

Produced and Annotated by JOHN R. CRAIG

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FTS 31110



THE  
LEGEND OF TOM DULA  
and other  
Tragic Love Ballads  
sung by  
SHEILA CLARK



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE



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SHEILA CLARK—Vocals and Guitar  
DAVID JOHNSON—Guitar, Banjo, Bass, Violin and Mandolin

## SIDE ONE

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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The Legend of Tom Dula is, in fact, a true story which to this day still offers the student of history a fascinating study in human nature. Is it true that this Confederate soldier who fought for his beloved Southland came back after the war to murder his true love? Is it not true that others had a motive, not the least of which was Ann Melton, a part-time lover of Tom?

Separating fact from fiction in the Legend of Tom Dula (pronounced Dooley by the folks in Wilkes County, North Carolina) is not always easy. However there are many facts that present themselves upon careful study.

Tom Dula was a veteran of the Civil War. He served as a private in the 42nd Regiment, North Carolina Infantry. He was wounded in battle, and for a short while was held prisoner until war's end. He returned home to Wilkes County, North Carolina; and soon after the murder of Laura Foster, he was tried and convicted of her murder.

Tom had dated Laura before and after his war years and had also spent time with Ann Melton. It was Ann who had a hand—if not the sole role—in the murder, if you listen to many accounts of the old folks' who lived during this time.

I have always been fascinated by the story as related and sung to me by my late Great Grandmother Zora Church Lee. Born in Summit, North Carolina, in Wilkes County where the murder took place, Grandmother Lee grew up learning first hand the events and people associated with the tragedy. Through many years of listening to her tell and sing about "Tom Dooley", I have collected many stories and tunes to go with the legend.

Having lived my entire life less than ten miles from the site where the real-life happenings relating to Laura Foster and Tom Dula occurred, I have developed a sense of closeness to the physical surroundings as well as to related stories told to me by my great grandmother. I am also indebted to Edith Ferguson Carter who contributed to my research on this album.

John R. Craig  
January, 1986

## THE BALLAD OF TOM DULA

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

You met her on the mountain  
There you took her life,  
You met her on the mountain  
Stabbed her with a knife.

(Chorus)

This time tomorrow,  
Reckon where you'll be,  
If it hadn't been for Grayson  
You'd a been in Tennessee.

(Chorus)

You had your trial in Wilkesboro  
But what do you reckon they done?  
They bound you over to Statesville  
And there's where you'll be hung.

(Chorus)

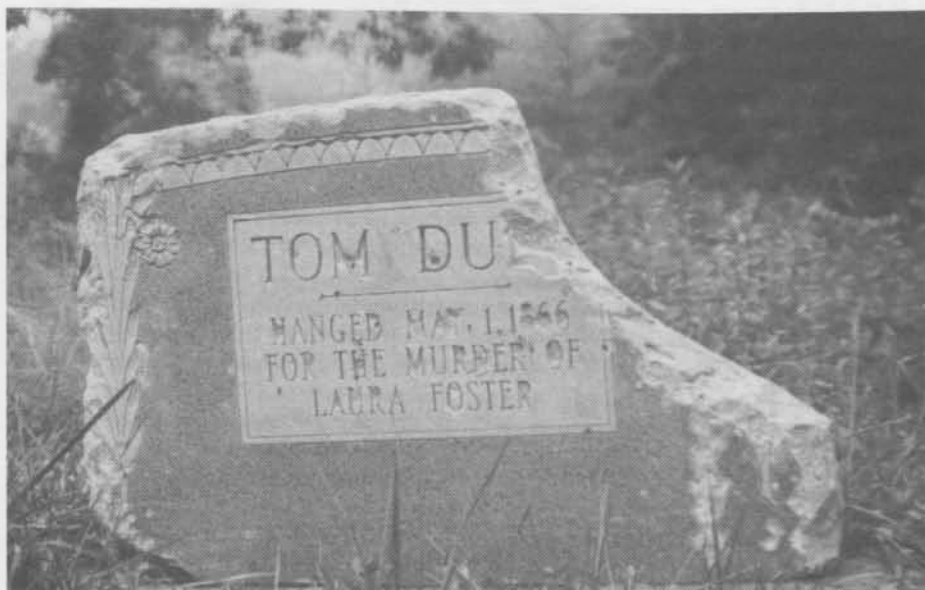
What your momma told you  
Is about to come to pass,  
That a drinkin' and the women  
Will be your ruin at last.

(Chorus)

This time tomorrow,  
Reckon where you'll be,  
Down in some lonesome valley  
Hangin' from a white oak tree.

Hang down your head Tom Dula,  
Hang down your head and cry,  
You killed poor Laura Foster,  
And now you're bound to die.

