pocket, facing Max.

Max looks around the room with a confused and frightened expression as he begins to hallucinate. He hears the toms of war as he looks around at all the Indians aiming bows and arrows at him, wearing war paint and feathered headdress.

He watches Hank make the combo on the 9 ball. Then, Hank raises his cue in the air, claiming victory. Suddenly, in Max's mind, the cue turns into a tomahawk.

Max goes berserk, he grabs Hank and slings him across the room as though he was a rag doll.

Three Indians try to restrain Max, he breaks loose and lunges after Hank. Louie sees that Hank has a dagger pulled and he jumps out in front of Max to protect him. Max picks Louie up and throws him over the bar.

Hank takes a swipe at Max and slices his left cheek. Max falls backward and hits his head on the corner of the pool table.

Bucktooth Billy grabs Hank from behind and slams his face down onto the bed of the pool table.

FADE TO:

EXT. BUCKTOOTH BILLY'S BAR - NIGHT

Paramedics have Max strapped to a stretcher loading him into an ambulance. Louie and Bucktooth are standing nearby.

LOUIE

Max has never done anything like that before.

BUCKTOOTH

You can't trust those damn Cherokees, if I find out he jarred Max, they'll be making toupees out of that silver streaked sissified ponytail of his.

LOUIE

You don't think he did that, do you?

BUCKTOOTH

Does the bear shit in the woods?

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL MENTAL WARD DAY ROOM - DAY

Louie is talking to a pretty young nurse, her name tag says SHIRLEY.

SHIRLEY

We don't know how long it'll be before it's safe for him to leave... that sure was a strong dose of LSD and he also has a hairline fracture on the back of his skull.

LOUIE

His drink was spiked. He was in a high stakes pool match with a low life that wanted a winning edge.

Louie wipes a tear from his cheek.

LOUIE (cont'd)

I talked him into going there... nurse, you've got to do something, he's the best friend I've got.

Shirley touches Louie's hand and tries to comfort him.

SHIRLEY

He's in good hands here. We'll do
whatever it takes to make him well.

Louie and Shirley look over at Max. He is sitting on the sofa with a couple of disoriented patients. Max is hugging a teddy bear and watching Bugs Bunny on TV. The left side of his face is bandaged up.

Louie sadly walks away.

MONTAGE OF MAX'S STAY IN THE HOSPITAL

-- Max being spoonfed by Shirley.

-- Shirley helping Max with a simple jigsaw puzzle.

-- Shirley tucking Max into bed.

-- Louie visiting and trying to communicate with Max, but Max doesn't know him.

-- Max in line to take his medicine.

-- Max sitting in the corner of his room trembling with a frightened look in his eyes.

-- A doctor takes the bandages off of Max's face, he has a four-inch scar running down the side of his left cheek.

-- Shirley is reading the Bible to Max.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT - DAY

Louie and Shirley are standing beside Louie's car.

SHIRLEY

I understand you having to leave, may
God bless you for staying around as
long as you did.

They hug, and Louie gets into his car and drives away.

FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - SIX MONTHS LATER - DAY

Max is in the recreation room teaching JOHNNY, a teenager with Down Syndrome, how to hold a cue stick and shoot an easy shot.

Shirley walks in and smiles at Max.

SHIRLEY

Well, DOCTOR HARRIS says you're free to go whenever you want...unless you would like a job.

MAX

You know what that means.

SHIRLEY

I sure do.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Max is slipping a wedding band over Shirley's left ring finger.

MINISTER

I now pronounce you husband and wife.
You may kiss the bride.

They kiss and we see an ECU of the scar on Max's cheek.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRUSHY MOUNTAIN PENITENTIARY - 34 YEARS LATER - PRESENT TIME - DAY

ECU of scar on the face of fifty-seven year-old Max Harper, the preacher.

Max is wearing a gray suit and navy blue tie. He's rapidly pacing the floor and preaching the gospel to about 30 inmates sitting in metal folding chairs. A pool table is nearby. A prison guard is standing near the door.

MAX

God performed a miracle in my life and I'm here to tell you He can, wants to, and will perform one in yours.

Max pauses to pour a glass of water from a pitcher that is sitting on a small table, his Bible and some gospel tracks are also on the table.

MAX (cont'd)

He can deliver you from drugs, free
you from alcohol, adultery, gambling,
anything that has you under
bondage...Jesus can set you free!

He loosens his tie and continues to pace and preach.

MAX (cont'd)

He can turn the hatred in your hearts
to love, even for your enemies, the
very ones that double crossed you...
snitched on you.

Max strolls around the inmates and places his hand on the shoulder of RED, the meanest-looking one of all.

MAX (cont'd)

Come on friends, turn to Him, ask for
His forgiveness. He loved you enough
to lay down his life for you...all of
you!

He walks to the pool table.

MAX (cont'd)

Today is the day for salvation, if
you give Him your life, He will give
you eternal life in heaven...with
Him! How can you turn down a deal
like that?

Everyone sits quietly, sheepishly glancing at each other. Max looks disappointed that no one is responding to an altar call.

Red speaks up.

RED

Preacher Cue, how about shooting one
more trick shot before you leave.

Max smiles and starts taking pool balls out of the pockets.

He places five balls near the side pocket and a sixth ball near the lower right hand pocket.

MAX

These six balls represent people, the table is the world, and the pockets represent the kingdom of heaven.

He places the cue ball near the cluster of five balls.

MAX (cont'd)

The cue ball is Jesus.

Max leans over the pool table and shoots into the cluster.

The five balls go into four separate pockets and the cue ball goes three cushions to make the ball near the corner pocket.

Max picks up the cue ball and kisses it.

MAX (cont'd)

See there! Jesus will go all the way around the world to find that one lost soul.

Red and all the inmates applaud with laughter.

CUT TO:

EXT. ATLANTA, GA - USED CAR LOT - DAY

INSERT SIGN

FAST LOUIE'S - WE GIVE THE BEST DEALS ON THE BEST WHEELS

It's a small lot of about thirty cars, different models. All are at least six or seven years old.

A well-groomed sixty-year-old Louie Yates is carrying a briefcase, briskly walking across the gravel parking lot. JASON, his manager, is following.

LOUIE

I shouldn't be gone for more than three days.

JASON

Why don't you take a day off and enjoy yourself...Knoxville's got some good-looking babes.

LOUIE

That's a joke, these things have become like a bad movie, worse... movies have an ending

Louie stops and takes the price tag off of a 1996 town car and hands it to Jason.

JASON
Cheer up, do you know anyone that has fun and makes money, too?

Louie lights a cigarette and ponders.

LOUIE
Used to...gotta go now. Sell some cars, the rent's due.

As Louie pulls out, Jason hollers at him.

JASON
Hey boss, drive carefully. That car's on consignment!

FADE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 75 - DAY

Louie's car is leaving Atlanta.

Louie drives through the mountains of Chattanooga, Tennessee.

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Louie sees a sign that jogs a memory.

INSERT SIGN

LOUDON 5 MILES

LOUIE
(MUMBLING)
Loudon, I wonder if...maybe...I think I'll check it out.

EXT. HIGHWAY 75

Louie takes the Loudon exit.

EXT. LOUDON

Very small town with about five business blocks with a brick court house in the center.

Louie's car pulls into a service station across the street from the court house. He gets out of the car to stretch.

JAMIE, the attendant, walks toward Louie WHISTLING, "I'll Fly Away." Jamie speaks with a very strong southern accent.

JAMIE

Good day, sir, would you like for me to fill her up?

LOUIE

Yeah, with the cheap stuff. You wouldn't happen to know Max Harper, would you?

JAMIE

Sure, I do, he baptized my son last week. We call him Preacher Cue around these parts.

Louie looks a little confused.

LOUIE

Can you tell me where I might find him?

JAMIE

Sure can. He's over on Hospital Hill, bricking Mr. Langley's house.

Jamie points down the road.

JAMIE (cont'd)

Just get back on this here road here...now, when you get on top of that hill over there and see Johnson's store on the left...You've gone too far...

Jamie hangs up the pump.

JAMIE (cont'd)

So, turn around and come back, now when you pass the church and graveyard, take a right.

LOUIE

So, in other words, I take a left at the graveyard.

JAMIE

That's right, you can't miss it. That will be eighteen dollars and fifty cents, please.

Louie smiles, peels a twenty-dollar bill off a roll of money and gives it to him.

LOUIE
Keep the change.

JAMIE
Thank you, sir, and have a good day.

Jamie walks away WHISTLING as Louie gets in the car.

EXT. LOUIE'S CAR - DAY

Louie drives slowly, passing a field with kids playing softball. He drives over a small bridge that crosses a creek. There's an old man wearing a straw hat fishing with a cane pole.

Louie makes a left turn at the graveyard. He sees a house being bricked with a flatbed one-ton truck, pickup truck, and work van parked in front.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Louie parks his car, gets out, and walks past a few stacks of bricks, a pile of sand, and a mortar mixer. He sees a man laying brick, and walks toward him.

LOUIE
Pardon me, could you tell me where...

Max turns around and they recognize one another.

LOUIE (cont'd)
Max! It's you!

MAX
Louie! I can't believe it! Where in the world have you been?

They aggressively hug one another.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX'S HOME RECREATION ROOM - DAY

Louie stands next to a beautiful professional-sized pool table. He rolls the cue ball to the end rail, watching it bound and roll straight back to him.

Shirley comes into the den, carrying a tray with two servings of pie and two cups of coffee. She places it on the coffee table, and Louie sits down.

SHIRLEY

Please, make yourself at home, Max will be out of his work clothes shortly.

LOUIE

Looks like one thing came out of that six-month stay in the hospital - Max met you.

SHIRLEY

Yes, Louie, we're very blessed.

Max enters the room and gives Shirley a loving quick kiss on the cheek.

MAX

I'm a very lucky man, Louie.

Louie smiles in agreement.

SHIRLEY

Honey, I'm sorry, but I've got to leave. I have to take a couple of pies to the rest home.

Shirley takes Louie's right hand in both of hers.

SHIRLEY (cont'd)

Louie, it sure is good seeing you again. Come back anytime.

Max sits in a chair facing Louie.

MAX

I tried to reach you in the past, but no one knew where you were.

LOUIE

After I quit visiting you...Max, I'm sorry, I thought you weren't coming out of it...Anyway, I made a good score and invested it in a used car lot. Hustling pool didn't mean much to me without you as a partner.

MAX

Well, it sure is great to see you, and I'm glad to hear you're doing so well.

LOUIE

When did you become a preacher, Max?

MAX

A little over twenty years now. I'm an evangelist. I go to prisons and detention homes to preach the Good News. You'll appreciate this, Louie...I use trick shots to teach parables.

LOUIE

How's your game, Max? You think you can still beat your coach?

Louie stands and takes a cue from the wall rack. He sights down the shaft, checking to see if it's straight, then he racks the balls for 9-ball.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Come on, how about a game for old times' sake? You can have the first break.

MAX

Sure, I'd love to.

Max chalks his cue and delivers a sledgehammer break, scattering the balls, with three balls finding a pocket.

MONTAGE OF POOL MATCH

-- Max smiles continuously as he shoots with a fast rhythm and silky smooth stroke.

-- Louie watches intently, also smiling from amazement, inspired by Max's great shooting.

-- The pool balls keep slapping the back of the pockets, back shots, kiss shots, and combinations.

-- Louie racking, holding his cue, waiting for a shot, and making expressions of awe as he watches Max make the balls disappear into the pockets.

BACK TO REAL TIME

Max makes the 9 ball for the fourth time, and Louie places his cue back in the wall rack.

LOUIE

This game's a little too one-sided for me. Man, you're playing great, you ran those four racks with ease.

(MORE)

LOUIE (cont'd)
Do you realize the money we could
make with you playing like that?

MAX
Yeah, but I don't think they would
take it kindly when I tell them Jesus
loves them.

