Scenes from Thurso's Landing

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Susan Spurlock and Tim Hunt; to my mother for tirelessly supporting not just one, but two Jeffers-obsessed Hunts; and to my father for dedicating nearly 20 years of his life editing the critical edition of the collected works of Robinson Jeffers for Stanford University Press. The field of Jeffers studies would not be what it is today without their enormous efforts and personal sacrifice, nor would this dissertation have been possible.

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Finally, I would like to thank my partner Mark Gleason for his never-ending emotional, administrative, culinary and healthcare support, and for keeping me going when the going gets tough.

PREFACE

Content warning: the libretto of *Scenes from Thurso's Landing* includes themes of sexuality, infidelity, violence, sexual violence, suicide, homocide, and ableism.

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ABSTRACT

Scenes from Thurso's Landing, contains roughly half of the materials from an anticipated opera in two acts, *Thurso's Landing*, based on Robinson Jeffers' (1887-1962) lengthy narrative poem by the same title, first published in 1932. Scenes from Thurso's Landing is intended to be presented in a concert staging in which singers move about a bare stage and sets are suggested only by groupings of music stands, and is comprised of highlights from the intended full opera including arias, duets, trios, quartets, one quintet, and several chorus numbers.

Dramaturgically, this opera sits somewhere between the worlds of opera and musical theatre, seeking a rhetorical balance between elevated poetics and emotional immediacy. The opera's musical vocabularies are informed by the free-yet-structured atonality of Berg's Wozzeck; by the modernist middlebrow vocabularies of Menotti, Bernstein and Vernon Duke; and by the "Americana" sonorities of Gershwin and Copland in an attempt to explore the musical intersections of opera and musical theatre through the unique lens of neo-verismo American eclecticism.

CHAPTER I

Characters, Setting, and Synopsis

Characters

Scenes from Thurso's Landing employs five principal singers, one principal speaking role, and a small chorus of eight low voices which also are featured as soloists in a number of small supporting roles. The table below provides the voice type and description (where applicable) for each character.

Principal Roles			
Character	Voice Type	Description	
Helen Thurso	Dramatic Soprano	Mid-twenties. Hedonistic. Wants something, anything more than what she has. Frustrated with her life and marriage to Reave.	
Reave Thurso	Verdi Baritone	Mid-twenties. Big, broad, muscular, and intimidating. Rigidly self-controlled. Is now head of the Thurso family after his father's suicide.	
Mark Thurso	Lyric Tenor	Early-twenties. Injured in the war; walks with a cane and a limp. Emotionally fragile. Reave's brother.	
Mrs. Thurso	Dramatic Contralto	Forties-fifties. A hawkish woman, wary and tenacious. Reave and Mark's mother.	

Rick Armstrong	Spinto Tenor	Twenties-thirties. An itinerant worker. Tall and handsome, cocksure and charming. Reave's friend and the dynamite man on the construction crew.	
Johnny Luna	Speaking	Any age. Must be played by an actor of color. Devoutly Catholic, Spanish-speaking. Reave's farmhand.	
Ensemble Roles			
Track	Voice Type	Characters	
1	High Tenor	The Doctor	
2	High Tenor	Danny Woodrow The Minister	
3	Low Tenor	Prison Laborer 1	
4	Low Tenor or High Baritone	Factory Worker 1 Orderly 1	
5	Baritone	Prison Laborer 2	
6	Baritone	Factory Worker 2 Orderly 2	
7	Bass-Baritone	Foreman	
8	Basso Profundo	Old Man Thurso	
All tracks		Road Crew, Prison Laborers, Factory Workers, Neighbors, & Offstage Voices	

Table I.1 — Character, Voice Type, & Brief Description

In order to ensure that *Thurso's Landing* and *Scenes from Thurso's Landing* can contribute positively to social progress initiatives such as diversity, equity and inclusion, the following casting note will be included with all perusal materials distributed to potential producing entities: "Permission will not be granted to produce this work unless, at a minimum, at least half of the chorus roles and also half of the principal roles will be performed by individuals of color."

Setting

Scenes from Thurso's Landing takes place in the summers of 1932 and 1933. Along the coast of the Big Sur region in California, a road crew blasts away at the cliffs of the Santa Lucia mountains where they rise abruptly from the Pacific, erecting the span that will soon become the iconic Bixby Bridge. Some ways inland from this gorge is the Thurso family farmhouse on the valley floor, nestled between the two cliff faces. Spanning the gorge hangs a rusted iron cable with a defunct skip, a mechanical relic of the failed industry of the Thurso family lime-works and timber mill.

Scene-by-Scene Location & Timeline		
Scene	Location	Timeline
Act I, Scene 1	The construction site near the ocean cliff-face	Pre-dawn
Act I, Scene 2	The woods of the canyon	Dawn
Act I, Scene 3	The farmhouse and its yard	Afternoon
Act I, Scene 4	A cabin in the desert	Morning, one year later
Act II, Scene 1	The farmhouse and its yard	Evening, a few days later
Act II, Scene 2	The valley of the canyon and the top of the canyon cliff	Next morning
Act II, Scene 3	The farmhouse and its yard	Evening, a week later
Act II, Scene 4	High on the cliff promontory	Next morning

Table I.2 — Scene-by-Scene Location & Timeline

Synopsis

(NOTE: Bracketed Material is included in the full opera libretto, but is omitted from the excerpts presented in *Scenes from Thurso's Landing*. Material indented in script format and courier font is excerpted from the libretto, the full text of which follows in Chapter III.)

Act I

Scene 1

(The construction site near the ocean cliff-face; pre-dawn.)

A red moon hangs brightly, illuminating a crew of construction workers laboring at a cliff-face: "The road, the road! It must be straightened and repaired again, to run clear from San Simeon up to Carmel." Two laborers observe an ominous iron cable, moaning in the breeze; they speculate that this must be the "voice of Old Man Thurso, come back to haunt the canyon: the poor, dead, devil's shame, calling from beyond the grave." The crew foreman retorts "Reave himself is bad enough, without ghosts of the dead troubling us."

Helen, Reave, Mark, and their farmhand Johnny Luna, on their way to go hunting, observe the worksite. Helen, unhappy in her marriage to Reave, pays particular attention to one of the workers: "isn't he amusing? That one. Rick Armstrong, the dynamite man."

At the worksite, the rigidly controlled, intimidating, and justice-seeking Reave confronts one of the other workers for carelessly breaking one of the Thurso farm's fences with construction equipment: "You are the one who broke it. You will be the one to fix it." The worker is frozen in fear until the charming Rick Armstrong mediates a solution.

In thanks, Reave invites Armstrong to join the Thurso party on their hunt, and suggests his brother Mark return home, instead. Mark implores Helen to return with him: "Let the others do the shooting. Killing's against your nature." Helen responds: "I'm not so gentle as

Act I

Scene 2

(*The woods of the canyon; dawn.*)

[Reave and Johnny have climbed down into the gorge to follow deer tracks, leaving Helen and Armstrong alone together.] Helen observes the red moonset; Armstrong observes the dawn stars. [Helen laments Reave's coldness as the dawn flashes brightly around them.

Reave climbs back to the others, alone, having sent Johnny Luna home with a young fawn on his back. Helen spots a regal stag on the hill; Reave takes his shot and the stag runs downhill, injured. Helen touches the stag's blood: "it looks like a red toadstool. Red scum on rotten wood. Does it make you sick? Not a bit: it makes you happy." Reave sets out to follow the stag, directing Armstrong to take Helen home.]

Helen, alone with Armstrong in the misty, early-morning woods, sees a romantic opportunity to distance herself from Reave, and takes action. Armstrong, at first caught off guard, is swept up in Helen's emotional momentum:

HELEN

The cloud has come all around us.

ARMSTRONG

I'm Reave's friend.

HELEN

And I'm his wife.

(HELEN kisses him, ARMSTRONG after a moment kisses her back. Swept up in their passion, they do not notice JOHNNY LUNA's entrance on his way back to REAVE. He stands in shock and watches them a moment, then backs away, crossing himself, and turns to run back to the farmhouse.)

Act I Scene 3

(*The farmhouse and its yard; afternoon.*)

[Helen enters the farmhouse and is met with the suspicious gaze of her mother-in-law, Mrs. Thurso. Helen falters, and exits to the bedroom.]

Reave returns, self-satisfied with a bloodied shirt; he has successfully tracked the stag, completed his hunt, and carried it home. His mother warns him that trusting Armstrong might be a mistake.

[Reave exits the house, rifle in hand, and moments later a gunshot is heard. Helen rushes out in a panic to find that Reave has euthanized their dog.

HELEN

Poor old dog. You knew I loved him, so you took him off. Killing's your pleasure, your secret vice.

REAVE

He was old and made of miseries. If we'd used this mercy two or three months ago we'd have saved pain.

HELEN

Will you do as yourself when life dirties and darkens? Your father did.

REAVE

No I will not. What's that said for? For spite? We may help out the beasts, but a man mustn't be beaten.]

Later in the evening Reave discovers that Helen is missing from the house and resolves to find her and bring her back. Mark and Mrs. Thurso lament the fortunes of Reave as Helen and Armstrong run off in the night.

Act I

Scene 4

(A cabin in the desert; morning, one year later.)

A year later, Armstrong and Helen awake in their cabin; he has found work in a factory in the Arizona desert. As workers pass by in the distance, Armstrong gets dressed and ready to leave. Helen implores him to come back to bed. The company whistle blows, and Armstrong goes to work.

[Time passes; it is now nearly noon.] Reave enters, Helen's cabin, having finally tracked them down. Helen resists going back with Reave until the factory whistle blows. Knowing that Armstrong could be back for lunch at any moment, and fearing a violent altercation, she begs Reave to "take me with you before he comes!"

Armstrong returns. Reave attacks him brutally, breaking both of his legs. [As Armstrong drags himself away on his elbows to die, Reave backs Helen into the cabin to reclaim her.]

Act II

Scene 1

(The farmhouse and its yard; evening, a few days later.)

[Reave and Helen return home to the Thurso farmhouse.] Mrs. Thurso questions Reave's stubbornness in finding Helen: "your mind sticks in its own iron. When you've said 'I will' then you're insane, the cold madness begins. I suppose it's better than weakness."

[Mrs. Thurso tells Reave that while he was gone, Mark has begun to see a "shadow" of their dead father:

MRS. THURSO
About the old cable:
He's been seeing lately...a
shadow of your father:
Pitifully staring up at it in the evenings.
Mark broods on that. The shock of your disgrace I believe
Started his mind swarming, and he hobbles out
In the starlight. I wish you to keep your promise
And cut that ruin from our sky.
Something unlucky will clear
When that cord's cut.]

[Reave searches outside for Mark.] Mark is caught up in a vision of Old Man Thurso that Reave cannot see. Mark warns Reave that their father does not want him to cut down his cable.

Mark asks the vision of his father about death, and the vision responds:

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

Life is all a dream,

and death is a better, more vivid immortal dream.

But love is real, both are made out of love

that's never perfect in life

and the voids in it are the pains of life.

But when our ungainly loads of blood and bone are thrown down

Love becomes perfect, for then we are what we love.

Love must become conscious of itself and claim its own.

Act II Scene 2

(The valley of the canyon and on top of the canyon-cliff; the following morning.)

A group of neighbors from farms around the county gather in the canyon to watch the falling of the cable: "Poor old Thurso, poor Old Man Thurso. The last of his mark on these hills will fall; his old bones will have nothing left but his sons and his shame."

Reave stands at the top of the cliff with an axe, readying to cut down the cable. The neighbors observe the sea wind, and the clouds blowing up the gorge as Reave works. As he raises his axe for another blow, the cable snaps in two. The spring-like force of the loose end whips around his torso, bending him backwards and slamming him violently into the earth.

[HELEN

God evens things. My lover in the desert, crawled in the
 sand like that after Reave struck him.
A bushel for a bushel says God exactly.]

Act II Scene 3

(The farmhouse and its yard; evening, a week later.)

A doctor confirms the extent of Reave's injuries: "the nerves of pain will live, but the nerves of motion are lost." [Mrs. Thurso and Helen discuss the viability of Reave's future.]

As Mrs. Thurso retires to bed, Helen, in a dream-like state, mesmerized by a twisted idea of forgiveness and mercy (and unknowingly followed by Mark) makes her way to the storage shed in which the hunting rifles, squirrel poison, rat traps, and other instruments of death decorate the walls. Mark confronts Helen, consumed by images of lust, pain, and disillusionment.

Mark's advances are rejected by Helen, who, rifle in hand, sneaks through the farmhouse to Reave's bed while the Thurso family considers the woven meanings of life and death, of "beauty and paint."

As Helen aims her rifle at Reave, Mark lifts a pistol to his head. Only one shot is heard.

Mark crumples to the ground, dead.

Act II

Scene 4

(High on the promontory; the next morning.)

Helen, Reave (carried on a stretcher), Mrs. Thurso, and Johnny Luna gather at Mark's fresh grave high on the cliff-face with a minister and a few neighbors. After a time, Helen and Reave are left alone on the cliff-face. Reave blames the vision of their father's ghost for Mark's death: "The dead dog that walks in the woods, that Mark used to talk to has done this. Too shot with cowardice to live and too envious to let his sons."

When Reave's rage is spent, he confesses to his confusion over Rick Armstrong's involvement with Helen:

REAVE

I still don't understand what drove him to it.

HELEN

Who; Mark?

REAVE

No, Rick Armstrong. He was a good fellow.

HELEN

(Erupting.)

Was it nothing to you? It was something to me! (Beat.)

He's dead, don't you understand?

He's gone down. You live.

That debt is paid.

Helen, full of conflicting remorse, anger, guilt, mercy, love and hate, considers the role that death could have had, has had, and might yet have in their lives. "I do this for love," Helen cries as she slices Reave's throat open with his own hunting knife.

[Refusing to be judged by any moral code but her own, Helen ingests a fatal poison. As Mrs. Thurso returns to Mark's grave, she finds herself wearily, tragically relieved to see the end of Reave's suffering. Mrs. Thurso waits with Helen as she dies, tenderly holding her hand.

MRS. THURSO

...To bear...to endure...
...these are poor things, Johnny;
Now come, it is time.]

CHAPTER II

Libretto

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(Lights up on a scene of controlled chaos. It is not yet dawn, instead a red moon hangs brightly, illuminating the scene with a darkling glow. A CREW of LABORERS is busy making preparations at the foot of a cliff, one of two such cliffs that face each other on the promontory where this canyon meets the ocean. Far in the distance, an iron cable from which hangs a rusted iron skip spans the gorge, ominous. In particular, we see RICK ARMSTRONG, the dynamite man, passing among the different groupings of men on the CREW, fixing problems, calming nerves, well-liked. The CREW is made up of both PRISON LABORERS in chains as they work, and others, like ARMSTRONG, itinerant workers.)

HIGHWAY CREW (All)

(Shouted.)

Hup!

(Sung.)

The road, the road!

It must be straightened and repaired again to run clear from San Simeon up to Carmel.

Thank God, thank God, for the dynamite,

and that I'm not the one to light the fuse.

(The FOREMAN spots two LABORERS idling, staring at the hanging cable. He crosses to them.)

FOREMAN

Hey now, you two!
Whaddaya think yer starin' at?
This road won't fix itself, y'hear?
This bridge won't build itself, ya hear me?
(Menacing.)

I said d'ya hear me?

