

A Question of Color

by

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Based on A Question of Color

by Sara Smith-Beattie

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DESCRIPTION

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many states in the South had laws making miscegenation a crime. At that time, “miscegenation” broadly meant illegal marriages between whites and non-whites (though lesser liaisons than marriage also often came under the statutes). Blacks, Native Americans, and other groups could intermingle all they wanted -- no one really cared if they “mongrelized” their bloods. But it was a crime to dilute the purity of white blood.

In A Question of Color, two people, John Wicks (white) and Susan Morgan (black), defy this prohibition in early 20th-century North Carolina and get married. The play follows Susan and John as they struggle to live under the shadow cast by color and prejudice. The story, in its essentials, mirrors the current and historical American obsession with color and proves that W.E.B. Dubois’ comment that the great problem of the 20th century would be the color line will also be the country’s great problem of the 21st century.

CHARACTERS

SINGING: All the ACTORS must have the ability to sing in chorus.

ACCENT: No attempt is made here to recreate a North Carolina regional accent in the writing, and it is not necessary to do so (unless the director wishes to use a dialect coach). The play takes place in the Piedmont section of North Carolina. People interested in accents can hear them on the Alan Lomax recordings used here for the music. Otherwise, a soft gentle Southern accent (however that is defined) will suffice.

- SUSAN MORGAN, African American. Wife of JOHN.
- JOHN MORGAN (née Wicks), Caucasian. Husband of SUSAN.
- PETER GRIER/COLONEL GOFORTH/GROVER BOLLING, Caucasian. As GRIER, petty tyrant. As GOFORTH, the largest white landowner in the county. As BOLLING, a dissolute moonshiner.
- MRS. GOFORTH, Caucasian. Wife of the largest white landowner in the county.

- AUNT BECKY (REBECCA CALDWELL), African American, mid- to late-60s. The woman who takes in JOHN and SUSAN.
- DEACON BELL, African American, mid-50s. An overseer for GOFORTH.

(TOTAL: 3 women [2 African American, 1 Caucasian], 3 men [1 African American, 2 Caucasian])

TIME

The first four decades of the 20th century.

STAGING

The staging will be simple, with props and costumes as well as characterizations and lighting changes defining the movement back and forth across time. ACTORS will stay on stage at all times, sitting upstage or to the side when not in a scene. Around the stage, strategically placed, are the costumes people will use to change characters and times. Costumes should be simple: a basic outfit will be overlain with simple pieces, such as SUSAN's shawl or JOHN's headband. All props are onstage, and ACTORS will move things as needed. All set/scene changes should be done smoothly and, if needed, with choreography/music.

Though not detailed in the script, it would also be good to have levels on the stage. One thought is to have props hidden in any boxes used for staging. The act of taking out props is akin to the play's intent about hidden things being exposed. But this is only a suggestion.

Directors are free to invent any other means to tell the story (through movement, song, slides, pictures, etc) as long as the staging remains simple, uncluttered, and direct.

MOVEMENT

Wherever appropriate, movements should have a choreographed look and feel to them. The preference is for directed movement as opposed to a "natural" style of acting -- wherever possible, gestures, movements, etc. should be shaped and specific. Also, where possible, the ACTORS' bodies should be used to create the scene; for instance, when JOHN and SUSAN come to BECKY's house, BECKY can hide behind the ACTORS with her broom. ACTORS can also be used as the forest when JOHN runs away from GRIER, as the river when SUSAN first meets JOHN, and so on.

MUSIC

The songs in the plays are done a capella. (Lyrics are appended; the music is taken primarily from Alan Lomax's recordings)

The writer's preference is to use music as often as possible as long as it does not take away from the action. Directors are free to substitute music, but it must match what is suggested here, including mood, emotion, and region (as close to North Carolina as possible). Preferably, the music should be in the public domain to control production costs.

PROPS

The only set pieces needed are a wooden table, several wooden chairs, and two rocking chairs. In addition, the ACTORS will need a few simple wooden boxes around for general use that can be used for sitting, standing, different levels, and so on.

Note: The easiest way to get a prop list is to jot down the props mentioned in the script and then add to them as the director and actors wish.

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PROLOGUE

In the darkness the ACTORS enter singing Northport [Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 11] as the lights come up. They finish and speak.

SUSAN: Come gather and listen.

JOHN: Come listen and see.

MRS. GOFORTH: In the year of our Lord 1875 --

BELL: In the tar heel state of North Carolina --

BECKY: In one of the original thirteen colonies --

GOFORTH: That once declared itself for freedom --

MRS. GOFORTH: And the right of all to be equal --

ALL: Equality for all!

JOHN: And that four score years later --

SUSAN: In the most uncivil Civil War --

BELL: Fought for the right of all to be made unequal --

ALL: First in flight, North Carolina!

GOFORTH: A law was passed in 1875.

BELL: Beware when the legislature is in session.

SUSAN: General Statutes, Vol. 2A, Part II --

JOHN: Chapters 51 and 51-3.1 --

BECKY: That stated the following.

THE WOMEN: Listen.

THE MEN: Closely.

GRIER: "All marriages"

ALL: All.

BELL: "Between a white person"

ALL: White.

BECKY: "And a negro"

ALL: (*emphasizing both syllables: "Nee-grow."*) Negro.

JOHN: "Or between a white person"

SUSAN: (*emphasizing "negro" again*) "And a person of negro descent"

MRS. GOFORTH: "To the third generation inclusive"

ALL: In. Clusive.

BECKY: Including mulatto.

GOFORTH: Quadroon.

BELL: Octoroon.

SUSAN: Cascos.

JOHN: Sambo.

GOFORTH: Mango.

MRS. GOFORTH: Mustiffee.

BELL: Mustee.

GOFORTH: Mustifino.

MRS. GOFORTH: Pardo.

BECKY: Loro.

SUSAN: Mestizo.

GOFORTH: All shall be prohibited.

ALL: Prohibited.

All ACTORS clap, as if a period on a sentence.

SUSAN: Come gather and listen.

JOHN: Come listen and see.

SUSAN: In 1907, Susan Morgan, with the light ocher skin of her African father and the angled cheekbones of her Indian mother, married one John Wicks from the mountains.

JOHN: John Wicks, a Piedmont mountain boy as white as white could be made white in those colored times. As a sign of his love for Susan, he took her last name as his own and became John Morgan.

SUSAN: All this was dangerous.

JOHN: All this was love.

SUSAN: And their journey is not yet finished.

JOHN: Act I, Scene 1 -- By The River.

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ACT I, SCENE 1: BY THE RIVER

The banks of a river. JOHN is splitting wood.

JOHN: One mother hot day, one motherloving melt-the-brain-pan hot day -- my brains will drown me if I don't get something cool and soul-saving soon.

In a separate pool of light: GRIER. He holds a bugle or a trumpet and blows a short, sharp blast. JOHN responds.

GRIER: Keep chopping my wood, boy! Chop, chop!

Another blast of the trumpet as GRIER laughs. Lights out.

JOHN: Dog bastard Peter Grier -- off my back! A few more cords -- and then his money in my hand. And then -- I go north of here as fast as a fart out of a full-fed cow.

JOHN looks where GRIER stood.

JOHN: Blow yourself, old cock -- enough brow-sweat for now. I think it is time for me to gather myself to the river.

The ACTORS half-whisper/half-sing "Let's All Gather At The River."

ACTORS: "Let's all gather at the river / The beautiful, the beautiful river / Let's all gather at the river...."

JOHN sits and takes off his shirt. SUSAN enters carrying a fishing pole (mimed) and a bag. She takes out a small rag doll from the bag and sits it beside her. She then casts into the water. SUSAN does not see JOHN. SUSAN hooks a fish.

JOHN: Who? Who? I have never spied the likes of someone so beautiful. Fishing good?

SUSAN is startled; she has hooked another "fish," but it falls off and gets away.

JOHN: Oops -- that one got away.

SUSAN sees him.

JOHN: I'm chopping wood -- for old man Grier. Over there. Know him? Catfish got your tongue?

SUSAN hesitates, then moves to leave.

JOHN: Don't go! -- I want to make your acquaintances!

JOHN wades into the river. At SUSAN's cue, several ACTORS become the "undertow," pulling him down and roiling him around -- as if the river were rising up in SUSAN's defense. JOHN struggles back to the bank.

SUSAN: What do you want, white man?

JOHN: River work for you?

SUSAN: White man, what do you want?

JOHN: I want to know.

SUSAN: Know what?

JOHN: Know you.

SUSAN: Know me?

JOHN: Know all.

SUSAN: No chance.

JOHN: No to your no.

SUSAN: Has the sun brained you, white man?

JOHN: When you say "white man" --

SUSAN: Yeah?

JOHN: Like you're clearing to spit.

SUSAN hawks a gob, perhaps even vocalizes "white man" as she does it.

SUSAN: Like that?

JOHN: I have a name.

SUSAN: You are truly lucky.

JOHN: My name is J[ohn] --

SUSAN stops him curtly with a gesture

SUSAN: If I want it, I will ask! You gonna leave?

JOHN: No chance.

SUSAN: You got wood to cut.

JOHN: I got time to spare.

SUSAN: But not much brain.

JOHN: That remains to be seen.

SUSAN: See that rock there, then?

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: You can go to it.

JOHN: *(uncertain)* Yeah?

SUSAN: Touched with fear, are we?

JOHN: Afraid of nothing.

SUSAN: That's a lie -- a little white lie -- I'll let it pass. Pass on. White man.

One ACTOR sets a box for a "rock" in the river. JOHN wades out to it carefully and sits.

SUSAN: Haven't you ever seen a woman?

JOHN: Not like you.

SUSAN: Your ma's titties, and that's all, I'll bet.

JOHN: You have a filthy mouth.

SUSAN: God's comfort for my empty pockets.

JOHN: You don't know what you're saying.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: My mother is dead --.

SUSAN: How long dead?

JOHN: Father, too.

SUSAN: How long?

JOHN: Dirt of their graves still under my nails.

SUSAN: And not from the flat lands around here.

JOHN: I came off the mountain -- after -- leaving the dirt --

SUSAN: (*refusing to pity*) Well, we all got a cross nailed to our shoulder, don't we, orphan white man? And you be living where now?

JOHN: Over there.

SUSAN: With the sodomite?

JOHN: Chopping wood for Grier --

SUSAN: He got himself another --

JOHN: What? What's a sodomite?

SUSAN: He's crazy --

JOHN: Not that bad --

SUSAN: Paid you yet?

JOHN: At the end of twelve cords.

SUSAN: Any money yet?

JOHN: He said at the end of twelve.

SUSAN: White man, white man --

JOHN: Can you stop saying that --

SUSAN: -- looking at you as you look now, you do not have many good prospects in your favor.

JOHN: I got a lot more than you know.

SUSAN takes out her rag doll.

SUSAN: How is it out there?

JOHN: Snug as bug in a braided rug.

SUSAN: Butt not going numb?

JOHN: Nope.

SUSAN: Sun not frying your edges?

JOHN: Double nope.

SUSAN: Yeah?

JOHN: Nope.

SUSAN: Good.

SUSAN speaks to the doll.

SUSAN: Wouldn't want him to feel he's got "nope" choices. You said you had a name.

JOHN: I do.

SUSAN: Tell me now --

JOHN: Now you want to know.

SUSAN: I want to know if you're worth knowing -- first name first.

JOHN: John.

SUSAN: Last.

JOHN: Wicks.

SUSAN: John Wicks, white man.

John repeats it for rhythm, says it to the doll.

SUSAN: John Wicks, white man. *(still in rhythm)* John Wicks, white man, coming off the mountain.

She pronounces it "moun-tan," to rhyme with "man."

JOHN: Yes.

SUSAN: Orphan John Wicks -- an only child now of God, our mother father.

JOHN: Have no interest in that.

SUSAN: Not afraid for your soul?

JOHN: Two things I know about God.

SUSAN: Yes?

JOHN: He is truly mysterious --

SUSAN: Praise His name.

JOHN: And He never put bread on our table.

SUSAN: Such a short opinion of what He can do.

JOHN: Just matching my opinion to His opinion of me.

SUSAN: And not afraid for your soul?

JOHN: Can't be afraid for what I believe I don't have.

SUSAN: So you have no soul?

JOHN: I have my heart.

SUSAN: And how is this heart of yours?

JOHN: It beats with a full face.

SUSAN: And that's the face it shows?

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: Hmmmm --

JOHN: You don't like my face?

SUSAN: It's not a pig's face... that's a plus.

JOHN: You like to mock.

SUSAN: White man, you're sitting in the middle of the river on a rock with the sun frittering your brain and your backside number than your skull --

JOHN: My skull ain't numb --

SUSAN: -- talking to a black woman with no reason to trust you and every reason to thrash you and even more reason to avoid you --

JOHN: I'm not --

SUSAN: -- be quiet! -- talking to her about your heart and your face like you think she even has an interest in your fallen flesh -- and, phew, papa, I can smell you from here! -- moaning about his dead parents and jawing her about his unbelief and you don't deserve at least a little mockery?

SUSAN speaks to the doll.

SUSAN: And yet he sits there. Sits there still.

JOHN: That's admiration in your voice.

SUSAN: Then I must closer guard my tongue. Not going to leave, are you?

JOHN: When I got so much admiration washing over me from over there? Not on the life of Lucifer.

SUSAN: Well, then, white mountain man John Wicks, I guess I have to offer you that I, too, have a name, Christian and family.

JOHN: How kind to let me know.

SUSAN: Go ahead and ask me.

JOHN: I'm not sure now I want to.

SUSAN: You're weakening, I can see.

SUSAN speaks to the doll.

SUSAN: He does want to know.

JOHN: It'd just be a common courtesy.

SUSAN: Courtesy would be in your favor, common man.

JOHN: What do they call you when they're not calling you devil?

SUSAN: Those with affection for me, orphan John Wicks, call me Susan Morgan.

JOHN: Susan. Morgan.

SUSAN: Don't think you can own it.

JOHN: Susan Morgan.

SUSAN: Sun warm enough for you?

JOHN: Cool as a cave.

SUSAN: Butt numb?

JOHN: Double nope.

SUSAN: Then what a manly man you are!

SUSAN speaks to the doll.

SUSAN: Isn't he?!

JOHN: Isn't he.

SUSAN prepares to leave.

JOHN: Wait!

SUSAN: Why?

JOHN: We were just getting to know enough to start knowing!

SUSAN: Twelve cords I thought you said. Best sharpen your blade. You crippled? You can go.

ACTOR grabs box, upending JOHN who moves back to shore.

JOHN: When will I see you again?

SUSAN: High-handed to think of an "again."

JOHN: Orphan boy common white man John Wicks wants to see you again, Susan Morgan.
Some fine angles, don't you think?

SUSAN: Like I said, it's not a pig's face.

JOHN: From what little I know of you, Susan Morgan, not being matched to a pig is a major accomplishment.

SUSAN: More accomplishment than most, I'll admit.

JOHN: And a lot of cords of wood have come out of these arms.

SUSAN: I was able to see that clearly from the beginning.

JOHN: So can't you see your way through to offering me an "again"?

SUSAN: I am over there if you can make it to here, white man.

GRIER blows his trumpet.

JOHN: And I'm offering you the first of a thousand thanks.

SUSAN: Don't get ahead of yourself on the count.

GRIER blows his trumpet again.

SUSAN: Don't let him know when the twelve cords are done until you get your promised money up front.

JOHN: You mean he won't pay me?

SUSAN: Keep your door locked at night.

JOHN: What do you know about --

SUSAN: You got halfway across this time. Choice is yours. Look at your feet.

JOHN: Three fish.

JOHN looks back at her.

JOHN: Three fish.

JOHN kneels down to touch the "fish," stroking them as if precious gifts.

SUSAN: For sustaining your body and soul in what lies ahead. Go.

SUSAN exits.

JOHN: Miss, the odds and ends are in your favor -- at the moment. But I will know you more than your name.

GRIER: Boy!

ACTORS begin to set table and chair and bucket of blackberries

JOHN: Damn!

GRIER: Where are you?

JOHN: What does that flapping hog-jowl want now?

GRIER: Are you trying to spite me? Are you trying to cheat me?

JOHN re-dresses as he scrambles to GRIER's house.

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ACT I, SCENE 2: GRIER'S KITCHEN

ACTORS set table and chair. A metal bucket of blackberries sits in the middle of the table.

