

THE WIND  
An Opera in Three Acts  
Libretto Adapted from the Movie and the Novel  
By Patricia Herzog

Characters, in order of appearance

Cora Mason, wife of Beverley Mason

Beverley ("Bev") Mason, cowboy originally from Virginia

Letty Mason, Bev's cousin from Virginia

Ann, Frank and Johnny (nonspeaking), children of Cora and Bev

Sourdough, cowboy

Lige Hightower, cowboy and soon-to-be Letty's husband

Wirt Roddy, the bad guy

Sweetwater, Texas during a drought in the 1880's

ACT I Scene 1

*Nighttime. The sitting room of Bev and Cora's house, a modest, ramshackle affair in the midst of the wide open prairie. The wind is blowing hard but not howling. Cora is busy sweeping up the sand that blows in through the and seeps in through cracks in the windows and elsewhere, settling on everything.*

CORA

Another mouth to feed.

BEV

Another hand around the house.

CORA

Ann's grown up now.  
The boys mind her rule.

BEV

When she's not in school.

CORA *(looking at Bev out of the corner of her eye)*

Is she pretty?

*She senses Bev's hesitation.*

Very pretty?

BEV

Delicate and soft ...  
With cheeks pink as peach blooms.  
A little wisp of a thing.  
An April breeze of a girl.

CORA *(jealous)*

Not like me!

BEV *(laughing gently and shaking his head)*

Not like you!

*Cora stops sweeping and turns to look at Bev in earnest.*

CORA

Is she really very pretty?

BEV

Cora!  
My beautiful Cora!  
I am the envy of every man ...

CORA

Oh Bev!

*She drops the broom and rushes to his arms.*

BEV (*embracing her passionately*)

Cora!  
My beautiful Cora!  
Big and strong and bold.  
Truth be told ...  
There's not a thing a man can do ...  
You can't do better!

Poor Letty!  
Now her mother's gone ...  
There's no one's left ...  
To look after her.  
There's no one left ...  
In Virginia.  
I'm her only kin.

CORA (*unsympathetically*)

Doesn't know what she's in for.

BEV (*shaking his head in sympathy*)

Doesn't know what she's in for.

*A strong gust of wind and the door flies open. A heap of sandy dirt blows into the house. Cora and Bev both cover their faces. Bev goes to close the door and sees his cousin arriving. He exclaims excitedly to Cora.*

She's here!  
Lige is with her ...  
Sourdough, too.  
*(puzzled)*  
The third man I can't make out.

*He hails Letty from the door.*

Cousin Letty!

*They embrace at the threshold.*

LETTY

Cousin Bev!

CORA *(sounding irritated)*

Quick!  
Shut the door.  
What are you waiting for?

*Bev ushers Letty in and shuts the door.*

LETTY *(approaching Cora with great warmth)*

Very pleased to meet you!

*She goes to kiss Cora on the cheek but senses her rejection and pulls back.*

BEV

My you're lookin' pretty ...  
And after such a journey!

*The door opens again. Lige and Sourdough enter, laden with baggage. They are followed by the third man.*

SOURDOUGH *(good-naturedly unburdening himself of his heavy load)*

She sure don't travel lightly!

LIGE *(unburdening himself of an even heavier load, but not complaining)*

Here's the rest.

BEV (*scrutinizing, then recognizing the third man*)

Who's this?  
Why it's Wirt ...  
Wirt Roddy.  
What are you doing in these parts?

WIRT (*bowing graciously to Cora, then speaking to Bev*)

The lady was traveling alone.  
We talked a lot and I bought her a sandwich.  
I unloaded her bags and said goodbye.  
(*gesturing with mild contempt at Lige and Sourdough*)  
Then she saw these two and started to cry.  
Was expecting you ...  
Not them.

BEV (*mildly sarcastic*)

Very gallant of you.

LETTY (*apologetically*)

Wirt's right, Bev.  
I didn't expect to be greeted by strangers.

CORA (*to Letty, coldly*)

He's coughing again.  
I told him no ...  
He couldn't go.

LETTY (*to Bev, looking concerned*)

Coughing?

BEV (*trying to minimize*)

Nothing.

CORA (*angrily*)

Not nothing!  
Not in this wind!

*The three men shuffle awkwardly. Cora addresses them directly, pointing to the bench in the corner.*

Pull up that bench.  
I'll fetch you something to eat.

*They nod gratefully. Wirt sits down on the bench. Bev pulls up a chair for Letty. Lige and Sourdough remain standing. Cora exits through a door to the kitchen. Letty looks around at the sand-covered surfaces.*

LETTY

It sure is windy.

SOURDOUGH (*mildly amused*)

Ain't nothing!

LIGE (*sensing her unease*)

It's dry ... mighty dry.  
All it takes is a puff and the sand kicks up.