LABORER 1

(Staring off in the distance.) I can't take my eyes off o' that cable there, Hangin' 'cross the gorge.

LABORER 2

'Cross Reave Thurso's land.

LABORER 1

That rusted iron skip a-hanging from it like a...
...like a

LABORER 2

(Staring off in the distance.) ...like a stuck black moon.

OTHER HIGHWAY CREW (5)

O000000, Mmmmmmmm.

LABORERS 1 & 2

It makes a lonely creakin' in the mountain wind that pours down the gorge every night...

LABORER 2

(To FOREMAN.)

That Johnny Luna,

LABORER 1

(To FOREMAN.)

The farmhand!

LABORER 1 & 2

He says it's the voice of Old Man Thurso Come back to haunt the canyon, The poor dead devil's shame calling from beyond the grave.

FOREMAN

(Spits superstitiously.)

Ha! Old Man Thurso!

Reave himself is bad enough

without ghosts of the dead troubling us.

You San Quentin boys, you're all alike--

--superstitious lot.

But you know better than the others:

There's nothin' to fear that ain't in a man's eyes.

(Stares them down.)

That cable, that skip--nothin' but relics.

Now get a move on!

(The FOREMAN brushes past the LABORERS towards the rest of the CREW.)

TABORER 2

(To LABORER 1.)

Why don't they cut it down?

The lime-works have failed,

And that skip'll never move again.

LABORER 1

(To LABORER 2.)

It'll never move again...

(Beat.)

...until it falls.

(ARMSTRONG, full of confidence, crosses prominently.)

OTHER HIGHWAY CREW (5)

It's Armstrong, it's Armstrong!

HIGHWAY CREW (All)

It's time for the blast!

FOREMAN

(Shouted.)

You lot! Out of his way!

(There is another scramble on stage as the CREW clears out of ARMSTRONG's way. Far removed from this action REAVE THURSO and MARK THURSO enter. MARK limps along, supporting himself on a crutch or a cane, suffering from an old war injury.)

MARK

(To REAVE.)

I think they'll blast again in a minute.

REAVE

(Agreeing.)

Yes.

MARK

I wish they'd let the poor old road be. I don't like improvements.

REAVE

No?

MARK

They bring in the world; We're well without it.

(HELEN THURSO and JOHNNY LUNA enter close behind MARK and REAVE, catching up. JOHNNY is holding four rifles in an awkward grasp in front of his body.)

HELEN

(To MARK, upon seeing ARMSTRONG.) Isn't he amusing, that one, Rick Armstrong, the dynamite man.

(ARMSTRONG lights the fuse and walks away, very slowly, making a show out of his nonchalance in the face of danger. All other CREW members are hiding, covering their heads, terrified.)

HELEN (Continued)

How slowly he walks away after he lights the fuse. He loves to show off. Reave likes him too.

(There is a bright flash of light and a chaos of sound -- the dynamite has exploded. ARMSTRONG is pulled into a group of the CREW emerging from their hiding spots, admiring his bravery and ad libbing noises of congratulations, celebration, and relief. REAVE draws near the closest group of CREW as the dust clears and the CREW begins to return to their normal activities. REAVE frowns and chooses DANNY from among them with his eyes.)

REAVE

You're Danny Woodruff, aren't you, that drives the tractor.

DANNY

Maybe. What then?

REAVE

Why, nothing,

(Pause.)

except you broke my fence and you've got to fix it.

DANNY

(Laughing.)

You don't say,

Did somebody break your fence? Well, that's too bad.

REAVE

My man here farmhand saw you do it. He warned you out of the field.

DANNY

Oh, was I warned?

(Spoken, to JOHNNY.)

What did I say to you, cowboy?

JOHNNY

(Spoken.)

You said...you said 'go to hell.'

DANNY

(To REAVE.)

That's what I say.

(REAVE twitches the whip in his hand. After a considered moment he makes a deliberate show of coiling it and putting it away over his arm.)

REAVE

Still, you'll fix it.

DANNY

(Recoiling a step.)

If you've got a claim for damages, take it to the county.

REAVE

I'm taking it nearer hand. You'll fix the fence.

LABORER 1

Wait for him

Until he fixes it, your cows will be down the road.

FOREMAN

(Jumping in, not wanting a fight.)

They'll be off down the road.

You'll be better off with your man there to do it

REAVE

(To FOREMAN.)

No.

(The FOREMAN hastily backs away.)

REAVE (Continued)

(To DANNY, stepping forward with casual menace, punctuating his words.)

 \underline{You} are the one who \underline{broke} it, \underline{you} will be the one to \underline{fix} it.

(Rolling up his sleeves.)

I said, you will be the one to fix it.

(Closing the last few inches of space, staring DANNY down, calmly.)

Won't you.

(DANNY is mute, petrified in his terror. ARMSTRONG finally sees REAVE and DANNY.)

ARMSTRONG

(Disarmingly.)

Why, if it isn't Reave Thurso!

REAVE

(In greeting.)

Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG

'Shame about your fence, now, those tractors are hell to steer. I'm sure it was an accident.

(To DANNY.)

Isn't that right, Danny?

DANNY

(To REAVE.)

It was...it was an accident.

ARMSTRONG

(To REAVE.)

And I'm sure he'll be fixing it for you.

(To DANNY.)

Isn't that right, Danny?

DANNY

(To REAVE.)

I'll be fixing it.

ARMSTRONG

(To REAVE.)

And I'm sure he'll be starting it today.

(To DANNY.)

Right, Danny?

DANNY

(To REAVE.)

I'll fix it today!

(DANNY slowly backs away, turning to run offstage once he's beyond REAVE's reach.)

FOREMAN

(Spoken.)

Alright, back to work.

ARMSTRONG

There now. You see? Danny'll do the right thing.

MARK

It was your manner that put him off, brother.

REAVE

(To MARK, coldly.)

Was it.

(MARK shrivels a bit, under that gaze.)

REAVE (Continued)

(To Armstrong.)

Will you blast again today?

ARMSTRONG

(Laughing good-naturedly.)

I've time enough to join your hunt, if that's what you're after.

REAVE

Good.

MARK

(Resigned, pleading.)

Take care of Helen, won't you, Reave, Don't tire her out.

(REAVE, ARMSTRONG and JOHNNY begin to exit.)

HELEN

(To MARK, laughing as she turns to follow them.)

Pity the others, Mark.

I'll not be the tired one, by evening.

(REAVE, ARMSTRONG and JOHNNY are now out of earshot.)

MARK

Let the others do the shooting, Helen, spare yourself. Killing's against your nature, it would hurt with unhappy thought Some later time.

HELEN

Ah, I'm not so gentle as you think. Good-bye, brother.

(HELEN exits, humming.)

Mmm...

CREW

(Sporadic, fading.)

Mmm! Mmm!

ACT 1

SCENE 2

(High in the canyon, before dawn. HELEN, REAVE, JOHNNY and ARMSTRONG enter, rifles in hand, hunting.)

REAVE

(To HELEN.)

Wait here, with Armstrong.

(To JOHNNY.)

Johnny, with me.

(REAVE and JOHNNY exit, climbing down into the gorge out of earshot, or, alternatively, exiting offstage.)

HELEN

(To herself.)

The red moonset shines in the clear between those murky hills,

like a burning ship on the world's verge.

(The lights begin to shift, slowly, gradually; dawn begins to creep onstage.)

ARMSTRONG

The stars are strange at dawn, see, they're not autumn stars,

They belong to last March.

HELEN

Maybe next March.

(Beat.)

Tell me how you've charmed Reave To make him love you?

ARMSTRONG

Why: nothing.

HELEN

He never has cared for a friend before.

ARMSTRONG

If he lacks friends perhaps it's only

Because there's so few neighbors in this country To make choices from.

HELEN

You don't know him yet. He's cold, And all alone in himself.

(HELEN looks down or offstage towards REAVE.)

HELEN (Continued)

(With a kind of triumph.)

Look down there:

What size Reave Thurso is really: one of those little dirty black ants that come to dead things could carry him.

(ARMSTRONG and HELEN settle in to wait. The light continues to brighten. After a time HELEN walks a few feet away, impatient. ARMSTRONG observes her. One rifle-shot is heard. Full dawn flashes brightly, seeming to come all at once.)

HELEN

ARMSTRONG

(Reveling in the light.)

Ah!
Now light has come.
The cloud-line flushes
With rose-color flame,
And standing rays

Of indigo shadow

Creep close behind

The fired fleece

Now light has come. Now light has come!

(Watching HELEN.)
Now light has come.
The cloud-line flushes
With rose-color flame

The standing rays

Of indigo shadow

Creep close behind

The fired fleece.
Now light has come!

(REAVE climbs up to them or enters.)

HELEN

Where's Johnny Luna?

REAVE

(To HELEN.)

Sent him home with a young fawn on his back. He knows where to meet us.

(Turning towards the opposite direction.)

No other tracks down that way, we'll try to the east.

(HELEN and ARMSTRONG turn and follow REAVE.)

REAVE (Continued)

(To ARMSTRONG, pointing outwards while walking.)

See that tree that stands alone on the spur, It looks like a match-stick: but the trunk's twenty feet through. The biggest redwoods left on the coast are there, The lumber-men couldn't reach them.

(HELEN suddenly points just barely offstage where she sees a buck.)

HELEN

Oh. Look!

(REAVE and ARMSTRONG both aim.)

HELEN (Continued)

(Bitterly.)

So I've betrayed him.

(REAVE fires as ARMSTRONG raises his cheek from the rifle stock to look at HELEN; he misses his chance to shoot. REAVE rushes downstage, a spongy scarlet thing is found at the downstage corner.)

REAVE

(Seeing the blood.)

He was hit in the lung, Coughed up a froth of blood and ran down hill. I have to get him.

HELEN

(Moving downstage, seeing the blood.)

It looks like a red toadstool: Red scum on rotten wood. Does it make you sick? Not a bit: it makes you happy.

REAVE

Why do you come hunting, Helen, If you hate hunting, Helen? Keep still at least. As for being happy: I'll have to go down the steep thicket.

HELEN

Let the poor thing die in peace.

REAVE

It would seem a pity, to let him suffer; besides the waste.

ARMSTRONG

(Pointing some distance away, upstage.) I'll go down there and work up the gulch, if you go down here.

REAVE

You'd never find him without the blood-trail.

(During the above, HELEN goes back and touches the foam of blood on the ground, dipping four fingers. She returns.)

HELEN

(Holding up her bloody hand.)

I was afraid to do it, so I did it. Now I'm no better than you.

REAVE

Helen--

HELEN

Don't go down.

Please, Reave. Let's hurry and go home. I'm tired.

REAVE

(To ARMSTRONG.)

That would be best, if you'd take her home. It's only a mile and a half.

I'll hang the buck in a tree

Near where I find him, and come fetch him to-morrow.

ARMSTRONG

If you want.

HELEN

(HELEN clenches her blood-tipped fingers and feels them stick to her palm.)

All right. I'll do What, you've chosen,

Mark wins, he said I'd be tired. But he was wrong,

(Opening her hand, regarding the redlined nails.)

To think me all milk and kindness.

(REAVE exits, going down the thicket and offstage.)

ARMSTRONG

I ought

To've gone with Reave, it doesn't seem fair to let him Sweat alone in that jungle.

HELEN

He enjoys toil.

He's never set his mind on anything yet But snuffled like a bloodhound to the bitter end.

> (ARMSTRONG chuckles wryly. THEY begin to move about the stage, on their way to the farmhouse.)

> > HELEN (Continued)

Mark, his brother, you met this morning, He's very different, a weak man of course But kindly and full of pity toward every creature, but really at heart

As cold as Reave. I never loved hunting, and Mark has Persuaded me to hate it. Let him persuade Reave if he could!

ARMSTRONG

Why did you come then?

HELEN

Ah? To watch things be killed.

(Beat.)

Do you ever think about death?

ARMSTRONG

Hell no, that was all settled when they made the hills.

HELEN

I've seen you play with it, Strolling away while the fuse fizzed in the rock.

ARMSTRONG

There are worse ways to go than dynamite.

(They move about the stage, continuing on their way.)

HELEN

Did you notice how high he held his bright head And the branched horns, keen with happiness? Nothing told him

That all would break in a moment and the blood choke his throat.

I hope that poor stag Had many loves in his life.

(She moves past him to the highest point on the stage; he follows.)

HELEN (Continued)

See there?

The mountain sea-wall looks abrupt as dreams, and Lobos like a hand on the sea.

And there, in Mill Creek Canyon between the black and the green the painted

Roof of Reave Thurso's house, like a grain of corn in the crack of a plank, where the hens can't reach it. And Reave's old mother's like a white-headed hawk...

(To herself.)

Look how I'm stuck in a rut: do I have to live there? Life is so tiny little, and if it shoots Into the darkness without ever once flashing?

HELEN (Continued)

(To ARMSTRONG, trembling.)

It seems cold up here.

I hate the sea-fog.

(HELEN leans into ARMSTRONG.)

ARMSTRONG

(Pulling back.)

Helen, I...

HELEN

(Laughing.)

Look, what the crooked bushes have done.

(HELEN shows ARMSTRONG where her shirt has ripped open, a thin red scratch on the smooth skin.)

ARMSTRONG

(To himself.)

Such smoothness...

(ARMSTRONG touches her, then pulls away as if burned.)

You're tired, Helen.

HELEN

(Blazing.)

I'll not let the days of my life
Hang like a string of naughts between two nothings.

ARMSTRONG

(To himself.)

Drops of cloud...

HELEN

Wear a necklace of round...

ARMSTRONG

(To himself.)

...drops of cloud...

HELEN

...zeros for pearls;

ARMSTRONG

(To himself.)

...like seed-pearls hanging in her hair...

HELEN

(Continuing.)

I'm not made that way.

ARMSTRONG

(To himself.)

...on the dark lashes

HELEN

(Continuing.)

Think what you please.

ARMSTRONG

(Spoken, to HELEN, on the edge of

control.)

Shall we go down now?

(ARMSTRONG turns to go down.)

HELEN

(Grasping him from behind.)

I have seen dawn with you,

The red moonset and white dawn, with you

HELEN ARMSTRONG

And starlight on the mountain, (To himself.)

Those indigo shadows and noon on burnt hills

in the dawn...

where there was no shadow but a vulture's, and that stag's blood:

Those violet eyes,

I've lived with you A long day like a lifetime,

of craving under the at last I've drawn something long dark lashes,

Hollowed with points

In the string of blanks. Her face a white

flame!

HELEN

(Spoken.)

The cloud has come all around us.

ARMSTRONG

(Spoken.)

I'm Reave's friend.

HELEN

(Spoken.)

And I'm his wife.

(HELEN kisses him, ARMSTRONG after a moment kisses her back. Swept up in their passion, they do not notice JOHNNY LUNA's entrance on his way back to REAVE. He stands in shock and watches them a moment, then backs away, crossing himself, and turns to run back the way he had come, back to the farmhouse.)

ACT 1

SCENE 3

(The farmhouse and its yard, early evening. The main living space is visible inside, as is a section of yard outside beyond the front doorway. MARK is sitting on the porch outside, MRS. THURSO is mending cloth inside. JOHNNY LUNA runs onstage, a little breathless, stopping short when he sees MARK.)

MARK

(In greeting.)

Johnny.

How was the hunting?

(JOHNNY startles, then hurries inside without speaking to MARK.)

MRS. THURSO

(Looking up from her mending.)

