

LIBRETTO

RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE

The Opera, based on the novel by Zane Grey

Music by Craig Bohmler
Libretto by Steven Mark Kohn

Cast

(in order of appearance)

TULL (Baritone) A powerful Mormon Elder, early 40s, interested in marrying Jane.

BERN VENTERS (Tenor) A Gentile, mid 20s. Jane's head ranch hand and good friend.

JANE WITHERSTEEN (Mezzo-Soprano)-A faithful Mormon woman-early 30s, owner of the sprawling Withersteen ranch and herd, as well as the spring which gives water to the town of Short Creek.

LASSITER (Bass Baritone) A Hardened Texas gunfighter, late 30's, on a quest to find the grave of Milly Erne.

JUD (Tenor) A faithful ranch hand, in his 50s, working the Withersteen Ranch.

BESS (Soprano) A young woman, late teens, ward of Bishop Dyer.

BISHOP DYER (Bass) The leader of the local Mormon Church, in his 40s-50s, the most powerful man in Short Creek.

SMALL MEN'S CHORUS Tull's men and the Bishop's parishioners.

SYNOPSIS

The action takes place at the ranch of Jane Withersteen, in the nearby mountains, and in the town of Short Creek on the Arizona-Utah border, circa 1870.

ACT 1

Jane Withersteen, a devout Mormon woman has inherited a sprawling ranch from her father. Tull, a Mormon elder, wants to marry Jane, in part to add her ranch, herd and spring to the growing Mormon settlement of Short Creek, but Jane resists his advances. To pressure Jane, Tull threatens to whip her head rider, Venters, on a trumped up charge. Lassiter, a mysterious gunman arrives in time to save Venters and drive off the Mormons. Lassiter has come to see the grave of Milly Erne, who was a dear friend of Jane. He asks about Milly's daughter, who was taken by the Mormons when she was a baby. Jane does not know of her whereabouts. When rustlers steal one of Jane's herds, Venters rides off to confront them, knowing the feared "Masked Rider" is among the rustlers.

ACT 2

Jane speaks to her departed father, questioning the behavior of her churchmen and confronting the challenges of her situation. Lassiter arrives in time to avert a stampede bearing down on Jane's ranch. Venters and Bess, who he saved in a shootout with the rustlers, hide out in Surprise Valley. Bishop Dyer, the head of the local Mormon Church confronts Jane on her friendship with Lassiter, as well as her refusal to marry Tull. Lassiter arrives and drives off the Bishop, who damns them both. Venters arrives and tells Jane and Lassiter about Bess, Surprise Valley and their plans to leave for Illinois. Jane and Lassiter visit Milly Erne's grave where Jane accidentally reveals a dark secret the Bishop has kept all these years. Lassiter swears his revenge on the Bishop.

ACT 3

Bishop Dyer and Elder Tull reaffirm their commitment to the growing Mormon Church. Dyer conducts a sermon as Lassiter waits outside the church. Lassiter confronts the Bishop. Back at Jane's house, Lassiter surrenders his guns to Jane, prepared to give up his life as a gunman. Tull and his men prepare to attack Jane's ranch and pursue Lassiter as Bess and Venters prepare to leave Surprise Valley for Illinois. Jane and Lassiter decide to meet up with Bess and Venters and begin a new life there as well. The four meet out on the Sage. Jane and Lassiter surrender their horses to the young lovers, so that they may escape. Lassiter and Jane make their way to Surprise Valley with Tull and his men in hot pursuit. With no way out, Jane and Lassiter must make a dramatic decision on how to save themselves.

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LIBRETTO

ACT ONE

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The year is 1870. The place is the town of Short Creek in the Utah territory, near the Arizona border. It is night at the sprawling ranch of Jane Withersteen. Tull, a Mormon Elder, enters with his men.

TULL

He's around here somewhere.

You! *(gesturing to one of his men)*

Go around that side of the house!

You, look over there! *(gesturing to another man)*

The rest of you check the barn and stables! *(gesturing to the remaining men)*

Bring him back here.

I want him tied up.

Tied up like an animal!

JANE WITHERSTEEN *(entering)*

Elder Tull, what do you mean by this?

TULL

There was a shooting fray in the village last night.

Your man Venters was seen there.

Where is he, Jane?

Where is he?

JANE

Venters was with me the whole time.

He never left the ranch.

Besides, I took charge of his guns.

You're making this up, Elder Tull.

TULL

Why do you defend this worthless rider?

JANE

Worthless?

He's the best rider I've ever had.

It shames me that my friendship with him has
made him an enemy of my people.

I owe him my gratitude.

TULL

I'm sick of seeing this fellow Venters around you.

I might even get the idea that you love this man.

JANE

Maybe I do love him. *(Tull bristles)*

That poor fellow needs someone to love him.

TULL

Deny that!

Take it back or it will not go well for him!

(Offstage we hear men)

VARIOUS MEN

There he is!

Grab him!

Hold him down!

Hold him!

Rope him!

Tie his hands!

JANE

What are you going to do?

(Tull's men enter dragging Venters. His hands are tied behind his back.)

TULL

Bring him over here. *(they do)*

Venters, you will leave Short Creek at once
and never return.

VENTERS

Why?

TULL

Because I order it.

VENTERS

I will not leave!

You can tell your people what to do
and Lord your power over them,
but you will not tell me what I can and cannot do.

(Tull raises his whip to strike Venters.)

JANE

Don't you dare touch him!

TULL

You will leave Utah.

VENTERS

Oh, I see! It galls you.

This beautiful woman

being friendly to a poor Gentile.

You want her all to yourself.

Looking for another Mormon wife.

You have use for her, and the Withersteen House,
and Amber spring and six thousand head of cattle.

I see who you are. I know what you are.

TULL

One last time.

You will go.

VENTERS

No!

TULL

Then I will have you whipped within an inch of your life!

Bring him over here!

(The men drag Venters.)

JANE

No, Elder Tull!

This has gone on far too long!

You and your men harassing my riders,
driving them off my land!

When will it end?

(directly to Tull)

Only a loving God could create this glorious wilderness.

Mormon and Gentile can share this wondrous land.

Let not the hatred our people suffered
lead us to hatred as well.

TULL *(raising his whip, brutally cutting her off)*

Silence!

That'll do from you!

You will not be allowed to hold this boy to a friendship
offensive to your Bishop,
offensive to your people,
offensive to me.

Jane Withersteen,
 You have not come to see your place as a Mormon woman.
 We've reasoned with you, been patient with you,
 waited while you had your fling.
 But my patience is at an end.

You are not a young woman, Jane.
 You should have married long ago.
 You were meant to be my wife
 and give me this ranch.
 It's what your father wanted
 and the Bishop as well.

Your father, God rest his soul, was a good man.
 He raised you under Mormon law.
 He taught you respect for the faith and
 made clear your duty.

And he left you wealth and power.
 Withersteen ranch is all yours,
 the buildings, the land, the cattle, the horses,
 Amber spring, all yours.

But this power has gone to your head.
 It has filled you with dangerous thoughts
 no woman should have!
 It has turned you from our faith.
 Now, once and for all, come to your senses.
 You can have no further friendship with this man!

Venters, will you take your whipping here,
 or out on the sage?

JANE
 Please don't whip him.

VENTERS
 I'll take it here. But by God, you better kill me
 or I will come for you and your praying churchmen if I live!

TULL
 Hold him!

(The men ready Venters for his whipping.)

JANE *(To Tull)*
 In the name of our Father, where is your mercy?

TULL *(full of sinister righteousness)*
 My mercy is justice.
 Hold him.

JANE (*to Tull*)

Show me your mercy.

Must I renounce my heart and marry you
to save the life of my friend?

TULL (*with Jane above*)

You must come to know your duty
and what is expected of you
as a daughter of the Mormon Church.
This power has gone to your head.
It has filled you with dangerous thoughts
no woman should have.
It has turned you from our faith.

TULL'S MEN (*various with above*)

Give it to him!

Make him pay!

Give him what he deserves!

Whip him! Whip him good!

Hold him boys! Hold him tight!