WIRT (*mildly arrogant*)

There's nothing here for miles around.  
Nothing to stop the wind ...  
From whipping across the plains.  
Nothing to stop the wind ...  
From howling so loud ...  
You can't even hear yourself think!

SOURDOUGH (*chiming in*)

Ain't that the truth!

WIRT (*continuing*)

They say the wind makes the womenfolk crazy.  
Pits their skin ...  
Ruins their eyes ...  
Makes them lose their looks.

*Letty looks greatly distressed.*

BEV

Nonsense!  
Look at my beautiful Cora!

SOURDOUGH

Drives men mad, too.  
I seen it ...  
In a norther.

LETTY

A norther?

BEV

We dug that hole underground ...

*He points to a spot in the corner covered with straw.*

So we're safe and sound ...  
While the storm rages round us.

SOURDOUGH

You ain't never seen anything like it!

WIRT (*as if telling a ghost story*)

The temperature drops ...  
And a deafening wind ...  
Comes barreling 'cross the plains ...

SOURDOIUGH

You ain't never seen anything like it!

WIRT

A deafening sound ...  
Like thundering hooves ...  
Like horses fleeing in terror.

SOURDOUGH

They say the wind is a stallion ...  
Stomping and rearing and snorting with rage.

WIRT (*laughing*)

Wailing and moaning ...  
They say the wind is a woman.

*Letty looks terrified. The men don't notice. They laugh along with Wirt. Cora re-enters with a heaping platter of food.*

CORA

Quiet!  
You'll wake the children.

BEV (*seeing that Letty is scared*)

You'll get used to it, Letty.

LIGE (*sympathetically*)

Some days there's less ...  
Some days more.  
When it rains ...  
The sand don't stir.

SOURDOUGH (*singing a little ditty*)

"Never mind the weather so the wind don't blow."  
That's what we say out here!

LETTY

Do you mean to say it never goes away?

BEV

It's a terrible drought we're in.  
Two years on ...  
And barely a drop ...  
To stop the wind ...  
From racing across the plain.



SOURDOUGH

Stop messin' with the wind.  
My mouth's a'waterin'!

BEV

Gentlemen ... let's eat!

*The men eagerly help themselves to food. Sourdough sits on the bench next to Wirt. Lige remains standing. Bev encourages Letty to partake.*

Cora's a mighty good cook!

*The traumatized Letty has been imagining a wild stallion stomping and rearing and snorting with rage.*

No thank you ...  
Not just now.

BEV (*sympathetically*)

Come a long way, you have.

*Letty sits quietly with her hands folded. She stares into space. Cora goes back into the kitchen. The others attack the food with gusto. Wirt finishes first and gets up to take his leave.*

WIRT

I'll be takin' my leave.  
Please tell the misses thank you.  
(*addressing Letty*)  
As for you, young miss ...  
(*amused*)  
Find a young man as soon as you can ...  
And get him to take you away ...  
From here!  
(*to the others, tipping his hat*)  
So long, gentlemen!

*Letty looks up but doesn't react. Still amused, Wirt opens the door and exits. A strong gust of wind blows in more sand and the food is now gritty. The hungry men try to make the best of it.*

SOURDOUGH

That Wirt sure is a funny guy.

BEV

They say he married a ton of money.

LIGE

Keeps a lot of women, too.

LIGE

Got no business worrying the girl.

*Letty looks up, but she hardly hears them. The wind has transported her somewhere else.*

End of Scene

ACT I Scene 2

*The interior of Bev's house. A sunny Sunday. The wind is blowing mildly. The front door is open, letting in the light. Cora is packing a picnic lunch in a large woven basket. Everyone is dressed for the occasion. Letty is too done up and looks slightly ridiculous. Ann is wearing a frilly gingham dress and Letty is tying on her bonnet with a ribbon. The boys have on fancy shirts and cowboy hats. The children are happy and excited.*

LETTY *(to Ann)*

There!  
It's done!  
*(exclaiming)*  
A beautiful day!

CORA *(busy packing the picnic lunch)*

A beautiful day!

LETTY

A beautiful day for a picnic!  
Where is Bev?

CORA *(doesn't look up)*

Loading the wagon.

*She hands Ann the basket and points to the door.*

The horses are hitched.  
I'll fetch the boys.  
Hurry along now!

LETTY *(trying to be helpful)*

Frank ... Johnny ...  
Come along!

CORA

Come along, children!

*The children scream with excitement and run out the door. Cora finally looks at Letty.*

There's just a few dishes left.  
Not that much to do.  
Sunday's for you, too.

LETTY

But the picnic!

CORA

Sunday's for callin' and courtin'.  
Someone's got to stay at home.

LETTY

Is that why I'm all dressed up?