GRIER: (*shouting*) You run like a coon with a dog licking its ass. I swear you come slower than an old man stroking hisself --

JOHN: Been chopping your wood.

GRIER: Been swimming, too, looks like.

JOHN: That, too, a little.

GRIER: On my time.

JOHN: It's hot.

GRIER: Not when it's my money. My wood?

JOHN: I am close to twelve cords -- but not there yet.

GRIER: Well -- finish dressing, and then you can start my dinner.

JOHN: I will.

JOHN finishes dressing and faces the audience: he is at a stove and mimes cooking on it.

GRIER: Why are you grinning?

JOHN: I'm not grinning.

GRIER: You're a bad liar.

JOHN: That big, huh?

GRIER: Your stance -- your -- way. Why the grinning?

JOHN: As the Lord promises Paradise --

GRIER: What are you blathering about?

JOHN: -- I think I found Paradise today.

GRIER: By cutting my wood?

JOHN: By the river. A girl.

GRIER: No girls around here.

JOHN: Not so.

GRIER: You don't want a girl.

JOHN: Susan Morgan's definitely one to want.

There is an ominous silence.

JOHN: What?

GRIER: Why are you living in my house?

JOHN: What does that have to do --

GRIER: Why are you living in my house?

JOHN: You took me in.

GRIER: I took you in -- watch my dinner! -- believed you about your parents dying -- watch the dinner! Felt sorry for you, gave you shelter. And work, too, paid work --

JOHN: Haven't paid me yet --

GRIER: Food. A bed.

JOHN: I understand.

GRIER: No -- you don't.

GRIER rises and steps to JOHN, carrying his chair.

GRIER: If you're seeing Susan Morgan, you are not seeing to your best advantage.

*GRIER thrusts the chair against the back of JOHN's knees, forcing JOHN to sit.
GRIER looms over him. GRIER moves the food off the heat.*

GRIER: (*rapping his head*) "Advantage" is not with the colored bitch.

JOHN: (*moving to rise*) I will not take --

GRIER grabs JOHN's hair, pushes his face close to the hot stove; JOHN resists.

GRIER: Your ignorance could endanger your soul.

GRIER lets him go; JOHN remains seated.

GRIER: Susan Morgan's father was a nigger pig -- slave's son -- and her mother a Cherokee sow. We purged these bastards. Our one mistake? We didn't spit the piglet.

GRIER puts his arm across JOHN's chest and slides into the seat behind him, in effect having JOHN sit in his lap.

GRIER: Wouldn't want you to run yourself to the foul side, John -- some laws we need for civilizing -- sooner learned, sooner best for all.

GRIER strokes JOHN's hair and face gently.

GRIER: Now, wouldn't it be better to stay with me, the man paying you your money?

GRIER bucks JOHN off his lap and moves his chair back to the table. JOHN stands stock still, terrified.

GRIER: Careful of the stove.

GRIER takes a blackberry from the bucket.

GRIER: Blackberries, John, fresh -- sweet as an angel's fingertip.

GRIER takes one and mashes it against JOHN's shirt, right over his heart.

GRIER: Keep that in mind. You do that kind of keeping in that kind of mind.

Sudden change of light, isolating JOHN. As JOHN speaks, an ACTOR helps him change his shirt. GRIER watches him from the shadows.

JOHN: I will burn this, I will. Touching me like that. Like that! Like I was a beast!

GRIER speaks from the shadows.

GRIER: You done cutting my wood?

JOHN: He can't know -- how much, how little, how far, how close.

GRIER: The payment --

JOHN: My money!

GRIER joins him in the light.

GRIER: The payment will be special, young man. Unforgettable.

JOHN, in panic, runs out of the light into the shadow by the table. GRIER turns and watches him. JOHN takes the bucket of blackberries. GRIER exits from the light while ACTORS strike the table and chair. The light changes to a night blue. JOHN circles around until he comes to the bank of the river, now in such great fear that he does not see his own woodpile -- in reality, two ACTORS -- and runs into it, sprawling him on the ground. Slowly he recovers his wits and waits; the light slowly but steadily changes from night blue to dawn: he has spent the night by the river.

When the dawn light comes, JOHN makes a gesture. As he does so, small circles of light come up -- stones across the river. As he quickly crosses the river, the spots of light go out. In the meantime, ACTORS set up SUSAN's "house": two rocking chairs, side by side, and an axe.

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ACT I, SCENE 3

JOHN: Susan?! Susan?!

SUSAN, who has heard him approach, hides. As JOHN passes, SUSAN knocks him down, then kneels on his neck. JOHN protests, but SUSAN pushes his face into the dirt to shut him up, then scouts around to see if anyone has pursued him.

JOHN: John Wicks --

SUSAN: Quiet, fool!

SUSAN finds no pursuit. She releases JOHN and notices his condition.

SUSAN: You told him, didn't you? Didn't you? And then bam! right to me.

JOHN: I had no other place.

SUSAN hits him.

SUSAN: Dizzard -- lunkhead -- Danger! A mooncalf even to let myself taste --

JOHN does not fight back, simply stands and listens. This confuses SUSAN. She notices the bucket.

SUSAN: Bring your lunch?

JOHN: Took all night to figure things out.

SUSAN: How to kill me off?

JOHN: No, ma'am.

SUSAN: Ma'am? And that -- at the end of your manly arms.

JOHN: Blackberries.

SUSAN: You're flying your ass away and --

JOHN: Needed a gift for what I want to do. I am not completely unchurched.

SUSAN gapes at him, then stalks away. JOHN follows.

JOHN: Wait!

SUSAN: You can't do what you want to do!

JOHN: Why not? Why not? Answer me.

SUSAN: Orphan man, you don't know what you don't know. Leave!

SUSAN walks to her "house," and JOHN follows. SUSAN pushes JOHN away roughly.

SUSAN: I told you to leave!

JOHN looks around, then sits in a rocking chair. SUSAN tries to tip him out. JOHN immediately re-seats himself. Again, but JOHN holds on. SUSAN changes tactics, moves to the side of the chair and tries to dump him out. Suddenly, JOHN gets up and snatches the chair from SUSAN. He fixes his eye on her steadily as he slams the chair down, sits, picks up the bucket. They glare; then, without taking his eyes off SUSAN, JOHN opens the bucket and slowly eats a blackberry. Offers her one.

JOHN: They have been known to settle the heart.

JOHN slaps the chair next to him for SUSAN to sit. SUSAN, glaring, takes the chair and moves it several feet away, with her back to JOHN, agitated: foot banging the porch, etc.

JOHN: I have a cure for that twitching.

SUSAN makes an obscene gesture.

JOHN: A cure for that, too.

JOHN takes his chair and moves it next to SUSAN's.

JOHN: A cure from my mother -- a sweet physic to ease one's pains. She put it right on my tongue. Like this.

JOHN sticks out his tongue, puts a blackberry on it, and folds it back into his mouth.

JOHN: Did your mama ever do that?

Against her will, SUSAN looks at him stick out his tongue, put a berry on it, and slowly draw it into his mouth.

JOHN: Didn't care for the molasses she used -- but the sweetness of her touch -- ah -- that was the real physic.

JOHN offers SUSAN a berry. Both wanting and not wanting to, she goes to take it. JOHN pulls it back, indicates for her to open her mouth and stick out her tongue. SUSAN does so, and JOHN puts the berry on her tongue like a communion wafer.

SUSAN: We can't --

JOHN: Works, doesn't it?

JOHN gives SUSAN one more.

JOHN: Sweet.

JOHN takes one more.

JOHN: Physic.

SUSAN jumps up and stalks around.

SUSAN: You have to go.

JOHN: You drew me across the water, and here I've landed.

SUSAN: I do not want to care about you, scarecrow.

JOHN imitates a scarecrow, arms out.

JOHN: Oh, well.

Suddenly, JOHN grabs his head, in pain.

JOHN: Oh, man!

SUSAN does not go directly to him. JOHN has blood on his hand and forehead. Exasperated, SUSAN goes into the "house" -- that is, an ACTOR will hand her a bowl of water and a rough cloth. She returns to JOHN.

SUSAN: How conveniently you bleed.

SUSAN washes JOHN's wound.

SUSAN: How'd this happen?

JOHN: No moon, woodpile, running hard to find my purpose in life -- bam!

SUSAN: Be'd better to gag you with this and drown you. There.

JOHN sticks out his tongue.

JOHN: Physic?

SUSAN wrings out the cloth, then deliberately drops the cloth into the water for maximum splash. She puts a berry on JOHN's tongue, then slaps him not too hard on the cheek.

JOHN: Now I am completely healed.

SUSAN: That apple tree --

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: Next to it.

JOHN: A cross.

SUSAN: Next to that.

JOHN: A pile of stones.

SUSAN: It's a cairn. Say it.

JOHN: Cairn.

SUSAN: The cross is Mama. When she died, Papa wood-cut for Grier, for money to school me. But when he went to collect -- c'mon --

JOHN: Grier wouldn't pay him.

SUSAN: And Papa, proud man in a black skin -- he beat Grier.

JOHN: That's why he said --

SUSAN: Grier cried "Sheriff!" and the sheriff cried "Lynch!" and running for his life, my father ran out of his life when he tried to cross the river after the rains. And Grier sold every cord, that wood soaked in my papa's gut blood.

JOHN: He won't be giving me the money.

SUSAN: What he wants to give you is hard, boy, but it won't be cash, and he won't be putting it in your pocket. Your money --

SUSAN makes a gesture like smoke.

SUSAN: You're just his newest nigger.

GRIER steps out of the shadows, carrying his trumpet. He inspects the ground, looks in the direction of SUSAN's house. He watches through the next scene.

JOHN: Yeah, well, maybe my money is gone, maybe not, but he still owes me, and I will collect.

SUSAN: Righteous man trash talk -- just like Papa --

SUSAN jumps out of her chair and grabs the axe. JOHN follows.

JOHN: I've got plans --

SUSAN: -- trash talk about honor, just like Papa --

JOHN: Not your Papa --

SUSAN: -- thought he could do.

JOHN: I'm not your papa --

SUSAN: Gets himself killed --

JOHN: Listen to me!

SUSAN: And now you -- no, no, no --

JOHN: Listen to me!

SUSAN: -- not on my time, not on my porch, not with my life --

JOHN: Listen to me!

SUSAN: -- I am not going to lose again --

JOHN: If -- if you might let this lunkhead mouth flap for a moment instead of yours --

SUSAN faces him, axe in her hand.

SUSAN: Are you telling me to shut up?

JOHN: Much as it pains me to say it -- I am telling you to shut up.

JOHN reaches out and turns away the axe-blade.

JOHN: The money is for me what it was for your papa -- for freedom -- and I am thinking this, too: for us.

SUSAN: You are stupid to the bone, white man.

JOHN: For wanting my money, or for wanting you?

SUSAN: For thinking, white man, that you can ever really have this hand.

JOHN: Well, colored girl --

SUSAN: Watch your direction!

JOHN: -- you talk a strong game --

SUSAN: No death sentence of skin color hanging over you --

JOHN: But I've been nigger'd by Grier --

SUSAN: You can still go white --

JOHN: If I had a mind to go white, which I don't --

SUSAN: What are you saying?

JOHN: I hereby give it up.

SUSAN: You can't give it up!

JOHN: I hereby give up what doesn't make sense.

SUSAN: Not making sense is right!

JOHN: I give up what splits me from you. I give up what I never asked for in the first place.

SUSAN: You can't just give it up! It stains you, just like mine does me --

JOHN: Susan -- Susan! -- if there is enough love --

Both are astonished at the word.

JOHN: You meet a person, you cross the river, you sit on their porch with the smell of blackberries in the air, and you talk out the loneliness. "Color" in that? Do you feel it? Answer me -- do you feel it?

SUSAN: My mama's people gave up on her.

JOHN: Answer me!

SUSAN: Out there won't --

JOHN: Answer me!

SUSAN: I'd like -- What does it matter what I like?

JOHN: Like it!

SUSAN: Why are you forcing me?

JOHN: Spit it out!

SUSAN: Color darkens everything --

JOHN: Answer.

SUSAN: Papa said color is a nail through the hand --

JOHN: Answer. Me.

SUSAN: You are so ignorant. You are too dangerous, Orphan John, from off the mountain, out of the clouds. Your heart is too dangerous.

JOHN: Answer me.

SUSAN: I fear the words will burn me.

JOHN: Let me draw off some fire, then.

JOHN kisses her, lightly.

JOHN: Now answer me.

SUSAN: There are all these ghosts --

JOHN: Let me draw again.

SUSAN resists him.

SUSAN: They smell of knives and whippings and old hard stories of Africa -- long chain of chains, long pain of pains -- Your --

SUSAN touches his lips.

SUSAN: -- not enough.

JOHN: Yet.

JOHN goes to kiss her, but SUSAN stops him.

JOHN: Just one thing, then: would you like me to sit on your porch?

SUSAN: I would like to have you sit on my porch.

JOHN: Then we will deal off the ghosts one by one.

SUSAN: (*ruefully*) You are so dumb.

JOHN: The lunkhead's saving grace.

SUSAN: Against my better judgment, I am having a better judgment of you.

GRIER blows his trumpet.

JOHN: Well, I guess Gabriel knows when to blow.

JOHN gets the bucket, hands it to SUSAN, and sticks out his tongue. SUSAN puts a berry on his tongue.

JOHN: Then go away no more.

JOHN turns and leaves. SUSAN goes to the porch and waits.

* * * * *

ACT I, SCENE 4

Back in GRIER's kitchen: table, chair.

GRIER: The prodigal son. How were her thighs?

JOHN: You owe me money.

GRIER: Got to sell the wood first.

JOHN: That wasn't the contract.

GRIER: Contracts change.

JOHN: I know you got money.

GRIER: (*laughing*) What a handsome fire in you!

JOHN: Stop that.

GRIER: All defending what you're owed. And probably in love, too.

JOHN: I said --

GRIER: What a long night spent waiting can bring to the day, huh?

GRIER reaches into his pocket and brings out a leather bag, with a sun figure stitched on it. GRIER points to it.

GRIER: Go on. Take it. You win -- can't beat you -- so strong and strapping! Got to play fair.

JOHN takes the bag and goes to open it, but GRIER stops him.

GRIER: Eh, eh, eh -- now it's different. Now you are in my house when I don't want you here. A "trespass" -- the sheriff could shoot a body for a trespass. You had better go.

JOHN pockets the bag and exits.

GRIER: You have broken the law, boy; you have robbed an old man. The sheriff will hear all about it. In fact -- is that the sheriff I hear now coming up the drive? Could be. I did send him an invite to meet the mongrel that wants nigger on his breath.

* * * * *

ACT I, SCENE 5

JOHN: Susan! Susan! Susan! I got the money! I got the money! I got the money!

SUSAN: Grier gave it to you?

JOHN: I got it!

SUSAN: Did he give it, or did you take it?

JOHN: What's the difference? I got --

SUSAN: It makes all the difference!

JOHN: I don't know the difference!

SUSAN: Did he put it in your hands?

JOHN: No --

SUSAN: Did he write you out a note?

JOHN: I doubt the man can write --

SUSAN: Pay attention!

JOHN: No, he didn't! He just put the payment --

SUSAN: Where? Where?

JOHN: Just -- out. Where I could take it!

SUSAN: And you took it.

JOHN: I took it!

SUSAN: So -- open it.

JOHN opens the bag. Inside is a ruby pendant and two gold rings.

JOHN: This isn't money!

SUSAN: Something new added to you every minute --

JOHN: Necklace, rings --

SUSAN: John -- you are now a thief!

JOHN: I didn't steal -- No! He didn't!

SUSAN: It was never much of a home anyways.

JOHN: He --

SUSAN: Oh, stop it. What did you expect, mountain man? We have to go.

JOHN: I can't go.

SUSAN: The sheriff already rides us down.

JOHN: I can't go. He still owes --

SUSAN puts her hand gently but firmly around his throat.

JOHN: What are you --

SUSAN: Rope around your neck --

SUSAN tightens her grip.

SUSAN: He will say what? Think!

SUSAN releases her grip when she sees JOHN understands.

SUSAN: He has said it already. Time to go. Grier is waiting very much to be hard upon you.

SUSAN takes a shawl, which she puts on, and her bag with the doll in it, and then a headband.