Give him what he deserves!

Make him pay!

VENTERS (*with above*)

You better kill me now
or I'll come after you praying Mormons!
Kill me now or I'll come after you!
You better watch your backs!
Watch your backs!

(The men's attention is taken by an offstage rider.)

TULL'S MEN (*various*)

Look! (*pointing toward the hills*)

It's a rider!

It's a stranger!

That's a fine horse he's ridin'!

TULL

Do you know him?

Does anyone know him?

TULL'S MEN (*various*)

Look! He's wearin' black!

He's a gunman!

TULL

Careful, fellers.

Careful now 'bout movin' your hands.

(Lassiter, the gunman enters...and slowly walks up to Jane.)

LASSITER

Evenin' ma'am. Are you Jane Withersteen?

JANE (*riveted by this lean, tough man*)

Yes.

TULL (*coldly*)

Stop there, stranger.

What business have you?

LASSITER (*Ignoring Tull, to Jane*)

This water here is yours?

JANE

Yes.

LASSITER

May I water my horse?

JANE

Yes. The trough is there.

LASSITER

Thank you, ma'am.

It looks like I've stumbled onto somethin' here.

(*regarding Venters*)

So, is he a rustler, a thief, or a Gentile?

JANE

He's an honest man.

LASSITER

Then that makes him a Gentile, I reckon.

TULL

Stranger, this is none of your mix.

Water your horse and be on your way.

LASSITER

Easy, easy now. I ain't interferin'.

I just stumbled onto a queer deal here.

A bunch a' men all packin' guns

and a fella tied up with a rope.

And here's a woman who swears by his honesty.

TULL

This is none a' your business.

LASSITER

Where I come from, a woman's word is law.

I ain't quite outgrown that yet.

TULL

Medler, we got a different law here.
It's called Mormon law.
Take care you don't transgress it.

LASSITER

To hell with your law!
I got my own law right here. (*indicating his guns*)
Careful you don't transgress it.
Lessen you're anxious to meet your God.
(*to Venters*)
Now you, young man,
what have you done to be roped that way?

VENTERS

I done nothin'.
I've offended these people by being her friend.

LASSITER

Ma'am, is that true?

JANE

Yes, it's true.
Venters is a good man and my best rider.
He's done nothing to deserve this.

LASSITER

Well, young man, you can't be blamed for bein'
a friend to such a woman.
No man could help that.
So, what're they gonna do about it?

VENTERS

They plan to whip me.
And you know what that means out here.

LASSITER

I reckon I do.

JANE (*urgently*)

Stranger, please help us.

LASSITER

Ma'am, are you askin' me to save him from your own people?

JANE

I'm asking. I'm praying.
Oh, sir, I beg you, save him!

LASSITER (*to Tull*)

Mormon, untie him. Now.

The young man stays.
And you and your men, you go!

TULL
He is my prisoner!
You, go on your way now or-

LASSITER
Or what? Don't threaten me.
I don't recognize you or your damn law!
You gettin' all high and mighty on me.
I could put you all in your graves right now!
Every one a' you!
Wouldn't be so high and mighty then.

TULL
Who the hell are you?

LASSITER
I'm called Lassiter. *(The men back off muttering "Lassiter". They are afraid)*
But you can call me Mister Lassiter.

TULL
Jane Withersteen, this is not the end.
This isn't over!

(Tull and his men exit)

LASSITER *(watching them leave)*
A lotta bluster, then the back end of a horse.
I see it all the time.
Let's get these ropes off ya.

(They untie Venters)

VENTERS
You saved my life.
I will never forget this.
My name's Bern, Bern Venters.

LASSITER
Pleased to meet ya.
Call me Lassiter.

VENTERS
Let me water your horse for you.

LASSITER
Thank ya, Bern.

(Venters exits)

JANE

Thank you for saving my friend.

LASSITER

He seems like a good boy.

But those other fellas...

You keep some hard company, ma'am.

JANE

Lassiter, my people have been hated and scourged
in a way you could never understand.

Some hearts have been hardened.

But I pray for a time when our men
will find their peace.

Will you break bread with me and Venters?

LASSITER

Your people might rest uneasy
knowin' I was eatin' with ya.

JANE

This is my ranch and my land.

You are my welcomed guest.

LASSITER

Your kindness of heart is clear to me, ma'am.

JANE

What brings you to Short Creek?

LASSITER

I've come to see the grave of Milly Erne.

JANE

Milly Erne?

She was my best and dearest friend.

What was she to you?

LASSITER

I knew Milly Erne

when I was a much younger man.

And I loved her more than any woman I ever knew.

She was devout, Milly Erne.

Religion ran deep in her soul.

And it gave her a peace,

gave her a place in this world

Now there's two kinds a' faith,

two kinds a' religion out there.

One is gentle and quiet,

calms you down and makes a hard world easier to bear.

But there's another kind of religion.
It gets inside you and fills you up
with intolerance, and self-righteousness
and a hatred that burns like fire!

Now, some new preacher had come to town
and sweet talked his way right in.
I was workin' up north
and when I got back, she was gone!
Gone with her daughter, a sweet little thing!
He took them both, that preacher man!
Took them away from me!

I searched all over the west for her,
through Texas, Arizona and on to Utah.
The land and its people made me hard.
They change a man.
Scrape the goodness off ya.
Leave your soul tired and tough.
They made me the gunman!
The man in black!
Lassiter!

Maybe the Mormons and me got somethin' in common.
Maybe we all got scraped raw by the world.

Well, she died, Milly Erne,
and part of me died when I heard.
When the word came to me,
it came with a name...
a woman who Milly called friend.
It was you, Jane Withersteen.
You were there at the end.

Will show me the grave of my dear Milly Erne?
Will you show me my dear Milly's grave?

JANE
Of course I will take you there.
Tomorrow perhaps.

LASSITER
And Milly's little girl.
What became of her?

JANE
I don't know, Lassiter.
She just disappeared.

LASSITER

Do you know the man who took Milly from me?

JANE

Yes. But I fear what you may do if I tell you.

LASSITER

It's plain an' right that you should fear.

Cause I'm gonna find that man

who dragged her to Hell.

I'm gonna find that man and kill him!

JANE

I will not turn on my own people!

Let me help you change, to see that there's a better way.

LASSITER

Might be best to change yourself a little, ma'am.

JANE (*somewhat coldly*)

Have some water.

See to your horse.

We'll eat in a moment.

LASSITER

Ma'am. (*he exits*)

JANE

Who is this man?

My churchmen knew him when they heard his name.

Lassiter...

How powerful a name can be.

When men with guns ride off, afraid for their lives.

Who is this man?

His eyes are cold, his skin is tough and tanned.

And he's got strength and pride.

They're a part of him,

like his guns are a part of him.

Who is this man?

He may be a killer.

But this killer saved my friend from a terrible fate.

He is fearless and ruthless,

but he showed more kindness than

my own people have shown.

There's trouble coming.

I know there's trouble coming my way.

If I can take his guns.

then maybe I can keep him from killing my people.
If I can win him to my side,
if I can make him my friend,
maybe I can get him to change his ways.
But first I must know...
Who is this man?

ACT 1, SCENE 2

*It is the next morning at the Withersteen ranch. The sun is rising.
Venters is packing some supplies. After a few moments, Jane enters.*

JANE
Good morning, Bern.

VENTERS
Mornin' Jane.

JANE
Are you heading off to check the herd?

VENTERS
Jane, I have to leave.

JANE
Bern, no! I need you!
You're my best rider!

VENTERS
I'm afraid I don't have much choice.
And I can't take bein' hounded no more.

JANE
Please stay.
I won't let those men back on my land.
I promise, Bern!

VENTERS
I don't see a way for you to stop 'em.
Tull has his mind set. Has for a long time.
These elders and the Bishop will do any deed
to go on buildin' up the power and wealth of their church.
Look what they done to the Gentiles here,
to Milly Erne and to me.
It won't stop, Jane.

JANE
Tull is hard, I know.
And he's been after me a long time.
But you're wrong about the Bishop.

The Bishop is a good man.