What on earth's the matter Johnny?

(HELEN enters the yard, flurried and anxious, then approaches the house.)

JOHNNY

(Spoken, hesitating.)

I...

I saw...something... Something evil--

(He is interrupted by HELEN's entrance. JOHNNY crosses himself and runs out the front exit, knocking bodily into MARK, who has risen to follow HELEN inside.)

JOHNNY (Continued)

(While running outside and offstage)

Sorry, sorry!

(MRS. THURSO looks sharply after JOHNNY. HELEN barely notices.)

MRS. THURSO

(With suspicion.)

Where is Reave?

HELEN

Reave went after a wounded deer. Hasn't he come home yet?

MRS. THURSO

(Watching HELEN steadily.)

We've not seen him.

(MARK enters.)

HELEN

(To MARK, avoiding MRS. THURSO's eyes.) Ah, Mark, you guessed right.

I'm tired to death, must creep up to bed now.

(HELEN begins to cross towards an inner doorway. MRS. THURSO's words bring her up short.)

MRS. THURSO

So you came home alone? That young Armstrong Stayed with Reave.

HELEN

(Faltering.)

No, for Reave sent him with me.

But we...he...parted ways at the fence...to go back to his work-site...

My rifle, Mark,

Is clean: I minded your words.

(HELEN exits to the bedroom. MARK settles in a chair with a book. Light shifts, time passes, it is now near twilight. REAVE enters, his shirt blood-stained on the breast and shoulders.)

REAVE

(Self-satisfied.)

I got him.

By luck I found him, in a buck-eye bush.

MARK

How far, Reave, did you carry it?

REAVE

Two miles or so.

MARK

What does it weigh?

MRS. THURSO

You are strong, that's good; but a fool.

REAVE

(Spoken.)

What have I done?

MRS. THURSO

I'll never say
Your young Helen's worth keeping,
but while you have her
Don't turn her out to pasture on the mountain
With the dynamite man.
Those heavy blue eyes
Came home all enriched.

(REAVE laughs.)

MARK

(Bitterly.)

Helen is as clear as the crystal sky.

REAVE

(Smiling.)

I trust Rick Armstrong as I do my own hand.

MRS. THURSO

It shames my time of life, to have milky-new sons. What has he done for you To be your angel?

REAVE

I like him.

MRS. THURSO

That's generous, And rare in you. How old is he?

REAVE

My age. Twenty-four.

MRS. THURSO

So that's a better reason to trust him: You're the same age.

REAVE

That's no reason.

MRS. THURSO

No.

(REAVE sits a long while, considering.)

REAVE

(Coming to a sudden decision.)

I've time before supper, Something I must see to.

(REAVE exits, taking his rifle with him. After a time a GUNSHOT is heard. HELEN screams from the bedroom, and comes running into the living area, nearly hysterical.)

HELEN

What was that shot?!

(Stammering.)

What...what...

(She runs outside, and meets REAVE, coming back onstage with the rifle and a dirt-covered spade.)

HELEN (Continued)

What have you done?

REAVE

I've just put old Bones out of his misery.

HELEN

(Laughing and trembling with relief.) I thought something had happened to someone.

(REAVE walks past her.)

HELEN (Continued)

(Recovering from her relief, now accusing.)

Poor old dog.

You knew I loved him, so you took him off. Killing's your pleasure, your secret vice.

REAVE

(Turning back.)

He was old and made of miseries.

If we'd used this mercy

Two or three months ago we'd have saved pain.

HELEN

Will you do as much for yourself When life dirties and darkens? Your father did.

REAVE

No, I will not.

What's that said for? For spite?

We may help out the beasts, but a man mustn't be beaten.

(Beat.)

That was a little too easy, to pop himself off because he went broke.

HELEN

You needn't despise him, Reave. My dad never owned anything.

He ate my laundry-wages and lived as long as he could And died crying.

REAVE

We used to see mine
Often in the evenings.
Coming back to stare up at that cable,
Looking at his unfinished things.
It ought to be taken down
Before it falls.

HELEN

Do you really believe that your father's ghost?

REAVE

(Shaking his head.)

No, some stain

Stagnates here in the hollow canyon air, or sticks in our minds.

How could 'too weak to live' Show after it died?

HELEN

(Blanching with capricious anger.)

I knew you'd no mercy in you,

But only sudden judgment for any weak thing; How can I live

Where nothing except poor Mark is even half human, you like a stone,

hard and joyless, dark inside, And your mother like an old hawk--

REAVE

(Grabbing HELEN by the shoulders.) Were you born a fool? What's the matter, Helen?

HELEN

If I had to stay here I'd turn stone too: cold and dark. Oh, what do you want me for? Let me go.

(HELEN brushes past REAVE to go back inside. She looks from MRS. THURSO to MARK, nervously, then sits, picking up some mending and fidgeting. REAVE enters, brooding, and sits.)

MRS. THURSO

It seems Johnny Luna saw something evil today, now he crosses himself each time he sees your Helen. Your business, Reave: not mine: Ask him: I'm only The slow man's mother.

MARK

Helen?

HELEN

Will you promise, Reave, promise Johnny You'll give him, for telling the perfect truth, whatever your mother has promised him for telling lies. REAVE

He'll sleep in hell first.

(REAVE stares HELEN down for a long moment.)

HELEN

If it was nothing worse than killing to fear I'd confess. All kinds of lies. I fear you so much I'd confess...all kinds of lies...to get it over with, Only,

To get it over with: only, I haven't done anything. This terror, Mark, has no reason,

Reave never struck nor threatened me, yet well I know That while I've lived here I've always been sick with fear

As your mother is with jealousy.

(Beat.)

May I go up to bed, now? I'm trembling-tired: But indeed I dare not While you sit judging.

MARK

Go, Helen, go. I've watched innocence tormented And can no more. Go up and sleep if you can, I'll speak for you, to-morrow all this black cloud of wrong will be melted quite away in the morning.

(HELEN smiles brokenly and leaves the room, but lingers out of sight of the others to listen at the doorway, clutching at the wood.)

MARK (Continued)

Mother:

You've done an infamous thing.

MRS. THURSO

They might play Jack and queen All they please, but not my son For the fool card in the deck.

> (HELEN's cheek and brow strike hard on the edge of the doorway. The sound of struck wood and HELEN's hushed groan is heard in the living room.)

MARK

What has she done? Helen, oh Helen...

(REAVE crosses to the doorway and grabs HELEN roughly by the elbow, dragging her back into the lamplight of the living room; a little blood runs through her left eye to her lips from the cut eye-brow.)

MRS. THURSO

She's not hurt. Why make a fuss?

HELEN

The wood of your house
Is like your mother, Reave, hits in the dark.
This? This will wash off.

REAVE

(Shouting.)

Johnny!

(JOHNNY, who has been listening against a different door, hurries into the room.)

HELEN

(Moaning.)

I'm ringed with my enemies.

REAVE

What did you see?

JOHNNY

(Fearful, spoken.)

Don't know. Don't know.

HELEN

(Turning to flee, then turning back.)

My husband, Johnny,

Is ready to kill me, you see.

Someone has made him angry at you and me.

Look in my eyes. Tell no bad stories...tell no lies...

(JOHNNY steps backwards, crossing himself and praying under his breath.)

JOHNNY

(Spoken, sotto voce.)

Dios te salve, Maria. Llena eres de gracia: El Señor es contigo.

Bendita tú ere entre todas las mujeres...

HELEN

(Overlapping, meekly to MARK.)

Think kindly of me, Mark, I believe I shall be much hated in the morning. Goodnight, sweet Mark.

(HELEN exits.)

JOHNNY

(Spoken, overlapping.)

...Y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre:

Jesús. Santa María, Madre de Dios,

ruega por nosotros pecadores, ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte--

REAVE

(Suddenly shouting.)

Answer!

JOHNNY

(Spoken.)

Don't know, don't know!

(During the above, HELEN makes her way silently out of the house, through whatever back or side door or window is available on stage. She sneaks towards offstage and discovers ARMSTRONG creeping through the yard.)

HELEN

(Greatly surprised, sotto voce.)

What are you doing here!?

ARMSTRONG

I had to see you again, I had to--

HELEN

(She shows him her cut brow.)

Look what Reave did.

He knows. He knows!

REAVE

(Inside the house, surging to his

feet.)

By God! If she's played me false...

ARMSTRONG

By God!

(ARMSTRONG caresses HELEN tenderly.)

HELEN

What will you do?

ARMSTRONG

I'll take you to the camp.

REAVE

I'll hear it from her own lying mouth.

(REAVE crosses to the bedroom exit.)

MARK

(Overlapping.)

Reave! Brother!

HELEN

(Overlapping.)

You can't stop him when he comes, to-night, in an hour--nothing can stop him.

MRS. THURSO

(To MARK, Overlapping.)

You gentle fool.

MARK

(Overlapping.)

Why mother, have you ignited such a false flame?

HELEN

(Overlapping.)

And how could you bear to face him, he thought you his faithful friend. Don't you know him? I do.

REAVE

(Overlapping from offstage or the empty bedroom.)

Where is she?

(REAVE rushes in to the living room.)

REAVE (Continued)

Where is she?

HELEN

Oh, my lover!

ARMSTRONG

Oh!

REAVE

(Shouted.)

Where is she?

MRS. THURSO

My fool son.

MARK

Oh Reave!

REAVE

I'll find her!

HELEN

Take me to the end of the world and kill me there!

ARMSTRONG

I'll take you!

REAVE

By God, I'll find her.

MARK

Oh my brother!

HELEN

Just take me there!

MRS. THURSO

Such betrayal!

ARMSTRONG Oh, Helen! MARK Oh, Helen! REAVE I'll find her! HELEN Just take me before Reave comes! **REAVE** If it's the last... ARMSTRONG I'll take you! **REAVE** ...thing... MARK Oh, Reave! **REAVE** ...I... MRS. THURSO Cut out the rot! **REAVE** ...ever... HELEN ARMSTRONG (Overlapping.) (Overlapping.) Oh, take me away! I'll take you away! MRS. THURSO Burn it away! ARMSTRONG

Take you away!

REAVE

By God!

MARK

Oh God!

HELEN

Ah!

(HELEN and ARMSTRONG exit in a rush. Inside, with deliberate motion, REAVE grabs up his rifle, examining it, weighing it in his grip. He looks from MRS. THURSO to MARK, both held in silence by the intensity of his gaze.)

REAVE

(With electric calm.)

I'm going to fetch my wife.

(REAVE strides outside the house, exiting into the night.)

ACT 1

SCENE 4

(In the desert at the foot of sunrotted hills a row of wooden cabins are worn to the look of sea-drift by the desert sandscour, drying in the rage of the sun. The inside of the last cabin is visible, barely more than a one-room shack, dingy, illfurnished, poor. Inside, HELEN and ARMSTRONG lie in a simple bed, entwined and at ease. There is enough room outside amongst the other cabins for a small crowd to gather in the hot white dust. In the background men clad in denim and boots cross the stage all heading the same direction, in sparse ones and twos, on their way to their shifts at the company mine.)

CHORUS (on and offstage)

Hmmmmmm, Hmmmmmm.

(WORKER 1 makes for ARMSTRONG's cabin and knocks on the door while WORKER 2 lingers upstage, waiting.)

WORKER 1

Hey, Armstrong! Get yer sorry ass out'a bed, The whistle's about to blow.

(ARMSTRONG kisses HELEN, as if he has all the time in the world, HELEN giggles. WORKER 1 shakes his head and returns to WORKER 2.)

WORKER 2

(To WORKER 1.)

Prob'ly don't even have his trousers on yet, the dog.

(The WORKERS exit. ARMSTRONG finally stretches and rises, beginning to move about the small space, getting dressed.)

HELEN

(Watching him dress.)

Come back to bed.

ARMSTRONG

(Laughing.)

Only for a moment, Helen

(ARMSTRONG rushes back to HELEN and kisses her passionately. After a short while, he pulls away from her embrace and rises once more.)

HELEN

Rick, my darling...

ARMSTRONG

(Mock disapproval.)

You wicked woman!

(While pulling on his other boot.) Someone must pay for this fine house, our rich gardens, your jewels and furs and all the servants' wages.

HELEN

(Laughing.)

Mr. Armstrong you scoundrel!

ARMSTRONG

(ARMSTRONG leans over to kiss HELEN

goodbye.)

I'll be home for lunch.

HELEN

Good-bye.

ARMSTRONG

(At the door, looking back.)

Good-bye!

(ARMSTRONG flashes a brilliant smile, and exits the cabin. He hurries towards

where the men were going earlier, the stream of workers slowed to a tiny trickle of a few last stragglers like himself. The mine whistle blows, and ARMSTRONG picks up the pace, jogging offstage. Inside, HELEN rolls and stretches luxuriously, rising in her night shift, beginning to putter around. She begins to brush out her hair, singing wordless tunes of satisfaction to herself. Lights shift, gradually and imperceptibly, the early morning becoming mid-morning. REAVE enters the space outside, stopping and looking around. HE hears HELEN's humming, goes to HELEN's cabin and opens the door without knocking, and taking a step inside he blocks out the light from the threshold, casting a shadow over HELEN. HELEN stops singing suddenly, her last note trailing upwards into a shriek of surprise and despair as she hears him come in.)

REAVE

(Spoken.)

Well, Helen. You found a real sunny place.

(REAVE steps further into the room, HELEN driven backwards in front of him.)

HELEN

(Spoken.)

How...

How did you...track us at last?

REAVE

(Spoken.)

Oh.

(He laughs, humorlessly.)

time and I.
He's at work?

HELEN

(Spoken.)

Yes.

REAVE

(Sung.)

If you wanted to hide You'd have got him to change his name.

HELEN

(Sung.)

I begged him to, so many times.

REAVE

Pack your things.

HELEN

You won't take me.

REAVE

(Astonished.)

Not take you! After hunting you a whole year? You dream too much, Helen. It makes you lovely in a way, but it clouds your mind.

HELEN

(Shuddering.)

Oh God,

Will you preach too?

(Kneeling to him and pressing her face on his hard thigh.)

I know I've been wicked, Reave.

You must leave me in the dirt for a bad woman.

Don't forgive me. I only

Pray you to hate me.

REAVE

(Hastily.)

Get up,

This is no theater. I intend to take you back, Helen, I never was very angry at you, remembering That a woman's more like a child.

So we'll shut this bad year

In a box of silence and drown it out of our minds.

(HELEN rises and turns away from him, her face toward the window.

HELEN

(Slyly and trembling.)

Don't you care, that he and I have made love together In the mountains and in the city and in the desert, And once at a Navajo shepherd's camp with a storm of lightnings

Playing through the cracks of the shed: can you wink and swallow

All that?

REAVE

I can't help it. You've played the beast.
But you are my goods and you'll be guarded, your filthy time
Has closed. Now I'll take you home.

HELEN

You can't take me against my will. No: I won't go. Do you think you're God, And we have to do what you want?

REAVE

You'll go all right.

HELEN

(Laughing.)

At last you've struck something Stiffer than you. Reave, that stubborn will Is not strength but disease, I've always known it. Your mind sets and can't change, you don't go on Because you want to but because you have to, I pity you,

But here you're stopped.

(Trembling with sudden fear.)

If you did take me I'd stab you in bed sleeping.

REAVE

You're talking foolishness, Helen. Pack your things.
I have to see Armstrong before we go.