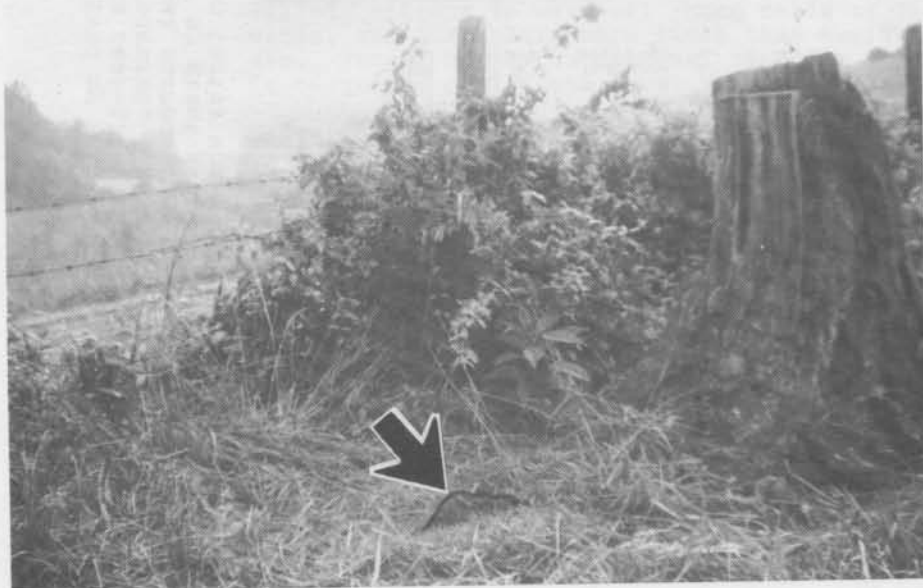




The tombstone of Tom Dula which was erected a century after his death shows the damage done by souvenir hunters. The inscription reads:

TOM DULA  
HANGED MAY 1, 1866  
FOR THE MURDER OF  
LAURA FOSTER

(The correct date of his death was May 1, 1868)



A simple rock marks the grave of Ann Melton

## THE BALLAD OF LAURA FOSTER

The tragedy I now relate  
Is of poor Laura Foster's fate;  
How by a fickle lover she  
Was hurried to eternity.

On Thursday morn at early dawn  
To meet her groom she hastened on,  
For soon she thought a bride to be  
Which filled her heart with ecstasy.

Her youthful heart no sorrow knew  
She fancied all mankind were true.  
And thus she gaily passed along  
Humming at times a favorite song.

Ere sun declined toward to the west  
She met her groom and his vile Guest;  
In forest wild they three retreat  
And look for parson there to meet.

Soon night came on with darkness drear  
Yet poor Laura felt no fear.  
She thought her lover kind and true  
Believed that he'd protect her too.

Confidingly upon her breast  
She laid her head to take some rest;  
But soon poor Laura felt a smart,  
A deadly dagger pierced her heart.

No shrieks were heard by neighbors round  
who were in the bed sleeping sound.  
None heard the shrieks so loud and shrill,  
Save those who did poor Laura kill.

The murder done they her conceal  
And vow they'll never reveal  
To dig the grave they now proceed  
But in the darkness make no speed.

But dawn appears, the grave not done,  
Back to their hiding place they run,  
And there in silence wait till night  
To put poor Laura out of sight.

The grave was short and narrow, too,  
But in it they poor Laura threw,  
And covered with some leaves and clay,  
And hastened at break of day.

## THE SEARCH

Since Laura left at break of day  
Two days and nights had passed away;  
The parents now in sorrow wild  
Set in search of their lost child.

In copse and glen, in wood and plain  
They search for her but all in vain;  
With aching hearts and pensive moans,  
They call for her in mournful tones.

With sad forebodings for her fate  
To friends her absence they relate,  
With many friends all anxious, too,  
Again their search they do renew.

They searched for her in swamps and bogs,  
In creeks and caves and hollow logs,  
In copse and glen, and bramble, too,  
But still no trace of her they view.

At last upon a ridge they found  
Some blood all mingled with the ground.  
The sight to all seemed very clear  
That Laura had been murdered there.

Long for her grave they search in vain.  
At length they meet to search again,  
Where stately pines and ivies wave,  
At last they found poor Laura's grave.

### THE RESURRECTION AND INQUEST

The grave was found as we have seen  
Mid stately pines and ivies green.  
The Coroner and Jury too,  
Assembled this sad sight to view.

They take away the leaves and clay  
Which from her lifeless body lay.  
They from the grave her body take  
And close examination make.

When soon the bloody wound they spied,  
Twas where the deadly dagger pierced her side;  
The inquest held, this hapless maid  
Was then in her coffin laid.

The Jury made the verdict plain,  
Which was, poor Laura had been slain;  
Some ruthless fiend had struck the blow,  
Which laid poor luckless Laura low.

Then in the church yard her they lay  
No more to rise till Judgment Day  
Then robed in white we trust she'll rise  
To meet her Saviour in the skies.

