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Bleeding Kansas

by Kathryn Walat

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
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***Bleeding Kansas* was first produced as a world premiere by
The Hangar Theatre
(Kevin Moriarty, Artistic Director; Lisa Bushlow, Executive Director)
in Ithaca, New York in August 2007.**

CHARACTERS

HANNAH ROSE ALLEN – A young abolitionist from Boston.

EDWIN REDPATH aka **RED** – A pro-slavery “Border Ruffian” from Missouri.

KITTSOON CLARKE – A headstrong woman following her husband George.

GEORGE CLARKE – A free-state farmer from Indiana.

JOSIAH NICHOLS – A pro-slavery farmer from Missouri.

OTHER MEN – Played by the actors who play Red, George, and Josiah, as indicated.

SETTING

Kansas Territory

TIME

1855-1856

AUTHOR’S NOTES

This play is set in a historical time and place. But then, history is happening all around us.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska Act established the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, opening the land to legal settlement. It also stipulated that the residents of these territories would decide by popular vote if their state would enter the Union as a “free” or “slave” state – a concept of self-determination known as popular sovereignty.

People on all sides of this hotly contested issue flooded the territory, in an attempt to sway the vote in their favor. Three distinct political groups occupied Kansas: pro-slavers (many from neighboring slave state Missouri), free-staters (farmers looking to better their lot in the territory), and abolitionists (a small but vocal group mostly from New England).

While many free-state Kansans seemed to care little about slaves, and many pro-slavery Kansans never owned a single slave, violence broke out almost immediately between these opposing factions, largely fueled by election fraud, rival territorial governments, and squabbles over land claims. After reaching its peak during the bloody summer of 1856, the violence continued until 1861, when Kansas entered the Union as a free state.

This era – during which the territory became one of the first battlegrounds over the question of slavery – is now known as “Bleeding Kansas.” It is a snapshot of a country, politically divided and ready to shed blood over issues of God and man.

ACT I

Scene One: This Here's Kansas Territory

(From the darkness of the stage, we hear sounds of freedom and anticipation mixed with danger riding across the land. This is Kansas territory, the new frontier, a rough and wild place to be. In the morning sunlight, we see HANNAH ROSE ALLEN, a young Boston abolitionist. She is inside a letter.)

HANNAH. *America.* Dear Abigail, that's what I thought. Looking out the back flap of the wagon. This is America. No, even better: America's *future*. You should have seen it, Abby – as far as the eye can reach, nothing but a beautiful green carpet, save here and there a cluster of trees. And I felt nothing but awe in view of this infinite display.

Until I pricked my finger on the sewing needle – yes, because I didn't *secure* my needle before wondering at the glory of America – and sucking on my bloody finger, I tasted yesterday's salted dinner and the fire that warmed it and the horses I fed this morning, together with the rich frontier soil – and I thought heck, and just threw that sampler overboard, dear sister, because this place is nothing like Boston.

This is Kansas. Three parts danger, one part home.

(We see the rough and almost-clean frontier cabin of the Clarkes. KITTSOON CLARKE stands out front, looking at their farm, which is modest but theirs. Shielding the Kansas wind with her cupped hands, she lights a corn-cob pipe.)

KITTY. Dear George. So. This is *Kansas*. Not that I've complained. Since we set foot here and I found our temporary shelter would be a *lean-to*. Open on *two* sides, so that Kansas wind could blow right through – made powerful sense when I washed my one pair of bloomers, dried them quicker than you could say: My, *Kansas...*

So I didn't say nothing, George, about the cookin' out of doors, stamping on the bottom of my skirt when it catch fire. Enjoyed that *red* complexion the open flame gave me. Could throw an Indian blanket over my head, pass myself for a *squaw*.

(We see EDWIN REDPATH. You can call him RED. A young man, but still, he's been drinking bad whiskey for almost a decade now. He has long boots, covered in dust and mud. Unshaven face. Unwashed hands. He spits. Looks around. He's looking for trouble. He's a Border Ruffian.)

RED. Chicken-hearted fools.

(As RED cusses to himself, he makes a line in the dirt with the heel of his boot. He sharpens his bowie knife with slow strokes.)

KITTY. And no complaints about this cabin, George, where the only way the wind comes through are the *three-inch spaces* in between the boards. Because how should my *husband* know what kind of wood to build with? All those hours in town standing round the whiskey barrel, where I'm sure them men're discussin' which local wood ain't gonna shrink up...

RED. White-livered cowards.

KITTY. Let the Kansas wind blow right into this homestead, I say. Bring with it all the Kansas soil it can carry, I'ma *shovel* that dirt right back outdoors. But, you see, George, it's the *snakes*.

RED. Negro-sympathizin' thieves.

KITTY. Hearing them *slither* underneath my feet just for the joy of it, snaking along the rafters, just waiting to *drop down on me*.

RED. Diggin' them underground railroads.

KITTY. Sleeping with that rifle in between us so I can knock the butt end on the floor before I step out of bed, just to be *ambushed* when I go out back to do my business – their hiss, their rattle – I'm talkin' about –

RED. Those blue-belly, Bible-totin' *Yankees*...

KITTY. The snakes.

RED. Thinkin' they got an abolitionist stake here in Kansas.

KITTY. Because those belly-crawlin' creatures is where I draw the line.

(RED spits across the line in the dirt and walks away. He passes GEORGE, who has been standing there listening, even when KITTY's been addressing him, thinking that he's not.)

GEORGE. I know, Kitty.

(GEORGE is a first-time farmer just finished his morning chores, looking for his coffee.)

KITTY. Not that Indiana was snake-free land, but these here are –

GEORGE. Kansas snakes.

KITTY. Got one in the coffee pot – all curled up, comfortable-like. Didn't want to disturb 'em.

GEORGE. I'll make the coffee.

