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# Dula: An Acoustical

Lucien G. Holmes  
*The College of Wooster*

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# D U L A

An Acoustical

Lucien G. Holmes

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Independent Study  
Department of English  
451-452

Advised by Alan Walworth

Spring 1999

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# Acknowledgements

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To **Mom and Dad**, whose unwavering faith in me has been immeasurable. I wouldn't have done it any other way;

To **Liz**, who is simply too solid for words;

To **The American Roots String Band**, the well-intentioned hacks who make bluegrass worth loving;

To **Bill, Ralph, Ricky, John, and Jim**, whose musical careers are inspirations to all who choose to listen;

and, of course,

To **Alan Walworth**, whose suggestions were indispensable, whose support was constant, and whose philosophy that works are never completed, only abandoned, has given me a new lease on literary life.

-L.G.H.  
20 March 1999

# Introductory Companion

I remember the morning I thought of writing a bluegrass musical about Tom Dula. My mother had just awakened me with a tall cool glass of orange juice, and I was showering upstairs. Somewhere between the soap and the shampoo, it struck me that this was exactly the project which would showcase all the talents I have consciously worked to hone in college. It would also be a challenge. I am proud to have succeeded. My creative writing, love of songwriting and composing, voracious appetite for anything Appalachian, my personal bluegrass skills: they are all between these covers. But there are plenty of battlefields in here too, and those, more than the successes, tell the story of my journey as a writer.

There was a time (about three days in September) when I believed that crafting a fictional I.S. would be somehow easier than a full-fledged research project. That changed quickly when I found out that absence of hard-and-fast rules tend to lead me astray. There's not much in the literary canon on folk musicals, or "acousticals," as I've somewhat playfully tried to dub the genre. I struggled with inventing it, and how to keep the characters who break into bluegrass songs from getting -- well, corny.

The text was one half the battle. But people were just as challenging. There were those who were fond of telling me I had bitten off more than I could chew, the ones who raised a silent eyebrow, and those who just laughed knowingly, as if to tell me, "I can't wait to see what your *real* Senior I.S. project will be once you reconsider." If I had a dime for every caustic comment I'd received, I'd have a lot of dimes. So many with whom I discussed "Dula" shared my vision, but did not have the belief that I could pull it off. Belief, however, is just a poor man's faith<sup>1</sup>.

"Dula" is written, and is in a state of completion acceptable to both me and my advisor Alan Walworth. The play, as amateurish perhaps as any playwright's first effort is bound to be, represents an incontestable personal victory. There grows a peculiar love, but also an equally delightful antagonism between student and thesis. While I do not claim to have defeated Independent Study, my euphemism for getting to work on this play was nonetheless "going to

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, Lucien G. "Dula: An Acoustical." Page 40.

war.” I feel like I fought the good fight, but without Five-Star General Walworth keeping me on track and on task, “Dula” would simply not have been.

Even with him, this war was not without its frustrations. During our cabinet meetings together, he would often nettle me by making me think I had nearly won the whole show when in fact what he meant was that I was a little closer to winning a comparatively insignificant battle on the pages one of my many drafts. Not knowing where I stood became even more maddening when other majors would remark casually (especially during this last month), “I’ve got two chapters and one revision left. How close are you to being done?” I never could answer that.

But all’s fair in love, war, and literature, and it turned out to be the very absence of established conventions that enabled me to be adventurous. “Dula” grew and grew, in terms of size, from ten songs to twenty, from three acts to four. I succeeded in paying literary tribute to my father, a great songwriter, by including a song he wrote over twenty years ago. I also remembered my formative theater experience at Kentucky’s Union College: I wrote each character with a particular actor friend of mine in mind, and I like to think there is a subtle echo of “Rashomon,” a favorite of my Union College director Rebecca Pettys. I was even able to record the soundtrack on compact disc. It was these little freedoms -- diversions, perhaps -- that helped to keep morale high.

It wasn’t easy. I am the first to admit I got off to a rocky start. At first, I erred on the side of too little creativity. Like a soldier with an unfamiliar gun, I was frightened of my pen. That was when I realized that maybe those eyebrow raisers might just have a point. It was -- and continues to be -- a big bite to chew. But the more I played with the artillery, the more I became comfortable with the devices. In fact, I became too comfortable. And the plot started to get a little too convoluted. Fortunately, at that point, my computer crashed. It happened in January, and it was a good reality check. I reconstructed the lost regiments, and sent new words out to fight on the battlefield pages. Despite the retooling, some troubles continued to plague me. Writing three-part conversations, for instance, turned out to be a chore I was not up to, and the alert reader will note that I avoided them as much as possible.

While I learned my limitations, but I also discovered the delicate balance of writing and editing. For months, almost detached, I watched “a hundred visions and revisions” (as T.S. Eliot might put it) dance across my pages.

It was interesting to watch the line between fact and fiction begin to blur. I, like the minstrel, have known the story as long as I can remember. The only trouble the story is short and sparsely documented apart from oral tradition. And even that is subjective; it depends if you ask a Foster or a Melton. I was excited to find a book called “Lift Up Your Head, Tom Dula,” until I read it. I discovered it was little more than revisionist history, designed only to exonerate the ancestors of the author. That planted a seed in my brain. I could write with as much factual authority as anybody, and maybe my status as an outsider would give the Dula-Foster-Melton affair a fresh take. I don’t have a message about the people. I have a message about the characters, justice, and jumping to conclusions.

What I take from this is a profound sense of what it means to create: music, songs, stories, characters, and entire fictional lives. Wilkesboro became my little Yoknapatawpha, and I would wake up wondering what would happen to Ann and James today. When I began to live and breathe over their shoulders, I knew I had grown as a writer. Not, certainly, to the point at which I am prepared to shoot myself out of the literary canon, but every morning, a little bit closer.

# Song List

words/music by L.G. Holmes except as noted

## Act One

Overture (trad., arr. Holmes)	G
Little Mountain Cabin	A
I'll Bend But I Will Not Break	E
Count the Cost	g#m
I Know Where You'll Be Tonight	C

## Act Two

Take a Stand	bm
I Am the Man	D
Honey, Do	E
I Will Let Him Go	G#
Judgment Day	G

## Act Three

One Heart Alone	E
Can This Be Love?	B
I Won't	D
Gloryland	D
Bluegrass Blues	C

## Act Four

East Carolina (trad., arr. Holmes)	A
Second Chances (T.S. Holmes)	D
What Have I Done?	E
Cold Hard Clay	dm
Home Is Just a Heartbeat Away	F



# Cast

(Suggested Players)

In Order of Appearance

Minstrel. . . . .	Paul Wilkes
Ann. . . . .	Aimee Allen
Tom. . . . .	Lucien Holmes
James. . . . .	Walter Sizemore
Martha. . . . .	Kasey Carter
Reverend. . . . .	Eric Inge
Sheriff Grayson. . . . .	Jonathan Hendrickson
Gov. Pike. . . . .	Christian Crum

The setting is a one room cabin with a door to James' adjoining shop. It is the late 1860s in Wilkesboro, North Carolina.

# Act One

*The house lights dim and there is complete black on stage. The sounds of the sweet beginnings of a bluegrass song. Unintelligible musician dialogue, brief discussion of who gets what break, and so on. The musicians will know what I mean. The pit band consists of one banjo, one mandolin, two guitars (one rhythm and one lead), one upright bass, and one fiddle. There are a few seconds quiet and the Overture begins. It is "Tom Dula." Lights to half. Tom enters.*

Tom            Hand me down my banjo  
                 I'll pick it on my knee  
                 Come this time tomorrow  
                 It'll be no use to me

*Ann enters. She folds her arms, and despite Tom's pained looks at her, she stands in a corner away from him.*

Ann            Two-timed once too often  
                 Lord, I've heard it said  
                 A man who can't be faithful  
                 Is better off lyin' dead

*James enters, led by Martha. She heads right for center stage, and the two of them harmonize while Ann and Tom sing backup. James waits at Martha's shoulder.*

All            Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
                 Hang down your head and cry,  
                 Hang down your head, Tom Dula,  
                 Poor boy, you're bound to die

*James sings facing Ann (who ignores him too). Martha yanks him back as she begins her half of the verse.*

James        Keeps my wife a lover  
                 Makes me less a man  
Martha        He's bound for the gallows  
                 On his wicked path of sin

*The lights dim again, and the spotlight illuminates the minstrel. He sings in a rich but unprofessional baritone. The others on stage all freeze and the minstrel stands front and center.*

Minstrel     Found poor Laura Foster  
                 Thought he had to flee  
                 Hadn't been for Sheriff Grayson,  
                 He'd be in Tennessee

*Our narrator is wearing overalls dulled and a little dirty, but they do look comfortable.*

*James and Martha exit when it's gotten dark enough.*

Minstrel     I'll bet you've heard that song somewhere, back when you were growing up. In Caroline, it's as popular as that day that put Wilkesboro on the map. People said all sorts of things at the time, but then again, you know how people are. All they ever know is what someone else told 'em, plus whatever they add themselves. Point being, what we got is a story that went and became a legend. We don't have too many of the facts. Tom was a popular guy, a Civil War hero and friend of the governor. Plenty of people played his game, but plenty of folks didn't. And by the time his murder trial came about, I don't know a soul who would have testified for him. I'm gettin' ahead of myself here, I know it. Tom used to see a young girl by the name of Laura Foster before he went off to fight. Well, he was a hero in Shiloh and would have been decorated by Jefferson Davis hisself if he hadn't gone sick with complications. He came back and started spending too much time with Ann Melton, a local married woman. Tom even lived in her house with her husband, James. See, Tom didn't have no job to support her with. The crazy thing was Ann and Laura was cousins! Well, by and by, Tom got to thinkin' the grass was greener after all and started seeing Laura again. Of course, his secret got loose though, 'cause can't nobody keep a secret in a small town. So when somebody up and killed Laura Foster with Tom's twelve-inch hunting knife, he looked like the guilty man. And when they caught him riding for the Tennessee on the Cumberland Trail, that was all the proof Wilkesboro needed to find ol' Dula guilty of murder. Even the best lawyer in the state, the governor, couldn't save him. Most folks thought she was expectin' a ring for her finger and Tom didn't exactly want to put one there. He hated commitment as much as any man. But would that be any reason to kill her? I ain't convinced. So I'm going to help tell you this story three different ways and let you make up your own mind. This is my first time doin' this, though, so I hope I don't get a little long-winded or a little preachy to you folks. Where I come from in Caroline, we don't like to shove nothin' down nobody's throat, except good ol' cornbread and beans. But we do tend go on a bit here and again. You gonna meet Tom and his lady friend, the lovely and married Ann, and her husband James -- well, I already gone on just a little too long. You see it all for yourself.

*Gradually, the rest of the stage is illuminated and the minstrel exits stage left. The setting is James and Ann Melton's one-room mountain cabin. The walls are a throaty wood, and there are a few folk paintings on the walls. The furnishing is minimal; after all, this is a modest cobbler's home. There is a rocking chair, a chest by the bed, and a couch in the foreground. Since James hasn't been allowed in bed lately, there is an Appalachian quilt at the foot of the couch. There is a small kitchen stage right. There is also a window, by which Ann is rocking. She has*

worried eyes, and wears a long dull-colored but solid skirt. The are two doors: one is Tom comes blustering in, with the air of a man who considers himself more important than he really is. Tom is smartly dressed in a rugged sort of way, wearing an overcoat and a seamless grin. He comes toward Ann gallantly.

Ann           Where have you been all day?  
Tom           I did a few errands in town. Why?  
Ann           It's been since daybreak. You said you'd be home for lunch.  
Tom           I'm sorry.  
Ann           *(getting up)* I made sandwiches.  
Tom           Isn't that sweet? Thanks all the same, I'm not hungry.  
Ann           That figures. Everyone says you're supping at someone else's table.  
Tom           *(grinning)* I declare you are the most suspicious type lady I ever had the pleasure of loving.  
Ann           Exactly how many have you had the pleasure of?  
Tom           What?  
Ann           You heard.  
Tom           Ann! Will you stop listening to those rumors? People have forked tongues. There's only you. I love you. Let's not talk about this now. *(changing the subject with a kiss on the cheek)* It doesn't look like James is here yet.  
Ann           *(gathering his tenderly roaming hand)* You're not off the hook. He said he'd be late picking up a few hides.  
Tom           *(chucking her chin)* Ann, if you want to be a cobbler's wife till you're gray around the edges, that's your choice. But I can give you more. I will, if you let me.  
Ann           Don't talk like that in here, Tom, it's like holding hands in Church.  
Tom           And why shouldn't we? I would kiss you on any street corner, on the steps of Town Hall, on the --  
Ann           A Church is different. I can accept the wrath of Wilkesboro, but not the wrath of an angry God.  
Tom           *(reasonably)* He is a good Father to His children. He's all for true love. You and I have that. You and James don't. Now please. . . Will you leave with me?  
Ann           Tom. . . I can't answer that now.  
Tom           Okay, we'll take it in steps. *(mincing)* First let's work on leaving. Leave the house with me. We'll go watch the sun set.

*He makes eyes at her broadly.*

Ann           *(giggling)* Oh, Tom.  
Tom           *(wheedling)* Please?  
Ann           Of course.  
Tom           *(gesturing grandly)* That's at least leaving this prison of love behind for an evening. Think about it. *(squeezing her)* A little cabin where we won't have to worry about what people say. I'm tired of sleeping in the house your husband made; I want you to sleep in a house that we build together.

*Tom draws Ann into "Little Mountain Cabin."*

Tom           Settin' on the front porch  
Living without a care  
Pick a tune on the banjo  
Pick lilies for your hair

Ann           Little mountain cabin  
Up among the trees  
Wildflower summers  
Doin' what we please

Both          Way up on a hill  
Way up on a hill  
Carolina  
Blue sky shinin'  
Way up on a hill

Ann           In a little mountain cabin  
I'd hold you through the night  
Followin' a dream of love  
Doin' what I thought was right

*While they trade stanzas, a bespectacled James appears from the front door. His hair is thinning, and he carries hides of leather (bound for a comfy pair of boots, perhaps) and sets them down. He is dressed in a cobbler's smock and wears a pained expression. Ann looks at James as if he is a nuisance.*

Ann           In a little mountain cabin  
Both          Oh, the wind and rain

*Ann looks at Tom romantically and then pointedly at James.*

Ann           Weather the storm together  
Both          Sun gonna shine again

Both          Way up on a hill  
Way up on a hill  
Carolina  
Blue sky shinin'  
Way up on a hill

James        If you're so bent on leaving, why don't you just do it?

Ann           (primly) I like it here.

James        Well, then you're staying in tonight.

Ann           Oh quiet, you old fool. Of course I'll go if I choose. And I'll enjoy it far more than sitting here listening to you talk about your leather.

James        You've got the nerve, haven't you?

Tom           The lady will come and go as she pleases.

James        (under his breath) As you please, you mean.

*Ann crosses to him and stands purposefully under his nose.*

Ann            You can talk to me however you please, because I don't listen anyway. But don't talk to Tom like that. You've no right.

James        I have so. *(To Tom)* The deed still says I'm married to this lady, not you.

Tom           In deed, perhaps, but hardly in fact. You've got to show her you love her. When was the last time you took her out?

James        *(exasperated)* Took her out? I don't have the time for that. The money's got to come from somewhere. How do you all expect we're supposed to eat if I don't put food on the table?

Ann           *(airily)* I'd just as soon it didn't come from anywhere, the way you fix it.

James        *(spreading his hands)* The fairer sex certainly has our work cut out for us, don't they?

Tom           *(scornfully)* Have a nice quiet evening, James. . . at home. . . alone.

*They snicker together, and exit out the front door arm in arm. With a sigh, James tosses his apron to the side and goes back to the stove and falls to his knees to pray, backstage right.*

James        Jesus, smile on me; I need your warmth to help me through my valley. It feels like the end. It used to be everybody knew about it, but nobody said nothing. Now, every place I turn I see them, or -- worse yet -- hear people talking about them. She's my wife. I have the paper to prove it. But the paper don't say nothing about when your wife don't love you no more.

Now, I ain't trying to judge my misfortunes because I know Job didn't say a thing. But I ain't nothin' like him. God, I need You because I'm not strong enough to walk alone. As long as You're with me, I'm good at turning the other cheek -- on the outside, but I just don't know what to do with what's on the inside.