J - - - - - **J** -

HELEN

Why must you see...Rick?

(Faintly.)

Reave?

Reave. You said you weren't angry.

REAVE

Not at you.

(The mine whistle blows, indicating noon.)

HELEN

(With sudden, urgent realization, hearing the whistle.)

I led him, I called him, I did it. It's all mine.

REAVE

(Spoken.)

What is?

HELEN

The blame, the blame, the blame!

REAVE

(With difficultly.)

I've had a year to think about it:

I have to have relief, but you're let off, keep still.

HELEN

I planned it, I did it, Reave.

HELEN

(Urgently.)

Oh, take me with you if you want me, but now, before he comes!

(fidgeting with her fingers.)

I can't face Rick, not wait for Rick...

(Breath barely filling her words.)

I've done, wickedly, I'm sorry.

I will obey you now.

We'll crawl home to our hole.

REAVE

(After a long pause, almost joyful.) Pack your things, then.

(HELEN moves jerkily about the small cabin, gathering up a few items collected in a years' time and getting dressed, like a marionette with cut strings, dejected, but with a frantic

urgency to her preparations. In the background, a few men from the mine begin to cross stage, heading to their own cabins and their lunches.)

REAVE (Continued)

(Anxiously, to himself.)

I was to blame too, Helen. Part of the blame Is mine, Helen. I didn't show enough love, Nor do often enough

What women want. Maybe it made your life Seem empty. It seems...it seems to me it wouldn't be decent.

To do it just now: but I'll remember and be Better when we get home.

(HELEN turns to him, some semblance of dressed and decent. She picks up her ragged bundle of items. REAVE approaches her and she pulls back a little in fear, then catches herself and makes herself stand meekly. REAVE, after a moment, takes the bundle from her and walks outside. HELEN follows him; suddenly in the doorway she drops and kisses the threshold. REAVE watches and says nothing. She gets up and walks at his side. REAVE addresses one of the workers returning from the mine.)

REAVE (Continued)

I'm taking my wife home.
When Armstrong comes, tell him
We're going west. He's got a car.

HELEN

Oh cheat, cheat! Will you tole him after you?

REAVE

(Heavily.)

Come on.

(REAVE grabs HELEN tightly by the wrist tightly and begins dragging her

offstage. ARMSTRONG enters from the mine.)

REAVE (Continued)

(Shouted.)

Armstrong!

(REAVE drops his grip on HELEN, dashing across the stage.)

HELEN

(Shouted.)

Reave, no!

(ARMSTRONG looks over his shoulder, and seems, for the first time, afraid. He runs inside his cabin and slams the door, holding it shut with the weight of his torso. REAVE slams into the door, knocking it open, throwing ARMSTRONG to the floor of the cabin. With deliberate steps, REAVE reaches ARMSTRONG and grabs him by his shoulder and the straps of his coveralls, spinning him and dragging him outside, to where a crowd of lunch-break workers gathers. He shoves ARMSTRONG, who tumbles down to the ground a short distance away.)

REAVE

(Erupting with anger.)

Look here, Helen. Yellow you see, yellow you see. Your friend makes us all vile.

ARMSTRONG

(Struggling to his feet.)

Thurso, I--

REAVE

(While punching ARMSTRONG heavily in the face.)

Yellow snake! Treacherous bastard!

(ARMSTRONG reels back from the assault, staggering out of REAVE's reach. HELEN

throws herself between the two of them, protecting ARMSTRONG.)

ARMSTRONG

Ah!

HELEN

Ah! What have you done. I love him you know. Even yellow to the bones, even yellower than gold, I love him.

If I were dead in the desert
And he drowned in the ocean, yet something and
something from us would climb like white
Fires and twine high shining wings in the hollow sky:
while you in your grave lie stuck
Like a stone in a ditch.

REAVE

(Grabbing HELEN and shoving her aside.)

ARMSTRONG

Oh, Helen!

Enough, woman.

HELEN

Reave, no!

(REAVE and ARMSTRONG grapple, the men grunting with effort. REAVE rains blows down upon ARMSTRONG, brute strength coupled with steely determination against the hot air of ARMSTRONG's shallow bravery, easily cracked under the pain and fear of the fight. The lunch-time crowd watches intently. HELEN watches in her own world, only aware of the two men in front of her. With one tremendous final blow, REAVE knocks ARMSTRONG to the ground, The crowd gasps, HELEN sways and crumples to the ground in a heap. The crowd, realizing they are seeing more than just a normal brawl begin to remember they have other places to be; they back away, dissipating, fearful. REAVE is caught up in the sight of his vengeance, breathing heavily. The stage is now clear of the lunch-crowd. REAVE notices that HELEN has fainted. Much changed, he tenderly kneels by her side, cradling her and rocking her.

REAVE

(Gently.)

Oh Helen, oh, Helen.

HELEN

(To herself, dazed, confused.)

The ship, the ship!

The rocking of the waves and the hot smell close up my throat. Oh be patient with me.

When we land I'll feel better.

REAVE

You're in the desert: wake up.

HELEN

(Humbly, to REAVE.)

Please, Reave, won't you leave me here?

I must have freedom,

If only to die in, it comes too late...

REAVE

(After a long pause, quietly, to himself.)

Dearest, I've done

Brutally: I'll not keep you against your will.

(To HELEN, with compassionate love.)

Dearest...

(To himself, changing his mind.)

No.

(He releases HELEN and rises, stalking towards the pitiful figure of ARMSTRONG.)

Nothing further

Has meaning in it, mere jargon of mutterings, the mouth's refusal

Of the mind's surrender;

that poor dead man - my father, with the sad beaten face

When the lime-kilns failed:

that man - that man yielded and was beaten.

A man mustn't be beaten.

(Violently.)

No!

(REAVE steps leverage onto one of ARMSTRONG's legs, and grabbing the foot in hand snaps mightily upwards, a great, rending crack accompanying the breaking bone. ARMSTRONG screams, inhuman.)

No!

(Mechanical, cold, REAVE breaks ARMSTRONG's other leg. ARMSTRONG wails once more.)

REAVE

No! No! No!

(REAVE, having reached his satisfaction, matter of factly pulls HELEN upright. He walks inexorably toward her, backing her into the cabin, ignoring the moaning of ARMSTRONG, clawing at the sand, trying to drag himself away. As HELEN stumbles backwards onto the bed REAVE's hands go to his belt buckle.)

HELEN & REAVE

No!

BLACKOUT. END OF ACT.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

(REAVE and HELEN enter the yard of the farmhouse, road-weary after a few days' travel through the desert. HELEN stops, hesitant, some distance away from the house. REAVE walks on a few steps, notices, and comes back to her, taking her by the arm to steer her towards the house.)

HELEN

Don't touch me, please, your hands are terrible.

REAVE

(Letting her go, frustrated.)

Come along, Helen.

HELEN

Were you ever on a ship?
This place is just like a ship, everything smells
In spite of neatness.

Oh Reave I never dreamed that you'd be deep-wounded. Forgive me.

REAVE

(Violently.)

Lick your own sores.

The man was my friend and that degrades me: but no woman can love a coward, And still you stayed...

HELEN

(Defiant.)

For his money, for his money you know,

and the fine house

You found me in among the rich gardens, the jewels and furs,

Necklaces of pearls like round zeroes, all these hangings of gold

That make me heavy...

REAVE

Ah, be quiet.

HELEN

I dread death

More than your mother's eyes.

I'm the coward or I'd kill myself.

I fear death

More than I hate this dishwater broth of life.

A bowlful a day, Oh

God! Do the stars look

Like lonely, pretty sparkles when you look up? They look to me like bubbles of grease on cold dishwater.

(HELEN and REAVE enter the farmhouse. MRS. THURSO looks hard at HELEN.)

REAVE

My wife and I have come home.

MRS. THURSO

Yes.

REAVE

Where's Mark, mother?

MRS. THURSO

Sitting under a bush on the hill, probably. Your wife's, adventures, Stick in his throat.

HELEN

I'm not ashamed. No reason to be ashamed. I tried to take myself out of here
And am brought back by force, to a gray place like a jail, to a house where no one ever loved or was glad. But your spite's nothing,
I'll fear Reave, but not you.

(HELEN goes outside in search of MARK. REAVE and MRS. THURSO are silent for a while.)

MRS. THURSO

Oh why, Reave,

Why did you have to bring her back.

(REAVE looks at MRS. THURSO a moment, unreadable, then moves to sit.)

MRS. THURSO (Continued)

Your mind sticks in its own iron:

when you've said `I will'

Then you're insane, the cold madness begins.

(Pause.)

I suppose it's better than weakness.

REAVE

(With shame.)

Though it may seem strange:

I love her.

Some accident, or my neglect, changed her;

But I'll change her over

And bring the gold back.

MRS. THURSO

You talk like poor Mark. Or, worse.

Mark at least feels disgust.

(Beat.)

About the old cable:

He's been seeing lately...a shadow of your father:

Pitifully staring up at it in the evenings.

Mark broods on that. The shock of your disgrace I believe

Started his mind swarming, and he hobbles out In the starlight. I wish you to keep your promise

And cut that ruin from our sky.

Something unlucky will clear

When that cord's cut. Don't you hate seeing it?

REAVE

Oh, yes,

Like anything else that's no use.

I'll cut it down to-morrow morning.

MRS. THURSO

(Sharply.)

If you could stand her

Under the iron skip when you cut the cable In the path of that great weight of metal...

REAVE

(Fiercely.)

Don't speak, mother, of Helen.

I never will let her go until she is dead.

I must ask you, mother,

Not to interfere between mine and me.

MRS. THURSO

I have no desire to: as you know clearly, Reave, In your mind's quiet time.

REAVE

What does that mean, that I seem excited: drunk, hm? Wrong, mother, quite wrong.
I've noticed in other autumns,
when the earth bakes brittle and the rains lag,
I become gloomy and quarrelsome,
But not this year. Cheerful.
Our ship sails when I cut the cable.
Go to bed, mother.

(MRS. THURSO rises, stares at REAVE, and exits offstage. REAVE paces heavily inside the house. Outside, HELEN finds MARK. His lameness appears more painful than before.)

HELEN

Have I lost your love, my brother?

MARK

(Overlapping.)

Oh, Helen!

HELEN

(Overlapping.)

Because I could hardly think how to live here without it.

MARK

I have no color of words

To say how dearly I...Helen, when I seem dark: You must think of me as a foolish day-dreamer Whose indulgence turns and clouds him, so that he sees a dead man walk on the deck and feels the ship sailing through darkness to a bad place.

HELEN

(Astonished.)

The ship, the ship?

MARK

I feel the see-sawing keel, my mind tries darkly ahead under the stars

What destiny we're driving toward...do you think, Helen, a dead man's soul Can flit back to his scene long afterwards?

HELEN

Your father you mean? I seem to remember hearing That to dream of a ship means death...

MARK

(Smiling meagrely.)

If that's all,

If we both dream it. I, for one, shan't trouble My survivors with any starlight returns, but stick to peace like a hungry tick.

HELEN

(Eagerly.)

Oh, hush.

It's wicked to talk like that.

MARK

(After a pause.)

Did you love him, Helen?

HELEN

I thought you'd ask that. Of course I loved him.

(Unseen by MARK and HELEN, during the above REAVE comes outside the house and stares up at the cable. MARK, suddenly fearful, sees REAVE.)

MARK

(Near-whispering.)

Is that Reave?

(In terrified realization.)

He's staring up at the cable, Helen!
My father stands in that same place
and stares up at the cable every night.

(REAVE approaches.)

REAVE

To-morrow morning we'll cut it down.

(To MARK.)

We'll feel better

After the old advertisement of failure has fallen. It's cobwebbed the canyon for too many years.

(To HELEN.)

We'll start a new life to-morrow.

HELEN

(With shrill anger, surprising even herself.)

You and I?

REAVE

You're staying. So rest your mind.

HELEN

Ah, ah,

Whatever fails, cut it down.

Whatever gets old or weakens.

If a dog or a horse have been faithful,

Kill them on the shore of age before they slacken.

Keep everything around you

As strong and stupid as Reave Thurso.

(HELEN turns and goes toward the house, exiting through it and offstage.)

REAVE

There was a time when I'd have stared at myself For bringing that home...and letting it talk and talk As if it had rights in the world.

(Beat.)

It's her colored Abounding life That makes her lovely.

MARK

(Earnestly.)

Oh be good to her,

Not to let her be hurt.

(During their exchange, OLD MAN THURSO enters, a ghostly apparition.)

MARK (Continued)

Even you,

I think, feel the steep time build like a wave, Towering to break, Higher and higher;

And the ship's trimmed top-heavy.

MARK (Continued)

(Seeing OLD MAN THURSO.)

...do you really take it down to-morrow?

REAVE

The cable?

(Turning to look at the cable, walking towards it, inadvertently heading straight for OLD MAN THURSO.)

In the morning.

We'll feel better after that failure has fallen. I'll send Johnny round to tell the neighbors, They must all come and watch.

The fall will be grand. Those things have weight.

OLD MAN THURSO Mmm!

O.S. CHORUS Mmm!

MARK

Look, our father.
Reave, I beg you
Walk some way around, or he'll glide off again
And never tell me the rest.

(REAVE returns and takes his brother by the shoulder.)

REAVE

Come up from dreams, my brother.

OLD MAN THURSO Ah! Mmm! O.S. CHORUS Mmm!

MARK

He says to warn you...

OLD MAN THURSO Ah! Mmm!

O.S. CHORUS Mmm!

MARK

...to let his work stand, he says:

OLD MAN THURSO Ah! Mmm!

O.S. CHORUS Mmm!

MARK

... "Honor your father."

REAVE

(Laughing impatiently.)

Tell that imagination I honor as much of him as I can see: Nothing.

MARK

(Shouted.)

You are blind brother!

OLD MAN THURSO Ah! Mmm!

O.S. CHORUS Mmm!

(MARK shakes REAVE off and falls to his knees in front of OLD MAN THURSO following his vision, with no mind for this world.)

MARK

(Mournfully.)

Has death no peace? No dreamlessness?

OLD MAN THURSO Ah! Mmm!

O.S. CHORUS Mmm!

MARK

(Shouted.)

For God's sake, father, tell me!

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

Life is all a dream...

MARK

...Life is all a dream...

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

And death...

MARK

...and death...

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

...is a better

more vivid immortal dream...

MARK

...an immortal dream...

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

But love is real;

MARK

...but love is real...

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

Both are made out of love...

MARK

...both are made out of love...

OLD MAN THURSO, O.S. CHORUS & MARK

That's never perfect in life, and the voids in it Are the pains of life; but when our ungainly loads Of blood and bone are thrown down, Love becomes perfect, For then we are what we love.

(A vision of HELEN, ghostlike, in MARK's mind and unseen by REAVE emerges from behind a cloud of smoke during the above, distorted by lights and fabric, writhing provocatively, all in white. MARK begins to crawl toward the vision.)

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

Love

Must become conscious of itself And claim its own.

MARK

Oh, love!

OLD MAN THURSO & O.S. CHORUS

Love

Must become conscious of itself And claim its own.

REAVE

Mark, turn away Mark!

(MARK throws himself back in terror.)

MARK

(Crying shrilly.)

I can't. I can't.

(OLD MAN THURSO and HELEN drift away, disappearing in the mist.)

REAVE

Come, inside, brother.

(REAVE helps him up and coaxes him towards home.)