KITTY. You make a powerful bad pot of coffee, George.

GEORGE. I know, but this time will be different. This time will be coffee 'n' snake, two different things, mixing and mingling together in that tin pot.

KITTY. George?

GEORGE. Yeah?

KITTY. It's a rattler.

GEORGE. Rattler?

KITTY. Uh-huh.

GEORGE. Well, missus, that's my favorite flavor.

Scene Two: North Meets South

(HANNAH enters, carrying a letter.)

HANNAH. November 28, 1855. Dear Abigail. We're heeeere!

(She dances on RED's line in the dirt, mussing it up, thinking nothing of it.)

Kansas Territory. Kansas soil...

(She reaches down, picks up some of the dirt, puts it in the envelope.)

Enclosed for your perusal or locket, as you see fit. Dear sister, as evidenced by my writing you, we did not get "ambushed by Indians" along the way, although we did get charged double on the riverboat – "Bible surcharge," captain said.

Seems not everyone is as supportive of the New England Immigrant Aid Society as the crowds in Boston at our farewell. I know, little James had the sniffles – again – but you missed a grand leave-taking, Abby – with people holding up dog-eared copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the look of green envy on Cornelia Ely's face – why, I felt like I was riding off into the sunset on a bronco, instead of getting on a train with a bunch of Christians!

It is true that Papa and Mama, God rest their souls, must have rolled over a few times as their youngest daughter set off to be a schoolteacher on Western frontier. And you did always say: What *good* could come from going to all those Transcendentalist meetings?

But, Abby, it *is* good we're doing here. We're saving this nation from the sin of slavery that's a mark on our souls that no amount of scrubbing can get out. If the Kansas territory is voted into the Union as a slave state, the power split in Washington between North and South will shift – this entire country could be lost.

But, it won't be. We won't let it. First election is tomorrow, to select a territorial delegate – the very first in a

long line of ballots leading up to the vote over slavery. And yes, I do know I can't vote myself, and with all the bowie knives around I'm not planning to try. But I can stand here, Abby – my feet planted on this Kansas land – and take up Abolitionist space.

(She seals up the envelope and steps across the patch of dirt where once was RED's line.)

HANNAH. *(cont.)* Fondly, your sister, Hannah R –

(RED has appeared, standing just on the other side of the line.)

RED. Red.

HANNAH. Pardon me.

RED. Introducin' m'self proper. Yer turn. Hannah...

HANNAH. I'm trying to reach –

RED. What?

HANNAH. The *post office*.

RED. Where d'ya think you are?

HANNAH. I need you to move your dirty boots. Sir.

RED. Post office?

HANNAH. You do get *mail* here. I know you do. They said –

RED. No such office.

HANNAH. But this is – town.

RED. Lecompton.

HANNAH. That's right, the second largest –

RED. Mostly saloons – so, I'll jist take that.

HANNAH. No, thank you.

RED. No "sir"?

(He whistles between his teeth.)

My, the manners do go fast in Kansas, don't they girlie...

HANNAH. I'm not a –

RED. That's right, miss, yer an *abolitionist*. Ain't you? Well, I dunno how things go in New England, but down these parts we make proper introductions, Hannah.

HANNAH. You smell like whiskey.

RED. And that's my favorite smell.

HANNAH. And it's still morning.

RED. Don't you know.

(He's got a live one here. RED likes a live one.)

Edwin. Edwin Redpath.

(He reaches out like to shake her hand, and takes her letter instead.)

But you can call me Red. Hannah...

(She decides she best play along.)

HANNAH. Hannah Rose. Allen.

(He looks at the address on the envelope.)

RED. And I'll jist call you *Boston*, Boston, OK?

HANNAH. OK, I'm just going to post my letter now.

RED. That all yer here for?

HANNAH. Yes. My letter.

RED. Hold up now, Boston, I thought you were here *abolitionizin'*.

(HANNAH doesn't say anything.)

I know – that's a biiiig word. Abolitionizin'. Here abolitionizin' this southern territory. Abolitionizin'. Coupla sucks on the whiskey jug, jist rolls off the tongue: abolitionizin'. You're here –

HANNAH. That's *not a word*.

RED. If I say so.

HANNAH. I am an Abolitionist. We preach Abolitionism.

The verb is *preach* and the noun is –

RED. I know what it is, Boston.

HANNAH. I know what you are.

RED. Yer new neighbor.

HANNAH. Border Ruffians they call you.

RED. Half-horse, half-alligator that makes me.

HANNAH. Crossed over the Missouri line.

RED. Whoop louder, jump higher, shoot closer, and git drunker than any man this side o' the Rocky Mountains.

HANNAH. You came here to vote.

RED. And here we go – whoop, whoop – first election's tomorrow.

HANNAH. You don't even *live* here –

RED. Might cast me a dozen ballots 'fore movin' on.

HANNAH. You're – messing with the democratic process!

RED. Jist 'til the whiskey runs dry. Red eye. That's what we call it, Boston. The whiskey.

(He winks as he hands her back her letter. Steps out of her way.)

HANNAH. I – know that.

(And then tells it like it is.)

RED. I know who y'are. You read that Harriet Beecher Stowe one too many times, sittin' blue-bellied with them laced-up boots in front the fire, burnin' wood you never took a hatchet to. And now you think jist because you can tote yer Bible 'cross so many states, you got a right to *mess with* a southern man's liberty. Before *your* whiskey runs out.

You got a whiskey don't ya, Boston? Tell me, what's yer whiskey?

(HANNAH holds her book tight as she moves past him.)

No *post office*, by the way. Like I said. We ain't that particular, here in the territories. You can leave it there in the store with a man named McGreevy. Tell 'em Red said so, yer letter won't end up rollin' paper fer tobacco. Jist *might* make it back to Boston.

