

Patience & Sarah

A pioneering love story

**Music by Paula M. Kimper
Libretto by Wende Persons
Based on the novel by Isabel Miller**

LIBRETTO

Commissioned and Developed by
AMERICAN OPERA PROJECTS, INC.
Grethe Barrett Holby, Artistic Director
Charles Jarden, Managing Director

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© 7/98 Paula M. Kimper and Wende Persons
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"A rare--and moving--opera about women in love."

---**New York Magazine**

"Kimper's music recalls Gian Carlo Menotti in its conservatism and Richard Strauss in its soaring vocal lines."

---**USA Today**

"The opera bubbles with glorious vocal writing."

---**Opera News**

"There was a soaring affirmation in this music of the transcendent beauty of life and love."

---**The New York Times**

"Wende Persons' libretto is . . . a masterpiece of economy."

---**The Wall Street Journal**

"The delicate, chamber textures of the score allow the text to emerge with uncommon clarity amidst shimmering, Ravel-like harmonies."

---**American Record Guide**

". . . rapturous and soaring arias, a ballad or two, and several airborne duets, all beautifully 'vocal,' all supported by a lucid, clean-lined chamber orchestra . . . It is an opera that sings."

---**New York Post**

Author's Note

“This story was suggested by the life of the painter Mary Ann Willson and her companion Miss Brundage, who lived and farmed together for many years on Red Mill Road, Greenville Town, Greene County, New York State, in the early part of the nineteenth century.

“Not much is left of them. Even their hill--still called Brundage--is partly gone, bulldozed for road improvement. I couldn't find them in any Greene County census, or in the records of land transactions in the Catskill courthouse.

“Still, something is left. The bright, playful watercolors are left. And ‘Admirer of Art,’ a friend, wrote a note about Miss Willson and Miss Brundage. It's safe in a book.¹ What looks to be Admirer of Art's first draft is safe in the Vedder Library of the Greene County Historical Society at Coxsackie, New York. There is another account in a book called *Picturesque Catskills*.²

“So we know about their 'romantic attachment' to each other, their quiet peaceful life, the respect and help of their neighbors, their dooryard full of flowers, their plowing and haying, their cow, the improvised paints--berries and brick dust--the paintings sold for twenty-five cents to neighbors or bartered to peddlers who carried them all over eastern North America, from Canada to Mobile. And we know our own response. We are provoked to tender dreams by a hint. Any stone from their hill is a crystal ball.”

--Isabel Miller

1. Lipman, Jean, and Black, Mary C. *American Folk Painting*. New York: C. N. Potter, 1966.

2. DeLisser, R. Lionel. *Picturesque Catskills*. Northampton, Mass.: Picturesque Publishing Co., 1894. Reprinted 1967 by Hope Farm Press, Cornwallville, N.Y.

From the novel *Patience & Sarah*, A Fawcett Crest Book. Published by Ballantine Books.
©1969 by Isabel Miller under the title *A PLACE FOR US*.

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Steven Osgood, Conductor
Douglas Moser, Director
Marie Anne Chiment, Set and Costume Designer
Mimi Jordan Sherin and D. M. Wood, Lighting Designers

Cast
(in order of vocal appearance)

Martha White, *Edward's wife, contralto*.....**Amy Ellen Anderson**

Patience White, *soprano*.....**Lori Phillips**

Edward White, *Patience's brother, tenor*.....**John G. Bellemer**

Sarah Dowling, *mezzo-soprano*.....**Elaine Valby**

Rachel Dowling, *Sarah's sister, soprano*.....**Laure Meloy**

Ma Dowling, *mezzo-soprano*.....**Janet Ellis**

Pa Dowling, *bass*.....**LeRoy Lehr**

Parson Daniel Peel, *tenor*.....**Barton Green**

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This
opera
is dedicated to
the memory
of the lives
and loves of
Mary Ann Willson
and
Alma Routsong.

Patience & Sarah

ACT I, Scene 1: Martha, Patience, Edward; Sarah

(Connecticut, 1816. Late winter, at Patience White's house. The Whites are well off, the house comfortably furnished. As lights come up, Patience sits at her easel staring into the kitchen fireplace.)

- MARTHA: *(Enters, very pregnant, very tired.)* Nobody else has time to make pictures.
- PATIENCE: Nobody else knows how. I'm thinking of painting "Lot's Wife Looking Back"-
-at the moment she turns to salt. Half salt. Half woman.
- MARTHA: The soup needs salt. The children are hungry. And where did I leave my mending?
- PATIENCE: Bottom half salt. Dress and all. She'll have green tears falling from indigo eyes. And off in the background Sodom and Gomorrah going up in one big flame like a torch. *(Absorbed in her vision, stares at the fireplace.)* Fire's not red. Oh, for goodness sake, fire's not red!
- MARTHA: Oh, for goodness sake! Any fool knows fire's red.
- EDWARD: *(Enters. Stern and forbidding. Instantly sums up the situation.)* Martha's ailing. Can't you help out?
- PATIENCE: *(Stubborn. Doesn't move from her easel.)* They're your children.
- EDWARD: Sister!
- MARTHA: *(To Edward)* It's bad enough she doesn't mean to marry and do her part. But to live in my house, lazy and spoiled and indulged like a princess...
- PATIENCE: *(Flash of anger)* Your house? It's my house! Half mine. Half Edward's--by our father's will!
- EDWARD: Enough, sister. She needs your help.
- PATIENCE: I won't be her slave...or yours.
- EDWARD: *(Angrily)* What will you then? Patience? "Patience." Father always said he named you Patience that it might give you some. Instead he might have called you Faith, or Hope, or Charity. *(Leaves.)*
- PATIENCE: *(Brightly)* Hope. I'll take Hope!
- SARAH: *(Outside)* Ho there! Ho! *(Knocks on the door. As Patience doesn't move, Martha answers the door.)*
- SARAH: *(Sarah is dressed in boots, breeches, jerkin, fur mittens, fur hat, with a scarf tied over it to cover her ears.)* Where do you want this put? It's the firewood Mr. White asked of us.
- MARTHA: Out front.
- SARAH: Would you look and say it's half a cord?
- MARTHA: It's half a cord. *(Slams door, thoroughly scandalized.)* I never!

PATIENCE: Who's out there, Martha? What's the matter? *(Looks out the window.)*

MARTHA: Never mind.

PATIENCE: Is it a woman or a boy?

MARTHA: Patience, never you mind.

PATIENCE: If it's a woman, I'll get Edward to unload that wood and ask her to come in.

MARTHA: She don't set no foot in this house.

PATIENCE: So it is a she! Do you know her?

MARTHA: Know her? No! And I'm not about to. I've heard about that Sarah Dowling. This is a Christian home.

PATIENCE: She'll have to come in. It's dinnertime.

MARTHA: Then she can go home and put a dress on first. It's in the Bible. Not that she'd know that. *(Martha out.)*

PATIENCE: *(Puts on a shawl, and goes outside where Sarah is unloading the wood. Very proper, nervous.)* You could put your cattle in the barn. They shouldn't have to stand out in this cold for nothing.

SARAH: *(Sarah looks up and they stare at each other awkwardly.)* You're not the one I talked to before.

PATIENCE: No, that was my brother's wife. *(Makes a gesture of greeting.)* I'm Patience White. I'm the old-maid aunt. *(They laugh.)*

SARAH: The lady of the house didn't worry none about my cows. *(Finishes stacking wood.)*

PATIENCE: This house has two ladies. You're coming in with me to warm up. *(Leads Sarah to her own quarters adjacent to the house.)*

SARAH: *(Confesses)* I could've stacked that wood and been gone by dinnertime, but I wanted to see your place inside.