Louie looks like a dog that just peed on the carpet.

LOUIE
I'm sorry, I just...

MAX
(interrupting)
That's OK, I understand. I could
never hustle again...
(Max laughs and slaps
Louie on the
shoulder)
It's too much fun playing for fun.

Louie appears to be restless as he looks at the grandfather
clock. It shows seven o'clock.

LOUIE
I should be leaving now, the auto
auction starts very early in the
morning.

Louie hands Max a business card.

LOUIE (cont'd)
Here's my card. If you ever need a
rack boy, give me a call.

Max walks Louie to the door.

MAX
Come back any time, Louie, you're
always welcome.

FADE TO:

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Max is laying brick with the ease and fluency as his pool
playing, while whistling a happy tune.

After laying the last brick of a row, Max takes out his
pocket watch and checks the time. He looks back at CHARLIE,
who is working on the same wall.

MAX

Let's rod up, it's time to eat.

They rod the last course. Max, Charlie, and their two laborers, DANNY and BUD, gather in a circle while holding hands and heads bowed.

MAX (cont'd)

Lord, we thank you for this day and the food we are about to eat. Amen.

Max and Charlie sit on the steps, Bud sits on a stack of mortar bags, and Danny sits on the ground in a lotus position.

Charlie takes a sandwich out of his lunchbox.

CHARLIE

I'm sure thankful for my job. Did you read the paper this morning about all the homeless people in America?

DANNY

It's a shameful thing. I don't understand how our government can spend so much money on ET hunts when we have people starving right here in our own backyard.

Max listens with a concerned and compassionate look on his face.

FADE TO:

EXT. MISSION FOR THE HOMELESS - KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE - DAY

Max and REVEREND MICHAELS, a black man with snow white hair, are serving soup to a line of about 20 homeless people.

REVEREND MICHAELS

The donations and love offerings have been a little slow lately, but no one's going hungry. We could use some money for clothes, especially coats...it's starting to get pretty cold.

Max hands him an envelope.

MAX

Brother, I hope this will help.

REVEREND MICHAELS
Bless you, brother, bless you.

CUT TO:

INT. ATLANTA, GA - STRIP JOINT - NIGHT

Louie is sitting near the stage, placing a dollar bill in a young beauty's G-string. The music is playing very loud.

Louie's cell phone rings.

LOUIE
(to himself)
This is a helluva time to get a call,
I hope it's worth it.

He puts the phone up to his right ear, and his left hand over his left ear.

LOUIE (cont'd)
Louie here, what do you want?

INTERCUT BETWEEN LOUIE AND SAM THE HAMMER

INT. EXECUTIVE SPORTS CLUB - HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS - NIGHT

Very upscale private club. Decorated with sports memorabilia, and the waitresses are wearing designer uniforms designed after different sports.

Sixty-year-old SAM THE HAMMER has his cell phone to his ear, watching fifty-five-year-old JOCKEY JERRY sit on the edge of a beautiful expensive pool table with his cue held in a vertical position. He's getting ready to shoot a massè shot.

The table is down in a pit about three feet lower than the main level. FAWN PANG, a Chinese man, is also in the pit, watching with the look of defeat in his eyes.

There are about about 50 spectators watching from the main level. All are dressed either in a nice sweater, suit, or sports jacket.

SAM
Louie, it's me, I'm returning your
call. Where have you been so long? I
haven't heard...

Jerry shoots the shot and makes a fantastic massè shot. A tremendous roar comes from the spectators and distracts Sam.

LOUIE

What the hell was that? Sounds like you're at a damn bullfight.

SAM

That was the Jock making an unbelievable shot to beat Fawn Pang in a hundred thousand dollar HORSE match.

LOUIE

Did you say John Wayne?

SAM

No, Fawn Pang, the supposed great trick shot artist from China. Might as well been playing Skunk, he couldn't put a letter on Jerry, no contest.

LOUIE

So, the action's that strong now?

SAM

Stronger than ever.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX'S HOME RECREATION ROOM - NIGHT

Max is leaning over the pool table lining up a shot. He's practicing 14.1 straight pool. The grandfather clock is showing nine o'clock.

Shirley is sitting at the sewing machine mending a pair of khaki pants.

Max makes the 5 ball in the side pocket and stops the cue ball for position on the 2 ball for a perfect break shot. While he is racking, Shirley walks over with the pants hanging on her arm and gives Max a kiss.

SHIRLEY

Sweetheart, I'm going to bed and read for awhile, play as long as you like.

Max chalks his cue and lines up for the break shot.

MAX

I'm on a pretty good run, I just want to play it out.

Shirley leaves the room and Max fires the 2 ball into the corner pocket, scattering the racked balls for a picture book break shot. While Max is leaning over and getting ready to play another shot, the telephone rings and Max answers it.

MAX (cont'd)

Hello, Max Harper speaking.

LOUIE O.S.

Max, sorry to bother you so late, but I had to give you a call.

MAX

Sure, Louie, what can I help you with?

INTERCUT BETWEEN LOUIE AND MAX

INT. LOUIE'S CONDO

Louie is stretched out on a recliner, smoking a cigar and drinking a beer.

LOUIE

To begin with, I want you to know I respect you and the way you believe, so please hear me out.

MAX

Sure, Louie, sure. What's on your mind?

LOUIE

I got on the horn and made a few calls...Max, the action is stronger now than ever.

MAX

So?

LOUIE

Sam Rogers - you know, the Hammer - he says there's no limit a top notch player...

MAX
(interrupts)
I don't hustle anymore, it's...

LOUIE
(interrupts)
He told me four locations we could win a total of a half million or more.

MAX
I can't believe you're asking me to hustle pool again.

LOUIE
We wouldn't be playing the everyday Joes. We'd be taking off the pimps, drug dealers, and bookies

MAX
I'm called to preach to those people, not take their money.

LOUIE
I'll stake the whole trip and we'll split 50-50, it'll be just like the good old days...Man, we were the best, we never booked a loser.

MAX
What about the match with Cherokee Hank?

LOUIE
That doesn't count, they spiked your drink.

MAX
We still lost twenty thousand and I almost lost my life.

LOUIE
That really hit me hard, you were like a brother to me...I'm sure you don't remember. I came to see you every day for a month...I couldn't take it seeing you like that.

MAX
For those who love the Lord, all things work for the good.

LOUIE

Well, I had to try, if you change
your mind, you know where to find me.

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSION FOR THE HOMELESS - DAY

Max and Shirley are talking to Reverend Michaels. Ten-year-olds, JEFFERY and NANCY, are standing beside them all giggly and excited.

SISSY, a little five-year-old girl, wearing a patched-up dress and spaghetti sauce on her cheeks, is standing beside Reverend Michaels with a sad look on her face.

Max squats down to talk to her.

MAX

Remember now, we're taking you to the
zoo next week and you can pet the
ponies and make faces at the monkeys.

Max takes his handkerchief out and wipes the spaghetti sauce off her cheeks.

MAX (cont'd)

Now, you weren't saving that for
later, were you?

Sissy smiles and hugs Max's neck.

FADE TO:

INT. SKATING RINK - DAY

Shirley and Jeffery are holding hands and skating and laughing as they watch Max acting silly while he's skating with Nancy. Max is skating backwards and doing the Elvis wiggle to the rock and roll music.

CUT TO:

INT. MCDONALD'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Max, Shirley, Jeffery, and Nancy look like a happy family eating their burger and fries.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

Max, Shirley, Jeffery, and Nancy are coming out of the theater.

FADE TO:

INT. MAX'S SUV - NIGHT

Max is driving with Shirley sitting close beside him. Jeffery and Nancy are sitting up, leaning against one another, asleep in the back seat.

SHIRLEY

What a fun day this has been.

MAX

Sure has, especially the roller skating. It's always been great therapy for me. Used to be, whenever my mother and father were fussing, I'd bum a quarter from my brother and go skating... When I was zooming around on that rink, I didn't have a worry in the world, free as a bird.

Two fire engines pass with their sirens SCREAMING.

SHIRLEY

I hope it's nothing serious.

MAX

Maybe it's a false alarm.

FADE TO:

EXT. MISSION FOR THE HOMELESS - NIGHT

The mission building is totally engulfed with a blazing fire reaching into the dark. The fire engines are nearby with firemen hustling around, frantically trying to put it out.

Max's SUV is parked a half block away. Through the windshield, we can see the expressions of shock on the faces of Max and Shirley.

Reverend Michaels and about 25 homeless people are standing off to the side, watching. Some crying and some just with blank emotionless faces.

Sissy is very frightened and holding on to Reverend Michaels' leg.

FADE TO:

EXT. MISSION SITE - DAY

Max and Reverend Michaels are walking around the two feet high block foundation and charred rubble that used to be the mission.

MAX

What are you going to do, where are the homeless going to sleep and eat?

REVEREND MICHAELS

MISTER HOPKINS, the owner of this land, is going to let us use his warehouse and the state fair is going to loan us a couple of large tents and propane heaters.

MAX

I'll have my men come up and clear away this mess and put the tents up.

REVEREND MICHAELS

Brother, you're a saint...
(looking gloomy)
Christmas upon us and something like this happens.

Max hugs the Reverend.

MAX

Have faith, we'll trust God for a miracle.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX'S HOME RECREATION ROOM - NIGHT

Max is playing pool, uncharacteristically firing balls into the pockets with unusually hard strokes. When the 9 ball is the only ball left, Max picks it up and stares at it for a few seconds. Then he slams it into the pocket with his hand.

Max picks up the telephone.

INT. LOUIE'S CONDO - MOMENTS LATER

Louie is lying in his hot tub, drinking a beer and reading a girlie magazine. The telephone beside him RINGS.

LOUIE
Hello, Louie here...Max, how's it
going?

Louie's eyes get bigger as he listens. He gets so excited,
he drops the magazine into the water.

LOUIE (cont'd)
Am I! Are you serious? Of course, I
am.

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

MAX
Louie, this is strictly business - no
booze, drugs, or women. Agreed?

LOUIE
Sure, Max, whatever you say. I'm
going to need a few days to get
everything set up. Max, I've got a
plan.

MAX
Same old Louie, the man with the
plan. What's the plan, Louie?

FADE TO:

EXT. ATLANTA BANK - DAY

Louie is walking toward the bank.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK

A LOAN OFFICER is sitting behind a desk looking at Louie and
shaking his head no.

INT. STRIP JOINT - NIGHT

Louie is standing at the bar with CHAZ, the owner, and
signing a sheet of paper.

INSERT - PAPER

I owe you (Chaz Wiggins) \$120,000 or my condo, payable by
December 26, 2004. Signed, Louie Yates.

CHAZ

Louie, I know we're friends, but I'm
also a businessman.

CUT TO:

INT. BANK - DAY

The loan officer has a surprised look as he stares into a
briefcase filled with stacks of hundred dollar bills.

Louie sits across the desk.

LOUIE

Don't worry, it's real. I want a
cashier's check for the full amount.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY 72 - DAY

Louie's Town Car is driving through a scenic mountainous
countryside. One of the barns has a sign painted on it that
says, "SEE ROCK CITY."

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Max and Louie are dressed in western wear. Louie is driving
and smoking a cigarette with his window cracked a few
inches.

MAX

I won't complain about your smoking,
as long as you keep the window partly
down.

LOUIE

Whatever you say, partner...What do
you think about my plan?

MAX

Sounds like a Mission Impossible plot
to me. I hope it works.

Max points to a road sign.

MAX (cont'd)

Only 10 more miles to Huntsville.

CUT TO:

LOUIE

I'd like for you to play this at seven o'clock and seven fifty. If you pump it up real good, there might be another C-note for you.

KEN

This had better be good, I'm taking a chance here, I could lose my job.

LOUIE

That song is so country, it makes George Jones sound like an opera singer.

FADE TO:

EXT. COOL COUNTRY SWING CLUB - DAY

Two pickup trucks and four cars are parked in front. Louie parks near the entrance.