(HANNAH doubles back. Looks him in the eye.)

HANNAH. Messing with the post is a federal offense, by the way. Even in the territories.

(She exits with a purpose. RED smiles and gives a little whoop as he heads in the other direction.)

Scene Three: Meet the Neighbors

(Elsewhere that morning, GEORGE and JOSIAH, the two farmers, stand looking out over the land, tin cups in their hands.)

GEORGE. Land.

JOSIAH. Good land.

GEORGE. Sure enough.

JOSIAH. Farmin'.

GEORGE. Farmin'.

JOSIAH. Ain't for the faint of heart.

GEORGE. Always said.

JOSIAH. Still. It's there.

GEORGE. The land.

JOSIAH. Might as well farm it.

(KITTY appears, holding a coffee pot.)

KITTY. More coffee, Mr. Nichols?

JOSIAH. Josiah. Only neighbor on the horizon, I best be Josiah.

KITTY. More coffee, Josiah?

JOSIAH. Call me Joe. Never was Josiah in Missouri except to my in-laws.

KITTY. More coffee, Joe?

JOSIAH. Coffee? No, I got to be getting back.

GEORGE. But it's not *on account* of the coffee, that you don't want more coffee?

JOSIAH. On account of the wife of mine. And the winter bein' just 'round the corner.

GEORGE. Because the *coffee* ain't such a bad pot, Joe?

JOSIAH. No, sir, this coffee's right fine.

GEORGE. Got a nice *flavor*. Little something extra...

KITTY. Just *slithers* down your throat.

GEORGE. Kitty, I'll have a touch more.

KITTY. Sure you will.

(She gives him a look as she refills his cup. GEORGE smiles. JOSIAH puts on his hat.)

JOSIAH. Well, I best be going.

KITTY. Your wife is well, Joe?

JOSIAH. Louisa. She is.

KITTY. Tell me, does she mind the dirt?

JOSIAH. She's always minding the dirt. Minding the children. Minding the cooking and the washing – keeps the place right clean.

KITTY. But this Kansas dirt.

JOSIAH. Oh, we had dirt back in Missouri.

KITTY. But blowing inside, through the spaces in between the boards?

JOSIAH. We don't have much in the way of spaces. Built with pine.

KITTY. Did ya. With pine.

JOSIAH. Sealed up the few spaces, here 'n' there.

KITTY. Hear that, George?

GEORGE. I'm standing right here, Kitty.

KITTY. Drinkin' yer coffee.

JOSIAH. Show you anytime, George, just come 'round the farm.

GEORGE. I'd appreciate that. And – many thanks, Joe. For bringing by those fence posts.

JOSIAH. Got to fence off your claim, now. Use as many as you like, I finished mine up last week.

GEORGE. Did ya.

KITTY. He did.

JOSIAH. Well, I best be going. Louisa.

KITTY. Sounds like Louisa's – quite the homesteader, minding all that she does.

JOSIAH. Oh, she is. Canning this time of year, too. Drying the herbs she planted out back.

KITTY. Any tobacco? That's my favorite herb.

JOSIAH. No, the – uh, kitchen herbs. Dill and what not.

KITTY. Kitchen herbs.

JOSIAH. Oh, and she's got another one on the way, now.

KITTY. And how many does that make?

JOSIAH. Three girls and a boy. Baby makes five.

KITTY. All them alive now, too?

GEORGE. *Kitty...*

KITTY. Well, you best be getting back then.

JOSIAH. Many thanks for the coffee, Mrs. Clarke.

(JOSIAH hands KITTY his cup.)

George.

GEORGE. Joe.

KITTY. It's Kittson.

JOSIAH. Many thanks, Kittson.

KITTY. Kitty. Like the feline. Only neighbor on the horizon, you best call me Kitty, Joe.

(JOSIAH nods and exits.)

Hear that, George.

GEORGE. I'm standing right here.

(He drinks his coffee.)

KITTY. Seems children are being born. Right here in Kansas.

GEORGE. Seems that way.

KITTY. Seems some farmers got their fences up. Houses sealed –

GEORGE. You heard it. Right from the farmer's mouth.

KITTY. They got kitchen herbs.

GEORGE. And what use have *we* got for kitchen herbs?

KITTY. I'm just saying, George. And I'm just wondering what're you doing just standing there?

GEORGE. Right now? I'm finishing my morning coffee. And I'm looking out over the land, which is *our land*. And I'm thinking on the moon.

KITTY. Of course you are. On the moon.

GEORGE. The Kansas moon, Kittson. Did you not see it last night?

KITTY. No, George, I did not see *the moon*.

GEORGE. Because I thought you did. When I looked over at you, thought I saw your eyes out the window. And if you were looking anywhere *near* that window, you could see nothing but the moon.

KITTY. I was listening for rattles. As in rattlers. As in – *the snakes*.

GEORGE. They say the Kansas moon's so beautiful, it's like the moon over Venice, Italy.

KITTY. As if any of these Missourians have ever set foot in –

GEORGE. Don't have to. Just look out the window. Like you were doing last night.

KITTY. I was someplace else.

GEORGE. Looking at the moon...

KITTY. Yes, *the moon* – it fills up the whole darned window, how could I not see –

GEORGE. That moon that could inspire poetry and Italian love songs –

KITTY. But *my mind* was someplace else. Someplace in between Kansas and Indiana, in a field, where the ground is going to be getting cold. Where that mound of dirt has long dried from the tears we watered it with, because what can you do but water for an hour or two, and then get back into your wagon and move on.

(From the pocket of her apron, KITTY takes out a wooden horse, a child's toy.)

GEORGE. Wasn't nothing more we could do.

KITTY. I know that.

GEORGE. This is a *good* place here, Kitty.

KITTY. I know, George.