PATIENCE: *(They go in.)* Look around.

SARAH: *(Sarah explores the room while Patience pours tea and puts out some food. She walks around the room, the kitchen area, past the spinning wheel, past the bed, touching everything with curiosity. She stops and leafs through a pile of Patience's paintings. Completely fascinated.)* This is fine. You made these? Just look at that!

PATIENCE: *(Pleased.)* I haven't had anyone to look at them.

SARAH: Such beautiful colors... And so real! What's this one?

PATIENCE: *(Watches Sarah intently.)* I've painted Saul on the road to Damascus, the raging wolf and all his attendants. Here the road bends, and although Saul can't see it, there he'll be, in the next moment, knocked flat by love, rising up St. Paul.

SARAH: *(Murmurs, completely entranced)* Knocked flat by love...

PATIENCE: That's how it happens in the Bible.

SARAH: *(Reluctantly pulls away.)* I got to get going. I can't gab all day like women folk.

PATIENCE: Do you always work like this?

SARAH: Yup. I'm Pa's boy. He couldn't get one the regular way, just got girls, so he picked me out to be a boy.

PATIENCE: *(Cautiously)* Do you like it?

SARAH: Being a boy? It's best, I expect. Anyhow it seems natural now. I like being outside. I couldn't have fetched wood today. I wouldn't be here with you.

PATIENCE: You'll have to change when you get married.

SARAH: Don't figure to get married.

PATIENCE: *(Shocked.)* But unless your father's well-to-do...

SARAH: *(Stubbornly.)* I figure to take up land and make me a place.

PATIENCE: Alone?

SARAH: I'm strong. *(Pushes up sleeve and shows muscle.)*

PATIENCE: *(Touches muscle, doubtful.)* Very good.

SARAH: *(Hurt by Patience's doubt.)* I plan to go. I never told anyone before. Do you think I can't?

PATIENCE: *(Tries to sound sincere)* No, I think you can.

SARAH: I want to live nice, and snug and free. I think about it. *(Starts to go.)*

PATIENCE: *(Entranced.)* Don't go. Won't you stay awhile longer? I want to hear more. *(Patience invites Sarah to sit and eat with her, takes her hand and leads her to the table.)*

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ACT I, Scene 2: Patience; Sarah

(A few days later, Patience is alone in her room.)

PATIENCE: I want to live.... I want to live!
(Realization) I want to paint.
 It's all I've ever wanted and never dared to tell.

(Puts on her shawl and goes out.)
 Who is this brave and outrageous young woman,
 coming into my house with such wild schemes?
 Standing there in her boots and her breeches,
 wearing that smile and telling her dreams?

Oh, Sarah Dowling, are you going West alone?
 No painting halfway done
 has ever fired my imagination like you have!
 How have I been keeping on without you for so long?

I watched your eyes when you looked at my paintings.
I watched you point with your strong, lovely hand.
Not since my father was here have I felt such joy
seeing my work through someone else's eyes.
Your daring gives me dreams of my own.
Sarah Dowling is going West!

(Patience approaches the Dowling clearing.)

SARAH: *(Chopping wood in the clearing, she looks up to see Patience. She is surprised and pleased.)* Patience White! *(Leaves her ax in the tree and brushes snow off of a log to make a seat for Patience with her mittens.)*

PATIENCE: *(Remains standing. Abrupt and nervous)* Is that your ax? Your own ax?

SARAH: *(Uncertain.)* It's one of our axes. I guess it's mine. It's the one I use.

PATIENCE: But could you take it pioneering with you?

SARAH: I should think Pa would give me that much.

PATIENCE: Oh, Sarah Dowling. Dear Sarah Dowling. How reasonable are you being to think of going West alone?

SARAH: I won't tell you. You'd just say I couldn't.

PATIENCE: I feel I must say it, dear, as a friend.

SARAH: *(Defiantly, strides around the clearing.)* I'm going. I'm strong. I can do it.

PATIENCE: *(Tentatively)* Do you have any money?

SARAH: *(Defensively)* I'll buy my land like Pa's buying his.

PATIENCE: Do you think anyone would let a woman alone, with no money, buy land?

SARAH: They don't have to know I'm a woman. *(Pauses while Patience lets this sink in.)* Well, what'd you think? That I was gonna drag out there in a skirt?

PATIENCE: I doubt anyone would let a man alone do it, either. One alone is not enough. You haven't thought.

SARAH: I have thought. I've thought I'd rather die than not go. I have to try.

PATIENCE: Then take me with you!

SARAH: You better think it over.

PATIENCE: I have been thinking. I want to paint where nobody's angry at me for it.

SARAH: I wouldn't be angry. I'd be proud.

PATIENCE: *(Shyly)* Yes, I know you would.

SARAH: I'll come by your place Sunday. You tell me then if you haven't changed your mind.

PATIENCE: I won't have. Where are we going?

SARAH: York State. Genesee Country. *(Patience leaves. Sarah resumes chopping with new fervor.)*

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ACT I, Scene 3: Edward, Patience, Martha; Sarah

(White's house, the next Sunday, after breakfast. Edward is getting ready for church, Martha is busy dressing the children, and Patience is reading the Bible.)

EDWARD: *(Notices Patience isn't getting ready.)* Aren't you going to Meeting? Are you sick?

PATIENCE: I'm not going, Edward. I'm expecting Sarah Dowling today.

EDWARD: Sarah Dowling?

MARTHA: *(Searching for a word.)* That...that...

PATIENCE: She's a fine person when you get to know her. *(To herself.)* Lovely, too.

EDWARD: *(Stern.)* You shouldn't miss Meeting. It's not a light matter to miss Meeting.

MARTHA: *(Shocked.)* She's not fit.

PATIENCE: *(Defensive.)* She's very fit, a very fine young woman who happens to have the gumption to help her family. I honor her for it.

MARTHA: There's fit ways, and there's unfit ways! *(Martha out.)*

PATIENCE: She's coming to talk about our plans for going out to York State--Genesee Country.

EDWARD: That nonsense again?

PATIENCE: Can you lend me a map of York State?

EDWARD: No sense in it.

PATIENCE: Please, brother.

EDWARD: What would folks think of me if I let you go off?

PATIENCE: *(Laughing.)* They'd think it couldn't be so bad if Edward White did it. Please lend me a map. Just for today.

EDWARD: *(He gives in and hands her a map and a book.) Speaking:* "Don't carry these with coals. They're dear." *(Edward out.)*

SARAH: *(Arrives almost at once--in a dress. She looks miserable.)* Don't say nothing.

PATIENCE: *(Preoccupied with her book, doesn't notice.)* I have a book on Genesee and a map of York State. I'm going to copy it for us.

SARAH: *(Bending to pick chunks of ice off her hem.)* Ma said it would be better for Sunday.

PATIENCE: Listen to me!

SARAH: I can't. I've got this cussed dress on.

PATIENCE: *(Looks up and bursts into laughter.)*

SARAH: Why, I just don't know how you stand it. My skirt's all chunks of snow where it dragged. And where do you put your hands? *(Gropes around for a place to hook her thumbs)*

PATIENCE: *(Reaches out and takes Sarah's hands.)* Here.

SARAH: I told Pa I'm going.

PATIENCE: I told my brother. He wants me to go, but he can't help thinking that what tempts him so much must be wrong. I suppose your father can't spare you.