The building is old and run down. A couple of beer signs are hanging on the front wall. One is crooked and looks like it's ready to fall off.

Louie and Max get out of the car. Louie is carrying a couple of rolled up posters, and Max is carrying a stack of 8-by-10 colored head shots of himself wearing a cowboy hat.

They walk toward the entrance and stop at the door.

Louie unrolls a poster and uses thumb tacks to hang it on the door.

INSERT POSTER

Has a photo of Max and Willie Nelson on it; saying Willie Nelson and Max Jordan concert; Birmingham, Alabama in big letters.

LOUIE

Don't forget you're going by Max Jordan - Max Harper is still famous in the pool world.

Max looks apprehensive.

MAX

This sure is a rough-looking place.

LOUIE

I'm sure it's much nicer inside.

Max and Louie go inside.

INT. COOL COUNTRY SWING CLUB - DAY

It's a dive, the inside is worse than the outside. The bandstand and dance floor are to the left. There are about 25 tables with wooden and metal chairs.

The bar is to the right, with a seven-foot coin-operated pool table near the middle.

Roscoe is behind the bar, washing glasses. He looks like the redneck version of Count Dracula. JUDY, his girlfriend and waitress, is walking across the dark dance floor carrying a tray full of drinks.

Louie and Max look around, checking the place out.

MAX

Sure, Louie, plush place.

Louie turns and attaches a poster beside the door.

Judy opens a door in the back, exposing light and MUFFLED VOICES coming from the room.

Max and Louie approach Roscoe.

LOUIE

You must be Roscoe...I'm Louie and this is Max.

ROSCOE

You all are right on time, DIRTY GEORGE should be here any time now. Man, this is going to be sweet, I've been trying for a year to get someone in here to snap George off.

LOUIE

That's what we're planning on doing. I just hope he's ripe for the picking.

ROSCOE

Remember now, you've got to let him hustle you. One wrong move and you will lose him. Play him right and he'll go off like a rocket...be cool, here he comes now.

Dirty George Brooks comes through the door wadding up the poster Louie hung on the outside of the door.

George is in his late fifties, heavysset, wearing jeans, a western shirt, cowboy hat and a huge shiny belt buckle.

He has a big chaw of tobacco in his left jaw and a short stubby cigar sticking out of the right side of his mouth.

Max and Louie watch George walk toward them.

LOUIE

He's got that bull dog look.

ROSCOE

He's more like an Airedale, he's smarter than he looks.

George stops in front of them, takes his cigar out of his mouth and spits a long stream of tobacco juice right between Max and Louie's feet. They both dodge the spit and look down and see a spittoon sitting on the floor between them.

GEORGE

Who in damn hell has been littering my door with this damn poster? Hell, I can't make money if my customers go running off to Birmingham.

Max quickly signs a photo and hands it to Roscoe.

MAX

Here you go, Roscoe.

ROSCOE

Hey George, meet Max Jordan and his agent, Louie Yates.

George presses the poster out flat on the bar.

GEORGE

Well, call me a turd, if that ain't you. This is a little wrinkled, but would you sign it? We don't get many celebrities here.

MAX

Glad to.

Max signs the poster.

GEORGE

We've got a house band that sounds pretty good, starts at eight o'clock...you all ought to stay around and sing one. It'd be good PR for you.

MAX

That's almost three hours from now,
we could be in Birmingham by then.

GEORGE

We've got a nice social poker game in
the back, you could kill some time
there until they start.

LOUIE

Poker...hey, Max, what do you say? I
haven't played poker in a coons age.

MAX

Don't you think we should get on in
to Birmingham and rest up? Tomorrow
night is a big night.

LOUIE

Ah, come on, Max. I just want to play
a few hands.

MAX

OK, but if we leave late, you're
doing the driving.

GEORGE

Good, I think I'll sit in on a couple
of hands myself.

CUT TO:

CARD ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

There's a blackjack game and poker game in progress with a
house dealer and three players at each table. Two large
sofas sit catty-corner off to the side. Two attractive
hookers, ROSE and DARLENE, wearing short skirts and low-cut
sweaters, are sitting on one.

JANE HALL, a nineteen-year-old bubblegum-chewing cutie is
lying on the other. She's wearing jeans and a tank top and
reading the Enquirer while blowing bubbles and popping them.

There's a radio sitting on a table between them playing
country music.

George, Louie, and Max stand near the door. George waves his
arm gesturing.

GEORGE

The most honest game in town.

George introduces Max and Louie to everyone.

GEORGE (cont'd)
Hey folks, this is Max and Louie.
They're going to sit in for awhile.

They walk a few steps to the poker table.

GEORGE (cont'd)
(pointing)
JACK'S the dealer, this is FRANK,
HELEN, and that old ornery prick over
there is JUDGE WALKER.

Judge Walker is wearing a white shirt, that looks like he slept in, and a red bow tie loosely around his open collar.

JUDGE WALKER
(very cranky)
OK, OK, the introduction is over,
deal the damn cards.

MAX
I think I'll play blackjack, never
did like poker.

George pats Judy on the butt.

GEORGE
Judy, bring everyone a drink on the
house, let's show these men some real
southern hospitality.

Jack is still shuffling the cards.

JUDGE WALKER
Are you trying to wear the damn spots
off? You're slower than smoke off
turtle shit. Deal the damn cards!

ANGLE ON BLACKJACK TABLE

Max has a face card showing and the dealer has an eight.
Jane is standing behind Max, looking over his shoulder.

MAX
Hit me.

The dealer gives Max a six of clubs, and Max turns over his
cards.

MAX (cont'd)
23 - I'm bust.

Jane pops a big bubble right near Max's left ear. Max jumps, slapping his chest.

JANE

What are you doing hitting seventeen?
You never hit seventeen.

George snaps at Jane.

GEORGE

Damn it, Jane! It's his money, don't
tell the man how to play his cards.

CUT TO:

BAR SECTION

Roscoe is filling Judy's tray with drinks.

ROSCOE

If everything goes right, me and you
might be moving into a better
apartment next week...make sure Max
gets this one here
(points)
straight coke.

CUT TO:

CARD ROOM

The voice of Ken James comes over the radio.

KEN O.S.

Country fans, here's a brand new one
for you, TOO COUNTRY TO SING A
COUNTRY SONG, by Max Jordan. I
believe this one has a chance to make
it to the top.

LOUIE

Max! They're playing our song!
Someone turn the radio up!

Everyone stops talking and listens to the song. When the chorus starts, George speaks his opinion.

GEORGE

That song's more country than corn
bread and collard greens.

LOUIE

I can't believe it! We just signed the contract three days ago. Partner, that hundred Gs signing bonus is peanuts compared to what we're going to make...Judy, a round on me, this time, we're going to celebrate.

George gives Helen a knowing smile.

MONTAGE OF CARD GAME

-- Max and Louie losing hands.

-- Jane popping bubbles and criticizing Max for his bad playing.

-- Louie drinking and ordering more drinks.

-- Judge Walker rips his cards up after losing a nice pot.

-- George winning and raking in the money with both hands.

BACK TO REAL TIME

ANGLE ON BLACKJACK TABLE

The dealer has a nine of hearts showing, and Max has a face card.

MAX

I'm good.

The dealer turns over a Jack of Spades, making nineteen.

Max turns over a three of clubs, making thirteen.

JANE

Ugh! You stink. Where did you learn to play blackjack, in church?

MAX

The cards are not falling my way, I'm going to take a break.

JANE

It's about time, because I can't watch any more of this masochistic shit.

Max takes his drink and sits on the sofa, and Jane sits beside him.

MAX

Aren't you a little young to be in here? I bet your mother and father don't know you're here.

JANE

That's my mother in the poker game, and my father's the blackjack dealer that just took you to the cleaners.

MAX

So, you're going to drink and gamble the rest of your life just because they do?

JANE

Shit no! As soon as I make a good score, I'm going to Little Rock, live with my grandmother and become a beautician.

Max glances over at the poker table.

ANGLE ON THE POKER TABLE

Underneath the table, Helen's bare left foot moves into George's lap with a two of diamonds stuck between her toes. George takes the card and replaces it with the ace of hearts. Max sees the move, smiles wryly, and looks back to Jane.

George's poker hand has two deuces, a seven, and a Jack showing.

Everyone else has folded, except Louie. His hand is showing three aces and a ten of spades.

LOUIE

It's on you, George. I figure my aces are worth a hundred a piece. I just raised you \$300, call or fold.

GEORGE

Since that was the third raise, I guess I can only call.

George puts three hundred dollar bills in the pot and turns his hole cards face up.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Four ducks...you don't have that other ace, do you?

LOUIE

Can you believe that?! I just got aces full beat with four little deuces. Hey, Max! I need some more money, all I've got left is this check and a twenty dollar bill.

Louie takes the cashier's check out of his inside jacket pocket for everyone to see.

MAX

I'm busted. Besides, don't you think we've had enough of this fun?

LOUIE

I'm stuck like a roasted pig. When I get even, I'll quit.

Ken James' voice comes back on the radio.

KEN O.S.

The phone's been ringing off the hook. People requesting TOO COUNTRY TO SING A COUNTRY SONG, by Max Jordan. Got to keep my listeners satisfied...here it is, country fans.

MAX

Hear that, Louie? Sounds like we've got a chart topper. I feel like singing.

CUT TO:

MAIN SECTION

At the same time the song begins, the band in the main section of the club starts warming up, with guitars being tuned and drum rolls.

A rowdy crowd of about fifty or sixty people have gathered. Almost everyone is dressed in western garb.

CARD ROOM

Louie leaps up from the poker table.

LOUIE

You're right, Max! Let's have some fun, I'd rather hear you sing than play poker any time.

Max gets up and walks toward the door with Louie. Louie looks back at the poker table, and George looks disappointed.

LOUIE (cont'd)
I think we've donated enough. Thank you, gentlemen, for your kind hospitality.

GEORGE
Hey! Come on back, I'll cash that check, you've got all night to sing.

Max and Louie ignore George as they walk into the main section

MAIN SECTION

Max and Louie stand around, anticipating George to follow. As expected, George walks up behind them.

GEORGE (cont'd)
I'll get the band to let you sing something.

George approaches the stage and takes the microphone from the lead singer.

GEORGE (cont'd)
Folks, you all are in for a treat tonight! My good friend, country singing star, Max Jordan, stopped by to see his old good buddy...yours truly...and he's going to sing a couple for us...right now!

Straight from Nashville. Here is is live! Max Jordan!

Max looks nervous as he looks at Louie and swallows.

LOUIE
Go ahead, Max, knock their socks off.

Max gets some WHISTLES and APPLAUSE as he steps up on the stage.

He takes a guitar from one of the musicians and starts showing them the key and tempo. Then he faces the crowd.

MAX
Here's one I hope you like...it's called PICKING AND A GRINNING.

Max starts with an up-tempo chicken-picking intro. He really works the crowd, singing and picking as George walks to the bar.

Most of the people start dancing when the band kicks in with Max. Jane grabs Louie by the arm and takes him out on the dance floor.

BAR SECTION

George is talking to Roscoe.

GEORGE

I want you to start making our new
celebrity friends' drinks stronger.
With a little alcohol courage, they
might get their noses open
(snarling)
then I'll bust them.

ROSCOE

Maybe you can get them to play pool.

GEORGE

What are you doing, reading my mind?
That's exactly what I was thinking.

STAGE SECTION

Max is singing and having fun, he looks across the dance floor and sees Rose and Darlene playing pool.

BAR AND POOL TABLE SECTION

George struts the few steps to the pool table to speak with Rose.

GEORGE (cont'd)

When Merle Haggard up there gets off
the stage, ask him to play some pool.

Rose pinches George on the cheek.

ROSE

That'll be a pleasure, Gorgeous
George.

GEORGE

Just pool, nothing else. He's all
mine.

