

A QUESTION OF COLOR
By Michael Bettencourt

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A Question of Color

by

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Adapted from *A Question of Color* by Sara Smith-Beattie
(Permission has been granted by the author for this adaptation)

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many states in the South had laws on their books 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. To keep suspicion from their doorstep, John passes himself off as Indian (vaguely Catawba or Cherokee), and as long as they keep to the insulated black sharecropping community in which they live, no one much questions the lie.

But once John and Susan begin to become successful (they own land, have two children, start several successful businesses, even found an academy), they also become a target of envy and betrayal among their neighbors, including threats to expose their "crime." What began with such high hopes ends in tragedy with John's murder, all because "color" denied their humanity.

A Question of Color follows Susan and John as they struggle to make full lives under the shadow cast by color and prejudice. It is a story that, 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 as well.

CHARACTERS

Doubling: Some actors will double.

Singing: All the ACTORS should 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 will suffice.

Nudity: Act II, Scene 4 suggests that SUSAN be completely nude. However, if the costume change can be done and the sense of the scene gotten across without the nudity, then that is a valid directorial choice.

* Susan Morgan, *African American. Wife of JOHN.*

* John Morgan (née Wicks), *Caucasian. Husband of SUSAN.*

* Colonel Goforth/Grover Bolling, *Caucasian. As GOFORTH, the largest white landowner in the county. As BOLLING, a dissolute moonshiner who hates JOHN.*

* Mrs. Goforth, *Caucasian. Unhappy wife of the largest white landowner in the county.*

* Aunt Becky, *African American, mid- to late-60s. The woman who takes in JOHN and SUSAN and helps set them up in life.*

* Peter Grier/Wayne Bolling, *Caucasian. As PETER GRIER, the man who cheats JOHN. As WAYNE BOLLING, son of the moonshiner Grover Bolling.*

* 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])

TIME: The first four decades of the 20th century.

STAGING: The staging will be very simple, with essential 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 modern outfit will be overlain with simple pieces, such as SUSAN's shawl to indicate the younger SUSAN or the headband for JOHN. All props are also onstage, and ACTORS will move things on and off as needed. All set/scene changes should be done smoothly and 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 boxes which are also used for staging. The act of taking out props is akin to the play's intent about hidden things being exposed.

MOVEMENT: Specific choreographed movements are outlined in the script; as much as possible, these suggestions should be followed *if they work*. However, these are *minimum* suggestions -- directors are free to add whatever movements they want that define the action and the characters' relationships. The preference is for directed movement as opposed to a "natural" style of acting -- wherever possible, gestures, movements, etc. should be shaped and specific.

MUSIC: Scene changes and other moments are supported by the ACTORS' a capella singing.

Lyrics are appended to the script. Directors are free to substitute music, but it must match the mood and style of 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.

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 and direct.

PROPS

Act I

Prologue -- none

Scene 1: * Wood for "chopping" noise
 * SUSAN's bag (burlap, canvas, etc.)

Scene 2: * Box, 2 chairs
 * Quirt/short whip
 * Change of clothes for JOHN
 * Small metal bucket

Scene 3: * SUSAN's bag

Scene 4: * Black bag with ruby necklace, 2 gold rings

Scene 5: * Two boxes

Scene 6: * Quirt/short whip
 * Black bag with ruby necklace, 2 gold rings

Scene 7: * Susan's shawl
 * Headband

Scene 8: * None

Scene 9: * Pipe

Act II

Scene 1: * Becky's Sunday clothes
 * Bell
 * KKK hoods
 * Three chairs
 * Coffee cups

Scene 2: * Cake
 * Becky's shawl, hat
 * 2 chairs (for Goforths)
 * Quirt/short whip for Goforth
 * Headband

Scene 3: None

Scene 4: * Materials for making gunshot and broken glass sound
* Shotgun
* Pipe
* Blood
* White dresses for Susan and Becky
* Water (bucket, bowl)
* Towels
* Shawls (Becky and Susan)
* Ruby necklace
* Bible with deed

Scene 5: * 3 chairs
* 2 gold rings

Act III

Scene 1: * Bell
* Rag (for Grover)
* Shotgun
* Shotgun sound (See Act II, Scene 4)

Scene 2: * Shotgun
* Chair

Scene 3: * Chair
* Quirt/short whip
* Cane

Scene 4: * 2 chairs
* Watch

Scene 5: * Flask
* Cane
* Papers to sign
* Piston
* 2 shotguns
* Shotgun sound

Epilogue: * Ledger book (must look old) and pencil

* * * * *

A Question of Color

Act I, Prologue

*[In the darkness the ACTORS come out. If possible, they should be scattered among the audience. Still in darkness, they start clapping in rhythm and begin singing **Northport [Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 11]**. As they sing, individual lights come up, in the following order:*

* *GOFORTH*
* *BELL*
* *BECKY*
* *GRIER*
* *MRS. GOFORTH*
* *SUSAN and JOHN (standing as a pair)*

[As the lights come up, the clapping and singing become slightly stronger -- they finish the song.]

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: Equal, yes!

JOHN: And that four score years later --

SUSAN: In the uncivil war --

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

ALL: First in flight, North Carolina!

GOFORTH: A law was passed in 1875.

BELL: Beware whenever the legislature is in session.

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

JOHN: Chapters 51 and 51-3.1 --

GRIER: That stated the following.

THE WOMEN: Listen. Closely.

THE MEN: Closely. Listen.

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."*) "And a person of negro descent"

MRS. GOFORTH: "To the third generation inclusive"

ALL: Inclusive, inclusive.

GRIER: 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.

*[The ACTORS sing the second verse of **Feed Me Jesus [WPAQ]**, and as they sing, they exchange places.]*

GOFORTH: Four score and twelve years later, in 1967 --

BELL: The Supreme Court --

[All seven ACTORS bang their right fists into their left hands like a gavel three times and speak the following line as they do.]

ALL: Oye! Oye! Oye!

MRS. GOFORTH: Abolished all laws --

GRIER: That stopped the races from mixing.

JOHN: The categories came crashing down.

BECKY: No more mulatto --

GOFORTH: Quadroon --

GRIER: Octoroon --

SUSAN: Cascos --

JOHN: Sambo --

BELL: Mango.

MRS. GOFORTH: Mustiffee.

GRIER: Mustee.

GOFORTH: Mustifino.

MRS. GOFORTH: Pardo.

BECKY: Loro.

SUSAN: Mestizo.

BECKY: The whole. Damn. System. Broken.

[All ACTORS bang their right fist into their left hand once.]

ALL: Oye!

SUSAN: In 1977, five score and two years later --

JOHN: H.B. 277 Chapter 107, s. 2 --

BELL: North Carolina law in its infinitely temperate and amnesiac language finally said --

GOFORTH: "All interracial marriages that were declared null and void" --

ALL: Null and void.

MRS. GOFORTH: "Are hereby validated."

[All ACTORS make a single clap, as if a period on a sentence, after each "Yes."]

ALL: Yes. (Clap.) Yes. (Clap.) Yes. (Clap.)

*[SUSAN and JOHN step into their own light; the lights on the other ACTORS go down. ACTORS begin humming **Amazing Grace** under SUSAN' and JOHN's words.]*

SUSAN: In 1907, my North Carolina great-grandmother Susan Morgan -- light ocher skin, with the angled cheekbones of her Indian background -- married my great-grandfather John Wicks.

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

SUSAN: This is the story of how they were "hereby validated" long before the law caught up with them.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: And their journey is not yet finished.

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

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 1: By The River

[Lights up: the banks of a river. The ACTORS change into their costumes and take up various positions as if they were trees and rocks by the river; they do not need to make those shapes but simply act as obstacles which SUSAN and JOHN can use.]

[Downstage right, JOHN is "splitting wood": JOHN mimes chopping while an ACTOR uses his or her hands to be the "log," splitting as JOHN chops. Several other ACTORS, using pieces of wood, make the sound of the axe hitting the wood.]

JOHN: *(The "chopping" breaks up JOHN's speech.)* One mother hot day, one motherloving melt-the-brain-pan hot day, and my brains are going to drown me if I don't get myself something cool and soul-saving soon. *(JOHN stops and looks around.)* A few more cords, and I will have finished what that old bastard Grier wants to suck out of me. And then -- the money. And then - - I am north of here as fast as a fart out of a full-fed cow. *(Looks at the next "log.")* Enough -- I have given that bastard Grier enough of my brow-sweat for this Lord's day.

[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: I think it is time for me to gather myself to the river.

[Lights change to the "river"; ACTORS finish singing. JOHN sits on the bank and starts to take off his clothes. At the same moment, SUSAN enters, carrying a fishing pole (mimed) and a bag of some sort (actual), sits, and casts into the water. SUSAN does not see JOHN, but he sees her. He crouches, hiding.]

JOHN: Who in the devil's dancing is that? I have never spied the likes. Never, ever, ever. She is beautiful.

[One of the ACTORS is a "fish," using his or her hand as the fish, swimming around SUSAN's "hook." When it "bites," SUSAN pulls it out; she takes it off the hook and puts it beside her. She casts again -- another fish.]

JOHN: Fishing good?

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

JOHN: Oops, one that got away.

[SUSAN stands, looking around until she can see him.]

JOHN: I'm chopping wood for old man Grier, over there. Know him?

[No response.]

JOHN: Catfish got your tongue?

[SUSAN stares/glares at him for a breath, grabs her stuff, pivots, and leaves.]

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

[JOHN wades into the river, and several ACTORS become the "undertow," pulling him down and roiling him around -- as if the river were rising up in SUSAN's defense. The rest of the objects become agitated. JOHN yells, and SUSAN turns to look at him, watching him calmly. JOHN struggles until he gets back to his original place on the shore, breathless.]

[After a moment JOHN's breathing calms. He sits up and sees SUSAN watching him. He tentatively puts a foot back in the river, and the ACTORS become agitated; he takes it out, they stop.]

SUSAN: What do you want, white man?

JOHN: *(Indicating the "woods" and the "river.")* River work for you?

SUSAN: White man, what do you want?

JOHN: I want to know.

SUSAN: Know what?

JOHN: Know you.

SUSAN: Know me?

JOHN: Know all.

SUSAN: No chance.

JOHN: No to your no.

SUSAN: Has the sun brained you, white man?

JOHN: Don't appreciate being called "white man" like that -- sounds like you're clearing to spit.

SUSAN: That how it sounds, white man?

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: Then your ears hear true.

JOHN: I have a name, my own name.

SUSAN: You are one of the truly lucky.

JOHN: It's J --

[SUSAN stops him curtly with a gesture]

SUSAN: If I want your name, you will be asked!

[Beat.]

SUSAN: You gonna leave?

JOHN: No chance.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: *(Pointing to one of the ACTORS.)* 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 one -- I'll let it pass. Go on. White man.

[Three of the ACTORS should now be "rocks." JOHN gingerly steps out on them until he gets to the third, where he sits. The first two "rocks" move away, leaving JOHN alone in the middle of the "river." He senses this. An ACTOR also becomes a "rock" on which SUSAN sits.]

SUSAN: Haven't you ever seen a woman?

JOHN: Not like you.

SUSAN: Seen 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.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: My mother is dead -- no comfort in that kind of empty.

SUSAN: How long dead?

JOHN: Father, too.

SUSAN: How long both?

JOHN: A short time back.

SUSAN: A short time since soon?

JOHN: *(Holds up his hands.)* Dirt of their graves is still under my nails.

SUSAN: And you're not from the flat lands around here.

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

[Beat.]

SUSAN: *(Refusing to give in.)* Well, we all got a cross buried in our shoulder, don't we? And you be living where now?

JOHN: Over there.

SUSAN: With the sodomite?

JOHN: Old man, Grier -- chopping his wood for him. What's a sodomite?

SUSAN: He's crazy --

JOHN: Not that bad --

SUSAN: Surely you're not so white that you can't see that?

JOHN: All I know, he's paying me to cut his wood.

SUSAN: Paid you yet?

JOHN: At the end of twelve cords.

SUSAN: Any *money* yet?

JOHN: He said at the end of the twelve.

SUSAN: White man --

JOHN: Could you stop saying --

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

JOHN: I got a lot more than you know.

SUSAN: But is it worth for me to know?

[Beat. SUSAN reaches into her "bag" and takes out some knitting. One of the ACTORS sits in front of her, back against her legs, and SUSAN uses the two index fingers of the ACTOR as "needles." She knits. At this point, the ACTORS can "dissolve" the river scene, leaving just the ACTOR as JOHN's "rock" and SUSAN's "knitting needles" and "rock."]

SUSAN: How is it out there?

JOHN: As snug as bug in a braided rug.

SUSAN: Butt not going numb?

JOHN: Nope.

SUSAN: Sun not frying you around the edges?

JOHN: Double nope.

SUSAN: Yeah?

JOHN: Nope.

SUSAN: Good -- wouldn't want you to feel you got "nope" choices.

[JOHN surreptitiously puts his foot into the "river," and the ACTORS make warning noises and gestures.]

SUSAN: You said you had a name.

JOHN: I do.

SUSAN: Tell me, then --

JOHN: Now you want to know.

SUSAN: I want to know if it's worth knowing -- first name first.

JOHN: John.

SUSAN: Last.

JOHN: Wicks.

SUSAN: John Wicks, white man. (*Repeats it for rhythm.*) John wicks, white man. (*Still in rhythm.*) John Wicks, white man, coming off the mountain. (*Pronounces it "moun-tan," to rhyme with "man."*)

JOHN: Yes.

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

JOHN: I have no interest in that.

SUSAN: Aren't you 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 brought home bread to our table.

SUSAN: You have such a short opinion of what He can do.

JOHN: Given what I've gotten from His creation, I'm just matching my opinion to His opinion of me.

SUSAN: But aren't you afraid for your soul?

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

SUSAN: So you have no soul?

JOHN: What I carry in its place is my heart.

SUSAN: And how is your heart?

JOHN: It beats with a full face.

SUSAN: (*Pointing.*) And that's the face it shows?

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: Hmmmm.

[Beat while she appraises him.]

SUSAN: Well, white mountain man John Wicks, I, too, have a name, Christian and family.

JOHN: How kind to let me know.

SUSAN: Go ahead, you can ask me.

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

SUSAN: Then be ye forever ignorant and unfree sitting on your rock.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: You're weakening, I can see.

[Beat.]

JOHN: It'd just be a common courtesy. To ask your name.

SUSAN: Common, yes.

[Beat.]

JOHN: Just for courtesy.

SUSAN: Courtesy would be in your favor.

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

[Beat.]

SUSAN: Susan.

JOHN: Susan.

SUSAN: Morgan.

JOHN: Morgan.

SUSAN: Sun warm enough for you?

JOHN: Cool as a cave inside.

SUSAN: Butt numb?

JOHN: Double nope.

SUSAN: What a manly man you are, then!

[SUSAN puts away her knitting and prepares to leave.]

JOHN: Wait!

SUSAN: Why?

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

SUSAN: Cords twelve in number, I thought you said. You best sharpen your blade.

[SUSAN turns to go.]

JOHN: Hey! How am I supposed to get back to my twelve cords?

[SUSAN gestures, and two ACTORS become stones so that JOHN can get back to shore. He starts to go back.]

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.

SUSAN: *(Indicating.)* I'm over *there* if you can make it to *here*, white man.

[JOHN is on the other shore.]

SUSAN: Don't let the crazy man know when you got your twelve cords done.

JOHN: You mean he won't pay me?

SUSAN: Keep your door locked at night.

JOHN: What do you mean? What do you know about him?

SUSAN: You got halfway across this time. Choice is yours.

[Before SUSAN leaves, she gestures once more, and the three "rocks," using their hands, become "fish," who fling themselves onto the shore at JOHN's feet. SUSAN exits with her bag. JOHN kneels down to touch the "fish," stroking them as if precious gifts.]

