



BENEATH SHELTON LAUREL

**A Play in Two Acts
By Sean O'Leary**

Commissioned by The Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre

20 Consecutive sold-out performances at the Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre

◆
National Endowment for the Arts Access to Artistic Excellence Grant

◆
The subject of a chapter in John Inscoe's new book, "Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South"

◆
"The rage on the stage!" — Tony Kiss, Asheville Citizen-Times

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*"A powerful portrayal of the disasters of war . . . A timely parable giving cause to wonder how our contemporary war on terror will resonate in the history books."
Jim Cavener, Asheville Citizen-Times*

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BENEATH SHELTON LAUREL

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Background

The winter of 1863 was brutal in the mountains of Western North Carolina. A cold spell accompanied by the ongoing Civil War created conditions of extreme deprivation. The pain was most keenly felt in the remote Shelton Laurel region whose residents were not generally supportive of the war and were, as a result, denied access to desperately needed supplies by Confederate loyalists in the nearby town of Marshall. In response, men from Shelton Laurel joined a roving band of Union guerilla fighters and raided Marshall taking the much-needed supplies. The Confederate army retaliated by sending two battalions to Shelton Laurel to recapture what had been taken and punish the raiders. While some supplies were recovered, nearly all of the raiders escaped. Never the less, thirteen men and boys, most of them without any connection to the raid, were taken and summarily executed in an incident that has come to be known as the Shelton Laurel Massacre.

Synopsis

It is thirty-one years later. One of the army officers involved in the massacre, James Keith, has returned to Marshall to put to rest his feelings of guilt and to silence the ghosts that torment him. As he kneels in fevered prayer in a decrepit church, his friend and former commander, Lawrence Allen, interrupts him. Allen, well acquainted with his friend's emotional distress, has come to offer comfort and return him to Arkansas where both now live. But, before Keith can be persuaded to go, they are visited by old Patsy Shelton whose husband and two sons were among those killed in the massacre. Keith has arranged the meeting with Patsy as an act of penance and, in the ensuing discussion, the three struggle to come to terms with the deaths of innocents, which Keith and Patsy feel with acute pain, but which the detached Allen believes was justified in the larger context of the war. The recounting of events liberates Keith, but crushes Allen who, for the first time, feels the hollowness of the justification that once seemed ironclad.

Setting

The Union Baptist Church, Marshall, North Carolina. August 1894.

Characters

James Keith – Age 69, a gentleman, but he is unwell, unkempt and wild-eyed.

Lawrence Allen – Age 61, a patient, compassionate and earnest gentleman.

Patsy Shelton – Age 69, the matriarch of her mountain clan.

THE GHOSTS:

Mary – Age 16. A mountain girl. Pretty, but wild-eyed with unruly hair.

Old Jim Shelton – Age 36, a whiskered, mountaineer.

Young Jim Shelton – Age 15, Old Jim's oldest son. Boyishly handsome, sensitive.

David Shelton – Age 12, Old Jim's youngest son, mischievous.

Songs

“Beneath Shelton Laurel” is not a musical, however at times Mary sings the following period songs a cappella. Visit these websites to hear the melodies and see sheet music:

- “Long, Long Ago” by Thomas Haynes Bayly. Words and music at www.contemplator.com/england/longago.html
- “Goober Peas”. Traditional. Words and music at <http://www.acws.co.uk/sounds/main.htm> (click on *Goober Peas (2)*).
- “Just as I Am, Without One Plea” by Charlotte Elliott and William Bradbury. Words and music at <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh357.sht>
- “Hard Times Come Again No More” by Stephen Foster. Words and music at <http://www.mutopiaproject.org/cgi-bin/piece-info.cgi?id=371>
- “Where Is Thy Spirit, Mary” by Stephen Foster. Words and music at <http://www.stephen-foster-songs.com/archive02.htm> (click on title to download MP3 file)
- “Oft in The Stilly Night” by Thomas Moore. Words and music at <http://www.stephen-foster-songs.com/archive02.htm> (click on title to download MP3 file)

Acknowledgments

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Author’s Bio

Sean O’Leary is the author of five completed full-length plays, three of which are receiving Equity productions. His most recent, VALU-MART, is the 2007 winner of The University of Alabama at Birmingham’s Ruby Lloyd Apsey Award for plays confronting racial and ethnic issues and was a finalist in the National Arts Club’s Playwrights First competition. BENEATH SHELTON LAUREL was commissioned by The Southern Appalachian Repertory Theatre where it played for 20 consecutive sold-out performances between 2005 and 2006 and won a National Endowment for the Arts “Access to Artistic Excellence” grant for a touring production that is now underway. Sean’s earlier play, POUND, about the poet Ezra Pound, received its professional premiere in October 2004 at The Washington Stage Guild in Washington, DC and has gone on to five other productions. RAIN IN THE HOLLOWS received its professional premiere three months earlier at Tri-State Actors Theater in New Jersey and has gone on to numerous productions as well. Between them POUND and RAIN have won or been finalists in more than a dozen national playwriting competitions. Sean’s first play, WINE TO BLOOD was produced by Oglebay Institute’s Towngate Theatre and selected by Brandeis University for its permanent collection of works inspired by the Spanish Civil War. Sean is the 2004 winner of the West Virginia Commission on The Arts Fellowship for Drama and was recently added to The Literary Map of West Virginia. He is a member of The Dramatists Guild of America and the Playwrights Forum of Washington,

DC. He lives near Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. For more information visit
www.olearyonstage.com.

I. i.

BENEATH SHELTON LAUREL

ACT ONE

The Union Baptist Church. Marshall, North Carolina. August 1894. The church is old, of wood plank construction, and sparsely furnished in the Baptist style. The audience occupies the area that would be the sanctuary and looks out over the stage where benches serve as pews. A wide aisle runs up center leading to a large double-door at the back of the church. Down center is a simple iron railing that stands about waist high and five feet across.

The ghosts, MARY, YOUNG JIM, OLD JIM, and DAVID occupy the bench area and frequently move within that area to stay close to the action, closely observing everything KEITH, ALLEN, and PATSY do and say. The downstage areas are the province of the living characters, KEITH, ALLEN, and PATSY. Throughout the performance ALLEN, and PATSY are never to exhibit awareness of the ghosts. KEITH, on the other hand, hears the ghosts, but only as voices.

The house goes dark and the silence is broken by MARY's angelic voice singing "Long, Long Ago". For music see www.contemplator.com/england/longago.html

MARY

Tell me the tales that to me were so dear,
 Long, long ago, long, long ago,
 Sing me the songs I delighted to hear,
 Long, long ago, long ago,
 Now you are come all my grief is removed,
 Let me forget that so long you have roved.
 Let me believe that you love as you loved,
 Long, long ago, long ago.

(As the second verse begins lights fade in first on KEITH who kneels at the railing, eyes closed and serene. Then lights fade in on the singing MARY and YOUNG JIM who gaze lovingly at one another. Finally, fade in all. DAVID is seated on a rear bench, playing mumbly peg. OLD JIM stands behind KEITH watching him closely.)

Do you remember the paths where we met?
 Long, long ago, long, long ago,
 Ah, yes, you told me you'd never forget,
 Long, long ago, long ago.
 Then to all others, my smile you preferred,
 Love, when you spoke, gave a charm to each word.
 Still my heart treasures the phrases I heard,
 Long, long ago, long ago.

(As MARY begins the third verse the disheveled KEITH's ancient voice begins creakily humming along.)

I. i.

Tho' by your kindness my fond hopes were raised,
 Long, long ago, long, long ago.
 You by more eloquent lips have been praised,
 Long, long ago, long ago.

(KEITH begins to sing along to MARY's annoyance.)

But, by long absence your truth has been tried,
 Still to your accents I listen with pride,

(MARY stops altogether and glares at the oblivious KEITH who continues singing. The mischievous DAVID looks up in gleeful anticipation.)

Blessed as I was when I sat by your side.
 Long, long ago, long ago.

YOUNG JIM

Go on, Mary. Don't pay him no mind.

MARY

(To KEITH.) Stop!

(KEITH is still oblivious and starts the first verse again as though in a dream.)

Stop! You hear?

(DAVID stands excitedly.)

YOUNG JIM

It's all right.

DAVID

(Climbing over benches to get to his father.) You gonna let him get away with that?

MARY

Make him stop! Ain't his song. Make him!

(KEITH continues singing.)

YOUNG JIM

Please, Mary.

DAVID

C'mon, Daddy! Whatcha gonna do?

MARY

(Enraged, screams wildly at KEITH.) Shut up! SHUT UP! Ain't your song.

YOUNG JIM

(To Keith.) You're hurtin' her. Now stop!

(KEITH winces, stops singing and looks forward with a pained expression. YOUNG JIM tries to calm the agitated MARY, but OLD JIM is now standing glaring at KEITH.)

I. i.

YOUNG JIM

See that, Mary. It's over now.

MARY

It ain't his! *(Breaks down sobbing in the arms of YOUNG JIM.)*

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) What's wrong, old man – you forget about us? *(Then bellows!)*
You hear me, old man?!

YOUNG JIM

Daddy, it's over. Now, don't you get started.

DAVID

(Gleefully let's go with a shrill shout in KEITH's ear.) Whoooooo!

KEITH

(His eyes pop open as he looks to the sanctuary and begins praying out loud. The characters talk over each other and, as they do so, the volume increases until it becomes a cacophony of noise.)

Whether I be for Hades or my savior's house on high keep the soul of this unworthy and spare if from assault . . .

OLD JIM

Go on! Pray . . . pray all you want.

YOUNG JIM

(To OLD JIM.) Daddy, No! Don't do it.

DAVID

Let him have it, Daddy!

KEITH

Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity; for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping . . .

OLD JIM

There ain't no God for you!

KEITH

The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer . . .

YOUNG JIM

(*To MARY.*) Don't pay 'em no mind. It'll pass.

I. i.

OLD JIM

Can't nobody hear you but the likes o' me!

(*KEITH continues more loudly causing OLD JIM to laugh louder in response.*)

Go on! Shout! Scream!

KEITH

(*Urgently. Desperately.*) Lead me, Oh Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies. Their inward part is very wickedness; their throat an open sepulchre . . .

MARY

(*Almost delusional in YOUNG JIM's arms, re-experiencing the pain inflicted by KEITH thirty-three years earlier.*)

Stop it! STOP . . . Please!

OLD JIM

Hear that, old man? You hear that!

YOUNG JIM

(*To MARY.*) I'll stop 'em, all right?

DAVID

(*Who has been enjoying the mayhem.*) No, you won't!

KEITH

Jesus feels her pain. Jesus is the redeemer. Jesus is . . .

YOUNG JIM

Daddy . . . !

OLD JIM

(*Laughing again.*) You're gonna feel her pain. You're gonna be her redeemer!

DAVID

(*To YOUNG JIM.*) See that?

YOUNG JIM

(*Yelling to all.*) 'at's enough!

DAVID

(*Another shrill shout.*) Whoooooo!

MARY

(Hands over her ears MARY sings pathetically as others talk over her.)

Tell me the tales that to me were so dear,

Long, long ago, long, long ago.

I. i.

Sing me the songs I delighted to hear,

Long, long ago, long ago.

Now you are come all my grief is removed.

Let me forget that so long you have roved.

Let me believe that you love as you loved,

Long, long ago, long ago.

KEITH

(Shouting over the din.) Dear God, save her for thy mercy's sake . . . Deliver our souls!

OLD JIM

Ain't no God fo the likes o' you! None . . . You hear!

DAVID

(Shouting fiercely at KEITH.) Hear that you bastard!

KEITH

Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed . . .

YOUNG JIM

(To MARY.) I'm right here. Ain't nothin' gonna happen to ya.

KEITH

He shall cast my enemies down . . .

OLD JIM

He'll heal her with your blood, your soul!

KEITH

He shall smite them on the cheek bone and break the teeth of the ungodly . . . !

OLD JIM

God is your enemy!

DAVID

And he gonna take you and . . . !

KEITH

Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them . . . !

(As KEITH rambles, ALLEN enters and as they see him the ghosts go silent. ALLEN, oblivious to the ghosts, winces at the sight of KEITH who is still shouting in apparent delirium. Allen proceeds slowly down the center aisle and as he does so OLD JIM and David climb over benches to get a better look at him. YOUNG JIM continues to hold the sobbing MARY, but also watches ALLEN. The

concerned ALLEN slowly approaches the oblivious KEITH fearing that a sudden interruption may trigger a violent reaction from the raving man.)
 . . . cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against thee. Hear my supplications oh Lord. Hear my prayer!
(KEITH becomes aware that the din has stopped. Still unaware of ALLEN's presence he believes it is the effect of his prayers, so he redoubles his effort.)
 . . . for thou art my King and my God. Unto thee I will pray and thou shalt defend me, thou shalt be my shield, for I am weary O Lord. For I am consumed of grief. For peace, peace I pray.
(KEITH wilts in exhaustion and ALLEN addresses him cautiously.)

ALLEN

James? James Keith?

KEITH

(Looks forward in wide-eyed fear thinking the ghosts may be returning.) My prayer, Lord . . . my prayer . . . !

ALLEN

(Places a hand on KEITH's shoulder causing him to shrink back.) James, calm yourself. It's all right.

(KEITH goes silent, but in his distressed state, he fails to recognize ALLEN and shrinks back.)

It's Lawrence . . . Lawrence Allen. You see?

(KEITH stops retreating, but does not respond.)

You see?

DAVID

(Getting almost in ALLEN's face to get a good look.) Daddy, it's him!

(OLD JIM shushes him and pulls him back.)

OLD JIM

I know who it is.

MARY

(To YOUNG JIM.) Who? Who is he?

YOUNG JIM

(Transfixed by ALLEN.) It is . . . the same one.

KEITH

Lawrence?

DAVID

(To YOUNG JIM.) I told ya!

ALLEN
It's all right. Now calm yourself.

I. i.

MARY
Who?

DAVID
Tell her, Jim!

YOUNG JIM
(*To MARY.*) He's the one who ordered it.

KEITH
Where did you come from? Why did you . . . ?

ALLEN
Margaret asked me to come. She's worried about you.

KEITH
No, there's nothing to fear. Nothing . . .

ALLEN
Come now. Relax.
(*Takes KEITH by the shoulders and leads him to a bench where the ghosts examine them closely.*)

MARY
What did he order?

YOUNG JIM
The feller in command when we . . . when we . . .

DAVID
(*Excitedly.*) When we was kilt!

OLD JIM
Quiet! All o' ya.

ALLEN
There. Are you feeling better now?
(*KEITH nods and smiles uncertainly.*)
You catch your breath. Then we'll get you someplace comfortable.

OLD JIM
You got business here, old man.

KEITH
(As though on OLD JIM's string.) No! No, I can't go.

I. i.

ALLEN
 Not yet. When you're recovered.
(KEITH calms a bit as ALLEN looks on.)

DAVID
 I'd know that bastard anywhere!

YOUNG JIM
 Last man I ever seen.

OLD JIM
 'at's enough from both o' ya

ALLEN
(To KEITH.) I think the trip from Arkansas wore on you.

KEITH
 I had to come.

ALLEN
(Indulgently.) I understand.

KEITH
 Margaret sent you for me?

ALLEN
 You scared her to death.

KEITH
 I told her, it's a pilgrimage.

ALLEN
(Amused.) To Shelton Laurel? Well, they do say the Lord is everywhere.

KEITH
 Lawrence, you shouldn't . . .

ALLEN
 I'm sorry.
(KEITH closes his eyes to relax for a moment.)

DAVID

I'd like to split his noggin!