ROSE

Why, I didn't think he was your type.

GEORGE

You know very well what I mean - I want to see how good he can play.

STAGE SECTION

Max finishes his song and hands the guitar to a band member. He does a quick bow to his adoring fans and hops off the stage. Louie joins Max and they walk toward the bar section.

Louie hands out a few photos, and Max signs them quickly and keeps walking.

BAR AND POOL TABLE SECTION

Louie picks a table near the pool table, takes off his jacket and hangs it on the back of his chair. Jane takes a chair beside Louie. While Louie motions to Judy for another drink, Rose is standing in front of Max smiling and running her fingers up and down the shaft of her cue.

ROSE

Do you play pool as good as you sing?

MAX

Sure I do, I paid my way through college playing 9-ball. Would you like some pointers?

George is listening and seizes an opportunity to work on Max's ego.

GEORGE

You would still be learning your damn ABCs, if you tried to pay your way through college playing blackjack.

Max ignores the ribbing as he awkwardly instructs Rose how to hold and stroke the cue.

MAX

I'm serious, I'm really good at this game.

George watching Max whispers to JEFF, one of his bouncers, who looks like an Olympic weightlifter.

GEORGE

The sucker can't even spell pool. Watch me pluck this turkey.

George takes a cue that's leaning against the bar and chalks it slowly, getting Max's attention and staring him in the eye.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Fast Maxi, between you and your agent Double-O-Seven-Up over there, you lost about \$2,000 playing cards. You say pool is your game...well, I'm going to make the old double or nothing sucker bet.

I'll play you 9-ball, a race to five for what you lost.

Max seems to be a little intoxicated, now, as he downs another supposed rum and coke, and looks over at Louie.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Well, it's on you, call or fold...
Fast Maxi.

Louie looking drunk and pissed off, springs up out of his chair. He raises his hands out to his sides, holding the cashier's check in one hand and a twenty dollar bill in the other.

LOUIE

That was pocket change. Here's a twenty dollar bill, all the cash we have...and here's a hundred thousand dollar cashier's check.

You have a choice, he'll play you for Andrew here (waving the twenty dollar bill gently) or the check...now, let's see how much gamble you have...
Alabama Fats.

MAX

Louie! Are you crazy, put that check back in your pocket.

LOUIE

Relax, he ain't going to play for the check. Why, he'd be so nervous he wouldn't be able to hold his cue.

A crowd has gathered around the pool table. They're looking at George to see if he calls the bet.

GEORGE

Stay right where you're at! I'll be right back, I promise!

CUT TO:

GEORGE'S OFFICE

George is taking stacks of money with \$5,000 wrappers around them out of the safe and putting them into a potato sack.

JEFF

You've got him right where you want him, right boss?

GEORGE

That's right, son, I'm going to show that turkey what hustling's all about.

George takes a pistol out of the safe and sticks it in his pocket. He takes his shirt tail out to let it hang over it. Then he hands Jeff one.

JEFF

What's this for?

GEORGE

In case he shits out on me. You don't think I'm going to let him walk with the cash, do you?

JEFF

But what if the pigs come in to check the place out?

GEORGE

Just keep it hid, there's nothing to worry about. Trust me.

Jeff sticks the small pistol in his boot and pulls his pant leg over it.

CUT TO:

BAR AND POOL TABLE SECTION

Max is leaning over the pool table getting ready to shoot, the bag of money flies through the air and lands smack in front of his face.

GEORGE

I'm playing for the check!

Louie shuffles over to the pool table and turns the sack upside down, spilling the money onto the table.

Gasps and whispers circulate through the wide-eyed crowd, as Louie examines the stacks of money.

He misses an easy shot on the 3 ball, but hides the cue ball behind the 6 ball. Then he stands near Louie. Jane is also sitting at the table.

While George is trying to figure out how to play the shot, Max leans close to Louie.

MAX

I'm not going to clean the table on him, but I won't leave him anything when I miss.

LOUIE

Go ahead and run out on the bum, he needs a lesson in hustling.

George shoots a kick shot, hitting the 3 ball, but not making anything.

Max walks to the pool table, while looking back at Louie, frowning at what he had just said.

Max makes an easy shot on the 3 ball. Louie orders another drink.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Hey, sweet thang, make mine a double, this time. Put a little Jack Junior in there with his daddy.

Max makes a simple four-nine combination to win the first game. He marks his game on a chalk board near the cue rack.

George hands the triangle rack to Rose.

GEORGE

Here, make yourself handy - rack 'em.

LOUIE

Come on, Max, make the nine on the break.

Max breaks, making the 1 ball. Then he lines up a two-nine combo for the side pocket. He shoots hard, missing the far side pocket, but it reverses back and forth three cushions into the side pocket near him.

Louie leaps up out of his chair.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Great shot, Max! We've got him on the ropes, now.

George slaps a ball across the pool table with the side of his cue and begins slamming balls into the rack.

GEORGE

That was plain old slop. He couldn't make that shot again in a hundred years.

LOUIE

He made it then, that's what counts.

Max breaks, making a ball, then he runs the 1, 2, and 3 balls. He misses the 4 ball, leaving the cue ball frozen on one end of the rail and the 4 ball on the other.

George looks at the difficult shot and starts complaining to Max.

GEORGE

You're luckier than a two-peckered billy goat.

Louie stands and spills about half of his drink, gesturing with his arms while he's talking.

LOUIE

What do you mean, lucky? He told you pool was his game.

George points at Louie and gives him the evil eye.

GEORGE

If I hear much more of your damn cheerleading, you're going to find out what my best game is...I don't think you'll want to play...and I'm damn sure you can't win, if you know what I mean.

Max is now standing next to Louie and nudges him with his elbow.

MAX

Cool it, sit down. Are you trying to get us killed?

LOUIE

I'm just trying to make it look good, I know how to handle this jerk.

MAX

If you make it look any better, we won't be able to get out with the money after we win it.

George tries to bank the 4 ball and misses it.

LOUIE

(to Jane)

That was a real good shot

(sniggers)

if you don't like money.

Max shoots a cut shot on the 4 ball, missing it, sending the cue ball three cushions to hit the 6 ball and make the 9 ball in the corner pocket.

Max acts surprised, shakes his head, and marks his score to three.

George glares at the table, the crowd, Max, then Louie. He looks as though he wants to kill something, anything. He bends down and grabs underneath the pool table with both hands. He picks it up a foot or so and drops it, making a very loud noise when the legs hit the floor.

GEORGE

Shit! Shit! That's all it is, shit!

If you're a good pool player, my Aunt

Minnie's a Sumo wrestler. I can't

stand this shit!

George racks the balls still mumbling to himself. Then he slams the rack into its slot.

GEORGE (cont'd)

Break 'em, you lucky ass.

Max breaks and makes the 7 ball, then he runs the one through the 3 ball, all easy shots. He misses the 4 ball, snookering George behind the 5 ball.

GEORGE (cont'd)

What in the hell did I do to deserve

this kind of horse shit?

Max watches George attempt a desperation kick shot, not even hitting the 4 ball.

As Max takes his warm up strokes, George goes to the bar and whispers something to Jeff. Roscoe leans over to listen.

Max shoots a bank shot on the 6 ball and misses it, but he sticks the cue ball snugly behind the 9 ball.

George's demeanor has changed, he calmly walks to the pool table and studies the shot.

Roscoe gives Max the trouble sign by raking his finger across his throat. George shoots missing the impossible kick shot.

Max makes the 6, 8, and 9 ball, all easy shots. He marks his score to four.

While George is racking, Max is standing beside Louie's table, and Jane gets out of her chair and walks away.

MAX

Roscoe just gave me the trouble sign.
This is all in vain, I can feel it.

LOUIE

Don't worry, just win one more game
and we'll really celebrate.

Max goes back to the pool table and breaks without making anything.

While George studies the layout, Jane can be seen talking on the telephone at the end of the bar.

GEORGE

I can't believe it, I've finally got
a decent shot.

George makes the 1 ball, then the 2 ball, with good position on the 3 ball.

LOUIE

Looks like the sucker might win a
game.

Max, standing next to Louie, reaches down for his drink and picks up Louie's instead.

Max takes a drink, coughs into the glass, spills the drink, and keeps coughing and gasping, trying to catch his breath.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Hey! That's my drink!

All the commotion startles George and causes him to miss any easy shot on the 5 ball. He angrily throws his cue onto the pool table and looks at the bystanders.

GEORGE

Did you all see that?! He sharked me!

All the spectators shake their heads in agreement. Max is still coughing and wiping tears from his eyes.

MAX

I-I'm sorry, you can have that game.
I got strangled on my drink.

GEORGE

Damn right! That was my game, I was
on a run.

Max racks the balls and returns to Louie's table. We hear
George break the balls in the background.

MAX

What are you drinking, straight
whisky?!

LOUIE

I just had a few drinks to settle my
nerves.

Max looks around the room nervously, contemplating what to
do.

MAX

Listen up, when I start shooting, you
slip out, start the car, and aim it
toward the highway with my door
open...Can you do that, Louie?

LOUIE

Don't forget the sack.

George misses the 6 ball, leaving Max an easy layout for the
match. Max slowly walks to the pool table, chalks his cue,
and makes the 6 ball in the corner pocket.

Louie clumsily gets out of his chair, walks toward the door,
leaving his jacket on the back of the chair.

Max stalls for a moment before he shoots the 7 ball into the
side pocket. The cue ball goes two cushions for perfect
position on the 8 ball for the same side pocket.

Still moving slowly, he chalks his cue and leans over to
shoot the 8 ball. While he's aiming and taking his warm-up
strokes, he looks up and sees Louie standing at the door
with two big goons blocking his way out.

Max stands and nervously re-chalks his cue. He leans over
and plays the 8 ball into the corner pocket, stopping for a
straight-in shot on the match-winning 9 ball.

As he cautiously lines up the shot, he notices George standing directly in front of him with his shirt tail tucked to the side, revealing the pistol handle sticking out of his pocket.

It has gotten very quiet with all eyes watching Max take an unusually long time to shoot an easy shot. Max slowly leans over and shoots the 9 ball into the corner pocket. As George places his hand on the handle of his pistol, four policemen come barreling through the door with billy clubs in-hand.

George quickly recovers his pistol. The policemen look around with a dumbfounded expression on their faces.

LEAD POLICEMAN

(to George)

We got a call that a free for all barroom brawl was going on here.

GEORGE

Well, as you can see, it was a false call, this is a peaceful and friendly place.

Max reaches down and takes the sack from underneath the pool table. Jane walks up and grabs Max by the arm.

JANE

If you want to get out of here with the cheese, give me the bag.

Max gives Jane the sack, and she tucks it under her arm. Then, she removes Louie's jacket from the back of the chair, and drapes it over the sack.

Jane goes to the policeman, with Max walking behind her. She points at the poster hanging beside the door.

JANE (cont'd)

Officer, this is Max Jordan, he's been singing tonight and we were playing pool, waiting for the crowd to thin out.

We're afraid some of Max's fans are wives of jealous husbands. Would you be kind enough to escort us to the freeway?

LEAD POLICEMAN

Sure, any friend of Willie Nelson is a friend of mine.

George hollers across the room to Max.

GEORGE

Hey Max! I'd like to play some more pool.

MAX

Maybe some other time, and thanks for letting me sing with the band.

Max, Jane, Louie, and the policemen walk out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. FREEWAY - NIGHT

There's a police car in front and behind Louie's car. The police cars toot their horns as they exit. Louie gives them a thank-you toot.

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Max is driving, Louie is on the passenger side, and Jane is sitting in the back, leaning on her elbows against the back of the front seat.

LOUIE

My plan was perfect, he fell for it - hook, line, and sinker.

MAX

What do you mean?! You almost got us killed.

LOUIE

I can't help it if Georgie Boy is a poor loser.