JOHN: That's all?

SUSAN shows JOHN the shawl.

SUSAN: My mother's grandmother gave her this when my mother left home. The doll my mother gave me. My mother's hands -- what else would I need?

JOHN: Gun would be nice --

SUSAN: Never had one --

JOHN: Matches, food --

SUSAN: I'm ready.

JOHN: Even the Israelites took food out of Egypt --

SUSAN: I am prepared where it matters most -- and I won't be taken like my father.

Susan tosses the headband to JOHN.

SUSAN: Wear this. You now have to be what you aren't --

JOHN: I can't wear --

SUSAN: Isn't about choosing now, John.

JOHN: I can't be --

SUSAN: If you want us, then you be what they mark you, or else we will bend a tree like Judas. You want us, you wait. Choices've been made for us. Are you still willing to choose me?

JOHN adjusts the headband.

JOHN: Your mother?

SUSAN: Made it for my father.

JOHN: Ever wear it?

SUSAN: Once, for pleasing -- that's all she wanted.

JOHN: What tribe? Wait -- I know. The johnwicks.

SUSAN: Must be new --

JOHN: Old race -- here since the dawn-times.

SUSAN: And will stay until the sun-downs?

JOHN: What I have heard. I will be what we need.

SUSAN: I was hoping that's what your tribe believed.

JOHN: And we go where to find new land?

SUSAN: Down the river out of Egypt.

JOHN: I love you, Susan Morgan. There hangs no question about that.

SUSAN: We must leave before "too late" is here.

JOHN: Can you say it?

A trumpet blast from GRIER as lights change. Frightened, SUSAN and JOHN leave.

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ACT I, SCENE 6

The "escape" of JOHN and SUSAN is done to a rhythmic vocalizing and clapping. JOHN and SUSAN are following an old Indian path through the forest, at night. The terrain they cover is moving down a mountainside, following a creek, and finally ending up in a clearing. The journey is guided by the actions and shapes the ACTORS take, and those actions and shapes should be on several levels, i.e., JOHN and SUSAN could be moved overhead, carried in certain ways, etc. The particular choreography will be worked out by the director and ACTORS. At the end of it, SUSAN and JOHN find themselves in a clearing, dazed but escaped. They are sleeping apart but close. JOHN wakes up, finds SUSAN, and snuggles up next to her. Lights change to dawn. A few beats of silence, then SUSAN wakes up and sees JOHN next to her. She slowly but deliberately untangles herself and sits several feet apart from him.

JOHN: Why did you move?

SUSAN: I liked it too much.

JOHN: Reason to stay.

SUSAN: "Liked it" is reason to slip away --

JOHN: Come here --

SUSAN: Take that hand back.

JOHN: It's harmless.

SUSAN: Put the snake back in your pocket.

JOHN: Any idea where we are --

SUSAN: Old Indian trail by the river to the other side of the mountain.

JOHN: We're on the other side?

SUSAN: Yes.

JOHN: Without going over?

SUSAN: Without going over.

JOHN: You surely have magic, Susan Morgan.

SUSAN: I have burned up all my magic, John Wicks. Now you can go.

JOHN: Go?

SUSAN: Go. Go.

JOHN: This was together.

SUSAN: Go. You're free. You're safe -- sheriff won't come to here -- different county. So -- north, like you said you wanted.

JOHN: "Go" means "go" with you, whatever part we reach.

JOHN moves closer to SUSAN, who gives him a shove strong enough to throw him on his back.

JOHN: You're kicking me away.

SUSAN: We're out of danger. I am out of magic. No obligations. Who needs you?

JOHN: Look, I'm not going to go.

SUSAN walks around the clearing, looking for something.

JOHN: What are you looking for?

An ACTOR hands SUSAN a stout piece of wood, and she threatens JOHN with it.

SUSAN: Two days ago I had -- today I have not. And whose fault is that?

SUSAN jabs JOHN with the wood. JOHN tries to back off.

JOHN: I am so tired of being damaged by wood.

SUSAN jabs him again.

SUSAN: Oh, really?

JOHN: Put it down.

SUSAN jabs him again, and continues to jab him. JOHN protests.

SUSAN: Should have done this two days ago!

JOHN: Stop it.

SUSAN: Then I'd still have a house! And a bed to sleep in -- alone!

JOHN: Ow!

SUSAN: And not lug an iron ball called "johnwick" clapped to my leg!

JOHN: That hurts!

SUSAN: All because of a stranger from the river!

With a wind-up and a heave, SUSAN really whacks JOHN.

SUSAN: No more strangers!

JOHN: After what we've been through --

Hits him again.

SUSAN: No more lies!

JOHN: I didn't cross the river to --

Hits him a third time, which knocks him to the ground.

SUSAN: No more riiiiivveerrrrsss!

SUSAN drops the stick, breathing heavily. On the ground, JOHN edges warily to grab the stick, then edges away.

SUSAN: I don't know who you are, johnwick. I have given my heart to someone I do not know. Can you understand if I find that a touch -- a touch -- confusing?

JOHN uses the stick to help himself get up.

JOHN: You said some hurtful things.

SUSAN: I intended them to hurt. I aimed deep.

JOHN: I don't know if I can come back.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: I am a man with feelings, Susan --

SUSAN: Wait a minute --

JOHN: -- and they have been questioned.

SUSAN: What's with that hang-dog look?

JOHN: It's sorrow, Susan.

SUSAN: I am not going to feel sorry for you!

JOHN: Damaged, Susan -- what can I say? I am going to have to take your advice. I am going to have to leave.

This brings SUSAN up short.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: I think you're right.

SUSAN: Never take advice given with a stick.

JOHN: Dried oak does not lie. I'll go north.

SUSAN: North?

JOHN: Going there anyway when Grier's money came through.

SUSAN: You would leave me now?

JOHN: We'll let things air out -- you know. See if maybe we can just be friends.

JOHN readies himself and grabs what is now his walking stick.

JOHN: Well, I'm off! See you around, maybe.

JOHN goes about twenty feet, then stops, inhales deeply.

JOHN: Ah -- Ah --

SUSAN: What are you doing?

JOHN: The air is better up north! Smell that --

SUSAN: That's as far as I get to get rid of you?

JOHN: Already my brain is clearing! Now, who was that colored gal --

SUSAN: Colored gal?

JOHN: -- who fancied herself so highly? Susan! I guess I was just too looowww for her!

JOHN moves slowly toward SUSAN as he speaks.

JOHN: Guess she couldn't have confidence in a "white man," especially one that wanted to earn her money and become a whole new Indian tribe just to have the pleasure of her company till the trump of doom. Almost lost my heart on her -- good thing I didn't. Now I can be an up-north orphan and free all by my airy lonesome self!

JOHN looks directly at SUSAN.

JOHN: Or maybe not.

SUSAN swoops her shawl in a wide circle, settling it back on her shoulders. A whoosh of wind.

JOHN: I find it much warmer down south.

SUSAN: It is much warmer. Enough for the johnwick to stay?

JOHN: Yes.

SUSAN: He will stay?

JOHN: Yes.

SUSAN: He will not leave?

JOHN: Only in his coffin.

JOHN moves to SUSAN.

JOHN: We've gone through an engagement of fire.

SUSAN: Yes.

JOHN: And bruises.

SUSAN: Deserved ones.

With a flourish, JOHN hands the walking stick to an ACTOR.

JOHN: No more, then. Not "wife" yet --

SUSAN: Not "husband" yet --

JOHN: But it seems we could --

SUSAN: Johnwick --

JOHN: Ancient johnwick wisdom, yea verily: Safety in, danger out. Big walls.

SUSAN: Thick walls.

JOHN: Tall walls.

SUSAN: Walls solid and signified.

JOHN: Will that do? Will that do, Susan Morgan?

SUSAN: Yes -- yes it might --

JOHN: But?

SUSAN: But I fear -- I fear --

JOHN: Fear what?

SUSAN: I fear how easily these solid walls can turn into a box -- I've seen it happen -- a box that buries you away --

JOHN: Then we must raise the roofbeam high -- high, even higher than -- than --

SUSAN laughs as John exaggerates his reach.

JOHN: -- so that we can always breathe whatever air we please.

SUSAN nods yes.

JOHN: What do we do now?

SUSAN: Hungry?

JOHN points to her bag.

JOHN: Don't happen to have a full breakfast --

SUSAN: Out of magic, I told you. Smell.

JOHN: Chimney smoke. Cooking smoke.

SUSAN: Sending your belly a smoke signal.

JOHN: How proper for an Indian.

JOHN kisses her and gently puts his hand on her breast. SUSAN, still kissing him, just as gently removes it. From another part of the stage we hear BECKY begin

singing Sheep, Sheep, Don't'cha Know The Road? softly [Southern Journey, Vol. 6, Track 1].

SUSAN: We ain't done "now I pronounce" yet --

JOHN: Well, then, if not the honey yet, I'll just have to take biscuits and bacon instead.

SUSAN: Honey for dessert when the time comes ripe for honey.

JOHN: Then I count on time moving forward quickly.

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ACT I, SCENE 7

There is no transition between scenes except for a light change as JOHN and SUSAN walk into the area that is BECKY's property. BECKY's singing gets louder, but when she sees JOHN and SUSAN enter, she hides behind several ACTORS, picks up a broom, and sticks it out.

JOHN: Hello? Anyone to home? Did you hear singing?

SUSAN: I thought so.

JOHN: Hello? Stopped. The smoke --

SUSAN: But no body.

JOHN: Ghosts?

SUSAN: Ghosts can't hold matches.

BECKY: Hands to God, knees to the ground --

JOHN turns to look at BECKY, just enough to see the "gun."

BECKY: Back around!

JOHN: *(whispering, to SUSAN)* Gun.

BECKY: Go on! Or I will drill you through your hearts! Send you to fetch me some brinestone!

They raise their hands and kneel.

BECKY: From Grover Bolling, aren't you?

JOHN: Who?

BECKY: Bullyrag me some more.

SUSAN: We don't know him.

BECKY: All knows Grover Bolling.

SUSAN: Us, by the river around the mountain --

BECKY: Bolling not send you.

JOHN: Sent by hunger, ma'am. Saw your smoke --

BECKY: Around the mountain, you said?

SUSAN: Yes.

BECKY: Hands down -- but stay on your knees -- be good for you. That rag on your head?

JOHN: I'm Indian.

BECKY: You the whitest Indian --

JOHN: From the johnwick tribe --

SUSAN: *(loud whisper)* John!

BECKY: Johnwick?

JOHN: From over the river's other side --

BECKY: Say that again.

JOHN: What?

BECKY: That name.

JOHN: Johnwick. Not many left of us.

BECKY: In fact, you may be the only one, right? -- *(dismissively)* -- the johnwicks, my sweet eye-tooth. Eyes straight, wick! You, girl.

SUSAN: Ma'am.

BECKY: You ain't full colored --

SUSAN: No, ma'am -- Indian mama.

BECKY: A "johnwick" mama?

BECKY laughs.

BECKY: Johnwick -- johnwick slick, you are.

JOHN: Can we stand up?

BECKY: Christian? Saved?

JOHN: My knees are whining.

SUSAN: Saved when I was ten, fused with the Lord.

JOHN: You didn't tell me that.

SUSAN: Dark continent, I am.

BECKY: *(to JOHN)* You?

SUSAN: *(interrupting)* When we fellowship, he will ask for his soul.

BECKY: I suppose even a heathen "johnwick" should be saved. Stand up.

BECKY shouts suddenly.

BECKY: Grover Bolling!

JOHN: Never heard of him.

BECKY: Pray!

SUSAN begins; JOHN stumbles, not knowing the prayer. BECKY comes out from behind the ACTORS holding the broom.

SUSAN: Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name --

BECKY: Enough said. Can feel it. Turn.

JOHN: That's a broom.

BECKY: My "gun."

JOHN: A broom. *(to SUSAN)* Snookered with a broom.

BECKY: Power of visions.

JOHN: Power of a lie.

BECKY: This from the "johnwick"?

SUSAN: Best to button it.

BECKY: She's wise. You said hungry?

JOHN: Whole body hungry.

BECKY: Trade food for names.

SUSAN: More fair to us than you.

BECKY: How do you know what I want? I am Aunt Becky to everyone around here -- now you.
Name.

SUSAN: Susan Morgan.

BECKY: You feel good, my mulatto. *(to JOHN)* Name of Aunt Becky includes you, too, if you
aim to stick with her.

JOHN: That's what John Wicks aims to do.

BECKY: John Wicks – johnwick. *(to SUSAN)* He do that kind of thing too often? You two aiming
for a marriage under God?

SUSAN: "So that he bringeth them into their desired haven." [Psalms, 107:30]

BECKY: Psalms!

JOHN: Yeah?

BECKY: Mister johnwick, you have a jewel here. "The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel."
[Proverbs, 20:15]

SUSAN: Proverbs.

BECKY: More proof, if proof was needed.

SUSAN: Are you a preacher?

BECKY: Been called to deliver his word.

JOHN: Women can't do that.

BECKY: I was mistaken -- *(to SUSAN)* -- he surely looked smart enough for you.

SUSAN: Sometimes his mouth runs on --

BECKY: Run with this, johnwick. God's colors come out a lot of mouths, titties or not, and you
had better get used to that. Kneel down -- it's time.

JOHN kneels. BECKY hands him one end of the broom.

BECKY: Now, you.

BECKY hands SUSAN the other end of the broom, and then gingerly sits on the broom, balancing herself by holding onto their shoulders, and lifts up her feet.

BECKY: Who-wee -- steady me! -- you all strong enough! This broom is God's word, lifting me off -- but the word of God is steep, and I got to hold to them that lives around me. Color don't matter -- only the love of willing hands and willing shoulders. Put me down. Now rise -- and don't let go.

When they stand, BECKY grabs the broom midway between their hands.

BECKY: When I was sanctified, a window shut over my eyes. Now all I see is souls, which got no color except the color of heaven. Your law outguns the man's law that says they can't make a life together, and in that I bind them, full of your love, till death carry them to your mansion. Now, Susan, you is known as Susan Wicks.

JOHN: Becky?

BECKY: Yes?

JOHN: It was Susan gave me life back back there by the river on the other side of the mountain. I want to honor her --

BECKY: Yeah?

JOHN: I want to honor her with the taking of her name for mine.

SUSAN: That's not done.

JOHN: Supposedly this isn't, either, but we just did. And a lady preacher.

BECKY: With a broom.

JOHN: So why not keep on?

SUSAN: But so much at once --

JOHN: Rules know only being followed or broken. We follow no rules that keep us unbonded.

BECKY: Susan? New from old?

SUSAN: Do you know how deep in you are?

JOHN: Susan -- I know the danger square.

SUSAN: I know you know.

JOHN: You know I know.

SUSAN: John Morgan -- you are cracked crazy with grace.

JOHN: Finally! So, Becky, I take her line. Now pronounce us.

BECKY: It's done. You is married. Now, put the broom down and jump!

JOHN: Jump a broom?

SUSAN: Jump into a new life.

JOHN: Well, okay.

They jump. BECKY jumps.

BECKY: And you can kiss her, too, you know -- just don't use her up all at once!

JOHN: Honey time?

SUSAN: Later.

JOHN: Well, then, breakfast time!

BECKY: Just like a man -- the stomach leads. First you sign the Bible to make the record: John and Susan Morgan, July 19, 1907. Then we eat to celebrate.

SUSAN: Becky -- who is Grover Bolling?

JOHN: Can we talk about this over breakfast?

SUSAN: John -- Aunt Becky?

BECKY: Let me give you the short chapter: Bolling's a moonshiner, and one of the men who killed Jake, my husband.

SUSAN: One of the men?

BECKY: (*ignoring her*) Verse 1: Gave Jake easy money and liquor to look out for the sheriff.
Verse 2: Jake looked out for the sheriff -- and looked out not for me. Verse 3: The liquor
--

BECKY holds back on saying something, not wanting to tell either a lie or the truth about JAKE.

BECKY: Told you it was a short chapter. Bolling comes to plague me, or he sends someone over to plague me, whenever his liquor liquors him up cloud-high 'cause he thinks I'll patch the sheriff to his ass and land his ass in jail. Got no interest in his ass, the sheriff, jail, or any combination of the three. My Trinity sits elsewhere and elsewhere.

SUSAN: But did you ever talk to the sheriff?