REAVE (Continued)

Come inside.

MARK

(Sotto voce, echoing the melody of OLD MAN THURSO.)

Ah!

O.S. CHORUS

Ah!

ACT 2

SCENE 2

(MARK, MRS. THURSO, HELEN, and a few NEIGHBORS have gathered to watch the cutting of the old REAVE and JOHNNY are near cable. where the cable itself is anchored on the Southern cliff high above the canyon. Depending on stage limitations, MARK, MRS. THURSO and HELEN may either be down in the canyon proper, or far back from REAVE on top of the cliff face. In either case, they are removed from the action, observing from a distance. A decent length of the cable is seen up close for the first time, a thick and manystranded monument of industry. A rope has been tied to the cable near the end to be cut, the other end tied to an oak a little higher than the cable-anchorage and some distance to the side (or entirely offstage); so in their falling the heavy steel serpent and the hanging iron skips should be deflected enough to miss those highest and best-grown trees.)

NEIGHBORS

It seems it's always been there That cable.
That skip.

NEIGHBOR 1

I've never seen it move.

NEIGHBOR 2

(Overlapping.)

It's eaten through with rust.

NEIGHBOR 3

(Overlapping.)

Will he really cut it down?

NEIGHBORS (7)

(Overlapping.)

Will he really cut it down?

ALL NEIGHBORS

Poor Old Thurso,
Poor Old Man Thurso.
The last of his mark on these hills
Will fall,
Will fall,
Will fall.
His old bones will have nothing left
But his sons and his shame.

(During the above, REAVE works at the cable, trying to sever it.)

REAVE

What engines did my father use to Sling so great a weight so high: A man capable of that, blown out In the first draught of bad luck like a poor candle!

NEIGHBORS

Now the sea-wind begins, The wool-white fog on the ocean Sends clouds flying up the gorge

REAVE

(Growing cheerful.)

With these clouds underfoot I feel a little godlike!

HELEN

How long has it hung?

MARK

Eighteen years.

HELEN

Not more? Eighteen?
I thought it had always hung on these hills.
When Reave tackles it,
Down it shall come. Not the mountain-backed earth
bucking like a bad
horse, nor fire's

Red foxtail on the hills at midnight, nor the mad southeasters:

nothing can do it

But Reave Thurso, ah? That's the man we're measured against.

MRS. THURSO

(To Mark.)

An inch to the mile.

MARK

(Whispering to Mrs. Thurso.)

Do you think he cares?

MRS. THURSO

Who?

MARK

Father: his old work

Falling from the air at last.

MRS. THURSO

We'll credit the dead

With a little more intelligence than to be troubled About old iron.

NEIGHBORS

Hmm.

000.

MARK

(Answering hollow and slow.)

It has to be done, I suppose.

HELEN

Sometime San Francisco and New York and Chicago will fall

On the heads of their ghosts, so will that cable.

REAVE

(To himself.)

All the birds

Count on this ironware for as fixed as mountains, It was here before they were hatched in the high nests,

Now I'll surprise them.

(To JOHNNY.)

Hand me the axe. Stand clear, Johnny,

(REAVE swings the axe; the whole cable like a hive of bees hums over the gulf in the hanging air, but the wires hold.)

REAVE (Continued)

I'll hew my father's failure from the face of nature. I have work to do!

(The sound of snapping strands of metal is heard from offstage. REAVE raises his axe.)

JOHNNY

(Pointing offstage.)

Reave, look out!

(The cable snaps, the anchoring, scything rope that runs from the cable to the oak-tree goes west and strikes REAVE where he is standing; he is bent at the loins backward and flung on the face of the hill. HELEN sees and hurries to REAVE's body. He is not dead but crawling, his belly and legs flat to the ground, his head lifted, like Armstrong in the desert, the shirt and the skin flayed off the great shoulders.

HELEN

(Gasping.)

God evens things. My lover in the desert, crawled in the sand like that after Reave struck him. A bushel for a bushel says God exactly. What can we do?

(MRS. THURSO climbs up from below during the above. She sees REAVE. With a cry she runs to his side and falls to her knees beside him.)

HELEN (Continued)

He's met somebody

Stronger than himself. Now I forgive him, now I forgive him.

I'd die for him.

MRS. THURSO

(With astonished hatred.)

You forgive him!

(JOHNNY stands mute and helpless. REAVE crawls down hill between them.)

REAVE

Must 'a' been holes in my mind. Everything wrong. Won't die.

HELEN

(Crying shrilly.)

How can we get you down, where can I touch you?

REAVE

Can't worsen it, fool. I won't die. Drag.

(They drag him a little way down the hill. A few concerned NEIGHBORS trickle in and assist in carrying REAVE. MARK finally makes it up high enough to meet them, hitching up on hands and knees for his lameness on the steep slope.

HELEN

(To herself.)

Both her sons crawling!

ACT 2

SCENE 3

(MRS. THURSO and HELEN sit in the living room of the farmhouse in the late afternoon as JOHNNY, a DOCTOR and TWO ORDERLIES carry REAVE on a stretcher onto stage.)

DOCTOR

Steady now, gentlemen.
Let us try not to jostle the patient.

ORDERLY 1 & 2

Yes, doctor.

(MRS. THURSO and HELEN hear the bustle outside and come out to assist the DOCTOR, JOHNNY, and the ORDERLIES in carrying REAVE through the front door and into the bedroom. REAVE is clearly in much pain, and has no use of his legs. MRS. THURSO goes back outside to have a conference with the DOCTOR.)

HELEN

The jolting of the road must have been torture.

REAVE

(After a long pause, suddenly.)

What of it?

MRS. THURSO

Will he live, Doctor?

HELEN

Not to hide it from me, hidden pain's worse. If you trusted me...

DOCTOR

The nerves of pain might live...

REAVE

Do you think rat-gnawings

Mean much to a man who never any more...

DOCTOR

But the nerves of motion are lost.

REAVE

All the endless rest of his life lie flat like a cut tree...

MRS. THURSO

But will he recover?

DOCTOR

He shall never ride ...

REAVE

Have food brought and be wiped...

DOCTOR

Walk...

REAVE

Grow fat between a tray and a bed-pan...

DOCTOR

Nor even be able to stand.

REAVE

...While every shiftless and wavering fool in the world has walking legs.

MRS. THURSO

I see. Thank you, Doctor. I am certain you did...

DOCTOR & MRS. THURSO

...all that could be done.

(MRS. THURSO directs JOHNNY to help the ORDERLIES and the DOCTOR back off stage. She remains outside for a time. The world becomes still and heavy. REAVE cannot prevent a grunt of pain from escaping through clenched jaws.)

HELEN

What kind of a doctor was that, who leaves you suffering.

REAVE

An honest old man.

HELEN

(Pitying.)

Oh, Reave!

REAVE

Never waste pity: the cramps and the stabbing are my best diversion: if they ever ended I'd have to lie and burn my fingers with matches. Well: day by day.

You promised lightly to take the worse with the better. This is the worse.

(REAVE's will breaks momentarily and he groans, with convulsed lips.)

HELEN

(Suddenly.)

I'll never leave you

In life or death.

Nothing can break you,

It was only bones and nerves broke, nothing can change you.

Now I've begun to know good from bad I can be straight too.

REAVE

Dead legs and a back strapped in plaster. You'll never Be as straight as this.

(HELEN shivers. REAVE smiles and his lips whiten with pain.)

REAVE (Continued)

How's Mark?

HELEN

Stark mad: all his gentleness Gone into vengeful broodings. He thinks a dead man tore up an oak on the mountain...

REAVE

(Frowning.)

Do you think there's anything beyond death, Helen?

HELEN

(Darkly.)

Yes, Worms.

REAVE

And sleep, without pain or waking. Don't worry, I'll never ease myself out by hand. The old dog Stinks in that alley.

HELEN

How did he kill himself? I never knew.

REAVE

(Sharply between tight lips of suffering.)

Leave that.

HELEN

Perfect courage might call death like a servant at the proper time, not shamefully but proudly.

REAVE

(Groaning involuntarily.)

Means your freedom, ah?
But I mean to stick it out,

you know, and there's tempting

Too sweet to be patient with. I say damn quitters.

HELEN

May I shift the pillows under you?

REAVE

(Rolling his head.)

I can shift them. Look here.

(REAVE raises himself upward with prodigious pain and effort by the thrust of his elbows backward against the bed.)

REAVE (Continued)

(Harshly.)

I am not helpless.

(REAVE clutches his hands in the bedding and slowly with immobile face and no groan lays down.)

There's nothing a man can't bear. Push my bed

To the window and let me look out westward.

(HELEN moves his bed to the window.)

REAVE (Continued)

(To HELEN.)

Go.

(HELEN leaves the room, making her way to join MRS. THURSO outside.)

REAVE (Continued)

(Muttering wearily.)

We're too closed-in here.

I lie like a felled log in a gully and women wrangle above me. I have no power and no use

And no comfort left and I cannot sleep. I have my own law

That I will keep, and not die despising myself.

MRS. THURSO

(To HELEN.)

There were two oaks broken that morning.

HELEN

What can we do?

MRS. THURSO

You can run away.

You are out of employment

When a man's withered from the waist down.

HELEN

Yet I was thinking there's....another kindness That I could do for him. Another that his mother can't.

MRS. THURSO

(Fiercely.)

You're not the make. I wish

He could see your slobbered face, Helen, he'd hardly Have hunted into Arizona to fetch it home.

Do what then?

HELEN

(Faintly.)

Nothing, nothing, nothing.

I promised I'll never leave him and I've grown faithful At last.

MRS. THURSO

(Scornfully.)

So you say.

If you think of killing yourself...

(MRS. THURSO laughs.)

HELEN

How did...Reave's dad do it?

MRS. THURSO

In the forehead, poor fool, And was long dying.

HELEN

In the heart would have been better?

MRS. THURSO

You must find out for yourself.

HELEN

I wasn't thinking of myself; I'm faithful now.

MRS. THURSO

To the death? Ah?

A new color for you, worn strangely.

(MRS. THURSO goes through the house towards the bedroom. HELEN follows.)

HELEN

Go quietly, And listen.

(HELEN and MRS. THURSO tiptoe near the closed bedroom door. REAVE moans thinly, increasing, then breaking off; then his fist beats on the bed, followed by silence, then another moan. MRS. THURSO shakes her head in pity.)

MRS. THURSO

(Whispering.)

I'll not awake him.

HELEN

If that is sleep, Then life's a dream.

(MRS. THURSO retires to a rocking chair in the living room. The lights shift, time passes, night comes. HELEN moves restlessly about, finally making her way to the exterior storage shed where vermin-traps, squirrel-poison, and hunting-gear are kept. Unseen by HELEN, MARK enters from offstage through the yard, returning from late-night wanderings. HELEN seeks out her hunting rifle and loads in new cartridges with glittering brass jackets. MARK enters the threshhold of the shed.)

MARK

Are you going hunting, Helen?

If you kill any living

Creature, your heart will be troubled

In quiet times afterwards.

Life's bad for people,

But the clean deer, that leap on the high hills

There's not one of them

Lame nor a fool.

HELEN

(To Mark.)

There's a great fallen stag Would thank me kindly For death.

MARK

Where is it? I'll feed it With tender grass.

HELEN

It fell on the mountain, in pain forever: I hate...love him too. Love him, I said.

MARK

I know what love is,

Horrible dreams of love

Like splintered glass in my bed cut me all night, like a splintered mirror.

You betrayed Reave, you know.

Oh, this place crawls with death!

(Mark goes from the doorway towards HELEN.)

Traps, guns, knives, poisons:

but no one sleeps near, no one can hear us.

There's a bright wanting beast in me:

Hunt that, Helen. Kill that.

I thought love

Was kindness, it's a blind burning beast.

(With growing frenzy.)

Because I heard voices and answered them,

Because I saw spirits and feared them,

You and the rest were whispering that I was crazy.

(Shouted.)

That was nothing!

(Sung.)

I burn to strike the obscene parts of our flesh together--

This is the real thing, this is the madness.

(MARK lunges towards HELEN, grabbing at her. He hisses when he touches her breast.)

HELEN

(Contemptuously.)

You fool!

(HELEN gently pushes him away.)

We'd manage you a kind cure

If I were liberal; but you'd loathe me for it, and my winter's come.

(HELEN exits the shed.)

MARK

(Shouted.)

The two you've had

Are nothing, take two hundred.

Kill all the deer on the mountain,

What's that to me?

(During the below, HELEN stealthily enters the house, sneaking past MRS.

THURSO on her way to the bedroom where REAVE is.)

HELEN, MRS. THURSO, REAVE, AND O.S. CHORUS

Ah!

MARK

We know what life is:

HELEN, MRS. THURSO & REAVE

We know what life is:

REAVE

That mercy is weakness,

HELEN

And honesty, the fear of detection,

MRS. THURSO

And beauty, paint.

MARK

And love, is a furious longing to join the sewers of two bodies.

HELEN, MRS. THURSO, MARK &

REAVE

That's how God made us and the next wars Will swallow up all....

MARK

I fear insanity.

Lunacy is worse than death.

(HELEN opens the door to REAVE's room, approaching with rifle aimed. REAVE sees her.)

REAVE

(Coldly furious.)

Sneak in behind me

Fighting on my last inch?

Trust you, to side with my enemy.

MARK

My only cause for this act is fear of madness. No other cause.

REAVE

Come closer. You'd botch it from there, and I'd be days

Dying or not, cursing you for a fool.

(MARK raises his own gun.)

MARK

(Desperate, pleading.)

Dear love

Come soon, this room is purer.

(HELEN leans and shuffles toward REAVE. A GUNSHOT is heard, MARK collapses. HELEN startles at the noise, REAVE grabs the rifle out of her hand. They both share a look of realization as MRS. THURSO rushes outside to discover MARK's body.)

ACT 2

SCENE 4

(In the late afternoon on the top of the cliff-line, HELEN, MRS. THURSO, JOHNNY LUNA, a few NEIGHBORS, and REAVE, lying on a low stretcher, are gathered around a fresh grave marked by a modest wooden cross as a MINISTER draws the sparse funeral for MARK to a close.)

NEIGHBORS, HELEN, & MRS. THURSO

Mmmmmmm.

MINISTER

(Spoken.)

Amen.

(The few NEIGHBORS make their way slowly down and offstage, leaving HELEN, MRS. THURSO, JOHNNY LUNA and REAVE behind at MARK's grave.)

MRS. THURSO

(After a long pause.)

Reave...

(REAVE holds up his hand and shakes his head. MRS. THURSO hesitates, then nods solemnly to JOHNNY. They make their way down, JOHNNY assisting MRS. THURSO. HELEN waits silently at REAVE's side.)

REAVE

The dead dog that walks in the wood, that Mark used to talk to, has done this: too shot with cowardice To live, and too envious to let his sons. Praising death. Oh my poor brother, You oughtn't to have yielded.

(Beat.)

That dead dog.

HELEN

(Faintly, half borne into belief by Reave's passion.)

Have you seen him?

REAVE

Felt him.

(Hoarsely.)

Mark is dead. He'd not have yielded in his right mind. (REAVE wipes his forehead.)

Now he's another dead dog to bite us.

If there's a God, he's a torturer, that sits calmly Above the stars.

He sees the old woman lose both her sons for nothing! One in a spray of life-blood,

The other like a broken stick on a dung-hill;

Then God smiles over the sea to China

on a million people

Dying of hunger.