SARAH: But he won't stop me. The trouble is, when Rachel heard, she wanted to come, too.

PATIENCE: *(Shouting.)* Who's Rachel? *(Realizes she's over-reacting.)* Who's Rachel?

SARAH: *(Cautious.)* My sister. She's set her heart on coming.

PATIENCE: You told her no.

SARAH: I told her I'd see.

PATIENCE: You told her I was going.

SARAH: I told her you was thinking on it.

PATIENCE: I have told you and told you. *(Emphasizes with the map.)* How can I be more definite?

SARAH: *(Shrinks under Patience's onslaught, amazed at her show of emotion.)* Rachel's just like me. She never had things fine. She wouldn't fret.

PATIENCE: Would you leave me in a life I can't stand because I've had things fine?

SARAH: *(Still reluctant.)* This might be just play for you. You might not stay.

PATIENCE: Did Rachel say she'd stay? Did Rachel say, 'I'll stay.'? Did she say, 'I'll stay, though I hate it and die of it!'? All right, I'll say that. I'll stay. Whatever happens.

SARAH: *(Still resists.)* There's something else. There's how I feel. You might not like it. I care for you.

PATIENCE: I want you to. I care for you, too. I don't want you to stop.

SARAH: *(Looks at Patience)* Is it really all right?

PATIENCE: Of course it's all right.

SARAH: I think about you every day in the clearing. I expect to see you again because I once did...that one time.

PATIENCE: *(Puts her hand on Sarah's shoulder.)* I think about you, too.

SARAH: *(Bends her cheek down until it touches Patience's hand.)* I keep thinking every shadow is you because that day, there was this shadow in the corner of my eye that when I looked was you.

PATIENCE: *(Pulls back, shaken.)* I'm wasting daylight here.

SARAH: You didn't mean what I meant! You don't feel what I feel! Well, Miss White, you get on with your daylight and I'll get on with my...

PATIENCE: No, wait. Please wait. At least let me kiss you goodbye. *(Pulls Sarah to her, kisses her cheek, pauses... then kisses her lips.)*

SARAH: *(Shy at first, then more ardent, the women embrace.)*

PATIENCE: *(Pulls back to catch her breath, to save her life.)*

SARAH: Did I hold you too hard? Did I hurt you?

PATIENCE: Oh, no!

SARAH: Was that a feeling I felt in you?

PATIENCE: Yes.

SARAH: That's something powerful, woman, that's something powerful.

PATIENCE: Yes, something powerful.

TOGETHER: Powerful. Something powerful! *(They embrace and kiss again.)*

PATIENCE: *(Leads Sarah to the table)* Come, let us read about Genesee. *(They sit, leaning against each other, and begin to look at the book and map.)*

#

ACT I, Scene 4: Rachel, Ma Dowling, Pa Dowling, Sarah

(At the Dowling house later that day. Ma, Pa, Rachel and the family are gathering for dinner. The house is rustic and plain.)

QUARTET:

SARAH: *(Enters and takes off her coat.)*

RACHEL: Sarah!

MA DOWLING: Sarah's home!

PA DOWLING: What happened?

RACHEL/MA: Tell us!

MA DOWLING: What was it like?

SARAH: I'll tell you...

PA DOWLING: Are you going pioneering?

RACHEL/MA: Tell us!

RACHEL: Is Patience White going pioneering?

SARAH: She is.

MA DOWLING: What was her house like?

RACHEL/MA: Tell us!

PA DOWLING: How tall was her woodpile?

SARAH: I'm hungry--let me be.

PA DOWLING: When are you leaving?

RACHEL/MA: Tell us!

RACHEL: Will she really go along?

SARAH: I told you already--yes.

MA: Stir, Rachel! Don't burn the soup, you ninny! Stir it from time to time.

RACHEL: *(Stirs mournfully.)*

PA: *(Sneering.)* Well, you've got yourself a nice job, waiting on that Patience White while she sets on a silken pillow. I expect she'll ride in a carriage and you'll walk out and meet her there. Well, is that the plan?

SARAH: *(Shakes head, but looks down.)*

PA: Oh, she's got to have a carriage. And you better figure on about a hundred pair of silken slippers. They won't hold up long in the woods, and she couldn't wear no ordinary boots like no ordinary girl. Hmph!

RACHEL: *(Sarah Doesn't answer--goes up to the loft to change back into her breeches. Rachel follows her and whispers)* What happened? Your face! It shows in your face. What happened?

SARAH: I found my mate.

RACHEL: Who?!

SARAH: *(Hushes her)* Patience White.

RACHEL: *(Angry.)* So she goes with you and I stay here?

SARAH: 'Fraid so, Sister. *(Rachel presses her face into Sarah's shoulder and cries.)* Never mind, Rachel. Pretty soon the one for you will come, and you'll be glad you're not out there with me.

RACHEL: I hate her. She's rich and that's why.

SARAH: *(Plainly)* No, I love her.

RACHEL: *(Pleads.)* It's always been you and me. Since before we could talk we held together. How can you say you love somebody but me?

SARAH: It's different. She kissed me. I never felt such a feeling.

RACHEL: I'll kiss you. *(Hastily pushes her lips against Sarah's cheek.)* You want something else? I'll do that, too. More than she ever would.

SARAH: Oh, sister, don't. The one for you will come, man or woman.

RACHEL: I wouldn't have nobody but a man.

SARAH: If it happens that way to you. It happened this way to me, and I'm happy.

RACHEL: I used to worry no man would have you. I never thought to worry you'd think you was a man.

SARAH: I'm not. I'm a woman that's found my mate.

#

ACT I, Scene 5: Patience, Martha, Edward

(At the White's house, the next day. Patience returns from the barn, humming joyfully.)

PATIENCE: Hmm...I think about you, too...

MARTHA: *(Surprised)* You didn't have to do my milking.

PATIENCE: I was glad to do it. Is there anything else I can help you with?

MARTHA: *(Sighs)* No, I'm managing. Edward says we'll be losing you.

PATIENCE: Yes, if you want to call it a loss.

MARTHA: *(Appreciates the chores Patience is doing.)* I just might begin to.

PATIENCE: I can see now where I could have done better. I can see now where I could have done more.

MARTHA: *(Simultaneously, quickly)* I can see where you wouldn't take the interest you would for your own. *(Laughs)* Why couldn't we be like this more often?

PATIENCE: *(Cautiously)* Like what?

MARTHA: Sweet like this. Friends, like we used to be.

PATIENCE: Oh, yes, I remember. You used to come here to see me, but then you saw Edward and you liked him better! *(Gives Martha a hug and a playful push.)*

MARTHA: *(Startled, but pleased by Patience's display of affection.)* Well, it's only natural. *(Leaves. Patience smiles, goes to her room, and sits down at her table to copy out the map of York State. Edward enters--very stern and upset.)*

PATIENCE: Good morning, brother.

EDWARD: No! Not very good. Sarah Dowling is making it her brag that you're her mate. *(Patience pales and freezes--tries to hide her dread and terror.)* Well?

PATIENCE: *(Out to save herself)* Partner, she must mean.

EDWARD: No, something like wife she means.

PATIENCE: *(Produces a tiny, astonished laugh.)* She couldn't mean that. Whoever heard of such a thing?

EDWARD: She's bragging it. Her pa was just here. Pretty riled up, and I don't blame him.

PATIENCE: *(Frightened.)* What could she be thinking of?

EDWARD: She says the two of you are like man and woman.

PATIENCE: It's so impossible. *(Tries to laugh.)*

EDWARD: If it's not so, I'm glad to hear it.