JOHN: Miss beautiful woman of the water, the odds and ends are in your favor -- at the moment. But I will know you more than your name. You -- and *(addressing the "rocks" and "trees")* all of you -- mark my words.

GRIER: *(Shouting, as if from a distance away.)* Boy!

JOHN: (*Hurrying.*) Christ --

GRIER: (*Even louder.*) Boy! Where are you?

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

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

[JOHN finishes tucking in his clothes, putting on his shoes, etc., then grabs the "fish." He scrambles into GRIER's "kitchen." The ACTORS join the others upstage.]

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 2: Grier's Kitchen

[Scene switches to GRIER's "kitchen:" two chairs around a box set by ACTORS. GRIER stands at what would be the door. He carries a quirt or short whip.]

GRIER: Where is that catamite? (*Shouting.*) Boy! Ah, there he is, running like a coon with a dog licking its ass.

[JOHN rushes in.]

GRIER: Where is my supper? Where is my food? Where is the sustenance to sustain a body around here? I swear you come slower than an old man stroking himself --

JOHN: Food's coming up and around.

[JOHN mimes preparing the "fish" for cooking. GRIER sits.]

GRIER: What's that?

JOHN: Fish, Mr. Grier.

GRIER: Fish from where?

JOHN: Fish from the river.

GRIER: Three fish.

JOHN: Two for you, one for me.

GRIER: As right it should be. But what about the cutting of my wood?

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

GRIER: Because you're too busy distracted.

JOHN: Catching food for your plate.

GRIER: Don't sass. Why are you grinning?

JOHN: Just as the Lord promises we can each find Paradise.

GRIER: What are you blathering about?

JOHN: In fact, I think I found Paradise today.

GRIER: Cutting my wood?

JOHN: By the river.

GRIER: Heat baked your brain hard.

JOHN: A girl.

GRIER: Ain't no girls around here.

JOHN: Not so.

GRIER: You don't need a girl.

JOHN: She's definitely one to want.

GRIER: I told you, no decent girls around here.

JOHN: Susan Morgan.

GRIER: The colored bitch.

JOHN: You got poison in your voice --

GRIER: You spoke with her?

JOHN: I am not going to take what you say.

GRIER: You want to get between her sweaty thighs, is that it?

JOHN: No.

GRIER: You want her to *clench* you, don't you, let her *juice* just smear all over your face!

JOHN: Shut up! Shut up!

[*Beat.*]

GRIER: (*Low menace.*) There is a *lot* that you don't know about. Your ignorance could be a danger unto your soul. (*Pause.*) The fish, by the way, needed salt. For preservation. Just like you.

JOHN: I'll keep that in mind.

GRIER: You do just that kind of keeping.

[GRIER goes to strike JOHN with the quirt but instead lets it caress JOHN's body. With a smirk, GRIER sits down. JOHN gawks at him for a moment, then touches his body where GRIER's quirt touches him.]

[Sudden change of light, tight focus; JOHN moves into it. As he speaks, he takes off his clothes and puts on new ones, handed to him by the ACTORS, who take off this old clothes. They also hand him a small metal bucket when he is finished. GRIER watches him.]

JOHN: I will burn these, I will. Touching me like that. Like *that!* Like I was a *wife!* No -- like I was a beast. His beast.

[GRIER speaks from the shadows.]

GRIER: You done cutting my wood?

[JOHN freezes for a moment as he hears GRIER's voice, a voice he is hearing in his head.]

JOHN: The wood -- gotta hide the wood so that he doesn't know how much, how little, how far I have to go with it.

GRIER: The payment --

JOHN: My money!

GRIER: The payment for my wood will be real special, young man. Unforgettable.

[GRIER moves upstage and JOHN finishes dressing.]

JOHN: I cannot forget -- I cannot forget.

[ACTORS remove the box and two chairs.]

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 3: In Court

[JOHN moves to the river and stands quietly at the bank; lights change. SUSAN appears with her bag. They look at each other for a few moments.]

SUSAN: You're standing like a choir boy.

JOHN: How's that?

SUSAN: Tight.

JOHN: Yeah?

SUSAN: Like a string ready to be plucked.

JOHN: Couldn't sing a note if I had a gun at my throat.

SUSAN: Maybe that's a blessing for the rest of us.

JOHN: Could be.

SUSAN: But that doesn't change how you stand.

JOHN: No, it doesn't.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: You are standing awful quiet.

JOHN: Yes, ma'am, I am.

SUSAN: Ma'am?

JOHN: Ma'am, as in "yes, ma'am."

[Beat.]

SUSAN: I have to tell you --

JOHN: Tell me.

SUSAN: That's an unusual word for me.

JOHN: That's too bad.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: What do you have up your sleeves besides those manly arms?

JOHN: Nothing.

SUSAN: Nothing.

JOHN: Nothing.

SUSAN: Then what's that hanging at the end of your arms?

JOHN: Blackberries.

SUSAN: Blackberries.

JOHN: A bucket of blackberries.

SUSAN: You *picked* blackberries?

JOHN: I did.

SUSAN: With your own hands.

JOHN: The ones at the end of my manly arms.

SUSAN: For me.

JOHN: Can I come across?

SUSAN: For me?

JOHN: For you. For us. For both.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: Those blackberries sound very much like the nature of a gift, John Wicks.

JOHN: They are.

SUSAN: A gift of what?

JOHN: The answer to that, I know for a fact, is on the other side.

SUSAN: Where I am.

JOHN: Where you are.

SUSAN: Where I sit.

JOHN: There is the answer, I know, if I can only get there.

SUSAN: *(Smiling, with a little gospel quaver.)* Coming cross the River Jordan!

[Beat.]

SUSAN: John Wicks -- I find that I have a sudden taste for the sweetness of blackberries.

[JOHN slowly walks across the river -- without the ACTORS as rocks -- and sits next to SUSAN. JOHN holds the bucket up to her; she takes out a blackberry and eats it, carefully. JOHN then takes one out and eats it. Then JOHN takes one out and feeds it to SUSAN; SUSAN does the same for JOHN, though with more hesitation. JOHN puts the bucket down.]

SUSAN: You picked these?

JOHN: I did.

SUSAN: In all your free time from cutting wood.

[Beat.]

JOHN: I finished the wood.

SUSAN: You haven't told -- him that, have you?

JOHN: No. You told me to be careful.

SUSAN: And you listened to me.

JOHN: All manner of miracles come to the River Jordan.

[SUSAN rises.]

SUSAN: John Wicks, against my better judgment I am having a better judgment about you.

JOHN: Nice to know the rock ain't so hard.

SUSAN: *(Counting off on her fingers.)* Ma'am. *(Shaking her head in small disbelief.)* Ma'am. Blackberries -- blackberries as sweet as an angel's fingertip. And -- and you took the advice of a black woman. And this -- air about you. This -- manner. Not choir boy at all. Like you're folded in on yourself. Like something in you got -- settled.

JOHN: That it did.

SUSAN: What? What in you got so settled?

JOHN: My heart.

SUSAN: The one that sits in the place of your soul.

JOHN: The one that is my soul.

SUSAN: Listen to these words of yours!

JOHN: You listen to them. You listen to them, Susan Morgan. Listen to them hard because I am saying them only for you.

SUSAN: For me?

[JOHN takes a blackberry out of the bucket and eats it.]

JOHN: They are just like these.

SUSAN: A bucket of words.

[JOHN takes another berry and holds it up.]

JOHN: You need to listen with more sweet in your ears.

[JOHN eats the berry.]

JOHN: I don't bring a bucket of words to just anybody.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: John Wicks, are you courting me?

[JOHN takes out another berry and eats it; he smiles.]

JOHN: You wanted to know what the gift was.

SUSAN: That I did.

JOHN: The gift coming across the Jordan.

SUSAN: A gift off the river.

[SUSAN gets up, perturbed.]

JOHN: *(Knocking his knuckles against his own head.)* Nice to know the rock ain't so hard.

SUSAN: You can't do that!

JOHN: Which that?

SUSAN: You can't court me!

JOHN: You can't deny that I am.

SUSAN: It doesn't work that way.

JOHN: You mean, you black, me white? That?

SUSAN: Yes!

[JOHN takes another berry and eats it.]

JOHN: It works any way we want.

SUSAN: Mountain man, you don't know your own bucket of words.

JOHN: I know my settled heart.

SUSAN: I know my unsettled heart.

[JOHN grabs the bucket and stands up.]

JOHN: Come here. Come here.

[SUSAN steps toward him. JOHN takes a berry and offers it to SUSAN. JOHN indicates to her to open her mouth. SUSAN hesitates, then opens her mouth. JOHN very gently places the berry on her tongue; SUSAN eats it.]

JOHN: My mother would often give me a physic of sweet molasses to ease my fevers. (*JOHN takes another berry.*) Sometimes I pretended to a fever -- open up -- (*looking at her tongue*) -- whew! blue! -- (*JOHN places it on her tongue*) -- there -- eat -- I pretended so that she would brew it up for me. I don't know if the *molasses* ever cured anything. But the sweetness always cured what ailed me. Good, aren't they? Isn't this?

SUSAN: (*Quietly.*) You can't do this.

JOHN: But I am.

SUSAN: This will not work.

JOHN: But it is. Yes? A little?

SUSAN: (*Taking her bag.*) My mama had an idea, too.

JOHN: Tell me.

SUSAN: Mama -- She believed that once you crossed the Jordan River, in any form, you didn't have to give up any of the goodness you got there if you had to cross back over to the darker side. Like what you got there varnished the soul against all stain.

JOHN: Not like our blue tongues, hey?

[JOHN sticks out his tongue; SUSAN smiles.]

SUSAN: The sweetness you brought here -- that sweetness -- bring it back again, if you'd like.

JOHN: Beause it doesn't go away, right, if I cross back over to the darker side.

SUSAN: I hope not.

JOHN: Yes ma'am.

[SUSAN starts to exit.]

JOHN: Wait!

[JOHN runs up to SUSAN and hands her the bucket.]

JOHN: They'll stay sweeter with you on this side.

[SUSAN exits. JOHN turns and crosses the river, and as he does, GRIER confronts him. Lights change.]

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 4: Grier Again

GRIER: I know where you been!

[GRIER strikes him.]

JOHN: And I know how you're bent!

GRIER: I'm hell-bent for election, I am!

[GRIER strikes him again and knocks him down.]

GRIER: Where's my wood?

JOHN: Getting done.

GRIER: I checked. I *checked*. It ain't *getting* done -- it's done.

JOHN: Then you owe me some money.

GRIER: I know it's been done for a while.

JOHN: Then you been owing me money for a while.

[GRIER reaches down the front of his pants into his crotch and takes out a small bag; he holds it up.]

GRIER: In here, boy; this is where it is.

JOHN: Give it to me.

[GRIER just laughs as he drops the bag back down the front of his pants.]

GRIER: It's in the nature of a treasure-hunt, boy. Finders, keepers. Losers -- *(with a shrug and a smirk)* -- well --

JOHN: Give it to me!

GRIER: Oh, you don't mind getting between her pegs, do you, even when there ain't no money there. Christ! You don't know your own right way, boy -- you don't know what's good for what ails you.

JOHN: You leave her out of your mouth.

[GRIER laughs and pats his crotch, as if to say, "Don't go too far; I still have your money." And, in an instant, GRIER turns all fury and cracks JOHN two or three good strokes with the quilt.]

GRIER: Her father -- her father was a nigger pig and her mother -- just an Indian whore. They got what they deserved. Oh, she didn't tell you all that, did she? Race-mixing is Bible wrong -- they broke God's law. And the sheriff did his duty and skinned their asses when he ran them out of here! And now you want to bed with that colored sow. Go ahead -- and I'll have the sheriff do the same thing because sticking your white into her black is against the law! Against the law, God's law, our law, and I'll tan *your* ass and use it to wipe *my* ass if you so much as lick one drop of sweat off her lip. Do you hear me, *boy*?

[Beat. GRIER goes to JOHN, touches him.]

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

[GRIER slips his suspenders off.]

GRIER: Time to dig for treasure.

[JOHN looks at GRIER for a moment in shock and disbelief, then bolts to the "river." Light out on the "kitchen." GRIER moves upstage. JOHN is breathless, fearful.]

[There is a fairly quick light change from night to dawn as JOHN waits at the water's edge. When it is light, JOHN crosses to SUSAN's "house."]

* * * * *

Act 1, Scene 5: Susan's House

[As JOHN approaches SUSAN's "house," he is bowled over by RUFUS, SUSAN's dog. RUFUS is not seen, but his presence is felt. If it can be done well, one of the ACTORS should make the dog's barks and snarls.]

JOHN: *(Lying flat, scared.)* Get off me, get off me!

[SUSAN appears.]

SUSAN: Lie still.

JOHN: I am lying, and I am still.

[Beat.]

JOHN: I'm still still.

[SUSAN laughs.]

SUSAN: Meet Rufus.

JOHN: What's a "rufus"?

SUSAN: Rufus is the only male I have trusted -- so far.

[SUSAN kneels down.]

SUSAN: Now, I have a question for you, and Rufus has a strong abiding interest in your answer because he has told me in the past that white meat is sweetest.

[Beat.]

JOHN: The question?

SUSAN: The question: Are you lying still -- or are you still lying?

JOHN: I was never lying to begin with. So I am just still -- still. (*Pause.*) Is he going to eat me?

SUSAN: Why be afraid of death if your soul -- (*snaps her fingers*) that's right, your *heart* for you! -- your *heart* is settled?

JOHN: It's the manner of the death that bothers me. Is he going to? I'd like to prepare if he is.

SUSAN: You haven't prepared your heart yet?

JOHN: I am sometimes forgetful.

SUSAN: Not to mention foolish in walking up to a house where you are not known.

JOHN: I was invited.

SUSAN: Only by your own desires.

JOHN: And yours. Remember, your mama: nothing is lost by re-crossing the Jordan River? I have made it back across.

SUSAN: We're going to have to get you a ferry, you're traveling so much. And if nothing is lost, where are my blackberries?

JOHN: I was in a rush of a rush -- my hands were full, even if empty. So, a little trust, maybe?

SUSAN: Rufus, what say you?

JOHN: Or at least a little slack? Him -- you know -- slack off a bit, maybe? He's got a breath on him, he does.

SUSAN: Bit --

JOHN: A bit.

SUSAN: You have a bit of humor.

JOHN: Don't intend to if it gets me into trouble.

SUSAN: (*To the "dog."*) Rufus, I got two words to say to you: "Re. Lax."

[By JOHN's physical relief, the audience knows that RUFUS has moved away.]

JOHN: I don't think that dog's big enough. I mean, he's only as big as your porch.

SUSAN: He grows real well on white meat.

JOHN: Then I declare I am not white.

SUSAN: That ain't so easy.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: Well?

JOHN: Yeah.

SUSAN: You look like you haven't slept.

JOHN: I'm all right.

SUSAN: You look chased by demons.

[Beat.]

JOHN: Could I sit down?

[Two ACTORS bring out two boxes for JOHN and SUSAN to sit on SUSAN's "porch." JOHN sits; SUSAN joins him. Several beats of silence.]

SUSAN: You do look haunted.

JOHN: I'm fine.

SUSAN: Good that you're fine. So I guess you can go.

JOHN: I don't want to go.

SUSAN: I didn't hear you.

JOHN: I don't want to go.

SUSAN: Then maybe not so fine.

[Beat.]

JOHN: Are you here alone?

SUSAN: I have Rufus. And a shotgun.

JOHN: Not what I mean. Your parents? Family?

SUSAN: I have Rufus. And a shotgun.

JOHN: Old man Grier --

SUSAN: So you got stories from him?

JOHN: He said your parents --

SUSAN: Grier's mouth should burn for saying their names.

JOHN: Is it true?

SUSAN: Do you see them around here? Do you see me having a chance to love them till they're old and baby-like?

JOHN: No.