VENTERS

Bring me my guns, Jane.
I'll check the herd, and then I'm leavin'.

JANE

You're not going after Tull, are you?

VENTERS

No. Now, give me back my guns.

(more tenderly)

Jane, don't look so.
We both knew this time would come.
You're a wonderful woman.
I never knew one so good.

JANE

Bern, I'll miss you.
You've been my closest friend.
The one I relied on.
I hoped you'd always be there.

It never mattered to me where you came from.
That never mattered to me.
And of all the men I've met out here,
only you let me be who I am.

VENTERS

It never mattered to you that I wasn't Mormon.
That never mattered to you.
And of all the people I met out here,
only you let me be who I am.

BOTH

Sometimes it's hard just trying to get by,
wondering where in this world to belong,
finding a friend to share the road,
so you don't make this journey alone.

VENTERS

Jane, don't look so.
We'll meet again someday.

JANE

Maybe soon, maybe not,
but God-willing that day will come.

BOTH

God-willing that day will come.

(Venters extends his hand. Jane takes it.)

JANE

God be with you, Bern.

And don't ride through Deception pass.
Tull knows you go there.

VENTERS

I'll move on as quickly as I can.

JANE

Bern, what do you know about Lassiter?

VENTERS

I only heard things.

Some say he shot up a Mormon village.

Some say he's killed a lot a' men.

He's what they call a gunman.

Not the kind to mess with.

But I saw him with my own eyes last night.

And I saw him as my friend.

And I know this, if any of Tull's men had moved even a finger-

JANE

That's enough!

I'll hear no more of guns and killing!

I'm afraid.

Afraid of what's to come.

(Lassiter enters, casually.)

LASSITER

Good mornin' ma'am.

Mornin', Bern.

JANE *(somewhat coolly)*

If you gentlemen will excuse me...

(Jane exits.)

VENTERS

Lassiter! Good to see you again!

(they shake hands warmly)

LASSITER

I see you recovered from last night's little party.

VENTERS

Thanks to you!

You showed up outta nowhere!

Scared that whole gang till they were shakin' in their boots.

It was a beautiful thing!

LASSITER

Bern, how is it you never pulled a gun on Tull or any a' them others?

VENTERS

It was Jane. Jane Withersteen.

She talked me into givin' up my guns.

She's got somethin' in her.

Maybe it's the goodness of her heart,
maybe it's her God.

But whatever it is, she's the kindest,
most carin' woman I ever met.

But I ain't gonna be without my guns.

Not after last night.

LASSITER

Sometimes you gotta kill a man.

Sometimes it's the only way.

VENTERS

Jane tells me you knew Milly Erne.

LASSITER

That's why I came to Short Creek.

To see her grave...and finish up a few things.

Did you know her?

VENTERS

I knew Milly Erne,

she was a slip of a girl,

LASSITER

A slip of a girl...

VENTERS

as quiet and kind

LASSITER

and full of religion

BOTH

as any can be.

VENTERS

She had a child, Milly Erne

A beautiful girl

LASSITER

A beautiful girl...

VENTERS

And I know Milly loved

that child with all of her heart.

LASSITER

Milly loved with all of her heart.

VENTERS

Well, after a while, Milly began to
question the Mormon ways.

She didn't want her daughter to be
one of six or seven wives.

So she quit the church.

Well, they don't let you do that out here!

So, one day, Milly's child just up and disappeared.

Her little girl gone without a trace.

The report said she was lost, but
that child was taken! I know it!

They stole her little girl!

LASSITER

Those bastards!

VENTERS

I can see Milly Erne.

I can still see her now,
transparent and pale.

I can only imagine

how tortured her soul was

and how she was dyin' from pain.

LASSITER

Was there no way to help her,

no one to protect her

from men who were born without hearts!?

BOTH

Demons from Hell screamin' heavenly words
and swingin' a book like the hammer of God,

slammin' it down and crushin' her soul!

Crushin' her spirit! Crushin' her life!

VENTERS

So she drifted away on a cold, cloudy morn.

And she's buried somewhere in those hills.

BOTH

Resting peacefully

Resting still.

Buried somewhere in those hills.

LASSITER

That man.
The preacher who did this to her.
Bern, tell me his name.

VENTERS

I don't know.
These secrets are too well kept.

LASSITER

But Jane Withersteen knows.

VENTERS

And a red-hot iron couldn't burn it outta her.

LASSITER

I won't need a red-hot iron.
And I will get that name!

(Suddenly, Jane's head ranch hand Jud, storms onto the stage, bloodied.)

JUD

Miss Jane!
Miss Jane!
Come quick!

VENTERS

Jud!
What is it?

JUD

Get Miss Jane, Bern!
Rustlers!
They took the red herd!

(Jane enters with Venter's guns.)

JANE

Jud! What happened?
Oh, my Lord, you've been shot!

JUD

It's the red herd!
Rustlers ran off with the herd!

VENTERS

It's Tull's men, I know it!
If he can't have you, he'll drive you out!

JUD

Tull's men or not, I can't be sure,

but the masked rider was with 'em!

JANE

The masked rider! Lord help us!

VENTERS

You are lucky to be alive!

JUD

Don't I know it!

Nothing good ever happens when the masked rider is seen.

I rode for my life!

VENTERS

It's Tull, I tell ya!

Give me my guns, Jane!

I'm gonna get that man!

JANE

No! No, Bern!

You promised!

(Venters takes his guns from Jane and straps on his holster.)

VENTERS

Oh, I'm goin'!

An' you can't stop me!

LASSITER

I'm comin' with ya, Boy!

VENTERS

No, Lassiter!

You and Jud protect the ranch.

JANE

Bern be careful.

And God be with you!

(They run offstage.)

HORSE ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE #1

(Scene change as Venters rides out onto the sage.)

ACT 1, SCENE 3

Early evening, out on the sage in the open country. The scene is still and tense. Two rustlers enter and cross the stage.

RUSTLER #1

I'd say we rustled a couple thousand head.

RUSTLER #2

Pretty soon Withersteen ain't gonna have even one cow to milk.

(They laugh and exit)

(After a few moments, Venters appears, brandishing his rifle.

He slowly moves toward where the rustlers had exited.

From the other side of the stage, two more rustlers appear.

One is a big man. The other is smaller and wearing a mask. They notice Venters.)

THE LARGER RUSTLER

Hey you! Hey!

(With no pause, the large rustler pulls his guns and fires a couple shots at Venters, missing.

Venters wheels around and shoots twice, felling both men.

The smoke begins to clear.

Venters walks over to the body of the large rustler and nudges him with his foot.

The rustler is dead.

He walks over to the other felled rider to examine the body.)

VENTERS

Oh, my God.

It's the masked rider.

I got that sonovabitch!

(Venters checks out the fallen masked rider.)

VENTERS

He's still breathin'.

(Venters cocks his rifle and puts it to the masked rider's head.)

VENTERS

I better finish him right now.

(Venters is about to shoot when the masked rider lets out a groan...

a high-pitched, rather feminine groan!)

VENTERS

What?

(Venters, keeping his rifle on the masked rider, pulls the mask down to reveal a young woman!)

BESS (the masked rider)

You...you shot me.

VENTERS

You're a girl!

The masked rider is a girl!?
What's goin' on here?

BESS
Please...please...mister...
Please don't take me back there.

(End of Act 1)

ACT TWO

ACT 2, SCENE 1

A few days have passed. It is Sunday morning on the Withersteen ranch. A church service is in progress. As Jane enters, we hear a hymn.

PARISHIONERS

The sun need never ask to rise.
The moon and stars content to share the sky.
In Heav'n on earth as it shall be,
all God's plan, eternally.

JANE
Tell me Lord, is my father with you?
May I speak to him, Lord?
May I speak to my father?

The sage and mountains all surround,
side by side as brothers bound,
sharing all that God has laid.
Heaven's plan in Glory made.

Things are happening, father.
Bad things are happening
and I don't know where to turn.
The Bishop has told me I must marry Tull.
But how can I marry a man I do not love?
Would you want that for me?
Our own people want to steal my herd
and drive me off the land.
All because I won't marry a man I do not love.