YOUNG JIM

I. i.

Ain't nobody skeered o' no toad.

DAVID

Shut up!

MARY

(To YOUNG JIM.) He's a fine lookin' feller.

DAVID

(To OLD JIM.) D'you hear what she said?

(YOUNG JIM places a hand gently over MARY's mouth while OLD JIM quiets DAVID by showing him the back of his hand.)

KEITH

(To ALLEN.) What was she afraid of?

ALLEN

Margaret? That you wouldn't come back . . . that you came here to die.

OLD JIM

You ain't that lucky.

(Laughs and DAVID joins him.)

ALLEN

Did you come here to die?

KEITH

Our fate is in the Lord's hands.

ALLEN

There are people around here who won't wait for the Lord.

DAVID

'at's right!

OLD JIM

Quiet!

KEITH

It doesn't matter.

ALLEN

Is that so? Because you should have seen me bumbling about this county in search of "a man of your description". I dared not use your name . . . or mine.

DAVID

You was cowards then an' yer cowards now!

I. i.

OLD JIM

(To DAVID.) You need a piece o' shoe leather to chew on?

KEITH

I'm sorry, Lawrence. I didn't mean for you . . .

ALLEN

Stop it. No apologies. Not now, not here, in this place.

(Begins looking around the church as KEITH looks on quizzically as ALLEN goes to a spot down left.)

Do you know where you've brought me? After thirty years. Right here is where I was christened.

(Goes to a spot down center.)

Here is where Martha and I were married.

(Returns to the spot down left.)

Here is where Romulus and Betsy were christened.

(Returns down center and holds his hands palms out to the left and to the right.)

And here is where their caskets stood that horrible day thirty years ago.

KEITH

My God. This is your old church where your children were . . .

ALLEN

Wait. I'm not done. *(He motions down to indicate the spot where he stands.)* And here is where I expected my casket would stand one day. But, I was wrong. This tumble-down shack has not been a house of the Lord for years. And now we both have new families – loving wives and children . . .

KEITH

Lawrence, if I'd known. If I thought Margaret would ask you to come . . .

ALLEN

I told you, no apologies. Besides, the truth is I'd pretty much given up trying to find you. I stopped here for my sake, not yours.

(Smiles warmly at KEITH.)

But, there you were.

MARY

(To YOUNG JIM.) Ya' know, he really ain't such a bad feller.

YOUNG JIM

Mary!

DAVID

(To OLD JIM.) Ya' hear what she said?

I. i.

KEITH

I should step outside and let you . . .

OLD JIM

No!

ALLEN

Let me what? Make myself silly with grief for my darling children?

KEITH

I know what they meant to you.

ALLEN

The Lord has helped me reconcile myself to their deaths and the fact that I can stand here shows it. And I should thank you for bringing me back to here and giving me that opportunity.

(Holds his hand out to KEITH.)

So, we've both had our pilgrimages, but it's time to return to the present. Shall we go?

OLD JIM

(Firmly, soberly to KEITH.) Ya ain't goin' nowhere, old man.

KEITH

(Takes ALLEN's hand, but doesn't move.) I can't. Not yet.

ALLEN

(Reassuringly.) Come on, Jim. You've done your duty and paid your respects. It's time we got on with life.

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) You ain't done yer duty.

YOUNG JIM

Daddy, just let 'im go. Don't ya ever get tired o' . . .

DAVID

No!

KEITH

No, I haven't. *(Looking around the church.)* Don't you feel it, Lawrence?

ALLEN

Feel what? . . . luck that we escaped this place with our lives?

KEITH

I. i.

What happened here, I mean.

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Say it! Say the words.

ALLEN

A great many things happened in Shelton Laurel.

KEITH

You know what I mean.

OLD JIM

Say it!

YOUNG JIM

Daddy, don't. What's the point?

DAVID

Make 'im say it, Daddy.

ALLEN

What?

KEITH

The ones we killed.

ALLEN

The ones we killed? You mean the bushwhackers, the traitors who raided our homes.

DAVID

T'ain't so! T'ain't so!

KEITH

Some were just boys.

OLD JIM

Remind him, old man. Remind him o' what you two done!

KEITH

We killed them. Why?

ALLEN

Because it was a war and we were soldiers.

KEITH

But, you must feel it, don't you, Lawrence? The boys . . .

I. i.

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Make him feel it!

ALLEN

And some of our men were boys. And some of the Yankees were boys. It was terrible. The war was terrible.

KEITH

(Almost crying.) They were so frightened.

DAVID

Was not!

OLD JIM

(To DAVID.) Quiet!

ALLEN

Listen, Jim. Some may have been boys, but they raided our homes, stole from our children.

OLD JIM

And what o' my children?

KEITH

I hear them, you know.

DAVID

Damn right!

KEITH

(Becoming more distraught.) Boys and their father . . .

ALLEN

Stop it, now! Just stop it!

(Hugs KEITH closely.)

Yes, Jim, I do feel it. For God's sake, yes.

DAVID

He don't feel nothin'!

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Get him outta here!

ALLEN

But, do you know what else I feel? Despair, because they made us stoop to their level. That's what war does. It makes monsters of us all.

(ALLEN and KEITH both look to the sanctuary in contemplation.)

DAVID

He's sayin' it was our fault! Daddy, you gonna let 'im . . . ?

OLD JIM

(To KEITH grimly.) Get him out!

YOUNG JIM

Let 'em both go!

KEITH

But, aren't you afraid?

ALLEN

We all are.

DAVID

(To the unhearing ALLEN.) Like to knock yer head clean off, blim blam!

(OLD JIM raps DAVID upside the head and sends him sprawling across a couple of benches. DAVID is unhurt. MARY goes to help him, but in embarrassment he pushes her away.)

KEITH

What will happen to us?

ALLEN

Nothing. Do you hear? Nothing, because we were neither better nor worse than a million other men who did the same.

OLD JIM

If you don't get him outta here . . . !

YOUNG JIM

(To OLD JIM.) What? What ya gonna do, Daddy? You know there ain't nothin' we can do but carry on like a bunch o' . . .

OLD JIM

(To YOUNG JIM.) Shut up, boy!

ALLEN

We were fighting for a worthy cause. In that we must have faith. (*Urgently.*) Listen, Jim, could any cause that wasn't great have made us kill?

KEITH

I. i.

(*Hopefully.*) I suppose not.

DAVID

He's sayin' what they done's all right!

ALLEN

Could so many men like us have killed one another without a powerful reason?

OLD JIM

(*To KEITH.*) That's the devil talkin'!

KEITH

(*Fighting off OLD JIM.*) No.

OLD JIM

Old man, you hear me?

YOUNG JIM

(*Giving up.*) Everybody does. We ain't got a choice.

OLD JIM

(*To KEITH.*) You can't forget what ya seen, what ya done.

(*OLD JIM whispers in KEITH's ear causing his brow to furrow.*)

KEITH

(*To ALLEN.*) But, if we were wrong

ALLEN

Then everyone who ever fought is wrong and consigned to hell.

OLD JIM

Consigned to hell! Ya hear?

YOUNG JIM

(*Shaking his head. To MARY, dismissively.*) Listen to 'em.

KEITH

(*To OLD JIM as much as to ALLEN.*) There is salvation in Christ.

ALLEN

(*Firmly.*) There is salvation in our cause.

(*MARY seems amused by ALLEN's fervor and begins marching in place while humming "Onward Christian Soldiers". OLD JIM whispers in KEITH's ear.*)

YOUNG JIM

Stop it, Mary.

(But she ignores him and keeps on humming and marching.)

I. i.

KEITH

I don't know

ALLEN

Soldiers don't know. We obey. We obey and pray that our cause is noble.

KEITH

Noble?

ALLEN

Yes! Our cause was noble, just as the Yankee cause was noble.

(MARY switches to "The Battle Hymn of The Republic" and continues marching.)

All of us, stupid, fallible children of God trying to do what was right.

KEITH

(Finding confidence.) We did try!

ALLEN

And what God would punish us for doing what we believe in our souls to be in his name?

OLD JIM

(Making a last effort to control KEITH.) You can't forget us, old man!

KEITH

Yes! I did try. By God, I did try to do right!

YOUNG JIM

(Annoyed with MARY who has continued humming.) Mary, stop it!

(MARY stops, clearly wounded by the sharp words from YOUNG JIM.)

DAVID

He ain't gettin' away is he, Daddy?

(OLD JIM shows DAVID the back of his hand.)

YOUNG JIM

I hope he does.

ALLEN

That's why we're able to forgive each other now – Rebels and Yankees, Negroes and their masters, fathers and sons. It's why every war doesn't end in the insane revenge of

the last man standing. (*Grips KEITH by the shoulders.*) We are forgiven. You are forgiven!

OLD JIM

(*Roars in KEITH's ear.*) You are damned!

I. i.

(*But, KEITH shows no awareness.*)

DAVID

Daddy?

KEITH

The Lord does answer our prayers!

ALLEN

And the rest we must leave for him, because we are only men.

OLD JIM

Murderers!

KEITH

To follow God, to understand . . .

ALLEN

Understand God? Do you have a mind so powerful that you can comprehend the design of the all-knowing? Because all I can do is aspire to follow faithfully.

KEITH

Yes, it is a great deal to ask.

ALLEN

No wonder you are tortured.

OLD JIM

(*Lets out a roar in frustration.*)

KEITH

Is that why it haunts me?

ALLEN

It haunts you because you have the courage to let it. I don't. Not many men do.

DAVID

Make him stop it, Daddy.

YOUNG JIM

No, let 'im . . .

KEITH

But, how do you stop it?

I. i.

ALLEN

(Thinks for a moment.) I told you I'm a coward. It's the only possible explanation. I don't pray enough to purge the ghosts nor drink enough to drown them. But let me show you something.

(Begins rolling up a sleeve to reveal a nasty scar on his forearm.)

Because you feel pain, because you hear voices, you believe the thing that caused them must be evil. But, do you imagine the pain would vanish if there were no evil, no guilt?

(Shows KEITH his scar.)

KEITH

The bullet you took when you led the charge at Shiloh.

ALLEN

Hurt like hell! And it would have hurt just the same – neither more nor less – if I'd gotten it running away . . . deserting.

KEITH

Running away? You were heroic.

ALLEN

But, however you get it, a wound is a wound and with it comes pain. It has nothing to do with guilt or innocence, right or wrong. Pain is not moral condemnation. Not the kind I felt. Not the kind you feel. Your willingness . . . your courage . . . to accept the pain, to hear the voices, is testimony, not to your guilt, but to the goodness of your heart.

DAVID

Daddy, why don't you say somethin'?

YOUNG JIM

Cuz there's nothin' he can say.

OLD JIM

(Angrily.) Quiet.

KEITH

Still, I can't forget . . .

ALLEN

Of course not. Nor should you. But, it needn't always be unpleasant.

(MARY softly begins to hum "Goober Peas".)

You know, the other day as I rode up Buncombe Pike in search of you, I remembered marching that very road with our men all those years ago . . . and how happy we were. Do you remember?

(With MARY starts singing a rousing version of "Goober Peas".)

Sitting by the roadside on a summer's day,
 Chatting with my messmates, passing time away,
 Lying in the shadow underneath the trees,
 Goodness, how delicious, eating goober peas!

I. i.

(KEITH joins in the chorus.)

Peas, peas, peas peas,
 Eating goober peas!
 Goodness, how delicious, eating goober peas!

(ALLEN and KEITH laugh and relax reveling in the memory.)

DAVID

(To MARY.) Why are you singin' fer them?

YOUNG JIM

Let her be.

ALLEN

Oh Lord, every one of them so deserving of life. It was all too big. *(Pause.)* Give yourself over to the grief and the hole is bottomless. That's what ails you, Jim.

KEITH

We did have some good times.
(They pause and reflect.)

DAVID

I don't think he even knows we're here no more.

OLD JIM

He will.

YOUNG JIM

I hope he doesn't. I hope we're done with the whole thing . . .

OLD JIM

And where would you be, boy? Where would your sweetheart be?

YOUNG JIM

A better place 'n this.

KEITH

Thank you, Lawrence.

ALLEN
For what?

KEITH
Comforting me . . . bringing me peace. I. i.
(KEITH and ALLEN pause in relaxation looking around the church.)

DAVID
Ain't no peace fer you!

YOUNG JIM
Is if he cain't hear us.

ALLEN
I'm just happy to be your comrade.

KEITH
No, you're more than that. You understand things. You explain them. It's a miracle to people like me.

ALLEN
Nonsense. We're just a couple of teary old men who should be on our way.

DAVID
(To YOUNG JIM.) You just wanna let 'im go.

YOUNG JIM
Don't you?
(DAVID furrows his brow in thought.)

KEITH
You know, there are others like me.

ALLEN
What do you mean, "like you"? You're just . . .

KEITH
And you would help them too, wouldn't you?

ALLEN
Who?

KEITH
Others, like me.

ALLEN
It's as much as I can do to take care of the two of us. Now come on.

(Rises in preparation to leave.)

KEITH

(Not budging.) No. I mean it. You would help others who are haunted if you could?

I. i.

ALLEN

I suppose . . . if I could.

KEITH

Yes! Yes, you can!

ALLEN

Jim, what are you talking about?

DAVID

Wha's he talkin' 'bout, Daddy?

KEITH

Someone else you can help.

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Whatcha think yer doin'?

ALLEN

Someone here, you mean?

KEITH

Yes. Today!

ALLEN

From the regiment? . . . One of our men?

(KEITH has turned away trying to figure out how to put it to ALLEN.)

Jim?

KEITH

A woman. She lost her husband and two sons.

YOUNG JIM

Daddy . . . ?

ALLEN

Do I know this woman?

YOUNG JIM

He's talkin' 'bout us, ain't he?

I don't think so.

KEITH

DAVID

(Excitedly.) An' Momma? Is he talkin' 'bout momma?

I. i.

KEITH

Her name is Patsy Shelton.
(A great commotion among the ghosts.)

OLD JIM

Lord o' Abraham!

DAVID

(To YOUNG JIM.) Did ya' hear?!

ALLEN

Shelton?
(MARY begins softly humming "Oft in The Stilly Night".)

YOUNG JIM

Momma!

OLD JIM

(To YOUNG JIM and DAVID.) Quiet, both o' ya.

ALLEN

The Shelton's . . . here?

KEITH

She lost children . . . like you.

ALLEN

You're comparing those bushwhacking heathens . . .

DAVID

You hear what he called us?

KEITH

Boys . . . children of God.

ALLEN

What are you saying?
(Takes KEITH firmly by the shoulders.)
 This is nonsense. Now, it's time for us to go.

KEITH

(Not budging.) Please, Lawrence.

OLD JIM

(Laughing.) Ain't goin' nowheres now!

I. i.

ALLEN

(Has lost patience.) I'm sorry, Jim, but you're in an overwrought state. It's time to come with me.

(He reaches down to KEITH who does not move.)

KEITH

She needs us.

ALLEN

No!

YOUNG JIM

(To MARY.) Mary, be quiet.

(MARY stops humming.)

KEITH

She's in pain. For the Lord's sake.

(Clings to ALLEN.)

For the sake of her soul . . .

ALLEN

Jim, you're having another delusion.

KEITH

I've been told . . .

ALLEN

(Impatiently.) What have you been told?

KEITH

It's a calling. I've been told.

(Looks up to the sanctuary.)

If you could hear . . .

OLD JIM

You must redeem her!

KEITH

We must redeem her . . . If you could hear . . .

ALLEN
Jim, it's the voices in your head.

KEITH
No, no

I. i.

OLD JIM
Tell 'im!