MAX

The way you ribbed him, no wonder he got so mad.

Jane is hanging onto every word. Her eyes go back and forth from one to the other, as she plays with her gum, twisting it around her finger.

MAX (cont'd)

Louie, I'm very disappointed in you...we had an agreement and you broke your promise...I'm going home tomorrow.

LOUIE
Going home?! You said you would go to
four places with me.

MAX
What we're doing is wrong. Especially
me, I feel like a liar and a thief.

LOUIE
Are you serious? George would hustle
his mother, if he thought he could
win a dollar.

Jane can't take it anymore.

JANE
He'd hustle his grandmother for two
dollars. You all are confusing the
heck out of me. Am I hearing this
right? You all are pool hustlers?

LOUIE
That's right, little lady, and we're
the best you'll every see.

JANE
But, I heard Max singing on the
radio.

LOUIE
Honey, that was all part of the scam.

JANE
You're a con artist; and I thought I
was helping two honest men.

MAX
It's not what you think, this is not
what we do for a living.

JANE
Well, it should be! I've been around
sting operations and flim-flams,
since I was in diapers, and you guys
had me all the way. I mean all...
the...way.

Max sees a motel sign and notices that Louie is dozing off.
He exits off the freeway.

FADE TO:

INT. MOTEL RESTAURANT - MORNING

Max and Louie are having breakfast.

LOUIE

I'm sorry about last night, I didn't mean to get drunk, it kind of snuck up on me.

MAX

You weren't supposed to be drinking at all.

LOUIE

Give me another chance, Max...I promise not to do it again.

Jane walks in with a springy bounce in her step. She raises her arm to a nearby big-busted waitress.

JANE

Coffee, please.

The waitress points at Max and Louie.

WAITRESS

Are you with them two over there?

Looking over her shoulder, she acknowledges the waitress.

JANE

Bet your big boobies I am, I sure wouldn't want to be against them.

Jane sits with Max and Louie.

JANE (cont'd)

Good morning, team. Where do we go and who do we screw to top that act last night?

LOUIE

Max wants to go home, he doesn't trust me anymore.

MAX

It's not that, Louie. I've lied to my wife, took advantage of someone's greedy heart...it's the whole scene. It's wrong, and I'm going home where I belong.

JANE

You shouldn't feel bad about taking off dirty George. His money comes from drugs, pimping, and crooked card games.

LOUIE

That's right, Max, and you're giving your end to the homeless.

JANE

You're going to do what?!

LOUIE

Max is a preacher, and he's trying to raise money for the homeless.

JANE

Now, I'm really confused...First you're a singer, then you're a hustler, now you're a preacher. Would the real Max Jordan please stand up.

MAX

My real name is Max Harper, and I'm very thankful for what you did last night.

JANE

I just didn't want the world to lose a good country singer.

LOUIE

Max, I wish you would reconsider - this next place you won't have to hustle. Just play your best.

MAX

Really, that was a very foolish thing you did last night. I don't know what to expect from you.

LOUIE

I promise I won't... Listen, we'll be playing Jockey Jerry HORSE, and we can get three-to-one odds. He's playing in Hot Springs, Arkansas, now, and that's only about a seven-hour drive.

MAX

I've made up my mind, I'm going home.

LOUIE
I'll bet the whole two hundred thousand. Max, that's six hundred thousand more we can win...that's a lot of beans and taters.

Max's cell phone rings.

MAX
Excuse me, I've got to answer this.

Max gets up, takes the cell phone off his belt, and walks away.

JANE
(to Louie)
What kind of pool game is HORSE?

Max opens a door that leads outside.

EXT. MOTEL RESTAURANT - MORNING

Max answers call.

MAX
Reverend Michaels, glad to hear from you. How's things going back there?

INTERCUT BETWEEN MAX AND REVEREND MICHAELS

INT. MISSION FOR THE HOMELESS TENT

While Reverend Michaels is talking on the telephone, a couple of homeless people are decorating a Christmas tree in the background.

REVEREND MICHAELS
How are you doing on your fundraising trip, Brother?

MAX
Actually, pretty good, but I've run into a few problems. I'm cutting my trip short and coming back home.

REVEREND MICHAELS
I hate to tell you this, but I've got some bad news.

MAX
Oh, no, what now?

REVEREND MICHAELS

Mister Hopkins passed away, and his son came by yesterday. He said we've got until midnight Wednesday to get all our belongings off his land.

MAX

You can't be serious.

REVEREND MICHAELS

I swear, he's the devil incarnate. He said if we're not off the land, he'd bulldoze everything into the ditch. Of course, he gave us another option.

We can buy the land for two hundred thousand dollars. Max, what am I going to do?

MAX

Hold on, Brother, don't lose faith. Pray for me, and don't take the tents down yet.

REVEREND MICHAELS

But, I thought you...
(to self)
He hung up.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUIE'S CAR - DAY

Louie is driving, and Max is sitting on the passenger side. Jane is sitting on the edge of the back seat with her arms folded under her head on the back of the front seat.

Louie has just finished telling Jane a gambling story from the past.

LOUIE

If you think COLOR OF MONEY was a good movie, what kind of movie do you think that story would make? That's real stuff, too; that ain't Hollywood make-believe.

JANE

Come on, Louie, tell me another one. Puh...leeze, gosh damn, I wish there was some way I could go with you guys. Maybe I could carry Max's cue.

LOUIE

(laughing)

You've already proved you're good at carrying the money.

JANE

Y-y-yeah, carrying cue sticks and bags of money. It's a tough job, but I can handle it.

MAX

Easy now, you're forgetting something. We're dropping you off at your grandmother's in Little Rock, remember?

JANE

OK, OK, I was only fantasizing. After seeing how you guys stretched out Dirty George, I'd like to see some more of that action.

MAX

You'll soon find out, just like the good book says, you can only enjoy sin for a season. After a while, the excitement wears off, and you feel totally empty inside...

JANE

(interrupting)

Louie must have an awful long season because he still seems to enjoy the sinful things of life (laughs). Only kidding, Louie.

MAX

Jane, let me finish. The good news is Jesus can give you a new heart, new desires - in other words, a new life.

JANE

Is that what they mean when they say, "born again"?

Grandma used to tell me things like that...until daddy made her leave.

MAX

When you get to Little Rock, listen to your grandmother, and find yourself a church. Then, you'll see what we're talking about.

JANE
I like you, Max, I think you really
care about people.
(Pats Louie on the
shoulder)
I like you, too, Louie.

FADE TO:

EXT. INTERSTATE 40 LITTLE ROCK - DAY

Louie's car is driving down the freeway, and we see
billboards advertising hotels and restaurants.

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Louie is driving, and Jane is giving directions.

JANE
Take the next exit, go right, and the
trailer park is on the left.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY SIDE TRAILER PARK - DAY

Louie's car is parked in the driveway of a medium-sized
trailer home with a small porch connected to the front
entrance. Max and Jane are standing on the porch. Max
removes an envelope from his inside jacket pocket.

MAX
Here's something to help you get
started in your new career.

Jane opens the envelope and takes out a stack of money with
one of George's wrappers around it.

JANE
Five thousand dollars! Max, I don't
know what to say.

MAX
You don't have to say anything, you
deserve it for helping us get out all
in one piece last night.

Jane gives Max a big hug.

MAX (cont'd)
Just remember what we talked about,
OK?

Max joyfully walks away and Grandma opens the door and sees Jane.

GRANDMA
Is that you, Jane?! Well, bless my
soul! Child, you've been in my
prayers.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Louie is backing out of the driveway.

MAX
It sure does make you feel good.

LOUIE
Yeah, what's that?

MAX
Us giving Jane \$5,000 to help give
her a new start in life.

LOUIE
Five thousand dollars!

MAX
You sound almost as excited as she
did.

CUT TO:

INT. COOL COUNTRY SWING CLUB - NIGHT

George has a man down on the floor, kicking him. The man is trying to protect his head with his arms. George grabs him by the leg and drags him across the floor to the front door, that Jeff is holding open. Then, he picks him up by the back of his belt and throws him outside.

GEORGE
The nerve you have, cheating in my
poker game. What are you trying to
do - ruin my reputation?

Seated at the bar is Red, the prison inmate from Brushy Mountain Prison. Roscoe is serving him a draft beer. Red notices a photo hanging on the wall behind Roscoe.

RED
Hey, could I have a closer look at that (points) picture?

ROSCOE
Sure, that's Max Jordan, he was here last night and sang a song for us, damn good singer.

Roscoe hands Red the photo.

RED
This is Preacher Cue. When did he become a singer? He didn't come in here preaching and shooting pool, did he?

George is standing behind Red. When he hears him say, "shooting pool," his head snaps to attention.

GEORGE
So, you know him, huh?

RED
I sure do. This here is Preacher Cue.

GEORGE
Preacher Cue, who in damn hell is Preacher Cue? He didn't play pool like any preacher I know.

RED
Well, he's a preacher, that's what he does. I don't know why he changed his name, it's not Max Jordan...it's Max Harper. I'm certain of that.

ROSCOE
How in the hell do you know so much?

RED
Look, I just got out of the joint. It wasn't more than a month ago, this man right here (holds up the photo) came in there preaching and shooting pool like someone from another planet.

He even had me thinking about going to church.

Jeff is standing beside George, now.

JEFF

Sounds like he backslid, boss.

GEORGE

Backslid my busted butt, I've been had

(to Red)

You wouldn't know where he's from, would you?

RED

I might.

George slides a twenty dollar bill across the bar in front of Red.

GEORGE

Maybe this will improve your memory.

RED

I remember him mentioning Loudon, Tennessee.

GEORGE

I think I know a preacher, who needs to repent.

CUT TO:

INT. EXECUTIVE SPORTS CLUB - NIGHT

Max, Louie, and Sam are in the dining room eating. Sam is wearing a shark skin suit, looks very sharp.

LOUIE

You're looking like a million dollars, Sam. What did you do, hit the lottery?

SAM

Yeah, I'm doing great. Got my own pool room now. Twenty tables with a waiting list every night.

Max looks around, admiring the club.

MAX

This is quite a place. The owner must do real well here.

SAM

The Jock's stake horse, Bert Channing, owns the place. He's got a casino upstairs, a lot of prominent business men hang out here and gamble.

He's probably knocking out a cool million a month.

LOUIE

Where's the pool table?

Sam gets up out of his chair.

SAM

Come on, I'll show you. The Jock's playing Alabama Al five thousand dollars a game One Pocket and spotting him two balls.

MAX

You mean he's improved that much, Alabama Al used to play very good One Pocket.

SAM

I guess since you've been out of circulation, you didn't hear what happened.

CUT TO:

INT. EXECUTIVE POOL ROOM LOUNGE (MOMENTS LATER)

Sam, Louie, and Max sit at the bar so they have a clear view of the pool table. About fifteen people are sitting on the upper level watching the match between Jerry and Alabama Al. Al is a distinguished-looking gentleman, about six feet tall, and seventy years old.

SAM

Jerry was leading by two lengths, coming down home stretch and, for no apparent reason, his horse fell. Yep, busted him up real bad. He ended up in a body cast for six months.

MAX

So, how did his game improve so much?

SAM

He swore to never get on another horse and practically started living on a pool table.

Now, he's probably the best money player in the world.

ANGLE ON POOL TABLE

Jerry banks the winning ball into his pocket, and Al throws his white hand towel onto the pool table, then he breaks his cue down. Jerry limps over and shakes hands with him.

Max, Louie, and Sam walk down into the pit. They meet Al on the way while he walks out of the pit.

ALABAMA AL

You boys have fun, I'm going back to the hotel and lick my wounds - that was brutal what the Jock did to me.

Alabama Al stops on the top steps and turns around. Looking back at Jerry, he rests his cue case against his leg. He holds both hands up in front of him and spreads his fingers wide.

ALABAMA AL (cont'd)

By the way, Jerry, you made me surrender this time, but...