BECKY: Genesis showed us how not-good it was to talk to snakes.

JOHN: Sounds like Grover Bolling and this sheriff need to be punished.

BECKY: Let it go.

BECKY jumps over the broom.

BECKY: Old life -- new life. You two have always got to live what you want -- and -- *(to JOHN)* -- I know what you want, so let me make that breakfast for two newly harnessed and celebrate what's just walked into my life.

SUSAN and JOHN exit.

BECKY: Jake -- I will do right by them. Right for them. I will keep the danger away from them. I will not let any lie darken their new light. I miss you so much.

BECKY picks up the broom and sings as the lights go to black God Loves His Children [WPAQ], one verse, one chorus, slower tempo, with back-up from the ACTORS. The song should finish several beats into the black.

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ACT I, SCENE 8

Three months later, BECKY's kitchen. BECKY is seated with a coffee pot and three cups; she is drinking coffee. JOHN and SUSAN enter as she talks to herself; she hears them enter.

BECKY: "In this wicked, sinful world / When trouble takes its shot / I grind these beans and pour 'em out / Heat water good and hot / I smell a smell like Africa / Black and strong and free / Long as I got coffee / then I know my Lord loves me."

BECKY holds her cup up like a chalice.

BECKY: Come join me.

JOHN: Becky, we have something to --

BECKY: Been doing my praying over coffee like I do every day --

JOHN: Becky --

BECKY: You done your praying?

SUSAN: Both soft and hard, Becky, just like you.

BECKY: *(to JOHN)* You?

JOHN: *(to SUSAN)* We said we would --

SUSAN: Not so fast --

BECKY: *(to JOHN)* You should try praying. Especially with coffee. You two all right?

JOHN: *(clearing throat)* Becky -- Becky -- Susan, it's time.

SUSAN: Think twice, speak once --

JOHN: I'm trying.

Looking at the two of them but to JOHN.

BECKY: I hear distance in your trying.

JOHN: Becky --

BECKY: I hear "away" -- I hear "leave."

JOHN: Mind's been planning --

BECKY: Your thick johnwick walls.

JOHN: We got to --

BECKY: With a roofbeam as high as --

JOHN: We got to get going, Becky.

BECKY: Over the roofbeam and gone -- gonna leave Eden and go to live in that box out there called the world!

JOHN: We got to be on our own.

BECKY: What does that mean?

SUSAN: John thinks --

BECKY: What does "your own" mean when your own fits this place -- fits me?

JOHN: We can't take any more from you. We got to get going.

BECKY: Already said that, johnwick. You get wired some wealth I didn't hear about? You been packing away God's manna over the last three months?

JOHN: You know exactly what we have.

BECKY: What you don't have, you mean, and you don't have any scratch for traveling. So, if it ain't bound for glory you're bound for, then bound for where? (to SUSAN) Where?

SUSAN: Becky, John feels --

BECKY: What does Susan feel?

SUSAN: Becky --

BECKY: What does Susan feel? (to JOHN) Not all good walls is hard walls.

BECKY strikes her left breast.

BECKY: This can protect, too.

SUSAN: I like it here --

JOHN: Susan --

SUSAN: I do!

JOHN: Susan --

BECKY: Don't you cut her off! Don't you dare be the "man" with her!

JOHN: I wasn't --

BECKY: Are you "man" enough to have what you need to make Susan safe? To make your wife safe?

JOHN: No.

BECKY: No you don't. No you don't! You are strong, John Morgan, and honest, and I'll give you that, but you will kill us all if you let your greed for walls --

JOHN: Ain't greed.

BECKY: Is greed! Is pride -- "his mind hardened in pride!" [Daniel, 5:20]

SUSAN: Becky -- easy --

BECKY: You can't let walls become your pride for being, or they'll box you up like a coffin!

SUSAN: Becky!

BECKY: Land and money will not salvation you or her or anybody!

SUSAN: Becky -- this is my husband.

BECKY: A good one. Which is why I'm busting his jaw.

JOHN: But --

BECKY cuts him off.

BECKY: Ah -- ah --

BECKY catches his eye.

JOHN: All right.

BECKY: Good -- now I can get off this pulpit -- it's uncomfortable up there. John, she likes it here. Why ain't what she likes your compass? Why are you so prided up about accepting an old lady's offer of luck? (to SUSAN) Think color's a problem?

BECKY grabs her own crotch.

BECKY: Thinking too much with this man-part --

JOHN: Becky -- Becky --

BECKY: -- makes just as many problems --

JOHN: Let go of yourself --

BECKY starts clomping around the kitchen like a "man."

JOHN: Becky --

SUSAN starts laughing.

BECKY: You shocked, last living male member of the johnwick tribe?

SUSAN mimics BECKY's crotch-grabbing gesture and laughs even more.

JOHN: Susan --

BECKY: Grover Bolling makes a brain-rotting liquor, but it can't match that stupid-making liquor called "manliness."

JOHN: Now, look --

BECKY stomps around again like a "man," and SUSAN joins her, and then even JOHN -- a little -- and they laugh until the tension goes.

BECKY: Look, my sweaty son of Adam, you got no place to go and no money to go there with, so let me list your "prospects" in this world: a tight roof and someone to pray for you. Does that about cover it? And -- if my mother-sense ain't worn out, you have a wife now two where one used to be.

SUSAN: Becky!

BECKY: John Morgan, you can't afford to be your kind of particular man at this particular moment.

SUSAN: How did you know?

JOHN: True?

SUSAN: Think so. I'm late --

JOHN: Why didn't you tell me?

SUSAN: Been late a couple months now.

JOHN: You're late telling me.

SUSAN: Threw up the other day.

BECKY: A quiet thunder in the wedding bed.

SUSAN: Is it true?

BECKY: What say your womb?

SUSAN takes JOHN's hand and places it on her abdomen.

SUSAN: What testimony?

JOHN: I feel the quick.

BECKY: Too early for that -- just your own heart. What testimony, John Morgan? She's waiting.

JOHN: We have a home here. And here.

BECKY: And you'll stay?

JOHN lays his ear against SUSAN's stomach.

JOHN: What testimony, little Morgan? We're waiting.

JOHN looks at SUSAN and BECKY, nods yes.

BECKY: We are all orphans no more. We have safety in the world.

JOHN: I'm going to need work.

BECKY: You gonna need work --

JOHN: Need all I can get -- get started now!

BECKY: I know where to get it for you.

JOHN: (*jokingly*) Leave me a little "manly" dignity, eh, Becky -- say "You know where I could find work."

BECKY walks away from them, obviously agitated.

JOHN: (*confused*) And where might that be, Aunt Becky?

BECKY: With Colonel Goforth.

JOHN: The drunkard up there?

BECKY: Now get yourself ready.

JOHN: You're friends with the richest white man around here -- the richest drunkard --

BECKY: -- with a drunkard's wife -- she married the bottle --

JOHN: I hate drunkards.

BECKY: Tuck your shirt in.

JOHN: It's in. And why would he do you a favor?

BECKY: (*indicating the shirt*) Deeper -- you got two to tuck in for now.

JOHN: Becky --

BECKY: Slick your hair.

JOHN: It's lined up. I can pull up my own pants! Becky, enough. You're hodging and dodging like a horsefly at a bullfrog wedding. Answer me my questions.

BECKY looks at SUSAN, who immediately understands.

SUSAN: John, just let this go. Oh, Becky.

JOHN: What?

SUSAN: Don't --

BECKY: It's okay, Susan --

SUSAN: Becky --

BECKY: A test, Susan --

JOHN: Don't what?

BECKY: Listen to me, Susan. This is a test --

SUSAN: No, Becky --

BECKY: Listen! -- you two -- a test of my heart, test of grace. That's why you were sent.

SUSAN: You don't need to do this --

BECKY: Susan, stop! Child, stop!

JOHN: *(to SUSAN)* Are you all right?

BECKY touches SUSAN's face.

BECKY: Oh, so much pain --

JOHN: I got to say I'm up the creek here --

BECKY: Susan, I'm old enough and scarred enough to know what better is best. Trust me?

SUSAN: Yes.

BECKY: This way, no one gets left behind.

SUSAN: Then give me your hand as we walk.

BECKY: John?

JOHN: Yeah, Becky?

BECKY: You're standing there looking at an angry woman.

JOHN: You?

BECKY: Anger hot enough to murder -- I am going to make you feel the knives of what I'm bringing you into and bringing myself back into.

JOHN: If it causes this much trouble --

BECKY: John, listen sharp!

SUSAN: Listen, John.

BECKY: You ever wonder how poor slaves like Jake and me ended up owning land, outright, not just “share-cropping” it, like my Jake used to say? You wouldn’t.

NOTE: In the following scene, the director, in essence, must choreograph a dance that blends the telling of BECKY’s story with movement (and music, if appropriate), and he or she is free to use any devices, props, movement with the other actors, etc. to expand visually and aurally BECKY’s story.

BECKY: (*indicating SUSAN*) She knows -- least she suspects. We was share-cropping it then, for the young Goforths. But it was -- still is -- all her land and all her money -- and when we first met the Goforths you coulda been stone blind and still seen how her owning made him burn with envy! A complete half a man, Jake called him, watching him do this little bantam [two syllables: “ban-tam”] rooster thing when we went to pay. Well, he drank himself into a debt he couldn’t get out of, and one day, he just shows up. Our dirt on his boots rather than the other way around.

GOFORTH: I have a proposition for you.

BECKY: Jake didn’t know the word -- but I did.

GOFORTH: You work this land hard.

BECKY: He wanted to sell it to us --

GOFORTH: For a modest price.

BECKY: We had a little money saved --

GOFORTH: How much?

BECKY: -- and that’s what he took.

GOFORTH: Should be enough.

BECKY: His debt put the deed in our hands.

GOFORTH: May it serve you well. (*to MRS. GOFORTH*) Management, my dear.

SUSAN: But not all, was it, Becky?

GOFORTH’s rape of BECKY only needs to be minimally suggested.

BECKY: He came back one day, when Jake was in the field.

GOFORTH: To see how things were going.

MRS. GOFORTH: His -- management.

GOFORTH: My duties.

BECKY: He put his face next to mine. The liquor -- Then a hand on a hand. I took away the hand. And then a hand there, and I moved, and then a hand again, moved again -- my mouth afraid to say what my heart screamed, just trying to make it nice -- "yes, Mr. Goforth" -- "no, Mr. Goforth" -- "don't say, Mr. Goforth" -- but like begging to a snake's dead eyes. He asked if I loved Jake. *(to GOFORTH)* I love my Jake.

GOFORTH: I envy you --

BECKY: Go back to your wife.

GOFORTH: No escape there -- escape here -- aren't you willing, Becky?

BECKY: He wanted to make me willing --

GOFORTH: Not even a little, Becky?

MRS. GOFORTH: He'd lost his willing with me.

BECKY: But I loved my Jake.

GOFORTH: So, unwilling -- that's no problem --

BECKY: I could only do nothing -- so my mind took me to Jake in the field --

MRS. GOFORTH moves closer to watch what GOFORTH does.

MRS. GOFORTH: His appetites --

GOFORTH: Becky, you needn't do a thing.

MRS. GOFORTH: -- were what drew me in.

GOFORTH: Love Jake -- won't matter to me.

MRS. GOFORTH: Then sickened me --

GOFORTH: I love your skin --

MRS. GOFORTH: -- when he had appetites for everything but me --

GOFORTH: Skin deep and deeper --

MRS. GOFORTH: -- and made me build an appetite for hatred.

GOFORTH: And deeper, and deeper.

GOFORTH finishes with BECKY. GOFORTH and MRS. GOFORTH step back but do not exit.

JOHN: *(softly)* Damn! *(to SUSAN, softly)* Grier.

BECKY: And each time --

JOHN: More than once?

SUSAN: "Power" means more than once, John.

BECKY: And then one day, home early, to surprise me -- Jake knew -- little ban-tam Goforth --

JOHN: Goddamn -- Becky --

BECKY: No pity, because I am tired of carrying the sickness of this alone! Jake's heart --

BECKY makes a gesture/sound of breaking.

BECKY: He believed he couldn't protect me, John --

JOHN: How'd Jake and Bolling --

BECKY: Bolling brought Goforth his whiskey --

JOHN: And so he asked Bolling to take on Jake? He felt guilty?

BECKY: We were starving --

JOHN: I thought I'd seen darkness in Grier --

BECKY: So Jake sat -- and he sat -- and then one day -- one day Jake decided: No more.

Manliness kicked in -- kicked him upright, kicked his tongue in gear -- and in mid-course Bolling shot him with less concern than he showed for his mash. I buried Jake myself -- never went to the sheriff.

SUSAN: No good going anyway.

BECKY: Except Bolling thinks I still will --

JOHN: And he comes to remind you.

BECKY: When his liquor flames his head. *(with a sour laugh)* "Grover Bolling!" But when Jake died, my words died, John. Broken heart broke my heart.

A hesitation. Then BECKY reaches into her bodice and pulls out a leather sack hung from a thong around her neck. From the sack she pulls out a scrap of blue blanket.

BECKY: *(to SUSAN)* There's more that even you can't imagine.

An ACTOR hands MRS. GOFORTH a blue shawl the color of the scrap of blanket. As she walks slowly into the scene, MRS. GOFORTH puts the shawl on her head like a hood.

BECKY: *(to them both)* Here's a bitter kicker: Jake died even as I had life inside me. Eight pounds at birth with Goforth skin, and nothing like that stays secret for long.

SUSAN: And Mrs. Goforth must have --

MRS. GOFORTH: She knew, all right.

BECKY: At night, wearing a shawl to hide her face --

MRS. GOFORTH: Sheriff, take it --

BECKY: I wished I'd fought harder --

MRS. GOFORTH starts to go, but BECKY grabs the shawl, stopping her.

BECKY: But it took nothing for the sheriff to take him out of my arms.

BECKY lets go and faces MRS. GOFORTH. She takes the blanket scrap and rubs it gently on MRS. GOFORTH's cheeks.

BECKY: This was all I had left -- I'd rub his face with it to keep him from crying.

In anger MRS. GOFORTH grabs BECKY's wrist and stops her, then twists away and exits. GOFORTH follows. BECKY puts the scrap back in the leather pouch.

BECKY: I don't know where he is -- I don't even know if he's alive. *(to JOHN)* He'd be about your age. So, there it is -- all the knives. *(to SUSAN)* I think you should go to your husband.

JOHN: And you would ask --

BECKY: Yes.

Both JOHN and SUSAN are stunned. BECKY looks at them, pities them.

BECKY: Because I don't need to love my own pain any more.

JOHN: You said "murder"!

BECKY: I did.

JOHN: But you're asking us to swallow --

BECKY gestures, and an ACTOR hands BECKY a broom.

BECKY: You jumped the broom, didn't you?

SUSAN: Yes ma'am.

BECKY throws the broom onto the ground. Then she rears back and wails, a sharp keening sound.

BECKY: I have made a show of my grieving --

BECKY pulls her hair and beats her breast.

BECKY: I have wailed to Jake in my loneliness --

BECKY boxes with the air.

BECKY: I have cursed with an endless tongue! I am grief made flesh! I am vengeance made to flash! And you know what all that loving of my pain has gotten me? Nothing.

BECKY lets silence hang for a moment.

BECKY: A whited sepulchre -- beautiful tomb full of bones -- that was me until you two walked out of the woods and jumped. Jumped me right into a choice. C'mon. C'mon!

BECKY steps over the broom, then gestures for JOHN and SUSAN to join her. Then BECKY, with a sly grin, actually jumps over the broom, and JOHN and SUSAN also jump.

BECKY: That's what changed it. Between old family and new. Between dying and being bright.

BECKY hands the broom back to an ACTOR. She then takes their hands, and they stand in a circle.

BECKY: We go together.

SUSAN: Then orphans no more.

JOHN: None one left behind.

BECKY: We have safety in this world.

JOHN puts on the headband, and BECKY, JOHN, and SUSAN prepare to go to the GOFORTHS.

* * * * *

ACT I, SCENE 9

As the GOFORTHS enter and take their places, BELL sings a work song, Sink 'Em Low [Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 15]. GOFORTH is drunk but controlled. MRS. GOFORTH embroiders the figure of a phoenix. BECKY, JOHN, and SUSAN enter; BECKY indicates to them to wait, then approaches the "porch." BELL stops

GOFORTH: If it's not our African Eve --

BECKY: Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH: Cleopatra on her barge. With servants.