SUSAN: And you know why? That -- man over there -- that *filth* -- you think I have filth in my mouth? -- he just as sure killed them as if he'd taken a knife to each throat. Know how I know about cutting the wood?

JOHN: No.

SUSAN: My mama was Indian -- I'm sure he told you that -- (*touching her face*) see these bones? -- and when she died my papa went to work for Grier cutting wood. He was going to earn money to send me to Huntersville, the school for colored women to be teachers -- something my mama wanted with all her body and might. They wanted me to *learn*, and he wore his shirts out with his sweat making what he *thought* was going to be the money that would set me free. But when he came to collect --

JOHN: Grier wouldn't pay him.

SUSAN: And Papa, a proud man in a black skin -- now, that's the biggest sin you can sin in these parts -- he beat Grier. And Grier cried, "Sheriff!" And the sheriff cried, "Lynch!" And Papa, running for his life, ran out of his life when he tried to cross the river after the rains. And here I found myself in the house I was born in, dead mama buried in the back by the apple tree, dead father drowned somewhere -- nowhere -- and Grier with all his wood cut. My papa's blood was in that wood, and Grier sold it like he'd sell hogs for slaughter.

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: He won't do that to me.

SUSAN: No, not to you.

JOHN: I won't let him.

SUSAN: Just going to bull your way where others fell and died.

JOHN: He *owes* me!

SUSAN: Let that little -- *thing* -- of yours down there get stiff and bloated and lead you like a one-eyed Satan-snake.

JOHN: He *owes* me, Susan Morgan!

SUSAN: Nothing going to happen to you, nah-uh --

JOHN: Not like your daddy --

SUSAN: -- not you -- you're *different* 'cause you have a full heart.

JOHN: What's right is *right!* What right is *right!*

[*Beat.*]

SUSAN: Well, mister right-is-right, you gonna tell me why you spent the night by the river, wearing twigs in your hair and a look of haunt on your face, mister strong man?

JOHN: It was nothing.

SUSAN: It's a nothing that's something, and I'm telling you that you don't need to tell me details for me to know you had a scare and your eyes are looking for the back door even while that hard mouth of yours *pretends* it's spitting out courage, and if you want to play that man game, go right ahead, but it's not going to be sitting on my porch. John Wicks, you want to sit here, you better come clean with yourself because I will no have patience at all with any self-lying. This world is too dangerous and dark to let that come anywhere near me again. Now, you want to be near me on this porch or not?

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: Can I make a bargain with you?

SUSAN: I don't bargain. I agree or disagree. And don't forget Rufus while you're deciding yes or no.

JOHN: All right, then. And, Rufus, you listen for this close -- he can listen, can't he? -- okay, Rufus, here goes. I want to sit on this porch with you -- for how long, I don't know, but right now it's the safest, warmest place I've known since I lost everything on the mountain. Give me your hand.

[*Hesitantly, SUSAN gives him her hand.*]

JOHN: And if that means swallowing pride, then you have an *agreement* from me -- got that, Rufus? -- that that's what's going to happen. I like this porch. I like you being on this porch, me being on this porch with your being here, and I'll empty out what I need to to stay. *But* -- I *have* earned that money --

SUSAN: But, but, but --

JOHN: -- and I have a right to make him turn it over. To *try*. Believe me, I want nothing more than to be free of that man's poison air. So will you give me at least the chance to *try* without throwing me off this porch?

SUSAN: Orphan John --

JOHN: Orphan Susan.

SUSAN: I don't want you to go back there.

JOHN: I don't *want* to go back there.

SUSAN: So stay --

JOHN: The money.

SUSAN: The money --

JOHN: -- was what for your papa?

SUSAN: My papa, bless his soul and break my own for saying this, was a blessed fool -- he wanted more than the world would give.

JOHN: Your papa wanting so hard was not wrong -- world was wrong for not making room. Susan Morgan, he wanted freedom for you. I think -- I think this money could be some freedom. For me. And for you.

SUSAN: I owe my freedom to no one.

JOHN: I meant as an "us."

[SUSAN draws her hand away.]

SUSAN: What am I even thinking? What vapors are in my brain? White man, you can't ever really have this hand.

JOHN: Well, colored girl --

SUSAN: Watch your direction!

JOHN: -- you *talk* a strong game --

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

JOHN: If there's love --

[Beat -- both are astonished at the word.]

JOHN: You meet a person, you cross the river, you survive their dog, you sit on the porch with the smell of blackberries in the air and you talk out the loneliness. I don't feel, I don't hear "color" in any of that. We owe nothing to any color under this sun.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: (*Softly.*) It never seems to matter what the *small* people want.

JOHN: Do you say you feel it, too?

SUSAN: *Out there* is not going to let it fly. My mama's people gave up on her.

JOHN: Answer me -- do you feel it?

SUSAN: They won't --

JOHN: Answer me!

[Beat.]

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

JOHN: Like!

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.

[JOHN kisses her, lightly.]

JOHN: Now answer me.

SUSAN: There are all these ghosts --

JOHN: (*Goes to kiss her again.*) Let me draw again.

SUSAN: (*Resists.*) Listen. These ghosts *you* can't know, but they rise in *me*. They smell of knives and whippings and old hard stories of Africa and this river before white flooded everything. For you, fullness of heart -- I trust you're truthful on that. But for me, long chain of chains, long pain of pains --

JOHN: I can see that.

SUSAN: Your -- (*indicating her lips*) -- is not enough.

JOHN: Yet.

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: Just tell me one thing.

SUSAN: If it's one thing I can tell.

JOHN: Would you like me to sit on your porch?

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

JOHN: I like your porch --

SUSAN: But you can't --

JOHN: We will deal off the ghosts one by one.

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

JOHN: My saving grace.

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: Then I guess we have an agreement.

GRIER: (*As if from a distance.*) Boy! I know where you are! I know what you're doing!

[*They both sit up, as if hearing GRIER; then JOHN takes his leave.*]

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Act 1, Scene 6: Grier's Place

[*Quick scene shift to GRIER's place. ACTORS retreat upstage. JOHN rushes into the "house." GRIER enters, carrying a short whip or quirt.*]

GRIER: You were with her, weren't you? You weren't here last night.

JOHN: Checking my room?

GRIER: Don't backtalk me! You want her, don't you?

JOHN: I want my money! Wood is done, and I want what you owe me.

GRIER: Wood's got to be sold first before you get anything.

JOHN: That wasn't the agreement.

GRIER: Agreement's changed.

JOHN: I know you got money.

GRIER: What do you know what I have? Out of your place, boy. You need discipline.

[GRIER slips off his suspenders, pulls out his shirt.]

GRIER: Kneel down.

JOHN: Back off.

[GRIER strikes him with the quirt.]

GRIER: You have a liking for darkness, boy, that needs to be *burned* out.

JOHN: Don't hit me!

[GRIER strikes him again, this time with the butt of the quirt, which momentarily stuns JOHN.]

GRIER: I will hit as often and as hard as you need. And you need it.

JOHN: Susan!

GRIER: Stay *down!*

JOHN: Get thee back!

[GRIER goes to unbutton his pants, and JOHN lunges against him, knocking him down.]

JOHN: I want my money, and you will give me what I have earned!

GRIER: *(On the floor, laughing.)* You know *exactly* what you need to do to get your money. Between her thighs ain't *nothing!*

[JOHN starts going through GRIER's pockets roughly, looking for money, and GRIER laughs and laughs until, in an unguarded moment, GRIER strikes him again, hard, and JOHN falls. They are both on the floor. Then GRIER gets up. At this point, several ACTORS form a half-

ring around the two.]

GRIER: You have broken the law, boy. Not to mention trying to rob an old man. The sheriff will hear all about it.

JOHN: And your sin?

[GRIER elaborately tucks in his shirt and pulls up his suspenders.]

GRIER: What sin? Do you see any sin standing in front of you? I am all pure lamb. The sheriff, my old friend, surely is not going to see any sin. *(Pause.)* 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 who wants nigger on his breath.

[JOHN again lunges at GRIER, and the force of the lunge knocks GRIER into one of the ACTORS, who immediately bounces GRIER back toward JOHN. There follows a series of pushes and bounces as JOHN attacks GRIER. With each assault, GRIER looks more and more worried and in pain until, after half a dozen or so pushes, GRIER collapses to his knees, clutching his heart, then dies.]

JOHN: Mr. Grier?

[When it's clear that GRIER is dead, JOHN rifles his pockets. He does not find the bag. With a look of disgust, he reaches down the front of GRIER's pants and pulls out the bag; in it is a ruby pendant and two gold rings. JOHN pockets the bag. There is nothing else in any of the pockets. The ACTORS begin, softly at first, and then more loudly, to stamp their feet in place, as if someone were coming up the steps into the house. Alert, JOHN flees back to SUSAN's house. In the light change, two ACTORS pick up GRIER's body and carry it upstage. The other ACTORS form an obstacle course for JOHN as he runs through the "woods" and across the "river" to SUSAN's house. The obstacle course should be formed in a way that moving through it heightens his desperation. Where it fits, all this should be accompanied by rhythmic clapping/stomping and vocalizing.]

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Act 1, Scene 7: Susan's House

[JOHN rushes in and stops as the dog confronts him.]

JOHN: Not now, hell-dog, not now. You know me -- let me pass. Let me pass! Susan! Susan! Susan!

[SUSAN appears.]

JOHN: All hell has broken loose.

SUSAN: Rufus, let him be. Let him by.

[JOHN edges around the dog.]

SUSAN: Tell me slow, John. If hell has broken out, lay it out slow.

JOHN: Grier --

SUSAN: Ah --

JOHN: What?

SUSAN: I did not want that name.

JOHN: But you guessed.

SUSAN: It rang in your voice.

JOHN: He's dead.

SUSAN: Did you kill him?

JOHN: His heart -- (*Makes a gesture as if to say, "It broke."*) Without my hands, honest -- He said he'd told the sheriff --

SUSAN: Then we got no choice.

JOHN: Maybe the sheriff won't come --

SUSAN: Of course the sheriff is going to come -- he brings a rope hungry for your neck.

[SUSAN gets a shawl and puts it on. She also takes the headband.]

SUSAN: Let's go.

JOHN: That's all?

SUSAN: My mother's grandmother gave her this when my mother left home. (*Indicating the shawl.*) My mother's hands -- what else would I need?

JOHN: Gun would be nice -- you said you had a gun --

SUSAN: Just said -- don't have --

JOHN: Matches, food --

SUSAN: Just like a man.

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

SUSAN: I've been planning about this day for a long time -- I knew it would come. I am prepared where it matters most -- and I won't be taken like my father. (*Tosses the headband to JOHN.*) 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 takes the headband and firmly puts it around JOHN's forehead.]

SUSAN: You are, in your spirit or not, you are what *they* tell you to be. If you want *us*, then you be what they mark *you*. (*Faintly, but not hurtfully, ironic.*) You aren't used to that, are you? I've always had the burn of Africa on me, so I am practiced in the mask. You are new to the hatred. But you have to find the place in you that waits, quiet and dumb, or else we will be bending a tree like Judas. You want *us*, you wait. (*Pause.*) Choices've been made for us. (*Pause.*) 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: To please her, once. That's all she wanted.

JOHN: What tribe?

SUSAN: (*Laughing slightly.*) The johnwicks.

JOHN: Must be new --

SUSAN: Old race -- been here since from the dawn-times.

JOHN: And will stay until the sun-downs?

SUSAN: That is what I have heard.

[Beat.]

JOHN: 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.

[SUSAN suddenly looks very afraid. JOHN embraces her.]

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

[From upstage, a large loud laugh from GRIER as lights change. Frightened, SUSAN and JOHN leave.]

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Act 1, Scene 8: In The Clearing

[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 stirs, sees her sitting apart.]

JOHN: Why did you move?

SUSAN: I liked it too much.

JOHN: Reason to stay.

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

JOHN: Come here --

SUSAN: Take that hand back.

JOHN: It's harmless.

SUSAN: Only in your pocket. Besides --

JOHN: Yeah?

SUSAN: I have not heard "I now declare you" yet.

JOHN: I now declare you.

SUSAN: From someone with a soul and a Bible, please.

JOHN: I have one out of two.

SUSAN: "Soul" only on your shoe bottom. Stay away, John Wicks.

JOHN: Why do you tell your husband to scoot?

SUSAN: I mean it.

JOHN: We've gone through an engagement of fire, don't you think?

SUSAN: Does not make you "husband" yet -- back off!

JOHN: Now I am chilled to my bone.

SUSAN: And I have one word to warm you.

JOHN: Yeah?

SUSAN: Rufus.

JOHN: You wouldn't?

[SUSAN growls.]

JOHN: You couldn't be that mean.

SUSAN: He hasn't eaten yet.

JOHN: You'd give him my tenders?

SUSAN: Take them all by himself, no help needed.

JOHN: Now I am truly chilled.

SUSAN: Much virtue is maintained by cold water -- my father said that.

JOHN: Will you at least sit close enough so that I can steal some of your heat?

[SUSAN sits next to him.]

JOHN: Any idea where we are?

SUSAN: We followed an old Indian trail by the river to the other side of the mountain without going over it.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: Are you all right?

JOHN: Are *you* all right? (*Pause.*) Seems like we're both orphaned all over again.

SUSAN: But not orphaned alone.

JOHN: Then not orphans at all.

[Beat.]

SUSAN: Remembering, aren't you?

JOHN: Him dying --

SUSAN: In that mind's eye --

JOHN: Yeah -- hard. (*Looks at SUSAN.*) But no. (*Indicates his forehead.*) Now you're up there. He's gone.

SUSAN: And you thought color had no knives in it.

JOHN: It doesn't.

SUSAN: No?

JOHN: Only hate does. That's why we're on the other side of the mountain without going over it.

SUSAN: (*Standing.*) John Wicks, you have "stubborn" in you as tough as a pine knot. You don't want to see color --

JOHN: (*Standing.*) I don't.

SUSAN: (*Pointing to her face.*) Then what is this?

JOHN: Skin, hair -- human being.

SUSAN: Where did you come from?

JOHN: The johnwicks have got colorblind built in then all the way back through.

SUSAN: Yeah?

JOHN: Yeah. From the mountain [*pronounced "moun-tan"*] fog.

SUSAN: Meaning --

JOHN: Cleans out the eyes. All's the same in the fog. You know what my tribe likes to do instead of color?

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: It likes to build big walls. Safety in, danger out. Big walls.

SUSAN: If you could be true --

[*Beat.*]

SUSAN: If someone like *you* could be true -- then I suppose I could be the next queen of the

planters' ball come this autumn.

JOHN: (*Holding his hand out to SUSAN.*) And I will be your at-the-right-hand king -- agree?

SUSAN: We are in agreement.

JOHN: And now it is time to eat food we do not have. Can we eat Rufus?

SUSAN: I think we should try there -- the smoke? Someone's sending your belly a signal.

JOHN: If I can't have your honey just yet, I'll take biscuits and bacon instead.

SUSAN: You got the honey for dessert when the time comes ripe for honey.

JOHN: Then I count on time moving forward quickly.

* * * * *

Act 1, Scene 9: Aunt Becky

*[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 is singing **Sheep, Sheep, Don't'cha Know The Road?** softly[**Southern Journey, Vol. 6, Track 1**], but when she sees JOHN and SUSAN enter, she hides behind several ACTORS, picks up a pipe, and sticks it out.]*

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

SUSAN: I thought I did.

JOHN: Hello? (*Pause.*) Stopped. I see the smoke --

SUSAN: But no body.

JOHN: Ghosts?

SUSAN: Ghosts can't hold matches. Rufus!

JOHN: Dog's off terrorizing rabbits.

BECKY: (*Shouting.*) Raise your hands to God and fall to your knees, or I will drill you through your hearts!

[JOHN and SUSAN hesitate.]

BECKY: Do as I say, or I will pickle your souls in brinestone!

[They raise their hands and kneel.]