PATIENCE: How could it be so? *(Pauses)* Who's she telling such things?

EDWARD: She told her folks. I don't expect they'll brag on it. I sure won't. You just go about your business and see no more of her, and maybe that'll be an end to it.

PATIENCE: *(Not saying yes.)* I expect that would be best.

EDWARD: That's more sense than I thought you had. You just govern yourself better in the future and we'll say no more.

PATIENCE: (Nods in embarrassment.)

EDWARD: I'll take these. (Rolls up map and takes the book.) You're not going anywhere!

PATIENCE: Edward?

EDWARD: Yes?

PATIENCE: Don't tell Martha?

EDWARD: I don't tend to tell Martha much. (He leaves.)

#

ACT I, Scene 6: Pa Dowling, Sarah

(Meanwhile, in the Dowling clearing. Pa approaches as Sarah chops wood. He comes up behind her and catches her ax as she swings back. Sarah, feeling mellow, turns and grins at him, man to man.)

PA: *(Seething)* I've just come from seeing Edward White, about your carryings-on!

SARAH: What carryings-on?

PA: It's too late to play sly. Rachel told me all about it--and don't you punish her for it! I'll see to that. Me and Edward White agreed to put a stop. He'll keep his gal home, and I'll keep you. *(Holds out ax to her.)* Get back to work now. I just figured you ought to know you won't be seeing her.

SARAH: *(Ignores ax)* I will be. *(She starts to leave, taking long strides.)*

PA: *(Catches up to her, turns her around, and slaps her several times across the face. She looks surprised, but doesn't resist or fight back. He roughs her up, pushes her backwards, and she falls.)* That's to show, if you don't know enough to do right, I can still make you. Who do you think they'd blame if this got out? *(He turns and strides away in a rage. Sarah lies very still.)*

#

ACT I, Scene 7: Edward, Patience, Martha; Rachel, Sarah

(At the White's house, a few days later. Patience, Edward, Martha and the children are seated in prayer around the dinner table.)

EDWARD: Dear God, please guide us, your lowly servants, to the realization that we were not born to be happy, *(Looks at Patience.)* but to do our duty to God and to save our souls. We ask your forgiveness and your blessings in the name of your only Son, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying,

Trio:
Edward/
Patience/
Martha:

'Our Father, Which art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done,
On Earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the Kingdom

And the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.

(At the same time in Dowling clearing, Pa is beating Sarah again. Rachel watches from a nearby hiding place. After he leaves, Rachel comes out of hiding and tries to talk some sense into Sarah.)

RACHEL: Sister, quit! He won't let you go! And I can't stand this every day.

SARAH: Pa will get so that he can't either. *(Touches herself gingerly.)* I don't feel it at the time.

RACHEL: Bullhead, he don't wanna hurt you. He don't even wanna keep you. Can't you see that he's just pleading with you to tell a lie, so he has an excuse to stop pounding you?

SARAH: I haven't got one.

RACHEL: You just say it was all a lie, what you said before.

SARAH: But it wasn't.

RACHEL: *(Frustrated.)* Say so.

SARAH: I already told her I love her. Didn't you tell him that?

RACHEL: *(Caught! Scheming, inventing as she goes.)* Well, now you say you didn't think how it would sound. You say it sounded better than being greedy for her money to help you go West.

SARAH: I won't say that against my feeling. Why did you tell him?

RACHEL: *(Vulnerable.)* I didn't know he'd take on so. I thought maybe it was a common thing.

#

ACT I, Scene 8: Patience, Sarah, Edward, Pa Dowling

(A week later at the White's house. Pa Dowling arrives with Sarah, who is badly bruised.)

PATIENCE: *(Gasping at the sight of Sarah.)* Oh, my God!

SARAH: Pa's here.

EDWARD: Well, what brings you?

PA: She was set on it. I thought there'd be no harm if I came, too.

EDWARD: *(About the bruises)* Was that necessary, Dowling?!

PA: I didn't really hurt her. *(Pushing Sarah forward.)* Speak up, gal. We won't stay long.

SARAH: *(Braces herself)* Do you still want to go?

PATIENCE: *(Embarrassed)* We can't.

SARAH: We can, unless you don't want to.

PATIENCE: It wasn't very reasonable.

PA: There, you've got your answer. Now let's go.

SARAH: Do you want to?

PATIENCE: *(Weakly.)* No. *(Sarah groans and moves blindly for the door.)* Sarah? *(Sarah turns, hopeful)* Don't you care what people think?

SARAH: Care what people think? I only care what you think. What have I done?

PA: You was played with. Now come on.

SARAH: *(Goes to the door, on the verge of tears, turns to Pa.)* I'll be leaving soon as I heal up.

PA: You'll be back.

SARAH: *(Looks straight at Patience.)* No, Pa. *(Leaves.)*

EDWARD: *(Shuts the door and watches the retreating figures.)* She really feels. I never knew anybody to feel so much. *(Leaves)*

PATIENCE: *(Frightened. Frozen. Devastated.)* What have I done? What will become of me? Spinster. Sister. Teacher. Aunt. For one bright moment I thought I could be something more. Dear God, you gave me hope, but not the faith to follow it. Oh, Sarah, take me with you!

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END OF ACT I

ACT II, Scene 1: Sarah; Parson Peel

(Connecticut roadside, early evening, about a week after Sarah has left home. She has cut her hair off, and now looks uncannily like a boy. She has extra clothes in a blanket roll which hangs over her shoulder. An ax hangs from her belt, along with a little pan for cooking, and a water bottle. She stops by the roadside, unrolls her blanket and lies down to rest, exhausted from days of walking, and looking the worse for wear.)

SARAH: *(Thinking of Patience, imagines the letter she wishes she could write.)* Oh, Patience... Patience... I wish I could write to you--I wish I could tell you how hard it is out here alone. Patience, my love.

I stopped by your place as I left--just to ask you once more if you might have changed your mind. Mrs. White came to the door instead of you. She didn't know me as a boy. She was almost pleasant at first, but when I said who I was, she shut the door all but a crack--like I was dangerous. And she said you was gone--gone visiting! Did she tell you I came by? Did she tell you I said good-bye?

Oh, Patience... Patience... I wish I could write to you--I wish I could tell you how hard it is out here alone. Patience, my love.

Farmers out in these parts think I'm a runaway. I tell them my name is Sam. They say I can't be twenty-one without no whiskers. They won't hire no runaway apprentice. How am I to work my way West? At least they believe I am a boy.

One place where I stopped for the night, the farmer's daughter woke me up at dawn. She said, "Sam, hurry now, you have to go. Papa's gonna turn you in for the reward." She gave me some food to eat, then she pushed me on my way, and said, "Sam, you're sweet!" And then she kissed me! But it wasn't like your kisses--nothing to feel real deep. Nothing that hurts when the kisses are gone, but it made the miles fly.

Oh, Patience... Patience... I wish I could write to you--I wish I could tell you how hard it is out here alone. Patience, my love.

(Sarah hears whistling and she stops to gawk at a little blue horse-drawn van that is approaching from the opposite direction. The van has red wheels, yellow trim, a green door on the back, and painted on the side in white letters: BOOKS--PARSON DANIEL PEEL.)

PARSON: *(Playing a tune on a penny whistle as he drives, turns to Sarah, tips his hat and smiles a warm, open smile. He stops the van.)* Runaway apprentice?

SARAH: No.

PARSON: Run away from your father?

SARAH: No.

PARSON: Had any dinner?