BECKY: Mrs. Goforth.

GOFORTH: Will you offer nothing, dearest chuck?

MRS. GOFORTH looks up from her stitching, then just as studiously looks away without saying anything.

BECKY: It has been a hot day, Mrs. Goforth.

GOFORTH: A call for refreshment. Deacon Bell --

GOFORTH motions to BELL, who moves to bring GOFORTH a flask. MRS. GOFORTH, without any hesitation, jabs her needle into the back of BELL's thigh. When BELL stops in pain, she casually wipes the tip of the needle on her dress and continues stitching.

MRS. GOFORTH: (to BECKY) No need to explain a tar pit: it just is, a natural disaster.

GOFORTH pulls a second flask out of his pocket, opens it.

GOFORTH: In reserve. To my dearest partner of greatness -- the milk of human kindness to you all.

Everyone except MRS. GOFORTH watches GOFORTH take a long painful draught.

MRS. GOFORTH: My caretaker.

GOFORTH: I am suddenly very tired of you.

MRS. GOFORTH: Not a good attitude for a caretaker.

GOFORTH: Go, if you want. Now, Becky -- them?

BECKY: This is John and Susan Morgan.

GOFORTH: What relation to you that you bring them to me?

BECKY: Kin.

GOFORTH: To you?

BECKY: John's wife, Susan -- cousin.

GOFORTH: Wife?

BECKY: From the other side of the mountain.

GOFORTH: Wife? Come here. Come here!

GOFORTH indicates headband.

GOFORTH: The --

BECKY: Indian.

GOFORTH: I assume you own your own tongue.

JOHN: Like Becky says --

GOFORTH: That your story?

JOHN: It's the truth.

GOFORTH: Eh?

BECKY: (*whispering*) Sir.

GOFORTH: Heed her.

JOHN: Sir.

GOFORTH: Indian of any known species?

JOHN: Some of all: Tuscarora, Catawba, Cherokee.

GOFORTH: And some white, it seems.

JOHN: Hard to escape that tribe -- I hear. Sir.

GOFORTH: (*to BECKY*) Sure he's not your son? He's got your mouth. The truth here, Indian, is this: a drop of "other" turns your white to dark.

BECKY: All got some dark in their blood, Colonel.

MRS. GOFORTH stands.

MRS. GOFORTH: You won't be staying long.

GOFORTH: Becky has her business.

MRS. GOFORTH: And then you go.

GOFORTH: Eventually she will go.

MRS. GOFORTH: "Eventually" is not acceptable.

BECKY: It'll take no time, Mrs. Goforth.

MRS. GOFORTH: Make sure it takes no time at all.

MRS. GOFORTH exits.

GOFORTH: Management. (*distracted*) When she takes her leave like that, she takes everything.
(*focus*) Them, right?

BECKY: Just John -- he needs work.

GOFORTH: Not your dark kin.

BECKY: She stays with me, Colonel.

GOFORTH: Ever the protective angel.

BECKY: No need for temptation.

JOHN: I do need work.

GOFORTH: I got work. Would it be work an Indian would like?

JOHN: I work hard at all kinds of work.

GOFORTH: Then it should work out fine.

JOHN: It will work out fine -- sir.

GOFORTH: I have a soft spot for Becky -- family -- sort of. Right?

BECKY: You have your way with words, Colonel.

GOFORTH: My way, yes. Work this afternoon, John Morgan? Deacon Bell!

JOHN: Rest of the day'd be fine with me.

GOFORTH: Deacon Bell -- your new employee. My overseer -- my right hand at my right hand.
What falls from his mouth are my words.

BELL: Don't need more hands, Mr. Goforth.

GOFORTH: However, not those words. Deacon --

BELL: Least not hands like his.

GOFORTH: Deacon. Are you saying -- no, I cannot be hearing right --

GOFORTH holds up the flask.

GOFORTH: -- might it be this? --

GOFORTH shakes it next to his ear.

GOFORTH: -- nope, sounds fine to me -- then it's you, Deacon. Are you saying "no" to me?

BELL: Looking out for your best interests.

GOFORTH: And yours?

BELL: Mine is yours.

GOFORTH: Afraid of a little competition? John here looks like he could outwork you --

BELL: Afraid of no man.

GOFORTH: Then spare some Christian kindness for your own kind.

BELL: Them?

GOFORTH: Becky. And the Indian's Negro wife.

BELL: Like I said -- I know my interests.

GOFORTH: Then you'll be interested in doing what I say, and I say, a hand's a hand when it comes to work, Deacon, and we have work, that much I know. And I say I expect to see both of his employed fruitfully for the rest of the day.

GOFORTH waves the flask like a bell.

GOFORTH: Clear as a bell, Deacon Bell?

BELL: Yes sir.

GOFORTH: Clang, clang, Deacon Bell?

BELL: I still don't like --

GOFORTH: Deacon -- shut up.

BECKY: Thank you, Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH: Those that have should share -- as my sloe-eyed wife has reminded me.

JOHN: I am ready to start.

GOFORTH: I'll take that as a thank you.

JOHN: Thank you. Sir.

GOFORTH: Susan?

SUSAN: Thank you. Sir.

GOFORTH: I don't care what you call yourself. Just work hard for me, and things'll be safe enough for you.

GOFORTH goes to drink again, decides against it.

GOFORTH: Safe enough.

JOHN: Thank you.

GOFORTH exits.

BELL: What the fuck are you doing back here?

BECKY: Wait --

BELL: I'm not going to wait --

BECKY cocks her ear.

BECKY: I knew it -- the shit in the barn calls out for its brother. You better answer.

BELL: Why go to the barn?

BELL points to BECKY's head.

BELL: Enough shit in there to bury us all. Go take it back home.

BECKY: *(to SUSAN and JOHN)* Mr. Bell's family in slave times was birthed by the Goforths --

BELL: Shut up.

BECKY: He's got Goforth blood in his veins -- how well your kin treats you -- high, dry, and gelded.

BELL: You know why he gave you a job?

JOHN: We know.

BELL: You told them?

BECKY: Everything. You knew he was doing it -- you knew -- and you never offered comfort or protection -- spiteful and arrogant even when they stole the child -- *(to JOHN and SUSAN)* I figured he did nothing because he was so used to having it done to him. *(to BELL)* Only a handful of times with me, Mr. Bell -- he's been having at your tail for years.

BECKY makes a masturbating gesture.

BECKY: His "right-hand man"!

BELL: You just bought him digging shit for the day --

BELL leans in close to JOHN.

BELL: And, boy, the shit here runs on forever. I do have one regret, though.

BELL moves to stand very close to SUSAN.

BELL: I wish you were going to be around. Someone with your face and other -- favors -- would be very welcome here. *(a warning voice to JOHN)* Don't even think. *(to SUSAN)* I wouldn't listen to Becky too closely about "high and dry and gelded." What I have functions just fine. Thought you should know the truth.

BELL hovers over SUSAN just long enough to establish who's boss.

BELL: The barn -- five minutes. And get your back ready, tusca-tawba-erokee, because I am going to crack it.

BELL turns to BECKY.

BELL: It ain't good to see you. A snake'll have legs and walk man-like before it's ever good to see you again. *(to SUSAN)* Yeah, it is a shame. But, you know, things do change over time.

BELL stalks off. BECKY makes an "S" motion with her hand.

BECKY: Sssss -- slithering back! Put it away, John -- I know what you're feeling.

A moment to recoup, calm down, focus.

JOHN: What Goforth does to him --

BECKY: He's gonna practice on you. Every low dog needs a lower dog to kick.

JOHN: A complete half a man.

SUSAN: Two of 'em.

BECKY: The Siamesest of twins!

JOHN takes off the headband.

JOHN: I have a lot of work to do.

BECKY: Don't fuss about Bell -- the Colonel will be watching you.

JOHN: I don't know if that's good or bad.

BECKY: Just get through the day -- real family are waiting for you at home.

BECKY kisses him lightly, as does SUSAN.

SUSAN: I will be waiting for you.

JOHN watches them leave. Transition music comes up as lights go to black.

INTERMISSION

ACT II, SCENE 1

To call the audience back to their seats, the ACTORS sing Corn Bread and Butterbeans [WPAQ]. Finished, the lights go to black.

Lights up. BECKY, SUSAN, and JOHN are at BECKY's kitchen table in a tableau, holding coffee cups and smiling, as if they are in the middle of a funny conversation. BOLLING enters into his own, carrying a shotgun and quite clearly drunk.

BOLLING: Bring your black Satan's ass out here, Becky!

Gunshot -- the sound of broken glass. Lights come up. BECKY, JOHN, and SUSAN come to life. JOHN takes SUSAN roughly out of her chair and forces her to the floor. In doing so, SUSAN hits her abdomen hard against the corner of a piece of furniture as well as hitting the floor hard, face-first. She cries out in pain. BECKY dives to the floor.

JOHN: Who the hell is that?

Another shot, more broken glass.

BOLLING: It is time, time, time, Preacher, to be reminded again -- you're breeding new bastards, and we just can't have things go that way.

JOHN: Becky, down!

BECKY: Down as I can get.

BOLLING: Cmon, Becky -- I know you been talking me up to the sheriff.

BECKY: Bolling.

JOHN: Keep your goddamn head down!

SUSAN: (*obviously in pain*) I know where my head should go!

BOLLING: Doing my arithmetic, Becky --

SUSAN: Ahhhhhh!

BOLLING: Wouldn't mind adding a couple three niggers to the score.

BECKY: John --

BOLLING: Up to you, Becky -- tell me I'm wrong so I can sleep the peace of babes.

JOHN: And all you got --

BECKY: All I got is a broom.

BOLLING fires again. SUSAN grabs her stomach, but JOHN and BECKY do not see it.

BECKY: Try nothing! He'll go away.

JOHN: No, he won't. Stay here.

JOHN moves upstage; as he does so, he takes the broom from an ACTOR. BOLLING puts down the gun and begins to move in a contorted way, as if doing an exorcism: stylized lunatic movements. BOLLING is muttering to himself, occasionally bursting into words.

BOLLING: I am the angel of vengeance -- revenge -- aaahhhh!

As he does more movements, JOHN quickly circles behind him.

BOLLING: I am going to suck out the other demons in this house!

BOLLING picks up his gun to fire again.

BOLLING: Harlot -- bastards -- the end-times is drawing near -- drawing nearer --

JOHN, behind him, presses the broom-end against his neck.

JOHN: Put it down!

BOLLING: A voice. Hard voice.

JOHN: Down, now.

BOLLING: Very hard.

JOHN: Becky!

BECKY: We got problems here.

While JOHN deals with BOLLING, SUSAN collapses in pain and is helped by BECKY. JOHN sees none of this.

JOHN: Put the gun down. Now, now, now! Don't turn around!

BOLLING puts the gun down; JOHN picks it up and drops the broom.

BOLLING: Smart for a nigger.

JOHN: Go!

BOLLING: Gun.

JOHN: Go!

BOLLING: Gun.

JOHN: No! Straight -- out. Go!

BOLLING pivots, and for a moment they face each other. SUSAN cries out, then another scream from SUSAN. BOLLING moves toward JOHN, but JOHN pops the barrel-end against his forehead, knocking him back. JOHN then runs to the house, and one of the ACTORS takes the gun from JOHN. BOLLING, listening to the screams, rubs his forehead and smiles, then does a little exorcistic dance, takes the broom, and leaves.

SUSAN: Losing the baby, John!

JOHN: What can I do?

SUSAN: Losing the bay, losing the baby --

The lights focus immediately on the tableau of JOHN, BECKY, and SUSAN: the losing of the baby -- it is a sad mimicry of the Christ scene in the manger. The ACTORS gather in the darkness and sing Whole Heap of Little Horses [Southern Journey, Vol. 2, Track 25]. JOHN, BECKY, and SUSAN will hit a series of tableaux, as if slides were being shown, each held for only a few seconds, and each one a progression in the losing of the baby. The final tableau should coincide with the ending of the song.

* * * * *

When the song ends, the ACTORS will need to have the following items for SUSAN, BECKY, and JOHN.

SUSAN

- * A white dress, rough cotton
- * SUSAN's shawl
- * SUSAN's doll

BECKY

- * A white dress, rough cotton
- * Her Bible

JOHN

- * A white shirt, clean pants, shoes
- * The two gold rings in one of the pockets
- * The ruby necklace

They will also need a bowl of water and several rough towels.

ACTORS will take off items no longer being used.

* * * * *

JOHN: It's all right, honey, it's all right, it's all right --

SUSAN: This cannot happen --

BECKY: We have to take off your dress.

SUSAN: No!

JOHN: We have to take off the dress --

SUSAN begins pulling the dress closer to her body.

SUSAN: No!

BECKY: You need to be washed.

SUSAN: I will not lose --

BECKY: Child, he's lost.

JOHN: Susan --

BECKY: He's gone --

SUSAN: You will not take my child away!

BECKY: He is already away, Susan.

SUSAN violently pushes JOHN and BECKY away and falls to her knees breathing heavily -- she wants to no help from anyone. The ACTORS hand JOHN the bowl of water and BECKY the towels. After several beats, SUSAN stands.

SUSAN: What is left that's worth the living?

SUSAN roughly takes off her dress and uses the towels and water to wash her legs and pelvis; she does this very roughly. When she's done, she will put on the white dress of rough cotton.

SUSAN: If he's gone -- if he's already away -- then let's get him gone for good so that he doesn't have to put up with the murderers and drunkards and rapists and moneychangers and all the filth that's choking me! Goddamn! Goddamn it all! Let me wash him away so that he does not have to suffer for love. I am sick -- of love.

SUSAN dips her fingers in the water and flicks the drops at JOHN and BECKY.

SUSAN: Is this the water of life that I am supposed to welcome?

BECKY: Let the waters come down and cover your pain --

SUSAN: I'd rather drown like my father -- that would cover my pain.

SUSAN should be finished dressing. BECKY and JOHN can give the bowl and towels to the ACTORS.

SUSAN: Let the waters come now -- I've got no more waiting to do -- my blood is all wasted.

An ACTOR hands SUSAN's doll to JOHN, then puts SUSAN's shawl on SUSAN. JOHN hands the doll to SUSAN. SUSAN responds to these kindnesses. An ACTOR also hands JOHN the ruby pendant. JOHN holds up the ruby pendant. The ACTORS can retreat for the moment. JOHN and BECKY speak to SUSAN.

SUSAN: A drop of blood.

BECKY: *(in a voice straining)* Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.
[Proverbs, 31:11-31]

JOHN: It's my blood, Susan -- to you.

BECKY: The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.

JOHN: That child had mixed our bloods, Susan. This is for our grief.

SUSAN: It burns my hand.

JOHN: This is for our new mixed blood.

BECKY: Strength and honor are her clothing.

SUSAN: I can feel its heart.

JOHN: Can you?

SUSAN: Yes.

JOHN: Then we still have life in us.

BECKY: In her tongue is the law of kindness.

JOHN: We still have more life in us, Susan.

JOHN puts the pendant on SUSAN.

SUSAN: But I feel so dark, John.

BECKY: Her candle goeth not out by night.

SUSAN: Have we been punished?

JOHN: No one can punish love.

BECKY: *(to her God)* What rule of Yours have we broken?

JOHN: Everything is still left for us to do.

BECKY: What law have we disobeyed?

JOHN: Now live.

SUSAN: Live with me.

JOHN: Always with you.

BECKY: What would You have me do now?

JOHN and BECKY step into their own lights so that JOHN, SUSAN, and BECKY are now in separate pools. As they speak, one ACTOR will hand JOHN a change of clothes: a white shirt, clean pants, shoes. The two gold rings should be in one of the pockets. He hands the ACTOR the old clothes. The same will be done with BECKY, who will be given a white dress and the will.

JOHN: My heart is hard.

SUSAN: My heart is hollow.

BECKY: My God -- so hard.

JOHN: Each moment more hard.

BECKY: I still believe in Your wisdom.

JOHN: Bloody thoughts.

BECKY: But this pain goes beyond wisdom.

JOHN: Each moment bloodier.

SUSAN: Each moment more empty.

JOHN: The lie -- each moment deeper. I will not let it win.

BECKY: I still believe in Your plan.

JOHN: I will not let it win.

SUSAN: What can protect us, I will find it.