*The music builds under him and he breaks into song: "I'll Bend But I Will Not Break."*

James        There's restless winds a-gatherin'  
In storm clouds in the air  
And the place that bears the weatherin'  
You'll always find me there

*He gestures his options.*

Take a stand?  
Be a man?  
Refuse to play their game?

*He throws up his hands in despair.*

But I'm just the one layin' track in the sun  
For ol' Tom Dula's train

*In the middle of his soul-searching, Reverend Wilkins, dressed in preacher's black, enters and visibly debates whether or not to interrupt James. He does a barely*

*perceptible mocking dance and a slight sneer. He waits for James, but gets impatient at his going nowhere. During the song, the Reverend picks up a dinner plate from the set table.*

Just like the willow by the river banks  
And tall grass by the lake  
When hard rain falls and cold wind blows  
It bends but it will not break

I'll bend  
But I will not break  
I'll bend  
But I will not break

It's a hard road to travel  
It's a tough row to hoe  
If he wants to take her off  
Can I just  
Let them go?

I'm a fortunate man  
With unfortunate luck  
I gotta keep on a-rollin'  
And I'll never get stuck  
Again

I'll bend  
But I will not break  
I'll bend  
But I will not break

I know Tom and Ann will get theirs on the Judgment Day, I just don't know how long I can wait. Watching something and having to wait, wait, wait for it, it's unbearable! Sometimes I think if I have to wait one more little minute, I'll go crazy.

*The Reverend is visibly impatient, and as James is dragging out the pain of waiting, Wilkins purposefully smashes the plate on the floor. James' initial verbal reaction is left to the discretion of the actor and his vault of appropriately comic noises.*

Wilkins	I'm not interrupting anything, James Melton?
James	( <i>flustered</i> ) Well. . . Not a bit, Reverend.
Wilkins	( <i>blandly</i> ) I dropped a plate. Why, is that coffee I smell?
James	( <i>confused</i> ) Well, uh, no. Not just yet. Why?
Wilkins	( <i>drawling a little</i> ) Well, I wouldn't say no to a cup.
James	It'll just be a minute. Hope you don't mind the wait.
Wilkins	( <i>growling</i> ) Wait, wait, wait. Just make up your mind.

*Wilkins walks toward the stove, and treads on the shards. In annoyance, he wrinkles his nose, and kicks at them.*

James	( <i>trying to make conversation</i> ) I was just in prayer as you came in.
-------	---

Wilkins I noticed. It is well to ask for guidance. After all, the Lord's work is yours and mine to do.

*The good Reverend takes a seat on the couch, located slightly toward the door at center stage.*

James Knowing His will is not so easy for a simple man like me, Reverend Wilkins.

Wilkins We are all instruments of His glorious band. The sound is harmonious, but one foul note sends the piece to the devil.

James *(serving the coffee)* Some do not play as well as others, Reverend.

Wilkins *(gently)* We all need the practice. That's why I'm here.

James *(uncomfortably)* I don't understand.

Wilkins Let's lay our cards on the table, shall we? You are, I believe, a good man but a weak one. You're the one who needs to stop this affair. Tom is unrepentant, and his sins are infamous. Even in Kentucky, they talk about him. And you! You are in a position to help God. Yet you won't!

James Reverend, please help me.

Wilkins God helps those who help themselves. Tom is a walking scandal, and you know this. You cast your own soul to the Lake of Fire if you refuse to come to terms with the affair.

James *(wincing)* "Affair" is an ugly word.

Wilkins *(angrily)* It is the truth! You are feeding and clothing unrepentant sinners under this roof. This town will suffer this shameful union no longer. My reputation is most tarnished! I don't want to have these two starry-eyed lovers ruin the name of my god-fearing parish. It is a relationship offensive to God -- not to mention the good people of Wilkesboro.

*The downbeat for "Count the Cost."*

Wilkins It's up to you, whatever you do  
I can't save your soul  
Cause Judgment Day, there's hell to pay  
If you don't pay the toll

The river Jordan is chilly and wide  
Angels waiting on the other side  
It won't come to you,  
Your mountain to move  
I won't ask you twice  
You got a job to do,  
Something to prove  
Count the cost and pay the price

James Don't think I can, I'm not the Man,  
I'm really just that guy  
It might be wrong, but love's too strong  
For me to even try



Reverend please, will you listen now?  
I can't help myself if I don't know how  
Wilkins Stand up tall and be a man  
I won't tell you twice  
Hear the choir of angels sing  
Count the cost and pay the price

*The Reverend Wilkins finishes goading James into action. He swoops like an angry eagle and uses every inch of his energetic frame to preach to the frightened cobbler.*

I cannot tell you what to do, for you have your own mind. I only  
pray that you use it. Know that, whatever you do, the Lord will never  
abandon your side.  
James Good evening, Reverend.  
Wilkins I bid you good evening.

*Wilkins exits, and James, again alone, walks thoughtfully to the window where he trims the wick. He returns to the stove and kneels in prayer in the secluded kitchen corner of the cabin.*

James (guiltily) Lord, I need you now more than ever. And I know You never leave anybody's side, but I think we're on opposite sides of the fence on this one. You want me to be some kind of savior, but I just want to be left alone. I'd rather be Job than Jesus. Plus a man who takes a lot of chances is bound to have a few more difficult questions to answer on Judgment Day. If you never gamble you never lose money.  
Reverend Wilkins does have a point, though. I've got something to prove, and every minute I don't just makes things worse. Plus my reputation is chained to the back of Ann Melton, and every minute she runs around with Tom, I get dirtier and dirtier. I wish she would come home and he would just leave. I need to come between the two of them. 'Course, Ann would throw a fit if she knew, so whatever I do, it's gonna have to be a secret -- well, a lie, really.  
Lord, why did it have to be Reverend Wilkins as Your messenger? I know he wants me to do something, but I never do know what he's talking about with his parables and Fire Lakes and whatnot. It's just he's always got me all mixed up. (overwhelmed) Why has a man always got to prove himself? Why isn't it enough just to be?

*It's evening outside the window as Ann and Tom come in on each other's arms. Ann is fending off the pawing Tom. She keeps glancing back out the door and Tom tries to lead Ann straight to the bed. James stands up, and considers making a break for the door. He checks himself, though, because he's too indecisive to confront the two. He hides by the shelf, in the space between the stove and the wall.*

Ann Did you actually see him leave?  
Tom I saw the Reverend going over the hill, so I don't suppose James was far behind.  
Ann (defensively) James has the fear of God.

Tom           The fear of Reverend, more like. I declare, if that Reverend told him to stick a knife in a body, James'd do it.

*Tom pulls out his sheathed hunting knife and stabs Ann playfully.  
James cringes.*

Tom           Take that! Arrgh, you -- you slimy adulteress you.  
Ann           (giggling) You rake, oh you beast! Won't someone help me? He'd kill you before he ever killed me.  
Tom           You seriously think so?

*James is nodding energetically.*

Ann           He never would. He's not strong enough to hurt anything. He's a weak -- no, he's less than a man.  
Tom           He even buys his hides in town because he can't stand the sight of blood.

*He pokes her in the side and she laughs involuntarily.  
James is deflated.*

                  Oh, you evil woman!  
Ann           (playing) Are you worried, Tom?  
Tom           About him coming at me with a knife?

*He pokes her again and they share a good laugh.*

Tom           I wish he was here.  
Ann           Why ever would you wish that?  
Tom           Your living with two men has got to stop.  
Ann           So?  
Tom           So I'd beat the tar out of him and tell him to take his unnatural sister and leave.  
Ann           Think of that! Fighting over me!  
Tom           You'd not step in.  
Ann           (thoughtfully) No, I don't think I would.  
Tom           Why, talkin' of knives, I might just put this knife in him.

*Tom takes his knife up again and handles it expertly.  
James starts and bumps his head. Ann hears it, but Tom doesn't.*

Ann           What was that?  
Tom           (teasing and tickling her) Maybe it was Jaaaames!  
Ann           (playing James) Tom, don't kill me! Who will run the shoe business?  
Tom           Why, I will, old man. I might even make a pair out of your wrinkled hide!

*Ann doubles over, laughing, and Tom rolls her over on to the couch, and stabs in James' general direction, though directing the blows toward Ann. He steals kisses as he stabs the knife. At each blow, James shrinks a little further into the corner.*

Tom           It's over for you. How's this for blood? Got any last words? Better think 'em up quick. . . You're running out of time, judging by the look of things. . . *(putting the knife down on the table)* Where'd you say he was?

Ann           Maybe he's in the shop downstairs. I didn't actually see him leave the house.

Tom           Aah, forget him.

Ann           Well, it is his house. You're not even supposed to be living here.

Tom           It's not as if it's a secret.

Ann           *(seriously)* There are no secrets before God.

Tom           Ann, you sound like James! He isn't here and he doesn't care what we do 'cause if he did he would have done something about it.

*James stifles a sneeze on the floor.*

Ann           What was that?

Tom           *(approaching the stove in the relative darkness)* Must be the cat. Wonder if James fed her yet?

Ann           There's no dirty dishes for his awful supper yet, so the cat's probably starving too.

*Tom continues slowly to advance on James, who is paralyzed with fear.*

Tom           Here kitty. Come on.

Ann           Can't you find him?

Tom           He's hiding.

Ann           I'll get him out. *(Ann starts to cross to the stove)* OH! Look here, somebody dropped a plate. Tom, be a darling, fetch me a broom. *(still can't see him, but getting closer to the trembling James)* Now?

Tom           While you sweep, I'll see if there is another loaf of bread yet.

Ann           Why? What about the cat?

Tom           James will feed him, for better or worse. Let me by to the shelf so I can fix another sandwich.

*James is hyperventilating. The shelf is located in his hiding spot.*

Tom           *(turning away at the last second)* Damn the sandwich, Ann Melton. Make sweet love to me.

*James heaves an enormous sigh.*

*Tom takes a meaningful step toward her. She is less willing to play with Tom today, though. There's something on her mind, and she evades his amorousness with a practiced parry.*

Ann           Tom, we were going to see the sun set, remember?

Tom           For Chr -- we took a walk. What is wrong with you?

Ann           Well, what about James? I don't want James to come back with us like that.

Tom           He knows we --

Ann           Don't you say it in this house!

Tom           I know. But he does.

Ann           Never when he's here. James is a good man and I won't have you hurt him so.  
Tom           How you talk, Ann Melton! You're the one hurting him. Every day you go on with your two lives makes his worse. You can't keep putting that decision off.

*They've been moving toward the bed. In her moment of hesitation, Tom pulls Ann on to the bed. At this mention of his name, James rises to this spectacle. Tom and Ann begin a reprise of "Little Mountain Cabin." James stands behind, still unobserved. The lighting marginalizes him so that we only barely see him.*

Tom           Little mountain cabin  
                Ann, I don't believe  
                We can build a life for us,  
                If you refuse to leave

Ann           I want your mountain cabin  
                But let me make my mind  
                I don't want to hurt nobody  
                Give it a little more time

Both          Way up on a hill  
                Way up on a hill  
                Carolina  
                Blue sky shinin'  
                Way up on a hill

*James slowly starts to tiptoe to the shop door, the one that leads to the downstairs.*

Tom           Time's wasting. Tell me what I can say to change your mind.  
Ann           Why Tom Dula, I don't work like that.  
Tom           Please. For me. For us.  
Ann           *(thinking, declares)* I would never be able to look him in the face again.  
Tom           You never would have to see him again. *(beat)* I love you.  
Ann           *(petulantly)* I bet you say that to all the girls.  
Tom           What? What on earth are you talking about? There's only you.  
Ann           Don't play games.  
Tom           You're the only one playing here.  
Ann           *(tearfully)* Do you sing her the same songs?  
Tom           *(fretfully)* Who?  
Ann           *(half-crying)* Tom, you know very well who I mean. Laura Foster. My cousin. Today I heard she's been running around saying you're practically engaged, and any day now you're gonna give her a ring. You lied to me today. I need to know if you. . . If you. . .

*James, turns his head and starts to listen intently to the conversation.*

Tom           *(exaggerated)* You want to know if I share her bed? *(laughs)* Is that all this nonsense is? Once upon a long time ago, I do believe I promised to marry that girl when I came back from fightin' the War.  
Ann           Well?

Tom Well what?  
 Ann Do you -- "share her bed"?  
 Tom No, no, no. I thought you were in all day. Who told you this nonsense?  
 Ann James. He wouldn't lie.  
 Tom Sure.  
 Ann Did you ever love her?  
 Tom Laura? Never. I just didn't want to be the only soldier in the army without a sweetie back home. (*sweetly*) And I didn't know you then or it would have been you I wrote every day.  
 Ann You really haven't seen her recently then?  
 Tom (*hesitates*) I see her around town sometimes, and I wonder how she is, but I haven't really spoken to her since the war.  
 Ann You saw her this morning, didn't you?  
 Tom (*caught*) Well, that is true. . . Sure, I saw her. . . It's a small town, Ann.  
 Ann Do you think she's pretty?  
 Tom (*tired*) Oh, Ann, she's pretty, all right, but she's got no sense and not much money.  
 Ann I'm no good for you, Tom. I haven't any dowry either.  
 Tom I don't need the money; I need you. Come with me. To Tennessee.

*James' heart is in his throat.*

Ann I -- I --  
 Tom (*fed up*) Is this still about James? Or is it about me? If you don't want to run off, maybe you just don't love me enough. Or is it you not wanting to go?  
 Ann (*protesting*) No, no. it's not that at all. This is a decision that decides the rest of my life, and maybe my afterlife, too. I wish I could speak to the Reverend about it.  
 Tom That old windbag? What can he tell you that I can't?  
 Ann The truth maybe.

*Tom and Ann get closer to one another's faces.*

Tom (*ignoring her caustic remark*) The truth is I love you.  
 Ann I love you, Tom. I do.  
 Tom Then say say you don't love James.  
 Ann But --  
 Tom If you love me you'll go with me.  
 Ann You know I love you but I can't --  
 Tom Tell me you love me, not James.  
 Tell me you'll run away with me.  
 Ann I --  
 Tom Do you? Will you?  
 Ann Yes!

*Simultaneously, the lights are killed, and the band strikes up a mournful minor chord. We get a minor modulation of the Overture. As the background music ensues, out walks the minstrel, stage left, accompanied by a soft spotlight.*

Minstrel      Who knows exactly what went through James' mind? Just a weak-willed cobbler trying to make ends meet. Not a violent man by any stretch. But what would you do if your wife was about to leave you? I bet I'd snap and I'm not a violent man. I did get into it one night with Art down at the Red Rooster, but we was both kind of drunk, and I caught him dealing from the bottom of the deck and he'd just soaked me for ten greens. Sometimes you got to prove you're a man. It sounds kind of stupid, maybe, but if you ever been there, then you know. But losing a wife's another thing entirely. Now I might kill the man stealing my wife. But one of Tom's old buddies was Governor Pike, and I know I probably wouldn't get away with it. And even if I did get away with it, I know she'd know. I couldn't hide that. She'd know. So maybe I'd kill that wayward wife of mine? Runnin' all over town, playin' her games, lovin' another man in my bed. . . But if I loved her? No, I couldn't never kill my wife, I know. But I think if I was in James' position, I might do something different.

*As the minstrel exits the way he came, a cock crows and the lights come up softly. James is rising from the couch in the room and the lovers are asleep. There's morning in the window and the summer sun is rising through the mountain mist.*

James      Good morning to the both of you. Hope the accommodations are to your liking. The couch was most comfortable, thank you. Comfortable for a dog, maybe. For me, it's worse waking up in the morning. I have to take my aching body downstairs to the shop and work all day to finance your love. And you sleep on! You eat my store, wear my shoes, and keep my wife! And what do I get? A sore back. Damn you, Tom Dula. It's got to end, the Reverend is right. I won't put up with this any longer. I refuse to be the town joke because I'm not strong enough to stand up to you. I can. *(he picks up a large knife and moves toward the bed)* I'm strong. I can prove I deserve her more than Tom. I can't fight him, maybe, I can't beat him. But I can kill him.

*He raises up the knife, and his eyes are kindled with a fire of hatred, but his hand won't do it. He slams the knife down in the kitchen.*

The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Ann would wake, and then it'd be me off to the gallows. . . Ugh! Death. But I'm not the one who deserves to hang for this. If anybody deserves hanging, it's Tom. Tom's the one who should -- Wait. That might be something. The gallows. Send Tom to the gallows. A public execution! But for what?