GEORGE. The opportunities. We went west, just like your parents and mine. And today, west means Kansas. What was there for us in Indiana?

KITTY. Nothing. And you know I'd follow you to the dead end of the earth, George Clarke. But sometimes I wish you wouldn't just lie there, looking over my shoulder like you could make out what *might be* reflected in my eyes.

GEORGE. Your back's beautiful in the moonlight.

KITTY. I expect that's true. But my front terrain's got a little more to offer. If you remember.

(She stands with her back to him. There is some distance between them.)

KITTY. George, I love you. I do. Like a –

GEORGE. Wild cat.

KITTY. But I lack the *confidence* in you when it comes to the farming. You put the two of us together, George – between us both we don't know three beans about turning this land into farm.

GEORGE. We got the belief.

KITTY. In *what*?

GEORGE. Kansas.

KITTY. Kansas.

GEORGE. We can do this, Kitty. Together, we'll do it. And it will be *good* here. I know it will. This is good land. Just give it a little time.

KITTY. And how much is a little time? Because we only got *a little time* before winter –

GEORGE. Time enough for me to get up that fence. Time enough for you to be makin' friends with the snakes, or at least showin' 'em that we're here to stay. That they can slither around all they want, we ain't gonna pay them no mind, because we're busy here drinking our coffee, looking at the moon, planting our feet in this soil – making this land here our own.

KITTY. Kansas.

GEORGE. Kansas.

KITTY. Wild cat, huh?

GEORGE. Always said.

KITTY. Uh-huh.

GEORGE. Kitty, you and me – the two of us together – we got all the time in the world.

KITTY. As long as we got the time for sealing up the spaces in the walls of this cabin.

GEORGE. Tomorrow.

KITTY. Tomorrow *morning*.

GEORGE. First thing – I'll stop in at Joe's on my way into town.

KITTY. *Town* – ?

GEORGE. Lecompton.

KITTY. And George Clarke, what business have you got going to *town* tomorrow?

GEORGE. Got the business of voting.

KITTY. And what do you care to vote?

GEORGE. I care because this land is going to be our state.

KITTY. You don't give a boot about politics!

GEORGE. It ain't politics, it's my right.

KITTY. That's right – yer God-given right to stand in front of McGreevy's store –

GEORGE. *Kansas* is home now.

KITTY. Shooting the moon, shooting the red eye with those *men...*

GEORGE. And I won't have any of 'em telling us how things are gonna be here.

(He hands her his empty coffee cup, going to get at those fence posts. She calls after him.)

KITTY. Uh-huh. And when's it gonna occur to you, George, to bring a jug of that whiskey home?

Scene Four: Any Three Men

(Nighttime. We hear the sound of crickets, and of horses riding on a dirt road. The horses stop. TWO MEN enter from one direction – a third is heading the opposite way. We almost can't see them in the shadows, but their voices carry through the night.)

RED. Where're you going?

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. *(played by JOSIAH)* I'm going home.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. *(played by GEORGE)* Where're you coming from?

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. From town.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. What's going on in town?

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. Nothing in particular.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. Nothing in particular, hey?

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. That's right.

RED. Not what we heard.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. Lawrence.

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. That's right. Lawrence.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. Where all them abolitionists're at.

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. I'm no abolitionist.

RED. You ain't proslavery either, if you been in Lawrence.

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. I'm going home, to chop winter wood for my family. What's it to you?

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. We're from Lecompton.

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. What's going on in Lecompton?

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. That would be celebratin' our victry over the vote.

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. Still?

RED. Still.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. Better git used to it. Since we'll be takin' all them elections, no matter the numbers.

RED. We got our own particular way of countin', don't you know.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. And us Ruffians like wipin' clean
a bloody knife jist as much as much as we like votin'.

(They breathe. The night is heavy.)

RED. My, that's a nice holster ya got there, hey? Shiny and
new.

MAN FROM LAWRENCE. I got to be getting home to my
family. Gentlemen.

MAN FROM LECOMPTON. Ain't nothin' *gentle* 'bout us men
in Lecompton.

RED. Ain't but 12 miles from our town to yours, Lawrence.

Scene Five: The Women

(HANNAH knocks on the door. She is freezing. She knocks again. KITTY, with an Indian blanket around herself, answers. Two different kinds of women, standing eye to eye.)

KITTY. Who're you? Three parts cold, one part stupid...

(KITTY grabs shivering HANNAH and pulls her inside, wraps the blanket around her.)

Plannin' to freeze outside our door, so we got to *step over* your body all winter, get rid of it come spring. If spring ever comes. Forget it – it ain't coming. So, what've we got here?

(KITTY goes through HANNAH's sack while HANNAH epistles.)

HANNAH. Dear Abigail. I am sending you this letter so you won't be alarmed when you hear the Coltons have return to Boston. And the Rotters. And the Mannings, who envisioned me as the first schoolteacher in Kansas, but who packed it up after the lesson they learned from the first election:

Over 5,000 votes for the pro-slavery representative – but Abby, there're less than 3,000 registered voters in the entire territory! And something about those Southern *gentlemen* with their bowie knives, checking every vote *before* it was cast, that tended to scare off the abolitionist male.

Not me. I'm not scared, Abby. I – miss you. But I'm not leaving until the final election to decide the question of slavery, no matter how many Kansas winters I have to endure. And though I can't vote, I will write letters to every abolitionist newspaper this side of –

(KITTY has unpacked the entire contents of HANNAH's sack. Only books. Checks again.)

KITTY. Where's the rest of it?

HANNAH. That's what I got. My books.

(HANNAH stands by her books. KITTY seems confused.)

KITTY. But – what *for*?

HANNAH. To read.

KITTY. In Kansas?

HANNAH. Re-read, actually – been through them all.

KITTY. Here I was thinking portable firewood. Re-read.