SARAH: No.

PARSON: *(Grabs a basket, hops down out of the driver's seat of the van. He lays down a cloth and spreads out some food.)* Lord, we thank you for this food, such as it is, and thank you for this good boy to share it with.

SARAH: *(Gratefully accepts some food, feels a little awkward with such a kind, well-mannered man. Motioning toward the van.)* You peddle something? *(When he pauses and looks at the letters on the van, she realizes she's let him know she can't read.)*

PARSON: Yes, I peddle books. *(Proudly)* I go from town to town laying out my wares on courthouse steps. I have some books by Parson Peel up in those boxes. My name is Daniel Peel. Dan Peel. They call me Parson Peel.

SARAH: A parson! *(Remembering to act like a boy.)* I'm Sam.

PARSON: *(Nods, then turns thoughtful)* I was once a parson. I hoped it would be a happier thing than I'd ever seen it be. I tried to preach the message of love--that God is love--all kinds of love. But we're a strange and vicious people, Sam. Somehow we live our lives. Somehow people live their lives. *(Swept away in a private reverie.)* La la la la la la...Like water parted from the sea... It seems that songs and prayers will suffice. I think about it, Sam, all the time. I think about it. What do you think about, Sam? Swinging your ax?

SARAH: *(In Awe of Parson.)* I think of being...not alone...someday, and farming my own land someday. I'm going up the Hudson River to Genesee, where land's cheap. Do you get to York State? *(Points off in the distance.)* Did you ever see the Hudson River?

PARSON: *(Laughs and points in the other direction.)* Yes, I just came from there.

SARAH: Tell me about York State. Where would you leave this valley if you was me?

PARSON: I'd have left it at Egremont, which is now behind you.

SARAH: *(Groans)* Oh.

PARSON: The next good break in those hills, I'd say, is Stockbridge.

SARAH: *(Weakly)* Stockbridge.

PARSON: Sam.... *(Hesitates, points to the van.)* Sam, I always need some help unloading book boxes. I can usually hire some boy that's watching whenever I reach a town. But you look like you could use some steady work and regular meals. What do you say, Sam? Will you come along?

SARAH: *(Nods slowly)* I want to learn to read. I want to learn to write. Oh, Parson!

PARSON: Sam! *(They smile and shake hands.)*

#

ACT II, Interlude: Sarah, Parson Peel

(The weeks pass. Parson and "Sam" are sharing the driver's seat of Parson's van. There is a great ease of familiarity between them.)

PARSON: "Whither goest thou, Pilgrim Stranger,
Wandering through this lowly vale?
Knowest thou not 'tis full of danger?
And will not thy courage fail?"

&

SARAH: *(joins Parson)*
"No, I'm bound for the Kingdom!
Will you go to glory with me?
Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!
Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"

"Onward, ever on, wayworn trav'ler,

Searching for God's eternal peace.
Who abides with Him ever after
Knows love and grace will never cease.

"Yes, I'm bound for the Kingdom!
Will you go to glory with me?
Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!
Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!"

#

ACT II, Scene 2: Sarah, Parson Peel

(Much time has passed. It is almost fall. Parson and "Sam" are camping by the roadside for the night. They sit by a lantern. Parson points at words in a book, Sarah reads them.)

SARAH: Cloud. Hill. Man.

PARSON: Good, that's good!

SARAH: Horse. Road. Fate.

PARSON: No, FEET.

SARAH: *(Disappointed.)* Feet. Cow. Milk. Pan.

PARSON: Good, that's good!

SARAH: House. Food. Mate.

PARSON: No, MEAT.

SARAH: *(Blushes a little.)* Meat.

PARSON: *(Smiles and puts away the book.)* That's good, Sam. You're quick, Sam, you're learning fast.

SARAH: You're a good teacher, Parson. *(Shakes her head in amazement.)* I always thought folks that could read must have some special gift. Like for pretty singing, or straight throwing, or for painting pictures. But I'm getting better every day!

PARSON: There's life in these books, Sam--whole worlds to live. Look, this is a book I'm reading on astrology--on how the stars affect us from the moment of our birth. I was born when the sun was in a place called Gemini, and you were born with the sun in Leo. You have more in common with other people of Leo than you have with your own family. Your being is marked by the place of the stars and the moon and the sun.

SARAH: What does it mean to be Leo?

PARSON: Leo is the sign of love. It means you're passionate, romantic, a gambler, dashing, bold and strong.

SARAH: *(Shakes her head in disbelief)* Is the first of February Leo, too? I have a friend who's... like me.

PARSON: No, your friend is in Aquarius. Kind-hearted, humane. One who believes in freedom and the right of people to live their lives as they see fit, in peace and harmony.

SARAH: *(Claps Parson on the back)* I love your talk, Parson!

PARSON: *(Pulls away, uncomfortable.)* Yes, and now you'd better sleep, Sam.

SARAH: Sing that song, Parson? You know the one I mean.

PARSON: *(Softens.)* Again?

"Sit by me of an evening with the sunset in your hair,
 Bid goodbye to another day, and say a thankful prayer.
 Let me tell you I love you, and let me count the ways.
 Let me see you one more time, as in our younger days.

PARSON/SARAH: *(Sarah joins quietly on the harmony.)*
 "Walk with me of an evening, far out across our land,
 and let me kiss you one more time,
 and let me hold your hand.

Like water parted from the sea,
 I'm still here waiting patiently
 to look once more into your eyes
 when we meet again in paradise."

SARAH: *(Watches Parson then softly...)* Parson? Why do you travel like this? What makes you go it alone when you've got someone at home who loves you?

PARSON: Well, I love my wife, and I love the open road. It's just the way I am. You have to be yourself, Sam, and live your dreams.

SARAH: *(Sadly)* Live my dreams...?

PARSON: And speaking of dreams...Sweet dreams.

SARAH: Sweet dreams... *(Sighs and settles down to sleep. Parson watches "Sam" fall asleep, resists an urge to touch her by sitting on his hands.)*

#

ACT II, Scene 3: Patience, Sarah; Parson Peel

(Patience is alone in her room. Sarah dreams of Patience.)

PATIENCE: I want to live.... I want to live! I want to paint.
 I want to paint my life in blazing colors,
 And my hopes in vibrant hues,
 I want to paint a place where I belong.

SARAH: *(Stirring in her sleep)* Hmm, I think about it.

PATIENCE: Oh, Sarah, why didn't I go with you?

SARAH: Oh, Patience, Patience.

PATIENCE: What was the worst thing that could happen to me?

SARAH: *(Startled by something)* I keep thinking every shadow is you.

PATIENCE: Oh, what had we begun?

PATIENCE: I see your face in the glow of the coals.
 I feel your breath in the wind on my neck.
 I hold you in my dreams.

SARAH: Did I hold you too hard?

PATIENCE: I long for your kiss.

SARAH: Did I hurt you?
PATIENCE: I would seek your lips again and be calm.
SARAH: Was that a feeling I felt in you?

PATIENCE/SARAH: I want to live.... I want to live! I want to paint.
SARAH: I want to live.... I want to live! Nice and snug and free.
PATIENCE: I want to paint our lives in blazing colors,
And our hopes in vibrant hues,
I want to paint a place where we belong.

SARAH: I think about it. I think about it.
PATIENCE: Oh, Sarah, if only you could hear me.
SARAH: Oh, Patience, Patience.
PATIENCE: Where have you gone, my love?
SARAH: I think about it. I think about it.

SARAH: *(Wakes with start. It is early morning and Parson is strangely close beside her.)* Patience?
(Surprised and confused) Parson!