They tried to kill my friend, father.
My best rider, roped and tied and almost killed
by our own churchmen.

Our leaders are straying from the faith.
Their hearts are filled with greed and lust for power.
And while they preach the Holy word,
their deeds grow blacker every day.
Wandering into darkness.

But I will not follow them, no-I promise you!
I will not follow them down this dark path!

I know that God is love!
I feel Him all around!
And his light will not be dimmed
by men with hearts of stone!
No men with guns and hearts of stone
will pull me from His light!

Father, you taught me to love this land,
to protect our valley and those who live there,
to respect the teachings of the church,
whose very word is the word of God.
But you taught me more...

"Think for yourself, Jane!"
That's what you told me, isn't it?
"Think for yourself".
That's what you said.
"Trust your heart and mind
And you'll be fine."

We'll, I'm trying, father.
But what am I to do
when the laws of men
go against the laws of God and nature?

There can be only one!
The loving word of God!
And the cruelty of men
can never dim His light!
I need you, father.
Be here with me!
Help me be strong!
Help me be strong!

(Jud enters. He wears a gun belt. His wounds are dressed)

JUD
I checked the herd, Miss Jane,
what we got left of it, anyway.
Things are quiet, for now.

JANE
Thank you, Jud.
I see you're carrying a gun.
You've never carried guns before.

JUD
It's high time, Miss Jane,

Gettin' shot at has a peculiar
way of getting your attention.
Next time, I fire back!

JANE

I'm sorry it has come to this.

JUD

Miss Jane, I was at my mother's house last night
when a stranger came to the door.
He told me not to ride
for Jane Withersteen anymore.
Told me straight out like that,
then rode off into the dark.

JANE

Do you know who he was?

JUD

He was one a' Tull's riders.
I seen him in town.
That's why I'm packin' guns, Miss Jane.
I'll never quit ridin' for you.
Your father and you been good to me.
This is my home too.
And I'll stay here till ya let me go.

JANE

Thank you, Jud.
You've been more faithful than my own people.
I pray you won't suffer for your loyalty to me.
Jud, where are my other riders?

JUD

I don't know about Venters, Miss Jane.
No one's seen 'im since he rode off.
But I learned somethin' Miss Jane.
This won't be easy for you to hear.

JANE (*already intuiting*)

They're riding for Tull?

(*Jud nods*)

All of them?

JUD

It's as plain as that.
I asked 'em straight out why they left you.
And Miss Jane, they all froze up.
Like some dark and secret thing had come over them.
I could tell they had no say in the matter.
They was ashamed, I could tell.

But they ain't comin' back.
 Now you listen, Miss Jane.
 I'll get me what boys I can gather.
 The white herd is out on the slope now.
 We'll try to hold 'em for ya.

JANE

Jud, some day I'll reward you for this,
 unless all is taken from me.
 Find your boys.
 Take what you need from my stores,
 but don't shed blood for my cattle.
 Do not risk your life!

(Jud runs off as Jane's anger swells.)

JANE

So this is how it is.
 If Tull can't have me as his wife,
 he'll take everything.
 Well, they may have lost their way,
 but I have not.

Let them take my cattle!
 Let them take my house and fields!
 Let them take it all!
 But they will not break my spirit!
 They will not have my soul!

Never will I never marry Tull!
 Never!

My love is mine to give,
 and to the one I choose.
 And no rustler
 or a man of God will own my heart!
 I'll stand up for myself,
 just like you taught me, father!
 I'll make you proud!
 You will be proud!

(Lassiter enters)

LASSITER
 Howdy, ma'am.

JANE
 Lassiter. *(pause)*
 Good morning.

PARISHIONERS

The sun need never ask to rise,
 the moon and stars content to share the sky.
 In Heav'n on earth as it shall be,
 all God's plan, eternally.

Amen!

LASSITER

Is it a good one, ma'am?

JANE

Well, that all depends.

Venters is gone.

My riders are gone.

I've lost the red herd.

And I'm being pressured into marrying Tull.

LASSITER

Just another normal day, then.

JANE

It's becoming normal, I fear.

LASSITER

How are plannin' to fight 'em, Jane?

JANE

I'm not sure.

LASSITER

Well, there is one who could help, if ya want 'im.

JANE

You?

LASSITER

I'll stand with ya.

Seems like we have a common enemy.

JANE

These are still my people.

I'll accept your friendship

if it will keep you from killing another Mormon.

LASSITER

Well, you're askin' a lot there.

You're too good a woman to be sacrificed.

And you know why I'm here.

JANE

You came to kill.

LASSITER

Damned right!

The man who stole Milly Erne!

You know his name.

Tell me his name!

JANE

I will never tell!

I will not have blood on my hands!

I will protect my people.

LASSITER

Alright! Alright...

You'll hear no more such talk from me,
least for a while.

(changing the subject)

Jane, I been out on the sage the last few nights.

It's beautiful out there. Real peaceful.

But I been seein' things.

You're bein' watched.

The sage is fulla' creepin' crawlin' men.

I seen 'em sneakin' in and out of your ranch at night
while you been sleepin'.

They're after you.

JANE

I don't understand any of this.

I have not lost my way.

I have refused to marry Tull, that is true.

But I am faithful.

What more do they want?

LASSITER

They want it all!

You know that!

It's not enough to have your soul!

What's a soul, compared to a ranch?

Thousands 'a cattle! A life-givin' spring!

That's what they want, Jane.

Marry Tull?

That's just a less messy way to get the same result.

Either way, they take it all.

(A pause, there is a distant rumble...)

LASSITER

Wait. *(pause)*

What is that? *(pause)*

Do you hear it?

JANE

I don't hear anything.

LASSITER

Listen...*(pause)*

Hear that?

Feel that rumblin’?
It’s happ’nin’...

JANE
Yes...I hear it.
What is that?

LASSITER
It’s the white herd, Jane.
They’re stampedin’!
Bringin’ em right down on us!

JANE
Lassiter, Jud is out there!

LASSITER
I’m ridin’!
If I get there in time, I can head ‘em off!

JANE
Ride, Lassiter!
Ride!

(They run offstage, as the rumble grows.)

HORSE ORCHESTRAL INTERLUDE #2

(This instrumental piece describes the riding, the stampede and Lassiter’s control of the herd. He saves the ranch.)

ACT 2, SCENE 2

The lush and beautiful Surprise Valley. Nearby is a large rock, balancing on a tiny point at the bottom. Venters enters, carrying the masked rider (Bess). He falls to his knees with fatigue, overcome with the beauty of the place. He sets her down gently, removes his pack and takes in the surroundings.

Will ya look at this place.
As beautiful as any place I ever seen.
Risin’ right up to the sky!
I found a fine place to hold up.
These walls will keep us safe, for now.

That’s a strange rock there.
Wouldn’t take much to push it down.
Start one hell of a rockslide.
Bury the whole damn valley,
and bury your enemies as well.
Maybe that’s why it’s here...

(Venters looks at Bess, as she lies on the ground.)

The Masked rider. Ha!
She don't look so scary now.
Kinda small and frail.
She's pretty, though.
Who would want to put a mask on that?

(Bess stirs)

VENTERS
Easy, easy now.
How ya feelin?

BESS
Tired.

VENTERS
Here, drink this. *(he gives her some water)*
Slow...take your time.

BESS
You...you shot me.

VENTERS
I shot the masked rider.
That's who I shot.
The masked rider is a killer,
a rustler and a thief!
The stories I heard about you!
Why? Tell me why!

BESS
I never harmed a soul in all my life.
I only rode with them.
That's all it was.
I had no say about it.
When they told me to ride,
I rode like the wind!
But I never hurt anyone.

VENTERS
Was it Tull who made you do this?

BESS
Yes. Tull and his men.
I didn't have a choice.

VENTERS
What did those men do to you?

BESS
They made me wear a mask,

to hide who I really was.
I rode with them,
but when I wasn't riding,
they locked me up in a cabin.

VENTERS
What for?

BESS
To keep me from running away.

VENTERS
Where's your mama, girl?