KEITH
They are real. She needs us

ALLEN
Voices, that's all!

(Breaks free of KEITH's grip and takes him by the shoulders.)
If they were real, wouldn't I hear them? Wouldn't I hear them ten times as loudly?

OLD JIM
Your soul will burn and so will his!

DAVID
Whoooooo!

KEITH
But we'll . . .

ALLEN
Jim, look at me. *(Grabs KEITH and their eyes meet.)*

DAVID
Both of ya will burn!

ALLEN
There is nothing. They are voices, but not the voice of God!

OLD JIM
We're worse! *(He laughs.)*

ALLEN
They can rant and they can rave, but they cannot harm you.

OLD JIM
You know better.

ALLEN
They mean nothing.

OLD JIM
You'll burn together!

KEITH I. i.
But, Lawrence, for her sake . . .

ALLEN
Listen to me. I believe you. I believe you. The woman probably does suffer, but we can't comfort her.

(MARY begins sobbing and is comforted by YOUNG JIM.)

KEITH
We can You can . . .

ALLEN
No. It's not our place. She wouldn't understand. You say we killed her husband and sons. It's not fair to ask her to listen to us . . . to forgive.

OLD JIM
Tell 'im why, old man.

KEITH
To make amends.

ALLEN
No! We cannot. A mother, a wife – she'll only see murderers

KEITH
She would listen.

ALLEN
A Shelton would listen?

KEITH
They're people . . .

ALLEN
But, not like us! Jim, they have their ways and we have ours. It's not for us to cross that line. She will find peace with her own, just as you and I must find peace among ourselves.

OLD JIM
(A sarcastic pleasantry.) Salvation's awaitin'!

KEITH
Lawrence, she needs us. Please.

(Takes ALLEN's arm.)

ALLEN

(Exasperated.) What am I to do with you? You're noble, I mean that. But, what you propose is the stuff of angels, not men. If we ride into those hollers, they'll kill us and, what good would that do her soul or ours?

KEITH

But, she'll come.

(Looks up at the sanctuary making ALLEN think he's talking about a vision.)

MARY

Is he seein' things again?

YOUNG JIM

Quiet, Mary.

ALLEN

What do you mean?

KEITH

(Still staring into the sanctuary.) Here . . . to this church. She'll come.

ALLEN

In a vision . . . like the voices?

DAVID

(Suddenly sad.) Daddy, is Momma like us?

OLD JIM

Shhhh.

KEITH

No.

YOUNG JIM

(Delighted.) She's comin'! Momma's comin' here!
(Hugs MARY.)

ALLEN

What do you mean?

KEITH

I told her I would wait.

ALLEN

(Confused.) You told her?

KEITH
In a letter . . . I wrote

ALLEN I. i.
You wrote her that you'd be here?
(KEITH nods sheepishly.)
That you'd be here today?
(KEITH nods again.)

DAVID
Hallelujah!

ALLEN
Good God!

KEITH
I told her I will wait until she comes or I will die waiting. It is my penance.

OLD JIM
(Almost warmly.) You done good, old man.

YOUNG JIM
(To MARY.) It's been thirty year.

ALLEN
(Urgently.) We're leaving right now!
(Tries to raise KEITH to his feet, but KEITH resists.)

OLD JIM
Don't let 'im take ya. Fight'im, old man!

KEITH
Lawrence, no! Believe me . . .

ALLEN
They'll kill you! She'll bring her clan out of the Laurel and riddle you with bullets.

DAVID
Whooooo!

KEITH
I must make amends.

ALLEN
Dead men don't make amends!

Ain't no better kind!
 OLD JIM

Forgive me. *(Makes a huge effort to move KEITH.)*
 ALLEN I. i.

KEITH AND GHOSTS TOGETHER

Noooo!
(As ALLEN and KEITH struggle, the doors open and there stands PATSY. All are frozen by her sight.)

Momma?
 YOUNG JIM & DAVID TOGETHER

(Confused by the presence of two men.) Is one o' you a Mr. Keith?
 PATSY

Patsy?
 OLD JIM

(To YOUNG JIM.) Is it?
 MARY
(YOUNG JIM nods slowly.)

(Rising to greet PATSY.) I'm Keith . . . James Keith.
 KEITH
(PATSY eyes him uncertainly.)

Daddy, can Momma hear us?
 DAVID

You know she can't
 YOUNG JIM

Shhh.
 OLD JIM

Yer letter didn't say nothin' 'bout other folks.
 PATSY

Lawrence is a friend. He didn't know.
 KEITH
(Looks at ALLEN and says in resignation . . .)
 He was just leaving.

PATSY

(Looks back at the door and then at ALLEN.)
He better stay put.

KEITH
Why, Mrs. Shelton? He doesn't . . .

I. i.

PATSY
He better stay put!

ALLEN
What's on the other side of that door, Mrs. Shelton?
(A pause, but PATSY doesn't respond.)

DAVID
(Gleefully.) They're waitin' fer'im!

OLD JIM
It's her . . . still kinda pretty, ain't she?

YOUNG JIM
Yes, sir.

DAVID
I bet Uncle Earl's out there with . . . !
(MARY approaches him and gently silences him.)

ALLEN
You're implying that it wouldn't be safe?
(Still no response from PATSY.)
You see, Jim.

KEITH
(To ALLEN.) I'm sorry.

ALLEN
It's all right. Besides, since Mrs. Shelton wanted to see you, she might want to see me as well. *(To PATSY with a bow.)* My name is Allen, Colonel Lawrence Allen.

PATSY
(Hesitates to make sure she's heard right. Then a smile crosses her face.) See that? Ya' come to church an' ya git a miracle! My, my, Mr. Keith and Mr. Allen . . . or should I call you Colonel Allen?

ALLEN
You may call me what you wish.

PATSY

Oh, I don't think ya'd like that.

(The ghosts all break out laughing. ALLEN shows his superior breeding by making a conciliatory bow.)

(To KEITH.) Well, ain't he courtly.

I. i.

OLD JIM

Sassy as always, ain't she?

KEITH

M'am, there is no man I admire more than Mr. Allen.

PATSY

Surely, surely. All them manners.

ALLEN

Mr. Keith is generous with his praise.

PATSY

Well, there just ain't no end to how much ya admire each other. Makes me feel downright puny.

KEITH

Mrs. Shelton, Lawrence didn't mean . . .

ALLEN

(Perceiving what he thinks is the futility, he silences KEITH.) Jim.

PATSY

(To ALLEN.) Ya didn't know? Mr. Keith here didn't tell ya' why he come? *(Laughs.)* Bet yer feelin' pretty snake-bit now, ain't ya?

DAVID

Bet he is, Momma!

ALLEN

I understand why Mr. Keith came.

PATSY

Do ya? Well, then maybe ya kin explain it to me.

ALLEN

Mr. Keith can speak for himself.

(Thrown suddenly into the spotlight, KEITH looks panicked.)

PATSY

I'm sorry. I ain't always on my manners.

(An awkward silence as all wait for KEITH to speak.)

OLD JIM

Come on, old man. This is yer time.

I. i.

KEITH

(Trying to rise to the occasion.) I . . . I want to make amends.

PATSY

(As though she expects more.) Mmm hmm.

KEITH

We could talk . . . pray . . .

(Looks to ALLEN for help realizing his response is woefully inadequate.)

ALLEN

Mr. Keith puts a great deal of faith in the Lord.

PATSY

(Annoyed at the interruption.) An' you don't?

ALLEN

I try to.

KEITH

I pray for your husband and sons . . .

(Guffaws from OLD JIM and DAVID.)

. . . as if they were mine.

DAVID

To smite us down!

YOUNG JIM

Do we give 'im a choice?

OLD JIM

Quiet!

PATSY

Well, I 'spec in a way they are yers, ain't they?

KEITH

Yes.

PATSY

So, what in the world ya got fer an old woman gonna die perty soon?

ALLEN

(Recognizing KEITH's bewilderment.) Mr. Keith has not been well.

I. i.

KEITH

We could pray.

PATSY

Ya already pray.

KEITH

. . . Together.

PATSY

Ya got the Lord. Whatcha need me fer?

KEITH

To ask forgiveness.

PATSY

His or mine?

OLD JIM

(Laughs.) Listen to your mamma, boys!

PATSY

'at's why ya come, ain't it? Ya want me to forgive . . .

KEITH

No. That's not why . . .

PATSY

Ya' mean ya don't want me to forgive ya?

(OLD JIM and DAVID laugh at seeing KEITH outmaneuvered.)

KEITH

(Befuddled.) Wellyes . . .

ALLEN

(Out of patience. To PATSY.) Stop it. You know what he means.

PATSY

Do I?

ALLEN

Think what you like, but he did come here to help you.

PATSY

'at so? Well, I s'pose even crazy folks got good intentions.

I. i.

ALLEN

It's not your place to judge.

PATSY

I ain't judgin'. Yer the one thinks he's crazy. Bet that's why ya come.

ALLEN

Why are you here?

DAVID

Show 'im, Momma!

PATSY

I was invited.

ALLEN

Because of what awaits us on the other side of that door?

PATSY

What's that, Colonel?

ALLEN

I know what you intend.

PATSY

Intend? I give up intendin' a long time ago. It's as much as I kin do just to git along. An' I 'spec 'at's 'bout the way it is fer Mr. Keith here.

KEITH

I understand how you must feel.

PATSY

Do ya?

KEITH

And you have every right to do with me what you please.

PATSY

Do I? Do I really? Because, I don't think the Colonel here agrees with ya. *(To ALLEN.)*
Do ya, Colonel? Do I got the right to do anything I want?

ALLEN

So far as God allows.

I. i.

PATSY

(Laughs at ALLEN's twist.) But, if I cross the Lord, I better watch out, cuz he's gonna take it outta my hide. Ain't that right?

ALLEN

I don't presume to know how God works.

PATSY

No, but he does. *(Looking back to the disheveled KEITH.)*

DAVID

Yes, sir, Momma. We told him!

PATSY

(To KEITH.) Ya know God gonna take it outta yer hide, don't ya?

KEITH

I fear it.

PATSY

'Course ya do. An' any man don't be a damn fool. Ain't that so?

KEITH

Yes, ma'am.

PATSY

Be worse'n blind, deaf, an' dumb. Wouldn't he?

KEITH

He would?

PATSY

Yessir! So, tell me 'bout the Colonel, here? He look skeered to you?

KEITH

I know Lawrence to be a God-fearing man.

DAVID

He will be!

PATSY

Then, he must not think he got a reason to be skeered. Look at 'im!

ALLEN

I'm sorry if my appearance . . .

I. i.

PATSY

(To KEITH.) An' listen to 'im! It just don't figger. There ya are in a state an' he's just relaxed . . .

ALLEN

Let him alone! You can see my friend is scarred by the horrors of the war.

PATSY

(To KEITH.) An' ya hear that? Just cuz ya feel bad 'bout what ya done, the Colonel here says ya crazy.

ALLEN

I said no such thing!

PATSY

(Dropping her facetious tone and turning viciously on ALLEN.) Nah. You don't feel bad. You don't feel nothin' at all.

KEITH

(Fearing a violent confrontation.) No . . . no. He can explain. *(To ALLEN.)* Lawrence, tell her . . . like you told me.

ALLEN

(Taking the measure of PATSY and shaking his head.) It won't do any good.

PATSY

Tell me what?

KEITH

Why . . . why your husband and sons . . . the war . . .

(Turning to ALLEN.)

Lawrence, like you told me. Tell her.

OLD JIM

We'll see how crafty this feller is now.

PATSY

Well, what ya got to tell me, Colonel? . . . Huh . . . How ya shot 'em like they weren't but dogs?

KEITH

No . . .

PATSY

(In ALLEN's impassive face.) 'at's what ya done, weren't it? . . . weren't it! I. i.

(Unable to shake ALLEN's she laughs bitterly and turns back to KEITH.)

An' now yer gonna tell me it's all right. 'at why ya got me here today?

(Pointing to ALLEN.)

Look at 'im! He don't care . . . don't give a tinker's damn! I'm just trash . . . like my boys an' their daddy! *(Turning back on KEITH.)* But, you . . . yer even worse. Ya want me to say it's all right what ya done! Ya' want me to forgive . . .

DAVID

Whooo!

KEITH

(Dropping to his knees before PATSY.) No! No, I don't expect you to forgive.

PATSY

Then, what ya expect? Huh? Ya puttin' on a little show fer God up yonder? Showin' him how ya' . . .

KEITH

I want to help.

PATSY

Help? Ya want to help me?

KEITH

Whatever I can do . . .

PATSY

(Shakes her head in mock bewilderment.) Ya' know why I'm so angry I could spit? Cuz disgustin' as ya are, ya can help me an' it ain't got nothin' with God, ner prayin', ner none of it. Mr. Keith, all I want ya to do is tell me the story . . . the story o' what happened to my boys an' their daddy.

KEITH

What?

PATSY

Ya heared me. How ya took 'em, how they died

KEITH

(Clearly uncomfortable with the subject.) But, you . . . you know.

PATSY

Oh no, Mr. Keith. I don't. Ya see, all I know is y'all come lookin' for them what done the raid on Marshall an' then my boys an' their daddy was gone . . . or at least they was 'til we found 'em the way ya left 'em (*PATSY's tone turns dark.*) -- half buried, wild pigs been gnawin' on their toes an' such . . .

I. i.

(*KEITH goes down on his knees in agony and ALLEN intercedes.*)

ALLEN

That's enough! Madame, I mourn for you and I mourn for your family, but we will not play in your macabre drama. Your husband and sons may have deserved better. Thousands deserved better, but I tell you for your sake -- for the sake of your sanity -- that no one is ever improved by reliving the grisly details.

PATSY

Ya think ya know that much about me?

ALLEN

Oh, yes. Because in you I see everything that I fear I might become . . . would become, if I allowed my rage to consume me as yours consumes you. You are not the only loved one the war left aggrieved.

PATSY

An' ya care so much. . . about my sanity . . . that yer gonna take Mr. Keith an' march right out that door to yer death 'fore ya let 'im tell me what happened.

OLD JIM

(*To KEITH.*) What ya got to say, old man?

KEITH

(*Questioningly.*) Lawrence . . . ?

ALLEN

(*To PATSY.*) If that's the fate that awaits.

KEITH

Maybe we should . . .

ALLEN

(*To KEITH.*) It wouldn't do any good.

PATSY

(*Laughs.*) All right, Colonel. Well, then ya better git on yer way.

ALLEN

(*Never removing his firm gaze from PATSY's eyes, he reaches down and takes KEITH by the arm.*) Jim, it's time for us to go.

(*KEITH looks up in terror, but begins to rise.*)

It's all right.

OLD JIM

(In high expectation.) It's your time, old man!

I. i.

DAVID

They gonna get it!

YOUNG JIM

Daddy, no! If Mr. Keith goes, we'll be . . .

OLD JIM

Can't be stopped now.

(KEITH led by ALLEN starts slowly for the door. MARY somberly begins to hum "Just as I Am Without One Plea".)

DAVID

Whoooo!

YOUNG JIM

(To OLD JIM urgently.) No. Make 'im tell like Momma wants.

(OLD JIM does not respond.)

You wanna lose Momma again? Why, Daddy? . . . Just so he kin die. Just cuz you . . . ?

OLD JIM

Quiet!

KEITH

(To ALLEN.) Maybe it will help her . . .

PATSY

Hear that, Colonel?

ALLEN

You think it will make her spirit more generous, more forgiving? After what it's done to you, it's a story best taken to the grave.