PARSON: *(Quietly)* Sam, I wish I believed you were twenty-two.

SARAH: I am. I was twenty-two on the thirty-first of July.

PARSON: Will you swear it?

SARAH: *(Puzzled)* Yes, I swear it.

PARSON: *(To himself.)* I'd like to stop sitting on my hands. I'm very tired of sitting on my hands.
(Embraces her.)

SARAH: Parson!

PARSON: Sam, are you going to pretend you don't care for me?

SARAH: Not like that. Not that way. I can't.

PARSON: Can't or not, you do, and I do.

SARAH: Oh, no, Parson. *(She pulls away, but he won't let go and keeps his arm around her.)*

PARSON: I suppose you think men don't do this. I assure you that men have loved and embraced each other since the beginning of time. *(Sarah is thoroughly shaken, sits quietly, hoping he'll stop. Parson sighs, removes his arm and says sarcastically)* Ah, Sam--be nothing but a good boy. Scatter bastards all the way to Genesee...like a real American.

SARAH: *(Shocked at Parson's language)* Parson, don't be riled. I can't help it.

PARSON: Yes, you can. You could consider that I might be telling you the truth. Men love each other, Sam.

SARAH: Stop calling me Sam. I'm Sarah.

PARSON: *(Totally taken aback. Long pause. Then he laughs.)* Oh, Lord! Good Lord! Didn't I know? Somehow, I must have....It's so easy to see.

SARAH: *(Embarrassed.)* Maybe that's why you had...feeling?

PARSON: *(Quickly)* No, no.

SARAH: Maybe you won't want me 'round now.

PARSON: *(Becoming formal.)* Oh, my dear...girl! Do you think I feel no responsibility towards you? I've taken you a hundred miles out of your way.

SARAH: *(She can hardly look him in the eye.)* Well, don't you worry none. I don't regret a single moment of our long journey. It's just that we might not be easy anymore.

PARSON: I feel completely comfortable. More so than before.

SARAH: Good. *(But she is clearly uncomfortable. Gets up and lifts a large box of books from the van.)*

PARSON: Wait! Let me help with that. *(They both freeze and stare at each other. Long pause.)*

#

ACT II, Scene 4: Sarah, Parson Peel

(Early morning, a few weeks later. Late autumn daybreak. Sarah is dressed for traveling. She quietly lifts her gear out of the van and writes a note on a slate. Parson pokes his head out.)

SARAH: *(Explains.)* Winter's coming. I won't be any use to you and your family in New York City. I'm going home. No, don't say nothing. I'm going home.

PARSON: But leaving....just like this?

SARAH: *(Avoiding his eye.)* I can hardly stay here now. I'm not faulting you, Parson. You were the only one on the road to show me kindness.

PARSON: *(Sees that her mind is made up.)* Well, let me give you some food, at least. *(He goes into the van, returns, hands her a bag, a piece of paper, and a book.)* Here's some dinner. Here's the address of my house. And here's something to remember me by.

SARAH: *(Moved, despite what has happened between them.)* Garvey's Speller and Reader. Oh, Parson! I'll never see your like again.

PARSON: *(Softly)* You know, I won't see your like, either. *(Sarah stuffs the gifts inside her shirt, resists Parson's move to embrace her, and starts back east along the road into the sunrise.)*

#

END OF ACT II

ACT III, Scene 1: Rachel, Ma Dowling, Pa Dowling, Sarah

(At the Dowling's house later that day. Sarah enters, dusty, tired from walking all day, but excited to see her family. [She'll notice that the house seems smaller and shabbier than before--and that one of her younger sisters is dressed as a boy.] The family barely notices her arrival. They're hovering around Pa, whose leg is bleeding profusely.)

QUARTET:

MA DOWLING: *(Trying to get her attention)* Rachel!

RACHEL: Sarah's home!

SARAH: *(Oblivious at first)* Hi, Sister.

RACHEL/MA: Help us!

SARAH: What's going on?

PA DOWLING: That damn ox...

SARAH: Oh, my God, Pa--you're bleeding!

RACHEL/MA: Sarah!

PA DOWLING: *(Acknowledging Sarah, but scowling)* So you're finally done pioneering?

SARAH: I guess...

MA DOWLING: Go fetch some water!

MA: Rachel!

SARAH: How did this happen?

MA: Sit down!

PA DOWLING: Don't touch that--let me be!

MA DOWLING: *(To Pa)* Now you be quiet!

PA DOWLING: *(Sullen)* Are you really home to stay?

SARAH: If you'll have me--yes, yes. *(Quietly helps wrap the bandage.)*

PA: *(Scowls.)* I always said you'd be back!

MA: Who was this Daniel Peel who wrote to us about you?

RACHEL: *(Carefully watching Sarah's response)* We took his letter to Patience White. To read to us.

SARAH: *(Paying no attention to Rachel)* A parson, Ma.

PA: *(Sneers)* A parson!

SARAH: Yes. We sold books together and traveled over half of Massachusetts and Connecticut. I've been in more towns than I ever knew existed.

PA: I'm not plain thankful to that man. Without him you'd have been back sooner. I'd have never let you go except I figured you'd be right back. Now you think it's easy on the road. You didn't learn a thing.

SARAH: I learned to read, Pa--and I can teach you and Ma and Rachel. Parson gave me a book.

PA: Learn to read and you'll want books. One more fool thing to want and not get. I won't have it!

MA: *(Pulls Sarah aside)* Don't mind him, Sarah. It's just...it's been hard here without you. Rachel's no boy and the others are still too young. The work near killed him while you were off....learning to read.

SARAH: I'm sorry, Ma.

MA: *(Matter of fact)* Well, you're home now. *(Hands Sarah Pa's ax.)*

RACHEL: *(Follows Sarah to the door. Confidentially. Testing.)* Patience White kept school summer term.

SARAH: *(Fights to sound disinterested)* Oh?

RACHEL: When that letter came from Daniel Peel, I took and showed it to her.

SARAH: Oh?

RACHEL: Did you find someone else to care for on the road?

SARAH: *(Gives Rachel a shifty glance--no longer able to trust her.)* Parson. I care for Parson.

RACHEL: But his letter said he's married!

SARAH: I can't help that.

RACHEL: *(Pauses--and the light dawns.)* He thought you was a boy! He thought you was a boy! Oh, sister, I see it all now. You cared for this parson--this kind, dear man. You was trapped in your lie of being a boy.

SARAH: Trapped? Trapped?

RACHEL: Trapped with a love that he wouldn't feel.
Trapped with feelings you couldn't reveal.
Oh, sister, I see it all now. You suffered so much.

SARAH: Suffered so much.

RACHEL: You cared too much. And now he's gone and broken your heart.

SARAH: I couldn't tell, I had to go. It was the only way for my love to show. Oh.

RACHEL: You couldn't tell, you had to go. It was the only way for your love to show. Oh, sister, I see it all now. I see how much you loved him. *(Sarah is surprised, then plays along and allows Rachel to comfort her.)*

RACHEL: All you needed was the right kind of man. You always was a woman at heart.

SARAH: Too much.

RACHEL: That with Patience White was just her being the first outside one to show you kindness. *(No reaction from Sarah.)* Patience White--she said to let her know anything we heard from you.

SARAH: *(Casually)* Patience White. I expect I better get over to see her one of these days. *(Rachel picks up Sarah's book and pretend to be able to read--like a fancy lady. Sarah turns it right-side up, takes a long, deep sigh of relief and goes off.)*

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ACT III, Scene 2: Sarah, Martha, Edward, Patience

(At the White's house, the following Sunday. Martha answers the door.)