BESS
I don't remember her.
She left when I was just a child.
That's what the Bishop said.
So he raised me as his own.
He gave me everything I needed.
Everything but freedom.

It's no wonder I was happy when they let me ride.
Just to get out and feel the wind!
As much as I hated wearing that mask,
pretending to be something horrible,
I loved it!
I was finally free!
I could ride!

Those were the only times I felt alive...

But then they locked me up again.
All for my own good, I guess.
That's what the Bishop said.
"For my own good".

VENTERS
So the Bishop did that to ya?
Shut you away?

BESS
He thought he was protecting me.
But he was killing me.

VENTERS
Well, you're free now.
What's your name, girl?

BESS
Bess.

VENTERS

Pleased to meet, ya, Bess.
My name's Bern. Bern Venters.

BESS

Are you a rider?

VENTERS

I was once.
I drove the Withersteen herd.
I had a place, a position,
some standin' in these parts.
Six thousand head a' cattle.
That was my charge.
I had a job, a big responsibility!
And I was happy for it!
Made me feel I had somethin' that was mine...

Until the Mormons drove me out,
all because I was a friend to Jane Withersteen.

Seems like you been cast out as well.
Now you and me, we been thrown together.
I don't know what it means, but we're both here now.
And we gotta stay here till ya get well.

BESS

Bern, please don't take me back to Short Creek.
Don't send me back there.

VENTERS

Don't you worry about that, girl.
I'll never send you back to Tull.
But now I got me a job to do.
I'm gonna win you back your strength.

This place is safe for us.
There's water down below.
We have shelter.
I saw game.
We won't starve.

You know, someone used to live here.
Maybe Indians.
You see that rock there?
A balancin' rock.
Look how big it is.
It wouldn't take much to push it over.
Bess, I bet even you could push it over.
And you know what would happen then?
It would pull down a rockslide,

the size of this mountain,
 crushin' everything down there,
 sealin' up the whole valley!
 No one would be comin' in or goin' out,
 maybe not ever again.

BESS

Then push it down!
 Roll it now!
 Keep us in here.
 Keep us in here!

VENTERS

Bess, you been hidden away your whole life.
 Hidden away behind a mask.
 You don't need to hide no more.
 You gotta learn to live now.
 You and me both.

You know, Bess,
 I been thinkin' a lot lately about where I come from.
 A place called Illinois.
 A whole lot different from here.
 They have towns there, big towns!
 You're not alone there.
 You're connected to somethin'.

This is a lonely land, Bess.
 This land don't care what happens to you or me.

When I close my eyes,
 I can see a place
 beyond this purple sage.

I don't need to dream
 to know what's waitin' there;
 All my friends and neighbors,
 "how ya doin', sir?"

And the sky ain't quite so wide,
 and the land ain't quite so hard,
 and the people let you be
 just who the hell ya are!

No one to hold me down.
 No one to rope me like a steer.
 I need a place not quite so wild
 far away from here.
 If I can break these chains,
 then I can make it come to be.
 For the first time in my life,

I can see!

I see it, Bess.
A whole new life.
in a place called Illinois!

BESS

I can see it too, Bern.
But this is it, right here.

I have also dreamed
of a special place
among the purple sage.

Where there's room to breath
beyond my prison doors.
I can hold my face up open to the sky!

And the air is soft and dry.
I can feel it on my skin.
And I know a whole new life
is waiting to begin!

No one to lock me up.
No one to put me in a cage.
I won't need to wear a mask
or to hide my face.
If I can break these chains,
then I can make it come to be.
For the first time in my life,
I can see!

VENTERS

I could find myself a job in town
workin' in a shop.
I might go out and buy a brand new shirt.

BOTH

And I could raise me up a family,
sons and daughters of my own.
We'd have ourselves a home
where we belong!

VENTERS

No one to hold me down!

BESS

No one to tell me where to go!

BOTH

I need a place to call my own

where I decide what's so!
 If I can break these chains,
 then I can make it come to be!
 For the first time in my life,
 I can see!

BESS
 Bern, push that rock down!
 Make it so no one can ever find us!

VENTERS
 We can't stay here, Bess.
 Soon as you're strong enough,
 I'm leavin' here.
 And you're comin' with me, girl.
 We're goin' to Illinois!

BESS (*playfully*)
 How can I go anywhere
 with the man who shot me?

VENTERS
 How was I to know the masked rider was so beautiful?
 I'm so sorry I shot you.

BESS
 No, you saved me, Bern.
 You saved me.

(*Venters gently wraps his arms around Bess.*)

ACT 2, SCENE 3

A few days have passed. It is afternoon. Bishop Dyer is in Jane's house, looking around. Jane enters, startled by the Bishop's presence.

JANE
 Oh! Bishop Dyer.
 What brings you here?

BISHOP DYER
 Daughter of Withersteen,
 I must speak with you.
 I hear you've been keeping company with a gunman.
 Lassiter.
 Is it true?

JANE
 Yes, Bishop.
 My other riders left me.

I had to find someone.

BISHOP DYER

Is it true, what I hear?

He's a Mormon hater, steeped in blood?

JANE

Yes.

BISHOP DYER

What business does he have here?

JANE

He came to find Milly Erne's grave.

BISHOP DYER

Is that the only reason?

JANE

No.

He came for revenge.

To kill the man who took her away.

BISHOP DYER

And you make this man your friend?

How can you turn against your own people?

JANE

I have not turned against my people.

I will do what I can to stop him!

BISHOP DYER

You had better, Jane Withersteen.

Any Mormon bloodshed will be on your head!

But that is not the only reason for my visit.

I understand you refuse to marry Tull.

Do you deny that?

JANE

No, Bishop.

It is true.

I will not marry Tull.

BISHOP DYER

Jane Withersteen, you have known me all your life.

And I made a promise to your father

that I would see you married to a good Mormon.

Tull is a fine man.

In his house, you would find

safety and purpose.

JANE
But Bishop Dyer,
I do not love him.

BISHOP DYER
You have to choose, Jane.
Choose between the love of a man
and the love of God.

JANE
Bishop Dyer, I have always been true to my Mormon faith.
I accept the holy truths as you have taught me.
But I do not love him.

BISHOP DYER
Do not speak to me of your
petty wants, woman.
There is a divine plan, greater than you.
You have shamed your father, shamed his memory,
shamed Heavenly Father!
Pray for forgiveness!

JANE
I will not!
It is you who need forgiveness!
You have corrupted our faith!
You use the church for control,
not to help and comfort!
I will not marry Tull!
Not now, not ever!

(Dyer grabs Jane by her hair and holds her viciously.)

BISHOP DYER
Your very soul is at stake, woman!
Down on your knees!

(Dyer pulls her down to the floor)

Pray! Pray!
Pray with all your heart!

(Lassiter appears suddenly.)

LASSITER:
What the Hell's goin' on here?
Get your God damned hands off that woman!

(Dyer throws Jane to the ground and reaches for his gun, but before he can pull it, Lassiter has drawn on him. Dyer freezes. He is at Lassiter's mercy.)

JANE
Lassiter, no!

LASSITER
How dare you draw on me, you son of a bitch!
I could end you right here!

JANE
Lassiter, No!
Please don't kill him.

BISHOP DYER *(To Jane)*
So this is the scourge you have brought upon us?
How you multiply your sins!

LASSITER
Shut your mouth, preacher man!

BISHOP DYER
I will not have a killer in my town.
Leave us. Leave us in peace.

LASSITER
What do you know of peace?
A Man of God, who carries a gun?
A Man of God who beats up on women?
I'm onto you.
You and your men tryin' to drive Jane off her ranch.
Stampeding the herd.
You woulda' killed her,
but I got there in time!
Stopped your crazy little plan!

But I guess you came up with somethin' else.
Brought your God into it.
Fire and brimstone.
You're a parasite.
Suck 'em dry. Take everything they got.
Now for Miss Withersteen's sake,
I'm gonna let you off easy.
Go on. Get outta here!

BISHOP DYER:
You shame us, Jane Withersteen.
You're soul is damned.
You and your gunman!
I will not rest until I bring you both down!