Tom      *(waking, and seeing James)* Hullo James. Just about to put on some breakfast, were you? How's about throwing a spot of coffee down for Ann and me?

James      *(stiffly)* No trouble at all.

Tom      That's what I love about you, James. You're so easy to get along with.

How'd you sleep?

James      Well enough. I trust you feel well this morning?

Tom           *(rubbing his back)* This could be a comfortable bed all right, but I think there are some broken slats down here in the middle. If you get a chance you might want to take a look.

James        Today I'll be busy.

Tom           I know a carpenter who might do it for us.

James        You mean John Foster?

Tom           Right. You know John?

James        Well, he is my wife's cousin.

Tom           *(genuinely laughing)* That's right! Ann is your wife! *(even Tom is embarrassed now)* I forgot you knew all them Fosters.

James        Yeah. See 'em all every year out at their family picnic. Why, before the war, we used to see you down at Central Park by the river every July. Whatever happened?

Tom           Funny thing about that. I'm not real welcome.

James        That's too bad. *(reminiscing)* Yeah, I remember you holding Laura's fishing pole over her shoulder and puttin' her bait on the hook. *(laughs)* You young'uns were so cute back then.

Tom           *(uncomfortably)* I'm not a young'un.

James        *(dismissively)* Well, then, Laura certainly is.

Tom           What is it with you about Laura?

James        *(simply)* I hear what everyone else hears.

Tom           That don't mean you gotta tell it all over Creation.

James        Well, the word is she's still a little hung up on you. Saw her at the stables say she was expecting a ring on her finger any day.

Tom           Yeah, Ann told me. Don't you go running around telling all these lies.

James        Lot of folks don't call 'em lies.

Tom           *(defensively)* Try to understand. She was a serious part of my life for five years. I can't just pretend she doesn't exist.

*At the mention of Laura's name, Ann begins to stir. When she wakes, the first thing she sees is James, and so she pulls the bedclothes around her. Tom doesn't realize Ann's up.*

James        Come on, Tom. She's a sweet pretty young thing. Looks a little like Ann.

Tom           *(snorting)* Right. Like a trout looks like a catfish. Laura's a real catch, nothing like Ann.

*Ann pulls the covers up around everything but her head and looks toward the audience so we get the benefit of her reactions.*

James        Why don't you quit fooling around with my wife, then, and run away with Laura?

Tom           I would, except her heads got more bricks in it than a mason's shop.

James        So you're just playing them both?

Tom           For now. Ann would probably be a better wife, but I miss the way Laura laughs. You can hear springtime in her laugh. And she has the most beautiful hair.

James        *(for Ann's benefit)* That's true. She'd look so fine with, say, lilies in her hair.

Tom           *(laughing)* Funny you should say that. I used to do that for her all the

time. Yeah, I'll admit that there are times I miss her.  
James Why are you telling me? Aren't you worried I'm going to turn around and tell Ann?  
Tom Well, Ann ain't up yet, and I figure you're gonna tell her anything you want anyway. She don't listen to you.  
James *(bonding moment)* Women never do.  
Tom Yeah. *(beat)* Laura did.  
James She seems solid.  
Tom Used to be. She's got syphilis, they say. And I don't figure they're wrong.  
James Probably not. You probably gave it to her.  
Tom *(shrugging)* Maybe. Who knows?

*Ann's mouth falls open. She might have it too.*

James Shouldn't you tell Ann?  
Tom *(laughs)* Don't you worry. No chance you'll get it from her. It's between me and Ann. And what she doesn't know won't hurt her.  
James It will somewhere on down the road. Ann'll get batty as Laura.  
Tom See, that's why I have Laura. Like havin' an extra horse in the stable on Race Day.  
James Extra horse don't do no good if it's too crazy to run.  
Tom That's the trouble.  
James *(mildly)* Sometimes you got to shoot 'em when you're done with 'em.  
Tom I have been thinkin' on that. Laura's gettin' damn tiresome. I have been thinking on that.  
James Any ideas?  
Tom *(chuckling)* To shut her up? The longer the better.

*Ann moves involuntarily. Tom looks sideways at her, but concludes she's moving in her sleep and pays her no more mind.*

James If she's got syphilis as bad as you say, she don't have long.  
Tom Yeah, but if she was to say something about us seein' each other, I might lose Ann too. And I need my hosses.

*Ann can't take this anymore and begins to stir.*

*(regaining control)* Look, Laura's my business. Leave me take care of mine, and you go take care of yours. *(dismissively)* The world needs shoes.  
James *(to himself)* I'll take care of mine, yes.  
Tom And what about that coffee?

*James crosses over to take the coffee out of the fireplace. He picks up a long piece of paper from a rolltop desk in the corner. He pauses and puts his hand to his head. There is a reprise of "I'll Bend But I Will Not Break."*

James *(aside)* There's a lesson to learn  
But I probably won't  
Cause I'm damned if I do



And damned if I don't

He can try to take my house  
He can try to take my bride  
He can try to take my life  
But he can't take my pride

I'll bend  
But I will not break  
I'll bend  
But I will not break

*Ann, in a nightgown, drapes herself with the quilt, and eyes Tom with hate.*

James      Speaking of business, Tom, I need your signature on the invoice for  
the last pair I made you up. By the way, how are you finding them?  
Tom      (*sarcastically*) Gee, just like wading through a river in springtime.  
They do leak a little when it rains.  
James      I'll look into that.  
Tom      Please do. (*puzzled*) Gee, it's all blank yet. (*drawl*) Should I sign my  
name or shall I just make my mark?  
James      I'm going to write it up later. Just sign it. (*Tom looks between*  
*quizzical and unsure*) The books need balanced. And if I get ya now,  
I won't have to track you down tonight.  
Tom      (*laughing*) You know where I'll be tonight.

*Tom pounds the bed, and jabs James in the ribs trying to get him to laugh along.  
Instead, James turns away and begins to sing.*

James      I know where you'll be tonight  
But tomorrow's another day  
When they find her, they,  
They gonna look and say,  
Dula's the man, all right  
They'll take you away  
I hope it's worth your time tonight

I've got your name on a blank sheet of paper  
A perfect murderer's note  
I know they gonna take you away  
When they look at what you wrote  
"Goodbye, Ann," the note will say  
"Laura's now my bride  
I loved you once but love is gone  
And now I'm bound to ride"

I know where you'll be tonight  
Wearin' a ball and chain  
Starin' at the Carolina rain  
Feelin' a lonesome pain  
And cryin' till morning's light  
You might have once but you won't again

I hope it's worth your time tonight

I've got "Dula" on a blank sheet of paper  
I can play your game  
They'll take you to jail off the Cumberland Trail  
When they see you signed your name  
Once I've stabbed poor Laura  
And you go up to see her  
You'll run from her little cabin  
And I won't shed a tear

I can see tomorrow  
Don't think I can't see  
I know where you'll be  
Hangin' from a white oak tree  
Cryin' your morning sorrow  
Facin' your destiny  
No time left for straight and narrow  
I hope it's worth your time tonight  
Yes, I hope it's worth your time tonight

*He rips the invoice part off so all he has is the blank paper with Tom's arrogantly signed name. James pauses with his head bowed and the paper dangling from his hand as he contemplates setting Tom up for the murder he is about to commit. The minstrel enters from his customary door, and upstages Tom. He enters at the band's cue.*

Minstrel      Met her on the mountain  
                  There he took her life  
                  Met her on the mountain  
                  Stabbed her with his knife

                  Have his trial in Statesboro  
                  Reckon where he'll be  
                  Down in the Yadkin valley  
                  Hangin' from a white oak tree

*The assembled cast -- Tom and Ann, out of bed -- behind James and the minstrel help with the chorus. Tom stands downstage center with his hands behind him, head bowed.*

James          Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
                  Hang down your head and cry  
                  Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
                  Poor boy, you're bound to die

All             Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
                  Hang down your head and cry  
                  Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
                  Poor boy, you're bound to die

*Lights.*

## Act Two

*The minstrel slowly ambles on stage as before.*

Minstrel     'Course, that's just one of the ways this whole thing could have happened. They was more than a couple people in Wilkesboro didn't care much for Tom Dula. All they ever knew was poor little Laura Foster, innocent as a lamb, was stabbed to death high up on a mountain one day at dawn. Ol' Tom was caught runnin' for Tennessee on Laura's horse. That was about enough evidence for anybody. But there were all sorts of strong-willed people in that little town who might have up and killed Laura. And not just because they didn't like her, either. Why, James' sister Martha, she lived with them, too. Martha didn't mind Laura, but as it turned out -- well, I'll just let you see for yourself.

*The minstrel, hands thrust in the pockets of his overalls, leaves as James is chased in by Martha. James tries to respond to his sister at intervals, but it's like he isn't a part of the conversation. Which he isn't.*

Martha       That's what really burns me up. Tom ought to know better. Ann's a married woman. You don't see me carrying on, do you? I ought to be able to go to the market for fresh tomatoes without seeing those Wilson sisters laughing behind my back. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone. I ain't forgot about her Eddie carrying on with that tart in Statesboro, during the War even! Bad enough he faked that old nag of his'n kicking him to get out of service.

*James is now puttering about the room, trying to find a misplaced awl or a favorite mug, and is also doing his best to evade the eye of the wrathful Martha, already worked up enough to defeat the coffee-table in hand to hand combat. If it came to that. Martha turns on him.*

James        James!  
James        What?  
Martha        You sinner!  
James        Please, today let's not do this. I've got three pair to make before sundown and I can't find my awl.  
Martha        You misplace a lot of things, don't you?  
James        (*disarmed*) Heh heh, I s'pose I do.  
Martha        Why, just yesterday you lost that mug.  
James        Still ain't found that one.  
Martha        (*moving in for the kill*) And you lost your wife about six months ago.  
James        What? Oh, Martha --  
Martha        You've lost your family!  
James        I just came in looking for my --  
Martha        Looking for your pride? I think it's out on the compost heap.  
James        Why can't you let Ann alone?

Martha You certainly have.  
 James Well, it's my business.  
 Martha (*sarcastically*) Oh, I don't mind being the laughingstock of the county. I don't see why it should bother you.  
 James Men and women are going to do what they want to do.  
 Martha There are *laws* against what they are doing. And under our roof!  
 James (*simply*) Then let the sheriff take care of it.  
 Martha Have you noticed nothing has happened? Nothing but adultery.  
 James Martha, please. This is not your affair.  
 Martha It doesn't appear to be your "affair" either.  
 James (*tired*) Please don't let it bother you. It's a man's world.  
 Martha Then we best find a man to deal with it  
 James Can I --  
 Martha Your talking bores me.

*An uptempo bass line kicks in, and Martha sings "Take a Stand."*

Martha Your words all old like crusty bread  
 Excuses taste like moonshine  
 You always bend but never break  
 Don't you kinda think it's time?

You've always been the one that's weak  
 I've always been strong  
 I've always been the right one, yeah  
 You've always kinda been wrong

The time is here  
 The end is near  
 It is clear  
 We need to take a stand

Weeks turn into months  
 Soon they'll turn to years  
 You'll be growing old and gray  
 Cryin' stale tears

Your love's not lost, it's just misplaced  
 But now's the time to act  
 So do it quick, do it now  
 If you're gonna get her back

The time is here  
 The end is near  
 It is clear  
 We need to take a stand

James (*frustrated*) You never let me talk.  
 Martha The only reason to talk is if you got something to say. If you'd had anything to say, James Melton, you would have said it ages ago and stopped this nonsense with Tom.  
 James (*in tears*) It's not my fault my wife doesn't love me.

*The Reverend, knocking as he enters, can clearly tell he is probably not coming at the best of times. But even the way he carries himself reveals that he's got something on his mind and will not be put off. James is now collapsed on the director's choice of furniture, burying his head in his hands. Martha stands over him, matronly in a sense. She lacks only the rolling pin. Perhaps she even has the domestic handkerchief tied about her neck or head. She is feeling ominous*

Wilkins      Have I come at a bad time?  
Martha      (*importantly*) Not at all. Have a seat, Reverend Wilkins.  
James      (*pulling it together*) How are you?  
Wilkins      Overworked, perhaps, but my reward is more than worth the work.  
Martha      What brings you up our little holler?  
Wilkins      The Lord's work is never done.  
Martha      (*slyly*) I imagine the Lord has a lot of work to do around *here*.  
James      (*nodding absently*) A lot. Yes. Mm-hmm.  
Wilkins      Oh, indeed.

*James decides to try to shy away from the issue at hand -- Tom and Ann -- and Martha decides to play with him a little bit.*

James      Will you be organizing the base ball games this summer, Reverend?  
Wilkins      It's early yet.  
Martha      Later than you think.

*Beat.*

James      Is it coming up on sundown?  
Wilkins      Sundown's a good three hours off.  
Martha      Three.  
James      Three. Hm. Really.  
Martha      Three's an interesting number. In tales and such. Three misplaced wishes, three wasted chances. Love triangles.  
Wilkins      Nonsense. It's a very Christian number. The trinity. That's three. The three Wise Men. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.  
James      (*nodding*) They were three. Very holy.  
Martha      But then again, some other numbers are less holy. Like seven.  
Wilkins      (*getting into the game*) Seven sins. Deadly sins.  
Martha      (*intoning*) Plagues can come in sevens, can't they?  
Wilkins      Like to Job. Yes. Then there's Seven signs of the Apocalypse.  
James      I made seven pairs of shoes last week.  
Martha      (*withering look*) Seven's bad all right, but perhaps the unholyest things come in pairs.  
Wilkins      Two?  
Martha      Cain and Abel.  
Wilkins      Sodom and Gomorrah.  
Martha      Adam and Eve.

*Awkward pause.*

Martha      Which makes me think of Tom and Ann. . .

*James bows his head in anticipation.*

Wilkins        I have come, in fact, about that very godless pair. (*sharply, to James*)  
There has been far too little done.

*This last bit is too much for James, who has been trying to keep it together. He gets up too quickly, and knocks a plate off the coffee table.*

James        (*rushed*) Oh! Sorry. I'll go get something. Something just to -- to clean this. And -- uh -- some work, work down stairs. In the shop.

*Exit James.*

Martha        (*cleaning up the mess*) I'm very sorry, Reverend. He's been a mite edgy there for a while. Ever since the day he walked in on that pair in the marriage bed he himself made, and came upon them in -- Oh! Forgive me. Uh, came upon them in a (*searching*) -- that is, their souls were in a, uh,

Wilkins        (*mildly*) Parlous state?

Martha        (*relieved*) Exactly. Well, he's just not been quite right, you know?

Wilkins        It must take quite a lot out of a man.

Martha        Indeed it must. Let me go and fetch him for you.

Wilkins        (*seeing his chance*) No, no. Just set a spell here with me. He knows I'm here, bearing the sword of God. He will return when he's ready.

Martha        (*sitting*) Very well.

Wilkins        In fact, there may be something you can do for me -- and for the Lord. You're a famous woman, Martha.

Martha        (*vainly*) Me? How kind of you.

Wilkins        (*continuing*) Yes. A preacher friend of mine from Blowing Rock came by yesterday. He's just returned from spreading the Word out in Harlan and tells me the word of this situation is spread nigh to the four corners of the earth. Most everyone has heard of the affair concerning the young soldier Dula and the whore Ann Foster Melton.

Martha        (*her face falls*) And me?

Wilkins        And the egregious apathy of those around them. Wilkesboro has been put into a position of ridicule.

Martha        (*wailing*) God save us!

Wilkins        It is time for us to save ourselves. Charles Adams the fencemaker has lost a good piece of business downriver. Tyler Bains can't give his horses away. People don't do business with sinners. Something must be done. It is clear that neither Tom nor Ann will quit their affair in this life. This entire community is suffering for the actions -- (*sternly*) and inactions -- of a few.

Martha        I've done all I can! What more can I say?

Wilkins        Actions speak louder than words, good lady.

Martha        James keeps telling me it is not my business.

Wilkins        I am telling you that it is. There comes a time when institutions -- even the Church -- need the support of a good Christian individual in a position to help the community. God has told me that individual is you.

Martha        (*flabbergasted*) I'm nobody.

Wilkins        Do you remember who Martin Luther was, Martha?