BECKY: From Grover Bolling, aren't you?

JOHN: Who?

BECKY: Come to bullyrag me some more.

SUSAN: We don't know him.

BECKY: Every body knows Grover Bolling.

SUSAN: We just come by the river around the mountain -- we don't know the names.

BECKY: Bolling not send you.

JOHN: Been sent by hunger, ma'am. We saw your smoke --

BECKY: Around the mountain, you said?

SUSAN: Yes.

BECKY: You can put your 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 these eyes seen --

JOHN: From the tribe of the johnwicks --

SUSAN: (*Loud whisper.*) John!

BECKY: A race of albinos? Or more like them "whited sepulchers"?

JOHN: From over the river's other side -- not many left of us.

BECKY: In fact, you may the only one, right? -- (*dismissively*) johnwicks, my sweet eye-tooth. (*To SUSAN.*) You, girl.

SUSAN: Yes, ma'am.

BECKY: You ain't full colored --

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

BECKY: Same mama as the "johnwick"? (*BECKY starts laughing.*) Johnwick -- johnwick, slick, slick.

JOHN: Can we stand up?

BECKY: Are you Christian? Are you saved folks?

JOHN: My knees are whining.

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

JOHN: (*To SUSAN, softly.*) You didn't tell me that.

SUSAN: Dark continent, I am.

BECKY: (*To JOHN.*) You?

SUSAN: (*Interrupting.*) As soon as we fellowship with a church, he will ask for his soul to be taken.

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

[They stand.]

BECKY: (*Shouting.*) Grover Bolling!

JOHN: (*Calmly.*) Never heard of him.

BECKY: Pray!

[SUSAN begins, with JOHN stumbling along since he does not know the prayer. As they pray, BECKY comes out from behind, holding the pipe. ACTORS move upstage.]

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

BECKY: Enough said. Can feel it off you, the goodness. Turn.

JOHN: That's a pipe.

BECKY: Convinced you it was a gun.

JOHN: Piece of pipe. (*To SUSAN.*) Got us with a pipe.

BECKY: Power of visions.

JOHN: The power of a lie.

BECKY: This from the "johnwick"?

SUSAN: (*To JOHN.*) May be best to button it.

BECKY: She's wise. You said hungry?

JOHN: Whole body hungry.

BECKY: A trade of food for names?

SUSAN: More fair to us than you.

BECKY: Ah, you don't know what I want yet. I am Aunt Becky to everyone around here -- and that now includes you. Name.

SUSAN: Susan.

BECKY: Susan.

SUSAN: Morgan.

BECKY: Susan Morgan. (*To JOHN.*) And includes you, too, if you aim to stick with her. (*To SUSAN.*) I like you, my mulatto.

JOHN: Aunt Becky, this woman is never, ever going to be shy of John Wicks.

BECKY: You two aiming for a marriage under God?

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

BECKY: Psalms! (*To JOHN.*) Mister, you have a jewel here. "The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel." [Proverbs, 20:15]

SUSAN: Proverbs.

BECKY: (*To JOHN.*) More proof, if proof was needed.

SUSAN: Are you a preacher?

BECKY: I have been called to deliver his word.

JOHN: Women can't do that.

BECKY: Why not?

JOHN: I heard that only men can be preachers.

SUSAN: John --

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

SUSAN: Sometimes his mouth runs --

BECKY: Run with this, johnwick. The colors of God's voice comes out a lot of mouths, titties or not, and you had better get used to *that*. Kneel down. Go on.

[*JOHN kneels reluctantly.*]

JOHN: Is there gonna be much of this?

[*BECKY hands him one end of the pipe.*]

BECKY: (*To SUSAN.*) Now, you.

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

BECKY: This pipe is God's word, lifting me off the earth -- but to keep from pitching off, 'cause the word of God is steep, I got to hold on to them that lives around me. Color don't matter -- only love made by a pair of willing shoulders. Put me down.

[BECKY gets down, then faces JOHN and SUSAN.]

BECKY: Rise -- and don't let go.

[When they stand, BECKY grabs the pipe midway between their hands.]

BECKY: When I was sanctified, a window shut down over my eyes -- just wiped out skin-color. Now all I see is God's children. These stand afore you because they want to make their life. Your law is bigger than the man's law that says they can't. Souls got no color except the white of heaven, and in that color I bind them under your name, full of your love, till natural death do carry them to your mansion. Now, Susan, you is known as Susan Wicks.

JOHN: Becky?

BECKY: Yes?

JOHN: (*Looking at SUSAN.*) Susan doesn't need to tie my name to her because it was her that gave me life back back there by the river on the other side of the mountain. I want to honor her -
-

BECKY: Yeah?

[Beat.]

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

SUSAN: That's not done.

BECKY: New from the old.

JOHN: (*Indicating the two of them.*) Supposedly this isn't, either, but we just did. So why not keep on? Rules know only being followed or broken. We follow no rules that keep us unbonded.

BECKY: Susan?

SUSAN: I wasn't hungry to give up my name -- too much blood to earn it.

JOHN: Nothing in a name, anyway. It's in the spirit -- and your spirit's all through me.

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

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

BECKY: (*To them both.*) It's done. You is married. Well, go on, kiss her.

[They kiss. BECKY takes the pipe.]

BECKY: Don't use her up all at once!

JOHN: Now can we have breakfast?

BECKY: (*To SUSAN.*) Just like a man, ain't he? First you sign the Bible to make the record: John and Susan Morgan, July 19, 1907. *Then* we eat to celebrate. Let's go.

SUSAN: Who is Grover Bolling?

JOHN: Can we talk about this over breakfast?

SUSAN: Aunt Becky?

BECKY: Grover Bolling. Grover Bolling is the man who killed my husband, my Jake.

SUSAN: Sorry to hear.

BECKY: Not directly, not with a bullet or a knife, but he destroyed his soul with money and liquor and it ended up being the same bloody thing.

[Beat. BECKY uses the pipe in ways that underscore her story.]

SUSAN: Tell as much as can be told.

BECKY: Jake was a hard-working, honest man until Grover -- a moonshiner with an evil star in his head -- tempted him with easy money. All Jake had to do was watch out for the sheriff, so Jake stopped plowing, stopped haying, and just sat on that porch, watching the road. He shoved everybody away --

SUSAN: Included you.

BECKY: The devil had his teeth in Jake and just sucked the life out of him. Took himself away from me. I don't ever want to see anyone ever again live a lie -- lie just eats at the heart, lie just brings sorrow. "Neither lie one to another." [Leviticus, 19:11] You two got to live what you want -- God, don't let the lie come between them.

JOHN: Sounds like this Grover Bolling needs to be punished.

BECKY: Lord will find a means that suits. Not up to me. What's up to me is to now make breakfast for two newly harnessed and celebrate what's just walked into my life.

[JOHN and SUSAN walk upstage and sit with the others. BECKY faces the audience, pipe in

hand.]

BECKY: You sent them to me because Jake is gone. I will do right by them. I will not let any lie darken their new light. You have the word of your preacher, Rebecca Caldwell.

*[As the lights go to black, BECKY sings **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.]*

End of Act I: Intermission

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 1: The Family

*[To call the audience back to their seats, the ACTORS sing **Corn Bread and Butterbeans [WPAQ]**. Finished, the lights go to black. Three rings of a bell. Strong light on BECKY dressed in her "Sunday clothes": she is in church, praying. As she prays, the ACTORS, one by one, don the mask of the KKK and slowly shift positions, as if in a slow quadrille or dance.*

[Off to one side, JOHN and SUSAN lay together on the floor spooned, she in front of him, his arms around her. As BECKY's prayer progresses, they rise to a sitting position, SUSAN in front of JOHN.]

BECKY: Poor words, Lord, but poor is all I got to give because poor is all you gave to me to give You back. Because I am poor, I am weak -- not heart, not spirit, but in my power to protect. I'm asking You to lay down a Jerusalem wall for these poor colored folks, Susan and John -- they are surely going to need it. Yes, colored, Lord, both -- any creature at the mercy of someone else's evil is colored -- that's how I always seen it. Colored isn't about skin -- that's an accident, like spilt paint. Colored is about power -- that's by the choice of the fist. Color is just another name for the fist. We ain't got a fist, Lord, poor folks never do -- that's why we need to lean on You. And on each other. That's my prayer. Up it goes. *(Pause.)* I hope you're in the office.

[Lights come to BECKY's kitchen. JOHN and SUSAN enter with chairs and coffee cups. In the background the ACTORS move upstage but continue to wear the masks.]

BECKY: So I done my praying.

SUSAN: That's good, Becky.

JOHN: Like washing clothes -- can't hurt.

BECKY: *(To JOHN.)* Not a man for washing your soul?

JOHN: I've found --

SUSAN: John --

BECKY: Let him answer.

SUSAN: He's not one much made for church.

BECKY: Let him answer.

JOHN: (*Hesitant.*) I've found that when I prayed -- Becky, I don't mean disrespect, but I found I was just talking to myself. I already know myself --

BECKY: You do? In, out, dark and light?

JOHN: As much as any man.

BECKY: Can't be much, then, if it's as much as any *man*.

JOHN: As much as any *hu*-man [pronounced "hue-man"], then. As much as you.

BECKY: (*To SUSAN.*) He's so cute when he's so innocent, ain't he?

SUSAN: You gotta admit he's different.

JOHN: I know my mind because I wear it out in front of me each day.

SUSAN: John --

JOHN: It's always talking to me, and I'm always talking to it.

BECKY: Jake just the same -- must be a "man" thing about giving up pride to get the faith.

JOHN: I'm not proud -- I just know what --

BECKY: You ain't cock-like for sure, but johnwick, you got a rod up your spine that'll crack your neck if you're not careful.

JOHN: I just know what I want --

BECKY: "His mind hardened in pride!" [Daniel, 5:20]

JOHN: -- and I plan, plan, plan about how to get it all the time.

BECKY: And just what is it do what you want?

[*Beat.*]

SUSAN: John?

JOHN: I want -- (*to SUSAN*) I told you this already -- johnwicks want big thick walls. I got more reasons now than I ever had for wanting them. And from where I come from, that "want" means two ways. It means money. And it means land. Got those, everyone else can get gone.

BECKY: Don't leave out the state of your soul, johnwick.

JOHN: If I get the walls *thick*, that *is* my soul.

SUSAN: John -- polite.

BECKY: (*To SUSAN.*) Don't worry -- I know he's a good man, but I know his mind better than he thinks I know it, and knowing that, I pray especially hard for the baptism of the spirit now that I got family to protect.

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: (*Clearing throat.*) Becky -- Becky --

[*Beat, looking at the two of them but to JOHN.*]

BECKY: I hear distance in your voice.

SUSAN: Becky --

BECKY: I hear "away" in *your* voice.

JOHN: Mind's been thinking --

BECKY: Plan, plan, plan. Them thick walls.

JOHN: We got to get going, Becky.

BECKY: Someone's always got to leave Eden.

JOHN: We got to be on our own.

BECKY: Always got to leave the garden. Why is that? Why does someone always got to leave what fits them?

SUSAN: John thinks --

BECKY: This place fits you both! (*Pause.*) You fit me. (*Pause.*) If Jake was here -- I know you been talking -- talking about "on your own." I know you been -- those late-at-night whispers, things you don't tell me. I hear them on the air. So it's come to something solid?

JOHN: You given so much -- we shouldn't take up any more. We got to get going.

BECKY: You said that. Where? You got an invitation I ain't heard about? Sudden wealth like manna from God?

JOHN: You know exactly what we have.

BECKY: I know exactly what you *don't* have, and I know you don't have the traveling scratch.

JOHN: You don't need to repeat it.

BECKY: So if it ain't bound for glory you're bound for, then bound for where? (To SUSAN.) Where?

SUSAN: Becky, John feels --

BECKY: What does Susan feel?

[Beat.]

BECKY: What does Susan feel? (To JOHN.) Not all good walls is hard walls. (Striking her left breast.) This can be a wall that protects, too.

SUSAN: I like it here --

JOHN: (To SUSAN.) We talked, Susan --

BECKY: Don't you cut her off! Don't get the habit of being so much the "man" around her! Jake made that mistake, and *I paid for it!* Still paying -- I listen to you two about going, and it makes me pay more -- pay ever after after everything. (Pause.) Now, if you got a destiny-nation, if you got the stuff to render unto Caesar, and you got a place in the scheme where you can be *safe*, then I guess my blessing upon you. John, you got all that? You got all that for Susan? For your *wife*?

JOHN: No.

BECKY: No you don't. You ain't got the means, and worser, you ain't got the luck to make her safe in this world.

JOHN: I haven't had the good luck yet, but I am strong and I will work hard and I will make the luck!

BECKY: Sweat of your brow, huh. Gonna force the world. You *are* a strong man, John Morgan, I will give that to you, but you are dumb and rock-headed about the world -- growing up on that cloudy mountain gave you no warnings! Down here, where *we* grewed up, it seethes -- seethes! -- with vipers -- and maybe you got steel white skin and think you can dance through their fangs with hard work and muscle, but *that* dance ain't for us! We are always in danger because we are the dark reminder of their sins. Their sins! They will burn us bare to the bone with their poison if we so much as forget our place for one wing-beat of that angel of death they call by the name of "color." One wing-beat of "color," you hear me? (Pause.) She likes it here. Why ain't what *she* likes your compass? Why are you so prided up about accepting an old lady's offer of luck? (To SUSAN.) Think color's a problem. (BECKY grabs her own crotch.) *This* man-part makes just as many problems -- thinking too much with *this*.

JOHN: Becky -- let go of yourself.

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

JOHN: Becky --

[SUSAN starts laughing.]

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

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

BECKY: You think this God-fearing daughter of Eve don't know about *these* little eggs? Grover Bolling builds a still and makes brain-rotting liquor, but (*indicating JOHN's body*) it can't match *that* still, and *these*, cooking up that stupid-making liquor called "manliness."

JOHN: Now, look --

[BECKY starts stomping around again like a "man," and SUSAN joins her, and they laugh and laugh until all the tension is dissipated.]

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

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: I 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: I knew a quiet thunder had hit your wedding bed.

SUSAN: (*To BECKY.*) Is it true?

BECKY: What say your womb?

[Beat. SUSAN takes JOHN's right hand and places it on her abdomen.]

SUSAN: Like the Bible -- what testimony do you swear to give?

[JOHN looks at SUSAN, then at BECKY, amazement on his face.]

JOHN: I feel the quick.

BECKY: Too early for that. What you're feeling is your own heart. What testimony, John Morgan? She's waiting.

JOHN: We have a home here. And here.

BECKY: Adam and Eve you two is.

JOHN: Here is the garden, then.

BECKY: And you'll stay?

[JOHN kneels and lays his ear against SUSAN's stomach.]

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

[Beat. JOHN looks at SUSAN and BECKY, nods yes.]

BECKY: Then I formal adopt you as my family. We are all orphans no more. We have safety in the world.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 2

[GOFORTH, MRS. GOFORTH, and DEACON BELL, prepare to meet JOHN through BECKY. BECKY brings along a cake.]

BECKY: Now, you need work, and I know where to get it for you.

JOHN: Let me keep a little dignity, Becky -- say "You know where *I* could find work."

BECKY: *(To SUSAN.)* We'll keep his pride a-going, okay? Won't let him know the *real* power lies back of the throne. John, I know where *you* can find work.

JOHN: And where might that be, Aunt Becky?

[BECKY gets herself ready to leave: ACTORS hand her a shawl and hat.]

BECKY: With Colonel Goforth.

JOHN: And he is?

SUSAN: John --

BECKY: The richest man around here.

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

BECKY: All that land you trespassed over in the dark to get here is his.

JOHN: How'd you connect with him?

BECKY: He's a drunkard, with an unhappy wife -- it goes right through him to her and drowns her. Tuck your shirt in.

JOHN: It's in. What's your connection?

BECKY: Tuck it deeper -- you got two to tuck in for now.