PATSY

I ain't askin' no favors, Colonel. Go on! March into heaven like ya marched into this church, 'spect'n everybody gonna fall at yer feet.

YOUNG JIM

Daddy, stop it!

(But, OLD JIM stares steadily on. Desperate, YOUNG JIM approaches the dazed KEITH.)

You won't be saved, not like this.

KEITH

(*To ALLEN.*) I'm sorry for bringing you, Lawrence.

I. i.

YOUNG JIM

(*To PATSY.*) Momma, can you hear me? . . . Momma? (*But, she cannot hear.*)

PATSY

It's yer last chance, Colonel!

ALLEN

(*To KEITH.*) Are you ready, my friend?
(*KEITH looks at him and then back at PATSY.*)

YOUNG JIM

Daddy . . . !

OLD JIM

(*To YOUNG JIM.*) Quiet, boy. It's God's will.

YOUNG JIM

I'm sick o' God an' his will! Ya hear me? All o' ya?!
(*ALLEN puts his hand on the door handle.*)

PATSY

Colonel! Wait a minute. Seein' as how we're in church an' all, I'm feelin' generous.
(*ALLEN pauses with his hand still on the handle.*)
What if I told ya, I'd let ya go? What if all ya gotta do is tell me the story an', when yer done, I'll take my folks an' leave an' you kin go on home?
(*ALLEN pushes down on the latch to open the door.*)

KEITH

Lawrence! You shouldn't have to die. This is why I came. Right or wrong, mad or sane, it no longer matters. But, don't let me have your death on my head. I can tell the story.
(*ALLEN pauses.*)

PATSY

An' what ya care about me, Colonel? So, what if it makes me crazy? Ya think I'm crazy already, don't ya? . . . Or are ya just doin' it to spite me?

ALLEN

To spite you? No. To spare you.

PATSY

Well, ain't that big o' ya?

ALLEN

I meet people like you all the time – the wives, mothers of men who died in a lost war. You want to believe there's a reason -- that it's part of God's plan. So, you search for years grubbing among yellowed pieces of paper, leftover scraps of clothing, teasing out half-forgotten stories, trying to cobble together some kind of meaning that offsets it . . . that makes it "acceptable". But, in the end, all you're left with is a choice – either there is no reason or, if there is, it's as insignificant as those leftover scraps. There is no proportion, Mrs. Shelton.

PATSY

(Evenly, sincerely.) Well, Colonel, I'm from the hollers, so I guess I don't 'spect much from life nor the Lord. An' I ain't lookin' fer grand designs. It didn't kill me when it happened an' knowin' how it happened ain't gonna save me now. But, I still want to know.

ALLEN

There is no story. It was simple enough. Your husband and sons were killed by order of General Heth as part of an effort to suppress the insurrection that was taking place in Shelton Laurel in the winter of 1863.

PATSY

Insurrection? What are ya talkin' 'bout?

ALLEN

When people from your community conducted a raid on the town of Marshall in which they terrorized the population and stole a substantial amount of supplies . . . salt and linens . . . things necessary for survival, vital to the war effort. The penalty for such crimes is death.

PATSY

I know all 'bout the raid, but my boys an' their daddy didn't have nothin' to do with it!

ALLEN

Of course, not. Nobody had anything to do with it. It was carried out by ghosts and goblins . . .

PATSY

Colonel, I'm tellin' ya they didn't have nothin' to do with it. An' if that Gen'ral thought they did, then he was just wrong.

ALLEN

You're saying we made a mistake! . . . a monstrous, awful, horrible mistake in which innocent men . . .

PATSY

An' boys!

ALLEN

. . . . And boys were caught up and killed unnecessarily. Well, Mrs. Shelton, let me I. i. welcome you to the definition of war! I told you there was no proportion. You say your husband and sons died because of a mistake and I am telling you that the same can be said of nine-tenths of the men and women and children who died in that and every other war.

PATSY

We didn't have nothin' to do with your war!

ALLEN

Which is another way of saying that the men from your hollers were draft dodgers, deserters . . .

PATSY

We was mindin' our own business.

ALLEN

The war was your business! It was the duty of every man, woman, and child in the Confederacy! But, with that raid, your people went beyond merely shirking your responsibility to outright rebellion and it had to be stopped!

PATSY

There weren't no rebellion. Colonel, do ya know why that raid happened? Cuz folks in the hollers was starvin'! There weren't no salt to cure our meat, no stocks to . . .

ALLEN

Everybody was hungry. Everybody was cold.

PATSY

It's why we was hungry them boys did it. Them folks in Marshall was tryin' to starve us.

ALLEN

Salt was rationed.

PATSY

Then, where was our share? Them boys took what was needed.

ALLEN

Is that all they took?

PATSY

It was ours!

ALLEN

By what law? Under what God?

I. i.

PATSY

The same God that says you don't sit warm and happy when there's folks runnin' out of food, got no salt to cure their meat nor flour to bake bread . . . when their animals is dying for want of feed and their men is being taken away to fight somebody else's war! Do you know, Colonel, what it was like that winter?

ALLEN

I was there.

PATSY

I don't mean in your nice little house in your nice little town Out in the hills – the hollers – where you live off what little you can hunt or grow -- the places polite folks like you don't wander.

ALLEN

The places my men and I, frostbitten and getting shot at by bushwhackers, had to march in the dead of January looking for deserters and raiders who used your hills and hollers to kill and steal. I respect your suffering, Mrs. Shelton, but you weren't alone.

PATSY

Any suffering you knew you brought on yourself. It was your war and you expected my husband, my boys to fight it for you.

ALLEN

Everyone fought. Everyone sacrificed.

PATSY

And how many of 'em did it because they got bullied and jawboned into it with all that highfalutin talk of sovereignty and states rights and defending us from "the Yankee invaders" when all you wanted was to keep your nigger slaves to take jobs away from white folks?

ALLEN

You probably wouldn't understand concepts such as patriotism, duty, honor.

KEITH

(Trying to prevent an impending explosion.) What Lawrence means is . . .

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Shut up!

I. i.

PATSY

I know what he means! (*Pauses to consider and is almost amused at the irony.*) Him lecturing me on duty and honor . . . the man who took a bunch of men and boys out in the woods and murdered them. (*Accusingly to ALLEN.*) Just because you had an order! Is there anything so awful you wouldn't do it if you was ordered?

ALLEN

(*Loudly. Defiantly.*) Many things!

(*A pause as all are stunned by ALLEN's audacity. He recovers himself.*)

But, that is not the subject. We were discussing your peoples' "needs". A funny word, "need". Just last month my daughter told me she absolutely needs a new frock for the spring ball.

PATSY

Without salt we wouldn't a had no food!

ALLEN

No, no. I agree. It's hardly the same kind of "need". What other "needed" things were taken?

OLD JIM

(*To KEITH.*) Don't you let 'im weasel out, old man.

KEITH

What are you doing, Lawrence?

PATSY

What are ya sayin'?

ALLEN

I thought we were reminiscing, talking about old times.

PATSY

Ya don't understand nothin'.

ALLEN

But, I want to understand. Your people were cold, hungry, beset by recruiters who would spirit away your husbands and sons for a war that wasn't yours. The people in Marshall were keeping salt and other things from you. What other things? I would like to know.

PATSY

(*Defensively.*) You ain't the judge o' what we needed.

ALLEN

Of course, not. So, tell me.

(*A pause with no response from PATSY.*)

All right. I'll try. It's been a long time, but I think we recovered a good deal of cotton yarn. Jim, do you remember?

PATSY

The cotton was fer blankets!

I. i.

ALLEN

Oh, yes . . . very necessary. But, what else? Wasn't there some finished clothing – britches, boots . . . dresses?

OLD JIM

(To the unhearing ALLEN.) Ya son of a bitch!

ALLEN

Right out of store windows where anyone could buy them.

PATSY

What money we had, we needed fer supplies.

OLD JIM

He took our boys!

DAVID

Killt us!

ALLEN

And wasn't there money taken too?

KEITH

(To ALLEN.) Stop, Lawrence.

ALLEN

And bedding – sheets, blankets – from peoples' homes. I suppose they were “needed” too.

OLD JIM

Kill the bastard!

PATSY

So, yer sayin' we was just thieves.

ALLEN

I'm saying we should call the thing what it was – a raid in which your people took not only what they needed, but what they wanted – things that were available to them on the same terms as anybody else, the personal property of families, some of them no better off than you were.

PATSY

An' that makes killin' men an' boys all right?

I. i.

ALLEN

What would your husband have done to someone who came into your home in the night and made off with your food, your clothes?

PATSY

(Conceding nothing, but somewhat amazed at ALLEN's vigorous defense.) Colonel, let me ask ya this. If our men weren't willin' to die in yer army on the battlefield, did y'all think they were gonna be willin' to die o' starvation in the hollers with their families? Did yer folks really think we wouldn't do nothin'?

ALLEN

They could have joined the effort. Instead, they chose to become outlaws and organized the raid.

PATSY

(Pauses and smiles.) Oh, it weren't that organized. Half our men was gone into the hills . . . huntin', lookin' for food. An' one day this feller named Kirk and a bunch o' others come ridin' into the holler just as hungry as we were. Musta been twenty of 'em and I thought fer sure they were gonna take what little we had. An' when I told Kirk we didn't have no food to spare, not even enough fer ourselves, I thought they might be the last words ever pass my lips. Well, that feller – big he was, mean lookin' – just sat there in his saddle lookin' 'round like he was wonderin' what was scruffier, the animals or us. Then, he looked at me an' said, "Mrs., what kinda Christmas y'all have?" Well, right then I realized Christmas done gone by me like a whistle past a deaf man. An' he just looked at me an' laughed like I was the most lost creature on this earth. "Well, I'll tell ya what", he said. "You tell yer men folk to join up with us an' we'll go get what we need." All the salt we wanted, he said

ALLEN

You know, you're talking about John Kirk, a lieutenant in the Yankee army.

PATSY

He coulda been the devil's own an' it wouldn't a made no difference! 'fore we knowed it every man wasn't already out in the woods huntin' joined up.

ALLEN

They should have considered the consequences.

PATSY

The consequences o' doin' nothin' was dyin'.

KEITH

So, it's true your son and husband weren't among the raiders?

I. i.

PATSY

Them boys! Oh, they wanted to be. Darn near made David crazy when he got back from the woods an' found out what he missed. But, I was glad. I feared somethin' bad'd come of it. But, I never thought innocent folks'd git took up.

(Pauses for a moment to gather herself, then addresses KEITH.)

D'ya ever catch that Kirk feller?

KEITH

No.

(A lengthy pause as all contemplate what's been said.)

ALLEN

(Breaking the silence.) Are you satisfied now, Mrs. Shelton?

PATSY

Beg pardon, Colonel.

ALLEN

I said, are you satisfied? Although we may have different interpretations of the events, you now know why your husband and sons died. I hope it has brought you some comfort.

PATSY

(After a pause, she smiles, then begins laughing and shakes her forefinger at ALLEN as she might at a boy whose hand she has caught in the cookie jar.) Why, Colonel, ain't you the dickens? Tryin' to git 'long home 'fore we even got to the best part.

ALLEN

The best part?

DAVID

Don' let 'im git away, Momma!

PATSY

The killin' I mean. What happened, what my boys said . . . what ya said to them . . .

(ALLEN does not immediately respond.)

KEITH

Lawrence, please. It can't do any harm.

(ALLEN continues to mull it over.)

YOUNG JIM

I asked the Lord to spare us, Momma! So we could be with you!

OLD JIM

I. i.

Hush, boy!

YOUNG JIM

And Daddy asked 'em to spare David and me.

OLD JIM

I said hush!

ALLEN

There were thirteen of them. M'am, I don't even know which ones were your sons and your husband.

DAVID

He's skeered! Skeered to tell!

KEITH

Lawrence . . .

ALLEN

I'm sorry.

PATSY

Yer doin' it to spite me!

ALLEN

Whatever you may think of me and whatever awaits us outside that door, I swear, I did not know your husband and sons. If I could, I would respond, but I cannot. I'm sorry.

YOUNG JIM

Your mornin' glories, Momma! I seen what was gonna happen an' I just closed my eyes an' thought about yer mornin' glories.

OLD JIM

'at's enough!

KEITH

(Uncertainly.) Morning glories?

PATSY

What?

KEITH

I said, morning glories.

YOUNG JIM

You remember, Momma!

I. i.

ALLEN

(To KEITH.) Jim, what are you doing?

KEITH

Your boy fourteen, maybe fifteen . . . I . . . I don't know. Maybe I'm just confused.

PATSY

(Delighted by the fresh memory.) No, no. Ya ain't confused. I made 'im put 'em in every fall so he'd see 'em when they come up in the spring. It'd shame him cuz flowers ain't manly an' his daddy said they was uppity. But, I know he liked 'em. He told ya about that?

ALLEN

It's not worth it, Jim.

KEITH

(Disregarding ALLEN.) I must have overheard . . . him and another boy.

YOUNG JIM

He can talk for us! We can talk with Momma!

PATSY

The other boy . . . name o' David?

KEITH

(Thinking, trying to recall.) Yes. One they called David and the other Young Jim.

ALLEN

What are you doing?

KEITH

Young Jim was frightened

DAVID

(To YOUNG JIM.) Skeerdy cat!

KEITH

And David – even younger – cursed us like a sailor.

PATSY

What? What did they say?

KEITH

(Approaching PATSY.) After we caught them . . . the night before . . . the night before they died, we were holding them in an old house, all in one room and I listened from i. outside the door.

(Lights fade except for an amber light that indicates we've gone back in time. It is cast on DAVID, YOUNG JIM, and OLD JIM)

DAVID

(Standing atop a bench.) Mr. Moore says when they find out we wasn't in the raid, they gonna let us go an' he gonna hunt 'em down, specially those officers . . . an' I'm gonna help!

YOUNG JIM

You ain't gonna do nothin'.

DAVID

Who's gonna stop me?

YOUNG JIM

What if they don't let us go?

OLD JIM

Quit skeerin' the boy.

DAVID

I ain't skeered.

YOUNG JIM

(To OLD JIM.) Well, it's the truth, ain't it? They say they don't care we wasn't in the raid. They gonna kill us!

DAVID

He's skeered!

OLD JIM

(To DAVID.) Quiet.

YOUNG JIM

Fer somethin' we ain't even done.

OLD JIM

Boy, you done something worse'n that raid.

YOUNG JIM

What?

OLD JIM

(Facetiously.) You was born, boy! . . . a barefooted, ridge-runnin', heathen savage. I. i. Ain't worthy o' the life the Lord give ya.

YOUNG JIM

Stop it, Daddy.

OLD JIM

(Continuing in the facetious tone.) Ig'nrrnt, lazy. Why, if you was a nigger, they couldn't sell ya. They'd have to give ya away.

YOUNG JIM

That ain't what I'm talkin' 'bout.

OLD JIM

Lookin' down their noses . . .

YOUNG JIM

Hatin', Daddy. They hate us!

OLD JIM

Relax, boy. It ain't ever been otherwise.

YOUNG JIM

But, they're talkin' 'bout how they're gonna shoot us.

DAVID

Mr. Moore says they doin' it just to skeer us.

YOUNG JIM

How do you know?

OLD JIM

Cuz they're flesh'n blood like you n' me. Now, don't ya worry. They just gonna take us to Nashville, put us in uniforms, and try to make soldiers outta us. An' when they do, we'll come home. *(Smiling conspiratorially to DAVID.)* Ya understand?

DAVID

Yes, sir!

YOUNG JIM

An' what if they don't make us soldiers?