*(Bishop Dyer storms out.
Lassiter puts his gun back into the holster and helps Jane to her feet.
Jane is overcome with grief.)*

LASSITER
Are you alright?
Did he hurt you?

JANE (*rising*)
Oh, dear Lord, this is bad.

LASSITER
Don't mind him.
He ain't nobody.

JANE
He is the Bishop, Lassiter.
The leader of our church.
He'll be back and it's going to get worse.

LASSITER (*more tenderly*)
Don't you worry, Jane.
No need to worry while I'm here.
You been on your own all this time,
no one lookin' after you.

It's made you strong.
I can see that clear enough.
But we sometimes need someone
to lift us when we fall.

You're not alone, Jane.
I'll be there when you call.
Just give the word
and I will stay.

JANE
You're a strange man.
Not at all what I expected.
Behind the pain and anger,
there is something good in you.

What is God's holy plan?
It's a mystery to me.
But He's brought us here together,
and I hope that you will stay

Will you be there when I call?

Will you stay?

JANE
Lassiter, he drew on you.

LASSITER
You been on your own...

No one lookin' after you...

Sometimes we need someone
to lift us when we fall...

You're not alone, Jane.
I'll be there when you call.
Just give the word,
and I will stay.

Why didn't you kill him?

LASSITER

Killing a man is serious business.
I need to know a man deserves to die.

JANE

Maybe you're changing.
I prayed you'd find a way out of this
life you've chosen.

LASSITER (*sarcastically*)

That's powerful kind 'a you.

(Jane slowly reaches her hand down and grips one of Lassiter's gun handles.)

LASSITER

What are you doin'?

JANE

May I take your guns?

LASSITER (*coldly*)

Why?

JANE

I want to keep you from killing,
to save you from this blindness.

LASSITER (*removing her hand from his gun*)

It is blindness that keeps you from seein' the truth.
I've known a few good Mormons,
but some are blacker than hell.
Take my guns?
Jane, that's crazy.

A man without a gun is only half a man!
A man without a gun is somethin' not a man!
And no one can live on a border without guns.
Tell me what becomes of a man like me?

A man without a gun is only half a man!
A man without a gun is somethin' not a man!
It's crazy, Jane!
Blind and crazy's what it is.
Take a man's gun and he has nothin'.

Since the War, there's a new code.
It's the gun that makes the law.

JANE

It's against God's law to kill.
Against God's Holy law.

LASSITER

Your churchmen carry guns, Jane.
I seen 'em.
I'm sure your Bishop's shot a lotta men.
And if he'd been quick enough,
he'd a' shot me dead as well.
You won't see me under the sage
with all those other men.
Not as long as I have my guns.

A man without a gun is only half a man!
A man without a gun is somethin' not a man!
It's a wild time, Jane!
Ain't no mercy in the West!
And a man without a gun is only half a man!

(Venters enters suddenly, overflowing with joy.)

VENTERS

It's amazing, Jane!
You won't believe what's happened!

JANE

Where have you been, Bern?
I was so worried!

LASSITER

We been wondrin' where ya been, boy!

VENTERS

It's got more twists than a rattlesnake!
A hell of a story! One hell of a story!

North of Deception canyon,
there's a valley there,
risin' like a flame
right into the air!

I swear I ain't seen anything as grand.
Sure as God had cast it with his hand!
You could be there forever,
never have to leave.
Everywhere ya look,
anything ya need.
There's a cool clear stream running underneath,
a place to set an' fish right from the shore.

Right at the top of the valley
 is a big rock, just balancin' on a tiny point.
 One little push could send it down,
 cause that whole damn mountainside to fall!
 But that ain't all...

I met a girl out there on the sage.
 In the middle of nowhere, there she was,
 the prettiest thing I ever seen.
 Well, I don't know how it happened.
 Maybe God got this one right.
 But I gotta get back. She's waitin' there,
 and she's comin' back to Illinois with me!

I see a new life callin'!
 I can see it, Jane!
 Shinin' from the east,
 lightin' me the way!

Sayin' "brother you don't have to roam.
 Just follow me, and I will take you home!"

And she and I will make a new beginning.
 By this time tomorrow, we'll be gone.
 And I will never see this hardened land again
 and a new life will be ours from this day on!

JANE
 Venters, this girl.
 Where did you find her?

VENTERS
 Ya ain't gonna believe this,
 but she's the Masked rider!

JANE
 The masked rider?

LASSITER
 Now, you're puttin' one over on us.

VENTERS
 Shocked the hell outta me!
 But it's the truth, I swear it!
(He enjoys recounting the tale)
 So I see the masked rider with some big rustler.
 The big one takes a shot at me,
 so I shot 'em both!
 Killed the big one!
 And I knocked the masked rider clear offa' his-
 I mean HER horse!

Damn glad I didn't kill her
cause she's so pretty.
I tell ya, I'm a whole new man!

JANE (*with gentle sadness*)
I'm so happy for you, Bern.

VENTERS (*more sweetly*)
Thank you, Jane.
You been so good to me.
The best part a' bein' here was knowin' you.

JANE
God be with you.

LASSITER
Good luck, son.

VENTERS
Gotta get my supplies.
Don't wanna keep my girl waitin'!

(Venters runs off)

LASSITER
That boy is crazy as a coyote.
I never seen anyone so happy.

JANE
So he's really leaving.
I'll miss him.

LASSITER
How much will you miss him, Jane?

JANE
Oh, it's not like that.
Bern's been a good friend.
You hold on to people like that.

LASSITER
I hear ya. (*pause*)
Will you take me to Milly's grave now?

(Jane nods. Scene changes to Milly's grave)

ACT 2, SCENE 4

It is evening. Jane and Lassiter are at the grave of Milly Erne in the nearby hills.

JANE

It's me, Milly Erne.
I've come to see you again.
It seems my heart always leads me
back to this place.

I've brought a friend, Milly Erne.
He's someone you know very well.
And he's traveled so far
to be with you now.

LASSITER

Hello, Milly.
Remember me?
It's been a long time comin'
but I finally found you.

I've missed you, girl.
More than you could ever know.
I've come to say goodbye.
To lay all this to rest.

It is nice where you are, Milly?
Is your God right there with you?
Are ya happy?
You deserve to be happy.

JANE

Rest in peace, Milly Erne.
All of your troubles are past

God's eternal love...

Only quiet and stillness

BOTH

wrapped all around
like a blanket on you.

LASSITER

This is a fine place.
You done real good for Milly.

JANE

Lassiter, was Milly your wife?

LASSITER

She was my sister,
my dear baby sister.

JANE

She's with Heavenly Father now,
folded in his loving arms.

LASSITER

How can you be so sure?

JANE

I just know.

I've always known.

LASSITER

I envy you, Jane.

I wish I could have your faith.

It must be a wonderful thing.

JANE

You can find your faith too.

LASSITER

No. It's too late for me.

The world don't care how much you suffer.

God don't say "leave 'em be".

I can't believe there's any great love out there.

Maybe here, between people, in a small way...

But there ain't no one watchin' over me.

How I wish there was.

I truly do.

Oh, Milly!

Who could do such a thing to you?

Tear you from your family

and drive you to this?

(Lassiter breaks down, sobbing.)

JANE *(touching him tenderly)*

Lassiter. I'm so sorry.

I'm sure the Bishop didn't mean for it to end like this...

LASSITER

What?

The Bishop?

What did you say?!

JANE

No! No! Nothing!

LASSITER

You said the Bishop!

I heard ya!

JANE

No, Lassiter! I didn't mean anything-

LASSITER

So, he's the one!
He smooth talked Milly,
lured her from her home.
And when he couldn't hold her,
he stole her little girl!

I had that bastard in my sights and I just let him walk away!
You knew all along,
and you defend this man?

JANE

Lassiter, listen!
Let go of your hate and forgive!

LASSITER

Fifteen years searchin' through hell!
Well, to hell with your forgiveness!
I'm done!

A man without a gun is only half a man!
A man without a gun is somethin' not a man!