JOHN: Becky --

BECKY: Susan, you can get the dinner if you like -- but take it the easy way on yourself, okay, honey?

SUSAN: I'm not wounded, Becky.

BECKY: No, honey, you is the goddess. John, slick your hair.

JOHN: It's all lined up.

BECKY: (*Passing her hand through his hair.*) Don't want them to think you slept with the straw.

JOHN: Manger was good enough for Jesus. (*BECKY pulls up on his belt loops to straighten his pants.*) I can do that!

BECKY: (*She continues to primp him: straighten his shirt, etc.*) Goforths may be broken, John, but they ain't bowed, yet, so you got to play their rules.

JOHN: (*Gently pushes her hands away.*) I've been dressing myself since a minute after birth.

BECKY: But never played a hand with rich people, have you?

JOHN: "Rich" from where I was meant you had cotton underwear.

BECKY: Here it means the power to break your back -- especially the back of the too-proud. John Morgan, you have to *remember*: you are one of *us*, now. You are *colored*.

JOHN: So how do you connect with him?

BECKY: You now have to be one of those animals whose hair matches the ground so that the hawk flies away hungry.

SUSAN: (*To BECKY.*) New for him.

BECKY: (*To JOHN.*) The choice you've made. Whatever you *think* you are, you are what *they* think you are -- and right now, johnwick, you are an Indian married to a colored woman, and that ain't a very long leash around here. (*Pause.*) When I adopted you two, like we were getting

married -- love, honor, and protect. I'm going to do all three.

JOHN: (*Jokingly.*) Yes, *ma*.

[They all laugh. SUSAN hands him the headband, and he puts it on. BECKY gets the cake, and then she and JOHN move to the GOFORTHS. As they walk, BELL sings a work song, Sink 'Em Low [Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 15]. GOFORTH and MRS. GOFORTH are seated, as if on a porch. GOFORTH is drunk but controlled; from his hand GOFORTH dangles the quirt or short whip used previously by GRIER. Song ends. BECKY indicates to JOHN to wait, then approaches the "porch." In the background, BELL moves as if at work, in a stylized manner; when the talk comes around to JOHN, he stops and listen.]

GOFORTH: If it's not Cleopatra herself, floating in on her royal barge. With a servant, it seems.

BECKY: Good morning, Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH: Becky.

BECKY: Mrs. Goforth.

GOFORTH: (*To MRS. GOFORTH.*) Dearest, it is Becky, the earth mother, the African Eve. With a servant, it seems.

MRS. GOFORTH: (*Sotto voce.*) Be quiet.

GOFORTH: My wife is not appreciative of the verbal arts.

BECKY: It's a hot day.

GOFORTH: *That* explains it. And my thirst.

MRS. GOFORTH: (*Sotto voce.*) Nothing explains your thirst.

GOFORTH: If only you knew, my dear. Is that a cake I see before me?

BECKY: Yes, sir.

GOFORTH: The one I like? Best tribute a king ever received! (*Points to MRS. GOFORTH.*) She'll take it.

[BECKY hands the cake to MRS. GOFORTH, who obviously wants nothing to do with it.]

MRS. GOFORTH: I should go.

GOFORTH: No, stay. You should be intimately involved in the management of your own property. Watch your caretaker caretake.

MRS. GOFORTH: Not in front of her.

GOFORTH: I'm sorry, Becky -- I sometimes forget the fine feelings of my fine wife. (*Indicating JOHN.*) And your servant?

BECKY: This is John Morgan.

GOFORTH: Your very light-colored servant?

BECKY: John Morgan.

GOFORTH: And what relation is he to you that you bring him to me?

BECKY: John, and his wife Susan -- kin.

GOFORTH: He to you?

BECKY: No! She to me -- cousin from the other side of the mountain.

GOFORTH: Kin from the other side -- (*To MRS. GOFORTH.*) Nice how family helps each other from the other side? (*To JOHN.*) Come here. Come here. The (*indicates the headband*) --

BECKY: Indian.

GOFORTH: Let *him*, Becky. (*To JOHN.*) I assume you own a tongue.

JOHN: Like Becky says --

GOFORTH: And she says what?

JOHN: Indian.

GOFORTH: You holding onto that story?

JOHN: Easy when it's the truth.

GOFORTH: Heh?

JOHN: (*Looks at BECKY.*) Sir.

GOFORTH: Better. Indian of any known species?

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

GOFORTH: Awash in Indian blood. And some white, it seems.

JOHN: White flows everywhere, from what I hear.

BECKY: (*Softly.*) John.

GOFORTH: But a drop of that "other" washes it all away, doesn't it?

JOHN: From what I hear.

GOFORTH: God's law.

JOHN: So I hear.

GOFORTH: Which makes you a -- a -- a mongrel pureblood! With a colored wife -- (*to BECKY*) right?

BECKY: Right, Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH: What a mess you got in your kin, Becky! A *mess*. Be careful -- blood never lies, and Indian blood -- well, it's got a *dark* history.

BECKY: All God's children got dark in their history, Colonel Goforth.

MRS. GOFORTH: I am going.

[GOFORTH does not say anything. MRS. GOFORTH leaves. She leaves the cake on her chair. GOFORTH takes the cake and picks at it.]

GOFORTH: She does leave me the whole management -- it can be a burden to bear. Now, Becky, I know you didn't come here just to give me the cake I love.

BECKY: Right again, Colonel.

GOFORTH: About him, right?

BECKY: He needs work.

GOFORTH: You need work?

JOHN: I 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. I have a soft spot for Becky -- we been -- neighbors -- for a long time, through drought and deluge for longer than some people have had their skin. Family -- sort of. Right, Becky?

BECKY: In a way, yes.

[Beat. GOFORTH puts the cake down.]

GOFORTH: Monday fine for you, John Morgan? Deacon!

JOHN: Monday's fine.

[BELL arrives.]

GOFORTH: Deacon, meet your new employee.

BELL: Becky.

GOFORTH: John, Deacon is my overseer -- my right hand. Aren't you, Deacon?

BELL: "And the face of a lion is on the right side." [Ezekiel, 1:10]

GOFORTH: Sanctified man. What comes from his mouth are my words and you better receive them with grace.

BELL: We don't need another hand, Mr. Goforth.

GOFORTH: Deacon --

BELL: At least not one like his.

GOFORTH: A hand's a hand when it comes to work, Deacon, and we have work, that much I know. I expect to see both of his employed fruitfully come Monday morning. Clear as a bell, Deacon?

BELL: Yes sir.

GOFORTH: Clang, clang, Deacon?

BELL: Yes sir.

GOFORTH: Besides, he has a wife to succor. A *negro* wife.

[Beat.]

BELL: I don't like --

GOFORTH: Sunrise, Monday. Deacon, you get the paperwork done.

BECKY: Thank you, Colonel Goforth.

GOFORTH: Those that have should share with those that don't.

JOHN: Sunrise, Monday.

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

JOHN: Thank you.

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

[Beat.]

JOHN: Thank you.

BELL: Get your back ready, tusca-tawba-erokee, because it's going to slip and shake on Monday!

[GOFORTH, with a hand from BELL, gets up from his chair, and GOFORTH and BELL exit upstage.]

BECKY: You got work.

JOHN: (Taking off the headband.) Becky --

BECKY: Yeah?

JOHN: I have a lot to learn.

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Act II, Scene 3

[Four ACTORS sing *Corn Dodgers* [Southern Journey, Vol. 6, Track 9] as a commentary and to show the passage of time: three months. This accompanies a dumb show of JOHN, BELL, GOFORTH, and MRS. GOFORTH. BELL works JOHN hard, resentful of him. GOFORTH drinks and MRS. GOFORTH suffers.]

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Act II, Scene 4

[BECKY is in her kitchen. JOHN and SUSAN are asleep. A gunshot rings out (**to be done acoustically, not by tape**); the sound of broken glass (**glass in box**). Everyone is jolted. by WAYNE BOLLING, comes on, carrying a shotgun.]

WAYNE: Bring your black Satan's ass out here for its resurrection!

JOHN: Who the hell is that?

[Another shot, more broken glass. JOHN gets his pants on.]

JOHN: Becky, down!

WAYNE: My daddy's sent me to settle up the score, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky! It's time for the Revela-a-a-a-ations!

[During the next lines, WAYNE puts down the gun and acts as if he's performing an exorcism on the house: stylized but lunatic movements -- clearly unbalanced. The ACTOR can also improv any kinds of "spells" for conjuration. If it works, have some ACTORS shadow him as his "demons."]

JOHN: Who --

BECKY: Wayne Bolling.

JOHN: Who is he? (*To SUSAN.*) Keep your goddamn head down!

SUSAN: Don't talk to me like that.

JOHN: (*To BECKY, as he struggles.*) Who is he?

BECKY: Son of Grover Bolling.

JOHN: And who's that?

SUSAN: The moonshiner.

BECKY: Killer of my Jake.

JOHN: What's he want with you?

BECKY: Thinks I'll go to the sheriff about Jake.

[JOHN peeks out of the window at WAYNE's antics.]

JOHN: He's doing what out there?

BECKY: (*Peeking out.*) They say all his daddy's liquor-making's distilled his brain-pan.

WAYNE: I have already killed the hell-hound.

SUSAN: Rufus!

WAYNE: Now I am going to suck out the other demons!

JOHN: Crack-brain or not, this sucker has a live gun.

SUSAN: He killed Rufus!

WAYNE: I am the angel of vengeance -- revenge -- (*growls*) aaahhhhh!

JOHN: And all you got --

BECKY: All I got is a pipe.

SUSAN: Rufus --

JOHN: Ain't anything to do about that.

[WAYNE picks up the gun and fires again. SUSAN grabs her stomach, but JOHN and BECKY

do not see it. WAYNE puts the gun down and starts his "exorcism" again, ranting as he does.]

JOHN: All right, all right --

BECKY: All right what?

JOHN: Going to try something.

SUSAN: John!

[JOHN does not see the pain on her face.]

BECKY: Don't try nothing! He'll go away.

JOHN: But he'll come back. Just stay down, both of you.

[JOHN moves upstage; one of the ACTORS hands him the pipe. JOHN circles to the other side of the stage to get behind WAYNE and then sneak up on him. At some point BECKY sticks her head up to see what's going on and WAYNE, at the same moment, picks up his gun and points it right at her. There is a frozen moment; JOHN, seeing this, moves up behind WAYNE and pokes the end of the pipe against the back of his head.]

WAYNE: *(While holding the gun on BECKY.)* Ah, harlot, the end-times is near and nearer for you. Your soul stinks and offends high heaven --

JOHN: *(With the pipe pressed against the back of WAYNE's head.)* Put it down.

WAYNE: A voice.

JOHN: Voice of *my* god -- down, or buzzards'll have your brains!

WAYNE: Hard voice.

JOHN: Down, now.

WAYNE: Very hard.

JOHN: Becky!

BECKY: *(In a strained voice.)* We got problems here.

[During the next lines, while JOHN deals with getting WAYNE away, SUSAN collapses in pain and is helped by BECKY. None of this is seen by JOHN.]

JOHN: Don't turn around!

WAYNE: Round and round, the voice tells me.

JOHN: Go!

WAYNE: Not without my gun.

JOHN: Go!

WAYNE: Gun.

JOHN: No! Straight -- out. Go!

[With a quick move, WAYNE pivots and grabs the pipe. At the same moment he stoops to get the gun. JOHN drops and grabs the gun as well; he is holding the stock, WAYNE is holding the barrel. For another frozen moment they look at one another. In the background, SUSAN is in intense pain, then cries out. JOHN is momentarily distracted. WAYNE pulls the gun out of his hand, but before he can turn it around, JOHN reacts by swinging the pipe against WAYNE's knee, knocking him to the ground. JOHN steps on the gun and threatens to drive the pipe into WAYNE's face. Another scream from SUSAN. JOHN jams the pipe against the floor just beside WAYNE's head, grabs the gun away, and runs to the house. WAYNE, listening to SUSAN's screams, smiles, does a little exorcistic dance, then exits.]

SUSAN: Losing the baby, John!

JOHN: What can I do?

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

[When the song ends, the ACTORS retreat upstage. BECKY moves away from JOHN and SUSAN into her own light; she is devastated and looks as if all the life has been sucked out of her. The next set of lines interject with one another, but JOHN and SUSAN do not hear BECKY, and vice versa.

[As the lines start, half the ACTORS will come to JOHN and SUSAN and half to BECKY, carrying these props:

JOHN and SUSAN

- * A white dress, rough cotton*
- * A bucket of water with several towels for washing*
- * Several towels for drying*
- * Susan's shawl*
- * The ruby necklace*

BECKY

- * A white dress, rough cotton*
- * A bowl of water*
- * A rough towel*
- * Becky's shawl*
- * Her Bible, with the land deed*

[Through JOHN and SUSAN's lines, JOHN undresses SUSAN completely and washes off the blood; he dries her gently, then dresses her in the white dress. He then puts the ruby necklace on SUSAN.

[Through BECKY's lines, BECKY washes the blood off her hands, takes off her dress, puts on the white dress, opens the Bible, and takes the deed. BECKY's lines are delivered upward, as if

talking to God, Jake, or both.

[In each case, the ACTORS will take off the items no longer being used.]

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

SUSAN: Hold me, hold me, hold me, hold me --

BECKY: No Jake to hold me.

JOHN: Let me take off your dress.

SUSAN: No!

JOHN: I have to take off the dress --

SUSAN: Hold me, hold me, hold me --

BECKY: No Jake to hold me.

JOHN: I'm holding you.

SUSAN: Don't take him away!

BECKY: Jake, every evil comes back to haunt!

[Beat.]

JOHN: I have to take him, honey -- it's not anything anymore.

SUSAN: Not anything --

JOHN: No.

SUSAN: Not anything -- My baby -- my baby -- my baby -- *(trails off)*

BECKY: What rule have we broken?

JOHN: Let me help you.

SUSAN: My insides cut --

JOHN: Your arm -- that's right, that's right -- the other one --

SUSAN: Gone, gone, gone --

BECKY: *(In a howl.)* You lied!

SUSAN: We're living a lie --

JOHN: Lift -- good. Now, the rest --

SUSAN: No life left because of the lie --

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

[By this time, SUSAN is completely naked; JOHN washes SUSAN. Please see note about nudity at the top of the script: If the costume change can be done and the sense of the scene gotten across without the nudity, then that is a valid directorial choice.]

JOHN: Feel the cool water, Susan, feel my hands --

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

JOHN: Going to wash you, Susan, bring you back --

SUSAN: I am so far away.

JOHN: You are right here.

BECKY: So far away --

JOHN: Like the river where we first met --

SUSAN: I am so lost --

BECKY: So far away --

JOHN: The water that brought us together brings us again -- feel --

SUSAN: You are washing him away --

JOHN: I am bringing you the river to keep you with me --

[JOHN dries SUSAN and dresses her in the white dress. BECKY is also changed. He takes the ruby necklace and goes to put it around her neck. By this time, the ACTORS can retreat upstage with their props.]

SUSAN: Where did you get that?

JOHN: Old man Grier -- I stole it when he wouldn't pay me.

SUSAN: It's a drop of blood!

JOHN: No, it's a ruby.

BECKY: *(Opening her Bible.)* Who can find a virtuous woman? [Proverbs, 31:11-31]

SUSAN: It's blood!

BECKY: For her price is far above rubies.

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: (*Clutching the ruby.*) It burns.

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.

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 closes her Bible.]

BECKY: There is nothing left for me.

JOHN: Everything is still left for us to do. Now sleep.

SUSAN: Sleep with me.

JOHN: Always.

[JOHN leaves SUSAN sleeping; she clutches the ruby. JOHN steps into his own light. JOHN, SUSAN, and BECKY are now in separate pools. As JOHN speaks, ACTORS will hand him a change of clothes: a white shirt, clean pants, shoes. The two gold rings should be in one of the pockets. He hands them the old clothes.]