OLD JIM

(To YOUNG JIM more urgently.) Boy, you ever seen one man kill another in cold blood? Look 'im right in the eye an' stick a knife in his gut?

YOUNG JIM

No, sir But, they're soldiers.

I. i.

OLD JIM

You think 'at makes 'em diff'rnt? Soldier kills cuz he has to, cuz he's skeered, cuz the other feller's tryin' to kill him. But, that ain't the kind o' killin' we're talkin' 'bout. We talkin' 'bout the kind where the other feller ain't no further 'way 'n I am from you.

(OLD JIM moves close.)

Think ya could do it?

YOUNG JIM

Well, I

OLD JIM

(Almost violently.) You stick 'im! Watch the fear o' death in his eyes, the life oozin' outta 'im, knowin' someday you gonna feel that same fear.

YOUNG JIM

(Angrily.) We ain't talkin' 'bout me.

OLD JIM

Him lookin' ya in the eye, beggin' fer his life even after ya done it an' there ain't no savin' 'im. Could ya do it?

YOUNG JIM

I . . . I . . . No.

OLD JIM

Me neither.

DAVID

I could!

(OLD JIM cuffs DAVID sending him sprawling.)

OLD JIM

(To YOUNG JIM.) Well, them soldiers ain't no diff'rnt from us. An', if the time comes, they'll find out. Ya understand?

YOUNG JIM

(Uncertainly.) Yes, sir.

(Lights come back up signaling a return to the present. The attention of all returns to KEITH who still steeped in the memory, staring into midspace.)

KEITH

Their father was so wise . . . and so wrong.

PATSY

Why, Mr. Keith? Why was he wrong?

I. i.

KEITH

Do you mean why did we . . . ?

PATSY

How!? How could ya . . . ?

KEITH

I don't know. I . . . uh . . .

PATSY

(Shrieking at KEITH.) Did ya do it just fer fun!?

KEITH

No! . . . No . . .

PATSY

What kinda man are ya?

(KEITH is crushed in anguish.)

ALLEN

Stop it!

(PATSY turns her glare on ALLEN.)

You can have your goddamn revenge out there, but for God's sake let him go to his grave in peace!

PATSY

That ain't revenge, Colonel. I just wanna know how . . .

ALLEN

For the same reason a soldier does anything. We had orders!

PATSY

What?

ALLEN

What did you expect? A titanic struggle between good and evil? A heart rending story of personal anguish? *(Regains his composure and repeats evenly.)* We had orders.

PATSY

An' that talk o' goin' to Nashville?

ALLEN

A story to maintain order.

PATSY

I. i.

Ya mean if they knowed the truth . . .

ALLEN

They would have been thirteen desperate men.

PATSY

Boys! My boys!

ALLEN

Everybody was somebody's boy.

PATSY

Colonel, I don't believe it was that simple. It couldn't a been.

ALLEN

The orders were issued by Heth. Supplies were short and men were needed in the east. He didn't think your men could be made into soldiers and he didn't want to be troubled with prisoners – those were his exact words, “troubled with prisoners”.

PATSY

But, that ain't the same as . . .

ALLEN

Mrs. Shelton, you've never answered to a general. They enunciate objectives without saying how they should be accomplished. They tell us we can have any resources we request, but only after making sure we know they have none to spare. Then, they send us off with a reminder that we must succeed and they don't much care how.

PATSY

So, yer sayin' this General Heth knowed what ya was gonna do?

ALLEN

Worse. He didn't care.

PATSY

An' that was just fine with you.

ALLEN

No! As a matter of fact it wasn't. I don't approve of that kind of leadership. But, it wasn't my place to approve or disapprove.

OLD JIM

(Enraged.) Kill ‘em now! Send ‘em out there an’ kill ‘em now!

YOUNG JIM

It was him, Momma! He’s the one gave the order!

(KEITH still in agony covers his hears.)

I. i.

DAVID

Make ‘im go outside, Momma – get what he deserves!

PATSY

Yer animals! *(Looks at the writhing KEITH.)* Both o’ ya are animals!

KEITH

(To PATSY.) I’m sorry. Mrs. Shelton, I . . .

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Get out there an’ die, you bastard! Go on an’ meet yer maker!

DAVID

An’ him to! *(Pointing to ALLEN.)* They both gonna burn, ain’t they, Daddy!

YOUNG JIM

Both o’ ya ‘ll burn in hell!

KEITH

(Almost delirious he hits his knees and begins to pray loudly, urgently. The stunned PATSY and ALLEN can only watch. The ghosts continue their abuse.)

Mercy . . . mercy . . . dear Lord. Peace for us all, I pray. Hear me when I call! Oh God of righteousness, give ear to my words, hearken unto the voices that beseech thee. Lighten our eyes lest we sleep . . .

OLD JIM

There ain’t no sleep fer you!

KEITH

. . . the sleep of death. Make the way straight before us. Lift up the light of thy countenance upon us . . .

OLD JIM

The Lord shall abhor the bloody and deceitful man!

(Lights dim on PATSY, ALLEN, OLD JIM, YOUNG JIM, and DAVID, leaving only KEITH and MARY illuminated.)

KEITH

Put gladness in our hearts and lay me down in peace. . .

OLD JIM

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron . . . dash them to pieces like the potter's vessel!

KEITH

. . . and sleep . . . and sleep . . . and sleep.

I. i.

MARY

(Begins to sing "Just as I Am, Without One Plea".)

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

(Begin slow fade.)

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To the, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, O come, I come.

(Blackout. End of Act I.)

ACT TWO

The house goes dark and the silence is broken by MARY's voice singing Stephen Foster's "Hard Times Come Again No More".

MARY

Let us pause in life's pleasures and count its many tears,
While we all sup sorrow with the poor.
There's a song that will linger forever in our ears,
Oh, hard times come again no more.

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,
Hard Times, hard times come again no more.
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door,
Oh, hard times come again no more.

(Lights fade in gradually, first on MARY who stands among the benches, then on KEITH who kneels at the rail, head down, exhausted and silent.)

While we seek mirth and beauty and music light and gay,
There are frail forms fainting at the door:
Though their voices are silent, their pleading looks will say
Oh, hard times, come again no more.

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,
Hard Times, hard times come again no more.
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door,
Oh, hard times come again no more.

(As MARY begins the third stanza lights fade in on all. ALLEN sits behind KEITH, his face in his hands. PATSY stands down left looking away into midspace. OLD JIM is lying on a bench perhaps asleep. YOUNG JIM and DAVID are very near PATSY observing her.)

'Tis a sigh that is wafted across the troubled wave,
'Tis a wail that is heard upon the shore,
'Tis a dirge that is murmured around the lowly grave,
Oh, hard times come again no more.

'Tis the song, the sigh of the weary,
Hard Times, hard times come again no more.
Many days you have lingered around my cabin door,
Oh, hard times come again no more.

DAVID

Momma sure looks old. *(Stops and thinks for a moment.)* Jim, how long ago was it we was killt?

YOUNG JIM

Thirty year.

DAVID

Ya think she remembers . . . from before I mean?

YOUNG JIM

The important stuff. Ain't nobody remembers everything.

DAVID

I remember all kinda stuff weren't important – like how many stones there was in the chimney an' where ya could hide stuff and . . .

YOUNG JIM

Do ya remember what Momma looked like . . . then I mean ?

DAVID

Course I do! . . . *(Then he considers and looks worriedly at YOUNG JIM.)* . . . I think.

YOUNG JIM

Me neither.

(KEITH looks up with a pained expression. Noticing that his friend has stirred, ALLEN looks up at him as does PATSY. Pause. Slowly KEITH becomes painfully aware that he is center of attention. He is confused.)

KEITH

I'm sorry. Is . . . is something wrong?

DAVID

(Recovering quickly.) He's startin' again!
(All the ghosts sit up and take notice.)

ALLEN

(Stepping forward to comfort him.) It's all right, Jim.

KEITH

What is it? What did I say?

ALLEN

You prayed.

(Looks to PATSY causing KEITH to do so as well.)

PATSY

(Considers KEITH at length.) Mr. Keith, ya ain't the man I remember . . . not at all.

(KEITH is confused as PATSY approaches and looks into his face.)

Oh, maybe the eyes.

KEITH

We've met before?

PATSY

I seen ya.

(PATSY laughs at the wonder.)

Don't remember, do ya?

(KEITH stares blankly.)

When ya first come to the Laurel after the raid. Oh, Mr. Keith, you was a sight . . . ridin' into our clearing, high up in that saddle with all them men marching behind ya. Why, I'd say ya was almost dashing.

KEITH

(Smiles feebly at the notion that seems so absurd given his present state.)

It was a very long time ago. *(Pauses to reflect, then looks up with a new question.)* Did you know we were coming?

PATSY

There was rumors. That's why there weren't many men folk . . . 'cept fer the old ones . . . the ones too feeble to go lightin' out into the hills in the dead o' winter.

KEITH

But, you . . . why didn't you go . . . and the others? Weren't you afraid?

PATSY

Didn't think we had reason to be. Figgered ya'd come, find out Kirk an' his boys was gone, and set out after 'em.

KEITH

No.

ALLEN

Our first order of business was . . .

PATSY

(Somewhat harshly to ALLEN who she does not trust.)

Ah, Colonel, there ya go again. I know – put down the insurrection . . .

ALLEN

And to recover what we could of what was taken.

PATSY

Was that the reason? *(Then, sincerely to KEITH.)* Is that really why ya was there?

KEITH

Those were our orders.

OLD JIM

The truth, old man.

PATSY

But, is that why you was there? Was ya just follerin' orders like the Colonel said? Cuz ya sure was a buster.

OLD JIM

Tell her.

KEITH

I asked General Heth to send me and my men to Shelton Laurel. I was the one who called it an insurrection.

ALLEN

(Cutting off KEITH.) But, there were still your men who'd ridden with Kirk in the raid.

PATSY

An' those that didn't. *(Then, to KEITH.)* Didn't make no difference, did it Mr. Keith?

KEITH

We wanted them all . . . *(Remembering and regretting the rage he felt then.)* I . . . I wanted them.

OLD JIM

Boys, children . . .

ALLEN

We had no way of knowing who was and wasn't . . . They made it impossible.

PATSY

(To ALLEN.) He didn't even try. *(Then, to KEITH.)* Does the Colonel here know? He know what ya done . . . how ya found 'em?

ALLEN

(Interceding. Fearing this will take KEITH somewhere he doesn't want to go.) Yes. Yes, I know it all.

OLD JIM

Say it!

PATSY

Do you? Are ya sure? 'Cuz I think Mr. Keith wants to tell us.

KEITH

Yes, Lawrence.

(OLD JIM laughs in satisfaction.)

ALLEN

James, there's no point. It no longer matters.

PATSY

It does . . .

ALLEN

To you.

PATSY

To him.

OLD JIM

(Fervently.) To God!

(OLD JIM laughs and his sons titter. MARY moves closer to KEITH.)

KEITH

(To ALLEN.) It does, Lawrence.

(ALLEN turns away, but does not object.)

My men and I rode from cabin to cabin, taking the women . . . one at a time . . . I always started with the ones who looked like they might have husbands or maybe brothers old enough to fight . . . the ones that were out in those hills bushwhacking us . . . or in the raid, I guess. It seemed the humane thing at the time . . . spare the old men and old women and, of course, the children . . . *(ominously.)* unless no one would tell . . .

PATSY

Tell what? Where the things was that was took, like the Colonel said?

KEITH

That wasn't the question. *(ALLEN turns and looks at KEITH. To PATSY.)* Do you know the question?

PATSY

I got the marks.

OLD JIM

Bastard!

KEITH

(KEITH winces and for the first time looks closely at PATSY's face.)

I should remember you . . . I should see the faces, but I don't. I only hear.

PATSY

Hear what?

KEITH

Voices.

OLD JIM

Screams!

(DAVID begins whooping, but MARY quiets him. She starts humming "Long, Long Ago".)

KEITH

Voices . . . so many voices . . . one voice.

(Lights fade except for an amber on KEITH and MARY signaling that we've gone back in time.)

Sergeant! That one!

(MARY stops humming and looks up in wide-eyed innocence.)

To the stump!

(MARY is flung as though by invisible hands to the railing and is driven to her knees with arms draped over the railing to expose her back for whipping. She looks toward the audience in terror as a sadistic KEITH stands over her.)

The mule whip at the ready, Sergeant. Now, again. Where are they?

MARY

Who?

KEITH

Your men – the ones sniping at us, your dirty, illiterate, stinking men who steal from our families.

(Lifts MARY's chin as she continues to face toward the audience.)

You have a husband?

MARY

No, sir.

KEITH

You sure? They marry 'em off young in these hollers and a prime piece of womanhood like you can't go unspoiled.

MARY

No, sir. I ain't married.

KEITH

Probably didn't bother to wait for a wedding. I'll bet you have a beau . . . DON'T YOU!

MARY

Yes . . . Yes, sir.

(A spot comes up on YOUNG JIM.)

KEITH

And where is this beau of yours?

MARY

(Whimpers in fear.) I don't know. I think he's off huntin' somewheres.

(KEITH motions to the imaginary sergeant to strike a blow. MARY's body jerks and her face contorts as she cries out in pain.)

KEITH

Where?

MARY

Up the mountain somewheres . . . I don't know.

KEITH

I don't like to do this, you know. But you're making me. Now, tell me where he is.

MARY

(Crying in fear.) I don't know.

(Again KEITH motions to the sergeant producing the same result.)

KEITH

No one needs to know you told. It's just between you and me and the sergeant here.

MARY

I can't . . . Please?

KEITH

(Moves his face close to MARY's.) Just whisper.

(He waits, but MARY can only whimper. KEITH motions and the sergeant strikes again causing MARY to jerk and cry in pain and it occurs to her she may die.)

MARY

(Trying to distance herself, she begins to feebly sing "Where Is Thy Spirit, Mary" by Stephen Foster. See <http://www.stephen-foster-songs.com/Foster55.htm> .)

Where is thy spirit, Mary?

Dwells it in the air?

Friends thou hast forsaken

Fondly deem 'tis ling 'ring there.

(KEITH motions and the sergeant strikes once. He motions a second time and the sergeant strikes again causing the weeping MARY to turn for the first time to KEITH whose face is still near. She whispers in his ear.)

KEITH

(Smiles broadly and stands.) Help the young lady up, Sergeant.

(The spot on KEITH fades. MARY rises achingly and looks to YOUNG JIM, then down in shame when she sees he has been watching. She slowly makes her way back to her accustomed place where she sits alone face in hands. Lights up on all signaling that we have returned to the present. KEITH is back to his accustomed place, again the disheveled old man.)

YOUNG JIM

(Delicately approaching MARY.) Mary? Mary?
(There is no response from the ashamed MARY.)
It don't make no difference.

OLD JIM

Leave her be, boy.
(He moves the distraught YOUNG JIM away.)

KEITH

(To PATSY.) Who was she? . . . the young one . . . She sang.

PATSY

Sang?

KEITH

While . . . While I had her whipped, she sang. Did you know her?
(PATSY looks down and seeing this, KEITH continues.)
Was she all right . . . after, I mean?

PATSY

All right ?

KEITH

Never mind . . .
(Can't go on and PATSY takes pity.)

PATSY

Her name was Mary . . . Musical Mary folks called her.
(YOUNG JIM crosses to MARY and puts an arm around her.)

KEITH

Musical Mary?

PATSY

After that day she never talked much. Just sang, mostly to herself. Men'd still come calling cuz she was so pretty an' all, but she didn't want none of it an' took herself a place way up the holler.

KEITH

Is she still there?