The lucky ones sold their children for tufts of grass and die with green teeth,

God pats his baby hands together and looks down pleasantly!

No!

No!

I'll tell you what the world's like.

I'll tell you what the world's like!

Like a stone for no reason falling in the night

from a cliff in the hills, that makes a lonely

Noise and a spark in the hollow darkness,

And nobody sees,

And nobody cares.

There's nothing good in it

Except the courage in us not to be beaten.

It can't make us

Cringe or say please.

(Beat.)

Don't imagine that

I'm running from the dead dog:

I'll clean out

Trace and shape and smell of him!

I'll leave the canyon

Virgin if fire and dynamite can do it.

Dead as a dog!

Dead as a dog!

(Beat.)

D' y' see that star?

HELEN

What?

REAVE

The star.

HELEN

There's no star, Reave.

(REAVE draws his hand over his eyes.)

REAVE

No star? None? No, there are

Thousands, but we can't see them. Well, Helen. Move me, a little. I want to look Westward.

(HELEN shifts each of the dead legs one at a time, so that REAVE can look out over the gorge towards the nearly-completed bridge and the conspicuously absent cable. Helen struggles with the weight of him.)

REAVE (Continued)

You ought to rig up a mast And tackle,

To hoist your deck-load aboard.

HELEN

Reave, for God's sake! Ships are bad luck I think.

REAVE

Fool.

HELEN

Yes.

(Panting.)

Oh, you're quite right,

Call it a ship. I'll sit on the deck beside you. Our lives are taken away from luck and given Higher.

REAVE

I still don't understand what drove him to it.

HELEN

Who; Mark?

REAVE

No, Rick Armstrong. He was a good fellow.

HELEN

(Suddenly shaking.)

Was it nothing to you? It was something to me!

(Beat.)

He's dead, don't you understand? He's gone down. You live. That debt is paid.

(HELEN crouches again on the planks beside REAVE.)

HELEN (continued)

If I'd never been here, nothing would have been the same.

You'd not be hurt, you'd be riding on the hill.

Oh, how I wish I had died in misery before you saw me,

(Dream-like, with growing intensity.)

I wish you had seen me

lying five days dead in the jagged mountain,

I wish you had seen me

Blackening on a white rock in a dry place,

the vultures dipping their white beaks in my eyes,

their red heads in my side,

you'd make them raise the great wings and soar!

And if you had seen me

lying black-mouthed in the filth of death,

you'd not have wanted me then,

and nothing would be as it is,

but you'd be lucky and I quiet.

(Shuddering.)

What's all this troublesome affair of living,

what's it all about, what's it for?

Do you know something that's hidden from the weak like me?

Or do we live for no other reason than because we dread to die?

(With her hands at her throat.)

I dread it so... I can't bear it,

For now it seems that all the billion and a half of our lives on earth,

And the more that died long ago, and the things that happened and will happen again, and all the beacons of time

Up to this time look very senseless, a roadless forest full of cries and ignorance.

(Haunted, with mad gaiety)

I used to wish for round jewels and a fur cloak, and a set of laughing friends to fool with, and one of those long low stream-lined cars

That glide quietly and shine like satin: So, maybe, just maybe, life might have been precious At the best.

(Coming back to reality.)

But can life be precious at the worst? Maybe death is...
death is...

(HELEN fishes out REAVE's hunting knife from her pocket, hiding it from REAVE's view. She sways upright and goes around him to approach him from the upstage side, so that her right hand is visible downstage under his chin when she kneels down and kisses him.)

HELEN (continued)

For love, for love! I do this for love!

(HELEN draws the knife across his throat with hoarded, unconscious violence. All in a moment mattress and blanket, the planks, the whole world of sense, are painted with blood and foam.)

REAVE

(Gurgling, voice fading.)

No!

HELEN

(Crying.)

For love, Reave, for love!

(REAVE's breath fails, the animal flurry of death waggles his arms and head, no pain from the loins down. Then all is perfect, no-pain, a moment of blessed relief. He dies. JOHNNY approaches, fearing the worst. HELEN stands, covered in blood.)

HELEN (Continued)

Oh Johnny Luna, go down and tell his mother That the ship has found land.

Tell the old woman To come up here and see him like a king in Babylon

With his slave lying at his feet.

(JOHNNY flees. HELEN sinks down beside REAVE. With shaking, blood-covered hands she draws out a glass bottle of little white pills.)

HELEN (Continued)

For love, Reave. This is for love.

(She takes the pills, at times dryretching, but each time finding her resolve. MRS. THURSO labors up the steep face, JOHNNY behind her.)

HELEN (Continued)

...for love, for love!

(HELEN falls, drawing up her knees.)

MRS. THURSO

What poison?

HELEN

A woman's poison, a white one. The little tablets I used for fear of having a baby, in our happy time.

(MRS. THURSO moves carefully on the platform past HELEN to REAVE.)

MRS. THURSO

How did you do it? Did he let you do it?

HELEN

(Coughing with laughter in the poison fever.)

Reave let me? Have you gone crazy?
I knifed him while I kissed his mouth.

(HELEN cries with pain at the end of speaking.)

MRS. THURSO

I knew he would never give in, why did I ask? You have done well,

You always were treacherous, you did it easily.

(MRS. THURSO finds the hunting-knife and takes it up from the blood against REAVE's shoulder.)

HELEN

(Raising herself on her hands.)

You must not! You have no right. I alone saved him, Alone to die with him.

MRS. THURSO

When you die I will lay it down. You are not to get well.

(HELEN gasps, laughing and retching, then fixes her eyes on the vacant air above the sea-edge.)

HELEN

Why there's the dynamite man Come up to see us. Keep him off, please. No, Rick. No. You may watch if you like but I alone Am allowed to lie at his feet, my love is proved.

(MRS. THURSO watches her attentively across REAVE's body. JOHNNY comes up the platform and stands shaking, leaning over against the wind.)

MRS. THURSO

We can do nothing. She had a wasteful gallant spirit. It is not poured out yet; go down for now.

(JOHNNY goes down a respectful distance. MRS. THURSO creeps around REAVE's body, kisses HELEN's hand, and remains with her tenderly until she dies. Time passes, the lights shift towards sunset. MRS. THURSO stands, falls, and stands again. She calls to JOHNNY, who comes back up to listen.)

MRS. THURSO

...To bear...to endure...these are poor things, Johnny;
Now come, it is time.

(JOHNNY takes MRS. THURSO by the hand and helps her down the platform, she continues down on her own, without looking back. JOHNNY lingers, looking back to where HELEN and REAVE lay. He shakes his head, sadly.)

O.S. CHORUS

Mmmmmm

-- END --

CHAPTER III

Score

Performance Notes

Duration ca. 55'

Natural harmonics — Natural harmonics are indicated at sounding pitch.

PIANO: gently touch the finger pad upon the string(s) associated with the indicated pitch just barely beyond the rail (or on the copper wrapping within one knuckle-length of its beginning on the lower strings). Pressure should be very light—just enough to alter the sound in an eery way, but not so much that the sound is prevented from ringing. Think more along the lines of a sci-fi movie soundtrack, less along the lines of John Cage.

Percussion – LIST:

Auxiliary instruments (Ratchet, mark tree, triangle)

Large tam-tam Temple blocks (5)

Toms (2 - high and mid)

Kick drum Bass drum

Vibraphone (motor off throughout)

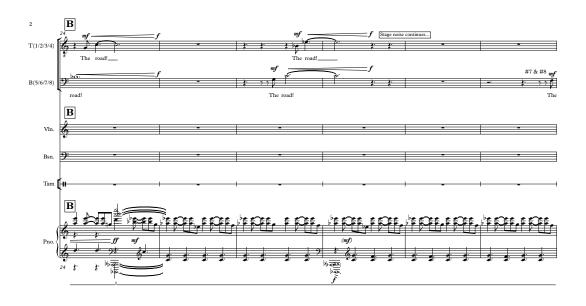
- Mallets are left to the discretion of the performer
- To achieve the "cable moan," using a superball mallet (or something else with grip, even a damp finger) rubbing on the head of the bass drum to make some wonky sounds reminiscent of big machinery swaying in a heavy coastal wind.

Tempo: "Freely" — Indicates a section of recitative or quasi recitative. Colla voce.

Score

The score, reduced to 8.5" x 11" size, begins on the following page. Please contact the composer at info@jessicahuntmusic.com should an 11" x 17" tabloid-sized score be required.



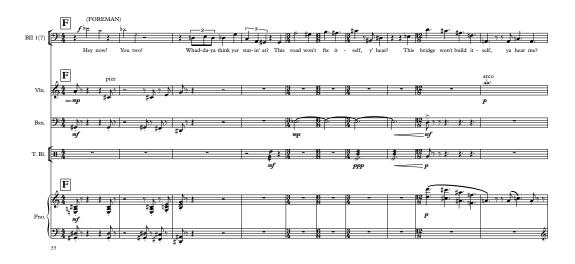


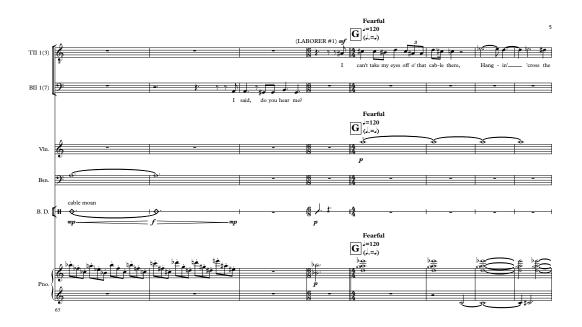






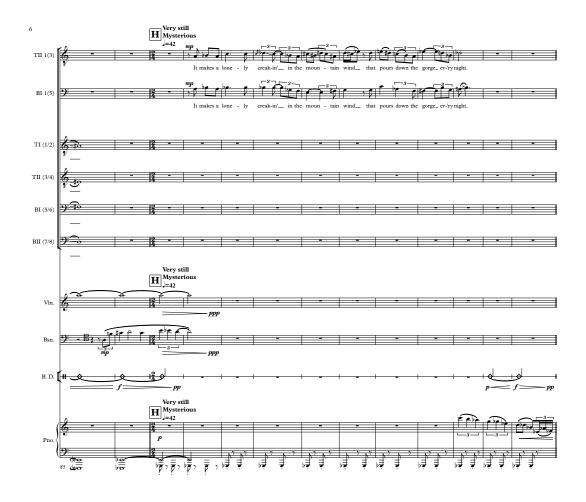


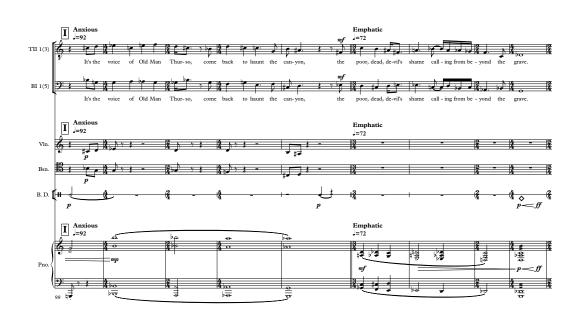






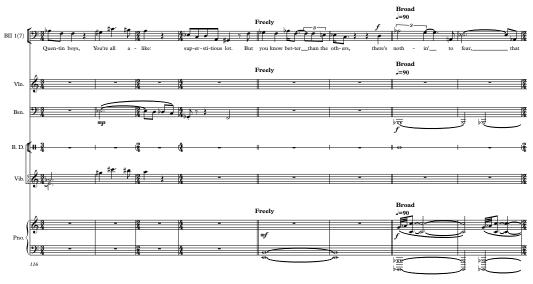




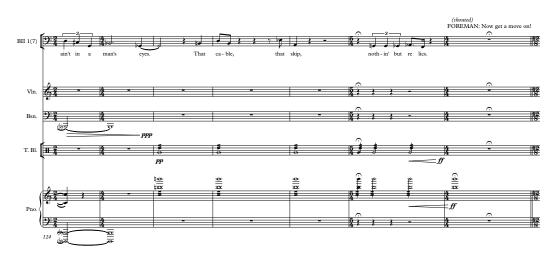




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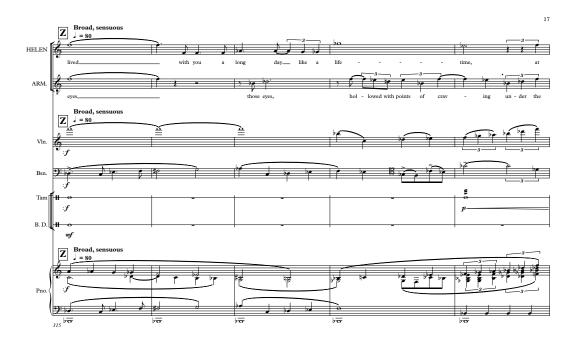


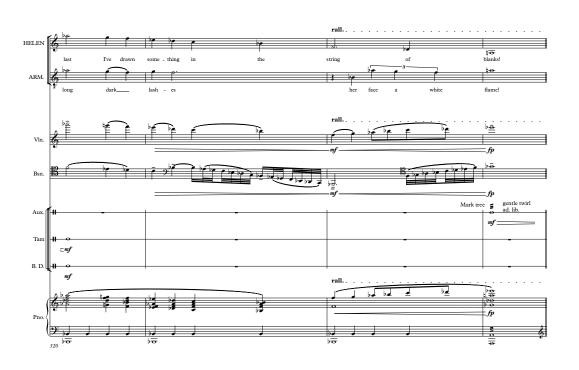
THURSO'S LANDING Excerpts from I.ii - HELEN & ARMSTRONG "I have seen dawn with you"