It's a wild time, Jane!
Ain't no mercy in the West!

(he holds his guns up high)

Get yourself ready, Bishop!

(Jane falls to her knees.)

Judgment day is here!

I'm comin' for ya, preacher man!
Prepare to meet your God!

(End of Act 2)

JANE
No!

God help us!

ACT THREE

ACT 3, SCENE 1

It is the next Sunday morning. Bishop Dyer and Elder Tull are sitting in an empty church.

BISHOP DYER

I'm worried, Tull. Worried about Bess.

TULL

She'll be home soon.

I have the men lookin' for her.

BISHOP DYER

Until then, she's in God's hands.

TULL

Amen to that.

(pause)

But I'm worried too, Bishop.

It's Jane Withersteen.

BISHOP DYER

Withersteen...

TULL

I can't get her to see reason.

She humiliated me in front of my own men!

BISHOP DYER

Do not allow your pride to be your undoing, Elder.

We need the land and the spring.

Keep your wits about you, Tull.

TULL

But she's so stubborn...

BISHOP DYER

and willful...

TULL

and selfish...

BISHOP DYER

Disrespectful...

TULL

She has no right to refuse me.

BISHOP DYER

She has no right to own so much.

BISHOP DYER

We need the spring.

The land.

She must be guided

back into the fold!

TULL

Her obedience...

Her submission...

Her surrender...

Into my bed...

TULL
How dare she disgrace me!

BISHOP DYER
How dare she shame us.

BOTH
Power has gone to her head!

BISHOP DYER
She must learn respect!

TULL
She must mind her place!

BOTH
She must be led!

BISHOP DYER
She must be led, like child though the dark.

TULL
She must be led.
We must make her understand.

BOTH
What is ours we share,
all for the common good.
A thousand bees to make a hive.

BISHOP DYER
She must be led
to the wisdom of her father.

TULL
She must be led
with a firm and steady hand.

BISHOP DYER
She needs our guidance,

TULL
Now more than ever,

BOTH
to lead her back to the light.

BISHOP DYER
We've come so far, but the journey isn't over.
We've come too far to ever turn back.
Tarred and feathered in Ohio!

TULL
Driven from our homes in Illinois!
Murdered

BISHOP DYER
and martyred

BOTH
in Missouri!
Cast out across the plains!

Westward to a new home!
Westward toward the light!
To build a new Jerusalem
With God's all-holy might!

BISHOP DYER
They must be led
to their own revelation!

TULL
They must be led
until they understand!

BISHOP
Like the Jews out the Egypt,

TULL
across the burning sand,

BISHOP DYER
Led by the heart!

TULL
Led by the hand!

BOTH
Until we all reach
the promised land!

*(The congregation slowly enters, singing the Mormon Hymn "Come, Ye Saints".
Tull joins the singing congregation as Bishop Dyer assumes his place at the altar.
The singing parishioners take their place in the pews.)*

CONGREGATION *(entering, singing verse one of the Mormon hymn "Come, Ye Saints")*
Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear;
But with joy wend your way.
Though hard to you this journey may appear,
Grace shall be as your day.
'Tis better far for us to strive
Our useless cares from us to drive;

Do this, and joy your hearts will swell.
All is well! All is well!

CONGREGATION (*hums a hymn verse, as Dyer speaks over them*)

BISHOP DYER

We talk a good deal about building up the kingdom of God upon the earth.
But if we are to build a kingdom, there needs to be a king,
a ruler; someone to govern and control the kingdom.
And there must be subjects and a territory for the subjects to live upon.
Well now, do you think we live in a kingdom without law?
No! The strictest law ever given to mankind is the law of God.

(*Lassiter enters and stands outside the church.*)

BISHOP DYER AND CONGREGATION (*hum a hymn verse, as Lassiter sings over them.*)

LASSITER

I'm here, Milly,
to put things right.

Look at him.
Prayin' to his God.
You'll be seein' him soon, Bishop
Everlastin' life!

BISHOP DYER AND CONGREGATION (*singing together*)

And should we die before our journey's through,
Happy day! All is well!
But if our lives are spared again,
to see the Saints their rest obtain,
oh, how we'll make this chorus swell—
All is well! All is well!

LASSITER

Pray, pray,
preacher man.
And hope to Hell
your God's a listnin'.
You'll be seein' him soon.
He's waitin' for ya.
He's waitin',
to send you down to Hell!

(*The Hymn ends. Lassiter enters the church, menacingly.*)

LASSITER

That was one good sermon, Bishop.
Mighty powerful words.
Almost had me believin'.

BISHOP DYER

How dare you enter this sacred place!
Get out. Get outta here!

(*The men move to draw on Lassiter.
Lassiter draws quickly and trains his guns on the men.*)

LASSITER
 Don't even think about it!
 Any 'a you!
 Drop em' now!

*(The congregation slowly drop their guns to the floor.
 Lassiter keeps his guns on the congregation and the Bishop.)*

LASSITER
 Your Bishop and I are gonna have a little talk.

BISHOP DYER
 Worry not, my brothers.
 I do not fear this man.
 God is with me.

LASSITER
 If God is with you,
 then you might wanna keep on prayin'.

BISHOP DYER
 For what?

LASSITER
 Forgiveness.
 You took my sister, Milly Erne.
 Stole her from her God and drove her to the grave with yours.

BISHOP DYER
 Milly Erne came to me of her own free will.
 I never forced her into anything.
 We welcomed her into the church
 and into our hearts.

LASSITER
 Until she didn't want to be one a' you no more.

BISHOP DYER
 Leaving the church was her choice.
 She chose damnation over the kingdom of Heaven.
 I won't be blamed for that.

LASSITER
 The hell you won't.
 You couldn't have Milly, so you stole her baby!
 You took her own little girl from her!
 That's what killed her!

BISHOP DYER
 I had to save that little girl.
 Milly was lost, but that baby still had a chance,

a chance at eternal life.
So, I protected her.

LASSITER
Where is she?

BISHOP DYER
I hid her behind a mask.
She rode with men sworn to protect her.
I loved that child
like she was my own.
And now she's gone,
maybe even dead.

LASSITER

My niece,
the masked rider.

She's alive,
with Venters.

But I can find my peace with that,
knowing I saved her a place in the
Kingdom of Heaven.

Who have you ever saved, gunman?
I deal in life eternal.
But you?
You deal in pain and death.
Who have you ever saved?
Your heart is black and empty.

(Lassiter starts to back down a bit, moved by these words and his discovery of Bess.)

You can't preach morals if you don't have any.
At least I believe in something.
Something almighty!
What do you believe in, gunman?
You're a killer.
A murderer.
A monster.
The pit of Hell's waiting for you,
earned by your deeds.
Your soul is damned!
Damned!
Think on that, gunman.

(Something in this speech has touched Lassiter. He lowers his guns, and slowly turns away from the Bishop. Bishop Dyer quietly reaches for one of his guns. He prepares to shoot Lassiter in the back.)

BISHOP DYER *(under his breath)*
I now consign you to Hell.
May you burn there forever.

*(Lassiter turns quickly and shoots several times, killing Dyer.
He trains his guns on the stunned congregation.)*

LASSITER
Don't ya move!
Not one a ya!

(He walks over to Dyer's body, guns still trained on the congregation.)

I reckon there's room in Hell for both of us.
I'll see you there.

*(He backs out slowly, keeping his guns on the congregation.
He exits the church and runs off.)*

ACT 3, SCENE 2

It is later in the day. Jane is in her house, pacing nervously. Lassiter enters, dazed and disoriented.

(pause)

JANE
What happened?

(pause)

JANE
What have you done?

(pause)

JANE
Is he dead?
Did you kill him?

(Lassiter nods tiredly, looking away from her.)

JANE
No!
Oh, God help us, no!
I tried to stop you!
I begged you! No!

LASSITER
Jane, I went there to kill him!
You know I did!
But when I heard about Bess...

JANE
Bess?

LASSITER
She's out there, Jane.

My niece is alive and she's
out on the sage with Venters.

JANE
Oh, my Lord.