JOHN: Land, money -- I will earn it.

BECKY: But I see no plan for me here.

SUSAN: Never again being at the mercy.

JOHN: There is no mercy there, on either side.

SUSAN: The lie shades all our love.

BECKY: I do not disbelieve.

JOHN: Never again.

BECKY: But I have lost Your way.

The lights on JOHN and SUSAN fade, and they join the other ACTORS, leaving BECKY in her own light, holding her will.

BECKY: *(in a great voice)* Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why hast thou --

BECKY stops.

BECKY: Jake, my call has come. I have done what I can do -- and I am undone by what I can't do to keep my children safe. Praise Him for the giving of life -- but to everything turns a season, and my season has run. I have lost my way, and I am far from home.

BECKY indicates the will.

BECKY: So, with your blessing, Jake -- and Yours as well -- I am passing on the land to Susan and John. It's all the value I have left to give. Then -- wherever you are, Jake -- there am I going. Wherever you are, there is home.

BECKY, pained and resolute, begins stomping rhythmically, at first slowly, then with more force: her own dance of death.

BECKY: (*rhythmically*) There is a home that welcomes me -- into your hands -- into your hands -
-

BECKY continues chanting the phrase in a lower and lower voice until she is simply mouthing the phrase as the ACTORS beat in the same slow rhythm and the lights fade to black on BECKY. When dark, for several beats, the dancing/stomping and clapping go on, then abruptly stop. In the black, BECKY, as she did earlier, lets out a long keening wail that trails off to silence.

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ACT II, SCENE 2

BECKY's kitchen. SUSAN holds BOLLING's gun.

SUSAN: People will be here soon for their Sunday with Preacher. Not any more. No more dead magic in this house.

JOHN: Susan --

SUSAN: I will tell them to lose their faith and stop being idiots.

SUSAN indicates the gun.

SUSAN: You will teach me how to use this.

JOHN: Susan --

SUSAN: Now, I am going to cook us a meal. Then we go to Goforth's to settle the papers. A sign on that door will be good enough for everyone else.

JOHN: Susan, we can't --

SUSAN tosses the gun to JOHN, hard. Moments pass in tense silence.

SUSAN: If you feel like being useful, find the gold rings you filched from Grier. And leave the gun by the door -- from now on, always by the door.

JOHN stares at SUSAN as the lights shift to the GOFORTHS' house. JOHN and SUSAN walk into the light, JOHN with the gun.

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ACT II, SCENE 3

GOFORTH is quite drunk, though not dissolved.

GOFORTH: You said there was --

GOFORTH can't remember.

GOFORTH: Damn it! -- something else.

MRS. GOFORTH walks into the scene wearing a shawl.

MRS. GOFORTH: You're still here.

BELL: They got their paperwork, Mr. Goforth -- I can ride them out --

GOFORTH: Gold rings -- you said gold rings --

BELL: *(hoarse whisper to SUSAN)* Take your shit --

GOFORTH: Sell me gold rings --

BELL: They don't have --

GOFORTH: They said they had --

MRS. GOFORTH: Reducing yourself to a pawnbroker?

GOFORTH: What?

BELL: *(to SUSAN)* You are done here.

GOFORTH: If people would just be quiet --

MRS. GOFORTH: Or would a pawnbroker be a step up?

GOFORTH: No more than half price -- goddamn it!

BELL: They don't have --

MRS. GOFORTH: In either case, not in my house --

GOFORTH: No more than -- *(to MRS. GOFORTH)* Just be quiet --

MRS. GOFORTH: Take this out to the --

GOFORTH: Just be --

MRS. GOFORTH: -- hog trough --

GOFORTH: -- just shut --

MRS. GOFORTH: -- where it belongs.

GOFORTH: Just shut that goddamn mouth of yours!

The sudden viciousness of GOFORTH's words strikes everybody dumb, even GOFORTH, who seems stunned by his action. Everyone, that is, except MRS. GOFORTH.

MRS. GOFORTH: My, my, my.

MRS. GOFORTH goes to GOFORTH and sniffs him, several times.

MRS. GOFORTH: (to JOHN and SUSAN) Your paperwork -- did he do it properly?

JOHN: It's all done.

MRS. GOFORTH sniffs him one more time.

MRS. GOFORTH: That's good -- one more swig and you might not have been so lucky -- you know, like a glass of water tight to the brim -- one more drop and then -- a mess -- (to GOFORTH) Don't bother yourself, dear -- let me. The subject in play is gold rings.

SUSAN: I have two of them to sell.

BELL: If she does, she stole them.

GOFORTH: Come on, you can give them to me.

MRS. GOFORTH: (sweetly) Dear -- be still -- one drop and --

MRS. GOFORTH gives him an unaffectionate rub of the shoulders.

MRS. GOFORTH: Susan, is it?

SUSAN: Susan Morgan.

MRS. GOFORTH: Ma'am.

SUSAN: Ma'am.

MRS. GOFORTH: Good. And how does Susan Morgan come to own two gold rings?

JOHN: Maybe we should go.

MRS. GOFORTH: Now, that sounds like a distinctly guilty tone of voice.

SUSAN: We didn't steal them.

MRS. GOFORTH: That's good to know -- there's enough thievery in this house already. I have been told that he took your name -- was that a theft? Answer me.

JOHN: I asked for it.

SUSAN: I gave it.

MRS. GOFORTH: So I trust that means your marriage is secure?

SUSAN: You can trust that, Mrs. Goforth.

MRS. GOFORTH: You agree?

JOHN: We have one mind on that.

MRS. GOFORTH: One mind. One mind. *(to GOFORTH)* Did you hear that? *(to BELL)* Deacon. Deacon! When I say "Deacon" like that, it has "come here" written all over it.

BELL: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. GOFORTH: His pet but not mine. Take Mrs. Morgan's rings.

JOHN fishes the two rings out of his pocket and hands them to BELL. MRS. GOFORTH gestures for BELL to give her the rings. BELL hands the rings to MRS. GOFORTH, who weighs them in her palm, looking back and forth from them to SUSAN and JOHN. MRS. GOFORTH points to a spot a few steps in front of JOHN.

MRS. GOFORTH: Mrs. Morgan -- would stand right there?

SUSAN takes several steps.

MRS. GOFORTH: Are these real?

SUSAN: Nothing but.

GOFORTH: Ask her where she got --

MRS. GOFORTH: *(ignoring him)* What would you do with the money?

GOFORTH: Ask her where --

MRS. GOFORTH: Dear, that glass of yours is so close -- *(to SUSAN)* Answer me.

SUSAN: We'd use the money to earn our own way.

MRS. GOFORTH: Keep your marriage secure.

SUSAN goes to answer, but MRS. GOFORTH stops her.

MRS. GOFORTH: You've had several losses -- that's a statement, not a question. Loss can -- crack a marriage. Especially the loss of a child.

MRS. GOFORTH turns to GOFORTH, all innocence.

MRS. GOFORTH: Wouldn't you agree, my lamb? Though Mr. Goforth and I have never had children together, we can imagine -- true, my pet? -- how such a loss would hollow out one's heart. We can -- sympathize with that. Couldn't we? Money would hardly begin to fill it.

SUSAN: Money would never fill it. But life goes on.

MRS. GOFORTH holds up the rings, looks through, examines them.

MRS. GOFORTH: The brute habit of living. Where do they come from?

GOFORTH: (*weakly*) Doesn't he have a tongue?

JOHN: She can speak for me.

GOFORTH: It seems the women are taking over.

SUSAN: In the family. Passed down.

MRS. GOFORTH: From?

SUSAN: They belonged to my great-grandmother. She -- worked -- and lived -- not far from here.

MRS. GOFORTH: Not far from here, you say?

SUSAN: Yes, ma'am.

MRS. GOFORTH: Great-grandmother -- that would've been --

SUSAN: Before the war.

MRS. GOFORTH: Our uncivil war. Gifts to her, then.

SUSAN: The only way.

GOFORTH: Ah -- for his favorite --

MRS. GOFORTH: There is no need.

GOFORTH: His favorite, his favorite --

BELL: *(to SUSAN)* More brass than brains. Let me throw them out --

MRS. GOFORTH: Deacon, you may belly up to our table because he lets you think you're not who you are -- but I know who you are. Shut. Up. *(to SUSAN)* Why sell what cost your great-grandmother so much? I want an answer.

SUSAN: You think, ma'am, she thought those were beautiful? That love came attached? Ma'am. She knew better. My grandmother and mother knew better. I know better. You know better. Ma'am.

GOFORTH: We don't need the rings -- Deacon --

MRS. GOFORTH: *(to GOFORTH)* My pet -- *(to BELL)* You [stay] -- *(to SUSAN)* You'd think I would know better. Great-grandmother's dead --

SUSAN: And the giver of those rings --

MRS. GOFORTH: Becky's gone --

SUSAN: And so is my child --

MRS. GOFORTH: And so is -- the child --

SUSAN: And this is what I know: nothing's left but what's now. And "now" always takes money.

MRS. GOFORTH: Deacon, now you can move.

BELL comes.

MRS. GOFORTH: Much better.

MRS. GOFORTH hands the rings back to BELL. She indicates for him to hand them to GOFORTH.

MRS. GOFORTH: Pay them what they need.

GOFORTH: Full price?

MRS. GOFORTH: Is there any other?

GOFORTH: That's not good management --

MRS. GOFORTH: I cannot bear that word in your mouth.

GOFORTH: Deacon -- back into my office.

GOFORTH gets up but stumbles, and JOHN and BELL have to catch him.

GOFORTH: I just think my glass got that one drop too many --

JOHN hands the gun to SUSAN. As the three exit, GOFORTH turns.

GOFORTH: I didn't hear a "thank you."

GOFORTH waits, but no one says "Thank you."

GOFORTH: I said --

MRS. GOFORTH: Consider it said. Go do what you do best.

GOFORTH turns, his hand on BELL, and the three exit into the office.

SUSAN and MRS. GOFORTH catch each other's eye -- the gun does not go unnoticed -- but they do not let each other go. Until, of course, they have to. MRS. GOFORTH exits. SUSAN stands with the gun, now professionally balanced in the crook of her arm.

JOHN enters to find SUSAN, but who he sees is, and is not, the woman he met by the river. They exit.

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ACT II, SCENE 4

BOLLING is kneeling in his yard working on his still when, suddenly, the sound of a brisk breeze comes up out of nowhere. He looks around, sees nothing but sniffs, as if an animal testing the wind.

BOLLING: Who is it? Who is it gliding by?

SUSAN enters with the gun, walks right up behind BOLLING.

SUSAN: Grover Bolling.

GROVER turns on his knees and finds himself staring into the business end of the gun.

BOLLING: I know you.

SUSAN: Yes you do.

BOLLING: I know you because you got no eyes.

BOLLING goes to put his index finger and middle finger into the two holes of the barrel.

BOLLING: You got dead eyes.

SUSAN rams the gun forward, knocking BOLLING's hand back against his face. But BOLLING hardly reacts to the blow. He closes his eyes, licks the ends of his two fingers, and wipes them down his eyelids, leaving a smudge in the dirt on this face.

BOLLING: *(laughing)* Dead eyes for Susan Morgan --

Suddenly, BOLLING flashes out his hand to grab the barrel, but SUSAN, anticipating this, simply drops the barrel down and takes a large step backwards so that BOLLING ends up falling onto his hands and knees. She then deliberately swings the gunstock against the side of BOLLING's head, knocking him over. The blow hardly seems to faze him.

SUSAN: Never watch the snake's eyes.

BOLLING: Takes a snake to know a snake -- takes dead eyes to see --

But before BOLLING can finish his sentence, SUSAN straddles his back and drives the gunstock against the back of his skull with a short, sharp crack. BOLLING drops, stunned but still conscious.

SUSAN: No more will garbage like you waste my time. Remember this.

BOLLING: What?

SUSAN: Becky, my husband, me, and my child. And before that, Jake.

BOLLING gathers his wits for a moment, then smiles and does a bit of the exorcistic dance he did in front of BECKY's house.

BOLLING: That? "Get your black Satan's ass -- " That? And Jake? Swatting a fly. Heh. And now you think you got Grover Bolling in a barrel of fish.

SUSAN: Becky, my husband --

BOLLING: I heard your nigger names.

BOLLING, unsteady but with unmistakable purpose, strides toward SUSAN.

BOLLING: You think you are going to kill something already dead?

BOLLING moves even more quickly toward SUSAN, but instead of retreating, SUSAN moves toward him and to the side. Using the gun like a bayonet, she catches him under the chin, knocking him to the ground.

SUSAN: Said to the rocks, fall on us.

BOLLING gets up, this time in real pain, and moves forward. SUSAN drives the gunstock into his knee, upending him.

SUSAN: With honey out of the rock.

BOLLING, now in great pain, moves toward SUSAN again. She slams the gunstock against the small of his back, knocking him forward. BOLLING cries out in pain.

SUSAN: A joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

BOLLING scrambles to get up, but before he is fully erect, SUSAN rocks him in the solar plexus. BOLLING gags as he tries to catch his breath, and his labored breathing echoes in the stillness.

SUSAN: Upon this rock I will build.

The wind picks up, and without taking her eyes off BOLLING, SUSAN lets out a wail of anguish, just like BECKY's. The wind dies. SUSAN squats down so that BOLLING can see her but is out of his reach. She stares at him steadily.

BOLLING: What do you want?

SUSAN: I cannot hear you.

BOLLING: What do you want?

SUSAN: What can an ass-up piece of moonshiner trash give me?

BOLLING: I have nothing.

SUSAN: That's not how I see it when I look around me.

BOLLING crawls painfully onto his knees, then sits back on his heels. SUSAN stands. They stare at one another for several beats.

BOLLING: You can't have my property.

SUSAN: I will.

BOLLING: You can't take my land.

SUSAN: Not take it. Buy it.

An ACTOR throws a dollar coin on the stage.

BOLLING: A dollar.

SUSAN: You will sign it over to me and to my husband.

BOLLING: No I won't.

Before BOLLING can react, SUSAN moves behind him and jams the gun against the nape of his neck.

SUSAN: The idea is coming hard upon you, Grover Bolling, that I have nothing to lose -- my dead eyes have nothing to lose. I am more dead than even you. Sell the land to me or crack rock in the county yard forever under the sheriff's whip. Squealer's choice. Gavel down once -- twice --

Lights change. BOLLING exits, and JOHN and SUSAN move into another area, their "house."

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ACT II, SCENE 5

SUSAN: Going to talk to me ever again?

JOHN hesitates, then grabs the gun. For a moment SUSAN does not let go of it, though she does not resist JOHN, then she does let go of it, and JOHN hands it off to an ACTOR.

JOHN: Now maybe it's safe to talk to you.

SUSAN: You have something dangerous to say?

JOHN: Never felt the truth with you was dangerous -- is it now?

SUSAN: No.

JOHN: So then tell me the truth -- what was all that about?

SUSAN: It's simple -- so simple, even you said it once: if you ain't got color, you can always get money and land.

JOHN: Now we got money and land -- and a warrior in the house!

SUSAN: At least we have one.

JOHN: You telling me I'm weak? Can't measure up to the warrior? Well, I don't feel more protected. I feel like our walls just got a lot smaller. The box a lot tighter.

SUSAN is looking at him, but her attention is not completely on him.

JOHN: Where are you?

SUSAN: I'm right here in front of you.

JOHN: No, you're somewhere I'm not.

SUSAN: I couldn't be more here than I am!

JOHN: But not with me.

SUSAN: I am not dead to you.

JOHN advances on SUSAN, and for a moment -- a flicker -- there is intense fear and sadness in her hardened face.

JOHN: Yes you are -- stone all in your face -- Grier all in your face!

SUSAN: Then stay out of my face!

JOHN: What you did takes a mean, hard hunger. Like a white man.

SUSAN: Shut up.

JOHN: White man -- that gun --

SUSAN: Shut up!

JOHN: You love it more than me.

SUSAN: More dependable --

SUSAN bites off the word, but it is too late.

JOHN: I think I am going to go back to being an orphan.

JOHN moves into another area, which would be outside the house, where there are two rocking chairs moved into place by ACTORS. SUSAN hesitates, pulled toward following, pride keeping her back, then joins JOHN. JOHN gets up and goes to leave.

SUSAN: Tell me about your mother again.

JOHN: My mother?