Alabama Al closes his left hand into a fist and pushes his lit cigarette down in it.

ALABAMA AL (cont'd)

I will be back for a rematch.

Alabama Al opens his left hand and the cigarette has disappeared. Then he smiles, turns, and walks away.

JERRY

You think that guy doesn't have class? I just beat him for fifty thousand dollars and, now, he's joking with me.

SAM

Jerry, remember Max Harper and Louie Yates?

JERRY

Remember? I say I do, Max gave me the 7 ball and beat on me like a drum.

(MORE)

JERRY (cont'd)

(Looking at Max)

I've heard all kinds of things about you. I heard you died of an overdose (laughs) and I even heard you became a preacher.

Max shakes hands with Jerry.

MAX

I've been preaching for over twenty years now...and I heard your game's improved about two hundred percent since we played last.

Jerry looks at Sam, and Sam looks away.

JERRY

I wonder where you would hear a thing like that. What brings you around these parts?

LOUIE

When we heard we could get four-to-one odds playing HORSE, it was enough to bring us out of retirement.

The crowd was thinning out; but, when Louie said "HORSE," it was like E.F. Hutton had just spoken. They all suddenly stopped dead in their tracks.

Bert Channing steps down into the pit wearing a \$4,000 suit.

A BUZZ OF MUMBLING circulates amongst the spectators about a HORSE game.

BERT

I'm Bert Channing, I own this place. What's this I hear about a HORSE game?

LOUIE

What about those four-to-one odds we heard about?

BERT

You can get three-to-one, bet anything you want, and he'll play you tomorrow night.

LOUIE

Max won't play on Sunday, how about seven o'clock Monday night?

BERT

(to Jerry)

What do you say, you don't have a hot date Monday, do you Jerry?

Jerry extends his hand to Louie.

JERRY

Fast action Louie, you haven't changed a bit. Monday's fine with me...bring lots of cash.

LOUIE

(to Bert)

I'll call you tomorrow and let you know what the bet is.

FADE TO:

INT. MAX'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Max has his suitcase open, lying on the bed, unpacking it. Louie is standing at the door with his hand on the doorknob.

MAX

Are you sure you don't want to go to church with me tomorrow?

LOUIE

Thanks, but I'll probably sleep late.

MAX

OK, sleep good, and I'll see you tomorrow afternoon.

LOUIE

You, too, partner.

Louie leaves the room.

CUT TO:

INT. LOUIE'S ROOM (MOMENTS LATER)

Louie is lying on his bed with his clothes on, talking on the telephone.

LOUIE

I heard for two hundred, you and I could have a real good time, and for five hundred, I could double my pleasure and party all night with you and your friend.

Louie listens for a couple of seconds.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Sounds great, and don't forget to bring five or six joints of that killer wacky weed, when you come.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX'S MOTEL ROOM (LATER)

Max closes his bible and lays it on the night stand. Then he turns out the light.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOTEL - MORNING

Max is in his sweats, jogging down the road toward the motel. He turns into the motel driveway, stops at the newspaper stand, and puts money into the coin slot.

He starts walking to his room, carrying the newspaper. He suddenly stops and sees the two prostitutes coming out of Louie's room. Max shakes his head in disappointment.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

It's a small church of about thirty people. Max is sitting in the back row, and the sermon is in progress.

PREACHER

There is one body of Christ, and He is the Head. Ephesians, chapter five, verse thirty says, "Know ye not that ye are members of His flesh and His bone."

Max is listening intently.

PREACHER (cont'd)

If a member of your body refuses to obey direction from the head, that member is helpless to you.

Members of the body of Christ can not be doing their own thing. We hear Lone Ranger Christians, proclaiming that God has given them this or that ministry.

Brothers and sisters, there has never been and never shall be more than one ministry, the ministry of the one body of Christ.

Max is sitting with his hands clasped together, bothered by this sermon.

PREACHER (cont'd)

So, all you Lone Ranger Christians had better get interested in the way that God is going. Seek God with your whole heart and yield to His calling, not your own...Please let us pray.

Max bows his head in prayer.

CUT TO:

INT. STRIP JOINT ATLANTA - DAY

Jason is sitting in a booth, talking with Chaz.

JASON

Louie called me, this morning, and asked me to come and borrow another hundred Gs, and he would put his car lot up for collateral.

Jason hands Chaz a slip of paper.

JASON (cont'd)

He wants you to do do a wire transfer to this bank tomorrow morning.

CHAZ

Tell him the interest is thirty percent on the second hundred, I'm sure he'll understand.

CUT TO:

INT. ROLLER SKATING RINK - HOT SPRINGS - DAY

Max stands out like a sore thumb, skating at a fast pace, zooming in and out of the traffic of teenagers. Two young punks BUTCH and TONY are watching from the sidelines. Tony smirks, as he hands Butch a five dollar bill.

As Max makes the turn, Butch faces the hand rail and grips it tightly with both hands. When Max goes by, Butch sticks his right leg out behind him to trip Max.

Max falls, hitting the floor on his left shoulder, and rolls three or four complete turns before stopping. He gets up slowly, while holding his left shoulder and cringing with pain.

CUT TO:

INT. MAX'S MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Max is lying in bed with an ice bag wrapped in a towel under his left shoulder. Louie comes through the door.

LOUIE

Partner, tomorrow's the big day. I just bet \$300,000 against Bert's \$900,000...Hey Max, what's wrong? Man, you don't look so good.

MAX

I've injured myself roller skating, Louie. I'm not going to be able to play...it's pretty bad, I wouldn't have a chance.

LOUIE

You did what?! You can't play?! What do you mean you can't play?! You've got to play, I've just bet everything I've got on this match...every damn thing!

MAX

I'm sorry, Louie, I know I shouldn't have gone skating, but I...

Louie is very agitated and pacing the floor.

LOUIE

(interrupting)

You're damn right you shouldn't have, you should have been practicing like your life depended on it.

(MORE)

LOUIE (cont'd)

I'm sure Jerry is...or maybe he's out galloping around on a damn horse.

MAX

Call Bert and let him know what happened, we can play Tuesday. I should be OK by then. It's not broken, it's just sore and swollen.

LOUIE

You know the rules, Max, once the bet is posted and you back out, you forfeit all bets. It's not like he's part of your church-going congregation back in Loudon.

He's a damn greedy sinner and he wants my cash...just like the rest of them greedy bastard Railbirds over there.

MAX

(speaking softly)

You know, we had some rules also, and you've broken every one of the them. I know about last night, Louie.

LOUIE

I'm human, I've got needs just like everyone else. I'm not a saint like you.

Louie cools off and starts speaking calmer.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Max, I'm sorry I got hot at you... It's that I just don't want to be back to zero. All I've known is hustling pool or hustling cars - which I hate with a passion.

At least you've got a trade you can rely on. I don't have anything.

Louie sits down on the bed.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Listen, Max, I'll go get some codeine or some strong painkiller.

MAX

I'm not going to take any drugs, Louie, I haven't even taken an aspirin in over twenty years.

LOUIE
What are we going to do, then?

MAX
I'll keep it on ice and pray.

LOUIE
Well, pray for me, too, because if we lost this match, I'll be in the soup line with the rest of the bums.

Max gives Louie a stern, then compassionate look.

MAX
You shouldn't talk about the homeless people like that. A lot of them are products of some unfortunate circumstance that happened in their life.

LOUIE
All the ones I've known were winos and looking for a handout.

Louie stands up and heads for the door.

LOUIE (cont'd)
I'll pick up a bandage and heat pad for you tomorrow morning, maybe it will help.

FADE TO:

EXT. SAM'S CLASSIC BILLIARDS - DAY

Max is getting out of Louie's car with cue case in-hand.

LOUIE
I've got to go to the bank, see if you can work that soreness out. I'll pick you up in a couple of hours... Max, I've got faith in you. Don't worry about a thing, just do your best.

MAX
Thank you, I appreciate that.

Max straps his cue case across his right shoulder, and walks up the stairs to the entrance.

CUT TO:

INT. SAM'S CLASSIC BILLIARDS - MOMENTS LATER

It's an upscale billiard room with twenty tables and walls smartly decorated with pool memorabilia. Sam comes out from behind the counter to greet Max as he walks across the floor.

SAM

Well, what do you think, Max?

MAX

Very impressive, they didn't have rooms like this when I was on the road.

SAM

Follow me, let me show you my pride and joy.

They walk a few steps to a door that has a private sign on it. Sam opens the door and they walk into a room that has a table identical to the one at the executive club. There's also a small bar, leather sofa, large screen TV, and video camera on a tripod.

SAM (cont'd)

This table has the same cloth and balls as the table you're playing the Jock on.

MAX

That's very important.

Max starts taking his cues out of his case.

SAM

I'm going to leave now. If you need something, just push this button (points) and someone will help you.

MAX

Sure Sam, thanks a lot.

Sam leaves as Max screws a cue together. Max places five balls in a half circle near the center of the table and places the cue ball about a foot away. He shoots into the first ball to the right, sending four of the balls into different pockets, and the fifth ball misses the corner pocket nearest him.

CUT TO:

INT. EXECUTIVE SPORTS CLUB - DAY

CLOSE on same 5 ball setup. Jerry shoots, making all five balls split the center of the pockets. Bert is standing beside Jerry.

BERT

I did a little checking up on your opponent. He really is a preacher, and he's also a brick mason.

JERRY

Now, I know why his hand felt like sandpaper...why did you check up on him?

BERT

I was curious why a preacher, who hasn't gambled in thirty years, is willing to let someone bet three hundred thousand dollars on him...in a match against the best player on earth.

Jerry lines four balls straight out from the side pocket, and holds the cue ball in his right hand.

JERRY

Maybe he's a Jesus Freak, who thinks he can walk on water.

BERT

Well, in that case, this Jesus Freak has a stake horse, who likes drugs and ladies of the night. It's like God and Satan hooked up together to take my money.

JERRY

Does it really matter? You don't think he can win, do you?

Jerry places the cue ball near the four balls, leans over, and fires the four balls into separate pockets. Two combinations, a carom, and a bank shot all in one stroke.

FADE TO:

INT. EXECUTIVE SPORTS BAR - NIGHT

The pool room section is packed with a very excited crowd, standing room only.

Louie and Bert are in the pit, they've just counted the money, and their putting it into a suitcase. Jerry and Max are taking their cues out of their cases.

LOUIE

It's all here, one million and two hundred thousand.

BERT

I'll put it in the safe. I've got a strong feeling that's where it's going to stay.

Louie and Bert walk out of the pit.

SCOTTY, the referee with the spiked hair and wearing a blue pinstriped suit, walks into the pit. He shakes hands with the contestants and starts explaining the rules to everyone.

There's a tripod beside him with a white two-feet by three-feet scoreboard attached to it. "Jerry" and "Max" in big black block letters are printed on it, with enough space between their names for the letters H-O-R-S-E.

SCOTTY

Good evening! I'm Scotty, and I'll be refereeing the match tonight. We'll start the lag to see who chooses and shoots the first shot.

A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS

Max is screwing his cue together.

Jerry's using a tip tapper on his cue.

SCOTTY O.S.

If player (A) chooses a shot and fails to execute it, that player will receive a letter, and player (B) will choose the next shot.

Eager spectators are shuffling around, trying to get close enough to see the match.

SCOTTY

But, if player (A) executes his shot and player (B) misses, player (B) gets a letter.

Louie and Sam take their seats at a table reserved for them near the rail close to the action.

SCOTTY O.S.

If player (A) executes his shot and player (B) also executes the shot, then player (B) gets to choose the next shot. No one gets a letter.

Scotty is holding a pocket watch.

SCOTTY

This watch has the function of a stop watch. Each player will have one minute and thirty seconds to set up his shot, explain it, and execute it. If time expires, he will receive a letter.