HANNAH. Read them *over* –

KITTY. I know what it *means*, doll, I just – don't understand.

That's all you got with you?

HANNAH. That's all I could carry.

KITTY. Where're your people?

HANNAH. They – had to go. Back to Boston.

KITTY. Boston. So you're one of those.

HANNAH. And they weren't *my people*. I was only living under their roof and caring for their young ones until the schoolhouse –

KITTY. Where's your man?

HANNAH. I haven't got one.

KITTY. Then whose bright idea was it to come to Kansas?

HANNAH. I'm here to –

KITTY. I know, I know – I've heard what *you people* are here for. Causing trouble.

HANNAH. Where's your man?

KITTY. My old man's chopping wood. He'll be back. Unless he's froze. He's probably froze.

HANNAH. And you've got – no children?

KITTY. What's it to you?

HANNAH. I just meant – it's only the *two* of you – here in this whole cabin?

KITTY. Just us two.

HANNAH. It's a nice cabin –

KITTY. We had a little girl. Flora. She died, on the road to Kansas.

HANNAH. Oh. I. I'm –

KITTY. And this cabin ain't what I expect you'd call *nice*.

HANNAH. No, it is, really, it's –

KITTY. Warm enough. Just barely. If you don't open the door. In fact, I think you knocked on the wrong door. We ain't yer kind, miss. And don't think we haven't noticed how you all look down your noses at our rough manners. We got no interest in Bibles here –

HANNAH. Please.

KITTY. Just trying to keep our feet from freezing.

HANNAH. I'm just – cold. I've got no place else I can go. Not until the spring melts the road from here to Lawrence. And I am *cold*.

(They look one another in the eye.)

KITTY. Next farm over's Josiah Nichols' place. Sure you'd be much more comfortable waiting out the winter there. I'm sure they got – jars and jars of preserves. You must have seen their cabin from the road, all that smoke out their functioning chimney – don't see why you can't knock there.

HANNAH. Because they're proslavery.

KITTY. We're no abolitionists.

HANNAH. I know. But you don't want slavery in this state either. You folks are Free Soil.

KITTY. What's it to you?

HANNAH. Everything.

(A knock at the door. The women look at each other. Insistent knocking. KITTY answers. RED is standing there. Freezing, but not showing it.)

KITTY. Thought you said you haven't got a man –

HANNAH. Stop following me!

RED. Jist makin' sure ya didn't freeze, Boston.

HANNAH. As evidenced by my standing here, I *didn't*.

KITTY. What've we got here?

HANNAH. Border Ruffian. The kind you secure your doors against. Three parts danger, one part –

RED. Whiskey.

HANNAH. What are you still doing in Kansas? I imagine you cast yourself enough votes in the last election –

RED. To last me through the winter – that's right, we took that vote like a two-dollar whore, and now I'm lookin' forward to the next one –

KITTY. *Whiskey*, you said?

(RED slowly raises the jug he's carrying. KITTY eyes that jug of whiskey.)

In that case – not that either of you're stayin' long enough to wipe yer boots – we might as well finish this in front the fire.

**Scene Six: One Jug of Whiskey,
One Greasy Pack of Cards**

(Later that night, HANNAH, KITTY, RED, GEORGE, and JOE play poker and drink whiskey. They've been at it for a while. KITTY gives a whoop-whoop and does a dance over her winning hand. GEORGE and RED sit across from one another, doing shots. JOE pours into one set of cups, and then the next, while they struggle to keep up. HANNAH counts off the shots.)

HANNAH. One!

(Shoot.)

Two!

(Shoot.)

Three!

(KITTY grabs the jug from JOE and takes a swig.)

KITTY. Deal 'em up, Red! This Kitty wants to win again...

GEORGE. Oh, you do, do you?

KITTY. I ain't lying. Not yet anyway.

(KITTY sits on GEORGE's lap.)

GEORGE. And what're you planning on winning?

KITTY. The moon.

GEORGE. Well, you're sitting in my territory now, no telling what'll happen.

(GEORGE plants a kiss on her. Like it would melt all the snow in Kansas.)

JOE. Shuffle, Mr. Red.

RED. Need another shot to shuffle.

JOE. I'll just – take that.

(JOE takes the jug from KITTY who is occupied with other matters. Pours RED another.)

HANNAH. One shot for the shuffler!

GEORGE. Go on, Joe, have another yourself.

JOE. Oh, I best be going.

KITTY. But it's medicine, Joe.

JOE. I don't know...

HANNAH. The word's *medicinal*, although –

KITTY. Whatever she said.

JOE. Louisa, *she* said –

GEORGE. She'd want you take your medicine –

KITTY. Like a good farmer.

(JOE takes his medicine.)

JOE. She said, just bring 'em what I canned, so they don't
starve before they *freeze*.

KITTY. Well, ain't she neighborly.

(KITTY does a shot. GEORGE pushes a cup towards
HANNAH.)

GEORGE. Go on, miss, your turn.

KITTY. Doll-face don't touch the stuff.

HANNAH. I never said –

GEORGE. Maybe she's just pacing herself. So she don't fall
over. Which I seen happen.

(GEORGE winks.)

KITTY. Don't you know these abolitionists preach the tem-
perance?

HANNAH. I just – don't think it's actually *medicinal*.

JOE. No need to explain, miss.

KITTY. And here she is with us drinkin', gamblin' heathens.

JOE. You *should* be scared of the red eye.

HANNAH. I'm not scared of a drink.

KITTY. Put hair on your chest. You wanna see my hairy...

(KITTY starts to unbutton.)

GEORGE. Kitty...

HANNAH. As evidenced by my being in Kansas, I am not
afraid of...

(HANNAH meets eyes with RED, who looks up from his shuffling.)

RED. Go on, Boston.