SUSAN: Tell me again what made it so you had to come to the river.

JOHN: Come to the river.

SUSAN: Yes.

JOHN: Come to you.

SUSAN: Yes.

JOHN: Sorrow -- my mother died of sorrow, Susan, because she was lashed to my father who was nothing but thorns and nails --

SUSAN: Tell me again.

JOHN: -- a drunk, a moonshiner --

SUSAN: Just like Grover Bolling.

JOHN: Deserter. Child killer. Up on the mountain my mother bled out sorrow because she had no protection! Because I couldn't protect her. I know the shame that Becky's Jake felt. Her only freedom came when she died. I buried her in a dress of cheap yellow cloth.

SUSAN: Wrapped in cheap yellow.

JOHN: And my father --

SUSAN: Drunk in his own misery --

JOHN: Because he had no one left he could make to suffer --

SUSAN: He burned to death --

JOHN: When the house exploded from a kicked-over lantern. Or maybe it was just his dried-out life. I remember also telling you --

SUSAN: Telling me --

JOHN: That I'd make sure no fire would ever take us down. No one would die in cheap yellow. I have not done well.

SUSAN touches JOHN.

SUSAN: Your face. My face. How hard we have become.

JOHN touches SUSAN's face.

JOHN: Susan, we can't. Because that's just the thing that makes us just like them. The river --

SUSAN: If we are not hard --

JOHN: -- brought me to you.

SUSAN: -- we will die. I don't know any other way.

JOHN: Yes you do.

The air around them is suddenly filled with the sound of flowing water. JOHN puts a soft hand on SUSAN's head.

JOHN: Forget this for right now.

JOHN puts a hand on SUSAN's breast-bone. The hard mask of SUSAN's face breaks as she feels the pressure of JOHN's hand against her chest.

SUSAN then takes JOHN's hand and puts it on her stomach.

SUSAN: I want another.

JOHN: I want what you want.

SUSAN: River flows --

JOHN: We go.

SUSAN: River has always been good to us.

JOHN: River flows, we take it.

JOHN tries to sing but has a croaky voice. The verses are from Fly Around My Blue-Eyed Girl [Southern Journey, Vol. 2, Track 17]. JOHN does not need to sing -- he can recite the lyrics.

JOHN: "Fly around my blue-eyed girl -- "

SUSAN: Ain't got blue eyes!

JOHN: "Fly around my daisy -- "

SUSAN: *(playfully whining)* Don't sing --

JOHN: "Fly around my blue-eyed girl / You almost run me crazy. / I wish I have some pretty little gal / To learn my secrets true..." I do. I do. I do.

SUSAN: Good words.

SUSAN growls playfully; JOHN growls back; they laugh.

SUSAN: What, johnwick?

JOHN: You meet a person, you cross the river, you sit on their porch with the smell of blackberries in the air and you talk out the loneliness.

SUSAN: John Wicks, white man --

TOGETHER: Coming off the “moun-tan.”

SUSAN: This box is so hard.

JOHN: But we are not alone.

ACTORS move the two rocking chairs to center stage. JOHN and SUSAN are handed clothing to indicate a change in time and a rise in their prosperity. As the ACTORS sing Borrowed Land WPAQ, JOHN and SUSAN strike two or three poses as if they are having a picture taken. There is a brief strobe burst to indicate each photo taken. If possible, a placard/slide that says, “John and Susan Morgan, 1914.” When finished, they sit on their “porch.”

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ACT II, SCENE 6: SEVEN YEARS LATER

As song ends, DEACON BELL arrives. SUSAN is embroidering.

JOHN: Well, if it's not the right hand of the master going forth into the world.

SUSAN: (*surprised*) Deacon Bell.

BELL is silent, sullen.

JOHN: I assume you came here for a reason.

BELL: I find no pleasure having to come to the Morgan “plantation.”

JOHN: But you have to come, and for what?

BELL: I don't know why he would want to --

JOHN: Who, Deacon?

BELL: Mr. Goforth.

JOHN: He wants to what?

BELL: He wants to see you.

JOHN: He sent you to me.

BELL: Not like I had a choice.

JOHN: Right now?

BELL: He said “now” -- if it would be convenient.

JOHN: Convenient -- he said "convenient"?

BELL: He said "convenient."

JOHN: Did he say about what?

BELL: He didn't say "what" to me.

JOHN: He wants to talk to me about something that he won't talk to you about?

BELL: It's not like we're friends.

JOHN: Though you've known him for years. And he trusts you -- at the right hand.

BELL: Are you coming?

JOHN: What's it been like in the Goforth household?

BELL: I don't tell tales.

JOHN: Peaceful, as always?

SUSAN: John, stop picking at the man.

JOHN: I'm just trying to see the knives of the invitation. *(to BELL)* Any landmines I should be wary of?

BELL: Not for me to say.

JOHN: That's right -- you and he ain't friends.

BELL: And neither are we. Are you coming?

JOHN: Tell Mr. Goforth that I will be there in an hour -- after I've spent a little time on my porch with my wife and two children -- they're playing inside over there -- and the new house rising in the near distance. That would be "convenient."

BELL: And if he ain't there when you get there?

JOHN: It's a nice drive -- no time wasted.

BELL: An hour?

JOHN: Starting from the moment you leave. Go forth!

BELL starts to exit, then turns to speak.

BELL: Even brass balls melt if the fire gets high enough.

JOHN: That what happen to you? The hour begins when you leave.

BELL exits.

JOHN: Don't --

SUSAN: Wouldn't think of it.

JOHN: Don't start.

SUSAN: On what -- your manners -- or the gleam in your eye?

JOHN: It's probably nothing.

SUSAN: "Subtle" is not you. You have your ear to every ground around here --

JOHN: I heard at the bank the other day.

SUSAN: You tell me!

JOHN: I heard his bank notes are due -- "liquidated" -- and she doesn't know.

SUSAN: He drank her life away.

JOHN: Heard say.

SUSAN: I feel for her.

JOHN: And I feel -- I feel possibilities --

SUSAN sniffs deeply.

SUSAN: I think --

JOHN: What?

SUSAN sniffs again.

SUSAN: Yep --

JOHN: What?

SUSAN: I think I smell "white man" --

JOHN: Susan -- let us think about this for a moment --

SUSAN: Thinking this way does not make me feel safe.

JOHN: There's no danger here, not any more.

SUSAN: You're as simple as the day I met you.

JOHN: If I'm so simple, then why would Goforth want to see me? Tusca-tawba-erokee me? Because we're not boxed in anymore. We have made our land way, our money way, our "new house" way, "new car" way, out! The only color Goforth sees in me is green!

SUSAN puts down her embroidery and fixes JOHN with a wry look.

JOHN: That's not what I meant.

SUSAN: Sometimes I think you are my fourth child.

JOHN: I am going to go there.

SUSAN: I know you are.

JOHN: No loss in talking to the man.

SUSAN: Never said not to.

JOHN: Then what?

SUSAN: Just don't be completely green.

JOHN: I hate it when you're sarcastic.

SUSAN: Only use it when I'm scared.

JOHN and SUSAN share a long look, then JOHN smiles broadly.

JOHN: I'm reaching past myself, aren't I? Again?

JOHN sniffs.

Yep -- I'm all over the air.

SUSAN: Seems to run in this family. Just reach past yourself and hold me so that I can confess something, johnwick --

JOHN embraces her.

SUSAN: I do forget, sometimes -- I do. I want to.

JOHN: Me, too.

SUSAN lets him go.

SUSAN: You should get ready to go.

JOHN: I am already ready.

SUSAN: Then --

JOHN takes the ruby and kisses it, exits. BELL and ACTORS set up GOFORTH's "house."

* * * * *

ACT II, SCENE 7

BOLLING appears to BELL, in much decline.

BELL: I've heard that plagues come back every seven years.

BOLLING: You wanted to see me.

BELL: You have been talking trash about John Morgan.

BOLLING: I have been hearing things.

BELL: What's the dung beetle been hearing that would bring him back to the scene of his finest hour?

BOLLING: I got to get something for what I know.

BELL: That means nothing for nothing because you probably know nothing.

BOLLING: I know something!

BELL: He's on his little high horse!

BOLLING: John Morgan? Naw. John Wicks. White man. That much I know.

BELL: As certain as you stink?

BOLLING nods yes.

BELL: What do you want?

BOLLING: I need a gun. Hurt them. Kill her.

BELL: So simple with you. Not her.

BOLLING: She stole --

BELL: Not her! You want blood-lust, take him.

BOLLING: I need a gun.

BELL: You need to leave so I can ponder this.

BOLLING: I'll go right to Goforth --

BELL plants a big hand in the middle of BOLLING's chest.

BELL: There is no way to God but through me. Besides, I have a gun. While you do not.

BELL sniffs deeply.

BELL: And it wouldn't be hard to find you to use it.

BELL gives him several rough pats with his hand.

BELL: All things come to he who waits. Even to scum like you. You'll get your taste.

With a final shove, BELL pushes BOLLING away. BOLLING exits, to become GOFORTH.

BELL: Not her. Maybe it's time to think more kindly about "my own kind."

JOHN appears in the GOFORTH house -- BELL notices.

BELL: Clang, clang, goes Deacon Bell -- *(looking at JOHN)* He clangs for thee.

GOFORTH enters, now with a cane, and throughout the scene he is racked by a bloody cough, a very sick man.

GOFORTH: *(taps his watch)* Within the hour -- Deacon, you have business in the barn.

BELL: All the tasks have been assigned --

GOFORTH: I just know something needs to be attended to. I can just feel it, Deacon. You had better check.

BELL: If you need me --

GOFORTH: I have always needed you, Deacon. But right now -- no. Go.

BELL exits but circles back so that he can eavesdrop.

GOFORTH: A remarkable man, you are, John. Remarkable. I've never known any one colored to be so -- well, you are the exception that breaks the rule.

JOHN does not respond.

GOFORTH: Flattery wasted, I see. All right -- to the hunt. The bank has given me two weeks to pay off money I needed for -- If I default -- well, you know how this works -- We have done business before -- and I have never questioned your -- ways --

JOHN: Ways.

GOFORTH: Becky's land -- Grover Bolling -- who I hear is back -- I'd be careful --

JOHN: I never did dishonest.

GOFORTH: Let's say a good -- eye for business.

JOHN: Let's say.

GOFORTH: So I'm offering something for that good eye to look at. I want to sell you this land. Straightforward transaction between me and you.

JOHN: I thought the land belonged --

GOFORTH: Fact is, I've had power of attorney for years --

JOHN: Does she know?

GOFORTH: The offer is not without -- conditions.

JOHN: I guess not.

GOFORTH: One of which is secrecy. Absolute and total. You will pay off my mortgage; I will deed the land to you. But Mrs. Goforth and I will continue to manage the land until our deaths. We have no heirs -- no surprises in the closet. When we die, the land is yours. But nothing -- nothing! -- makes its way to Mrs. Goforth's ears. Only you and I and the bank will know -- the unholy trinity --

JOHN: So I can't take possession until you both die -- even with the deed in hand?

GOFORTH: Mrs. Goforth should be allowed to go forth -- (ruefully) -- ha, ha, ha! -- secure that the land she walks on, until she's buried beneath it, is hers.

JOHN: That's the condition.

GOFORTH: You might not want to refuse.

JOHN: I can't do that --

GOFORTH: Thought you might say "can't" -- You know the land is good -- you've worked it.

JOHN: I know its qualities, but --

GOFORTH: But still not tempted --

JOHN: Tempted -- well --

GOFORTH: Tempted, yes.

JOHN: But disadvantage myself, my family -- I can't --

GOFORTH: Before you deny me the third time, John -- before we end this pleasant little exchange on a sad but necessary note -- we will have a brief -- discussion -- of your prospects.

JOHN: My prospects.

GOFORTH: Your prospects. And here they are, very briefly -- in fact, in a single word. Do you know what "miscegenation" means?

JOHN stands there, stunned.

GOFORTH: Let me state the brief. In this glorious state of North Carolina, there is a law that says -- in its pith -- that any white person married to a black person is a criminal. Convicted, that person can be sent to jail. Property seized. Reputation consumed. It's a foolish law, I think -- foolish. Conjoin any way you want to. But what does what I think matter? Law is law, fact is fact -- I'm pledged to both. A really smart man does not want to run to the foul side of this law. Wouldn't you agree? I mean, if you found yourself in a situation like that -- what could you do?

A cough racks GOFORTH.

GOFORTH: The bank needs an answer from me soon. In fact, I told them I'd have one today. Do I have your yes?

JOHN: I have done nothing to you.

GOFORTH: I have no hard feelings against you -- I have no feelings at all, hard or soft, according to Mrs. Goforth -- could be true. Though I have admired you -- from afar -- for the way you've made your way along the outside. But, in the end, you're just a -- crutch - - for this old man who's got "the mark of cane" on him. Nothing personal at all -- just necessity. Some have a great talent to kill off what gives them life, what gives other people life, too. I am thus talented. Can you can tell me, John -- not that this will change your inevitable "yes" -- but can you can tell me why some people end up being such beasts? Can you tell me that secret, John-tusca-tawba-erokee? John?

JOHN is frozen, as if GOFORTH is a cobra and JOHN watches it ooze toward him, unable to escape.

GOFORTH: John -- an answer for the sake of conversation? No? Well, son, we should go --

JOHN: Son.

GOFORTH: What?

JOHN: You called me "son."

GOFORTH: Purely conversational. Let's go.

JOHN: You wanted an answer.

GOFORTH: Not any more -- let's go --

JOHN: Why I'm not a killer like the killer you are.

GOFORTH: I'm no longer interested in --

JOHN: Because I am Rebecca Caldwell's son. That's why. I am Becky's only son.

GOFORTH sits.

JOHN: You figure it in age and years, with your head for numbers.

GOFORTH: You. Can't --

JOHN: Skin color --

GOFORTH: We -- got rid -- you can't --

JOHN: Did you see it done?

GOFORTH: No -- Mrs. Goforth --

JOHN: Why do you think we came to Becky?

GOFORTH: We got rid [of] --

JOHN: Make more life out of life --

GOFORTH: What?

JOHN: That's what Becky taught me --

GOFORTH: Talking circles --

JOHN: Not be a slave like you -- son of an owner of slaves, slave to your whiskey, slave to sucking everybody dry.

GOFORTH: Circles and --

JOHN: I may be colored, but I am a good son.

GOFORTH: Circles.

JOHN: Are you a good son to anything, white as you are? A good father to anything, powerful as you are?

GOFORTH: You're trying to --

JOHN: Look into your heart --

GOFORTH: Just circles! Just confusion! Saying anything is possible to a dying man.

JOHN: "Son" --

GOFORTH: It won't work -- it won't! -- you won't make it work! I will not let you go. I cannot let you go, even if it is true-- even if you are --

JOHN: Even if?

GOFORTH: Even if! Even if! -- Are you going to give me my "yes," or am I going to have to drill you --

JOHN: Do that, wouldn't you?

GOFORTH: Yes!

JOHN: And never think twice.

GOFORTH: Not even once!

JOHN: Like with Rebecca --

GOFORTH: This is done! You are done! No! No! No!

JOHN slowly backs away from GOFORTH to downstage.

GOFORTH: *(speaking mostly to himself)* So -- so -- to prosperity and long life -- not too long, though, eh? The bank has already drawn up the papers -- It is not that hard -- We will go to the bank now. It is not that hard to kill off -- You can understand why haste is -- It is not that hard to kill off what sustains you! Some of us have done it every day of our lives.

JOHN, downstage, is joined by SUSAN. Lights slowly fade on GOFORTH as JOHN speaks.

JOHN: Susan, I couldn't do anything. If I didn't accept, he'd tell the sheriff. But the deed is worthless -- Mrs. Goforth will never accept it. She'll fight it in court. She'll get it back. If he knew, then she knew -- all she has to do is threaten, and I'll tear up the deed in the middle of Main Street while dancing a jig. Susan, I reached too high -- I reached too high. This box, this box, this box!

BELL enters.

BELL: Not bad being here this time --

JOHN: What do you want?

BELL: -- because I get to tell you such good bad news: Goforth has gone to meet whatever made him.

SUSAN: That can't be true!