JOHN: My heart is hard.

BECKY: My heart is hollow.

JOHN: Each moment more hard.

BECKY: A stone of emptiness. [Isiah, 34:11]

[SUSAN sits up.]

JOHN: Bloody thoughts.

BECKY: Mind full of wind.

JOHN: Each moment bloodier.

BECKY: Each moment more empty.

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

[SUSAN and BECKY turn to look at JOHN, and he speaks to them.]

JOHN: I will not let it win. What can protect us, I will find it. Land, money -- I will earn it. Respect, fear -- I will join them to me. *(Pause.)* But never again being *at the mercy*. There is no mercy there, on either side.

[SUSAN and BECKY turn to the audience.]

SUSAN: The lie shades all our love.

BECKY: The lie will kill them, and then us all.

JOHN: Never again.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 5

[Beat. ACTORS bring out three chairs. JOHN, SUSAN, and BECKY sit. Change of lights: they are now in BECKY's kitchen.]

BECKY: I want you to have it.

SUSAN: Becky --

BECKY: These past few months, I have known something you have not: I am going to die.

SUSAN: That's not true.

BECKY: These past few months, I have heard my name called.

SUSAN: You're just tired.

BECKY: I want you to have the house and the land.

JOHN: You have kin --

BECKY: Not to speak ill of -- but my sister doesn't understand the gifts she already got, and to add more would be to throw away.

JOHN: But it should go to kin --

BECKY: All the kin I have is collected in those two chairs.

JOHN: But we want to pay you for it. We can't just gift-take your land.

SUSAN: John!

JOHN: It's only right.

SUSAN: How?

JOHN: I have a plan!

SUSAN: All right, John --

JOHN: Listen to me!

SUSAN: -- no need to --

JOHN: Listen to me.

SUSAN: All right!

JOHN: Becky, we are not going to just accept what you offer -- we are going to earn everything so that no one can ride us. Now, you stay right here --

BECKY: Only going up if I go anywhere.

SUSAN: No talk like that.

JOHN: We'll be back.

[JOHN and SUSAN grab the two chairs and move them away from BECKY. They sit, and JOHN brings out the two gold rings.]

SUSAN: Where did you get those?

JOHN: With the ruby necklace.

SUSAN: Gold.

JOHN: Pretty sure. (*Looks at SUSAN for a beat.*) Sell them to Goforth. For money to buy the land. Yes?

[*Beat.*]

SUSAN: He'll say you stole them.

JOHN: What?

SUSAN: Indians don't have gold.

JOHN: I didn't!

SUSAN: If he says you did, you did --

JOHN: But they were *payment!*

SUSAN: His words weigh heavier.

JOHN: (*Angrily.*) Can't ever mix, right, without it being a crime.

SUSAN: Colored -- remember?

JOHN: What can I do?

SUSAN: What can *we* do -- sometimes, John Morgan, you forget "we" too quickly. An idea.

JOHN: What?

SUSAN: You'll have to take me with you for it to work. And you don't get to say no to that.

[*Beat as they look at each other. Then they take the two chairs and move to the GOFORTHS' house. GOFORTH and MRS. GOFORTH take the chairs and sit. DEACON BELL is there. As usual, GOFORTH is slightly inebriated and carries GRIER's quirt or short whip.*]

BELL: This is not right. (*Points to SUSAN.*) You should not be here.

MRS. GOFORTH: (*To GOFORTH.*) Have you no shame?

GOFORTH: Lost it all when I married you.

BELL: I can ride them right out, Mr. Goforth.

GOFORTH: Deacon -- hard-working people -- I admire hard-working people, you know that. And John has worked hard for me. Think you might want to change your opinion of him. (*To MRS. GOFORTH.*) And you, too.

MRS. GOFORTH: Not in my house.

GOFORTH: We can see about that. (*Turning to JOHN and SUSAN.*) Now, you said sell?

[*SUSAN hands the two rings to GOFORTH, who examines them.*]

MRS. GOFORTH: Now you are with thieves.

GOFORTH: (*Quietly.*) Be quiet. Why do you want to sell?

JOHN: Don't you want to know where we got them?

GOFORTH: That's question number two. I want first to know why.

SUSAN: Aunt Becky --

GOFORTH: (*Indicating JOHN.*) Doesn't he have his own tongue?

JOHN: She can speak for me.

GOFORTH: (*To MRS. GOFORTH.*) We are in the midst of a social revolution. Well, Susan Morgan, speak, then.

SUSAN: Aunt Becky wants to deed us her land, and we want to pay her a fair price for it.

BELL: Deed it to you?

GOFORTH: Deacon --

BELL: What've you done to shrink that woman's mind to such a stupid idea?

JOHN: I think it's a fine idea.

BELL: Mr. Goforth, just two thieving jackdaws! I've known Becky --

GOFORTH: (*Chuckling.*) "Known" Becky? You?

BELL: (*Not hearing.*) -- for almost all my adult years and she never once made a gift of anything to me. But you two --

MRS. GOFORTH: This is intolerable.

GOFORTH: Management, my dear.

BELL: -- Indian, *you* say -- less than a year, and she wants to make you solid? Smells to me.

GOFORTH: Becky wants to sell?

SUSAN: Becky wants to *give*.

GOFORTH: For free?

SUSAN: We want to pay.

BELL: Mouth is full of fraud. [Psalms, 10:7]

GOFORTH: Deacon -- they want to pay for what they could get for free. (*To SUSAN and JOHN.*) Earn your way.

JOHN: Like you.

MRS. GOFORTH: Earn? I am leaving.

GOFORTH: Stay! (*Pause.*) Let's assume that Becky is of sound mind. (*Warning.*) Deacon -- (*To JOHN and SUSAN.*) Where did you get these?

[*Beat.*]

SUSAN: In the family.

GOFORTH: Yes?

SUSAN: They belonged to my grandmother.

[*Beat.*]

SUSAN: She lived not far from here.

GOFORTH: When?

SUSAN: Before -- all the trouble.

GOFORTH: Not far from here, you say? Gifts to her?

SUSAN: Yes.

GOFORTH: Ah -- from her --

SUSAN: From. Her. Master. Yes.

MRS. GOFORTH: (*Rising to leave.*) The filth you bring in --

[*MRS. GOFORTH exits.*]

GOFORTH: His favorite?

[*SUSAN nods.*]

BELL: (*To JOHN and SUSAN.*) You got more brass than brains, you do. Let me throw them --

GOFORTH: No. (*Pause.*) I know about -- such things. I surely do.

BELL: Digging up that dark stuff --

GOFORTH: (*To BELL.*) Stop muttering. And you want to sell them?

SUSAN: That time has gone. This time is now.

GOFORTH: I don't need the rings -- but I'll take them off your hands, so to speak, to help Becky. She deserves. Deacon, you keep your usual eye on things -- I'll be back.

[Lights down on that scene; all the ACTORS retreat upstage.]

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 6

[BECKY in her own light, her Bible open.]

BECKY: I have passed on the land; now time to pass on. No more a burden to anyone; no more burden to carry. I can lay it down. Jake, I hope you're there because I have been waiting a long time making belief that you are; I will be mightily aggravated if I have to search you out. But I think not -- I think your face is in that cloud and smiling for me like a beacon fire on a hill to guide me to home. Susan, John -- carry on the line.

*[BECKY closes her Bible, folds her hands, and closes her eyes. The ACTORS sing **Whole Heap A Little Horses [Southern Journey, Vol. 2, Track 25]**. SUSAN steps forward, and with very gentle motions arranges BECKY's hair and shawl. JOHN steps forward and very gently lifts BECKY in his arms, then sets her gently on her feet. Hand in hand, SUSAN on one side and JOHN on the other, they walk upstage as the lights dim.]*

Intermission

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Act III, Scene 1

*[To call the audience back to their seats, the ACTORS sing **Three Nights Drunk [Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 8]**. Finished, the lights go to black. NOTE: JOHN and SUSAN will have new clothes to wear for the act.]*

[Three rings of a bell. The lights come up on GROVER BOLLING at his "still": a tableau made by the other actors. To one side is WAYNE BOLLING, twitching and muttering. GROVER also has a facial tic, and throughout the scene he fiddles with a rag or cloth.]

GROVER: Will you shut yourself off?

[WAYNE ceases for a moment, then resumes.]

GROVER: I'm warning you.

[WAYNE ceases for a moment, waits.]

GROVER: As if it ever does any good.

[WAYNE resumes.]

GROVER: Your brain is broke -- ill wind is what you are -- that's what your mama blew to me. You got a brain like a passing ill wind. Like a fart. *(Laughs at his own joke.)* Passing wind.

[JOHN enters but is not seen right away. He is carrying WAYNE's gun.]

GROVER: You is like a bad batch, boy. Mash ain't right, maybe, 'cause it's got ergot in it, or you been cooked too long. You is like a bad batch I can't sell and I can't drink and I got to pour down the river's throat. You will be the misfortune of me yet.

[JOHN steps into the scene. WAYNE reacts immediately as if he's been stung; he circles JOHN, making motions. GROVER is also taken aback -- he is not used to strangers coming unannounced to his property.]

JOHN: Grover Bolling.

GROVER: No --

[JOHN holds up the gun.]

JOHN: Before a lie leaves you, recognize this?

[GROVER steps away from the "still."]

GROVER: How'd you get -- ?

JOHN: Look like yours?

GROVER: Not saying a thing until --

[JOHN points the gun at GROVER.]

JOHN: Does this speak to you? *(Indicating WAYNE.)* Tell him to stay away -- I am not inclined to cut him any mercy.

WAYNE: Swine goeth before pearls --

GROVER: What if that is my gun?

WAYNE: Unclean fruit --

GROVER: What if? Wayne, shut up!

[GROVER goes to WAYNE and prepares to backhand him; WAYNE offers his face, as if this is part of a ritual; and GROVER, firmly but casually, hits him. WAYNE retreats, sits.]

GROVER: The boy is not -- right -- Now, what if?

JOHN: Curious how it came to my hands?

GROVER: How did you find here?

JOHN: Not hard to follow an ill wind with an ill smell.

GROVER: Should I know you?

JOHN: (*Displaying the gun.*) The sheriff, I am sure, would show some interest.

GROVER: Sheriff does not need to be enlightened, about *that* or *this*.

JOHN: Ah. This.

[*JOHN fires at the "still" -- gunshot sound. Some of the ACTORS "break apart."*]

GROVER: Hey!

[*JOHN fires again -- more damage. Looking GROVER in the eye, JOHN breaks the gun open, mimes inserting two more shells, and then fires once more into the "still." The "still" is destroyed. JOHN breaks the gun open and mimes putting in two more shells. During the next lines, the ACTORS retreat upstage.*]

JOHN: Now, there's nothing for the sheriff to know.

[*GROVER says nothing. JOHN walks quickly to WAYNE, and before GROVER or WAYNE can react, JOHN presses the gun against WAYNE's temple. Incongruously, WAYNE is smiling. He keeps the smile on his face.*]

JOHN: One other matter. Concerning trash. Your son here is a double murderer.

WAYNE: In the secret places --

GROVER: Shut up!

WAYNE: -- doth he murder the innocent. [Psalm 10:8]

JOHN: You know Rebecca Caldwell.

GROVER: Maybe --

JOHN: Not a question. (*To WAYNE.*) Get up. (*Prods him with the gun.*) Walk.

[*They walk to GROVER.*]

JOHN: Kneel.

WAYNE: The revenger of blood --

GROVER: Shut up!

WAYNE: -- himself shall slay the murderer. [Numbers, 35:19]

GROVER: His mama read him too much of that --

JOHN: Rebecca Caldwell. Your son killed her. I know the story -- you're a murderer, too, of Jake.

GROVER: You the half-breed that Becky took in -- with the black sow -- I heard --

JOHN: (*Jabbing the gun muzzle hard against WAYNE's head.*) My wife.

GROVER: You and the sow?

[*JOHN quickly raises the gun to GROVER's face, who pulls back.*]

JOHN: Wife!

GROVER: Wife, then.

[*JOHN puts the gun back against WAYNE's head.*]

JOHN: Your son killed Becky with *this*.

GROVER: Wayne?

WAYNE: Him -- filthy water --

JOHN: He killed Becky, and he then killed my child.

GROVER: Wayne? (*To JOHN.*) He shot them?

JOHN: Through the heart.

GROVER: My boy is not a killer.

JOHN: Not for you to say. (*Poking WAYNE with the gun.*) Lay down.

GROVER: Leave him alone.

JOHN: Not until I get my satisfaction. Lay down. Lay down!

GROVER: Do as the crazy man says.

JOHN: One crazy man to another. Arms to the side.

[*WAYNE lays down and spreads his arms. Underneath the following lines he mutters and twitches, as if doing his incantations.*]

GROVER: You want to kill him?

JOHN: Justice must be paid by the father for the sins of the son. (*To WAYNE.*) Ah, ah, ah -- don't try to get up!

GROVER: (*To WAYNE.*) Lay down, you fool! Shut up! You've destroyed my machine -- ain't that enough?

JOHN: You have a liberal arithmetic, Grover Bolling -- you're still up short for two dead hearts.

[*Beat.*]

GROVER: What else do you want? You want him? Take him.

JOHN: What would I do with nothing?

GROVER: What else, then?

JOHN: What else do you have left?

GROVER: Nothing.

JOHN: What else?

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: That's what I want.

GROVER: No.

JOHN: Yes.

GROVER: You can't take my land.

JOHN: I don't intend to take it -- *you* intend to sign it over to me.

GROVER: I don't!

JOHN: The idea is coming hard upon you, Grover Bolling -- I can feel its hard approach upon you.

GROVER: You're crazed.

JOHN: I can feel it coming.

GROVER: Land is all I got.

JOHN: The idea is knocking, Grover Bolling. Knocking hard. Lose your land to me, but get a little money and keep yourselves free as the dirt you are, or see the sheriff snatch it for pennies at

auction while you two crack county yard forever. Dealer's choice.

GROVER: (*Ranting at WAYNE.*) Why am I always downriver from your shit? Why am I forever choking on your garbage? Damn!

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: Hear the gavel now. I can smell --

GROVER: All right!

JOHN: All right what? You have to spit it out.

GROVER: You can steal my land.

JOHN: No, no, no -- I *buy* your land. You *buy* your freedom. Something for something. Meet me at Mr. Goforth's in an hour, with the deed. He'll handle the papers. Then you're free to go. (*To WAYNE.*) Get up. (*WAYNE only gets to his knees.*) Family should stick together.

[*JOHN backs away from them.*]

GROVER: The gun.

JOHN: When we close.

GROVER: I'll need it.

JOHN: When you make your "X."

GROVER: I can write my name!

JOHN: Whichever way you sign it --

GROVER: I can write my own name!

JOHN: -- it will be written in blood. One hour.

[*JOHN exits. GROVER walks over to WAYNE, and, without warning, wraps the cloth or rag around WAYNE's neck. WAYNE does not resist. GROVER lets him go and exits. WAYNE stands. He mimes holding the gun and shoots three times: once to stage right, once stage left, once center. Lights out.*]

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Act III, Scene 2

[*The scene moves quickly into the kitchen of BECKY's house, now owned by JOHN and SUSAN. SUSAN brings in a chair. JOHN is getting ready to leave; he has the gun.*]

SUSAN: Where are you going?

JOHN: I have business.

SUSAN: Business you aren't telling me about?

JOHN: Business I *will* when it's done.

SUSAN: But not as it's in your mind right now.

JOHN: It'll be done soon.

SUSAN: Where did you go today?

JOHN: I had -- business. Why are you questioning me?

SUSAN: Why are you hiding from me?

JOHN: I'm not hiding.

SUSAN: Then what's your business?

JOHN: *Our* business.

SUSAN: Then even more obligation.

JOHN: I will tell you!

SUSAN: Now!

JOHN: Later!