LASSITER
When he told me about Bess,
somethin' changed in me.
I was gonna leave, I swear.
I wasn't gonna kill him.

And then he drew on me.
I didn't even have time to think.
It was done before I knew it.

After all these years of hatin',
I forgot what it felt like to feel.
I'd froze up my heart so cold inside,
I forgot what it felt like to care.

We're all angry, Jane
Everyone's got somethin' eatin' at 'em.
Someone takes somethin' from ya,
or gets in your way,
or even looks at ya,
and ya wanna kill.

And a gun makes it easy.
Ya don't have to get in close.
Don't even have to look em in the eye.
Clean an' easy...
and then it's done.

(Lassiter slowly removes his gun belt. He walks over to Jane and holds it out to her, surrendering his guns. She takes them.)

LASSITER
I'm headin' out now.
I brought enough trouble on ya.
Maybe they'll leave ya be, once I'm gone.

JANE
Do you think they'll just walk away?

LASSITER
It's me they're after.

JANE
It's us they're after.
You know that.

They're going to drive me out sooner or later.
We're in this together now.

(pause)

What's your Christian name, Lassiter?

LASSITER
John.

(Jane takes his gun belt and offers it back to him)

JANE
John.
Take these.

LASSITER
No.
I'm done.

JANE
I won't see you buried under the sage
with all those other men.
It's a wild time, John.
There's no mercy in the West.
Take these.
We may need them!

(Lassiter takes the gun belt, reluctantly.)

*(Music swoops in as Tull and his rustlers are illuminated on the other side of the stage.
The stage is split three ways. Tull and his men are preparing to head out, Bess and Venters are packing
to leave Surprise Valley and Jane and Lassiter are at Withersteen ranch.)*

TULL
Damn him!
Damn him to hell!
Gonna get that murderin' bastard!

Load up men!
We're movin' out!
Gonna find that man and kill him!

Shoot on sight!
Ya hear me?

THE MEN
We hear ya!

ALL
Shoot that man on sight!

(Lights up on Venters and Bess in Surprise Valley, packing to leave.)

VENTERS

Grab your things, little one!
I'll get the horses packed!
We'll be headin' out tomorrow, you and I,
before the sun can find a corner of the sky!
There's a place back east
where the sage'll never grow,
and it's there we're gonna find our home!

VENTERS

No one to hold us down!

BESS

No one to tell us where to go!

BOTH

We're gonna find ourselves a home
where we decide what's so!

VENTERS

We're gonna break these chains!

BESS

We're gonna make it come to be!

BOTH

For the first time in my life,
I can see!

(Lights up to illuminate Jane and Lassiter at Withersteen ranch.)

JANE

We can't stay here.
Not another moment.
We'll take our fastest hoses and ride!

LASSITER

I know where they are.
Bess and Venters!
We can find them, Jane,
before they leave the valley!

She's the only fam'ly I got
And you know I like that boy.

JANE

Bess is like my own.
He's like a brother to me.

BOTH

We can leave this place together,
and start all over in Illinois!

LASSITER AND VENTERS
In Illinois a man can be his own man!

JANE AND BESS
In Illinois a woman can be free!

ALL FOUR
And there won't be anyone to tell us
how to live or what to be!

No one to hold us down!
No one to tell us where to go!
We need a place to start anew,

Where we decide what's so!

We're gonna break these chains!
We're gonna make it come to be!

When we finally cross those plains,
We'll be free!

(The others disperse, leaving Jane and Lassiter on stage.)

JANE
John, get Black Star and Night ready.
They're our fastest horses.
Release the others!
Let them all go!

(Lassiter exits)

JANE
Father, forgive me.
They will take our land and herd.
I cannot stop them now.
But I will not give them the house you built
with your own hands!

(Jane takes an oil lamp and hurls it against the wall, lighting the house on fire. She runs off.)

HORSE/FIRE INTERLUDE # 3

(This instrumental interlude depicts the burning of the ranch and the characters riding out.)

ACT 3, SCENE 3

*It is later in the day, out near the mouth of Surprise Valley.
Venters and Bess are crossing the stage, with their supplies.*

TULL AND HIS MEN
Saddle up!

Grab your guns!

We're movin' out!
We're movin' out, now!

To the Withersteen ranch!
Gonna find that gunman!
Kill 'em all!

TULL
Kill 'em all! Ya hear me?

TULL AND HIS MEN
We're gonna take that ranch!
Don't leave anyone alive!

Saddle up men!
Now, let's ride!

Jane and Lassiter enter.

JANE

Bern! Bern!

VENTERS

Jane!

What are you doin' here?

LASSITER

We're comin' with ya, boy!

JANE

We're leaving Short Creek.

Can we travel with you?

VENTERS

You sure as hell can!

Damn, it's good to see ya! (*shaking Lassiter's hand*)

Both a' ya!

(pause)

I'd like ya to meet someone.

LASSITER

You must be Bess.

BESS

Yes.

JANE

Good Lord.

Look at you.

The spirit and image of Milly.

LASSITER

Hello, girl.

I'm your mamma's brother.

BESS

I never knew my mamma.

She left me long ago.

LASSITER

She loved you, girl,

more than you could ever know.

She never left you.

Someone took you from her.

BESS
Where is she?

(pause)

LASSITER
She's with God, Bess.
Milly's in the Kingdom of Heaven.

But you still got family, girl.
You and me is family.
All of us here.
And we're gonna start all over in Illinois together.

JANE *(noticing the dust in the distance...)*
Look. They're coming.
Tull's men are headed this way.

VENTERS
Let's fight 'em right here!

LASSITER
It's me they're after.
You three go.
I'll lead 'em off your trail
and catch up when I can.

VENTERS
We all go together!

JANE *(taking charge, to Venters and Bess.)*
Your horses aren't fast enough.
You've got one chance to get out.
Take our horses.
They'll never catch you.

VENTERS
We're not gonna leave you.
We all go!

JANE
No!
Take our horses.
John and I will draw them away.

LASSITER
Are ya sure, Jane?
If ya stay with me, ya might not make it out.

JANE
But they will.

They're young.
They deserve a chance at a new life.

LASSITER
And what about you?
Don't you deserve somethin'?

JANE (*touching him, tenderly*)
I have something.

(*Jane and Lassiter embrace.*)

VENTERS
Up over that ridge, Lassiter!
Hide in the canyon!

LASSITER
Now, you two,
ride like the devil!

BESS (*she gives Lassiter a hug*)
Follow us!
We'll be looking for you!

JANE
Godspeed!

LASSITER
Ride!

(*Venters and Bess exit. Scene changes to Surprise Valley.*)

It is nightfall. Jane and Lassiter are at the top of Surprise Valley, near the balancing rock, silhouetted against the setting sun. Tull and his men are offstage, climbing up to get them.

TULL AND HIS MEN (*offstage*)
There they are!
At the top!
Climb men, climb!

JANE
I can see them.
They'll be here soon.

Get 'em both!
Don't let 'em out alive!

So it ends here,
in this beautiful place.
If this is God's will, so be it.

Climb!
Climb!

LASSITER

Maybe God has another plan.
Maybe He put that rock there
for a reason.

Get 'em. Get 'em both!
Don't let 'em out alive!

We can stop 'em now, if ya want to.
All we gotta do is roll that rock.

JANE

Then roll it, John!
Roll the stone!

Climb!
Climb, men!

LASSITER

We'll be trapped in here, Jane.
No comin' in or out.
The whole valley sealed up tight!

Climb!
Climb!
Climb! Climb! Climb!

JANE

Roll it, John!
Roll the stone!

There they are!
Climb! Climb! Climb! Climb!

JANE AND LASSITER

We'll find our lives again!
With you I'm not alone!
And if this is where it ends,
then we have found our home!

(They both place their hands on the stone, ready to push.)

JANE

Help guide our hands, father!
Be here with us!

JANE AND LASSITER

Help us be strong!
Help us be strong!

(Jane and Lassiter push the rock together. It tumbles down, shaking the entire hall, burying Tull and his men and trapping Lassiter and Jane in the valley. They embrace as the music swells.)

(Curtain. End of Act 3)