SARAH: Good day, Mrs. White.

MARTHA: *(Startled. Flustered.)* It's...it's...you! *(Looks behind Sarah.)* You've brought firewood?

SARAH: No, I've come visiting.

MARTHA: But... but...

EDWARD: *(Joins Martha.)* I see. *(Looks Sarah up and down.)* Well, come in. My sister is in her room.

MARTHA: *(Under her breath.)* And a fine one, she is! Alone in there. Doesn't lift a finger. Just sits and stares.

EDWARD: *(Shows her to one of the chairs.)* Miss Dowling.

SARAH: *(Frozen, under her breath.)* Patience White. *(Edward and Martha pretend to go about their business, but they're not about to leave the room.)*

PATIENCE: *(Enters, polite, formal.)* I heard you were back. I'm glad you're home. *(She hangs up Sarah's jacket, hat & scarf.)* Would you like some tea? Cider? *(Sarah, impatient, embarrassed, anxious--shakes her head no.)*

PATIENCE: Cider for me, I think. *(She takes her time pouring it, and Sarah, for something to do, turns to a painting on the easel.)* I didn't paint much last summer. That was the only one. Jesus kneeling in prayer, and Peter with a group of soldiers, about to deny the only light he's ever known. *(Slowly, they look up from the painting and their eyes meet. Whispers.)* Do you forgive me?

SARAH: Yes. *(She's unable to say more.)*

PATIENCE: *(Relieved, ecstatic--but aware of Edward and Martha.)* I'm so happy...to hear of your travels. Tell me...

SARAH: I saw lots of places. Learned to read a bit.

PATIENCE: You learned to read?

SARAH: And I learned something else, out there traveling. I'm glad to be home.

PATIENCE: I learned something, too, staying here.

SARAH: Boys and penniless women don't fare so well on the way west. I can pass as a boy, but I'll never be a man, and I'll never earn a man's wages.

PATIENCE: Really? Have you given up on Genesee?

SARAH: You might say so. I'm where I belong now. My folks need me. *(Long, awkward pause. They are painfully aware that Edward and Martha are listening to every word.)* I should be getting home.

PATIENCE: Come tomorrow.

SARAH: *(Surprised)* Tomorrow! You're busy all day, same as me.

PATIENCE: In the evening.

SARAH: In the evening! *(Whispering)* It would look.... It would call attention.

PATIENCE: *(Whispering)* Don't worry. *(Loudly)* I'll be glad to help with your reading.

SARAH: You want to help me learn to read? My reading?

PATIENCE: Yes! If you're serious, I'll help you improve. But I'll have to see you every day. Come tomorrow.

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ACT III, Scene 3: Rachel, Patience, Sarah, Pa and Ma Dowling

(Dowling house, winter 1817. An ice storm howls outside. The Dowlings are gathered around the fireplace. Patience knocks, but no one hears. She knocks again louder, and Rachel answers the door.)

RACHEL: *(In disbelief that anyone would be out on a night like this.)* Miss White!

PATIENCE: *(Cheerfully)* Reading lesson, Sarah! *(She removes her wraps. She's bundled up with a cloak and a shawl and a scarf tied over her nose and chin, as well as extra stockings over her shoes. Mittens, lantern. She hurries to the hearth to warm up.)* Shall we continue with Ruth? Chapter one, verse fourteen.

SARAH: *(Embarrassed, excited, gets out the Bible, and reads slowly, while Patience sits behind her on a stool, looking over her shoulder and correcting her mistakes. Slowly--without expression or inflection)* "And they lifted up their voices, and wept again: and...Or...Or..."

PATIENCE: Orpah.

SARAH: "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law. But Ruth...cluh...clah..."

PATIENCE: Clave.

SARAH: "Clave unto her. And she said.. 'Behold, thy sister-in-law has gone back unto her people, and unto her gods. Return thou after thy sister-in-law.'"

PA: *(Gruff.)* Not doing too good.

PATIENCE: She's doing very well!

SARAH: *(With greater determination--less slowly)* "And Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from...following after thee. For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou...'"

PATIENCE: Lodgest.

SARAH: "Where thou lodgest, I will...lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

PA: Hmph! *(Leaves)*

SARAH: "Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be...buried. The Lord do so to me, and more, if...ought but death part thee and me."

PATIENCE: Yes, good! Start here again. *(She points)*

SARAH: *(With more confidence and inflection)* "'For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more, if ought but death part me and thee...'" *(She stops and stares at Patience.)*

MA: *(Listening to the storm)* You'd better stay the night.

PATIENCE: Oh, no, I couldn't. Anyway, the storm is letting up. *(A gust of hailstones hits the house.)*

MA: You'd better stay.

PATIENCE: *(Looking at Sarah, who clearly wants her to stay.)* Thank you all the same, Mrs. Dowling. I must get home. *(Puts on her wraps and goes to the door.)*

SARAH: *(Follows her to the door and whispers)* What made you come to my place?

PATIENCE: I have to see you every day.

SARAH: Do you call this seeing?

PATIENCE: I take what I can get.

SARAH: Some days it's foolish. In an ice storm, it's foolish.

PATIENCE: All right, I'll be the foolish one in nasty weather.

SARAH: You know I can't have that either. Oh, I thought love would be so sweet! I thought things would go easier.

PATIENCE: There's another way. We can go to Genesee.

SARAH: But how?

PATIENCE: *(Smiles)* 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from following after thee.
& SARAH: For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more, if ought but death part me and thee...!'

PATIENCE: Come tomorrow. *(Leaves)*

#

ACT III, Scene 4: Patience, Sarah; Martha, Edward

(Time passes. Patience and Sarah meet every day for Sarah's reading lesson, always in the presence of one of Sarah's sisters, her mother, Martha or Edward. The White's house, a month later. Patience greets Sarah excitedly at the door.)

PATIENCE: They're out visiting. At last! *(Shuts the door and embraces Sarah passionately. This is their first moment alone together.)*

SARAH: Oh, Glory! *(They kiss until they are weak in the knees.)* When I first walked in, I couldn't believe I'd ever kissed you, or ever would again.

PATIENCE: But I believed. *(Leads Sarah to her bed.)*

SARAH: We ought to thank our lucky stars that we have this tall, soft bed to kiss on. There's nothing out west to beat this.

PATIENCE: *(Incredulous)* Do you want another winter like this one?

SARAH: Yes!

PATIENCE: Exactly like this one?

SARAH: I'd settle.

PATIENCE: Do you want ten more? Twenty-five? Fifty? We can live to be eighty. Old maids often do.

SARAH: I hope we do.

PATIENCE: You hope to be tottering across the ice on your rickety brittle old bones every night of your seventy-fourth winter?

SARAH: *(Laughs--creaks around the room like an old lady, her voice cracking.)* Patience? Patience? *(When she spots Patience, she becomes "young" again and bounds toward her, leaping on the bed.)* Just like this, I'd settle.

PATIENCE: But I won't. I want something more! I want to live. I want to paint. I want our home, don't you? Don't you, darling, don't you? Shall I tell you what our house looks like? Or what happens there? *(She caresses Sarah, and kisses her neck.)* This happens in our house. Every day! *(She unbuttons Sarah's blouse, and they kiss passionately.)*

MARTHA: *(Enters quietly, sees them, and stands by the door, shocked.)* What are you doing? What are you doing?! *(Sarah pulls away from Patience, terrified. Martha stares, frozen, cries out)* Edward? Edward! *(Patience and Sarah are shaken, get off the bed and neatened themselves, bracing for Edward's arrival.)*

EDWARD: *(Rushes in)* What's the matter? What's going on...? *(Instantly sums up the situation.)*

MARTHA: They were... your sister was... *(too embarrassed to finish)*

EDWARD: *(Seething)* I hoped this was all done with!