SUSAN: Now!

JOHN: You need rest.

SUSAN: I need truth.

JOHN: You need rest!

SUSAN: I need healing! Our child is dead --

JOHN: I've got its blood in my eyes!

SUSAN: Don't you go dead to me now!

JOHN: I am trying to raise a wall here --

SUSAN: I don't need a wall!

JOHN: We need protection!

SUSAN: I don't need you to be a wall! I don't need you dead to me now!

JOHN: I'm not dead to you!

SUSAN: I see the stone in your face --

JOHN: I am so alive --

SUSAN: Alive? Look at me -- you have Old Man Grier all in your face.

[Beat.]

JOHN: I do not!

SUSAN: Grier.

JOHN: Stop looking!

SUSAN: Grier, Grier, Grier. Mean, hard with hunger. What's your business? What's your business so important that it makes that *white man* steal your face from me?

[Beat.]

SUSAN: Huh, *white man*?

JOHN: Sit down. Sit down!

SUSAN: You got the gun, white man -- mark your territory!

JOHN: Sit down!

SUSAN: I will not be saddled!

[During the next lines, the ACTORS will interact with JOHN as he explains the "wall" that he is trying to build. They are the "struggles" that he has gone through and is going through to protect his family. These tableau will be choreographed.]

JOHN: (*Quietly.*) Sit down. Okay? (*SUSAN sits.*) Do you know what that gun did today? It went to Grover Bolling's house.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: I went to his house -- his sty -- and spoke for us.

SUSAN: You went to *his* house?

JOHN: Yes.

SUSAN: I should burn your clothes.

JOHN: Please --

SUSAN: How could you?

JOHN: Because my mother died of sorrow.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: Because my mother died of sorrow.

SUSAN: Your *mother*?

JOHN: Sorrow -- she died of sorrow, Susan. Sorrow like a thick taproot. Sorrow so deep it flowed in her instead of blood. Sorrow so deep because she was lashed to my father who was nothing but thorns and nails. A drunk. A moonshiner, just like Grover Bolling. Don't -- listen! Up on the mountain my mother bled sorrow from the thorns in her spirit because she had no protection! Her only freedom came when she died. I buried her in a ragged dress of cheap yellow cloth. And my father, drunk in his own misery because now he had no one left he could make to suffer -- (*pause*) accident or not, I don't know, but he burned to death in his rocking chair when the house exploded from a kicked-over lantern. Or maybe he self-combusted from all the dry useless tinder he had called a life.

[The tableau finish. Behind SUSAN the ACTORS circle, interjecting comments to SUSAN as JOHN speaks. As each ACTOR speaks, he or she retreats upstage.]

JOHN: (*Picks up the gun.*) I saw my father's face again in Grover Bolling. (*Points the gun.*) I saw the deserter.

ACTOR: Pickaninny.

JOHN: Here was the chance to make him pay off his debt.

ACTOR: Mammy.

JOHN: Here was the chance --

ACTOR: Slave sister.

JOHN: -- to make my father pay off his debt to me.

ACTOR: Darky.

JOHN: His kind had taken my mother and my child.

ACTOR: Sambo.

JOHN: (*Puts the gun down.*) I forced him, Susan, to give me -- give *us* -- his land.

ACTOR: Nigger.

JOHN: I told him the land or I would load the sheriff's ears with Wayne's double murder.

ACTOR: All fall down.

JOHN: In twenty minutes I will be at Goforth's. I will have the deed in my pocket when I leave. No fire will take us down. No one will die in cheap yellow. I will not allow it.

SUSAN: And you think you can do all this?

JOHN: I am doing it.

SUSAN: Build the wall?

JOHN: Walls.

SUSAN: And make them safe?

JOHN: Stronger than Jericho.

SUSAN: I don't how to trust you on this.

JOHN: Trust me straight. Trust me deep.

SUSAN: You take the killer's land and mix it with Becky's grace. You breed an enemy and an enemy's son. You make your business known to Goforth but know nothing of his own. And then our secret -- always locking us on pain of death. There's a taint in everything that's anything to us, John, a stain, and it scares me without end.

JOHN: No, listen --

SUSAN: I'm sorry -- I don't feel protection. I don't feel the angel's hand. I have these -- voices and -- haunts and can hardly find my face for all their own thick sorrow.

JOHN: I have to go.

[Beat.]

JOHN: I have to go. *(Pause.)* I don't know any other way.

[JOHN starts to exit.]

SUSAN: Wait --

[Beat.]

JOHN: I'm waiting.

SUSAN: And so am I. It wouldn't be right, you going with that face. You not knowing all.

JOHN: Knowing all what?

SUSAN: How long's it been since -- our child --

JOHN: Stop it.

SUSAN: Our child died.

JOHN: Months --

SUSAN: Months out of an eternity.

JOHN: Yes.

SUSAN: Of hell.

JOHN: Yes.

SUSAN: Then come here.

[SUSAN places JOHN's hand on her stomach.]

SUSAN: It may be a little early, but --

JOHN: *(In wonderment.)* No!

SUSAN: -- if you can wait -- and feel --

JOHN: *(Softly.)* No.

SUSAN: There's another for why I am so scared --

JOHN: Another --

SUSAN: Another.

JOHN: River flows --

SUSAN: River flows --

JOHN: River flows, we go.

SUSAN: River flows, we take it.

JOHN: River has been good to us.

SUSAN: *(Touches his face.)* Grier is gone. Grier is gone. I see my johnwick back.

JOHN: *(Playfully fearful.)* Oh no -- oh no -- does that mean -- Rufus is back, too?

SUSAN: (*Playfully growling.*) I want your tender parts, white man!

[*SUSAN fakes a leap at JOHN, and JOHN crumples to the ground. SUSAN crouches over him.*]

JOHN: Tell him to turn his gaze elsewhere please!

SUSAN: Not until he hears the magic words.

JOHN: Those being -- ?

SUSAN: What words of magic you got locked in that throat of yours?

JOHN: I got lots.

SUSAN: Rufus likes to hear all kinds.

JOHN: How about these?

[*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: "Fly around my blue-eyed girl -- "

SUSAN: Ain't got blue eyes! (*Growls.*) Rufus grows impatient!

JOHN: "Fly around my daisy -- "

SUSAN: (*Playfully whining.*) Don't sing -- it hurts Rufus' ears!

JOHN: (*Sits up as he recites the words.*) "Fly around my blue-eyed girl / Fly around my daisy / Fly around my blue-eyed girl / You almost run me crazy. / I wish I have some pretty little gal / To learn my secrets true..."

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: I do. I do. I do.

SUSAN: Good words.

JOHN: Your turn.

[*SUSAN sits down. The verses are from **It Just Suits Me** [*Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 24*].*]

SUSAN: (*Reciting, not singing.*) "Mary wore three links of chain / Every link bore Jesus' name."

JOHN: "If this ain't the Holy Ghost, I don't know."

SUSAN: Well!

[SUSAN looks at him in surprise at knowing the words. JOHN gives her a mischievous look back.]

JOHN: I ain't completely dumb about being churched.

SUSAN: "If this ain't the Holy Ghost, I don't know / Never have had such a love before."

JOHN: "If this ain't the Holy Ghost, I don't know / Never have had such a love before." Good words, too.

[SUSAN growls playfully; JOHN growls back; they laugh.]

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

SUSAN: John Wicks, white man, coming off the mountain. *(Pronounces it "moun-tan," to rhyme with "man.")*

*[ACTORS softly begin singing **Borrowed Land [WPAQ]**. SUSAN and JOHN kiss very delicately, then JOHN helps her to her feet. JOHN exits. SUSAN feels her stomach lovingly. Several beat, then lights out. SUSAN exits. ACTORS continue singing as the next scene is set. Once set, they then shift from singing to humming the tune as it moves seamlessly into the next scene.]*

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 3

[An ACTOR moves SUSAN's chair for GOFORTH. Lights up on GOFORTH and JOHN. GOFORTH is seated; he now has a cane. His quirt or short whip hangs from the chair. At some point early in the scene, the humming fades out. Though seated, GOFORTH should never be completely still in the chair, as if agitated.]

GOFORTH: So you, you of all people, got Grover Bolling to sell --

JOHN: *(Cutting him off.)* Yes, I did.

GOFORTH: Got your deed?

JOHN: *(Taps his jacket.)* The deed is done.

GOFORTH: A remarkable man, you are, John.

JOHN: I don't know about that.

GOFORTH: A remarkable man. I've never known any one colored to have such -- such -- uncolored-like success. You are the exception that breaks the rule.

JOHN: Just trying to make my own way.

GOFORTH: And in what way would that "way" be?

JOHN: My own way.

GOFORTH: Your own way -- that can be dangerous.

[JOHN does not respond but waits.]

GOFORTH: You now have land, and land must be worked -- else it becomes an alligator that eats your house and hearth. How you going to tame the alligator, John?

JOHN: Land's never been an animal to me that you have to tame it.

GOFORTH: (*Encouragingly.*) Go on.

JOHN: You *raise* land, raise things on it -- work it right, it raises you. It's not an enemy. (*Pause.*) No one needs an enemy out of their land. Enemies enough to go around. And I should go.

GOFORTH: Quite the philosopher, John Morgan. Quite the philosopher. Stay -- don't fidget! A minute more -- you got land in your pocket, mister landowner! You can afford a minute with me. Now tell me again, John Morgan -- maybe I should be calling you Mr. Morgan now! --

JOHN: I have work.

GOFORTH: -- mister philosopher of the land -- (*pause*) -- tell me about not having enemies.

JOHN: I was talking about land, Mr. Goforth -- just dirt. Just talking that I have seen too many beat the life out of it, and that just makes no sense with me.

GOFORTH: You have anyone in mind?

JOHN: Just a general comment, Mr. Goforth -- not attached to persons.

GOFORTH: And why would they do that, John?

JOHN: I should go.

GOFORTH: Why would they kill what gives them life?

[GOFORTH gets out of his chair, and it is clear that he is in pain as he hobbles.]

GOFORTH: Humor this decaying man, John. (*Lifts his cane.*) See -- now, the mark of "cane" is upon me. The "mark of cane." Tell me, John -- this is the brass ring for me -- why do people kill the thing that sustains them? Tell me that, John-tusca-tawba-erokee. Why do they kill what loves them?

[Beat.]

JOHN: Not everybody does. Not everybody's got to.

GOFORTH: That's not an answer.

JOHN: Time to go.

[GOFORTH strikes JOHN with the cane -- just hard enough to get JOHN's attention, but he is too feeble to hurt him.]

GOFORTH: Answer me!

JOHN: I answered you. I am not going to answer you any more answers.

GOFORTH: You are still colored, *colored*, even if you got *land* in your pocket -- even if you got *land* -- and you will *answer me!*

[GOFORTH drops his cane and hobbles back to his chair to grab the quirt or short whip.]

GOFORTH: I will show you how things are supposed to be, how my father --

[As GOFORTH moves to the chair to grab the quirt or short whip, JOHN picks up the cane and moves right up to GOFORTH, face to face. He easily takes the quirt or short whip out of GOFORTH's hand.]

JOHN: I am Becky's son

GOFORTH: (*Feebly.*) What? What?

JOHN: I am the son of Rebecca Caldwell -- yes.

GOFORTH: No you're not.

[All of JOHN's words are said without anger, said to an old, drunken, dying man.]

JOHN: I am Rebecca Caldwell's son. Yes I am. I am the son of the good Rebecca Caldwell. I am the husband of the good Susan Morgan -- yes. You want an answer? That's my answer. And who are you?

GOFORTH: You don't dare --

JOHN: -- son of an owner of slaves -- yes. Husband to your whiskey -- yes. That's the divide, Mr. Goforth. That's the sheep and goats of it all between you and me.

[Beat. JOHN hangs the quirt or short whip on the chair and leans the cane against the chair.]

JOHN: You should give yourself some of that rest you need.

[With a gentle gesture, he sits GOFORTH down: it is the only time in the scene that JOHN actually touches GOFORTH. GOFORTH should play it as if he does not want the help but has to accept it because he is on the verge of collapsing without his cane: a reluctant, and ultimately

resented, acceptance.]

JOHN: I apologize, Mr. Goforth, for my hard words. (*JOHN hands the cane to GOFORTH, who grabs it away.*) Our work is over here, Mr. Goforth, for this time being. You should rest. And I have work to do on raising my new land.

*[Light comes up on SUSAN; JOHN joins her and they stand together calmly. Light remains up on GOFORTH. Two ACTORS bring out two chairs, and as they do, they and the remaining ACTORS hum **Borrowed Land**; SUSAN and JOHN now sit on their porch. GOFORTH watches them, then lights out on GOFORTH, who exits. The chair is removed.]*

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 4

[DEACON BELL arrives.]

JOHN: Well, if it's not the right hand of Mr. Goforth going forth into the world. You're still with the master?

SUSAN: Hello, Deacon Bell.

[BELL gestures to SUSAN.]

BELL: (*To JOHN.*) I see that now that you have a business --

JOHN: My very own general store -- you're welcome to shop there.

BELL: -- and a new-built house --

JOHN: Two children take a lot of room.

BELL: -- has not taught you humility.

JOHN: It has taught me that if God helps those who help themselves, then He helps them a lot who help themselves a lot. We've done nothing but do what Mr. Goforth and others do.

BELL: You forget too easy your place in the world --

JOHN: Our place in the world --

BELL: -- and it ain't with the master on the hill over there.

JOHN: We just fought a world war to take the masters off the hill.

BELL: That was over there -- over there, over there -- over here, you are still what you are -- whatever you are.

JOHN: I am --

SUSAN: John --

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: I am, Deacon, as you said, a successful businessman with two children in a new house taking the afternoon off to enjoy that afternoon with my wife and children. (*To SUSAN, mischievously.*) That okay? (*To BELL.*) What are you doing out and about today?

[*Beat.*]

JOHN: Surely you're here for some reason?

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

JOHN: Who?

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.

BELL: I don't tell tales -- like some I know.

JOHN: You mean me?

BELL: If the sin fits.

JOHN: It doesn't.

BELL: Then your soul be saved.

SUSAN: John -- close your gate.

JOHN: I'm just trying to find out what I'm walking into. It's not like the lord and master asks me over every day for tea and toast. (*To BELL.*) Any landmines I should be wary of?

BELL: Not for me to say.

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

BELL: And neither are we. Are you coming?

JOHN: Tell Mr. Goforth that I will be there in a hour -- after I've spent a little time with my family. 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. (*JOHN pulls out a watch and raises his arm.*) Go forth! (*He drops his arm like a starting flag at a race.*)

[BELL exits.]

JOHN: Now, don't start.

SUSAN: You suspect, don't you?

JOHN: Probably nothing.

SUSAN: You have your ear to every ground around here, John Morgan -- if a Goforth storm is mixing, you would hear.

[Beat.]

JOHN: I heard.

SUSAN: What?

JOHN: I heard his bank notes are due -- all been liquored down his throat -- 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 -- for us.

SUSAN: (*Sniffing.*) I think I smell that white man coming again.

JOHN: Think of it, Susan --

SUSAN: (*Pointing to JOHN's face.*) There he is! That's where you always carry him.

JOHN: Goforth's land, Susan!

SUSAN: That Grier ghost coming straight on through: grab, grab, grabbity-grab.

JOHN: That's not true!

SUSAN: John Morgan, you cannot manure me like some. The second Deacon Bell read you the appointment, your hands moved beyond your walls. You're on your way to kingdom now, aren't you? Mine, mine, mine.

JOHN: Ours, ours, ours.

SUSAN: Never, never, never. Don't forget -- we are still in the box, John.

JOHN: No, we're not --

SUSAN: Four sides, and top and bottom --

JOHN: We've worked our money way, our land way, out of that box.

SUSAN: Third way, John.

JOHN: Our own way.

SUSAN: Color way, John -- color way -- colored you, colored me. Still.

