

The Legend of John Henry's Hammer

Johnny Cash

John Henry's Pappy woke him up one midnight
He said before the sheriff comes I wanna tell you, listen boy,
said learn to hoist a jack, and learn to lay a track, learn to
pick and shovel too, and take my hammer, it'll do anything you
tell it to

John Henry's mammy had about a dozen babies, John Henry's pappy
broke jail a dozen times
the babies all got sick and when the doctor wanted money, he sa
id I'll pay you quarter at a time, startin' tomorrow, that's th
e pay for a steel driver on this line

Then the section foreman said hey hammer swinger, I see you bro
ught you own hammer boy, but what else can all those muscles do
?

and he said, I can hoist a jack, I can lay a track, I can pick
a shovel too

and he said "can you swing that hammer?"

I can I'll do anything you hire me to

now ain't you something so high and mighty with your muscles, j
ust go ahead pick up that hammer and show me what you can do

he said get a rusty spike and swing it down three times, I'll p
ay you a nickel a day for every inch you sink it to, go on and
do what you say you can do

With a steep nose hammer on a four foot switch channel, John H
enry raised it back till it touched his heels, then the spike w
ent through the cross tie and it split it half in two, 35 cents
a day for driving steel,

(he said sweat boy, sweat, you owe me two more swings)

I was born for driving steel

Well John Henry hammered in the mountain, he'd give a grunt and
he'd give groan with every swing, the women folks for miles ar
ound, heard him and come down, to watch him make the cold steel
ring, lord what a swinger, just listen to that cold steel ring

,

but the bad boss come up laughing at John Henry, said you full
of vinegar now, but you bout through, were gonna get a steam dr
ill to do your share of driven, then what's all them muscles go
nna do, huh John Henry, gonna take a little bit of vinegar out
of you

John Henry said I feed four little brothers, and my baby sister
's walking on her knees, did the lord say that machines ought t

o take the place of living, and what's a substitute for bread and beans, I ain't seen it, do engines get rewarded for their steam

John Henry hid in a coal mine for his dinner now, had thirty minutes to rest before the bell, the mine boss hollered get up wherever you are and get a pick ax, give me enough coal to start another hell, and keep it burning, mine me enough to start another hell

John Henry said to his captain, a man ain't nothin' but a man, but if you bring that steam drill round, I'll beat it fair and honest, I'll die with my hammer in my hand, but I'll be laughing, because you cant replace a steel drivin' man

There was a big crowd of people at the mountain, John Henry said to the steam drill how is you, pardon me mister steam drill, I suppose you didn't hear me, I said how you, well can you turn a jack, can you lay a track, can you pick and shovel too, listen this hammer swingers talkin' to you

2000 people hollered go John Henry, then somebody hollered the mountains caving in, John Henry told the captain, tell the kind folks not to worry, that ain't nothin' but my hammer suckin' wind, keeps me breathing, a steel drivers muscle I intend,

Captain tell the people move back further, I'm at the finish line and I ain't no drill, she's so far behind you ain't got the brains to quit it, when she blows up she'll scatter cross the hills, lord lordy, when she blows up she'll scatter cross the hills

Well John Henry had a little woman, I believe the lady's name was Polly Ann, yeah that was his good woman, John Henry threw his hammer over his shoulder and went on home, he laid down to rest his weary back and early next morning he said come here Polly Ann come here sugar, ya know I believe this is the first time i ever watched the sun come up that i couldn't come up with it

Take my hammer Polly Ann and go to that rail road, swing that hammer like you seen me do it, and when your swinging with the lead men, they'll all know they'll all know your John Henry's woman, but tell them that's not all I can do, tell 'em I can hoist a jack, and I can lay a track, I can pick and shovel too, ain't no machine can, that's been proved to you

There was a big crowd of mourners at the church house, the section hands laid him in the sand, trains go by on the rails John Henry laid, they slow down and take off their hats, the men do, when they come to the place John Henrys laid, rests on his back, some say mornin' steel driver you sure were a hammer swinger, then they go along pickin' up speed, clickety clak, clickety

clak, yonder lies a steel driven man oh lord, yonder lies a steel driven man, yonder lies a steel driven man oh lord, yonder lies a steel driven man