MARTHA: All done with? You knew?

EDWARD: *(Ignores Martha.)* Have you prayed to be free of it?

MARTHA: You knew?

PATIENCE: *(Ignores Martha.)* I meant to pray. Last summer I got as far as my knees.

MARTHA: *(Understanding for the first time. Turns to Patience)* I always knew there was something wrong with you!

EDWARD: But you didn't pray?

PATIENCE: I found I didn't wish to be free of it.

MARTHA: Spoiled and indulged like a princess!

EDWARD: The Devil wouldn't let you pray.

PATIENCE: I prayed, but not for that. I prayed to be fulfilled in it.

MARTHA: What made you think you could do things man and wife don't do?

PATIENCE: *(Notices Martha, curious)* Kiss, don't you kiss?

EDWARD: Martha!

MARTHA: *(Flushes in embarrassment)* I won't say. Not like that, we don't. I wasn't brought up that way.

PATIENCE: *(Murmurs)* But I wasn't either.

MARTHA: Cool as a pirate, you are. Not an ounce of decent shame in you.

EDWARD: These are the passions marriage is meant to discourage and then extinguish. You have awakened feelings, and let them grow.

PATIENCE: *(Quietly)* May God save my heart for love.

MARTHA: It's a sin, you know. Saint Paul forbids it.

PATIENCE: He does?

MARTHA: With all your Bible reading and Bible pictures, you don't know that? *(She goes over to the table and picks up Patience's Bible.)* You can't argue it away. It says right here: St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter one, verse twenty-six...

PATIENCE: *(Murmurs)* May God save my heart for love, despite Saint Paul.

EDWARD: *(Determined.)* You will stop--even if I have to build a cage in the loft and declare you mad!

PATIENCE: *(Shocked)* Brother, please! *(Quietly)* I'm leaving.

EDWARD: You're not going anywhere unless I say so!

MARTHA: Who do you think you are?

PATIENCE: But my money. Our father's will...

EDWARD: That's enough. *(To Sarah, for the first time)* It's late. You should go. *(Sarah is terrified, relieved, quickly puts on her jacket and boots.)*

PATIENCE: Goodbye, my Sweet.

EDWARD: *(Cutting Patience off.)* There can be no more in this house!

PATIENCE: *(Quietly)* No more...in this house.

EDWARD: *(Goes to the door to escort Sarah out.)* Miss Dowling?

SARAH: *(Meekly)* Mr. White.

EDWARD: I'd like a word with you.

SARAH: *(Glides past without looking him--or Patience--in the eyes. They leave.)*

MARTHA: *(Alone with Patience. An awkward moment. Her venom dissolves.)* It could've been so sweet, working and helping each other here. It was how I thought it would be: Edward and you and me together. Do you remember we were friends first--before Edward?

PATIENCE: *(Keeps her distance)* Yes, I remember.

MARTHA: I get so lonesome with just Edward. So many times I wished I could sit by you of an evening in here, but I expect you didn't want that. *(When Patience doesn't answer, her voice hardens.)* No, you didn't. You had that Dowling trooping in here every evening, and her not even in the family! *(Leaves)*

PATIENCE: *(Quietly.)* Family? Sarah is my family now.

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ACT III, Scene 5: Edward, Pa Dowling, Patience, Sarah

(Stratford, CT boat dock, a few weeks later. Early spring 1817. Edward is waiting on the dock with Patience, who has two large trunks beside her. Sarah arrives, dressed for travel as a lady, carrying only a single bag. Pa hangs behind her, sullen.)

EDWARD: I've hired the captain to take you to New York. And then there's a steamer up the Hudson to Albany.

PA: Albany!

EDWARD: From there you're on your own, by horse, by wagon, you'll find land at a decent price.

SARAH: *(Looks frightened.)*

PATIENCE: *(Sarah looks frightened.)* Don't worry, I have enough money to get us settled.

EDWARD: *(For Pa's benefit.)* You can't squander your birthright and then come back. Don't expect to.

PATIENCE: No, Edward.

PA: *(Pulls Sarah aside for one last plea.)* Would you really rather go than give her up?

SARAH: *(Hugs him, man to man.)* Yes, Pa. *(Pa hands her an ax, leaves without looking at Edward or Patience. Patience moves to comfort Sarah, who is on the verge of tears.)*

EDWARD: *(Embarrassed, tries to hurry things up.)* It's time. You may board now. *(Sarah starts to lift one of the trunks.)*

EDWARD: *(Shocked)* No! No! I'll get a boy. *(He leaves.)*

SARAH: I've got to begin.

PATIENCE: Later. Not now.

SARAH: *(Sulking)* I know I'm not as strong as a man. But I could tote those trunks easy. If you're wanting me to be a lady, I don't see how it's to go.

PATIENCE: Just until we get away from Edward. Just a little longer, for his sake.

EDWARD: *(Returns)* Your trunks will be taken care of.

PATIENCE: Thank you, Edward.

EDWARD: Goodbye, now. Write to me. Work hard. I wish you happiness.

PATIENCE: *(Amazed)* You do? Oh, brother, if you do--if you really do--give us your blessing on our day of beginning!

EDWARD: With all my heart. I hope you find the life you were born for. It wasn't here. I hope it's there. *(Turns to Sarah.)* I wouldn't want, myself, to let too much depend on how long a woman's love lasts, but take care of her. Don't let her run you. God keep you. God bless you. *(He tips his hat and leaves.)*

SARAH: *(Watches Edward leave, then turns to Patience.)* You look so sad.

PATIENCE: I grieve for what we leave, not for our beginning. *(Surprised)* You're trembling. Were you afraid when you went off before?

SARAH: No, but then it was just me.

PATIENCE: We'll be all right, now we have each other. *(They slowly realize they are completely alone together - for the first time - and they become increasingly exhilarated, even as they question each other.)*

SARAH: Patience! Can we do this?

PATIENCE: Do you dare?

SARAH: What's to become of us?

PATIENCE: Who knows what the future holds? Only that we'll hold each other every day, and every night.

SARAH: Sweet days and long, sweet nights.

PATIENCE: I see our new life...living together. I see our house on a hillside, and our door yard full of flowers.

SARAH: I just want to live...nice and snug and free. Anywhere you are is where I want to be.

PATIENCE: We'll have lots of land and green rolling mountains, like soft lady giants lying together.

SARAH: We'll walk in our fields of an eve after supper. You'll paint every day, and I'll plant the gardens.

P & S: We'll plant ourselves and see what grows of us.
We'll harvest our love, keep it safe in our barn.

PATIENCE: Give me your hand. This is all we need.

SARAH: Your hand in mine.

PATIENCE: Two hands, one dream.

SARAH: From this day on, for the rest of our lives.

PATIENCE: In all that we do.

SARAH: I will love you.

PATIENCE: Give me your hand. This is all we need.

SARAH: I give myself to you. Your hand in mine.

P & S: Two hands, one dream.

SARAH: From this day on, for the rest of our lives.

PATIENCE: With all my heart.

P & S: I will love you.
With all my heart. I love you.

(The boat horn sounds. They turn to leave.)

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END OF OPERA