Jerry is cool and calm, chalking his cue. Max takes a drink of water, and then he reaches across his chest with his right hand, and holds the back of his shoulder, rolling it with the look of discomfort on his face.

SCOTTY O.S.

Each player shall have one ten-minute break during the match. The one that gets five letters on him, spelling HORSE, loses the match.

Both players are at the pool table, getting ready to shoot the lag shot.

SCOTTY

Good luck, and may the best player win. Shoot the lag, please.

Jerry and Max shoot the lag at the same time. Both balls come to rest very close to the cushion, with Jerry's ball a little closer.

SCOTTY (cont'd)

Jerry, you get to choose the first shot.

Jerry begins setting up a shot while explaining, and Max takes his seat.

JERRY

I call this the Titanic shot. I'm going to sink all fifteen balls in one shot.

SAM

I can't believe he's starting with a tough shot like that. Fifteen things can go wrong.

LOUIE
Maybe he'll find one of them.

Jerry shoots, all fifteen balls go in cleanly, all the spectators APPLAUD LOUDLY and some WHISTLE their approval.

SAM
That shot took a lot of nerve.

LOUIE
That shot's no problem for Max.

Max sets the last two balls in place. He takes a few warm-up strokes and then he shoots making twelve of the balls, narrowly missing the other three balls.

Scotty places the letter H underneath Max's name.

SCOTTY
Jerry, you get to choose the next shot.

Jerry places the cue ball near the right corner pocket, then he freezes the 8 ball with it aimed straight into the far corner pocket.

JERRY
I call this shot "scratching with style." I'm going to shoot into the 8 ball, massè the cue ball around it, and get into the corner pocket (points with his cue) before the 8 ball.

SAM
Jerry's going for the jugular, choosing shots like that.

Jerry executes the shot perfectly, and the spectators APPLAUD LOUDER, showing their appreciation.

As Max sets up the shot, his fingers begin to tremble.

SAM (cont'd)
Max is so nervous, he's having trouble setting up the shot.

LOUIE
He's just worked up from his adrenaline.

Max shoots and doesn't even get close to making it.

Scotty places the letter O next to the H under Max's name.

SCOTTY

Mister Harper has H-O. Jerry, you may choose another shot.

Jerry places the cue ball deep within the jaws of the a corner pocket and surrounds it with seven object balls. Then, he sets the 8 ball near the opposite corner pocket.

JERRY

I'm going to shoot into the point of the pocket (points) here, jump over the surrounding balls, and go three cushions to make the 8 ball.

Jerry shoots into the point, goes airborne, hits three cushions, and tracks down the 8 ball like a guided missile.

The audience is really enjoying Jerry's shot-making, and their applause becomes louder with each shot.

Max fumbles with the balls trying to set up the shot.

Louie watches with clenched fist and whispers to himself.

LOUIE

Come on, Max, come on, you can do it.

Max shoots and the cue ball flies off the table and lands on the floor.

A couple of HECKLERS are sitting near Louie's table and one of them makes a loud remark to his companion.

HECKLER

The referee should tell the Preacher man to put a dollar in the jukebox for playing on the floor.

SAM

(to Louie)

I thought you said Max was playing great pool. I'm sure glad I didn't bet on him.

SCOTTY O.S.

Mister Harper now has H-O-R.

LOUIE

I don't know what's wrong with him. Maybe he can't take the pressure anymore.

Max is slumped down in his chair, looking defeated, and Jerry is setting up his next shot. He has placed the 4 ball on the spot and he is balancing a dime on top of it.

JERRY

I'm going to shoot the cue ball five cushions and hit the 4 ball, without knocking the dime off.

Jerry shoots the cue ball around the table with perfect speed to slightly nudge the 4 ball, leaving the dime on top.

The crowd goes wild again, APPLAUDING, WHISTLING, and SHOUTING.

SPECTATOR #1

Wow! What a shot!

SPECTATOR #2

Nerves of steel!

SPECTATOR #3

He's the greatest!

The crowd quiets as Max centers the dime, puts the cue ball in place, and bends over to shoot.

LOUIE

We still have a chance if Max can only make this shot.

Max strokes the cue ball, sending it five cushions, and slowly bumps the 4 ball, barely knocking the dime off.

SPECTATORS

Ohhhh.

SAM

That was hard luck. He hit that shot good.

HECKLER

Yeah, if he was playing horseshoes.

Now, Louie's optimism is nonexistent, he can hardly watch.

Scotty puts the letter S underneath his name.

SCOTTY

Mister Harper now has H-O-R-S.

Max lays his cue on the table.

MAX
Referee, I would like to take my
break, please.

SCOTTY
Sure, Mister Harper (looks at watch),
you've got ten minutes.

The heckler is laughing and talking loudly to his partner.

HECKLER
He should take a ten-year break and
practice.

The heckler's remark ticks off Louie.

LOUIE
Hey, punk! We don't need to hear that
kind of shit.

Bert gives the heckler a "hold it down" signal.

Max sits down with Louie and Sam.

MAX
The heckler might be out of line, but
he's right. I'm dogging my brains
out.

LOUIE
Is it your shoulder, Max?

MAX
Mostly my nerves...I'm sorry, Louie.

LOUIE
Yeah, it looks bad for us, but you're
still my horse, if you never win a
race. Ugh...now is not the time to be
calling you a horse.

The heckler is smirking and listening to them.

HECKLER
Maybe the preacher man should pray
for a miracle.

Max jumps up and suddenly looks very alert.

MAX
That's it!

SAM
What's that, pray?

LOUIE

If you start praying in here, you'll have more than one person heckling you.

MAX

I'm not going to pray, I'm going to praise.

Walking down into the pit, Max looks back at Louie.

MAX (cont'd)

I'm not your horse yet, I don't have the E.

LOUIE

Go ahead, Max, do your thing.

MAX

OK, Mister Smith, I'm ready.

SCOTTY

Jerry, you can set up your shot, now.

Jerry lays the mechanical bridge across the pool table about a foot from the end rail. Then, he places the 9 ball near a corner pocket and the 2 ball underneath the bridge near the rail.

Jerry has the cue ball in his left hand and his cue stick in the other hand.

JERRY

I'm going to make the 2 ball in the far corner, the cue ball will jump over the bridge and draw back to make the 9 ball in this corner pocket.

Jerry places the cue straight in one the 2 ball, and fires it into the corner, sending the cue ball up and over the bridge. Then, the cue ball bounces forward, stops, and reverses direction to come back and make the 9 ball.

The spectators APPLAUD WILDLY.

HECKLER

It looks like it's time for the fat lady to sing.

Max springs to his feet looking alive with energy and confidence. He quickly sets up the shot and looks around at everyone, smiling.

MAX

Let everyone that has breath praise
the Lord! Thank you, Jesus!

SAM

That's a unique approach to a pool
shot.

LOUIE

I think we're about to see what Max
has been doing for the past twenty
years or so.

Max strokes the shot with authority, making it look easy.
The spectators look surprised as they timidly APPLAUD

Louie jumps up out of his chair.

LOUIE (cont'd)

Great shot! Now, throw your best
stuff at him.

SCOTTY

Serve goes to Mister Harper.

Max places the 15 ball near the corner pocket, and the cue
ball a couple of inches in front of it. He takes a piece of
chalk and puts it on the rail about six feet down table.

MAX

I call this the yo-yo massè. I'm
going to stroke down into the cue
ball, make it go up table past the
chalk, turn around and come straight
back, and make the 15 ball.

Thank you, Jesus, for salvation!

Max does a powerful massè stroke, making the cue ball go
about six inches past the chalk, then come straight back to
pocket the fifteen ball.

Everyone gives Max a nice round of APPLAUSE.

SAM

That's the most amazing massè shot I
ever seen. That cue ball looked like
it had English on both sides.

LOUIE

You haven't seen anything yet. Now,
we're cooking, Max!

Jerry attempts the shot. The cue ball goes up table to the area where the chalk is and just stops.

SCOTTY

Jerry has an H and, Mister Harper,
you choose the next shot.

Max lines up 13 balls about a ball's width from the side rail. The, he places the 1 ball near the side pocket. He puts the cue ball between the last ball and the rail, near the corner pocket.

MAX

I'm going to play another massè
shot...the Machine Gun massè.

Watch the cue ball make contact with
all thirteen balls and make the 1
ball in the side pocket.

Max does a little dance and quotes another scripture.

MAX (cont'd)

All that call on the name of the Lord
shall be saved! Hallelujah!

Max plays the shot perfectly. The cue ball bullies it's way through the traffic of balls with a RAT-TA-TAT-TAT sound as it makes contact with each ball, finally making the 1 ball.

The shot brings some of the spectators out of their seats.

LOUIE

Did you see that, Sam?! The cue ball
looked like it had a motor in it!

We see Jerry setting up the shot, then turning to Max.

JERRY

Nice shot, I've never seen it done
that way before.

Jerry tries the shot, but his cue ball runs out of gas and only contacts about half of the balls.

SCOTTY

Jerry has H-O and Mister Harper gets
to choose another shot.

Louie turns to Sam.

LOUIE

We're back in the match. If Max can pull off three more shots like that, we'll win.

Max puts the 5 ball close to the corner against the cushion, and the cue ball about six inches straight out from it.

MAX

I'm going to bank the 5 ball back into (points) this pocket, and jump the cue ball up in the air and catch it.

The Lord is rich to all, who call upon His name! Oh, Lord Jesus! Thank you for your wonderful name!

Max banks the 5 ball straight back into the corner, making the cue ball jump about two feet above the table, and catches it with ease.

The crowd sounds as though they are pulling for Max, now, giving him a THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

SAM

What a shot!

Walking to the pool table, Jerry doesn't seem nearly as confident as before.

Jerry misses the shot with the cue ball only jumping a few inches.

SCOTTY

Jerry has H-O-R and Max H-O-R-S.

Louie's spirits are really high now.

LOUIE

We've got him now, Sam. What do you think, Bert? My hor....ugh, man is closing in on your horse.

BERT

I agree, Max has some strong shots. But when it comes to the finish line, an inch is as good as a mile, and my man has crossed a lot of finish lines.

SAM

That's right, Louie, don't jinx yourself.

LOUIE

I can feel it, two more shots and it's over.

Max has a cluster of eight balls set up near the side pocket - seven stripes and the 8 ball.

MAX

I'm going to make all seven stripes and play position on the 8 ball.

Whatever you do, do it heartily unto the Lord.

Max shoots, pocketing the seven stripes and ends up with perfect position on the 8 ball.

As the people APPLAUD, comments are heard from them.

SPECTATOR #1

What a comeback!

SPECTATOR #2

This is unbelievable!

Jerry sets up the shot. The 13 ball rolls out slightly, Jerry gently repositions it, TAPS it, then steps back to line up the shot. Jerry shoots, the balls BREAK out, six balls dart into their pockets, but the 13 ball hangs up.

LOUIE

What did I tell you, Sam. One more shot, just one more.

SCOTTY

The score is tied at H-O-R-S. The first man to miss gets an E and loses the match.

Max has the 1, 2, 3, and 4 balls lined up diagonally across the spot, in line with a corner pocket and side pocket. He has the five ball about a foot away from the four balls.

MAX

I'm going to use the 5 ball for the cue ball and make the four balls in one shot. The, the 5 ball will go three cushions into that (points) corner pocket.

We are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus.

Max makes the shot and everyone APPLAUDS, but it gets very quiet as Jerry goes to the table and sets up the shot. Jerry aims at the shot with intense concentration in his eyes. He shoots, making all five balls go cleanly into the pockets.

Everyone except Louie stands and APPLAUDS.

LOUIE

Oh, no! Now, Jerry gets to choose the next shot.

SAM

I told you, Jerry never gives up.

Jerry has the look of confidence, now, as he sets up the next shot. He sets up a trap shot, with the cue ball frozen against the side rail behind the 8 ball.

The 1 ball is near the far left corner pocket. Surrounding balls prevent any kind of systematic kick shot.