HANNAH. What I mean is: I ain't afraid of no whiskey. Jist have yer ol' man filler up, missus, I reckon I'll shoot this here red eye down.

(GEORGE pours it. HANNAH does her first shot. Coughs. The stuff is truly awful. GEORGE and JOE whoop.)

GEORGE. That's a little miss.

JOE. Liquid danger.

(HANNAH holds out her glass. GEORGE refills it. She raises her glass.)

HANNAH. Dear Abigail. We got this thing here in Kansas called the *red eye*. Quite different than that *pink eye* your little James had.

(HANNAH downs shot number two.)

KITTY. Something to write home about, ain't it? A little taste of the frontier, before you git on back home to Boston.

(As KITTY throws back another...)

HANNAH. Who said I'm going back?

(KITTY turns to RED, who continues his well-oiled shuffle.)

KITTY. And you – you got the fingers for the cards, don't you?

GEORGE. Red, they call you.

RED. That's right.

GEORGE. Where'd you come from?

RED. From town.

GEORGE. What's going on in town?

RED. Nothing in particular.

GEORGE. Nothing in particular, hey?

KITTY. He's from Missouri, Georgie, don't you know. Just like our neighbor Joe here, except he hasn't been bridled by Louisa. He's one of those –

HANNAH. Border Ruffians, causing trouble in Lecompton.

JOE. My Lou-Lou could tell what county in Missouri, just by the way you say *cow*.

RED. I bin 'round.

HANNAH. Around the *whiskey barrel*, you mean –

RED. I mean *Texas*. Fightin'.

GEORGE. What for?

RED. To fight. To have somethin' to cuss about when we're throwin' cards in the saloon, pissin' round the camp-fire. Road on down to Mexico – goin' days through that desert, not knowin' where my next drop was comin' from, never sure if that last one *was* my last. Land like you never seen.

Not like Missouri or Kansas, where it spreads out before you like a loose woman, but land with sharp red edges and plants that bite you back. Where that scorpion in yer boots come morning and that buzzard's been circlin' you all day are yer only God-given companions.

And the Rio Grande runs East-West, jist like our Missouri – but it runs thicker. And when some man calls you Eddie, shortenin' yer Edwin Redpath, it won't be out his mouth twice before he hits the ground. So, that's right. They call me *Red* now. Jist like that land. Like my hands after a good fight, before I wipe them clean and pick up the cards.

KITTY. And what do you do now, Red?

RED. I deal.

(**RED** *deals the cards.*)

GEORGE. Now he does whatever David Atchison says.

JOE. Our good senator from Missouri.

GEORGE. Who should *stay* in Missouri, mind his own state.

HANNAH. Old Bourbon they call him, Atchison –

GEORGE. Says he'd rather see Kansas sunk to the bottom of Hell than become a free state.

HANNAH. Because he *drinks* so much.

RED. That sounds like our man Atchison.

GEORGE. Sounds to me like a problem.

KITTY. Well, then.

GEORGE. Especially when I ain't allowed to vote otherwise.

KITTY. Looks here like we all got our cards spread out before us.

JOE. Clean shuffle.

(They each pick up their cards. HANNAH's emboldened by the drink.)

RED. God knows what each of us've been dealt.

HANNAH. Can we please leave *God* out of the card playing?

KITTY. You're the one who brought 'em along, all them Bibles –

HANNAH. *One Bible –*

RED. Sounds like your hand needs a prayer.

HANNAH. Well, then. Maybe you read me wrong.

KITTY. Are we wagering?

GEORGE. Haven't got a thing.

(GEORGE throws down his cards.)

RED. None of us got a thing to wager.

KITTY. The women, loose or otherwise, *always* got something.

HANNAH. The hair on our chest.

JOE. Well, I haven't even got that.

(JOE throws down his hand. GEORGE pours JOE a shot.)

I best be...

GEORGE. For the road, Joe.

JOE. Oh, almost forgot. Mrs. Clarke –

KITTY. *Kitty*, Joe...

KITTY & JOE. Like the feline.

(*JOE takes out a small packet tucked inside his shirt.*)

JOE. This here's from my Louisa.

GEORGE. Tobacco.

KITTY. For me?

JOE. Had a bit tucked away. Didn't even think Louisa knew about it, but she did, and she's making me share. Says it's the only way we're all gonna make it here in Kansas.

KITTY. That's right neighborly of her, Josiah. That it is.

GEORGE. To Lou-Lou!

(*KITTY kisses JOSIAH on the cheek. GEORGE pours them all shots, as they see JOE off.*)

(*HANNAH and RED are still in the game.*)

HANNAH. They're drinking all your whiskey.

RED. You drank some yerself.

HANNAH. Is that what you want, get them drunk, so you can make off with the stove?

RED. That what yer bettin' on?

(*She giggles. She's drunk.*)

HANNAH. *You* – holding the *stove* trying not to burn your *hands* – couple of *logs* in your *boots*.

RED. You still don't know why I came here, do you?

HANNAH. I think you're sweet on me.

RED. And what do *you* know from sweet?

HANNAH. Rock candy. In a paper bag.

RED. Yer bluffin'.

HANNAH. Am I?

RED. Boston, I been to Mexico and back. That jug of red eye? Jist bought yer winter quarters.

HANNAH. I don't need you looking after me, you know. I came a long way – *on my own* – and I'm not stopping now.

RED. How far will you go?

HANNAH. I don't know. Try me.

(They eye one another over the cards.)

RED. I saw them leave you off. Loaded-up wagon, youngins screaming in back. Dropping you there in the middle of town. At least they had the sense not to leave you in whatever poor excuse for a cabin they were vacating. But the whole operation didn't strike me as particularly *Christian*, those abolitionists, leaving you alone here in Kansas.

HANNAH. I wanted to stay.