CORA

Like I said ...  
Sunday's for callin' and courtin'.  
Someone's got to stay home.

There's just a few dishes.  
Besides ... I left a pie ...  
In case there's callers.

LETTY

Callers?

CORA *(shouting to Bev and the others)*

Ready!

*Cora rushes out and shuts the door behind her. Letty takes up the broom and starts to sweep up the dust accumulated around the doorstep. She lets the broom fall and re-opens the door.*

LETTY

A fine sunny Sunday!  
Rare gift of a day!  
And I am to stay ... here!  
*(looking around)*

Where's my shawl?  
I'll have my Sunday after all!

*Letty picks up her shawl and ties it around her shoulders. She looks at herself in the mirror to make last-minute adjustments.*

*(with disgust)*  
A ridiculous dress!

*She lets out a hearty laugh, drops the shawl and takes off the dress, revealing a delicately-embroidered slip and the beauty of her scantily-clad body. Leaving the dress in a heap on the floor, she picks up the shawl, drapes it over her shoulders and laughs again, shaking her head.*

Those ridiculous men at the barn last night ...  
Waiting in line to dance with me.

*On her way out, she looks in the mirror again.*

Where is the rosy glow in my cheeks?  
Where my bright golden curls?  
Whatever became of the girl of eighteen?  
Gone now...  
Gone with the wind.

*Suddenly she can't see herself in the mirror. The light coming in from outside has been blocked. She turns around to look at the front door and sees Lige standing at the threshold.*

Pardon me miss ...  
I've come a'callin'.  
Didn't mean to scare you.

*Letty quickly fixes the loose strands of her hair back in a bun and adjusts her shawl so that it covers the upper part of her body.*

LETTY *(embarrassed)*

I'm not dressed for company.

LIGE

You look mighty fine, Letty.  
Mighty fine to me!

LETTY

A mighty fine day for a picnic.  
They've all gone out ...  
And left me here.  
I'm the only one home.

LIGE

That don't bother me none.

LETTY (*suddenly remembering*)

Will you have some pie?

*Lige nods with pleasure.*

Let me take your hat.  
Please ... sit down.

*Letty goes to the kitchen and brings out the pie and a knife. She cuts two slices, a very big one for Lige and a small one for herself, then realizes she has nothing to serve them on. She goes back to the kitchen and brings out plates and forks.*

LIGE

Apple ...  
My favorite!

LETTY

Cora's a good cook.

LIGE

She sure is.  
Go on ... have some yourself.

*Letty watches Lige eat the pie with gusto. She takes a small bite and smiles at him, trying to be sociable. He returns her smile with a big wide grin.*

You looked awful pretty last night.

LETTY (*embarrassed*)

That awful dress ...  
All those ribbons and bows!

LIGE (*laughs gently*)

It was a bit fancy, I suppose.  
The men really went for it, though.  
All lined up in a row ...  
Waitin' to dance with you.

LETTY (*naively*)

What else were they supposed to do?

LIGE (*not knowing what to say*)

I guess I don't know.

LETTY

You're a good dancer, Lige.  
A big man like you ...  
And so light on your feet.

LIGE (*encouraged*)

You really think so?

LETTY

You were my favorite partner.

LIGE

Is that so!

*An awkward pause, while each thinks what to say next.*

LETTY

Where did you learn to dance like that?

LIGE

The girls 'round here all know what to do.  
They taught me some fine fancy steps.

LETTY

The girls must like you, then.

LIGE

Oh, I don't know ...  
I never liked one of them ...  
*(very awkwardly)*  
Not until now.

LETTY *(apprehensive)*

Now?  
What do you mean, Lige?

LIGE

I mean ...  
I mean ...  
Oh, I don't know ...  
I can't find the words!

LETTY *(relieved)*

No matter!  
Another piece of pie?

LIGE *(feeling rejected)*

No thank you.

LETTY *(tenderly)*

You're shy, aren't you?

LIGE *(embarrassed, looking down)*

Sensitive.  
My mother ...  
God rest her soul ...



That's what she used to say.

LETTY

You're not like the others ...  
That's for sure.

LIGE (*looking straight at Letty*)

Is that a good thing, Letty?

LETTY

Sure it is, Lige.

LIGE (*hesitantly*)

Would you be encouragin' me?

LETTY (*uncomprehending*)

Beg pardon?

LIGE

Sunday's for courtin' ...  
Would you be encouragin' me?

*Letty bursts out in laughter.*

LETTY (*trying to stifle herself*)

Oh Lige!  
Is that what you think?

LIGE (*screwing up his courage*)

Letty ...  
I've come to ask for your hand!

LETTY

You mean you want to marry me?  
Why ... why ...  
That's ridiculous!