JOHN: If it be that way, then why would Goforth want to see me? He's sees me as *green!*

SUSAN: (*Tenderly.*) He certainly sees you as green.

JOHN: That's not what I meant.

SUSAN: Sometimes I think I have my third -- my fourth -- child in you.

JOHN: I am going to go.

SUSAN: I know you are.

JOHN: There is no loss in talking to the man.

SUSAN: I never said you shouldn't go.

JOHN: Then what?

SUSAN: Just don't go and then forget.

JOHN: And you should remember that I never forget! Never *allowed* to forget!

SUSAN: As long as you don't forget *that*, we'll be fine.

[Beat. SUSAN approaches JOHN.]

SUSAN: Hold me.

[JOHN takes SUSAN in his arms.]

SUSAN: I confess something, johnwick -- I do forget, sometimes -- I do. I want to. And there are moments when -- it all goes away, and it feels like those first times at the river --

JOHN: Water washing everything away so that we could meet --

SUSAN: Baptized --

JOHN: Even me!

SUSAN: -- into a kind of -- blindness.

JOHN: Out of sight.

SUSAN: Out of time. (*Pause.*) No more fear.

JOHN: Just a big slobbery dog and a secret Indian path to the other side of the mountain.

SUSAN: Ah, Rufus!

[SUSAN steps away from him.]

SUSAN: You should get ready to go.

JOHN: I am already ready.

SUSAN: Then --

*[JOHN takes the ruby and kisses it, then moves to the GOFORTH house. As he does, SUSAN sings **Mama's Gonna Buy** [Southern Journey, Vol. 1, Track 4] with accompaniment from the ACTORS. It is clear that SUSAN is worried.]*

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 5

[The GOFORTH house. GOFORTH is sitting down; he looks considerably debilitated. He drinks from a flask throughout the scene. He no longer has the quirt or short whip; he holds the cane. BELL is to his side.]

JOHN: Mr. Goforth?

GOFORTH: Hello, John. *(Taps his watch.)* Within the hour, just as you said.

JOHN: Good business.

GOFORTH: I hope so. 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.

[Beat.]

BELL: If you need me --

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

[BELL exits. There is a pause. JOHN waits.]

GOFORTH: Mrs. Goforth is not feeling well.

JOHN: I am sorry to hear that.

GOFORTH: She may not have much time.

JOHN: That makes me even more sorry.

GOFORTH: I would not want to do anything that would -- hasten -- anything for her.

JOHN: I can understand that.

[Several beats.]

JOHN: If you're done, I'll --

GOFORTH: But something -- some one thing -- could -- prove -- too hasty -- for her --

[*Beat.*]

GOFORTH: Aren't you intrigued?

[*Beat.*]

GOFORTH: The bank has given me two weeks to pay off a loan I took out. I had to mortgage the land because I needed money for -- something. Something. If I default -- well, I am sure you know how this works -- Mrs. Goforth losing her land --

JOHN: Not to mention yourself.

GOFORTH: You and I have done business before -- and I have never questioned your -- ways -
-

JOHN: My ways.

GOFORTH: The rings -- how you got Grover Bolling to sell land he'd always said he rather lose a leg than sell.

JOHN: I never did dishonest.

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

JOHN: Let's say I do.

GOFORTH: I'm offering something for that good eye of yours to look at.

[*Beat.*]

GOFORTH: I want to sell you this land. Straightforward transaction between me and you.

JOHN: I thought the land belonged to Mrs. Goforth.

GOFORTH: Fact is, I've got the power of attorney --

JOHN: Does she know?

GOFORTH: Does she know? Does she know? The offer is not without -- conditions.

JOHN: I guess she doesn't.

GOFORTH: One of which is secrecy. Absolute and total. You will pay off my mortgage at the bank; I will deed the land to you. *But* -- the secrecy, John. Mrs. Goforth and I will stay in this house and continue to manage the land until our deaths. (*Looks for a reaction from JOHN, finds none.*) We have no heirs -- no one hiding in the closet. When we die, the land is yours. But

none of this -- none! -- makes its way to Mrs. Goforth's ears. Only you, me, and the bank will know -- the unholy trinity --

JOHN: So I can't take possession of the land until both of you die -- even though the deed will be in my hands?

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

[Beat.]

JOHN: I can't do that.

GOFORTH: Can't do it.

JOHN: I can't tie up my money -- disadvantage my wife, my children, my businesses, my own prospects -- I can't tie it up in a -- ghost. I appreciate the offer -- but I don't see the advantage. Secrecy always leaks, at least in my experience. If it leaks, then it floods, and if it floods -- well, you can understand.

GOFORTH: So you refuse?

JOHN: It's more that it's something I can't accept.

GOFORTH: Won't accept.

JOHN: However you put it. I guess I'll leave.

[Beat.]

GOFORTH: Let me ask if you know about something that I know about very well.

JOHN: What?

GOFORTH: Do you know what the word "miscegenation" means?

JOHN: I'm good in some things, not others. That's one I'm not.

[During these lines, GOFORTH passes downstage of JOHN.]

GOFORTH: It's a long word for a short situation. In this glorious state of North Carolina, there is a law that says -- in its essence -- that any white person married to a black person is a criminal. Convicted, that person can be sent to jail. Property seized. Reputation consumed.

[JOHN looks at GOFORTH's back and edges toward him.]

GOFORTH: 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 the law.

[JOHN moves closer.]

GOFORTH: A really smart man does not want to run to the foul side of this law.

[JOHN is right behind him -- could throttle him if he wanted to. GOFORTH senses the closeness and deliberately takes one step away from JOHN and faces him.]

GOFORTH: An arcane bit of local color, eh? -- but it has its power to persuade. Wouldn't you agree? I mean, if *you* found yourself in a situation like that --

*[Beat. In the background, the ACTORS begin to sing, softly, **Borrowed Land**, [WPAQ]. They should hum the tune and only say the words "borrowed land."]*

GOFORTH: The bank needs an answer from me soon.

[Beat -- singing continues.]

GOFORTH: Do you have an answer for me that I can give to them?

[Beat.]

GOFORTH: I want to spare Mrs. Goforth as much pain as possible.

JOHN: But not me.

GOFORTH: What did you say?

JOHN: I said, I am amazed how close "pain" and "gain" lie to each other.

GOFORTH: Is that a yes?

JOHN: *(Pause.)* You can make your appointment with the bank when it is convenient.

[Singing finishes. Two ACTORS come out with papers to sign, which JOHN and GOFORTH do. Copy to GOFORTH, copy to JOHN. They exit.]

GOFORTH: See, that wasn't too painful, was it? Here's to prosperity and long life -- well, though, I guess for you, you don't want the life to be *too* long, do you? Go tell your wife the good news.

[JOHN starts to leave.]

GOFORTH: And John? It's not that hard to kill off what sustains you, is it?

[JOHN steps downstage and is joined by SUSAN. During JOHN's lines, GOFORTH will commit suicide in the following way: he will take a pistol out of his pocket and point it at his temple. The ACTORS will circle him and slowly raise him upward. At the suicide (the gun does not actually fire), they will let him fall back into their arms, and the lights will go out on him. They all then exit -- be sure to pick up the cane.]

JOHN: Susan, I couldn't do anything. If I didn't accept, he'd tell the sheriff. But the deed I

have 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. I danced with devils I shouldn't have courted. Like Becky's Jake, like Grier -- no better, no different. All because of this box, this box, this box!

[BELL enters.]

BELL: Not that I want to be here again --

JOHN: What do you want?

BELL: -- but you should know: Goforth's killed himself.

SUSAN: That can't be true!

BELL: Bullet through what little brains he had left.

JOHN: Mrs. Goforth --

BELL: If I were you, I would dig myself a storm cellar and not come up till God separates the goats from the sheep.

[BELL exits, laughing. SUSAN exits as well. Immediately, MRS. GOFORTH appears upstage. Off to one side is WAYNE BOLLING, with the old gun -- scenes will switch between JOHN and WAYNE.]

MRS. GOFORTH: You will never own this land.

JOHN: *(Showing her the deed.)* 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 will ever set a foot on this soil!

JOHN: Then we're going to court.

MRS. GOFORTH: And you will be going to hell.

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

MRS. GOFORTH: Who are you?

WAYNE: Better than that -- what do I know?

MRS. GOFORTH: You stink -- that much *I* know.

WAYNE: I have something to sell.

MRS. GOFORTH: Not until you tell me who you are. I am not well -- and by the way you twitch, you aren't either.

WAYNE: Because I am in grief. Name's Bolling.

MRS. GOFORTH: Bolling?

WAYNE: Wayne.

MRS. GOFORTH: You and your daddy disappeared.

WAYNE: John Morgan killed my daddy -- that's why he disappeared.

MRS. GOFORTH: Your father left this town sitting up in a wagon, stinking of wood smoke and liquor!

WAYNE: John Morgan -- that ain't his real name, by the way -- stole the land, and we had to move back to the mountain. Fire on his head! It killed him. An evil disease cleaveth fast! [Psalm 41:8]

MRS. GOFORTH: I heard Grover Bolling got killed when his still blew up.

WAYNE: That was John Morgan's fault. His fault!

MRS. GOFORTH: Be quiet!

WAYNE: If he hadn't cheated daddy, we wouldn't've moved, and then --

MRS. GOFORTH: Shut up. I don't care about your bits-and-pieces father. What do you want?

WAYNE: What do I know? That's the question. What do I know about John Morgan, not-his-real-name?

MRS. GOFORTH: What makes you think I care what you know?

WAYNE: I got ears --

MRS. GOFORTH: Filthy.

WAYNE: I know all about the court case.

MRS. GOFORTH: You and every raven.

WAYNE: Give ye ear, and hear my voice! [Isaiah, 28:23]

MRS. GOFORTH: What, then!

WAYNE: For a price.

MRS. GOFORTH: I have no money.

WAYNE: Don't want that. (*Points to a "wall."*) I want that gun hanging over there. (*Holds up his own.*) Trash -- firing pin broken.

MRS. GOFORTH: Fine -- I have no use for it. Speak, and then get away from me.

WAYNE: When we was on the mountain, we heard a story -- about a man who killed his mother and father -- a man named John Wicks. Buried her in the ground and then burned his father up in the house. Ran away to the other side of the mountain. A boy, then, a white boy, not no Indian -- and they say he ran away with a nigger woman. What do you say to that?

[Beat.]

MRS. GOFORTH: Which gun?

WAYNE: That one.

[Beat.]

MRS. GOFORTH: You say he killed your father.

WAYNE: Yes.

MRS. GOFORTH: What should a son do to protect a father's honor? (*Points to the wall.*) Take that one.

[An ACTOR brings the new gun to WAYNE and takes the old gun away. Scene shifts to JOHN and MRS. GOFORTH.]

MRS. GOFORTH: So you killed your mother.

JOHN: What?

MRS. GOFORTH: Buried her, then burned your father 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! The box will crush you!

[MRS. GOFORTH exits. The ACTORS come on stage for the ending. SUSAN enters.]

JOHN: I don't know to do!

SUSAN: We can do nothing.

JOHN: She won't do nothing. The look in her eye -- Grier --

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

JOHN: The box, Susan -- I can feel it pressing me. I can't breathe!

SUSAN: We can leave.

JOHN: We can't --

SUSAN: We can leave right now -- take the money we have and just leave everything behind -- it's only trash, John, just stuff rusting. We'll take the children and go north -- like we always said we'd do. We don't have to fight --

JOHN: I don't know what to do.

SUSAN: Listen to me!

[WAYNE BOLLING enters, with the new shotgun.]

WAYNE: 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!

WAYNE: *(Levels the gun.)* Nuh-uh. Mine enemies.

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

WAYNE: My daddy's dead. Tooth for tooth.

JOHN: Susan!

WAYNE: Make yourself clean in the sight of the Lord.

[WAYNE fires -- gunshot sound. Just as with GOFORTH, the ACTORS lift JOHN 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 form a semi-circle and sing See That My Grave Is Kept Clean [Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 14 -- see also Peter, Paul, and Mary's version on their concert album]. At then end, they cover JOHN and SUSAN so that they disappear from sight.]

* * * * *

Act III, Epilogue

[Lights go to black. In the darkness the ACTORS continue singing. One ACTOR brings out a chair for SUSAN downstage center; if SUSAN is not wearing her shawl, one ACTOR brings out

the shawl. SUSAN places the shawl over her head, as if in mourning. The remaining ACTORS stand JOHN upright and disperse themselves across the stage.

[A single light comes up on SUSAN. As the light comes up, the singing ends. For several beats, SUSAN simply sits there, looking at the audience with an attitude of resigned, calm despair. SUSAN should not be afraid to let the silence settle in. Finally, she speaks.]

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.

[SUSAN takes the ruby pendant in her hand and, with a jerk, tears it from her neck. She holds it up, letting the light strike it, watching it swing. Then SUSAN speaks.]

SUSAN: I went after Mrs. Goforth, in the courts. *(Pause.)* I won. Because my cause was just. *(SUSAN catches the ruby in her hand and pockets it.)* I let her stay. I was not kind. I let her die shrouded by her misery. Like I was shrouded in mine. No color line in that, and she died darker than she had ever lived.

[Two ACTORS bring out the ledger and a pencil and hand them ceremoniously to SUSAN, then retreat. SUSAN opens the book, pauses, and begins to write for a few seconds in silence.]

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

[Each ACTOR will be lighted as he or she speaks.]

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

SUSAN: I told myself the story over, then over again, to make sure it had not been a dream.

[SUSAN pauses to read what she has written. She deliberately erases something and adds something.]

SUSAN: A title first.

MRS. GOFORTH: "A *Question of Color.*"

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

SUSAN: Yes.

[SUSAN continues to write, slowly, laboriously. The ACTORS recite what she is writing, as much in synch with SUSAN as possible.]

BECKY: "May all of my following generations draw the simple lesson from these pages -- "

GRIER: "-- that the question of color -- "

ALL: "Color. Color. Color."

DEACON: "-- should always be faced down with outrage and love -- "

ALL: "Love and outrage."

GOFORTH: "-- until it is answered -- "

DEACON: "-- answered completely -- "

MRS. GOFORTH: "-- with the simple truth -- the simplest truth, really -- "

BECKY: "-- the simple truth of our common humanity -- "

GRIER: "Amen."

[Out of the darkness comes JOHN. As he moves forward, SUSAN rises from the chair and stands; she clutches the journal against herself. JOHN stands beside her, and they simply hold hands.]

SUSAN: "A *Question of Color*. This is the journal of Susan Morgan. May all of my following generations draw the simple lesson from these pages that the question of color -- "

JOHN: Color, color, color --

SUSAN: "-- should always be faced down with outrage and love, love and outrage, until it is answered -- answered completely -- with the simple truth -- the simplest truth, really -- the simple truth of our common humanity. Amen." John --

JOHN: Yes?

SUSAN: I am afraid.

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

SUSAN: Well, all right. (*Pause.*) "This story begins, as all grand and tragic stories begin, by a river, by the sound of water giving birth and washing away the dead."

[SUSAN hands the book to JOHN.]

JOHN: "A moment before, it was only a river for food, for use and necessity. In the next, like in the Greek stories, it suddenly arranged for me to come alive with spirits."

*[SUSAN and JOHN look steadily at each other. All the ACTORS sing **I'm On My Journey Home [Southern Journey, Vol. 4, Track 22]**. When they finish, lights to go black.]*

* * * * *

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.

Act I, Prologue

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!

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.

Amazing Grace

To be hummed -- no lyrics.

* * * * *

Act I, Scene 7

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

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 1

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

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 2

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, Scene 3

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.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 4

Whole Heap of 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.

* * * * *

Act II, Scene 6

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.

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 1

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.

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 3

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

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 4

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

* * * * *

Act III, Scene 5

Borrowed Land [WPAQ]

See lyrics above.

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.

* * * * *

Act III, Epilogue

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.