Martha Wilkins (*eagerly*) He showed those Catholics. Er. . . Sorry, Reverend. Luther was a nobody, just like you. But God spoke to him for a cause he knew to be right. Without him, we would not have our little Church today. (*pregnant pause*) And someday people will say, "Without Martha Melton, we wouldn't have Wilkesboro today."

Martha Wilkins I'm to save the town?

Martha Wilkins More like, you're to preserve our way of life. It's little people like you and Martin Luther who keep the faith.

Martha Wilkins But you know I'm not a Lutheran!

Martha Wilkins (*patiently*) We're Protestants, aren't we.

Martha Wilkins Why yes.

Martha Wilkins And we wouldn't be here without Luther.

Martha Wilkins No, I suppose not.

Martha Wilkins You need to take this matter into your own hands, Martha.

Martha Wilkins Isn't that God's job?

Martha Wilkins Let me say it this way. We take care of our lives. God takes care of our afterlives.

Martha Wilkins (*struggling*) All right. So Tom and Ann is my affair.

Martha Wilkins Exactly.

Martha Wilkins What am I supposed to do about them?

Martha Wilkins That is between you and the Lord.

Martha Wilkins That's what I just don't understand. If God wants it to end, why doesn't He just -- just -- turn Tom into a snake?

Wilkins Maybe he is testing you, to see if you are bound for Heaven.

Martha Wilkins (*starry eyed*) Like Job!

Martha Wilkins (*unenthusiastically*) Exactly.

Martha Wilkins (*busily*) Well! you must excuse me, Reverend. We saints lead busy lives, you know. I need to do some thinking about Ann -- (*angrily*) and about Tom.

Wilkins (*quickly*) Whatever path you choose, you answer to the Lord, not me. But I caution you to remember your Bible.

Martha Wilkins What?

Martha Wilkins As long as mankind survives, we will suffer the sin of Eve. Women are to blame for the troubles of men. Ann Foster Melton has bitten the apple, and poor Tom was as much a victim as anyone in Wilkesboro.

Martha Wilkins Tom is a rake, Reverend.

Martha Wilkins Do you lust after married men?

Martha Wilkins No!

Martha Wilkins That could change! Beware! Our souls are in a daily state of peril, and yours is no safer than Ann's. (*dogmatically*) Ann must return to this house or I -- (*catching himself*) well, she must return because otherwise how can things ever be as they were?

*The Reverend exits, and leaves Martha to sing "I am the Man."*

Martha  
 If sinners come in twos  
 Then saviors come in ones  
 Like Jesus, Job, and Jericho,  
 Joshua and so it goes  
 The walls come tumblin' down

Oh, what a hurting town!  
And what a hurting man  
God chose us then to suffer so  
So I could fight a Jericho  
And have the walls come tumblin' down

I am the man  
I am the man  
To set it right  
To shine the light  
To save the clan  
To be the man  
To do whatever I can

Martha      Tom Dula. War hero, hero of the night, of Ann Melton. You're no hero of mine. I don't envy your road. But Ann! What about you? Temptress! Seductress! Neither of you can go unpunished. Job might have suffered in silence while he lost his family, but not Martha Melton. I will prove I am worthy of Heaven. First what to do about Ann. Her sin is adultery, and only James knows how it feels. To repent this sin, she has to know what it means to lose someone she cares about. All she cares about apart from Tom is Laura. She thinks an awful lot of her cousin. If I could put myself between them somehow. . . If Ann thought Tom was running off with Laura, maybe then she'd come home. That's not bad; it would explain where Tom is all day long. I bet I could get Ann to buy it. That don't take care of Tom, though. How could I get him out of this town and make sure Laura can't say nothing about my lie.  
*(peering out the window)* I believe that's them. . .

*She gets one last stanza as she swoops behind the door onto the staircase for the shop.*

Let me fetch my horn  
And no one I will fear  
The Reverend told me, this I know  
I'm to fight a Jericho  
And have the walls come tumblin' down

I am the man  
I am the man  
To set it right  
To shine the light  
Shine it on Ann  
To be the man  
To do whatever I can

*She swings the door most of the way shut. Enter Tom and Ann. Ann stumbles a little bit; she's been in the sauce. Tom is being manically sincere. He swings his coat up on the rack. They have entered in the middle of an argument.*



Tom Well, *you* need to quit your drinking at noon.  
 Ann You do it!  
 Tom That's different. I just meet the guys for a whiskey.  
 Ann Do you complain to them about Laura?  
 Tom Sure. . . Sure I do.  
 Ann Same thing. I just complain about James.  
 Tom If you hate him so much then leave him.  
 Ann You're pushing me too hard, Tom.  
 Tom You've been putting this decision off for months.  
 Ann And that's part of what worries me. As soon as we met, it was "run away with me."  
 Tom I knew what I wanted.  
 Ann Well, I'm not so sure. You say you love me, but I don't see it. I can't remember the last time we just spent a day together.  
 Tom (*reaching*) If I haven't been there for you, I'm sorry.  
 Ann You can't wash it all away with two words.  
 Tom All what away?  
 Ann All the suspicion.  
 Tom (*frustrated*) You can't listen to them, Ann. There's a better world out there, and I'm gonna take you there.

*The guitar leads Tom into "Honey, Do."*

Tom Come with me  
 And be my wife  
 We'll live a happy righteous life  
 Ann All the things  
 You want to do  
 You've got a lot of love to prove  
 Both Tonight  
 Tom I'd rather be  
 In Tennessee  
 Living together, you and me  
 Ann The road is long  
 I'll have to be strong  
 I've been right but I've been wrong  
 Both Before  
 Tom Honey, run away  
 This ain't no place for you  
 I know a place where the sky ain't gray  
 Oh, honey, do  
 Say yes  
 Ann Tom, you just  
 Say what you must  
 But I don't know if I can trust you  
 Tom You got to know  
 Our love can grow  
 And I love you  
 Both so Much

Tom           Honey, run away  
              This ain't no place for you  
              I know a place we can slip away  
              Oh, honey, do  
              Say Yes  
              Say yes baby  
              Ann say yes to me

*Ann holds her hands out and lightly touches Tom's chest. He looks at her earnestly, but if they are lovers, there is something missing.*

Ann           Tom, it's too much. You're asking too much right now.  
Tom           (mock intrigue) I know that look. . . Don't tell me. . . (snaps) Let me  
              guess: you'd rather be alone.  
Ann           Well. . . Yes.  
Tom           (snorts) No wonder I don't spend any time with you. Whenever I  
              try, you push me away.  
Ann           Just wait a little longer.  
Tom           For what? James to die?

*Tom gives her what he thinks is a meaningful look. He takes his coat off the coat rack and stomps out. Martha waits ten seconds or so and comes up the stairs. Ann, who has taken a seat on the couch, stands and faces her.*

Ann           Well, if it isn't the meddling Martha.  
Martha       Rather forward for a whore.  
Ann           I know what you're planning.  
Martha       How could you know?  
Ann           No big secret when the preacher comes to call on you like that. He  
              wants to hear the latest about (crassly) me and Tom. Writing another  
              nasty sermon for Sunday. But I haven't heard a-one of 'em.  
Martha       Great. Don't go to Church. Ain't my soul on the line.  
Ann           (slurring slightly) Shut up. You hate me.  
Martha       You're drunk.  
Ann           So what?  
Martha       You don't see me all in the sauce like so.  
Ann           Spend a day in my shoes and talk all you like.  
Martha       I wouldn't touch your shoes, sinner.  
Ann           You haven't any idea what I'm going through!  
Martha       You're right. I have neither the mind of a sinner nor the body of a  
              whore.  
Ann           I've been faithful to Tom.  
Martha       So has Laura.  
Ann           That's ridiculous.  
Martha       Also sick.  
Ann           Even before the war when Tom was with her, he never even loved  
              her. He told me so.  
Martha       You seen those letters Tom supposed to wrote her? I heard it was  
              mighty powerful stuff.  
Ann           I've known Laura my whole life! Are you telling me she'd lie?  
Martha       Not "lie," exactly. Rumor has it her butter's slidin' a little off her

biscuit.  
Ann She's no crazier than you.  
Martha Come on. She's old enough and pretty enough to be married. But she just sits in lily fields all day making wreaths for her hair. People see her up there. There's something wrong.  
Ann She just follows her own drum.  
Martha Whatever you like. I say she's crazy.  
Ann Because you don't understand her, that don't make her crazy!  
Martha Maybe not, but syphilis might.  
Ann *(uncertainly)* She doesn't have syphilis any more than I do.  
Martha Well, that's possible too, because rumor also has it she got it from Tom Dula.  
Ann Where'd *he* have got it from?  
Martha *(shrugs)* People say lots of things. Some wartime Atlanta whore, I heard.  
Ann *(unconvinced, but wavering)* That's absurd. Who'd you hear that from?  
Martha From the same person who told me about her and Tom.

*Martha twirls up out of her seat.*

Martha *(aside)* Hang down your head Tom Dula  
Hang down your head and cry,  
Might as well be guilty  
When poor Laura dies

*During the song, Martha evades Ann in a cold-shoulder sort of way. The pit band joins her as she sings and hums "Tom Dula" to herself, tidies the mess James left, puts mugs in the kitchen, and makes Ann follow her. Ann is still skeptical, but she wants to know what Martha knows.*

Ann What have you heard? I'm sure my own cousin would have told me if she were sick. Martha, please. Let's forget the fighting just for a minute.

Martha *(aside)* No two ways about it  
No good comes of sin  
Love a man like Dula  
Ain't no way to win

*Ann gets progressively more vulnerable. Her intoxication makes her focus on getting Martha to talk. Martha knows it's a game now, and knows furthermore she's going to win it. It makes her even more unbearable. As Martha hums, Ann has the following line.*

Ann Please! If it's something to do with syphilis, oughtn't I know about it? I may have it. Don't leave me like this. I need to know.  
*(groveling)* Martha, please. I am listening to you. If you've anything to say, please just say it.  
Martha *(airily)* You wouldn't want to know.  
Ann What if I would? Martha?  
Martha It's been around. Like you.

Ann            Martha, stop. Tell me.

*Freeze. The minstrel comes in from his customary door, and offers up his two bits.*

Minstrel        Amazing, isn't it. How people get when they think that God has called them. Hey. Maybe He did. I don't know, I wasn't there. Neither was anybody else. What we have here is a woman sad about a family gone to pieces. Nobody's sleeping in the right beds, and Martha takes it upon herself to see to it that everybody she knows goes where they belong. But that makes it sound too noble, what she done here. Martha's about to lie her way in between Tom and Ann. There's some folks who say it's all right to lie, if, say, your gal's wearing some ugly gingham and she asks how she's lookin'. Now my wife, whoo. She don't cotton to no lyin', no how, for no reason. She caught me once when I told her I was helpin' Ed with the harvest. I was really down at the Rooster. I slept on the couch for a week. James has been sleeping on the couch here for months. I feel bad for him, but I think Martha feels worse for him. She's doin' it for him, and the Reverend, and God, and Wilkesboro.

*The two have been pantomiming, and Ann is virtually in tears wanting only for Martha to talk to her. The moonshine hasn't been sitting well, and she's in a heap by the door.*

Ann            Please try not to hate me. I'm just trying to follow my heart. I've never been good with choices, Martha. Please. If you are any kind of friend. . .

Martha        There, Ann. Have a seat.

*Martha is just warming to her game. She gets Ann a blanket from the couch and sets her down.*

Ann            What if Tom chose you? I'm no stronger than James, really. I'm only human!

Martha        Please, Ann. Hush. I've something I must tell you. Let me go draw you some water.

*Martha exits and leaves Ann alone to sing "I Will Let Him Go."*

Everybody says it's wrong  
I've seen it coming for so long  
I was hoping that this day would never come  
Never come  
Loved a different drummer  
Followed his drum

Played the game of kiss and cry  
Love takes its time to die  
But I'm scared to live a day without you  
Without you  
But I want my freedom

Want to be free

I will let him go  
He's taken too much of me  
I will let him go  
And we both will be

Back on the path to righteousness  
Cleanin' up my dirty mess  
I'll try to live my life accordingly  
Accordingly  
Love's a lot like drinking  
Hurts like hell

And I will let him go  
But I don't want him to leave  
I'll try to let him go  
I'll try but I don't believe  
I can do it

*Re-enter Martha with the water.  
Martha puts her arm around Ann.*

Martha      Doesn't that taste better than 'shine?  
Ann          Thank you, Martha.  
Martha      Poor girl. You must be so alone. (*making her move*) How is your  
relationship with God?  
Ann          (*immediately*) Miserable.  
Martha      I know it is, honey. But I can help you get closer to Him, if you can  
let go of Tom.  
Ann          I can't.  
Martha      Well, Tom might have let go of you.

*Ann buries her head.*

Ann          Oh God! He *has* gone back to her, hasn't he? He swore he wasn't!  
Martha      Yes, he is. Please don't make this any harder than it has to be.  
There, there. Cry all your tears.  
Ann          You mean there's more? (*cries for a while*) Tell me. All right. Tell  
me.  
Martha      I had it from James. He told me not to tell you, but I can't let you stay  
like this, torn up over a louse like Tom.  
Ann          What is it?  
Martha      Oh. . . It's so hard. Tom is leaving for Tennessee within the week --  
Ann          He's doing what?  
Martha      But he's taking Laura.  
Ann          (*gasping*) He can't do this! Why would he do such a thing?  
Martha      She *is* younger.  
Ann          He never would -- he needs me. And Laura's got no money! Why,  
me and James have more.  
Martha      But if he left with you, he wouldn't see any of that. At least if he  
leaves with Laura, he's got just enough money to get him fixed up

with some Tennessee working man's wife and leave Laura to go crazy  
in a little mountain cabin.  
Ann It's not true!

*She just doesn't want to believe Martha.  
Martha embraces her. Ann is lost.*

Martha Don't take it out on me, Ann. Or James. Or anybody else. It's not  
your fault Tom "chose" you. Or your cousin. Oh, I saw it all along,  
but lovers never listen, do they?  
Ann Oh Martha!  
Martha (*soothingly*) Blinded by love.

*Ann runs out crying, unable to handle the betrayal. Martha has a reprise of "I am  
the Man."*

Martha I did it all for James  
And for a little mountain town  
Forgive me if I lied  
But I won't forever die  
And the walls are tumbling down .  
  
I am the man  
I am the man  
Look at me now  
Don't know how  
But I came out strong  
I can't be wrong  
I am the man

*Enter Tom.*

Tom What was that all about?  
Martha (*innocently*) What?  
Tom Ann. I was here just a minute ago. I decided to take a walk down  
near the garden when I just seen her running breakneck down the  
holler. I yelled to her, but I don't guess she heard me.  
Martha Don't guess.  
Tom What's wrong with her?  
Martha (*sarcastically*) Here's a woman's secret not many men know. See,  
Ann is a woman, and every month --

*Gives him the look.  
Tom doesn't buy it.*

Tom (*insightfully*) That ain't it at all. There's something you're not telling  
me, Martha Melton.  
Martha No, no.  
Tom (*eyes narrowing*) Look. I was just here. Ann was fine. Now she's  
running like the devil himself is after her.  
Martha Maybe he finally caught up to her.  
Tom Let me put it this way. I can find out from her, or you can save me

some time and tell me what this is all about.  
Martha *(long suffering sigh)* Men never understand. *(patronizingly)*  
Between women, there is an unspoken agreement that no confidences  
should be broken.  
Tom Martha. We're old friends.

*He gives her what he thinks is his winsome grin. Little does he know he's playing right into Martha's hand.*

Martha Well, just don't blame the messenger for the message. *(pause)* Tom,  
Ann doesn't want to see you anymore.