*She bursts out laughing again.*

LIGE (*trying to hold on to his dignity*)

Well I guess that's your answer, then.

LETTY (*feeling bad for him*)

Oh Lige!  
I'm just a girl ...  
I've no more than eighteen years.

LIGE

Round here that's marryin' age.  
(*looks around for his hat*)  
I guess I'll be goin' then.  
Good day, Miss Letty.  
Thanks for the pie.

LETTY (*not knowing what more to say*)

Good day, Lige.

End of Scene

ACT I Scene 3

*The interior of Bev's house. A windy day with occasional very strong gusts threatening to blow the door open. Sandy earth is seeping in around the corners of the door and the windows. Near the hearth hangs a big side of beef on a large hook. Cora is cutting it up with a large butcher's knife. Opposite them, Letty and the children are playing tag. It is evident that the children adore her.*

LETTY (*pointing to one of the children*)

You're it!

*The other children scramble around, shrieking with delight, chasing after "it". One of them grazes Cora's arm, the one that holds the knife.*

CORA (*angrily*)

Stop it now!  
Stop it at once!

*The children rush to Letty's side, cowering from their mother, whose anger they know to fear. Cora addresses Letty, indicating the side of beef with her knife.*

Won't get yourself dirty ...  
Come here and help me with this!

LETTY

Where I come from the men do the carving.

CORA

Well, well ...  
Out here the women do everything.  
Better get used to it, Letty.  
The womanly arts won't help you none ...  
Not out here on the frontier.  
Better get yourself some pioneer virtues ...  
Like shootin' a gun ...

*She gesticulates with the knife, pointing it at Letty.*

And plyin' a knife!

LETTY (*defiant*)

Not on your life!  
I'll not go near a knife or a rifle.

CORA (*laughing contemptuously*)

A gun's no rifle.

LETTY

No matter to me.

CORA (*pointing the knife towards the side of beef*)

A woman's got to learn to take life ...  
A woman's got to defend herself ...  
Out here ...  
From coyotes and rattlers and men.

*Letty shrugs with disgust.*

LETTY (*turning to the children with gentleness*)

Run along now...

*Eager to avoid the tension, the children scamper off.*

CORA (*disgusted*)

There's softer places for folks like you ...  
With backbones like twines of string.  
Lucky you got Lige.

LETTY (*confused*)

Lige?

CORA

Oh, I almost forgot!

*Cora rushes off and immediately returns with a large, lumpy present clumsily wrapped in tissue paper.*

Go on ... open it!

*Letty is completely confused. Slowly she unwraps the present, a fancy white dress.*

Your wedding dress.

LETTY *(stunned)*

Wedding?  
What wedding?

CORA

Lige came a'courtin,' didn't he?  
*(laughs)*  
Who ate up all that pie?

LETTY *(still holding the wedding dress)*

Lige?  
Why would I be marrying Lige?

*She bursts out in nervous laughter. Then a horrible gust of wind reminds her of her situation and she shuts up.*

CORA

A girl like you needs lookin' after.  
You're lucky you got Lige!

*Cora snatches the dress from Letty and disappears momentarily. She comes back out with an apron.*

Here!  
*(shoves the apron at Letty)*  
Put this on.  
Take this knife.  
*(laughs maliciously)*  
I'll show you a thing or two!

LETTY *(shaking)*

I'd rather not ...  
The children ...  
I'll go and fetch the children.

CORA

Take it!  
Go on ... take the knife.  
We don't need no game-playin' here.

*Letty is frozen with disgust.*

Go on, then!  
Get out of my sight!

*She picks up her shawl and opens the door.*

LETTY

Who hath gathered the wind in his fist? (Prov. 30:4)  
Dear God, save me!  
Take me away from here ...  
Or let me die!

*Terrified, Letty ventures forth into the howling, raging wind.*

END OF ACT

ACT II Scene 1

*The interior of Lige's modest one-room house., Lige and Sourdough are sitting around in fancy clothes, drunk and still drinking. Their silk bandanas are loosed from their necks, their shirts partly unfastened, hats tossed on the floor. Sourdough is playing the banjo and they are singing verses from Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie. Behind a screen, as yet unseen, is Letty. While the first verse is sung, a wedding veil is tossed over the screen and lands on the floor. Lige and Sourdough are too drunk and too involved in their singing to notice. Next, the wedding dress Cora gave Letty is flung over the top of the screen.*

LIGE AND SOURDOUGH

O bury me not on the lone prairie ...  
Where coyotes howl and the wind blows free ...  
In a narrow grave just six by three ...  
O bury me not on the lone prairie.

*Letty emerges from behind the screen, dressed simply and becomingly. The men take notice and stop singing.*

LETTY (*nervously*)

Please go on!