RED. And don't think I don't know, Boston, why you couldn't stay on in town. Workin' for McCreivy for your room and board, when that man's got three sets of hands, one for each of 'em pretty girls he's got workin' behind the counter of that store. I know why you set off on that road, middle of winter, nothin' but a sack of *books*.

HANNAH. That's my whiskey. My Shakespeare, Thoreau, *Uncle Tom's* – that's keeping me going.

RED. Well, my whiskey's *whiskey*. And that's keeping you alive.

HANNAH. Why are you doing this?

RED. Thought I was sweet on you.

HANNAH. Go back to Missouri, Red.

RED. I can't go back. Got nothin' in Missouri but trouble.

HANNAH. I got nothin' in Boston either.

RED. Yer kinda nothin' writes you boring letters. My kind of nothin' gets me killed. So I thought I'd stick 'round Kansas. For the fight. Because we *are* going to fight, Boston. Soon as the snow melts. You standin' on your side. Me standin' right here. All this sweet land in between us, ready to bleed.

HANNAH. You think you know who I am. You think you can watch me and follow me, and that you *know* me, but you don't.

(She lays down her hand. Can't help but smile at it.)

See? You don't know what I've got, mister. I tasted blood before. My finger's been pricked. And I ain't scared of a little red.

Scene Seven: Kansas-Style Lovin'

(KITTY enters a dark room, carrying a rifle. She knocks the butt of the rifle on the ground. Takes a few cautious steps. Knocks it again.)

KITTY. Shoo! Just – shoo! All of you, leave us alone tonight, you got that? No rattles at all, nothing moving but what's in this sweet bed. Because he's mine tonight and I'm his, and you got no business slithering about, distracting a woman from the *honey* at hand – and I'm talkin' the whole sweet pot. So much honey, we could spread it over us and still have some leftover for a late spring. See, this here's *my* territory, you rattle-asses, and tonight there is nothing outside this room, these loving arms, and that moon.

(KITTY stands at the window, bathing in the moon. She lifts the rifle and aims at it. GEORGE enters and watches her.)

No, not even you.

(KITTY mimes shooting the moon. GEORGE plays the now-empty whiskey jug. As he plays, he comes up behind KITTY. He sings to the tune of "Campton Racetrack")

GEORGE.

FARMER GEORGE HAS A WIFE KIT-TY,
OH YEAH, OH YEAH
WOULD LIKE TO HAVE HER ON MY KNEE,
OH YEAH DO ONE DAY
OH, WOULD YOU SEE HER BACK!
WHICH I'D LIKE TO HAVE...

(GEORGE takes hold of KITTY's ass.)

BUT TURN HER AROUND AND YOU WILL SEE
LOOK, THERE'S A PUSSY...CAT.

KITTY. It's like I'm some princess of Venice, and you're wooing me under the Italian moon.

GEORGE. What moon?

KITTY. Oh, Georgie, I like you playing on that jug.

(GEORGE drops the jug. He puts his hands on her.)

GEORGE. I like your land.

KITTY. I like your hands playing on my lands.

GEORGE. You're no Italian princess.

(KITTY purrs.)

Wouldn't have you any other way.

KITTY. Thought you'd be having me every which way.

GEORGE. That what you thought?

KITTY. Uh-huh. Farmer George.

GEORGE. Yeah?

KITTY. Let's have another one.

GEORGE. Another –

KITTY. Yeah.

GEORGE. Oh, Kitty, we said –

KITTY. We can't wait until we got a functioning farm,
because –

GEORGE. At least until we know it's safe here.

KITTY. It'll never be safe.

GEORGE. But for a *child*, Kitty, we –

KITTY. I think we got everything we need...

(With a smile, she feels to make sure. He moves away
from her.)

GEORGE. We – no – I can't – do it. Kitty, you know I don't know what I'm doing here. Yes, I'm a believer in the land, but I don't know three beans about farming it, and until I learn – I can't love another one, just to have that little one taken away.

I think on her, too. Not when I look at the moon, but

the sun – setting over the land. Think of our Flora lying in that lone field halfway between Indiana and Kansas. And I can't feel like it's my fault all over again.

KITTY. What about me?

GEORGE. You're the strong one.

KITTY. But this is what you *do*. Try again. Make a new start. Isn't that what we're doing here? Hey.

(She brings him back.)

That's why we're here. Come on, George. Look at me. It's just me. We can do this. Together. See? All you got to do is love me. Leave *Kansas* out of it. Leave it all alone. Just – love me.

(He looks at her. Picks her up. This is a new beginning.)

**Scene Eight: The Morning After &
the Morning Before**

(HANNAH stands in the cabin, the Indian blanket wrapped around her, reading from a copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin. KITTY enters.)

KITTY. Still here.

HANNAH. I got some water.

(KITTY goes to pour herself some.)

It froze.

(KITTY puts down the kettle and sits, as HANNAH puts the blanket around KITTY.)

Your man's out welcoming the morning, that's what he said...

(KITTY smiles to herself. She fills her pipe with her new tobacco.)

But I hear chopping. I think that's what he meant. Chopping wood – I could be gone before he gets back.

KITTY. That wouldn't be very Christian of us, now would it? Not very neighborly either, not that I'm aiming at either one, just trying to keep my George happy, because he makes me very happy, and George says you can stay.

Can't say you take up much space. Seems you can fetch water. Just see you don't hog the liquor – don't even dream of touching my tobacco. Keep those books of yours stacked in the corner, keep that Ruffian with the greasy cards – who I don't know *how* you got mixed up with – outside shooting range. Unless he's got a fresh jug.

And most of all, keep them abolitionist ideas and strange Boston habits to yerself. Don't stand so straight and tall. Sit with your legs planted firmly to the earth. And earn your keep by killing at least three snakes a week. So. What're we gonna call you?

HANNAH. My sister calls me Hannah Rose.