*Tom's smile falls from his face like a dropped dinner plate.*

Tom What?  
Martha She didn't know how to tell you. To tell you the truth, I don't either.  
Ann found out about you and Laura.  
Tom *(frustrated)* How has everybody come to know we was gonna run off  
together?  
Martha *(taken aback)* You were *really* going to run off -- er, and -- *(makes it rhetorical)* and leave poor Ann?  
Tom I was just following my heart.  
Martha Well, it looks like you followed it into a bear trap this time. It was all  
over town this morning. People are saying some pretty vicious  
things.  
Tom That damn girl talks too much for a lover.  
Martha It's a sick game you were playing with those poor women.  
Tom Spare the lecture, mother.  
Martha *(not put off)* Tom, Laura ruined your little game. Lord knows how it  
worked as long as it did. Playing one woman off another, telling  
stories and tales to keep 'em both satisfied. *(triumphantly)* But the  
walls came tumbling down on you. And all because of Laura.  
Wilkesboro put up with you only because we had to, and now that  
Ann's going back where she belongs, ain't nobody has any use for  
you. Nobody but some crazy old sweetheart of yours who can't wait  
to go to Tennessee with you.  
Tom The more I think about this, the more I'm coming to hate Laura.  
Nobody forces Tom Dula's hand. That girl -- she can be so damn  
witless some times.  
Martha How do you think Laura feels about you? Poor little child, you could  
have made her so happy.  
Tom So could a lily farm. She's pretty but she's crazy.  
Martha Ask me, you're the one that's crazy. You're just never happy.  
Tom *(to himself)* I knew she was going to make trouble. Laura and her  
big mouth.  
Martha Of course, it had to come to this sooner or later. You're the one  
wondering what was wrong with Ann. You're the one who saw her  
run away and not even look back. Tom, she won't ever look back to  
you.  
Tom *(waning confidence)* She'll be back.  
Martha You'll be bound for Tennessee with Laura soon, remember?  
Tom I don't have to go.

Martha Well, you won't be able to say here. (*smugly*) Oh. Be sure to say hello to Laura for me, won't you?

Tom (*angry*) So she went and told the whole town. . . She ruined my life! That crazy jealous bitch!

*Tom emphatically stabs the table with his knife, and leaves the blade quivering in the wood. He puts his head down on his chest.*

Why did I ever stay with her? Why are the young pretty girls always trouble?

Martha I don't know, I'm old and ugly. Why don't you ask Laura?

Tom Oh, I'll definitely talk to Laura. But I want to see Ann first.

Martha (*gently*) She's gone up to Laura's cabin, setting things right before you both leave. But Ann did ask to see you tomorrow at sunrise up at Laura's cabin, but not before. She wants to talk one more time.

Tom What's wrong with right now? I'll follow her!

Martha She said if you ever loved her you wouldn't. Let her have a little space with Laura.

Tom I don't care about Laura!

Martha Then do it for Ann. Meet her tomorrow morning, up on the mountain by the willow tree.

*Tom looks pitiful, and starts to leave.*

Where are you going?

Tom If anybody wants me, and I doubt they will, I'll be at the Rooster till they kick me out.

*Martha watches him leave and sings "Judgment Day."*

Martha A little lucky guess  
I hardly had to try  
It fell into my lap  
Like manna from the sky  
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord

It takes a lot to tell a lie  
To watch somebody cry  
But Ann gonn' see the light  
Martha gonn' fix it right  
Why wait for things if you can be  
The master of your destiny

When that great Judgment Day arrives  
We'll all be livin' our righteous lives  
All except one  
Gonn' live in the sun  
One gonn' live in the rain  
I do the crime  
Tom does the time  
Wearin' that ball and chain



The cost that I've been countin'  
High up on that mountain  
In the mornin', the price gets paid  
Under the willow's shade  
I'll meet Laura with Dula's knife  
And there I'll take that poor girl's life

When Tom gets over the rise  
He won't believe his eyes  
Gonna lose his head  
When he sees her lyin' dead  
After I kill Laura in the morning sun  
Tom shows up, and watch Tom run

When that great Judgment Day arrives  
We'll all be livin' our righteous lives  
All except one  
Gonn' live in the sun  
Tom gonn' live in the rain  
I do the crime  
He does the time  
Wearin' that ball and chain

*Lights.*

## Act Three

*Evening shades are falling outside the window. Tom and Ann are sitting on a sofa, as lovers do. The hitch, though, is that they look less and less like lovers, and more and more distant from one another. The minstrel walks on, a little more confidently than before.*

Minstrel      Howdy. Well, I guess y'all can see by now this ain't quite as open and-shut as people seemed to think it was. Thing was, everybody in Wilkesboro went along with it 'cause it meant an easy way of gettin' rid of ol' Tom. Wouldn't nobody go right out and kill him, cause the right Governor Pike was his close personal buddy. It didn't pay to make powerful people mad, especially when you're hurtin' from Reconstruction and all. Yessir, a lot of tobacco farmers were mighty glad Tom was gone, 'cause it somehow helped make Wilkesboro tobacco less sinful. If'n you know what I mean. James wasn't unhappy to see him gone, and I don't bet Martha shed too many tears. Even Ann got on the good road; everybody loves a born-again sinner. Tom was the easy one to blame. I mean, sure, he was a villain, but was he the *right* villain?

*Dull lighting off the spot for Tom and Ann.*

Tom            What do you mean, what did I do today?  
Ann            (*irritated*) I just asked what you did; you don't need to get mad at me.  
Tom            I'm not mad, you're just always jumping at me.  
Ann            How was I jumping?  
Tom            You always want to know where I am.  
Ann            I wouldn't have to if you were ever here.  
Tom            I sleep here every night!  
Ann            Yeah, you come home and sleep.  
Tom            I'm tired!  
Ann            Because you sleep somewhere else every day.  
Tom            What can I say? What do you want me to say?  
Ann            Why don't you say exactly what happens between you and Laura.  
Tom            (*beat, protesting*) Well -- no, it isn't like that.  
Ann            I think it is.  
Tom            Look. It isn't what you think even though I have spent time with her.  
Ann            (*savagely*) Why can't you love only me?  
Tom            I do love only you. I only see her sometimes because she's crazy and I don't know what she's liable to say.  
Ann            Now my family? Tom, this is really too much. Treat me however you must, but leave Laura alone!  
Tom            (*pleading*) I mean it. I don't know what's wrong with her, but the girl definitely ain't quite right. So I spend the days with her just to calm her down. I hear she runs around town telling the tallest tales about me.

*Ann looks skeptical.*

Ann I've not touched her.  
Swear.  
Tom I swear I've never made love to Laura.

*Tom takes her hand and is as earnest as any liar can be.*

Ann I just don't know when to believe you anymore.  
Tom I'm serious. She's not the same as she was when I wrote her the letters during the War. Haven't you noticed? You must have noticed.  
Ann How could she turn out any differently when she's being seduced by her cousin's lover?  
Tom This is exactly why I didn't want to tell you. I knew you'd act like this.  
Ann Like what?  
Tom *(defensively)* Just. . . Just jumping on me, that's all.  
Ann I've had it with you. You ruin everything.  
Tom How can you say that? I'm saving you from a cobbler.  
Ann Maybe I don't want to be saved. What kind of life would we have? What happened to us? I used to believe every word you said. Now I doubt every word. You can't even be honest about what you do all day.  
Tom Sweetie. . . I bought a sack of potatoes at the market, stopped in to see Sheriff Grayson and we talked about old times, and had some whiskey at the bar. We talked about old friends from out Asheville, and danged if ol' Ben didn't come through the door at the very minute. We had another round and talked about the glory days. Then when I was leavin', I saw Laura. She was yonder by the stables and I couldn't help but talk a while.  
Ann *(sulking)* You ruin everything.  
Tom *(explodes)* Why do you keep doing that? You're always so contrary. Your problem is that you always want things your way, and most of the time you get it.  
Ann And yours is the same.  
Tom So why are we fighting?  
Ann I don't know.

*Ann has some quiet tears on Tom's shoulder, but he holds her like an incompetent father holds a baby: awkwardly. After the guitar intro, Ann sings "One Heart Alone" with Tom.*

Ann Why can't I believe in you?  
Who has come between?  
It used to be so easy  
to love you  
  
Tom I will still stand by you  
In spite of all you say  
Because a love from yesterday  
dies slowly

Ann        You've got a lot to learn  
               And fire, it's gonna burn  
               Can't play two sides  
               True love abides  
               In one heart alone  
               Whose is it?

Tom        My hand stands on the table  
               Leave with me or stay  
               You know I'm bound away  
               Like a drifter

Ann        If it is my choice to make  
               It's now against forever  
               You know that I can never  
               Love a drifter

Tom        You've got a lot to learn  
               There's just two ways to turn  
               There's a choice to make  
               A side to take  
               On one heart alone  
               Whose is it?

Ann        There's so far yet to go  
 Tom        So much left to know  
 Ann        Don't play games  
 Tom        Is it me or James?  
 Both       One heart alone  
               Whose is it?  
               Whose is it?

*The song ends and they remain embraced.*

Tom        I don't know what happened to us. We can leave this, honey. Start again.

Ann        I can't leave.

Tom        Why not? You said you would think about it.

*Ann draws away from him and straightens herself.*

Ann        I thought about it. No, Tom. If I stay, I only sin against love. If I leave James, I sin against God. We both have some thinking to do about eternity.

Tom        I saw brother kill brother, over the difference between blue and grey. I couldn't even tell you if there is a God.

Ann        Hush! --

Tom        No. You hush a minute. And even if there is, if He would punish a woman for trying to quit a marriage as dull as stone soup, well, He's not the kind of God I want to spend eternity with.

Ann        Don't talk like that. Try to understand. I don't want to leave you, but I can't leave with you. I have too much here. I have a good home, an

honest husband. If I leave, I don't know that I'd have either.  
 Tom At least you'd have "Dula." That's a good name.  
 Ann (*haughtily*) Not as good as "Melton."  
 Tom A lot of good it is now.  
 Ann No thanks to you.  
 Tom Damn you, Ann!

*Tom jumps up, agitated.*

Tom I ruin everything, huh? I drag your name through the mud and kick you in the teeth, like an ornery mule. Have you ever thought about what you're doing to me? But you said you loved me, and I knew six months ago I'd eventually have enough to take us away from here. But you don't go, you think. And every minute you think and don't go, your name gets a little dirtier. And so does mine. I didn't plan on living with this because I didn't plan on living here. I loved you once, Ann.

*Tom pauses, rather too dramatically, and with a twisted look between pity and nostalgia, he slams the door. Ann sings "Can This Be Love?"*

Ann Is this the love  
 I'll treasure till I die  
 Is this the well  
 That never will run dry?  
 Tell me, heart of mine,  
 I keep forgettin'  
 'Cause it hurts so much  
  
 Can this be love?  
 All night but not one day  
 Do I forgive  
 And say it's just his way?  
 I want to make this work  
 But lately  
 His love hurts me so much  
  
 And I try, and I try  
 And I can't help but wonder why  
 If it's true  
 Why I'm blue  
 Why I cry  
  
 Why can't he love  
 Why won't he even try  
 The strongest oak  
 Will die when love runs dry  
 I need to know he's thinking,  
 Thinking of me  
 Even in another lover's arms  
 Why can't he love?  
 It can't be love

*Enter Reverend.*

Wilkins      So long absent from our flock, my dear.  
Ann          (*uncomfortably*) My face is not a welcomed one in the market, much less in a House of God.  
Wilkins      Forgiveness is a fountain. I invite you to drink from it.  
Ann          I have aged twenty years in all this.  
Wilkins      You don't look well.  
Ann          Reverend, I -- I need someone to talk to.  
Wilkins      When you took the name of Melton, James became your husband and your confidant.  
Ann          The valley between us is too wide. As much as I want to, I can't.  
Reverend, I know this is my fault.  
Wilkins      This is a good start.  
Ann          I feel like I'm someplace between Heaven and Hell. The decisions don't feel like they're mine anymore.  
Wilkins      Your fate is -- as it has always been -- in your own hands, Ann.  
Ann          I wish I could put the James I married together with the Tom that I love.  
Wilkins      (*sternly*) You must make a decision. Every minute you stay undecided, it hurts everyone more and more.  
Ann          Whatever I decide will hurt one of them very badly.  
Wilkins      Worry about you: your life, your self, your soul.  
Ann          That's just it. I don't want any part of it. That's why I keep trying to make one of them leave me.  
Wilkins      Well, they say it's never too late -- but sooner or later, it will be. And you will find yourself wishing it was yesterday.  
Ann          Sometimes I feel like everything was better yesterday. Life sure was easier before I knew Tom. There are times I curse the day I met him.  
Wilkins      Just so!  
Ann          But then again, I don't know what I'd do without him. I'm lost, Reverend. I don't know how to begin making my peace.  
Wilkins      Start with your husband. James loves you a good deal, in spite of the way you treat him. Come. . . you'd have never married him if you never loved him.

*Ann looks away.*

Look at me. Is it really Tom that you love?  
Ann          (*steadily*) I know I can't love Tom because love don't hurt this much.  
Wilkins      So surround yourself with strength.  
Ann          Strength? Everyone knows how weak James Melton is. Why do you think we live in this (*gesturing*). . . this cranny? Because he lets every customer -- right down to Tom -- walk all over him!  
Wilkins      Do not underestimate James. You, who married him, must know his quiet strength.  
Ann          I used to, but I don't even know him anymore.  
Wilkins      That's the trouble here.  
Ann          (*angrily*) I know that! I just don't know how to talk to him.

*James is revealed by the open door to the outside. He stands with his arms slightly akimbo and his mouth in an ever-so-slight sneer. Both the Reverend and Ann swivel in surprise when he speaks.*

James        "Hello" would be a good start.

*James sings the belligerent "I Won't." It's almost as if he's finally out of his shell.*

James        I won't leave my shoes upon the floor  
                 And I won't keep the river from the shore  
                 I won't worry anymore  
                 I won't, no I won't  
                 Tell you baby, no

                 I won't seek you out in stormy weather  
                 And I won't try to tie you to a tether  
                 And I won't miss the times we were together  
                 I won't, no I won't

                 If it's true what they say  
                 About how love slips away  
                 Then I'll let you move along  
                 It's just this feeling I feel  
                 That what we had was real --  
                 Whatever it was once is gone

                 Don't you try to make it all right  
                 Don't you know all we do is fight  
                 So don't you cry my name at night  
                 Oh don't, no, don't you dare

                 I won't stop you from runnin' far  
                 And I won't spend my mornings at the bar  
                 And I won't wonder how you are  
                 I won't, no, I won't

                 It's too late to save  
                 All the love that I have  
                 I'll let you move along  
                 It's just this feeling I feel  
                 That what we had was real --  
                 Whatever it was once is gone  
                 Whatever is was once is gone

Wilkins      You two look so natural together!

James        I think it's the first time we've all been in a room together since my wedding day.

Ann           Please, James. The Reverend and I have been talking.

James        Great! Seems like you talk to any and everyone in this town except for James Melton.

Ann           Really, we've been talking. About our marriage.

James        You're married to the Reverend too? Next thing you'll be in the

mayor's bed.  
 Ann Try to be serious, James.  
 Wilkins Please, you two. I think your marriage can be saved. You will need to believe in each other.  
 James With all due respect, Reverend, belief is a poor man's faith.  
 Wilkins As you like. You will need to have faith in one another.  
 Ann (*reaching out*) I -- I have faith in you, James.  
 James My faith in you is -- is broken.  
 Ann We can still try to make this right. There's nothing between us now but bad feelings. It's a long road ahead, but we can make it right.  
 James (*challenging*) You don't believe that.  
 Ann I do. And I want to try.  
 James That means saying goodbye to Tom.

*Ann bites her lip and looks down.  
 The Reverend jumps in.*

Wilkins Look past Tom and the petty battles of this life. There is only one important war, and it's not that difficult to win. And when you do, you're bound for better things.

*Everyone sings "Gloryland."*

Wilkins When Daniel saw the bluegrass in the valley below  
 He lived in ol' Kentucky where the warm winds blow  
 And when his life was over he was ready to go  
 Oh, Gloryland  
  
 The land of milk and honey where your soul never dies  
 Sit up in the clouds and watch the sweet sun rise

*Ann enters the song tentatively.*

Ann We'll be eatin' country gravy and hot apple pies  
 All Oh, Gloryland

*Wilkins smiles at her and tries to sweep her along in the music. James is less than excited about all the commotion.*

Wilkins Can't hope for your salvation if your soul is lost  
 Sailin' in the storm while your raft gets tossed  
 The price is always more when you've counted the cost  
 All Oh, Gloryland  
  
 Ann Well, Dula was nothing but trouble  
 And trouble's what he gave to me  
 They'll say that I ran away from my troubles  
 But my troubles run away from me

*The Reverend nods encouragingly to Ann who steps forward and gets into it with feeling.*



Lovin' to live but I was livin' to love  
I'm the only one I ain't been thinkin' of  
I'm givin' up my thanks to the Lord above  
Oh, Gloryland

Wilkins      Settin' high and mighty where the river flows  
It's easy to forget that the Savior knows  
So sinner, change your ways or else you ain't gonna go  
Oh, Gloryland

*Wilkins looks at James, who does not uncross his arms.*

James          Well that doesn't say a lot for Dula  
But what does that say about me?  
It took a little rat like Dula  
To drive Ann back to me

Wilkins      No use in hangin' on when the feelings are gone

*The Reverend forgets himself. The next line is accompanied by a decidedly un-Reverently thrust of the hips.*

So what if Laura Foster's gettin' so close to Tom?  
Saint Peter sends 'em south when that Great Day comes  
Oh, Gloryland

*Ann's mouth is open. She is horrified to have this unequivocal confirmation of her worst fears: Tom is cheating on her. James actually looks happy. Wilkins realizes the gaffe and the song trails off.*

Ann            What is this?  
James        (*incredulous*) Is it true?  
Wilkins      (*diplomatically*) Well, surely you know Tom and Laura have been  
seeing each other.  
James        Well, if that don't beat all.  
Ann           How do you mean?  
James        (*enjoying her pain*) Didn't you see how he said it? They sleep in the  
same bed.