LIGE AND SOURDOUGH (*obliging*)

I wish to lie where a mother's prayer ...  
And a sister's tear will mingle there ...  
Where friends can come and weep o'er me ...  
O bury me not on the lone prairie.

*They stop and there's an awkward silence.*

SOURDOUGH

It's gettin' late.  
I best be going.

LETTY (*practically pleading*)

No! Don't go!  
Stay and sing of cheerier things ...  
Sing to me of spring!

SOURDOUGH (*obliging, without banjo*)

How my heart leaps up in song ...  
To welcome the springtime rain!  
When the winds die down ...  
And the trampled plain smells sweet again.  
When flowers rise and greet ...  
The lark's exultant flutings ...  
And the crow flies over the smooth low hills ...  
Filling the air with the thrill of its call.<sup>i</sup>

*Lige harrumphs, giving Sourdough a clear sign that he should go.*

Well, I guess I'll be going.  
Mighty fine wedding!

LIGE

Mighty fine wedding!

LETTY (*resigned to Sourdough's departure*)

So long, Sourdough.  
Mighty fine singing.

*Sourdough exits and Lige turns to Letty expectantly. He has a big grin on his face. She does not meet his eyes, but rather lets out a sigh.*

It's getting on towards May ...  
And still no sign of rain.

LIGE

Not yet, Letty.  
Not yet.

LETTY (*despairing*)

Will it ever be spring?

LIGE (*very emotional*)

Oh yes Letty!  
Yes!  
It comes all at once ...



You never seen anything like it!  
The flowers oh my ...  
The sweet smellin' plain ...  
The sweet silver song of the lark.<sup>ii</sup>

Have faith, Letty ...  
You'll see spring yet!

LETTY (*desperate*)

When Lige ... when?

LIGE

This here drought's the worst I've seen.  
We're all gonna starve to death ...  
Unless the cattle go south ...  
Where there's water ...  
And grass for grazin' ...

Some of them's already dead.  
The rest is standin' like statues ...  
So weak they can't hardly move.

LETTY (*suddenly anxious*)

You mean to do it soon?

LIGE

As soon as the men all get here.  
Some of them's comin' from far away ...  
As far as Fort Worth.

LETTY (*remembering*)

Wirt Roddy ...  
The man I met on the train.

LIGE

That's right, Letty.

LETTY

Is that where you're going to?

LIGE

We're goin' to Devil's River.  
We're goin' to where it's wet.  
We need every hand we can get.

Don't fret, Letty ...

*Smiling shyly, he approaches and tries to kiss her. She steps back, trying to hide her fear and revulsion. He senses her reticence and withdraws.*

I'll go heat the coffee.

*Letty disappears behind the screen. Lige moves to the stove at the other side of the room. He turns off the whistling kettle, then walks across the room and gently folds back the screen. Letty is sitting on the bed by the night table. She has removed her shawl, revealing her beautiful bare arms, and is combing the long tresses of the hair she has let down. Lige is aroused. He gets two cups, sets them down on the night table, and sits down beside her.*

Sugar?

LETTY

No thank you.

*Lige takes two lumps of sugar, stirs his coffee, and drinks it down with great satisfaction. Letty tastes the coffee and tries to hide her disgust. While Lige isn't looking, she pours it out in the spittoon on the night table. Lige notices that her coffee is all gone and cracks a big smile. He gestures towards the pot but she shakes her head no. There is an awkward moment of silence. Then Lige tries to kiss her again. Letty pulls away.*

LIGE *(trying not to be offended)*

You're not much for kissin,' are you?

*Letty looks away and shakes her head no.*

Ever been kissed before?

*Pretending not to be embarrassed, she looks him directly in the eye. Taking her look as a sign of passion, Lige is overcome with passion himself. He seizes*

*her and presses her close. She resists as he tries to kiss her, but he will not be denied. She struggles free of his arms and violently pushes him away. Wiping his kiss off her mouth, she looks at him with disgust and contempt.*

LETTY

How dare you!

LIGE

You're my wife, Letty ...

LETTY

Disgusting brute!  
What makes you think I love you?

*Shocked and hurt, Lige strives mightily to gain control over himself and the situation.*

LIGE

Love takes time, Letty.  
It doesn't come all at once.  
You'll see, Letty ...  
In time, love will come.

*Letty can't help but admire Lige's dignity and restraint. She is moved to pity.*

LETTY

Oh Lige!

LIGE *(continuing to reassure her)*

You'll see, Letty ...  
In time, love will come.

*He pauses. There is a look of grim resignation on his face.*

*(softly, as if to himself)*  
Or else it won't.