BELL: Dead as the dust on his office carpet, where they found him -- *(to JOHN)* -- actually, not long after the two of you left. 'Tis a great shame when the mighty fall --

JOHN: Mrs. Goforth --

BELL: Goforth's body's already to the hospital morgue. Which means Mrs. Goforth has plenty of time on her hands right now. And speaking of hands -- is that some blood I see on yours? *(laughs)* If I were you? Dig myself a storm cellar and not come up till God separates the goats from the sheep. *(to SUSAN)* You, on the other hand -- you could be saved. A shame to waste --

BELL stops, looking at the stunned pair.

BELL: Yassuh!

JOHN and SUSAN exit as BOLLING enters and is joined by BELL.

BELL: You ready?

BOLLING: Gonna tell her on my own. Don't need you --

Like a snake, BELL grabs BOLLING by the throat.

BELL: In case your rusted brain forgot, you came to me -- yes?

BOLLING: There was a time --

BELL: Time. Moves. On. Dead man. This nigger is your only ticket in. Are. You. Ready?

BOLLING nods "yes." BELL does not release him right away but squeezes even harder, to make a point. Then he lets BOLLING go. BOLLING massages his neck.

BOLLING: Just get me what I said I need, like you said you could.

BELL: We'll see which gods answer which prayers today. Goats from the sheep, yassuh!

MRS. GOFORTH, BELL, and JOHN are at GOFORTH's. BOLLING stands off to the side, and the scenes will alternate between JOHN and BOLLING.

MRS. GOFORTH: You will never own this land.

JOHN: Your husband --

MRS. GOFORTH: Don't foul his name in your mouth!

JOHN: Your husband deeded the property to me for paying off his mortgage. He had a copy of the transaction --

MRS. GOFORTH: Not found in his papers because he would never do that! This land is mine, and no nigger will ever own it. No greedy nigger --

JOHN: I am not a nigger.

MRS. GOFORTH: You've never been anything but a nigger, and no nigger will ever own a foot of this soil!

JOHN: Then we're going to court.

MRS. GOFORTH: Just "hell" by a different name -- I am used to that.

JOHN moves away from the scene but is still on stage.

MRS. GOFORTH: I never thought I'd have to see you again.

BOLLING: I have something to sell.

BELL: He does.

MRS. GOFORTH: I don't need any rat poison. Get him out.

BOLLING: "John Morgan" is not his real name --

MRS. GOFORTH look up sharply, suddenly attentive.

BOLLING: What do I know about John Morgan, not-his-real-name?

MRS. GOFORTH: What do you know?

BOLLING: For a price.

MRS. GOFORTH: I have no money.

BOLLING: I don't want money.

BELL nods to BOLLING, who points to a rifle on the wall, which is the gun held up by an ACTOR.

BOLLING: That. John Morgan stole mine.

MRS. GOFORTH: For killing another nigger sharecropper?

BELL: Mrs. Goforth?

MRS. GOFORTH: What?!

BELL: He may have some -- other need for it. (*hissing, to BOLLING*) Quickly!

BOLLING: On the mountain, I heard tell of a man named John Wicks who killed his mother and father -- burned 'em up. He ran away -- a white boy, not an Indian -- and they say he ran with a nigger woman.

MRS. GOFORTH looks steadily at BOLLING.

BELL: Make the story work out true for you.

MRS. GOFORTH: Would you say John Morgan killed you?

BOLLING: Yes.

MRS. GOFORTH: Like he did my beloved husband. How should people protect their honor?

BELL: (*sotto voce*) Exactly.

MRS. GOFORTH: I have never needed that gun.

BELL gets the gun. The ACTOR remains.

BOLLING: And bullets.

The ACTOR hands BELL a box of bullets. He stands with the gun and box. A moment as the three of them look at each other, then BOLLING takes the items and leaves. BELL and MRS. GOFORTH exchange looks.

MRS. GOFORTH: To think -- life has raised me high enough to be a eunuch and a liar like you.

BELL: Don't it feel just grand? Clang-clang, Mrs. Goforth.

Scene shifts to JOHN and MRS. GOFORTH, with BELL in the background.

MRS. GOFORTH: So you killed your mother and father.

JOHN: What?

MRS. GOFORTH: Burned them to death.

JOHN: Who told you that --

MRS. GOFORTH: You take me to court, I'll not only have you for marrying outside your race and killing my husband, I will have you up as the murderer of your family! The heavens will fall on you hard! Crush you!

MRS. GOFORTH exits.

BELL: Is the fire high enough now? Can you feel that brass melting away? She will make a fine widow, don't you worry.

BELL exits. SUSAN enters.

JOHN: I don't know what else to do!

SUSAN: We can't go to court, John!

JOHN: Gotta fight --

SUSAN: "Court" is the sheriff on us again!

JOHN: I don't know what else to do!

SUSAN: We will lose in court, John.

JOHN: Have to fight this --

SUSAN: John, John --

JOHN: It's mine!

SUSAN: We leave, John --

JOHN: Have to fight!

SUSAN: We leave like we always said we'd do.

Suddenly, JOHN falls to his knees, breathing heavily.

JOHN: Susan, I can't breathe!

SUSAN: We leave now.

JOHN: I can't breathe!

SUSAN tries to calm him, but it appears that JOHN is strangling, laboring heavily to breathe.

SUSAN: We leave now -- take what money we have and leave the rest behind -- listen -- it's only trash, John, just stuff rusting -- We'll take the children and go north -- easy, easy --

like we always said we'd do -- soft, soft -- start fresh, like we always wanted -- slowly, John, slowly -- we don't have to fight anymore --

BOLLING enters, with the shotgun.

BOLLING: I will render vengeance to mine enemies. [Deut. 32:41] Like the ring of that. I'm going to cut your eyes out.

JOHN: You are supposed to be gone.

SUSAN: Let's leave!

BOLLING: *(levels the gun)* Nuh-uh. Mine enemies.

JOHN: You didn't get cheated -- Susan, get out of here!

BOLLING: I'm dead. Tooth for tooth.

JOHN: Susan!

BOLLING: Dead eye for a dead eye.

BOLLING fires. The ACTORS lift JOHN straight up and then let him fall back into their arms. The group pivots and tilts JOHN so that he is "raked" for the audience to see, and then slowly lowers him so that his head rests on SUSAN's lap, who during this has knelt on the stage. They cover JOHN and SUSAN.

* * * * *

EPILOGUE

A single light comes up on SUSAN, seated, wearing her shawl.

SUSAN: The lie won. Color killed. The walls -- not thick enough. High enough. Tight enough. White enough. And John Morgan's body lies a-moldering in the grave. The ironies -- Thinking she was doing right, she'd set up the man to come back and kill John. That guilt nearly crushed her. Nearly. And it left her standing. She went after Mrs. Goforth. She won. She let Mrs. Goforth stay -- and not out of kindness. She let her die shrouded by her misery. As Susan was shrouded in her own. They were sisters in sadness -- no color line in that. And Mrs. Goforth died darker than she had ever lived.

Two ACTORS bring out an old ledger book and hand it ceremoniously to SUSAN. SUSAN opens the book, reads briefly, and then speaks.

SUSAN: The river ran through her from the first page. Rivers had always been good to them.

GOFORTH: "This is the journal of Susan Morgan."

SUSAN: She told herself the story over, then over again, to make sure it had not been a dream.
The title first.

MRS. GOFORTH: "A Question of Color."

SUSAN: And a dedication.

BELL: "Dedicated to John Morgan. 'And he showed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as a crystal.'"

SUSAN: And prologue.

BECKY: "May all of my following generations draw the simple lesson from these pages -- "

SUSAN: "That the question of color -- "

Out of the darkness comes JOHN with the bucket of blackberries. SUSAN rises from the chair, clutching the journal. They simply hold hands.

JOHN: " -- should always be faced down with outrage and love, love and outrage, until it is answered -- answered completely -- "

SUSAN: " -- with the simple truth -- the simplest truth, really -- "

JOHN: " -- the simple truth of our common humanity."

SUSAN: "Amen."

JOHN: You meet a person, you cross the river, you sit on the porch with the smell of blackberries in the air and you talk out the loneliness.

JOHN feeds a blackberry to SUSAN, and then one to himself.

JOHN: Amen.

SUSAN: Amen.

They face the audience holding hands as the lights fade to black and the rest of the cast sing I'm On My Journey Home [Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 22].

LYRICS FOR SONGS

The songs are taken primarily from Alan Lomax's recordings, titled Southern Journey. Several songs are also taken from the CD WPAQ: The Voice of the Blue Ridge Mountains. All songs are in the public domain. They will be arranged, with sheet music, for the actors.

* * * * *

REQUIRED

ACT I

Northport Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 11

Jesus my all to heav'n has gone. Glory! Hallelujah!
He whom I fix my hopes upon! Glory! Hallelujah!
I want a seat in paradise. Glory! Hallelujah!
I love that union never dies. Glory! Hallelujah!
I want a seat in paradise. Glory! Hallelujah!
I love that union that never dies. Glory! Hallelujah!

* * * * *

Sheep, Sheep, Don't'cha Know The Road? Southern Journey, Vol. 6, Track 1

Sheep, sheep, don'tcha you know the road
Yes, my Lord, I know the road
(2x)
Don'tcha you know the road
by the playin' of the song?
Yes, my Lord, I know the road.
Don'tcha know the road
by the singin' of the song?
Yes, my Lord, I know the road.

* * * * *

God Loves His Children WPAQ -- One verse, one refrain, slower tempo, with back-up from the
ACTORS: I was a stranger, brother, full of sin

Didn't even have a love of God within
But now I've found the man I'm glad to say
"I love my Savior each and every day"
Refrain:
God loves his children, brother, yes, I know
He will protect you anywhere you go
Just call upon him, he will hear your prayers
God will protect you, brother, anywhere

* * * * *

Sink 'Em Low Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 15

If you want to
Please your captain,

Sink 'em low, boys,
Raise 'em high,
Sink 'em low, boys,
Sink 'em low,
Sink 'em low,
Raise 'em high.
I ask the judge
What might be fine, boys,
He said, "If I don't hang you,
I'll give you ninety-nine.
I'll give you ninety-nine."
He said, "If I don't hang you,
I'll give you ninety-nine."

* * * * *

ACT II

Corn Bread and Butterbeans WPAQ

Refrain:

Cornbread and butter beans and you across the table
Eatin' beans and making love as long as I am able
Hoeing corn and cotton, too, and when the day is over
Ride mule, a crazy fool, and love again all over.

Goodbye, don't cry, I'm going to Louisiana
Buy a god and a big fat hog and marry Susy Anna
Sing-song, ding-dong, gonna take a trip to China
Cornbread and butter beans and dirty Carolina

Refrain

Wearing shoes and drinkin' booze is goin' against the Bible
A necktie will make you die and cause you lots of trouble
Street cars and whiskey bars and kissing pretty women
Old man that's the end of a terrible beginning

Refrain

Can't read and don't care and education's awful
Raisin' heck and writings that ought to be unlawful
Silk hose and pretty clothes are just a waste of money
I can see how glad you'll be to marry me, my honey

Refrain

* * * * *

Whole Heap A Little Horses Southern Journey, Vol. 2, Track 25

Go to sleep, go to sleep

Go to sleep, little baby
When you wake, get some cake,
And ride them pretty little horses.
Black and a bay, sorrel and a gray,
Whole heap a' little horses.
Black and a bay, sorrel and a gray,
Whole leap a' little horses.
Little old horse, little old cow,
Ambling around the old hay mound.
Little old horse, he took a chew,
"Darned if I don't," said the old cow too.
Whispered: Sshhh.

* * * * *

Borrowed Land WPAQ

I'm living, living down here
I'm living down here on borrowed land
I'm living down here on borrowed land
I'm living down here on borrowed land
You gonna wait my mother
You gonna wait my father
You gonna wait my Lord
Refrain:
We gonna wait on, wait on, wait on the rising son
I'm praying down here on borrowed land
I'm praying down here on borrowed land
I'm praying down here on borrowed land
You gonna wait my leader
You gonna wait my tenant
You gonna wait my Lord
Refrain:
We gonna wait on, wait on, wait on the rising son
You're dying down here on borrowed land
You're dying down here on borrowed land
You're dying down here on borrowed land
You gonna wait my sister
You gonna wait my brother
You gonna wait oh my Lord
Refrain:
We gonna wait on, wait on, wait on the rising son

* * * * *

I'm On My Journey Home Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 22

Oh who will come and go with me?
I am on my journey home;
I'm on my journey home.
O come and go with me,
O come and go with me,
O come and go with me,
For I'm on my journey home.

OTHER SONGS THAT MIGHT BE USED

Feed Me Jesus WPAQ

Lots of people living wrong and claim they're living right
There's lot of people doing wrong from morning until night
You're right or wrong, you're good or bad, there's no halfway between
But if you have the love of god, you know just what I mean.

* * * * *

Corn Dodgers Southern Journey, Vol. 6, Track 9

Well, the doctor he's a dodger
He's a long corn dodger,
And the doctor he's a dodger,
And he's a dodger too.
He'll go to see his patient
And he give a dose of pills,
And the next thing you know
He's dodgin' for his bill.
Chorus:
And it's all a-dodgin', it's a long corn dodger,
And it's all a-dodgin' --
That's the way with the world.
Then, the lawyer's he's a dodger,
He's a long corn dodger,
And the lawyer he's a dodger,
And he's a dodger too.
He'll plead your case and wish you well,
And the next thing you know, he'll wish you hell
Chorus
Well, the young girl's a dodger,
She's a long corn dodger,
And the young girl's a dodger,
And she's a dodger too.

She'll spend every time
With the powder and the paint,
To make a boy think he's gettin' what he ain't.

Chorus

Then, the boys they're a dodger,
They're a long corn dodger,
And the boys they're a dodger,
And they're a dodger too.
They'll go to see the girl,
And they'll tell her that they love her,
And the next thing you know,
They're lookin' for another.
Chorus.

* * * * *

Three Nights Drunk Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 8

HE:

Well, the first night that I came home
So drunk I couldn't see,
Found a horse in the stable,
Where my horse ought to be.
Come here, my little wifey;
Explain this thing to me.

How come a horse in the stable,
Where my horse ought to be?

SHE:

You blind fool, you crazy fool,
Cant' you ever see?
It's only a milk-cow your granny sent to me.

HE:

I've traveled this world over,
Ten thousand miles or more,
But a saddle upon a milk cow's back,
I never did see before.

HE:

Well, the second night that I come home
So drunk I couldn't see,
Found a coat a-hanging on the rack
Where my coat ought to be.
Come here, my little wifey;
Explain this thing to me.

How come a coat a-hanging on the rack,
Where my coat ought to be?

SHE:

You blind fool, you crazy fool,
Can't you never see?
It's only a bed-quilt your granny sent to me.
HE:
I've traveled this world over,
Ten thousand miles or more,
Pockets upon a bed-quilt, I never did see before.
HE:
Well, the third night that I come home
So drunk I couldn't see,
Found a head a-laying on the pillow
Where my head ought to be.
Come here, my little wifey;
Explain this thing to me.
How come a head a-laying on the pillow,
Where my head ought to be?
SHE
You blind fool, you crazy fool,
Can't you never see?
It's only cabbage head your granny sent to me.
HE:
I've traveled this world over,
Ten thousand miles or more,
But a mustache on a cabbage head,
I never did see before.

* * * * *

Mama's Gonna Buy Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 4

Mama's gonna buy him a little lap dog,
Mama's gonna buy him a little lap dog,
Mama's gonna buy him a little lap dog,
Put him in his lap when she goes out.
Refrain:
Come up horsie, hey, hey,
Come up horsie, hey, hey.
Go to sleep and don't you cry,
Mama's gonna give you some apple pie.
Refrain

* * * * *

See That My Grave Is Kept Clean Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 14

Well it's one kind favor I ask of you,
Well it's one kind favor I ask of you,
Well it's one kind favor I ask of you,
Please see that my grave is kept clean.
It's a long lane, ain't got no end (3x)
It's the longest lane that's ever been.
Three white horses in a line (3x)
You may let me down with a golden chain.
It's a long lane, ain't got no end (3x)
It's the longest lane that's ever been.
O dig my grave with a silver spade (3x)
You may let me down with a golden chain.
Did you ever hear a trumpet sound? (3x)
You will know the poor boy's in the ground.
It's a long lane, ain't got no end (3x)
It's the longest lane that's ever been.
Did you ever hear a church bell tone? (3x)
You will know the poor boy's dead and gone.