PATSY

One winter about ten year ago they found her in her cabin froze . . . just layin' there in 'bed . . . plenty of wood fer the fireplace – matches. Some folks said she musta had a stroke. I s'pose it's possible.

(The distressed KEITH looks away.)

ALLEN

The war produced many sad stories.

PATSY

Why, Colonel, ya almost sound like you care.

ALLEN

Mrs. Shelton, think of me what you will, but I do feel sorrow. You and I disagree about a great deal, but one thing is certain. It was a great tragedy.

PATSY

You know, Colonel, if ya didn't know so many words . . .

(Pauses and shakes her head.)

ALLEN

If I didn't know so many words what?

PATSY

I think ere's a heart beatin' in there an' it just can't seem to find its way out.

DAVID

Tain't neither.

ALLEN

I choose not to be a slave to it.

PATSY

Maybe ya should.

ALLEN

Do you think then I'd tell you I'm sorry for what happened to your husband and sons?
(Pause.) Because I will anyway. I am sorry.

OLD JIM

He don't know what sorry means.

PATSY

That ya killed my boys?

ALLEN

That it was necessary.

PATSY

Them words again!

ALLEN

Not words . . . deeds. It's the men who conducted the raid on Marshall with whom you should be angry – the ones who refused to put on a uniform and fight according to the rules of war.

PATSY

What rules?

ALLEN

The one's where men of honor wear uniforms so innocent civilians aren't harmed . . . so women and children don't have to be taken up . . .

PATSY

And that makes all right what happened to Mary an' me?

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) An' how many others, old man?

DAVID

You tell 'im, Momma!

ALLEN

No, it wasn't all right. It was horrible. Shouldn't have been necessary, but it was because they made it so.

PATSY

So, we was responsible?

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) Don't you let him do that!

ALLEN

Your men – the ones who joined in the raid. The ones who ran into the hills instead of standing and fighting. We did not go to Shelton Laurel to torture old men and women. We didn't go through burning and killing everyone in sight. No! We did only what we had to . . . putting our own men at risk.

PATSY

What risk?

ALLEN

Do you know how much easier, how much more effective it would have been to destroy everything . . . everyone? We wanted only the men – the ones responsible.

PATSY

But, ya took ‘em all . . .

ALLEN

And what else were we to do when they wouldn’t identify themselves and no one else would either? What was I to say?

DAVID

It’s a lie!

YOUNG JIM

(*To KEITH.*) Make ‘im tell!

PATSY

To yer general?

ALLEN

To my men, frostbitten from marching for days in your God-forsaken hills – the ones wounded by your bushwhackers – the ones who died? We had a mission . . . a duty.

PATSY

My God, there ain’t no end to it! (*Pauses, turning away from ALLEN. Then takes a long look at KEITH.*) Mr. Keith, was he always this way? Don’t he change like other folks . . . like me an’ you? Ya know, if I just bumped into ya on the street out there, I never woulda recognized ya. Hard to believe yer the same feller I saw all those years ago.

KEITH

Age reduces us all.

PATSY

I ‘spec that’s got something to do with it. But, sometimes don’t ya think back all them years ago an’ don’t it seem like it weren’t even you – like yer remembering somebody else.

KEITH

Yes.

PATSY

A whole different person, huh?

(KEITH nods agreement. Then to ALLEN.)
What about you, Colonel? You know what we're talking about?

ALLEN
Of course.

PATSY
Really? Because ya wear it so much better'n us. *(To KEITH.)* Why I bet he don't hardly look different now than he did then.

KEITH
Lawrence has aged well.

PATSY
Pretty much the same feller?

KEITH
(Studies ALLEN and says admiringly.) Constancy was always one of Lawrence's virtues.

PATSY
(To KEITH.) I suppose 'at depends on what you're constant about, don't it? I mean, look at ya – all tore up, but the Colonel here . . .

ALLEN
Don't use James's misfortune to condemn me.

PATSY
Misfortune?

ALLEN
You believe you have vision – insight, don't you? Because I'm not haunted like James -- don't walk around in a state of distress, you think I'm incapable of compassion or remorse or whatever it is that your fevered mind thinks I should feel. Well, you may not believe this, but I do understand how you feel.

YOUNG JIM
He can't.

DAVID
He's just skeered!

ALLEN
(To KEITH.) James, you know what I mean.
(KEITH nods assent.)
So, before you waste any more time lording your grief, your victimhood over us, understand that others have grief as great as yours, tragedies as big, but they overcome

them. That James cannot I think is horrible, but you choose not to – you prefer to wallow in grief, making it your calling card, enjoying the somber deference people show when they learn of your past. Well, I'll give you this much. I'm grateful fate did not make me like you, but I will not be made to apologize for my sanity.

PATSY

Well, I'll be! *(To KEITH.)* Ain't that amazing? You come here to save your soul and he *(Turns back to ALLEN.)* Why are you here?

ALLEN

I had a friend in need.

PATSY

In need of what? Why are you here, listenin' to some crazy old woman from the hollers?

ALLEN

I don't think I shall be for long. *(Turns as though to leave.)*

OLD JIM

Time he met his maker!

PATSY

Oh, really? Ya had a sudden attack o' courage? Ain't ya skeered no more by what's on the other side o' that door?

DAVID

He's skeered!

PATSY

That's why ya stayed, ain't it? Ya think folks is waitin' out there to kill you. All this time, Mr. Keith here's been trying to save his soul, you just been trying to figure out how to save yer life. Well, what happened, Colonel? Don't ya care about that no more? Ya ready to walk out there now? *(Noting ALLEN's hesitation.)* Ya still ain't told me the story 'bout what happened. You afraid if ya do somethin' bad's gonna happen? Somethin' even worse 'n what's out there? Must be fearsome, ya'd rather die than talk 'bout it.

(ALLEN flashes a disdainful look and starts for the door. The ghosts follow excitedly.)

OLD JIM

Go on out there, you bastard!

(MARY begins singing "Oh Lamb of God, I come." As dialogue continues.)

PATSY

Well, what if I told ya there ain't nobody there?

(All are stunned. ALLEN stops.)

Never was.

DAVID

What? What's she sayin', Daddy?

PATSY

What if ya coulda walked out that door any time, a free man?

ALLEN

(Turns.) I have no more interest in what you have to say.

PATSY

It' don't matter to Mr. Keith here. He's gonna stay, ain't ya?

OLD JIM

(To KEITH after realizing that death does not await beyond the door.) You go out there, you're taking us with you, old man. Ain't nothin' changed . . . ain't never gonna change.

(KEITH looks down.)

ALLEN

(Studies her closely then motions to KEITH, inviting him to come.) Jim?

(KEITH looks first at PATSY, then at ALLEN.)

Jim, it's time we left.

(KEITH looks anguished, but shows no sign of moving.)

PATSY

Ya go out that door now, ya ain't bein' brave nor dignified. Yer just flat out bein' skeered . . . skeered to the bone 'bout what's gonna be said. . . the story we gonna tell. 'At's how I knowed all this time, Colonel, ya got a heart cuz there ain't nothin' else fer you to be skeered of – not me, not Mr. Keith here. Only what yer heart n' soul gonna tell ya if ya let 'em.

ALLEN

(To KEITH.) You shouldn't subject yourself to this.

KEITH

(Showing no inclination to leave.) It goes with me.

PATSY

See that, Colonel? Man wants to save his soul.

(ALLEN looks at the forlorn KEITH who is clearly resigned to staying.)

Besides, why not stay? Ya say ya was right to do what ya done, so ya got nothin' to worry about. Just gonna listen to a couple old coots yammer 'bout old times. Might be fun. *(To KEITH.)* An' we ain't even got to the best part yet. Ain't that right, Mr. Keith?

ALLEN

(*To KEITH.*) Do you want me to stay?

PATSY

Oh, yes, yes, yes . Please do.

(*DAVID cheers his approval only to be silenced by OLD JIM.*)

ALLEN

(*To PATSY.*) Shut up, you damned banshee!

PATSY

Why, Colonel! Your language.

KEITH

No, you can go.

ALLEN

While you prostrate yourself before this?

(*Motioning to PATSY who reels with delight.*)

KEITH

None of us gets to choose his judge.

PATSY

Besides, I ain't so bad.

ALLEN

(*Turning on PATSY.*) You're worse than bad. You enjoy watching men suffer.

PATSY

Like I suffered, ya mean?

ALLEN

As we all suffer. But most of us manage to endure it gracefully – without your mania for revenge. I don't know what outcome you think this will produce, but I warn you, it won't take away your suffering, because your suffering comes from within.

PATSY

And what about yours?

ALLEN

Oh yes. Mine too – so much like yours that I tremble to think how close I must have come to being like you. (*To KEITH.*) You have noted the irony, haven't you, James? Mrs. Shelton and I, both grieving parents who lost innocent children because of the raid on Marshall.

PATSY

Well, Colonel, there's time fer everybody to tell their story

ALLEN

What if, at the end, you find out that all your bitterness and hate has been misplaced?

PATSY

An' what if you find out it ain't?

(PATSY and ALLEN stare at each, neither giving way.)

C'mon, Colonel. I'll take my chances if you'll take yers.

(ALLEN doesn't flinch and PATSY smiles. Continuing to stare back at ALLEN she says . . .)

Go on, Mr. Keith. Go ahead an' tell it.

(KEITH is at the railing. ALLEN walks downstage to the side of KEITH opposite the one occupied by PATSY suggesting two duelists with KEITH in the middle.)

KEITH

What?

PATSY

C'mon, git us started. Ya went up an' down this holler for what was it . . . two days? . . . roundin' up any man ya laid eyes on.

OLD JIM

(To KEITH.) It better be the truth.

KEITH

Of a certain age.

PATSY

An' what age was that?

KEITH

Well . . . uh . . .

PATSY

Ellison King . . . man was fifty if he was a day. Course, there was my Young Jim. Ya know how old he was?

ALLEN

Old enough.

PATSY

Fifteen year old – an' David?

KEITH

No.

PATSY

Thirteen year old! An' how many of 'em you kill?

ALLEN

I thought you were going to let Mr. Keith tell it.

PATSY

(Amused but chastened by the interruption.) So, I was. *(To KEITH.)* Well, Mr. Keith, ya go right ahead.

KEITH

The first day I caught nine or ten – your husband and sons were in that group – and some had ridden with Kirk in the raid – even bragged about it. That's how certain they were that we would take them to Knoxville. One of them, a deserter from our very own regiment even taunted us. But, after a while they didn't say anything and neither did we because it was cold . . . bitter cold.

PATSY

No sir. Cold don't pick n' choose.

KEITH

We found an old house to hold them that night, in a single room without so much as a fire for fear they'd burn the place down. I posted men at the door and outside the window to make sure no one could sneak out. And every couple of hours I'd make rounds to see that all was well. I guess it was on my second rounds when I noticed the prisoners talking. I should have ordered them silenced. It's not a good thing for soldiers to hear and get to know the men they may have to kill. But, I was – I don't know – curious, so I stopped.

PATSY

That when ya heared my boys?

KEITH

Among others. That first night, we were all new, wondering what would happen.

YOUNG JIM

(Picking up where KEITH left off. Lights fade except for ambers on DAVID, YOUNG JIM and OLD JIM who seems to be trying to sleep.)

Daddy, I told 'em we didn't have nothin' to do with the raid, but they wouldn't listen . . .
(There is no reaction from OLD JIM.)

DAVID

Skeerdy cat.

YOUNG JIM

(Ignoring DAVID.) Ya gotta try. Maybe they'll believe you . . .

OLD JIM

Ain't likely. Not a man in here won't say the same.

YOUNG JIM

Why not? It ain't fair. If it was me done somethin' like 'at, I'd own up 'fore makin' other folks suffer.

OLD JIM

You think them that done the raid was wrong?

DAVID

I wish't I done it!

YOUNG JIM

That ain't the point . . .

OLD JIM

But, was it wrong?

DAVID

Course it weren't. They had it comin'.

OLD JIM

(To DAVID with great annoyance.) Ya want it upside the head agin?
(DAVID is chastened.)

YOUNG JIM

I said that ain't the point.

OLD JIM

Let me ask you something. When them soldiers snatched you up, did you tell 'em who the raiders was?

YOUNG JIM

No, sir. I ain't no snitch.

OLD JIM

And that salt them fellers took, they shared it with everybody. Didn't they?

YOUNG JIM

Yeah, but . . .

OLD JIM

You have any qualms when we was offered our share?

(YOUNG JIM looks down in silent acknowledgment.)

Ya think we shoulda turned it down?

YOUNG JIM

I ain't sayin' . . .

OLD JIM

An' ya ate the meat that was cured with that salt?

YOUNG JIM

Yes, sir. I did.

OLD JIM

Now, I'm gonna tell ya somethin', boy. *(To DAVID.)* And you too.

(DAVID pays close attention.)

If any of them fellers was on that raid step forward, the three o' us are gonna step forward with 'em. Ya understand?

(YOUNG JIM and DAVID look up in disbelief.)

They might throw us in jail or, more likely, suit us up an' try to make soldiers of us, but the only thing them fellers in the raid got standing 'tween them an' a firing squad is us.

YOUNG JIM

(In a rare display of anger toward his father.) But, I didn't do it an' I don't wanna go to jail or be a soldier.

DAVID

I told ya' he was skeered!

OLD JIM

(To DAVID.) I told ya, boy . . .

YOUNG JIM

(To OLD JIM.) And I ain't skeered o' you neither!

(OLD JIM is genuinely surprised as YOUNG JIM lets go with a tirade.)

Them Confederates used to come around wantin' me join up an' fight fer 'em, an' the Yankees come through wantin' me to fight fer them, an' now it's the fellers that did the raid, an' you're sayin' I gotta stick up for them. Well, it ain't got nothin' to do with me – the war, the raid, none of it. An' I just want ya'all to leave me alone!

(YOUNG JIM moves to the end of the bench and turns away from OLD JIM and the stunned DAVID, who has never seen his father confronted this way.)

OLD JIM

(Not immediately sure how to react, he contemplates his options, then approaches YOUNG JIM with a hand on the shoulder, which is quickly shaken off.)

No, it ain't yer war.

YOUNG JIM

And it ain't yers nor his neither.

OLD JIM

An' if ya run far enough or find yerself a deep enough hole, ain't nothin' got to do with ya. Sometimes I think 'at's why our folks first come to the Laurel, so folks'd leave 'em alone. They already got pushed off their land, couldn't find payin' work, so they went somewheres they figgered no one'd bother 'em – no roads, not much good for farmin – just enough land an' game to let a man feed his family an' live in peace.

When I was a boy that story made me proud – proud to be a mountain man, o' bein' able to live in a place most folks are afraid of. 'Course ya look at it another way an' they was just cowards an' failures with nowheres else to go.

YOUNG JIM

Ya don't believe that.

OLD JIM

I don't know. I don't know what I believe. Pretty pathetic, huh? Ya got a old man can't tell the difference 'tween bein' brave an' bein' cowardly. So, maybe I shouldn't be tellin' ya what to do.

YOUNG JIM

But, ya think I'm bein' cowardly.

OLD JIM

I don't know if y'are or y'ain't. Somethin' ya gotta figger out fer yerself an', far as I'm concerned, whatever ya' decide's all right with me.

(Having said his piece, he turns away whereupon he's confronted with DAVID.)

DAVID

What about me?

OLD JIM

What about you?

DAVID

Do I gotta step forward with them fellers that done the raid?

OLD JIM

Prob'ly won't even be asked.

DAVID

Well, I will anyway!

OLD JIM

(Tousles DAVID's hair.) 'at's if they don't get rid o' ya on grounds o' general aggravation first.