*Lige removes the coffee cups from the night table and takes them back to the kitchen. He looks to see that all is in order for Letty, arranging the blankets and pillows on his bed. He inspects the spittoon and discovers that Letty has*

*poured out the coffee. She registers his look of disappointment and feels ashamed. Slowly he replaces the screen, which he is now on the other side of. He sits down on a chair and puts his feet up on a bench. Soon he is fast asleep, snoring so loud that even the wind can't drown him out.*

End of Scene

ACT II Scene 2

*Interior of Lige's house in the evening, some days later. Lige is setting things up for the night. In what appears now to be a permanent arrangement, he places the screen in front of the bed and arranges his own improvised bed on the other side, with the bench and a chair. Letty is washing the dishes with sand from a bucket beside the sink. She stops her washing and looks up.*

LETTY

A fine cool night.  
In the still clear air ...  
There's not a trace of wind.

*(teasing and taunting good-naturedly)*  
Heaven is a place that has no wind ...  
Hell is where there's nothing else.<sup>iii</sup>  
That's what we say back home.

LIGE *(returning the volley in the same spirit)*

On the prairie ...  
A man's about as free as he can be.  
Yessiree ...  
That's what we say out here!

*Lige opens the door and looks out.*

I bet you've never seen such stars ...  
Take a gander at that!

*Letty moves towards the door and looks at the sky in amazement. A short while after, a coyote howls.*

A fine cool night for coyotes, too.

LETTY *(disturbed)*

It pierces my ears.

LIGE

Callin' his friends, no doubt.

*Letty shudders and steps inside. She puts away the dishes. Lige starts to undress. Letty steps behind the screen. Lige continues undressing, blows out the light and the stage goes dark.*

End of Scene

ACT II Scene 3

*Later the same night. All is still and dark inside the house. We hear muffled sounds. The door opens slowly and Letty, in her nightclothes and shawl, steps out under a piercingly bright canopy of stars. She wanders a little ways from the house, all the while looking up in wonderment. Then she stops and bends down on her knees, looking around at the barren prairie. The look on her face is ecstatic.*

LETTY

Spring at last!  
The fresh smell of lilac.  
The lilies and the violets.  
The pansies and asters.

Bluebells and bellwort.  
Toothwort and soapwort.  
Pennywort and spiderwort.  
Wild bergamot.

Blackberry, dewberry.  
Raspberry, baneberry.  
Buttercups and bittercress.  
And oh-so-many the ferns!

Hoary pea and honeysuckle.  
Black- and brown-eyed Susans.  
The gentle scent of clover ...  
White and crimson red.

Sweet pea and periwinkle.  
Silverbells and pussytoes.  
Hyssop ...  
And oh so much phlox!

Sweet fragrant breath of spring!  
Anemones and hyacinth ...

*Letty looks up at the starry night sky.*

And up above a canopy of leaves!

*She lies down on the ground, her fully-extended body facing upward, and looks up at what she thinks are trees.*

My heavens!  
So many trees!

*Letty points here and there, as if she were recognizing certain ones.*

White ash and green ash.  
Sugar maple, red maple.  
Silver maple, river birch.  
Yellow birch and sweet birch ...

*Her voice starts trailing off and she lulls herself to sleep.*

Slippery elm and sycamore.  
Dogwood and chestnut oak.  
Live oak and laurel oak ...

*No sooner is Letty asleep than a coyote quietly approaches, stealthily followed by three more. They form a circle around her. Suddenly one of them howls and Letty wakes up in a fright. She cries out for Lige.*

Lige! Lige!  
Oh my god!  
Lige! Lige!

*The naked Lige, who doesn't wear any nightclothes, bolts out of the house and races towards her. The coyotes scatter. He crouches beside her and holds her close. She clings to him tightly.*

LIGE

Letty!  
Whatever are you doing here ...  
Out on such a night?

*Letty comes to her senses, looks around her with great disappointment, and then up at Lige, pitifully.*

LETTY

Oh Lige!  
I thought it was spring ...  
In Virginia.  
A flowering dogwood ...  
Stood right there ...

*She points to a lone, sad-looking yucca.*



LIGE (*gently lifting her to her feet*)

Come back inside, Letty.  
Come with me now.

*Still clinging, she looks up at him scared and confused.*

LETTY (*pitifully*)

Oh Lige ...  
A canopy of trees ...

*She shakes her head in disbelief.*

LIGE

Come back with me, Letty.  
Come back with me now.

LETTY (*brightening*)

Back to Virginia!

LIGE (*sadly resigned*)

Yes Letty, yes ...  
Soon as I get the money.

LETTY (*eagerly*)

You'll come, too, Lige!

LIGE

Let's go back now, Letty.  
Back into the house.

