

A Question of Color

by

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Based on A Question of Color by Sara Smith-Beattie

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BRIEF 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/GROVER BOLLING, Caucasian. As GRIER, petty tyrant. As BOLLING, a dissolute moonshiner.
- COLONEL GOFORTH, Caucasian. Largest white landowner in the county.
- 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], 4 men [1 African American, 3 Caucasian]) -- if wanted GRIEF, BOLLING, and MR. GOFORTH could all be played by the same actor.

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.

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.

* * * * *

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 do 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 -- north! 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. 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 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, brings it in.

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. 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! I want to make your acquaint[ance] --

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

Sun brained you, white man?

JOHN

When you say "white man" --

SUSAN

Yeah?

JOHN
Like you're hawking 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 [John] --

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

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.
(speaks to the doll)
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.

SUSAN 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?

The words hang on the air. 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.

(to the doll)

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!
(to the doll)
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. 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?

JOHN re-dresses himself.

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

JOHN scrambles to GRIER's house.

* * * * *

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
You run like a coon with a dog licking its ass.
I swear you come slower than an old man stroking
hissself --

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, tuck your shirt in and 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

Why the grinning?

JOHN

As the Lord promises Paradise --

GRIER

What are you blathering about?

JOHN

-- I think I found Paradise today.

GRIER

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, raps
JOHN on his head.

GRIER
"Advantage" is not with the colored bitch.

JOHN
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.

* * * * *

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 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?

(gives one more)

Sweet.

(takes one more)

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 throws his arms out like a scarecrow.

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 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 -- pffft! 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 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
You are so dumb.

JOHN
The lunthead'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
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 leather headband -- no feathers or decorations.

JOHN

That's all?

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.

* * * * *

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
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 riiiiivvveerrrrsss!

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 and inhales.

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! 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
Don't happen to have a full breakfast in there --

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.

* * * * *

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
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? -- 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

You?

SUSAN

When we fellowship, he will ask for his soul.

BECKY

I suppose even a heathen "johnwick" should be saved. Stand up. 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. 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. 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. 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 -- 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?

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 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.

* * * * *

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 recites 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."
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

You?

JOHN

We said we would --

SUSAN

Not so fast --

BECKY

You should try praying. Especially with coffee.
You two all right?

JOHN

Becky -- Becky -- Susan, it's time.

SUSAN

Think twice, speak once -

JOHN

I'm trying.

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? Where?

SUSAN

Becky, John feels --

BECKY

What does Susan feel?

SUSAN

Becky -

BECKY

What does Susan feel?

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 chops.

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? Susan, you 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 now have 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
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
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 as nervous as 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
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-crapping" 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

Susan 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.

GOFORTH looks at MRS. GOFORTH.

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! 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. "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

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

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. He'd be about your age. So, there
it is -- all the knives.

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.

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! 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
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 -- when she takes her leave like that,
she takes everything -- 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, shakes it by his ear.

GOFORTH

Might it be this? 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 Indians' 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? Enough shit in your head to bury us all. Go take it back home.

BECKY

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 -- I figured he did nothing because he was so used to having it done to him. 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.

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

(taking off headband)

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 hard. 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

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 -- vengeance --
aaahhhhh!

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 tableaus, 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

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. 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.

* * * * *

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. 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.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 3

GOFORTH is quite drunk, though not dissolved.

GOFORTH

You said there was -- 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
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 -- 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
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? Are these real?

SUSAN
Nothing but.

GOFORTH
Ask her where she got --

MRS. GOFORTH
What would you do with the money?

GOFORTH
Ask her where --

MRS. GOFORTH
Dear, that glass of yours is so close -- 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

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

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. 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.

* * * * *

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 gets up, 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."

* * * * *

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

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. 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
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
Green.

JOHN
That's not how I meant it.

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?
(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? 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.

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 -- 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.
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 -- 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? 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 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

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 -- 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? If I were you? Dig myself a storm cellar and not come up till God separates the goats from the sheep. 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.

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.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 8: 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.