(KITTY lights her pipe, puffs on it.)

Last night I dreamt I was crossing the Missouri River. Jumping from ice floe to ice floe, and it was so dark I couldn't see the other side. So I just kept jumping.

But then the sun rose – a powerful sun, reflecting off of the surface of the ice – and it warmed my back, and the river flowed faster and faster, and soon I was riding that Missouri like a prophet – my arms raised, my voice squealing in my ears.

KITTY. That'd be the red eye.

HANNAH. Then the ice below my feet started to melt.

Disappearing at a startling rate, and I knew that it would soon be gone, but my heart kept on beating steady, slowed even – I raised my skirts to my knees and fixed my eyes on the horizon. And when I awoke, I was here.

KITTY. Kansas.

HANNAH. What does it mean, Kitty – my dream?

KITTY. I know the answer ain't in here.

(KITTY takes the copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin that HANNAH has been re-reading.)

HANNAH. But that's –

KITTY. The word of God?

HANNAH. Harriet Beecher Stowe.

KITTY. A woman. Even still.

(KITTY stacks the book with the others in the corner.)

HANNAH. But my dream –

KITTY. It means – Hannah Rose – that *springtime* will come.

(And it does. KITTY removes the blanket from her shoulders. HANNAH opens a window. GEORGE enters and pours coffee from the pot that was previously frozen.)

GEORGE. Popular sovereignty. That means *we* the people of Kansas are to decide if this here be a slave state or a free state.

HANNAH. That's what the Kansas-Nebraska Act says.

GEORGE. A question of the vote, which is a question of *rights*, the way I see it.

KITTY. Well, it ain't a question of the *slaves*, because I never seen a-one in Kansas.

HANNAH. But it's all about the slaves!

KITTY. Then explain to me why Josiah's pro-slavery when he hasn't got any slaves, never will, unless you count *him* indentured to Louisa.

GEORGE. It's the peculiar Southern *institution* of slavery –

HANNAH. Which is a scourge on the soul of our entire nation!

KITTY. Our nation's soul? What Christians do you think you're preaching to in this house?

(KITTY *folds up the winter blanket*. GEORGE and HANNAH *sit at the table*.)

GEORGE. Look, Joe's from Missiouri, and the Missiourians are pro-slavery, because that's what they got in Missouri – slaves – and they want to keep it that way, and frankly that's fine by me –

HANNAH. Not by me.

KITTY. Heard ya the first time, doll.

GEORGE. But these Southerners are trying to *spread* slavery – thinking they can just come here to Kansas and *take away* the political liberties of me and everyone else, when the majority of us settlers are Free Soilers.

HANNAH. They're messing with the democratic process.

GEORGE. Don't you know it, miss – and that's against the Constitution, against the War for Independence and the spirit of our forefathers – downright un-American, messin' with the popular sovereignty.

HANNAH. After we moved here to *vote* Kansas in as a free state.

(KITTY *takes the toy horse out of her pocket*.)

KITTY. No, *we* didn't. We moved here for a better life for our children, if you remember.

(**KITTY** hands **GEORGE** the horse. *He remembers carving it. Gifting it. He holds it.*)

HANNAH. And I moved here to make Kansas a free state. I'm not forgetting –

KITTY. Uh-huh, how you abolitionists are here turning up trouble. And don't think I don't know, Hannah Rose, how you been burnin' down our candles writing letters to your sympathizin' newspapers –

HANNAH. Our letters are winning supporters back East –

KITTY. And, George, you might recall that "meddlesome Yankees" was a phrase you yourself used more than once –

GEORGE. I know – and you'll have to excuse that, Hannah – but we're fighting on the same side now, Kitty. The abolitionists got their reasons, and us Free Soilers got ours. Those slave plantations take over the land and prevent working people like us from having our own homestead. And with slavery comes the Negroes, and I don't want them black people here populating my state.

HANNAH. I'm sorry but can't excuse that.

KITTY. And last I checked, women *can't* vote – and men sure can *talk*, can't they?

GEORGE. This ain't just talk, Kitty.

KITTY. And George I don't know what you've got to talk *about* considering you know less about politics than you do about farming.

GEORGE. I know I got rights, Kitty. That's my belief, and I know it in my heart. And I know it ain't right, what they're trying to do here in Kansas. Because I'm here working this land, and that gives me certain rights to decide the fate of this here land. This is our America, and we got a right to it. It's only *right*. That's why I'm standing up.

KITTY. Because they didn't count your vote, that's what this is all about.

GEORGE. Because when they opened up my ballot before it ever reached that box, and fixed it to the wall with a bloody knife, there wasn't a thing I could do but stand there.

HANNAH. It shouldn't even be a vote.

KITTY. So, you want it to be – *a fight*?

HANNAH. It's above a vote. This is *slavery* – a question of moral principle – it's a question of –

KITTY. Don't even say –

HANNAH. God.

KITTY. Because I don't believe it, doll, even if it is Sunday.

GEORGE. It's a question of men.

KITTY. The *men* – I believe that, because it's always the men.

GEORGE. A man's liberty –

HANNAH. The *black* man's –

GEORGE. *My* liberty.

KITTY. Spoken like a man.

GEORGE. A man making this a free territory for free white people. Spoken like *your* old man, Kitty. Thinking about you, like I always am because you know I can't help myself...

KITTY. Georgie –

GEORGE. Thinking about the future of this country for *our* children – that's why this fight matters.

(GEORGE *hands the toy horse back to KITTY.*)

KITTY. This *farm* is what matters. So why don't you all farm the farms, and not worry about who's preaching what about slavery or drinkin' in the name of Southern pride –

GEORGE. If Atchison has his way, and turns this Kansas into another Missouri –

KITTY. Then our children will grow up with a funny way of saying "cow."

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