DAVID

But, what if we don't see Ma again?

OLD JIM

She'll make do.

DAVID

But, I don't want to . . .

(Begins to break down and OLD JIM hugs him.)

OLD JIM

Boy, look out that window.

(DAVID does.)

You see them stars?

DAVID

Yes, sir.

OLD JIM

So many stars you can't even count 'em. Sometimes just bein' able to look at 'em all makes me feel like God. Then other times I feel like they're lookin' back an' I must be the tiniest, most no account critter on this earth. An' all I can figger is it prob'ly don't much matter what happens to me, but what I do, now that's somethin' might matter a whole lot.

(Lights come back up on others as we pass back into the present.)

KEITH

(Continuing the tale.) . . . and all through his tale I looked up at the sky and those stars and I almost forgot the rage that had been driving me.

(To Allen.)

Do you remember, Lawrence – that night?

ALLEN

You know I do.

KEITH

You came across me and asked if everything was all right . . . a strange choice of words.

(Lights down on all but KEITH and ALLEN who are in amber light indicating a flashback.)

KEITH

All right? . . . Yes, yes. Fine. I'm sorry. I guess I was daydreaming.

ALLEN

Remember, we set an example for the men.

KEITH

Yes, of course. *(Pause.)* Lawrence, what are we going to do with them?

ALLEN

The men?

KEITH

The prisoners – what are we going to do with them?

ALLEN

You know the punishment for thieves and deserters.

KEITH

But, they're civilians.

ALLEN

It's an insurrection, remember? Heth gave us orders.

KEITH

He didn't specifically say we should kill them.

(ALLEN looks at him doubtfully.)

He said we should put down the insurrection . . .

ALLEN

. . . and not bring back any more prisoners from Madison County. So, how do we do that if we can't kill them and we can't take them back for trial?

(KEITH is stumped.)

For God's sake, you're the one who went to Heth . . . who wanted two companies of men to finish off these damn savages.

KEITH

(Angrily.) I didn't want to

ALLEN

C'mon, Jim. It's all right. I want to finish them off too. They should be finished off. My God, what's got into you?

KEITH

I think some of them are innocent.

ALLEN

Innocent?

KEITH

Weren't part of the raid . . .

ALLEN

Maybe not, but what are they guilty of? Do you wait to kill a varmint until after it's attacked your stock?

KEITH

That's not my point.

ALLEN

That's right. It's not the point – who was guilty or not guilty of this or that. We're not a sheriff and a gaggle of deputies here to solve crimes. We're an army whose job it is to put down an insurrection.

KEITH

That was my word. Heth called it an insurrection because I told him.

ALLEN

He called it an insurrection because that's what it is. They threaten our towns, steal our supplies, harbor deserters and Union spies, and deplete our resources by diverting whole regiments to deal with them. My God! Half the generals in the Yankee army haven't accomplished as much.

KEITH

But they had reasons . . .

ALLEN

Reasons? And since when does an officer ask for reasons? Look at those men out there – our men . . . freezing, huddled around pathetic little fires, wondering if they'll survive tomorrow or the day after. (*Points out an imaginary window.*) What happens to any one of them who dares fall asleep on guard duty?

KEITH

He is shot.

ALLEN

And it doesn't matter if he's marched twenty miles . . . had no food . . . gone three days without sleep. He's shot. We do it. The Yankees do it.

KEITH

Soldiers know what's expected of them.

ALLEN

And it's a mighty punishment for giving in to a simple biological need. No excuses! They're executed . . . period! Now, if that's what's necessary to make our own

men understand, do you think anything less will make this rabble understand?

KEITH

But, when the innocent are punished along with the guilty . . .

ALLEN

It tells those who think they can act with impunity because they can escape into the hills that there will be consequences to pay, if not by them, then by others, the ones who harbor them. If they put our families at risk, they put their own at risk as well.

KEITH

Even children? Do you really mean that? Go look at them.

ALLEN

And have you checked the ages of our “men” lately. Half of them don’t shave and, thanks to this war, many never will. Is that fair or just?

KEITH

We can be better . . .

ALLEN

We’re talking about survival!

KEITH

On what terms?

ALLEN

Our men . . . our boys . . . every day they’re out there fighting for a cause. And in this perverse war they can die as easily for doing their duty as they can for not doing it. There is no power on heaven or earth that will persuade me that we should treat some ragtag bunch of savages, whose only concern is their own selfish interests, better than we treat our own soldiers who fight and die to protect our families – our way of life.

KEITH

(Cowed by ALLEN’s argument.) Lawrence, I can’t dispute that what you say is true. But the war can’t give us license to do anything however awful.

ALLEN

No, I suppose not. I hope not.

KEITH

But, where . . . where do we draw the line?

ALLEN

The line is drawn for us. We have orders. We can’t take them to Knoxville as prisoners and we will have failed in our mission if we let them go. Besides, I don’t want to.

KEITH

You can't mean you'll enjoy seeing them killed.

ALLEN

I won't grieve as much as when it's our own men we have to execute or a Yankee for that matter. Even they're to be respected for having the courage to put on the uniform and accept the consequences. No, this time won't trouble me much.

KEITH

Maybe if you knew them.

ALLEN

I'd probably dislike them all the more.

KEITH

They're not beasts. Ignorant perhaps, but not so different from us. I overheard some of them talking. A father and his sons. The sons were begging the father to explain to us that they didn't have anything to do with the raid.

ALLEN

If we asked, I'm sure none of them were in the raid.

KEITH

No. I'm quite sure these three didn't have anything to do with it.

ALLEN

So, what did the father say?

KEITH

Something you would have approved of. He told him that unless what the raiders did was wrong, that it's their job to stand by them whatever the consequences.

ALLEN

He probably doesn't know what the consequences are.

KEITH

I don't think it would make any difference.

ALLEN

Good for him and his sons. Three of them, at least, will die with some shred of dignity.

KEITH

That's all?

ALLEN

It's more than many of us will have before this war is over.

(End flashback. Fade to dark before lights up on KEITH, ALLEN, and PATSY. PATSY appears stunned by ALLEN's lack of compassion as does ALLEN himself.)

PATSY

(Steeling herself, addresses ALLEN.) Did you say them things?

(ALLEN is still stunned and does not respond.)

It's all right, Colonel. I told ya I wanted to hear.

ALLEN

(Without the confidence to argue, but not yet ready to capitulate.) I must have. I don't remember.

PATSY

And what ya said before about soldiers feelin' sorrow . . .

(ALLEN doesn't reply.)

They was boys an' their daddy.

KEITH

Lawrence was feeling sorrow that night.

PATSY

Not fer my children.

KEITH

For his own.

ALLEN

Stop.

KEITH

(To PATSY.) Did you know about them?

PATSY

Know what?

ALLEN

It's none of her business.

KEITH

Tell her, Lawrence.

(ALLEN doesn't respond.)

If you don't, I will.

(ALLEN turns away, but makes no attempt to stop KEITH who addresses PATSY.)

While we were talking that night a rider arrived . . . a messenger from Marshall who had come to tell Lawrence of a tragedy. Did you know that at the time of the raid Lawrence's family lived in Marshall?

PATSY

I heard.

KEITH

The raiders took money, boots, bed linens from his house.

(Pauses waiting to see if ALLEN will pick up with the narrative, but he continues to look away.)

PATSY

Ya said there was a tragedy.

KEITH

The bed linens were taken from the beds of Lawrence's six year-old son and his four year-old daughter. At the time they were ill with scarlet fever. Two weeks later, that night, they both succumbed to the illness.

PATSY

They passed on? Both of 'em?

(Return to flashback with amber lights on KEITH and the anguished ALLEN.)

KEITH

Lawrence, I'm sorry.

ALLEN

(Despairing.) Dear God, why? A minute ago you were speaking of innocence . . . and this is what it comes to?

KEITH

You must have faith. There is a reason.

ALLEN

They were children . . . so young they could be precious only to Martha and me. What purpose is served by such deaths?

KEITH

God has a reason.

ALLEN

Does he? But, if we can't know it, what does it matter? And even if we can . . . They were children.

KEITH

Look, why don't you return to Marshall. Martha will want . . .

ALLEN

No . . . No. She'll be looked after. I have a duty here.

KEITH

Lawrence, your family . . .

ALLEN

Many families, James . . . No. I belong here. (*Pause, then looks toward the room where the prisoners are held.*) Besides, we have business to take care of.

KEITH

What do you mean?

ALLEN

Are you still defending them . . . after this?

KEITH

I wasn't defending them.

ALLEN

You who whipped and pummeled women and old people -- the only man whose anger burned brighter than mine.

KEITH

I was talking about the innocent.

ALLEN

Innocent? . . . like my little Romulus and Betsy lying there fever-ridden, naked, and cold because their bedclothes had been ripped from their bodies? Why do you think God has chosen now to send me this news?

KEITH

Surely not so you would take revenge.

ALLEN

Revenge? . . . Oh no. I know you, James Keith. I know what you're thinking -- that God did it to make me feel the pain of innocents dying.

KEITH

I don't believe that God sends signs.

ALLEN

What did the messenger say my son's last words were? . . . Tell Daddy I love him . . . Tell my daddy I love him.

KEITH

Lawrence, I don't know what to say.

ALLEN

You think it's a warning.

KEITH

No! I don't!

ALLEN

Look at me . . . the love I feel now for my son, my daughter, for Martha . . . could someone capable of such love be evil? Could my son whose only request at his death was "Tell Daddy I love him" have said that of someone who is evil?

KEITH

I don't think you're evil.

ALLEN

But, I'm going to do it . . . we're going to kill them. And you're right. Innocents may die – will die. But, we'll do it because we have a duty.

KEITH

But, is it God's will?

ALLEN

We can't know God's will, but we do know our duty and like Abraham who was prepared to sacrifice his son, we must put our faith in that duty. It's what every soldier must do.

KEITH

Even if it means going to Hell?

ALLEN

If killing innocents in the performance of duty consigns us to Hell, then all the soldiers in all the armies that ever existed are on the way already. Every time we shell a town . . .

KEITH

We only do that when there are legitimate military targets. It's not intentional.

ALLEN

Not intentional? Then the word has no meaning. We do it with the full knowledge innocents will die – cause and effect – "A" therefore "B".

KEITH

But, that's not our objective. We're not trying . . .

ALLEN

But, it's an acceptable outcome all the same.

KEITH

It's a price we pay.

ALLEN

What price? We know innocents will die, even if only by accident. Don't you think the generals take the benefits of that into account?

KEITH

What benefits?

ALLEN

It awes the enemy . . . demoralizes him. My God, by the time the calculations are done the only thing separating intention from accident is the label we choose to place on it.

KEITH

Still, in the end we must answer to God – the same God to whom the men in that room may be praying right now.

ALLEN

The same God . . . you think so? People so ignorant, of such little understanding? Can any God they're capable of comprehending be any more than a pale facsimile – a clownish parody? Isn't our God bigger than theirs?

KEITH

He's still the same.

ALLEN

Their God who says it's all right to murder, pillage, and steal? Ask them! Ask any of them if they believe their God will punish them for what they have done – what they've done to Romulus and Margaret. James, we . . . you and I . . . must stand up for the one God, the true God who challenges us all to suffer in his name. If we don't stop these savages here and now, what excuse will I have, what can I say to Romulus and Betsy's mother, and when my time comes what will I say to our God . . . the true God?

(Pause.)

What will you say to God? What would you say to our soldiers, our boys who have died in their places? Tell me, James, in all you overheard did you hear them say one word – just one – expressing remorse or concern for the pain they've caused our families?

KEITH

No.

ALLEN

And you say the pray. What do you imagine they pray for?

KEITH

For their lives I expect.

ALLEN

But, what would you pray for if you were in their place? . . . What!?

KEITH

For my soul.

ALLEN

Not for your life -- For your soul! . . . as would all good Christians. So, what must we do with creatures who see not beyond themselves, who serve neither duty nor God, who undermine all that is noble while others suffer and die in their stead? They must be stopped!

(Lights up signaling a return to the present.)

KEITH

(Still overcome by ALLEN's passion.) He was right, on every count. I thought of his children, now dead, of him, and wondered how could I condemn him without consigning all mankind to hell? It was as he said, too great a monstrosity.

(Pause. All go silent as they consider. PATSY looks at ALLEN whose back is still turned, then ventures . . .)

PATSY

I'm sorry yer children died, Colonel. It was terrible. I think I understand.

ALLEN

(Turning angrily.) You understand what?

PATSY

Why ya done it

ALLEN

Revenge! You think it was revenge. What else would someone like you think?

PATSY

Yer sayin' it weren't?

ALLEN

God must have been feeling puckish to bring you and I together because we share so much history and are yet so different. You imagine it was revenge because you impute the way you would have reacted to others. Was I grief-stricken? Yes. But, what happened to your husband and sons was not the product of revenge. It was the result of an order that I would have carried out even if my family had not been victimized.

PATSY

My, my, but ya surely do hold yerself above things, Colonel. Ain't never met a man so skeered o' bein' human before.

KEITH

Lawrence tries to be better . . .

PATSY

An' he winds up bein' neither. So, go on, Mr. Keith. We know the story o' the Colonel's family now. Tell me 'bout mine.

KEITH

By the time I walked out into that starry night I knew what duty demanded and then I thought about what would happen – after they had been killed. God would not strike me dead. No demon from the underworld would rise up to snatch me away. No. I truly had God's permission. He had given me a job and he didn't care how it got done.

So, I called up two squads and before dawn broke, I rode back up that holler in search of more upon whom I could inflict righteous vengeance. Those that I'd whipped the day before should be glad they didn't encounter me again. I visited God's wrath on all. And I found more and the number of the condemned grew from eleven to fifteen and, by the end of that day, I knew I'd done well.

PATSY

Even if they was innocent!

KEITH

(Affecting the attitude he felt at the time.) Innocent? Every one of you . . . the way you curse, the way you clutch your ignorance – pride yourselves on it – the way you shirked your responsibilities while so many sacrificed, the way you rejected every civilizing influence -- everything good, everything noble.

PATSY

We was human beings!

KEITH

Who rejected everything that it meant to be human! . . . *(reverting to his present and more chastened attitude.)* Or so I believed. So, all that day I drove everyone I came near, friend or foe, to exhaustion – drove them until there were no more men or boys to be found and we had no more to give.

PATSY

An' all them words ya said to the Colonel about justice, my boys an' their daddy bein' innocent, havin' the same God?

KEITH

Words . . . the idle blatherings of a timid soul – not spoken out of concern for your sons or your husband or the other prisoners. Not even spoken out of principle. I was afraid – afraid of what would happen to me if we shot them. I suppose I had some vague notion that I might be punished by the army or by God. Who knows?

(His mood becoming bitter.)

Most people don't realize how much of what they call being good . . . being moral . . . is nothing more than fear – fear of the law or of the God they think will punish them. They imagine it's only the lowlifes, the ne'er-do-wells who need laws and the threat of punishment to keep them in line. As for themselves, they're quite sure that they would be the same moral people even if there were no jails, no firing squads. And how naïve they are. Given the opportunity, freed from fear, nine-tenths of them would become unholy terrors capable of acts that would shame a beast. They know not themselves. And if I were God I'd smite every last one of them who comes smugly to me in prayer calling himself a sinner, but without believing it – without any idea of how near Hell he treads and would fall if only the walls that protect him were removed. He must be a God of infinite patience. At least we'd better pray so.

PATSY

Ya got a low opinion o' just 'bout everybody, don't ya?

KEITH

Myself most of all.

PATSY

'at make it easier fer ya to kill 'em?