*Still clinging to one another, with Letty either not noticing or not caring about Lige's nakedness, they walk slowly back towards the house.*

END OF ACT

ACT III Scene 1

*The interior of Lige's house. The outside is projected in the background. The audience sees dead rabbits, prairie dogs and a cow carcass. The wind is blowing hard and sand is seeping in through every corner. Letty is shivering. Lige puts more logs on the fire, then puts his heavy sheepskin coat over her shoulders.*

LIGE

Mighty cold out there.  
This'll keep you warm.

LETTY (*apprehensive*)

All of a sudden!

LIGE (*trying to calm her*)

Never mind the weather so the wind don't blow.  
Just one of them things that happens now and then.  
Isn't nothin' you can do about it, Letty.

LETTY (*even more apprehensive*)

The sky's as dark as night.  
What is it, Lige?  
Tell me!

LIGE

Well now, Letty ...  
Like I say ...  
It's one of them things that happens.  
You just got to hold on ...  
'Til it passes.

LETTY (*realizing*)

A norther!

LIGE (*nodding*)

A right nasty storm.

LETTY (*desperate*)

Don't leave me, Lige!

LIGE

Can't be helped, Letty.  
Got to drive the cattle south ...  
Where's there's water.  
They're lasting longer than they oughter.

LETTY (*desperate*)

Lige!  
Don't leave me!  
Not in the cold and the dark ...  
And ... and the wind!

*Lige finishes dressing.*

LIGE

The men are waitin' on me, Letty.  
Wirt's here, too.  
Guess he's not as bad as I took him for.

LETTY

Lige!  
Take me with you!

LIGE

Cora knows to look after you, Letty.  
There's no one better in a storm.

*Lige points to the mantelpiece over the blazing fire.*

And you got this here gun ...

*The wind has worked itself up into a raging tempest. The house is practically shaking and sand is blowing in from everywhere.*

LETTY

I'm scared, Lige!  
Scared out of my mind!

LIGE

Poor Letty ...

LETTY (*pleading*)

Take me with you, Lige!

*She runs up to Lige and throws her arms around him, clinging to him wildly. Gently, he tries to extract himself.*

LIGE

Poor Letty ...

LETTY (*ever more urgent*)

Lige! Lige!  
Take me with you!

*The door bursts open. It's Cora, completely disheveled from the wind. In her wake is a tsunami of sand, which she forcefully shoves aside with her foot as she shuts the door behind her.*

CORA

It's Bev!  
He can't breathe!  
I got to get the doctor.  
The children's all alone.

LETTY

Cousin Bev!

LIGE (*to Cora*)

I'll go ...  
I'll go now ...  
You go on home.

CORA (*to herself, trying to hide her terror*)

I For the first time I'm afraid.  
I Dear God ...  
I Don't take Bev away from me ...  
I He's all I got!

LETTY (*to herself*)

I He can't breathe ...  
I Just like mother.  
I She's all alone now ...  
I Just like me.

*(to Cora)*  
Cora ...  
Let me help you ...  
I'll do anything you ask!

CORA (*fastening her steely eyes on Letty*)

You're not needed.

LETTY (*simply, with great compassion*)

Cora ...

*Slowly she starts to move towards Cora.*

Cora ...

CORA (*breaking down, covering her eyes and sobbing*)

Oh God!

LETTY (*full of emotion*)

Cora ...  
Your tears are my tears ...  
Bev is for me everything ...  
He's all I have ...  
All that's left ...  
All that's left of love.

*Lige looks on silently. He hears everything. Letty draws near Cora. Sensing that she does not retreat from her advance, Letty tenderly enfolds Cora in her arms.*

LIGE *(to Cora)*

Go on home.  
I'll get the doctor.

*Cora throws the door open and disappears into the storm.*

*(to Letty)*  
Won't be but an hour 'fore I'm back.

LETTY *(softly, to herself)*

Poor Bev ...

LIGE

You sit tight, Letty.  
Promise me, now ...  
'Til I get back.

*Letty looks up at him in alarm. Lige tries to reassure her.*

The men'll drive the cattle down.  
I'll catch up with 'em later.

Sit tight, Letty.  
'Til I get back from the doctor.

*Letty releases her hold on Lige. He grabs his coat, fastens down his hat and wraps a bandana around his face, barely revealing his eyes. He opens the door and steps outside into the raging storm. With difficulty, they both close the door—he from outside, she from within. There is sand blown about everywhere inside. We hear the sound of Lige's horse neighing angrily and Letty is reminded of what she heard that first day at Bev's. Letty's recollection of the demon horse of the wind sets off an extended nightmarish hallucination of an enormous white horse galloping furiously towards her.*