### COLD, COLD GROUND © Sheila Clark

There's a chillin' mist a-risin'  
In the Blue Ridge Mountains,  
While the mocking bird is singing  
Some sweet mournful song.

While the ivy is a-creepin'  
Above the grassy mound,  
There my true love lies a-sleepin',  
A-sleepin' in the Cold, Cold Ground.

Way down in the corn field  
Can you hear a mournful sound?  
That's my lonely heart a-weepin'  
For my love's in the Cold, Cold Ground.

(CHORUS)

When my life on earth is over  
And I close my eyes in rest,  
Lay my body down beside him  
Where I'll wait that final test.

(CHORUS)

### TOM DULA'S OWN BALLAD

I pick up my banjo,  
I pick it on my knee,  
This time tomorrow  
It'll be no use to me.

This banjo's been my friend  
In days both dark and ill,  
A-layin' here in jail  
It's helped me time to kill.

Poor Laura loved its tunes  
When sittin' 'neath a tree,  
I'd play and sing to her  
My head upon her knee.

Poor Laura loved me well  
She was both fond and true,  
How deep her love for me  
I never really knew.

Her brown curl on my heart  
I'll meet my fatal doom,  
As swift as she met hers  
That dreadful morning gloom.

I've lived my life of sin  
I've had a bit of fun,  
Goodbye to you mother  
My race is nearly run.



The gravesite of Laura Foster is located in Caldwell County (Formerly Wilkes) in the mountains of Western North Carolina. The inscription on the tombstone reads:

LAURA FOSTER  
MURDERED IN  
MAY OF 1865  
TOM DULA  
HANGED FOR  
CRIME

## SIDE ONE

The Ballad of Tom Dula - The version sung by Sheila is a compilation of verses heard from my great grandmother and a version learned from Frank Proffitt, Jr., who learned it from his father. Frank Jr. related to me that his father sang this version to Alan Lomax and he in turn was responsible for the version made famous by The Kingston Trio. Though she and I both feel otherwise, Sheila sings this ballad from the point of view of one who is convinced of the guilt of Tom, a view disputed by many.

The Ballad of Laura Foster - I have been unable to find any recording of this ballad which was sung to me by my great grandmother Zora Church Lee. The text is taken from a popular local account written by Captain Thomas Land who lived near Ferguson, North Carolina in Wilkes County. It is interesting to note that guilt is not specifically attributed to Tom Dula, or anyone else in particular, since many feel the true identity of the murderer was never proven.

Cold, Cold Ground - This is an original composition by Sheila which had as its inspiration the deaths of Laura Foster and Tom Dula. The haunting melody, combined with the sad lyrics of one whose true love has died, paint a picture of loneliness and despair. The fact that we are not sure if this is a ballad to Tom or Laura only adds to the mystery and charm of the performance.

Tom Dula's Own Ballad - Legend has it that Tom sang this ballad in jail the night before he was to be hanged. I have heard variations of this ballad but this recorded version is a favorite of mine because of the doubt that appears in Tom's mind over the true feelings of Laura toward him. One can only guess if the last verse is a confession of murder or just the failures of a young man to always walk the straight and narrow.

## SIDE TWO

House Carpenter - Catalogued by Child as ballad 243, this tune is also known by the title "The Demon Lover". In any form it presents a stern warning against the evils of forsaking one's mate. Sheila patterns her version after Joan Baez and keeps the tempo moving to underscore the theme of speedy retribution for those guilty of being unfaithful!

Come All Ye Fair Ladies - This ballad is a more subtle, yet emotion filled, attempt to warn all young maids of the many pitfalls, heart-aches, and just plain hard times that await in their dealings with men. Though hardly an original idea for a tragic love ballad, this is certainly one of the lovelier examples of the art form.

Silver Dagger - A somewhat distant cousin to "Come, All Ye Fair Ladies" in melodic content, "Silver Dagger" is never the less unique in poetic content. Though short in length, the characters, events, and happenings are many and varied. The tragic idea in this poignant ballad lies in the knowledge that the lovers can never be together but must always live apart because of the death threat.

The Jealous Lover - Similar to many other murder ballads, this one contains mistaken identity, jealousy, and suspicion, not to mention poor eyesight on the part of the "Jealous Lover". Also a mystery surrounds the reason why a young lady would "be dressed in mens' attire". If it were to enable her to slip away undetected to meet her lover, would he not realize this and be aware of her approach? In any case it is a haunting ballad though tragic in theme.

The False Knight - Child ballad 4 is an old Scottish ballad with a twist. It is the lady who overcomes the villainous attempt at murder by a cruel, and rather dumb, suitor. This is hardly in a class with the other selections on this album in tragic content, but the lovely melody, and the triumph of good over evil are certainly a proper and fitting ending. Sheila has chosen to perform this selection a cappella as a tribute to the many singers who have throughout the centuries carried on the tradition of relating ballads in this manner.