KEITH

(Ingoring PATSY.) It was dark before we got back with the new prisoners. The others were still in the house, but they were roiled. There was a rumor among our men that the prisoners would be killed and I caught one of the guards taunting them. I dressed him down – loudly, so the prisoners could hear – for spreading so contemptible a lie. The last thing we needed was to turn the prisoners into desperate men. So, I decided it would be best for me to stay with the guards that night. The next morning they were taken out and shot.

PATSY

That's it? Ya just took 'em out an' shot 'em? *(Looks pleadingly first at KEITH then at ALLEN.)* There's more. Before . . . when I asked what my boy said, you said "mornin' glories".

KEITH

It was just something that came into my mind. I don't even know when he said it.

PATSY

But, there was more. They didn't die in that house. We found 'em a mile or more from there . . .

ALLEN

I think James is trying to spare you the unpleasant details.

PATSY

Spare me? From what? *(A heartfelt plea.)* Colonel, do ya know I can't even remember the last time I saw my boys an' their daddy . . . what we said to each other. It was just ordinary times 'fore you come. I didn't have no reason to . . . to . . . I don't know.

(Looks down not knowing what to say. KEITH looks to ALLEN and his expression suggests he feels he should go on. ALLEN frowns.)

KEITH

Lawrence . . .

PATSY

Ya know, we're old folks, the three o' us an' I don't know 'bout you, but I think ya get to an age when this world can't do nothin' for ya no more . . . course, it can't do nothin' to ya neither. Yer kinda all by yourself watchin' what goes on around ya . . . try to help out now an' then . . . but, ya know it ain't really none o' yer business no more. Colonel, memories is all that's real fer me these days . . . more real'n that bench . . . more real'n you standing there. Truth is I don't care enough 'bout this world to get angry . . . to want revenge on you or anything in it. So, tellin' me ain't gonna do me no harm an' I ain't gonna do you no harm cuz what's yers is yers an' what's mine's mine an' that's the way we gonna take it to the grave.

(ALLEN is moved, but looks away as both PATSY and KEITH watch. PATSY finally becomes impatient.)

All right, Colonel, go on, get outta here. I don't know why ya even stayed this long. . . .

(ALLEN doesn't move.)

Well, go on! I told ya there ain't nobody waitin' for ya out there. Mr. Keith'll tell me everything I need to know.

ALLEN

(Wheels quickly and says urgently.) He can't! He wasn't there.

PATSY

What do ya mean?

ALLEN

You heard me. He wasn't there.

PATSY

Then why . . . ?

KEITH

It was my fault. I should have stayed. I could have . . .

(KEITH stops in shame. A pause while PATSY takes it in.)

PATSY

You ain't the one that killed 'em?

KEITH

No. What I did was worse. Whatever my duty . . . my responsibility – to kill them or to save them – I failed. I did neither. That night, things were in an uproar. The rumor of what we were going to do was spreading. I tried to calm things and took my spot where I could overhear the prisoners. Maybe if I hadn't, I could have gone through with it. But, that night . . . in the bitter cold that closes around you and makes you feel alone in the cosmos, their voices were inside my head and my soul was at war. On one side there was the impulse, the urge to have it done right now. And, on the other side, I don't know what. Compassion? A lack of resolve? All I know is that, when I heard Old Jim talking, at first I thought him a fool. The boy was telling him to his face the plain truth about what would happen and he couldn't see it. But, as I listened to his reasons why they wouldn't be killed – that we were like them, this father and his sons – I knew he was right, or I wanted him to be right. And I got scared . . . scared because both Old Jim and Lawrence were right, both justified, but I could not satisfy them both.

(Lengthy pause.)

PATSY

What did ya do?

KEITH

I ran. As the prospect of having to choose between killing them and saving them drew nearer, I began to feel panic. And it grew and grew until I began grasping for a way out . . . any way to avoid having to choose. Desertion? Suicide? I wasn't cowardly enough for the former or brave enough for the latter. Try to persuade Lawrence not to kill them? Just let them go? Right then and there . . . I was passing into delusion. And then . . . then it hit me – go out and find some more. Oh, it was absurd, of course. After two days of searching anyone that was going to be found had been. But, it was less absurd than a character as pathetic as me making the choice and living with the consequences. So, I ordered a squad to accompany me and left word for Lawrence telling him of my mission and my intention to rejoin him later. And off into oblivion I rode.

PATSY

So, ya didn't have nothin' to do with their killing?

KEITH

Nothing? I was the one who persuaded Heth to “put down the insurrection”, the one who assembled the troops, the one who scoured the hills and hollers capturing them. And, when I left on my imaginary mission, their fate was as certain as the sunrise. I had in every respect pulled the trigger. It was only a matter of time until the bullet reached its mark.

ALLEN

(To KEITH.) You should have told me.

KEITH

How could I?

ALLEN

Not then. Later.

KEITH

When? A day later? A year later? Ten years later . . . ?

ALLEN

Yes.

KEITH

You would have just persuaded me that I was wrong to feel as I did.

ALLEN

Maybe if we'd talked the voices you hear . . .

KEITH

The voices? . . . They're the last scrap of humanity left to me.

(KEITH stops and drops to his knees in silent prayer, but not at the railing, leaving PATSY and ALLEN to complete the story.)

PATSY

Well, Colonel, I guess that just leaves the two of us.

ALLEN

What do you want to know?

PATSY

Everything. Everything they did, saw, heard . . . felt.

ALLEN

(Reluctantly he begins.) It was as James described – a bitter cold morning when I returned to find that he had gone looking for more prisoners. I was returning from Marshall where I had attended my children's funeral. Right here, in this church . . .

(He looks around and PATSY does so with him.)

Two caskets – Betsy's where I stand, Romulus's where you stand . . . small, befitting their size. Otherwise nothing remarkable. Ceremonies were plain in those days, deaths being so common. Martha, my wife, was quite upset as you can imagine, and I felt guilty leaving her in that state, although that too was common in those days.

(As though he's caught himself wandering off the subject.)

I'm sorry. That's not what you asked to hear.

PATSY

Like I said, Colonel. Time for everybody's story.

ALLEN

So, I arrived, found James was gone and ordered the men to prepare the prisoners to march.

PATSY

Did ya tell 'em what ya was gonna do?

ALLEN

I told no one. Neither my men nor the prisoners.

PATSY

That just cuz ya was skeered what they'd do if they knowed? Or was ya hav'n second thoughts?

ALLEN

No. No second thoughts. James told you. It had been decided the night before. I don't know about the turmoil James described from the night before, but that morning they were a dour lot as my men shuffled them into something like a formation. If they were afraid, they didn't seem to be alert for danger. They looked down, said little. So, the march began.

PATSY

Them thinkin' they was going to Knoxville?

ALLEN

I expect.

PATSY

Did ya know which ones was my boys?

ALLEN

Not then. We'd marched a half mile when I ordered the column to stop and ordered a sergeant to take the prisoners into a little clearing at the side of the road and had them sit. Then, I had him form a squad . . .

PATSY

They musta knowed then.

ALLEN

I couldn't say.

PATSY

Or ya didn't care?

ALLEN

Both.

PATSY

Ya hated ‘em that much?

ALLEN

You don’t have to hate a man to kill him. In fact, it’s frightening how little passion is required. I ordered the sergeant to carry out his duty and that was it.

PATSY

No, Colonel. Ya ain’t convincing me ya just said “Fire” and nobody said or done nothin’.

ALLEN

What do you want? A description of the wounds – how the ball enters and flesh and bone explode?

PATSY

That’s all it is to ya . . . ? One thing hittin’ another?

ALLEN

That is all it is.

PATSY

And when yer children died, was that all?

ALLEN

(Sharply.) I don’t know. I wasn’t there. I was out in your hills and hollers . . .

PATSY

Oh, for God’s sake, why can’t ya just say it . . . ?! Say ya was angry . . . ya was in a rage.

ALLEN

I was following orders.

PATSY

Colonel, when ya first said about yer little boy an’ little girl, even I hurt . . mad as I was at ya. There ain’t no shame in hurtin’ . . . in bein’ so angry ya could . . . you could

ALLEN

. . . do what I did?

(A stunned silence as PATSY realizes the momentum of the exchange nearly led her to say, “Yes”.)

All right. You want to hear it? Every intimate detail? I’ll give it to you . . . and let God be my judge as he was theirs and will be yours. After the sergeant got them to the clearing he assembled a squad – the firing squad. He pointed to five of the prisoners to be taken aside. Then – then, they knew.

(Instant blackout signaling a flashback. Immediately we hear desperate cries for mercy presumably from the many prisoners. Gradually amber lights come up to reveal DAVID and YOUNG JIM seated on the floor down right looking up in terror, pleading. ALLEN stands sternly at a distance.)

ALLEN

Prisoners, to your knees! Your knees!

(Suddenly, OLD JIM, as though he has been grabbed by the scruff of the neck stumbles to the railing, ALLEN behind him and to his left. OLD JIM's pleading gives way to silent despair as he knows he has failed his sons – that he reassured them they would not be killed and now that it is about to happen and he feels responsible. But then, realizing that his attitude of despair may be interpreted as fear, he steels himself and looks up sadly but firmly, first at his sons and then at ALLEN.)

On your knees, damn you!

(OLD JIM drops to his knees at the railing still facing ALLEN. He maintains his composure, but barely. YOUNG JIM, DAVID, and the other voices are urgently pleading and, in some cases, cursing even more loudly. From the darkened area of the stage an adult voice shouts audibly . . .)

VOICE 1

For God's sake, you ain't gonna shoot us.

ALLEN

(Still staring back at OLD JIM.) Silence those men!

VOICE 1

You soldiers, don't let him . . .

ALLEN

I said silence those men!

(YOUNG JIM and the other voices go silent.)

OLD JIM

Colonel, not the children . . .

ALLEN

Sergeant! Have your men form a line!

OLD JIM

(Thunders!) There are children!

ALLEN

There are no children.

OLD JIM

Look at 'em!

(YOUNG JIM looks up as ALLEN looks at him.)

ALLEN

Squad READY.

OLD JIM

Can't we even pray?

ALLEN

AIM.

OLD JIM

May God have . . . !

ALLEN

. . . mercy on your soul. Fire!

(OLD JIM slumps over the railing head down. A pause in the remaining prisoners' pleas, but they quickly start up again with greater desperation.)

YOUNG JIM

No!

ALLEN

Sergeant! Remove those men and get five more.

(Lights go down. OLD JIM exits. YOUNG JIM is still seated when lights come back up. DAVID is not seen.)

YOUNG JIM

(To the presumed NELSON.) My brother . . . No! He wasn't on the raid

ALLEN

Shut him up! *(Pause.)* Sergeant! On their knees.

(The sobbing DAVID stumbles to his knees at the railing. A soldier presumably balks at killing children.)

You, soldier! Return to your place!

(From the darkened area a soldier's voice replies.)

SOLDIER'S VOICE

But, sir, he ain't even . . .

(The prisoners' pleas grow even more urgent at this sign of hope.)

ALLEN

Fire or you will take their place! Any man who fails to fire will take his place!

(Turns back in the presumed direction of the lieutenant.)

DAVID

Please, sir . . .

ALLEN

Sergeant! Are your men ready?

YOUNG JIM

No!

ALLEN

Fire!

(DAVID wilts. Blackout on all but ALLEN. DAVID exits. A horrible groaning is heard.)

SOLDIER'S VOICE

Sir, he's still alive! *(Pause.)* Colonel?
(Another pause.)

ALLEN

Finish him, Sergeant!

YOUNG JIM

No

(He winces at the presumed moment of the shot and so does ALLEN . . . but only slightly. All of this registers on YOUNG JIM who now tries to pull himself together for a last plea.)

ALLEN

Remove those men and take the last of them!

(YOUNG JIM is taken up and stumbles to a standing position at the railing, which is now illuminated. From the darkened area we hear MARY'S voice begin to hum "Oft in The Stilly Night" by Thomas Moore @ <http://www.stephen-foster-songs.com/Amsong68.htm> . She continues humming in the background throughout.)

YOUNG JIM

They ain't but three of us left. Colonel, you can stop it!

ALLEN

Sergeant! Have the prisoners kneel!

YOUNG JIM

Ya killed my father an' my brother. Please sir. Let me go home to my mother an' sisters
. . .

ALLEN

Squad . . . READY.

YOUNG JIM

Tell my mamma I love her. Tell her . . . !

(Flashback ends. Blackout on YOUNG JIM leaving only ALLEN illuminated.)

ALLEN

. . . I love her. Tell her I love her.

MARY

(A spot comes up on MARY who transitions into song. "Oft in The Stilly Night" -- <http://www.stephen-foster-songs.com/Amsong68.htm>. As MARY sings the first verse she looks at PATSY.)

Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond mem'ry brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears,
Of childhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm'd and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!

Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain hath bound me,
Sad mem'ry brings the light
Of other days around me.

(Quick blackout. At fade-in ALLEN is now kneeling at the railing transfixed, staring into mid-space. PATSY is seated in the first row of benches with her family closely and lovingly arrayed around her, although the spectral barrier remains unbroken. KEITH gazes with compassion at ALLEN.)

KEITH

(Carefully approaches ALLEN.) Lawrence . . . ? *(No response.)* Lawrence . . . ?
(Still no response.)

PATSY

I 'spec ya better leave him be right now.

(KEITH steps back perplexed and takes a seat beside PATSY.)

KEITH

He's hearing them.

PATSY

Who? My boys an' their daddy?

(KEITH nods.)

Then, I imagine yer the feller he'll need to see.

(A rueful smile from KEITH.)

Them voices . . . my boys' an' their daddy's . . . ya ever talk back to 'em?

KEITH

All the time. *(Pauses and thinks about it.)* Not that they listen.

PATSY

No. They weren't never much for listenin' to me neither.

(Pause.)

KEITH

(A whiff of playfulness.) Why do you ask?

PATSY

Next time ya talk to 'em, why don't ya tell 'em I said howdy?

(PATSY rises to exit.)

OLD JIM

(To a surprised KEITH.) No need, old man. *(Then to his equally surprised sons.)*

C'mon boys. It's time fer us to go home.

(OLD JIM, YOUNG JIM, and DAVID stand next to PATSY ready to depart with her.)

PATSY

Mr. Keith?

(A smile begins to cross KEITH's face.)

Mr. Keith, ya all right?

KEITH

Yes, ma'am.

(PATSY starts walking toward the door. All the ghosts follow except for MARY who continues to watch KEITH.)

PATSY

By the way, I'd appreciate it if ya didn't say nothin' to nobody 'bout today. The men in my family'd be real disappointed they weren't invited.

(PATSY turns to leave followed by the Shelton ghosts. Then, YOUNG JIM turns.)

YOUNG JIM

(To MARY.) Mary, ya comin'?

(KEITH turns as though he's heard. MARY turns and raises her hand in "goodbye" to YOUNG JIM. PATSY exits followed by the Shelton ghosts. MARY turns back to face KEITH. He smiles and turns to ALLEN who is still transfixed.)

KEITH

(To the unhearing ALLEN.) No rush, my friend. You take as long as you want.

(KEITH retreats to the first bench, lies down and begins humming the first line of "Long, Long Ago". MARY picks up the tune as we begin a long fade to black.)

MARY

(Sings "Long, Long Ago".)

Tell me the tales that to me were so dear,
Long, long ago, long, long ago,
Sing me the songs I delighted to hear,
Long, long ago, long ago,
Now you are come all my grief is removed,
Let me forget that so long you have roved.
Let me believe that you love as you loved,
Long, long ago, long ago.

(Blackout. End of play.)