*This utterly silences the room.*

Wilkins      (*embarrassed*) Well, that's a crude way to say it.  
Ann           (*small voice*) Is that true?  
Wilkins      Well, there's been some talk for a month or so. I thought you  
knew. . . But it shouldn't make any difference, right? Remember  
what you were saying? Ann? About making a decision? About  
strength? And your soul?  
Ann           It would have helped to know this a month ago.  
Wilkins      But think! Your decision's been made by God!  
Ann           (*stubbornly*) You told me it was my decision, and I will see that it is.  
James        Ever stop to think it's half mine?

Ann (continuing) So he's carrying on! I -- why, I'll -- I'll -- well, I can't lose him! But after swearing -- "just friends"!

James (mildly) Imagine! A loved one carrying on behind your back? At least it's not under your nose.  
What happened to saying goodbye to Tom?

Ann That was before! --

Wilkins I just can't get over how well the both of you look together.

James/Ann Please, Reverend.

Wilkins Well, I did have to be somewhere today. . . I'm lunching . . . In town. So I'd best be off.

James (mechanically) Pleasure to have you, Reverend. Come back again.

Wilkins See you both on Sunday.

*He grins too broadly at Ann.  
Exit Reverend hurriedly.*

Ann Feel good to act tough?

James Better than it does to be weak.

Ann Why can't you just leave me alone?

James What happened to having faith in me? Why can't you just leave Tom alone?

Ann I don't understand why Tom would do something like this to me.  
With Laura! Maybe I'm not young enough. Not pretty enough. But mark me, my best years are still to come.

James Too bad you're going to spend them all alone.

Ann Just because I'm not with you doesn't mean I'm alone. (Tosses her head) If you'll recall, I'm the one sleeping in the bed.

James Looks like we'll both be sleeping alone.

Ann That Laura! It's a good thing she's family, or I swear I'd -- well, I'd not let her get away with this. (beat) And I won't.

James What choice do you have?

Ann Maybe you can act tough, James Melton, but I can be tough.

James What's your trouble with it? You didn't have to make a decision.

Ann (frustrated) That's just it.

James I thought you didn't ever want to make that decision.

Ann I didn't think I did either.

James Well, you're clearly not happy. So I guess I missed the hint; the wrong man must have left you.

Ann All I know is Laura decided to steal a man from the wrong woman.

James What if she had stolen me away from you?

Ann Don't make me laugh.

James (mimicing Laura) Oh James, I don't know why Ann let you go!

Ann I -- I'm going for a walk.

James (calling after her) I don't care where you go.

*Ann stomps out, leaving the door open.  
Beat. The minstrel enters.*

Minstrel Ann and James had burned their last bridge, and was it ever a good torching! But after seeing how mad Ann got about the whole Laura situation, James really got to thinking.  
It really would have been the best of all possible scenarios if the

Reverend hadn't let his tongue slip. While carrying on with Ann, Tom secretly returns to his first love, Laura, and without warning up and runs off to Tennessee, then a jilted Ann is shamed back into James' home. Woulda worked perfect.

But now, Ann was somehow more attracted to Tom, now that he was out of her reach. So when Martha came back from the market that morning, there were all kinds of storm clouds gatherin'.

*Exit Minstrel.*

*Martha sets a basket of fruit down on the table, and starts to take everything out.*

*She is more like a wife to James than Ann has ever been, and together they act very domestic.*

Martha I don't think I've seen Ann's mouth so down at the corners since that horse of her'n died two years ago.

James Well, wait'll you hear what done happened.

Martha I'm all ears.

James I walked in on her talking to the Reverend, and you know how he keeps trying to get us to live as man and wife again.

Martha That'll be the day.

James Right. So, of all people, *he* lets it slip that Tom and Laura's more than friends.

Martha *(turns away from the fruit)* What?

James Apparently he's been up seeing her for nigh on a month.

Martha Well, I'll be.

James Odd day.

Martha Figure one of them girls is gonna ax the other one over that Tom, don't you?

James Yeah, that's the kind of thing Ann would do.

Martha Our Ann.

Martha All for having an affair with an unmarried man. Definitely more righteous than her and Tom

James Well, I know that I've done had enough.

*Martha's head jerks a little, but her guard remains up.*

Martha How's that?

James *(deliberately)* It's just too much. My life is just a story of being taken advantage of, and I don't feel like a man no more. Years ago, back in Flat Lick, I recall how at the schoolhouse one morning, ol' Charles Martin put that beehive by the stove.

Martha I recall that day. Remember how Teacher got stung twenty times?

James Dunno about that. I remember Charles tattling how I done it, and how he seen me, and how didn't nobody stand up for me but you. I recall Teacher sayin' as how families'll stick together. *(pause)* I remember that switch. That still hurts. And I'm damned if I'm gonna be that guy any more. This family -- well, what's left of it -- is gonna stick *together*. Ann was ready to choose me over Tom, but she got jealous about her cousin. So what I was thinking is, how jealous would she get if we could convince her me and Laura were having an affair?

Martha I declare, James, how you talk.

*She grins widely and gives him a hug. All of a sudden she adopts a conspiratorial tone and the two of them have a duet.*

James        I'm the man with the bluegrass blues  
                 Nothin' to win and less to lose  
                 I've had enough, time to get tough  
                 Get that girl some prison shoes

Martha        I don't mind a lie  
                 We'll tell one, you and I  
James        And what we say, either way  
Both           Little Laura's bound to die

Martha        You won't have to hold the knife  
James        You won't have to take her life  
Martha        If our Ann thinks that Laura  
                 Is stealing you away  
                 She's bound to do the deed  
                 That'll put her in the cold hard clay

James        Are we sure she'll put her down?  
                 Just because she gets around?  
Martha        If you were seein' Laura  
                 It would be such a bomb  
                 That even if she don't  
                 There's always good ol' Tom

Martha        I don't mind a lie  
                 We'll tell one, you and I  
James        And what we say, either way  
Both           Little Laura's bound to die

James        I'm the man with the bluegrass blues  
                 Nothin' to win and less to lose  
                 I've had enough, time to get tough  
                 Get that girl some prison shoes

*James looks to Martha for support, but she's no longer interested in singing.  
Martha's looking out the window.*

Martha        Wait, James, here's Ann coming now. Wherever Ann is, Tom isn't  
                 far behind. We can do this now. I'll take care of telling Ann -- and --  
                 and we'll figure out Tom later. Run downstairs to the shop. When I  
                 stomp on the floor, just come upstairs asking for something.

*James exits downstairs to the shop, and in comes Ann, back from her walk.*

Ann            Where's James?  
Martha        In the shop. I'm glad you're here, though, Ann.  
Ann            The day you're glad to see me is the day I'll die.  
Martha        Well, I didn't say I was glad to see you, I'm just glad you're here.  
                 Set a spell.

Ann           (suspiciously) All right.  
Martha       Have some coffee then.  
Ann           (still eying Martha) Thanks.

*Martha gets up and locks the door, looking significantly back at Ann. She crosses to get the mugs.*

Martha       We've had our differences in the past. . . And I wanted to make my peace with you.  
Ann           That sounds a little final.  
Martha       Does it? Every day things are ending. . . But there are new beginnings. Reverend Wilkins talked about that last Sunday. Like taking a new job. Death. Or marriages.  
Ann           What's on your mind?  
Martha       (dramatically) I heard about Laura and Tom, and just felt awful for you.  
Ann           Well, things have been bad between me and Tom these last few weeks anyhow. The only reason we don't fight anymore is because the only time I see him, he's sleeping. So then I think I miss James, but he's worse than Tom. And the last thing I want is to be without any man at all, so I can't leave either one. I'm as alone as you are.  
Martha       That's what I need to speak to you about. I think you better try to make things right with Tom Dula  
Ann           I thought you hated Tom. Why are you trying to get me to leave your brother?  
Martha       It's what James asked me to tell you.  
Ann           What's he up to? Why are you all on Tom's side all of a sudden?  
Martha       I just don't think after all of this that you and James could hold together. You need trust, and I don't see as how you could have any of that.  
Ann           So you think I ought to say yes to Tom, swallow my pride, and follow him to Tennessee?  
Martha       What's wrong with Wilkesboro?  
Ann           What isn't wrong with Wilkesboro.  
Martha       James and I used to live in Flat Lick, Statesboro, and here, and I'm telling you no matter what town you live in, it's always the same. Tennessee for you and Tom isn't going to make life any easier.  
Ann           Where would we live? We haven't any money.  
Martha       Well, Tom will need a job, but he can live here.  
Ann           (puzzled) I thought you didn't want Tom living here. Look, what are you up to?  
Martha       (slowly) There's something else I have to tell you. James told me not to, but I don't think you can take this all at once tomorrow. You need to stay with Tom because someone will have to take care of you. James won't do it.  
Ann           You mean James won't take me back?  
Martha       Uh, there's a little bit more to it. More coffee?  
Ann           No thanks. What else?  
Martha       It's about Laura.  
Ann           Martha, what is going on?  
Martha       This is hard for me to say. You hurt James very much when you started seeing Tom. James has worked very hard to make you happy,

but he knows he doesn't have whatever you're looking for.

Ann I feel badly enough. What is the point?

Martha Laura's been having an affair with James.

Ann That's ridiculous. I heard that Tom's been up at her cabin a couple days a week for a month.

Martha They're both using you. Tom might be up there all day, but James is up there most every night.

Ann I see him here at night.

Martha In the goose-down quilt from the hope chest? Sleeping on the couch?

Ann Yes.

Martha (*laughing*) That's me. He gets back before you and Tom even wake up.

But listen. Don't be angry. Her and James, I tell you, they were meant for each other. They're so happy.

Ann I'm not angry! Oh, I loved James so much. But why didn't he just come to me? We can still work this out. There's still time.

Martha I think you let him believe in you too many times. There's no more time. James told me not to tell you, but he knows a justice of the peace who is going to marry him and Laura. They're leaving tomorrow at sunrise.

Ann Leaving? For where?

Martha Tennessee.

Ann To -- to Tennessee? That was Tom's idea. For us!

Martha Well, you know how Tom is. All talk. Laura liked the idea, and she asked James. . . and he said yes.

*Ann looks despondent.*

(*too brightly*) You see? That's why you and Tom need to make up.

Ann But then I'd be a Dula. In Wilkesboro.

Martha Yes.

Ann You might as well drown me in the Yadkin. (*manically*) I'll be worth nothing. I can't have my husband leave me!

Martha (*stomping her foot and cursing James*) You left your husband a fortnight after Tom got back from Shiloh.

Ann I never --

Martha Just because you didn't leave the house doesn't mean you didn't leave James.

Ann This is ridiculous.

*James is coming up the stairs to the shop, yelling to Martha.*

James (*offstage*) Martha, I need that four-incher so if you find it in the kitchen, leave it on the table. You here, Martha?

*Enter James with tool belt.*

Ann Martha's here.

James (*uncomfortably*) Ann. I hardly expected you.

Ann Well, I hardly expected this.

*James looks uncertainly to Martha who nods and gives James enough of an*

*exaggerated look that the audience picks up their communication. James turns to Martha and ignores Ann.*

James        I *did* ask you not to say anything.  
Martha        (*waving him off*) I didn't say anything. She guessed something was wrong. You just can't keep a secret.  
James        Well, neither can you. This makes all this that much more difficult to deal with.

*James sighs and runs his fingers through his graying hair.*

Martha        Don't tell if you don't want it told.  
James        It's just like when we were growing up --  
Ann            (*angrily*) Excuse me, you two, but this involves me too!  
James        Well, do you have anything to say?  
Ann            (*flustered*) I was going to ask you!  
James        (*patiently*) I tried every way I knew how, but you just wouldn't treat me like a human being. So I found someone who would.  
Ann            Wouldn't treat you --  
James        (*to Martha*) This is the first time we've really talked in weeks.  
Martha        (*to James*) Funny that she doesn't have anything to say.  
Ann            I'm right here, you know.  
                  (*to James*) I'm calling your bluff.  
James        You know I don't gamble.  
Ann            Well, I know a thing or two about poker, and I'm calling your bluff.  
                  (*searching for the term*) Knocking.

*Ann knocks.*

James        (*shrugging*) Fine.  
Ann            Laura couldn't bear your company for a day. In fact, all I have to do is ask her myself. And that's what I'll do.

*Ann crosses to the door.*  
*Martha looks nervously at James.*

James        (*improvising*) Well. . . You could. . . Except. . .  
Ann            (*pausing*) And why not?  
James        I figured Martha might squeal. (*meaningful glance at Martha, then to Ann*) I didn't want you going up to tell Laura lies about me.  
Ann            So?  
James        So she's staying with a friend of mine.  
Ann            When are you supposed to be leaving?  
James        Tomorrow morning from her place at daybreak.  
Ann            (*pauses*) We'll see. I'm still knocking.

*Tom knocks outside.*

Martha        All right, Ann, we heard you the first time.  
Ann            (*acidly*) Wasn't me.  
Tom            (*offstage*) Hello? Why's this locked?  
Martha        It's Tom.

James           Coming, Tom.  
                   *(to Ann)* So you don't think I'm strong enough to leave you for Laura. But I am a man, and I'll prove it.

Ann             You could never put one over on Tom. He's too clever for you.

James          We'll see who bends and who breaks.

Tom            James? Hello?

James          I'm coming, now.  
                   *(hastily to Ann)* Right. So you be the judge. Hide back here and see how Tom takes the news.

Ann            *(spitefully)* You're lying. You'll crack in a minute.

James          The truth will hurt, Ann.

*He bundles her behind the curtain by the window and unlocks the door for Tom. Enter Tom, looking slightly confused. He takes off his coat as he enters and hands it to James. Tom glances from James to Martha.*

                  Hi Tom. I'll get your coat for you.

Tom            Thanks.

*James puts the coat on a coat rack by the front door.*

                  Martha. James. What's all this?

James          All what?

Tom            Look, old man. Something's going on, and I want to know what. Where's Ann?

James          Ann's not in just now.

Tom            Well, I need to find her so I can apologize for yelling at her earlier. I took a walk and cleared my head up. I just hope she takes me back.

*He grins broadly.*

James          You better hope so. Sit down.

Tom            *(lost)* What is this?

James          You love Ann, right?

Tom            Um. Martha, would you mind? *(shooing his hand)*

Martha         *(ignoring Tom)* James, shall I step out?

James          Downstairs is fine. I dropped a tin of rivets in the shop earlier today. Don't suppose you'd mind?

*She nods and steps through the door to the shop.*

                  I asked if you loved Ann.

Tom            What kind of -- yes, of course I love Ann.

James          Then this won't be as hard as I thought. I'm leaving Wilkesboro tomorrow at sunrise.

Tom            You're leaving? But where will I stay?

James          Well, that's up to you. Martha will stay here to tie up some loose ends for me. . .

Tom            *(relieved)* So you're leaving town. Finally. *(grins)* So why do I care?

James          *(deliberately)* Well, I'm not going alone.

Tom            Well, it won't be Ann.



James That's true. You made it impossible for me to even talk to Ann.  
 Tom Way I hear it, you didn't talk much at all. Your whole marriage was pretty much a disaster.  
 James *(continuing slowly)* I don't enjoy this, Tom.  
 Tom Well, I think it's fine. This should have happened a while ago. Until you give me a reason to care, I'll be out looking for Ann.  
 James *(puts his arm on Tom's shoulder as he rises)* Wait. I'm almost through. I'm a man like you, so I felt hurt at first. Spurned lovers sometimes do.  
 Tom I don't know much about being spurned.  
 James You may yet. I don't deny feeling a touch spiteful right now.  
 Tom Old man, you talk too much. I'm going to look for Ann.