JERRY

I'm going to shoot into the side rail and make the cue ball hook around these balls and make the 1 ball.

Jerry executes the shot and the spectators APPLAUD as Max walks to the pool table. Max sets up the shot and executes it as though he owns it.

MONTAGE OF MATCH

-- Max does the boot shot.

-- Bert is cheering Jerry on.

-- Louie is cheering Max on.

-- Jerry makes the Giz and Hum shot (seven balls in one shot)

-- Spectators are APPLAUDING both players.

-- Max makes a very impressive circular draw shot.

-- Three fast shots, a massè, stroke, and jump shot.

ANGLE ON MAX

Max places an unopened coke bottle on the pool table.

LOUIE

Oh, no! Don't tell me he's going to bet the whole match on the bottle shot.

SAM

What's the bottle shot?

LOUIE

It's a one-in-five shot, if you're lucky.

Max takes the 8 ball and balances it on top of the coke bottle. Then, he balances the 9 ball on top of the 8 ball.

OOHS and AAHS are heard from the spectators.

SAM

How did he do that?

LOUIE

Very carefully.

Max puts the 7 ball near the bottle, and the cue ball about five inches away from the 7 ball.

MAX

I'm going to play the 7 ball in the side pocket, and the cue ball will jump up and knock the 8 ball out from underneath the 9 ball and go in the same pocket.

The 9 ball is going to fall down and stay on top of the bottle.

SAM

I thought Max quit taking drugs, he has to be hallucinating. That shot's impossible.

MAX

Faith comes by hearing the Word! With God all things are possible!

SAM

Oh, excuse me. I stand to be corrected, I must have lost my head for a second.

Max executes the shot, and GASPS of awe are mixed with subdued APPLAUSE.

Louie leaps from his chair.

LOUIE
Great shot! Great shot! Wasn't that a
great shot, Sam?!

SAM
How in the world did he do that?

LOUIE
Very well, Sam, very well.

Jerry walks to the pool table, looking very perplexed.

JERRY
That was an amazing shot.

Jerry's having trouble balancing the balls on top of the
bottle. He keeps trying without any success.

SCOTTY
Jerry, you only have thirty seconds
left.

Jerry desperately tries to balance the balls with no luck.

SCOTTY O.S.
Fifteen, fourteen, thirteen,
twelve...

LOUIE
(to Sam)
Check this out! We're going to win by
default.

SCOTTY
Seven, six, five, four, three...

MAX
Wait! Stop the clock! This is not
fair.

Louie is shocked.

LOUIE
What do you mean, it's not fair?!

Max goes to the pool table.

MAX
It's not fair to lose just because he
can't set up the shot.

Max balances the balls on top of the bottle for Jerry.

LOUIE
I can't believe what he just did.
This beats all I've ever seen.

MAX
There you go, Jerry, you can shoot
now.

Jerry slowly takes aim, elevates the butt of his cue stick and shoots.

The 7 ball goes into the side pocket. At the same time, the cue ball hops up and knocks the 8 ball off the bottle into the same side. The 9 ball falls and lands on top of the bottle and rocks slowly from side to side.

Everyone is standing motionless, watching the 9 ball wobble on top of the bottle.

Louie has a hand over his eyes, peeping through his fingers.

The 9 ball falls off the bottle onto the pool table.

GASPS, MOANS, and GROANS echo through the audience.

Louie removes his hand from his eyes and SHOUTS.

LOUIE
What did I tell you, Sam! Max is the
greatest! I knew we would win.

SAM
Sure, Louie, never a doubt.

SCOTTY
Mister Harper is the winner.

Jerry and Max shake hands.

JERRY
It looks like you're the new HORSE
champion, Max.

MAX
Jerry, around here, you'll always be
a champion to your loyal fans.

Louie and Sam walk into the pit.

LOUIE
Jerry, you put up a hell of a fight,
and that bottle shot was a miracle.

JERRY

I just hope I don't have to wait
another thirty years for a rematch.

Bert leans over the rail and speaks to Louie and Max.

BERT

You two follow me to the office, and
I'll give you your money.

CUT TO:

BERT'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Bert sits down behind his desk, and Max and Louie are
standing with the suitcase with the money in it at their
feet.

BERT

You guys won a lot of cash tonight. I
never dreamed anyone had a chance
playing Jerry HORSE...Excuse me,
please.

Bert pushes the intercom button.

Would you tell Sue to come to the
office, please.

Bert addresses Max.

BERT (cont'd)

Something's puzzling me, Max. How can
you justify hustling pool, when
you're a preacher.

MAX

I really don't consider playing a top
player like Jerry "hustling."

LOUIE

Yeah, we matched up and Max played
his heart out, there is a difference
you know.

BERT

Shooting that bottle shot for twelve
hundred grand comes under gambling in
anybody's book, especially the
Lord's. Every preacher, that I've
ever heard, preaches against that.

The office door opens and in walks a seven foot, three
hundred and fifty pound giant.

BERT (cont'd)
Gentlemen, meet Sue, my bouncer. He
maintains law and order around here.

LOUIE
Yeah, I bet he does.

Louie gives Max a paranoid look.

Bert stands up.

BERT
Sue will escort you to your car.

Bert offers a congratulatory handshake to Max and Louie.

BERT (cont'd)
Max and I want to thank you for the
great exhibition. It was expensive,
but my customers will be talking
about it for a long time. It should
be good for business; and, Louie,
don't you guys be strangers, come
back any time.

FADE TO:

EXT. MAX AND LOUIE'S MOTEL - MORNING

Max and Louie are putting their suitcases into the trunk of
Louie's car.

LOUIE
Sam said the other two spots were
just as good. Max, we're on a roll,
no telling how much we can win.

MAX
I called Shirley early this morning
and told her the fundraising trip was
a success, and I'm coming home.

LOUIE
It would only be for another week,
just like we had planned.

MAX
You might as well give it up, Louie.
I've made up my mind, I'm going home
where I belong.

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Max and Louie get into the car, Max on the driver's side. They pull out of the parking lot.

FADE TO:

INT. COOL COUNTRY SWING CLUB - DAY

George is talking on the telephone, and Jeff is standing beside him.

GEORGE

Yes, Mrs. Harper, you don't know me. I got your number from information. I was just released from prison and I wanted to thank your wonderful husband for inspiring me to turn over a new leaf.

INTERCUT BETWEEN GEORGE AND SHIRLEY

Shirley is sitting at the sewing machine.

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry, but he won't be home until tomorrow. If you're in the area, you can catch him at the Knoxville mission for the homeless tonight.

GEORGE

Thank you for your time, Mrs. Harper, I'll call again another day.

George, grinning, hangs up the telephone.

JEFF

What did you find out, boss?

GEORGE

Well, son, we have an appointment in Knoxville, Tennessee. I have a message to deliver to a preacher, and this message is going to have some bruises and broken bones in it...the kind that reaches out and touches deep inside. Know what I mean?

FADE TO:

EXT. MISSION PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Louie's car pulls into the parking lot. One of the two large tents is lit up with Christmas lights strung around the top border, and gospel SINGING can be heard coming from it.

Max and Louie get out of the car and walk toward the lit up tent. Max is carrying a suitcase as he walks past a Baby Jesus Nativity scene.

INT. MISSION

The tent is crowded, with some of the people standing. Everyone is in good spirits SINGING, I'LL FLY AWAY, led by Jamie, the Loudon service station attendant.

Reverend Michaels is standing near Jamie, with his hands raised up in praise.

Children are playing around the perimeter of the tent. Louie and Max are standing inside the tent near the entrance.

LOUIE

I can only stay a short while, I'm going to try and make it to Atlanta tonight.

MAX

Sure, Louie, I'm staying here tonight. Shirley is going to pick me up in the morning.

Reverend Michaels sees Max and excitedly waves for him to come up front. Max makes his way through the crowd, shaking hands and hugging people on the way.

While the people are singing, Max is talking to Reverend Michaels and pointing at the suitcase. Reverend Michaels becomes ecstatic, and runs up behind the podium as they finish the song.

REVEREND MICHAELS

My friends, I have wonderful news! Preacher Cue has just returned from a fundraising, and guess what. He has raised enough to build a brand new mission. Hallelujah!

SHOUTS of joy erupt, and everyone APPLAUDS and PRAISES the Lord. Max joins Reverend Michaels behind the podium.

George and Jeff are standing behind a group of people about ten feet to the left of the entrance. George looks very angry.

George leans over and speaks to Jeff.

GEORGE

I'll bet pigs to polecats that's my money in that suitcase, and I'm taking it back.

JEFF

How's that, boss?

George points at a small electrical power box about six feet away, mounted on a supporting pole.

GEORGE

See that electrical box? I'm going to sneak around behind the preacher, and when you see me raise my arm and jerk it down like this (makes sharp downward motion with his arm), I want you to pull the handle down and turn the power off.

George opens his coat, revealing a club stuck partly down in his pants.

GEORGE (cont'd)

When the lights go out, I'm going to turn Saint Dick's lights out with this here club, and take my damn money back.

JEFF

Which one is Saint Dick?

GEORGE

Preacher Cue, son, Preacher Cue.

Max holds his hands up to stop the APPLAUDING.

MAX

Thank you for your appreciation. But, brothers and sisters, there is someone else here, who also deserves recognition.

Max points toward Louie. He's standing beside a very happy homeless family.

MAX (cont'd)

Louie Yates! He organized the whole trip, and I believe he deserves a big love hug.

People gather around Louie, hugging him and kissing his cheek. Little kids with dirty faces and patched up clothes are hugging his legs.

FRANK, a homeless man, is holding Sissy with one arm, and puts his free arm around Louie.

FRANK

God bless you, brother, God bless you.

Sissy leans over and throws her arms around Louie's neck.

SISSY

We love you a whole bunch.

Louie wipes tears from his eyes and cheeks.

George is easing his way around behind the people, getting closer and closer to Max.

MAX

Friends, besides Louie, there's two other people we need to thank. Without them, we surely would not have the money. Folks, please include them in your prayers.

REVEREND MICHAELS

A-men, brother, A-men.

Louie walks out of the tent.

George is directly behind Max, holding the club in his right hand.

Jeff is waiting patiently next to the electrical box with his hand on the handle.

MAX

Yes, people, tonight, when you say your prayers, the first two people I want you to pray for is Bert Channing and George Brooks.

George is stunned for a second, when he hears Max say his name. Then, George looks around at all the smiling and grateful faces.

MAX (cont'd)

If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be able to build our mission, and supply our little homeless kids with shoes and clothes.

As Max talks to the people, the anger and hate seem to melt right from George's face.

He now has a kind and thoughtful expression on his face, as he looks around at the people. George puts the club away and heads back to where Jeff is.

MAX (cont'd)

Come on, everyone! Let's sing and rejoice!

The band begins to play, and everyone starts singing.

George has made his way back over to where Jeff is.

GEORGE

Son, get your hand off the damn box, and let's get out of here.

JEFF

What about your money, boss?

GEORGE

I've changed my mind. Besides, there's plenty more where that came from.

George and Jeff leave the tent and, as they walk out, a homeless man comes into the tent carrying a small duffle bag. He walks up to Max and hands it to him.

Max opens the bag and is overwhelmed when he sees it full of money. He takes a note out and reads it.

INSERT NOTE

Here's a little extra, partner. Signed, Louie.

Max sets the bag beside the suitcase, and rushes toward the door.

EXT. MISSION

Louie's car pulls out onto the street, as Max comes running out the door. Max watches the tail lights disappear around the corner. He shouts out, knowing Louie can't hear him.

MAX

You were right, Louie, we are the
greatest team! God bless you,
partner.

INT. LOUIE'S CAR

Louie is smiling, with tears of joy running down his cheeks.
The singing can be heard in the background.

LOUIE

Max was right - it does make you feel
good. Real good.

FADE OUT