End of Scene

ACT III Scene 2

*Letty is alone inside the house, which shakes from the storm raging outside. There is sand blowing in from every crack and crevice. She is paralyzed with fear and cannot move. Listening to the pounding and roaring outside, she gradually falls into a trance. Her eyes are glazed over and she rocks from side to side. Finally, she passes out. Her head falls on the table and knocks over the kerosene lamp. The fire from the lamp starts to spread and she is startled awake by the smoke. Quickly, she takes off Lige's coat and smothers the fire. The fire in the fireplace has gone out and the house is completely dark. The wind rages on and all we see is Letty's continuing nightmare of a wild white stallion rearing and snorting and racing towards her in the storm. She starts to scream and her voice becomes one with the wind. After some time, she hears an insistent banging at the door. She runs to the door, which flies open as soon as she unlatches it, and a man whose profile we barely make out steps inside. With difficulty, he shuts the door behind him. Letty runs into his arms.*

LETTY

Lige!  
Oh Lige!

WIRT

A pretty little thing ...  
Shouldn't be left alone in a storm.  
You're shiverin', Letty!

LETTY

Lige, hold me tight!

WIRT

Kiss me, Letty!

*Wirt holds her ever tighter and moves to kiss her. Letty confusedly apprehends who he is and pushes him away.*

LETTY

Wirt Roddy!

WIRT

How I've dreamed of seeing you like this ...

*Letty moves away, towards the mantelpiece.*

LETTY

Stand away!  
Stay where you are!

WIRT (*turning towards her*)

How I've dreamed of seeing you like this ...  
Alone ... and frightened out of your wits.

*Wirt starts to undo his belt. As he moves towards her, Letty reaches behind her for the gun on the mantelpiece. She points it at him with her shaky hands. Wirt is taken aback at first but then he moves closer. His pants are now down around his knees.*

WIRT (*laughing*)

I bet you don't even know how to use that thing!

*When he is just upon her, Letty fires the gun into his chest. The stunned Wirt falls to the ground. Letty kneels down and sees that Wirt is dead. Realizing what she's done, she paces back and forth in a panic, then she goes to the door and throws it open. Letty takes hold of Wirt's feet and with all her strength drags his dead body outside into the raging wind. We see the body completely disappear, leaving a trail of bloody sand behind it. She comes back, grabs a shovel and goes out again, leaving the door open behind her.*

End of Scene



ACT III Scene 3

*Letty is outside the house with Wirt's body and the shovel. The sky is starting to lighten but the wind is still blowing hard. She struggles mightily to bury the body in a bank of sand. She covers and recovers the corpse as the ever-shifting sand threatens to reveal it. Utterly exhausted and taking her task to be completed, she goes back inside the house.*

End of Scene

ACT III Scene 4

*The interior of the house. Everything is in utter disarray. The wind has mostly died down. The front door is still open. Letty is kneeling before the dark fireplace. Her back is to the door. The gun is still on the floor. A trail of sandy blood still leads from where the body fell to the door. Letty does not see Lige, who stands in the doorway. He calls to her softly so as not to frighten her.*

LIGE

Letty ...

*She swings around and looks at him in terror. He is staring at her face and doesn't see the trail of blood.*

LETTY

Lige!

*Lige cautiously approaches Letty, but she backs away from him.*

LIGE (*alarmed*)

Letty ...  
What is it?

LIGE

I ... I ...  
I killed Wirt Roddy.

*Lige looks down and sees the gun and the trail of blood. Slowly Letty comes and takes his hand, leading him to the door. They open the door and look out. Wirt's belly and nose have been uncovered under the eroding sand bank. Lige turns to Letty.*

The weather does strange things, Letty.  
Makes you see things that aren't there.

*They look out again and all they see is a pile of sand, as if Wirt's body had never been there.*

You've come through a lot it, Letty.

LETTY

I faced down a demon.

LIGE

T'weren't nothin' but the wind.

LETTY *(softly, looking up at Lige)*

Lige ...  
I'm not afraid anymore.

LIGE

Ain't nothin' can measure up to you, Letty!

*A loud sound of distant rumbling. Letty grabs hold of Lige. He holds her tightly. She is trying very hard to be brave.*

LETTY

What kind of wind is that?

*They are still looking out the door. Lige knows the sound is thunder, but there is no time to explain before they see an enormous streak of lightening stretching across the prairie, followed by a deafening clap of thunder. It starts to pour. Lige runs outside. He is crazy with joy. He comes and takes Letty outside. They hold hands and joyously dance around in circles. Finally, they embrace, fully and passionately, as the rain continues to pour down in torrents.*

END OF OPERA

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<sup>i</sup> Adapted from songs 86 and 118, "Prairie songs; being chants rhymed and unrhymed of the level lands of the great West " (Chicago and Cambridge:

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Rogers, "You'll Never Walk Alone," from *Carousel*

<sup>iii</sup> Adapted from an old Virginia saying, according Dorothy Scarborough, author of *The Wind* (University of Texas Press, 1979)