*Tom rises impatiently.*

James I'm taking Laura Foster.

*Tom freezes.*

Tom Don't blame her. I just needed a wife; and I can't make Ann love me.  
 But what would Laura ever see in you?  
 James Constancy. You might not see it, Ann might not see it, but Laura does. For once in her life, and once in mine, we're going to know what devotion means. We know we can be happy. I only hope you and Ann find the same.

*James, satisfied, eases himself off the couch. Tom swings around like lightning and throws James on to the couch again. James looks momentarily frightened.*

Tom *(seething)* You do what you have to do to make yourself happy, but don't dare step on my toes, you bastard!  
 James *(struggling)* I -- I don't understand. You said you loved Ann.  
 Tom Sure, as much as anyone can. But I need Laura more.  
 James Look, you can't have it both ways.  
 Tom *(yelling)* I can have it *any* way I want!  
 James Between you and Ann, you are playing more games than the Red Rooster sees in a month of Saturday nights.  
 Tom What do you know about games?  
 James Laura and I have had enough of them. While she was putting up with you all day, she was waiting for me to come visit her after closing the shop and you came home to Ann.  
 Tom *(protesting)* But I need both!  
 James *(simply)* You couldn't make a choice, so I did.  
 Tom Ann makes me happy, but Laura makes me whole!  
 James I -- I'm sorry.  
 Tom Well, the joke's on you, old man. She's had syphilis from the first day I ever railed her. And that was before the war.  
 James She got it from you?  
 Tom *(modestly)* She never had nobody else.  
 James But -- that means Ann probably has it too.  
 Tom *(laughing spitefully)* And you too!  
 James Me?

Tom            You have had been intimate with Laura, haven't you? (*laughing again*)  
                  An affair isn't an affair without the sex.  
 James        (*genuinely mad*) Well, why did you do all this with Ann then?  
 Tom           I only slept with her so I could see what having a family might be like.  
 James        (*sputtering*) Family? It's yours then. I'm off with Laura.  
 Tom           (*grabbing James by the collar*) Call this off.  
 James        You know I can't do that.  
 Tom           I'll make you.

*James has a reprise of "I'll Bend."*

James        You can say what you like  
                  But now you've learned  
                  Play with fire  
                  And you're gonna get burned

Tom           I'll never understand  
                  How Laura likes you  
                  But if it all makes sense  
                  Then it must be true

                 She wouldn't run  
                  To Tennessee  
                  Actin' like she had  
                  A better place to be

James        For a gamblin' man,  
                  Life's a toss of the dice  
                  You count the cost  
                  And pay the price

                 I'll bend  
                  But I will not break  
                  I'll bend  
                  But I will not break

Tom           Nobody forces my hand. Then Laura did. And nobody beats me.  
                  James, you did. (*livid*) Congratulations, man. Now I get to spend  
                  the rest of my life with Ann. What a god damn prize. Thanks.

*Tom storms out in a rage. He leaves his overcoat on the rack and the door open.  
 Ann, who has been there the whole time, comes out of hiding.*

Ann            (*sobbing*) How can he talk like that? It's not true! It's not!  
 James        It is. But I was thinking of you the whole time. This way, we don't  
                  have to make things worse. With a divorce.  
 Ann            I don't want a divorce, I want you!

*He takes both of her hands and looks at her steadily.  
 During this, Tom reappears. James sees him standing in the doorway, returned for  
 his coat. Consequently, he needles Ann.*

James (evenly) If you really want me, then *you'd* leave with me tomorrow morning.  
 Ann (balking) I don't -- I can't. . . without thinking. . . I have to think. . .  
 James (quietly, turning away) You call me weak, but what are you? You're only made of talk. I may just -- talk about shoes all the time, but at least I know something about it. All you talk about is Tom, and you don't know anything about him.  
 Ann I know I don't love him.  
 James You're as much of a liar as Tom is.  
 Ann At least let's talk? I don't want to leave it like this.  
 James (coldly) It's always been about you, hasn't it.  
 Ann (crying) But I love you, James!

*James savors the moment, and saunters over toward the shop and downstairs. He doesn't look back. Tom walks in stiffly*

Tom Pardon me. I came back for my coat.

*Ann claps her hand to her mouth. She stares straight at Tom. Ann has made her decision; it came when she least expected it. Tom and Ann are left staring at one another, two disillusioned ex-lovers. There is a healthy pause.*

Tom I guess. . . You heard then?  
 Ann (tight-lipped) Enough.  
 Tom I -- I see Laura sometimes. . . (lamely) Just around. . . and things. . .  
 Ann I don't care.

*Beat.*

Tom We're really not so different. (laughing) The grass is greener for you, too. You want whatever you can't have! That really. . . (he trails off when she isn't laughing) So.  
 Ann James and Laura.  
 Tom (eagerly) Yeah. (beat) So he'll probably leave the house to us. . . You and me. . .  
 Ann Don't you get it? There isn't any you and me.  
 Tom But -- but you'll be alone.  
 Ann (spits) Being alone is better than being with a two-timer like you.  
 Tom Oh! Oh, it's me now? You're the one who said you loved James! I heard you! Don't deny it.  
 Ann The only thing I'll deny is you. You leave my house.  
 Tom You don't mean it.  
 Ann (holding up her hands with the palms out) I don't care where you go. I don't care what you do. You've done it all already. So go. Anywhere but here.  
 Tom What did I do but love you?  
 Ann Love Laura.  
 Tom I was with her but I never loved her.  
 Ann You need to learn how to use that word.  
 Tom I wasn't even with her for long.  
 Ann How long?

Tom I -- I don't know.  
 Ann How long?  
 Tom Two, three months maybe. (*manically*) But I was scared! I got involved with two women and I didn't know what to do! I'm just a drifter. I need you to help me. I need your love.  
 Ann You are no longer a part of my life, Tom Dula.  
 Tom Why? Because James let you go before you let him go?  
 Ann He chose another over me.  
 Tom That's what you did to him.  
 Ann It's what you're doing to me!  
 Tom It's not what you think! Laura -- Laura made me feel like a -- a young man again. You were the -- the spirit. . . the love. . . (*he trails off, realizing how empty he sounds*)  
 Ann I hope she was worth it. Because it's cost us everything. She stole you and James away. Damn you! Damn you and Laura!

*Tom comes to her to try to soothe her.*

*Ann grabs his hunting knife and waves it dangerously at him.*

*Tom, wary, walks backwards, not taking his eyes off the knife.*

(*deliriously*) You ruin it! You ruin everything! Get out! Get out of Wilkesboro! Get out of my life!

*Tom wordlessly backs toward the door, slowly at first, and then turns around and runs.*

That's right! Run! Run to Laura! Let her choose. Run! Run from your own hateful self, you pig!

*The lights have been dimming slowly now. Ann looks down at her trembling hand and sees the hunting knife. Carefully and purposefully she sets it down on the table. The candle casts long shadows on stage, as a mournful mandolin sounds. She sings a reprise.*

Hang down your head, sweet cousin  
 Let me tell you why  
 Stole my men away from me  
 Now she's bound to die.

*Lights.*

## Act Four

*There is a new setting; the four flats showing the walls of the cabin have been turned around, and we are in a southern courtroom. Stage right there is a witness stand and center stage there stands a judge's bench. There is a bench stage left which will hold the seated Ann, Martha, Tom, and Minstrel. The door (formerly to the cabin) has become a set of French doors to the Courtroom. One door is functional and the other is merely painted on for completing the effect. The window has a town scene behind it.*

Minstrel      Life's so funny. We can't trust other people and what they say, and we can't even trust ourselves. Memory plays tricks on you. Me and Ben Painter went out to Lake Cumberland to get us a Kentucky buck back before the war, and just a week ago at the Red Rooster, I was talking about this five-point I had bagged. Well, Ben was right there, and he took to laughin' so hard, I thought he'd fall out of his chair. By and by, all ears turns to him, and he says to me, "The onliest thing you bagged on that trip was your lunch!" Now, I'd a sworn to a judge I took me a five-point buck, so I went home to ask the wife if she remembered if I done it. Well, she gives me that look where I jist know I'm wrong, so I didn't ask no more about it.

*The pit band obliges with a bit of noodling behind the minstrel, and by and by, the familiar strains of Tom Dula may be picked from the melodic mixture.*

Your memory can play tricks on you. Especially when we're this far on down the road. Whatever really happened that morning in Wilkesboro is just plain lost. All anybody can say for sure is that Tom was convicted faster than you could gee a plow mule. Ma's family knew enough of them Fosters to tell me the story when I was a young'un, and I 'spect maybe I'll be tellin' my little boy someday too. Tom, by his own admission, was up by Laura's cabin the morning she was murdered. He said he was fixin' to leave with her, but found her stabbed, and hit the Cumberland Trail on her best hoss. He would have made it too, if it hadn't a been for the Tennessee mud. That trail's rough going in the summer rain.

It was word against word, Tom against Sheriff Grayson. Tom was waitin' in Grayson's custody till his trial. To be honest, though it didn't look good even though he had got the best lawyer in the state.

*Sheriff Grayson is asleep on his feet, leaning against the door and Tom is sitting on the bench with his head in his hands. At the knock at the court door, Tom's head snaps up and Grayson snaps into consciousness.*

Grayson      Your Honor?  
Pike            (offstage) No. . .  
Grayson      (thrown) Uh. Then Your worship, Reverend?  
Pike            No again.  
Grayson      Your. . . uh. . . Your reverence, worship?

Pike I'm afraid not. I am here to see Tom --  
Grayson Who is this?

*Tom and Pike deliver their lines at the same time. Pike's line, delivered from offstage, is hard to hear. Grayson turns away from the door to silence Tom.*

Pike It's your Governor; open the door.  
Tom For heaven's sake, just open the door!  
Grayson Tom, quiet, you. I can't hear. . . Whoever it is. Is this Hal?  
Tom *(over Grayson)* It's my attorney, I'm telling you --  
Grayson *(ignoring him)* This is Hal, isn't it. Listen, Hal. You know I got a prisoner to guard, and Judge Wilkins told me not to open the door for nobody but the Governor himself.  
Pike *(beat, acidly)* It is the "Governor himself."  
Grayson *(looks like he is going to object, scratches head)* Really?

*Tom gets up crossing in front of Grayson and opens the door.  
Pike gives him a big manly handshake. He is not much older than Tom, but clearly has avuncular affection for -- and attitude towards -- Tom. Their language becomes more citified, as the two vie for self-importance.*

Pike Dula.  
Tom I wish we could have been more well met.  
Pike You mean under less criminal circumstances? My boy, nothing we can do about that. Word's all the way from Charlotte to Raleigh now you're getting done for this one, so our work's certainly cut out for us.  
Tom It won't do any good. People believe in their hearts, not in their heads.  
Pike I know this. Tom, my boy, I requested your case. Put this glorious state in the hands of the lieutenant governor. And all because I don't trust anyone else to get you through this thing.  
Tom You think there's a chance, then?  
Grayson *(piping up)* I don't think he's got a snowball's chance in hell, Your Governance.  
Pike Perhaps you could wait elsewhere.  
Grayson A pleasure. I didn't mean no disrespect, your governorship, but in this town, finding twelve men what wouldn't want to see Tom swing from the end of a rope would be like finding twelve clouds in a summer Carolina sky.

*Pike disinterestedly motions for Grayson to leave.*

I'll wait just outside the door here then?

*Tom slams the door in his face.*

Tom Actually, his point is well taken.  
Pike You're not well liked. You never learn, Dula *(punches him on the arm)*. I remember when I had to explain to Jefferson Davis why you weren't there to get your Confederate medal of valor. . .  
Tom What did you tell him again?

Pike Well, I sure didn't say you'd been shackled up with some Georgia whore for a week.  
 Tom I remember Emily. She was a piece of work.  
 Pike Yes; the way I heard it, Sherman wasn't the only one that left a fire burning in Atlanta!

*Tom shares the laugh, but it's got a bitter tone to it. Pike stops laughing abruptly.*

The point is, you've got to start taking some responsibility. I'm here for you now because without you, my company never would have been able to advance as far as we did on Shiloh. I owe you one, my boy, and I'm glad to repay the favor. *(they walk across stage)* I think I can help you. But I need the truth.  
 Tom I didn't kill her.  
 Pike Start earlier. The war. Coming home.  
 Tom After I got back, I took a fancy to Ann Melton, but she was married.  
 Pike You take fancies to everything with two legs and long hair, my boy. Why Ann?  
 Tom Dunno. She was nice, her cousin introduced us. . .  
 Pike Laura. Why didn't you stay with Laura? It was a good thing: she was sweeter than a field full of honeybees.  
 Tom Yes but she was stupid.  
 Pike That don't mean you got to up and kill her!  
 Tom I didn't!

*They pause and look at each other warily.*

I know you think I did it, you and everybody else in the world, but I didn't do it. She was right crazy, and she had it coming.  
 Pike Doc Freeman says it was due to syphilis. You know if that's so?  
 Tom *(uncomfortably)* Could have been.  
 Pike He'll testify it's so.  
 Tom Yeah, she probably had it.  
 Pike So who might have given it to her?  
 Tom *(fidgeting)* I don't know.  
 Pike *(yelling)* You did, Tom! No-one else ever had her.  
 Tom *(obstinately)* Well then, I'll be crazy too, I suppose.  
 Pike Maybe you won't have to worry about it. Wilkesboro will not be sympathetic to a sexual disease, I guarantee.  
 Tom Do you think I'll -- I'll --  
 Pike Die? I'm going to ask that they lock you away.  
 Tom *(angrily)* Wait. I didn't do it.  
 Pike *(sighing)* Tell them it was a crime of passion. Tell them it was jealousy. I don't care; tell them anything. But don't tell them you didn't do it. That you're gonna be crazy or you got framed. You'll end up with a knife in you like yon Laura.  
 Tom I can't confess to a crime I never did. I'd *rather* die.  
 Pike You will if you don't. Politics isn't meaning you're sorry, it's about saying you're sorry. Anyhow, Grayson's right, you said so yourself. Ain't a soul in town gonna take your word against his. So do yourself a favor and cut your losses.  
 Tom The hell I will. I didn't ask for you to come down here and plead

guilty for me. I won't sit in jail for the rest of my life because  
(*searching for a possible murderer*) Ann heard I was still seeing  
Laura.

Pike (*suddenly interested*) Oh really? Hmmm. . . That's a good motive.  
Anybody else we could accuse of having killed her then?

Tom Martha, maybe. Or James. (*accusingly*) You haven't even considered  
that I'm innocent!

Pike You gotta admit, my boy, it doesn't look good.

Tom I deny the charge.

*Tom spreads his hands palms outward. For just a second he looks like Christ, but  
before we can dwell on it, the mountainy tune "East Carolina Blues" is kicked off  
by the band.*

Pike Ann is gone, you up and lost her

Laura's gone, you done that too

Tom It don't look good, but this I'll swear to

I never killed her, God, it's true

I don't want the hangman's gallows

I don't want that ball and chain

All I want is a girl to love me

Who would take me back again

Pike Them women, Tom, have been your ruin

Them women, Tom, done took you down

You'd yet be free without them women

Hear that banjo's mournful sound

Tom If I leave ol' Carolina

I'll be wearin' that ball and chain

Bound away, a life of sorrow

Left with nothing but my pain

I'd rather be in some dark hollow

Where the sun don't ever shine

Than for Ann to be some other's darlin'

And to know she once was mine

Pike Don't dare say that you still love her

You'll only make your trial worse

We'll plead your way: you didn't do it --

*One last pleading hint, at which Tom begins to look worried.*

I've never lost, don't be the first

Tom I see the clouds a-quickly gatherin'

Yesterday's sun has turned to rain

Pike (*aside*) Who will believe he didn't kill her?

All I do will be in vain



*Pike stands with his hands apart, gesturing helplessly. Tom is now sitting expectantly and worried in the witness chair. They freeze and in the darkness of stage left, James, Martha, Ann, the Minstrel, and Sheriff Grayson enter on to the benches for spectators. Wilkins sits in a judge's robe with a gavel.*

Wilkins      The state, having presented its case against (*witheringly*) Tom Dula, consents to yield the floor to the right Governor Pike, counsel for the defense.