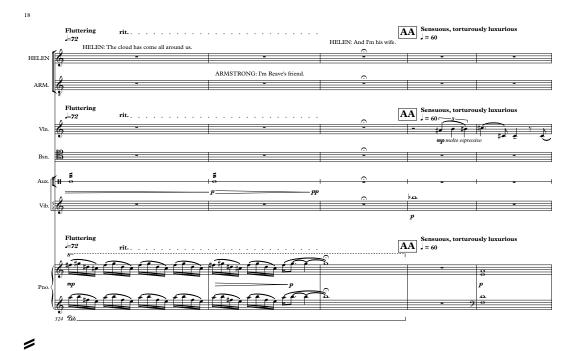


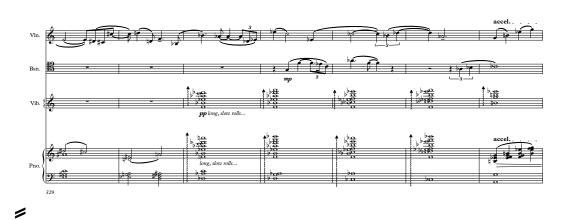


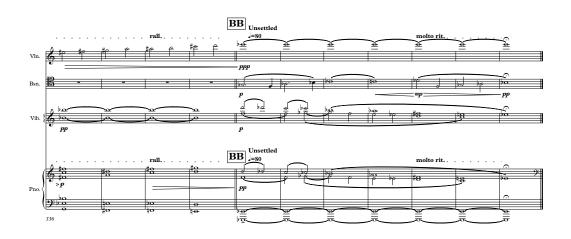






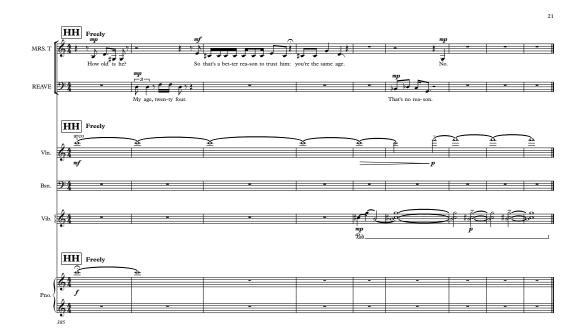




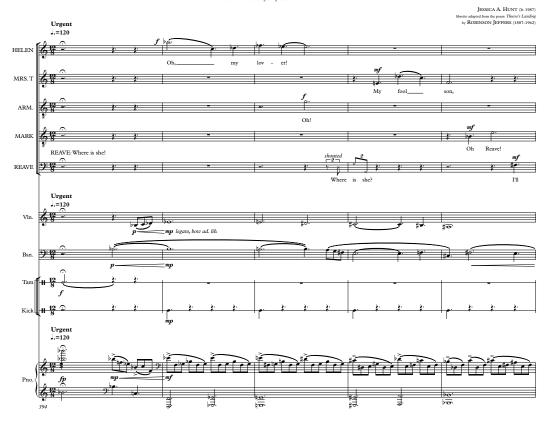








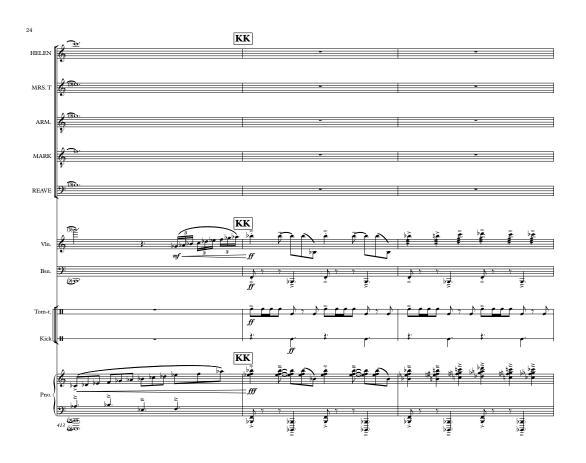
THURSO'S LANDING
Transition & Excerpt from I.iiie - HELEN, ARMSTRONG, REAVE, MARK, & MRS. THURSO
"Oh take me away!/By God I'll find her"



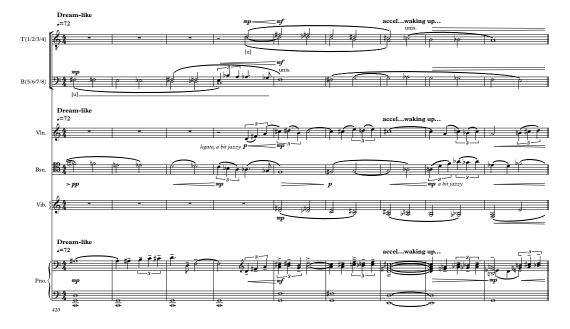




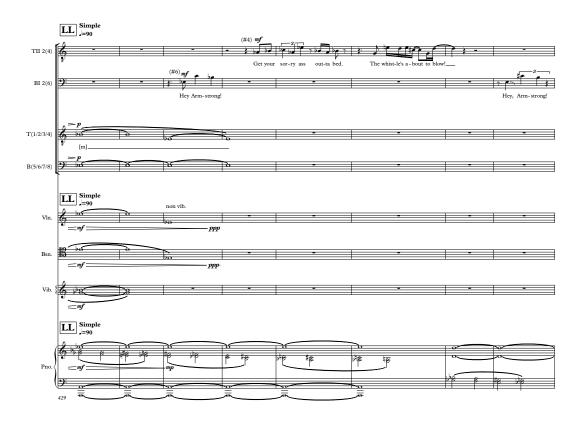


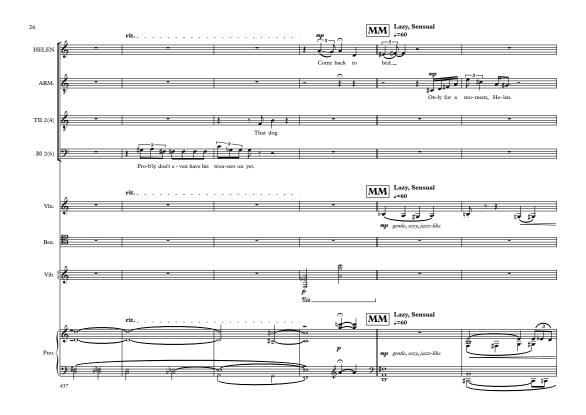












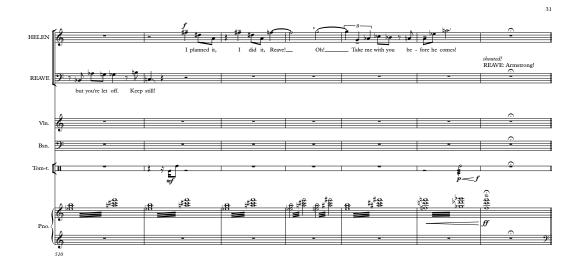








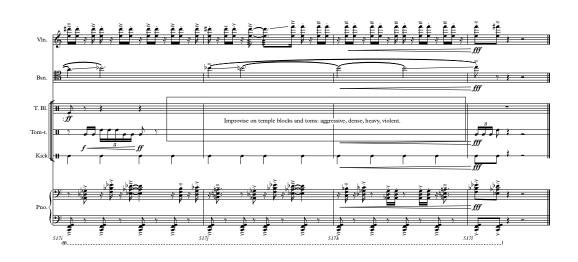




THURSO'S LANDING
Excerpt from Live - Instrumental & Dialogue (REAVE, ARMSTRONG, & HELEN)
"Yellow bellied snake!"



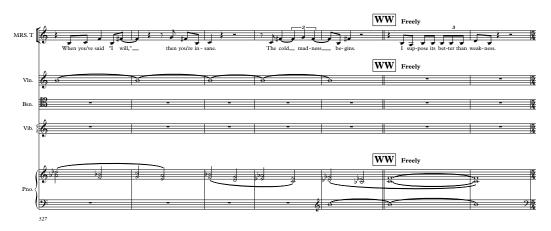




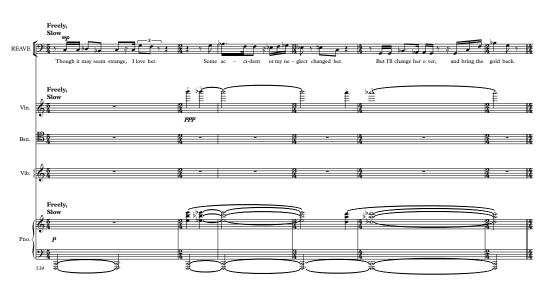
THURSO'S LANDING Transition & Excerpt from II.1a - REAVE & MRS. THURSO "Oh why, Reave, did you bring her back?"

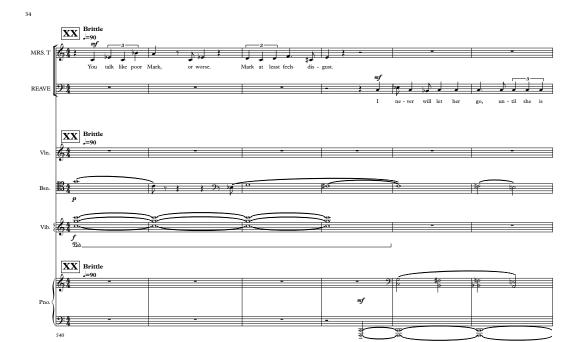
JESSICA A. HUNT (b. 1987) libretto adapted from the poem *Thurso's Landing* by ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887-1962)



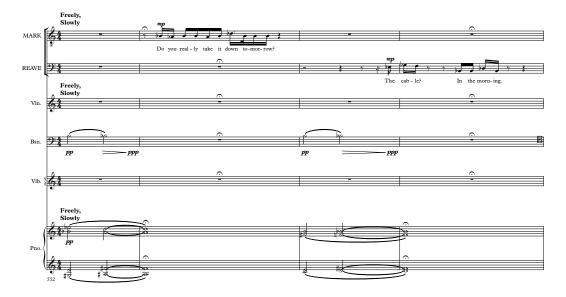




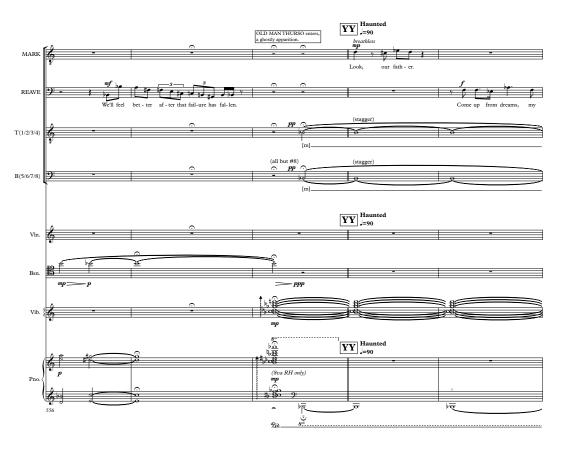




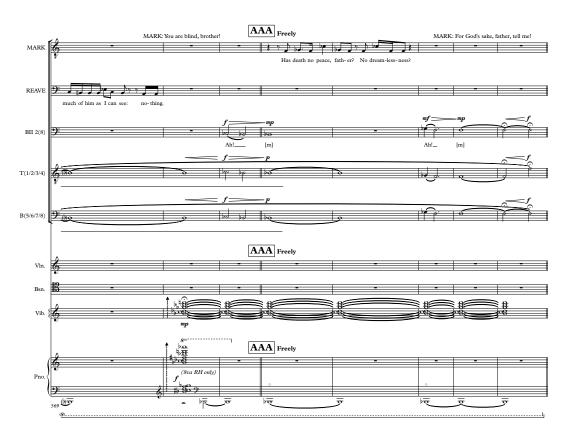












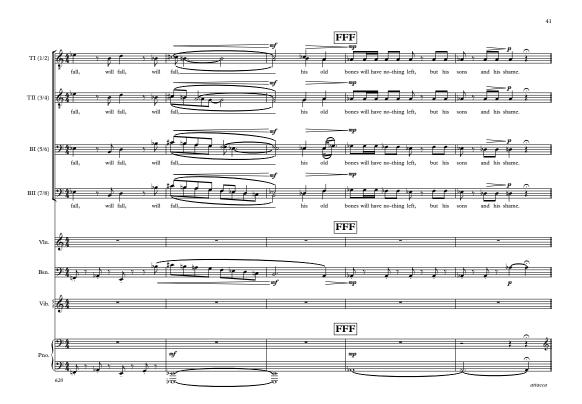












THURSO'S LANDING Excerpt from II.iic - REAVE, ENSEMBLE "What engines did my father use"

JESSICA A. HUNT (b. 1987)

libretto adapted from the poem Thurso's Landing
by ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887-1962)

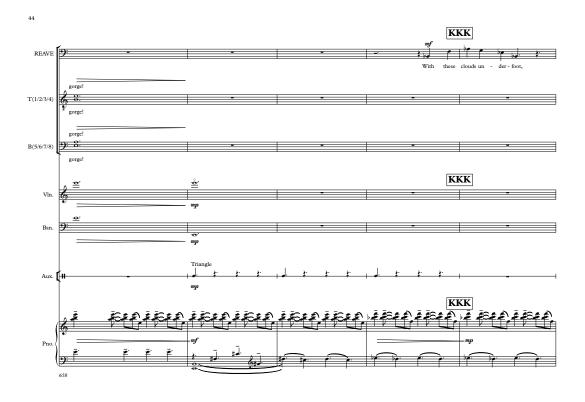


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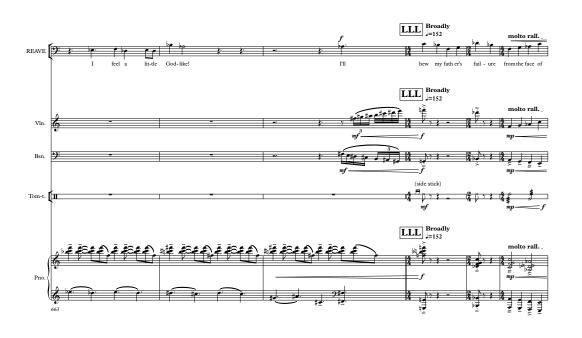


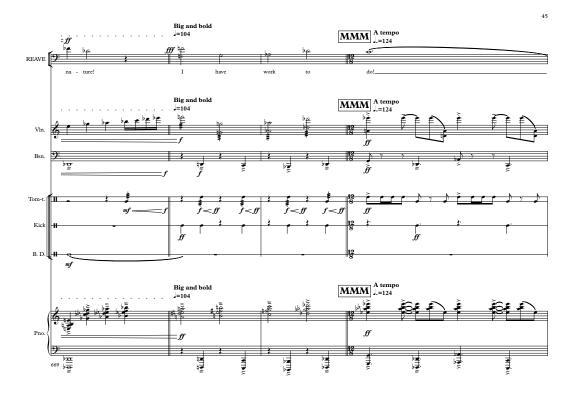
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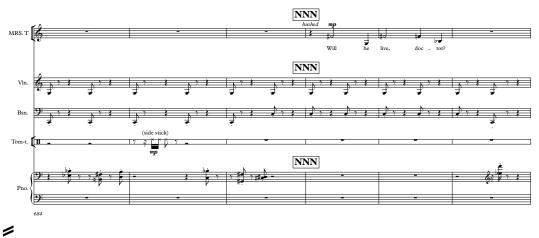


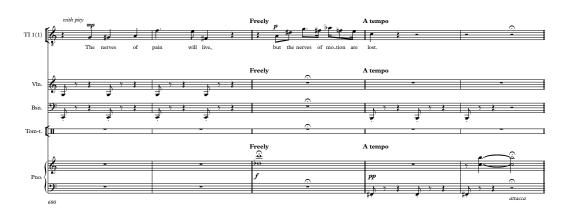




THURSO'S LANDING
Transition & Excerpt from II.iiia - HELEN, REAVE, MRS. THURSO, DOCTOR, ORDERLIES
"The nerves of pain will live, but the nerves of motion are lost"

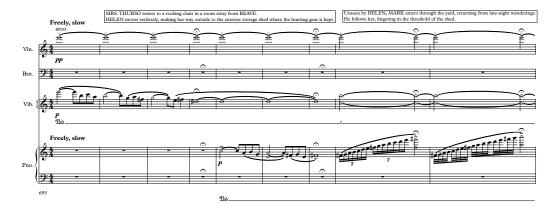




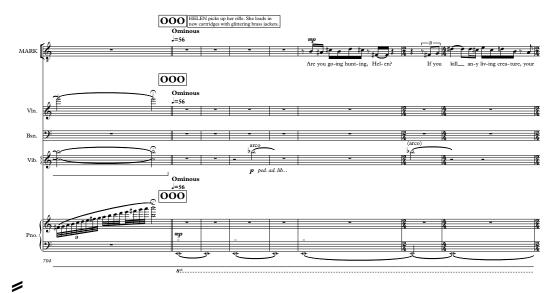


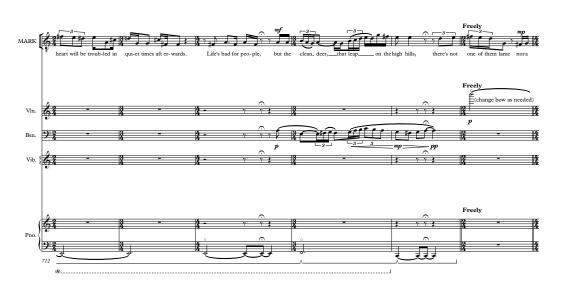
THURSO'S LANDING
Excerpts from II.iiid - HELEN & MARK
"Are you going hunting, Helen?"/"Horrible dreams of love"