Pike          Ladies and Gentlemen. In no way should the jury (*gesturing to the audience*) be influenced by my position as Governor of the Great State of North Carolina, where the justice is as righteous as the good people who live here.

*There is polite applause for the Governor, who acknowledges the applause politely. He immediately draws himself up to his full imposing height.*

But neither should you be swayed by one version of this story. I grant you this: Tom Dula is a murderer of the human spirit, of the sacred institution of marriage, and of the otherwise good names of Foster and Melton.

Tom          Now wait a minute --

Pike          But he is not a murderer of Laura Foster. I will be honest with you folks. You all know Tom and I served the Confederacy together. (*beat*) I came to Wilkesboro thinking I was going to do an old friend a favor. I, like you, was skeptical. Shoot, I figured he gone and done it.

*He laughs a long time until there is a smattering of laughter from the spectators at which point he cuts them off very abruptly.*

But he's as innocent of this heinous crime as any of you -- (*gesturing first to the audience, and then to the courtroom spectators*) or you. (*peering closely at James, Martha, and Ann*) Maybe more.

*Pike holds out the Bible.*

Wilkins      Do you, Tom Dula, swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Tom          I swear.

Ann          (*stage whisper to no-one in particular*) We all know what that's worth.

*Wilkins looks at her warningly.*

Pike          I call upon the defendant to answer my questions about that fateful morning. (*to Tom*) Tom, everyone in Creation knows you were having an affair with Ann Melton.

Tom          (*Martha elbows James hard in the ribs*) That's true, isn't it?  
Yes.

Tom                    Were you also having an affair with Laura Foster?  
                          *(locks eyes with Ann)* I was, yes.

*Ann looks away.*

Pike                  So this relationship, was it -- sexual in nature?

*Tom hesitates.*

Tom                    May I remind the defendant he is under oath.  
                          *(to Pike)* Do I have to answer this? It makes me look so guilty.

*Tom still doesn't want to say it.*

Pike                  *(impatiently)* Doc Freeman is prepared to testify that both you and  
                          Laura are suffering from the disease known as syphilis. Furthermore,  
                          you are the only two documented cases in the county.

Tom                    Yes, it was -- sexual.

*Tom glares at Pike, who ignores him.*  
*There is an audible gasp from the spectators.*

Pike                  Is that the reason you were up at Laura's cabin that morning?

Tom                    No. We were going to meet.

Pike                  For what purpose, Mr. Dula?

Tom                    *(softly)* To run to Tennessee.

Pike                  *(sharply)* Why was that?

Tom                    *(clearly)* To run away to a place in Tennessee.

*Consternation. The predictable gavel bang.*

Wilkins              Order.

Tom                    Ann and I hadn't been getting on well, and I was just trying to set  
                          things back to normal, to get out of your lives *(gesturing around the*  
                          *courtroom)*. *(to Ann, sadly)* Your life.

Pike                  But running away with Laura? Were you not angry that she had  
                          talked about your affair together down in Hal's barbershop, all over  
                          Central Park, on these very Courthouse steps?

Tom                    *(taken aback by the vigor of the questioning)* Well, I was, but it just  
                          gave us more of a reason to leave quickly. Together.

Pike                  So you were leaving Wilkesboro. That's why her horses were at the  
                          cabin and not at the pasture. Please tell us what happened when you  
                          arrived.

Tom                    Well, I hopped the fence and went to our regular place under the  
                          willow tree, and that's where I saw her. Face up with a knife through  
                          her heart. It was horrible.

Pike                  And you ran. On her horse.

Tom                    I figured everybody would think I done it. I knew how it would look.  
                          But she and I were the only two that knew we were running off that  
                          morning. Now she's dead, and it's my word against -- *(looking*  
                          *around)* -- all yours! But if you were me, you would have done the  
                          same thing!

Wilkins      The reason you have a lawyer, Tom, is so he can speak for you. Just answer his questions.

Pike          Let me see if I understand. You thought people would assume you were so angry at her that you'd kill her.

Tom          (*protesting*) I'm not that kind of man!

Pike          (*disarmingly*) Ladies and gentleman, Tom is guilty. Guilty of loving two women, of playing one against another, and of hurting them very deeply. But innocent of murder.

Wilkins      Governor, we can't just let him go.

Pike          Isn't that what's generally done with innocent men?

Wilkins      Even if what you say is so, he has violated the morals and laws of our little community. Governor, I know you're from the city and no offense intended, but here we still believe in the righteous path and the righteous path only.

*There are a few amens, and a loud one from Martha.*

Pike          I respect that, but I'm asking for you to give Tom Dula a second chance.

Wilkins      Second chance? There is no such thing. You do right or you do time. Hmph.

*At Pike's mention of "Second Chances," the band jumps into the song of the same name.*

Wilkins      Ain't no use in callin'  
 Squallin', caterwaulin'  
 No use callin' God in Central Park  
 Ain't no second chances  
 Romances, second dances  
 Ain't no second chances in the dark

*Pike tries to set up his argument for sparing Tom.*

Pike          When you see that stranger  
 Smell that color danger  
 When you lose that catcher in the rye

*Martha sweeps James to his feet, and they sing right back at Pike before he has a chance to make his point.*

Martha      When you know you've had it  
 James      When you know it's bad, it  
 All          Hits you that your time has come to die

All          Ain't no use in callin'  
 Squallin', caterwaulin'  
 No use callin' God in Central Park  
 Ain't no second chances  
 Romances, second dances  
 Ain't no second chances in the dark

Wilkins Sing, you righteous sinner  
 Martha Smile, you last place winner  
 Both Every breath you breath could be your last  
 Tom Lord, don't let me sicken  
 Just let me go out pickin'  
 Wonderin' how my life went by so fast

All Ain't no use in callin'  
 Squallin', caterwaulin'  
 No use callin' God in Central Park  
 Wilkins Ain't no second chances  
 Romances, second dances  
 Ain't no second chances in the dark

*Big finish by the band. Lights. Exit Reverend, Grayson, and Ann. Slowly, a spot finds Tom with his head buried in his hands and Governor Pike standing behind him. Tom's still on the stand, and Pike's hands rest on Tom's shoulders.*

Pike My boy, you know I did everything I could. . . Some people never hear the truth.

*Tom doesn't even budge.*

You had a glorious life. Shiloh. . . I wish I could have been you at Shiloh. Why, you should be governor.

*Again, Tom is motionless.*

This isn't easy for me, either. It's the first case I ever lost. I defended a man who shot a Yankee general in the back of the head after the North surrendered. I once defended a crippled man who. . . who raped women while their husbands were away at war. Oh, they were guilty, but I got them off. And I would trade all those verdicts if it could only save you now. . . I -- I believe in you. *(voice cracks)* Tom, speak to me!

*The spot dies on Tom and Pike exits stage right. Stage left, the minstrel, who has been frozen, is silently animated and is gesturing to James. Martha stands a little distance away waiting for him, with her back turned toward the following conversation.*

Minstrel *(to James)* Boy, this must be a load off your worried mind, huh?  
 James *(uncomfortably)* At least she's coming back to me.  
 Minstrel That is good news.  
 James Not as good as the good news that Tom's gonna hang.  
 Minstrel How do you suppose they figured Tom did it?  
 James *(lamely)* Well, her body. . . It was his knife and all. And he stole a horse.  
 Minstrel Come on now. Anybody could have stolen that knife from him. Why, the real killer might even have been you!  
 James Me? I'd never have the strength.

Minstrel      (*musings*) Dunno there. I've known some fellers in my time that surprised me. If there's one thing I've learned, it's never underestimate a man. No, sir. I once had a buddy named Cotton whose wife was forevermore cooking up venison. Well, Cotton just got to hatin' deer meat. But every day he'd get home from working on the railroad, and by God if she hadn't cooked him up some more venison. Well, finally one day, he come home to venison stew and he couldn't take it no more. He'd had a bad day already, and he up shot her in the head with a crossbow.

James      (*sputtering*) That's just silly.

Minstrel      No, it would have been silly if they convicted the local game warden of murder for allowing too many deer near Cotton's property. They hanged Cotton next morning. Anybody who takes a life is bound to pay.

James      (*violently*) I don't know what you're talking about. Good day.

*The minstrel strolls over to Martha, and leaves James looking scared. Spot on James. His song, "What Have I Done?" is a prolonged aside to the audience.*

James      He was a sleepin'  
                  When dawn came a creepin'  
                  That day

                 He never done  
                  Gone and hurt no one  
                  That day

                 Up on the hill  
                  It's my hand did kill  
                  That day

                 Tom gives his life  
                  James gets his wife  
                  I don't understand  
                  I thought I'd be a man  
                  What have I done  
                  What have I done  
                  This day

                 Morning streams  
                  Through faded dreams  
                  This day

                 Got so much on my chest  
                  But I can't confess  
                  This day

                 I do the crime  
                  But he does the time  
                  I count the cost  
                  But his life is lost

What have I done  
What have I done  
This day

Where was my wrong turn  
Sinner's gonna burn  
One day

It's the end of my rope  
I don't know how to cope  
This day

I'm the one to blame  
How can I bear the shame?  
I can't say a thing  
I never thought he'd swing  
What have I done  
What have I done  
This day

*The mandolin and bass provide a transition to the next song, and play gently over the top of the Minstrel, who is now talking to Martha.*

Minstrel      Guilty! You must be pretty happy.  
Martha        I hope he suffers before he dies.  
Minstrel      Isn't he suffering enough? After all, he might not even be guilty.  
Martha        (*much offended*) And who else would do such a thing?  
Minstrel      (*shrugs*) Gee, could have been anyone, I suppose.  
Martha        Anyone who hated that poor innocent girl Laura.  
Minstrel      Or anyone who hated Tom enough to kill that poor innocent girl  
                 Laura.  
Martha        (*eyes narrowing*) What are you saying?  
Minstrel      Nothing, nothing. Just to think of that beautiful Laura. . . in her white  
                 dress. . . Fresh lilies in her hand. . . Watching the orange sun rise  
                 under the willow tree. The light glints off the blade of that knife. . .  
                 That hunting knife. . . She turns suddenly. . . Too suddenly. . . And  
                 a hateful hand pushes that blade through her chest, so vicious! Her  
                 dress is stained red with her poor innocent blood. She screams, but  
                 that hand, that hateful hand twists the knife again. She falls to her  
                 knees, begging --

*Martha cannot handle the vivid description, and she loses her nerve.*

Martha        Stop! Will you stop? I did -- (*catches herself suddenly*) I did not kill  
                 Laura Foster.  
Minstrel      Never said you did, good lady. Good day.

*The minstrel exits stage left, and Martha is left with the lights dimming and a spot warming up. She sings "Cold Hard Clay."*

Martha        I done what the preacher man say  
                  Now Dula, he's bound away  
                  To lie in that cold hard clay

                 But it was me who held the knife  
                  I took that poor girl's life  
                  And she lies in that cold hard clay

                 It was a crime that I done  
                  And my conscience, it bothers me some  
                  Till I'll lie in that cold hard clay

                 O Laura, where was my head?  
                  It's Dula that I wish was dead  
                  Lyin' in that cold hard clay

                 If he would not have run away  
                  He might not have been here today  
                  Settin' himself up to lay  
                  Alone in that cold hard clay

*Martha turns and exits.  
 The lights come up full. Tom still sits as before, head in hands.  
 The door opens timidly, and Ann steps in. She carries a banjo case.*

Ann            Tom? Wilkins said I could come in and see you. One more time.

*Long pause. Tom doesn't look up.*

Tom            One last time, you mean?  
 Ann            (swallows) I brought you this. I thought it -- well, I thought you --

*She brings the case over to him and sets it by his feet. While Martha has been singing, shackles have been attached to Tom's ankles. Tom still makes no eye contact.*

Tom            Did she scream?  
 Ann            (thrown) Who?  
 Tom            When you stabbed her.  
 Ann            Tom! Don't talk like that  
 Tom            What were her last words?  
 Ann            (flustered) I don't know!  
 Tom            Were they, "I love you, Tom?"  
 Ann            Tom --  
 Tom            (yelling) Is that why you stabbed her again? And again?  
 Ann            (crying) Please! This won't do us any good now.  
 Tom            You're right. I'm sorry, darling.

*She comes to sit next to him.  
 There's a pause.*

Was it revenge against me or against her?

Ann (pleading) Tom, stop. This is our last time being here together.  
 Tom This is my last time being much of anywhere.  
 Ann So is this how you want to remember life?  
 Tom Is this how you want to remember me? A prisoner on your account?  
 Ann Don't blame me. If you hadn't taken up with Laura again, she never would have been killed.  
 Tom (beat) So it was revenge against her.  
 Ann Think whatever you want. I'll see both the sunrise and the sunset tomorrow.  
 Tom This worked out great for you, didn't it? You had your little fling with a younger man, you were the center of attention for a good long while, and now you'll get to see *both* the sunrise and the sunset. While I hang. For your crime.  
 Ann There's nothing you could do. You had the best lawyer, Tom. Now please make your peace with God.  
 Tom (darkly) God has forsaken me.  
 Ann (rising) James told me not to come. He said you'd be like this.  
 Tom You should have listened.  
 Ann (curtly) Maybe I should.

*Ann gets up and makes for the door.*

Tom It could have been so different, you know. If we had been in Tennessee.

*Ann turns and looks hard at him.*

Ann Somehow I doubt it.  
 Tom What do you doubt? That a man can change?  
 Ann No. That I could change a man.  
 Goodbye Tom.  
 Tom What? Don't I get a kiss? That's great. That's just great. A man dies and can't even get a kiss.

*Ann crosses to Tom. She leans over and they share a detached-looking kiss on the mouth.  
 Ann pulls away.*

So did you mean to set me up, or did that happen by accident?

*Ann turns briskly, having tried the best she could. She tries to be brave, but we can tell it's a struggle.*

(yelling after her) You did it, didn't you? You bitch. You're no better than Laura! You hear that? You're no better than her! No better. . .

*Tom breaks down, and a spotlight finds him. A slow and faithful bluegrass tune begins to sound. It is "Home is Just a Heartbeat Away."*

Tom Mother, if you care  
 Let me lay my head upon your breast



Let me find some comfort there  
In your sweet haven of rest

Sitting tonight  
Starin' down these four walls  
Outside the light  
Of the morningstar calls  
Breaks over the hill  
I've drunk my fill  
My cup runneth over with love

Life is a lonesome journey  
It's a long and narrow way  
Love will fall by the wayside  
As surely as night follows day  
There ain't nothin, nothin' left to say  
Home is just a heartbeat away

When it's your time to go  
You don't ask for more  
When it's your time, you know  
You open that next door  
I got no regrets  
Though I didn't yet  
Do half the things I want to do

Life is a lonesome journey  
It's a long and narrow way  
Love will fall by the wayside  
As surely as night follows day  
There ain't nothin, nothin' left to say  
Home is just a heartbeat away  
Home is just a heartbeat away

*Enter the minstrel, hands in pockets.*

*The song modulates into a sparse rhythmical background progression, over which the slowly picked banjo is heard from stage. Tom is playing "Tom Dula."*

Minstrel      Nowadays, I've heard people call "Tom Dula" a legend, or a myth. And it's true that the longer a story stays around, the more likely that it's going to become a legend or a myth. It's because folks are liable to remember the story and forget the facts. As the years roll on, though, the facts become less important anyway. To me, anyway, it's still just a story. They was plain folk, not like Iliads and Odysseys. "Tom Dula" ain't a legend, it's just a good old Carolina mystery story. But I still bet you're a little peeved because I don't have any answers. Well, think how I feel. I have to sit through it once a day, and twice on Sundays. And I still don't know who done it. But at the same time, that's not really what's important, since it's all been said and done. All that's important anymore is the story. So don't be mad at me for not having the answer to who killed Laura Foster. I tell stories, I don't solve crimes. And I don't expect we'll

ever know. Life in Wilkesboro, -- and everywhere else, really, -- it hasn't changed that much. People got their own secrets, their own stories. Yessir, everybody's got a song to sing, it just all depends on whose you listen to.

*The lights start to fade, and the minstrel picks up the tune and sings it unprofessionally as he crosses downstage right to the door stage left.*

Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
Hang down your head and cry  
Hang down your head, Tom Dula  
Poor boy, you're bound to die

*Lights.*