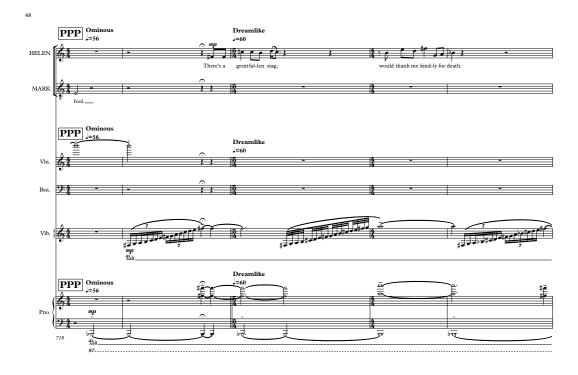
JESSICA A. HUNT (b. 1987) pretto adapted from the poem *Thurso's Landing* by ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887-1962)

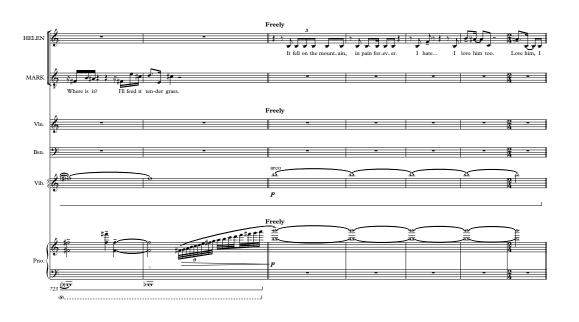


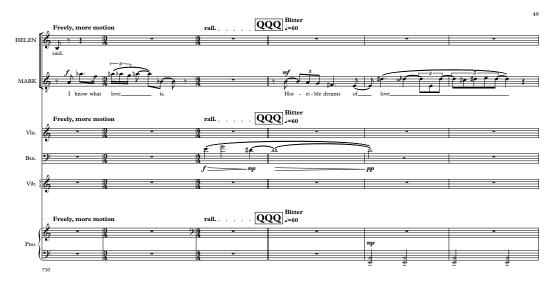








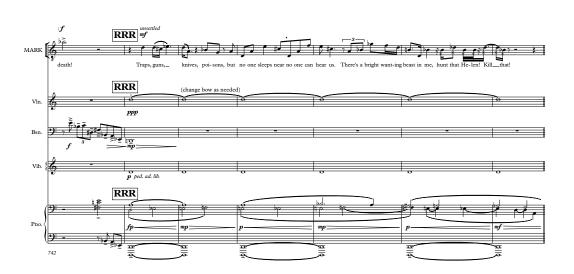


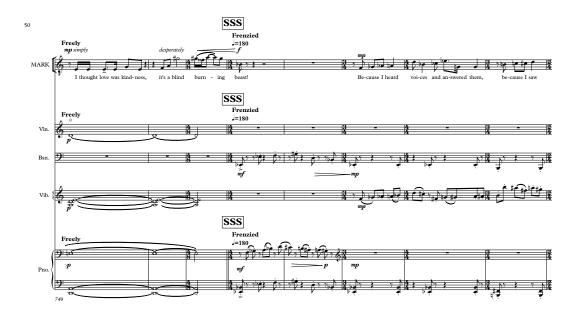










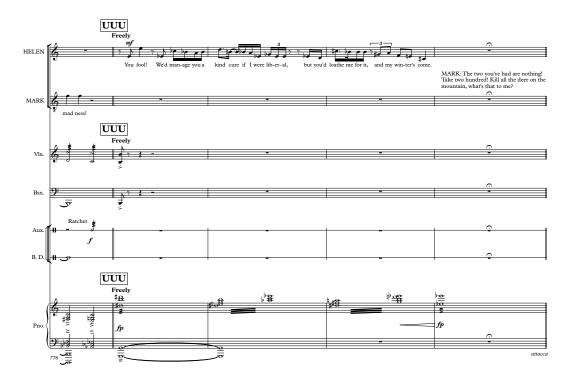




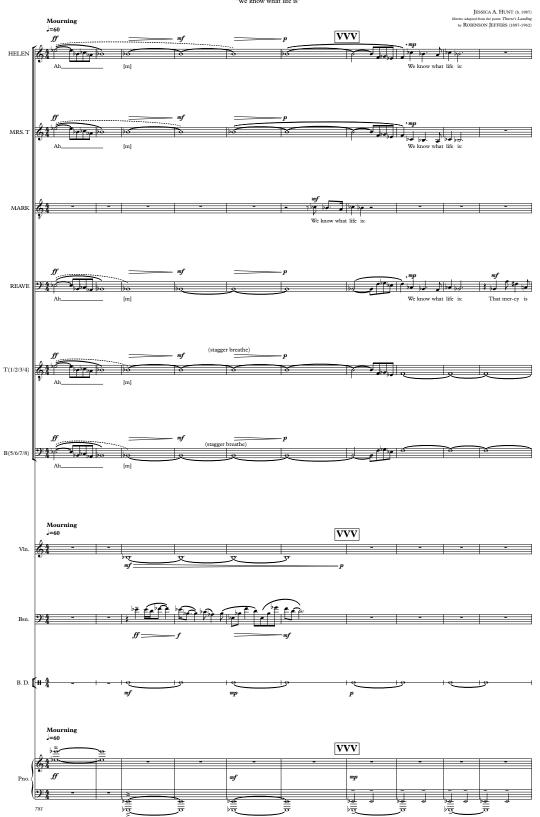




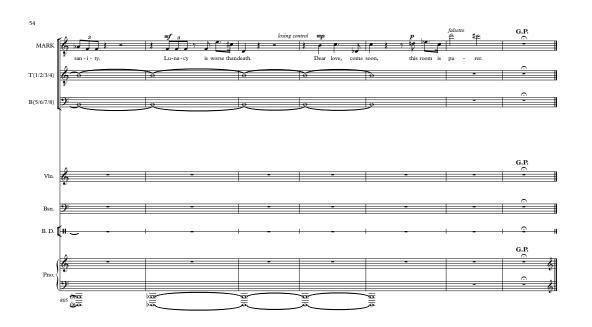
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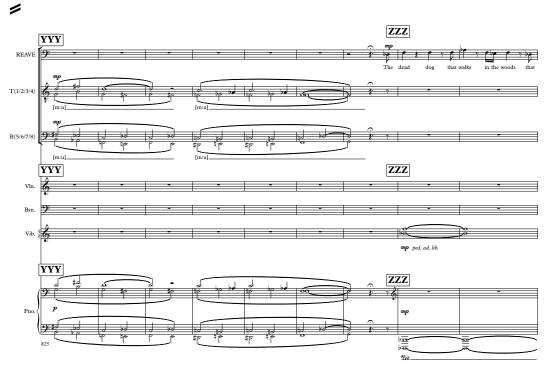
THURSO'S LANDING Excerpt from II.iiie - MARK, REAVE, HELEN, MRS. THURSO & O.S. ENSEMBLE "We know what life is"



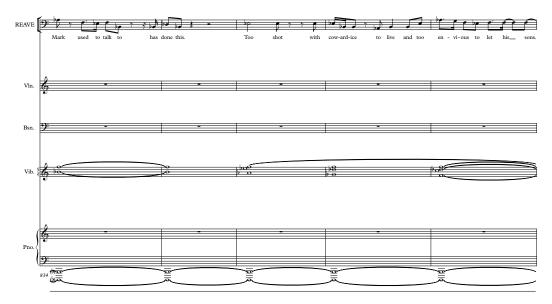




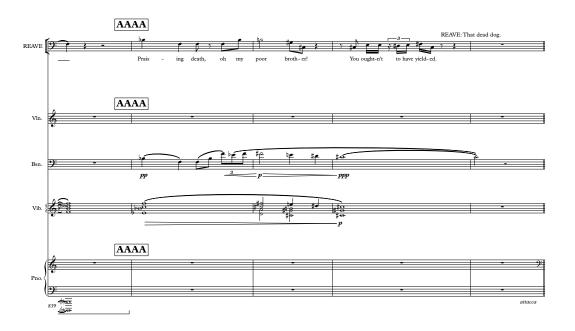






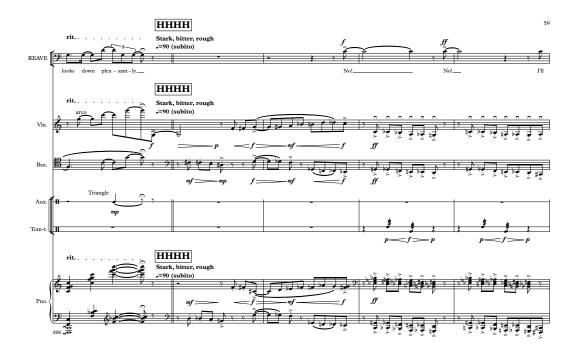










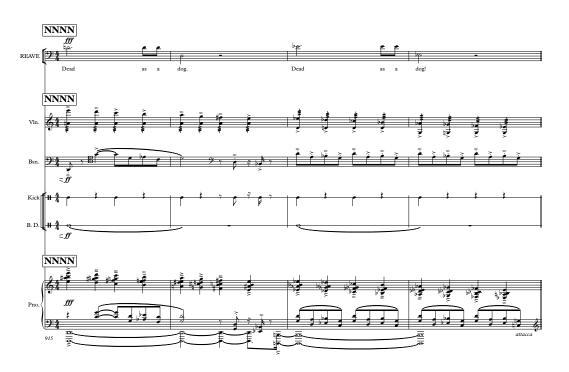








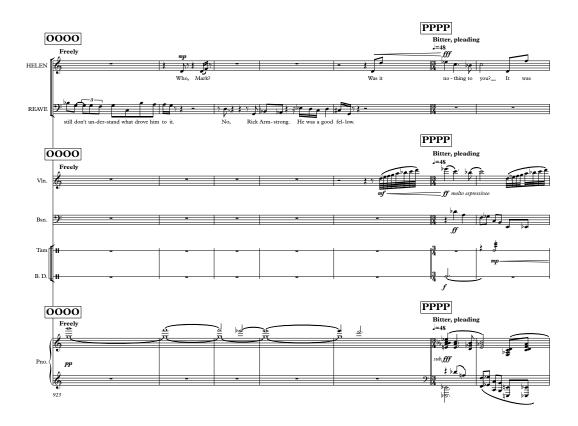


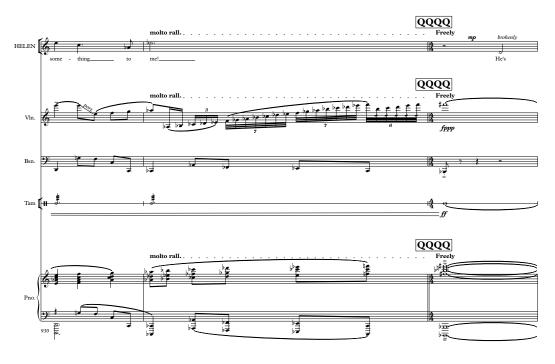


THURSO'S LANDING II.ivc - HELEN & REAVE "D'ya see that star?"

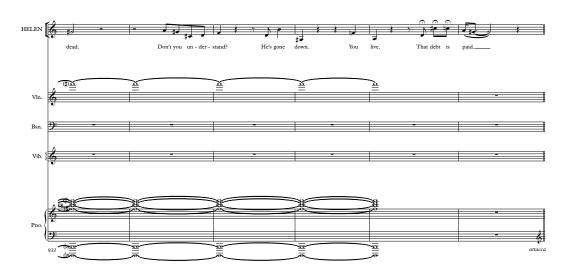
JESSICA A. HUNT (b. 1987) libretto adapted from the poem *Thurso's Landing* by ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887-1962) Haunted =60 HELEN: What? HELEN: There's no star, Reave. HELEN (Drawing his hand over his eyes) REAVE: No star? None? REAVE: D'ya see that star? REAVE: The star. REAVE Haunted ==60 Vln. Vib. (cut off on the word "thousands") Haunted ==60 炒窑 sub.**pp** (cut off on the word "thousands







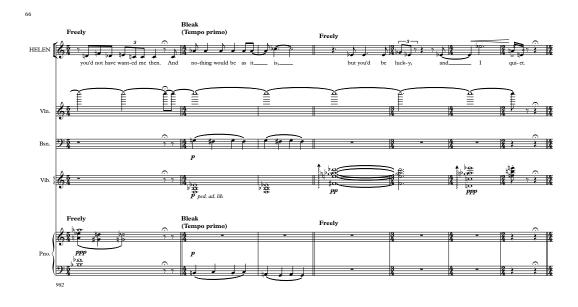




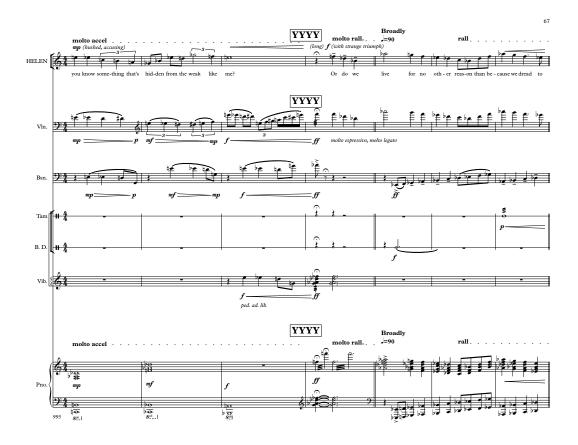
JESSICA A. HUNT (b. 1987)
libretto adapted from the poem Thurso's Landing
by ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887-1962)

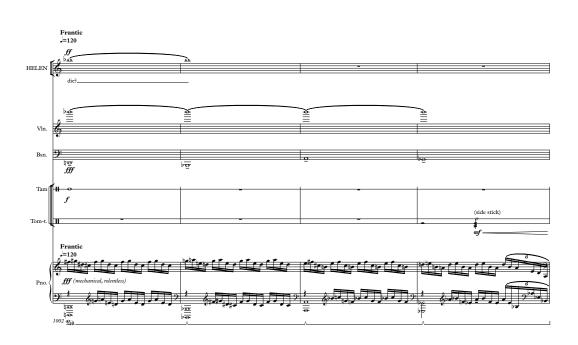




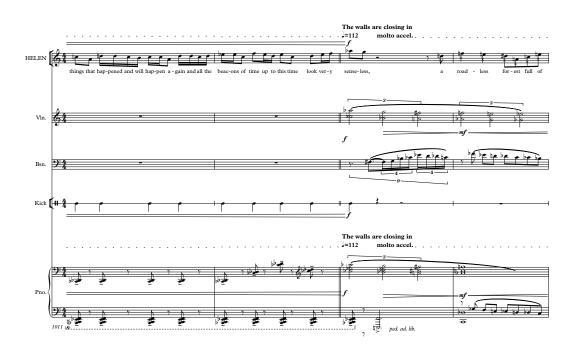




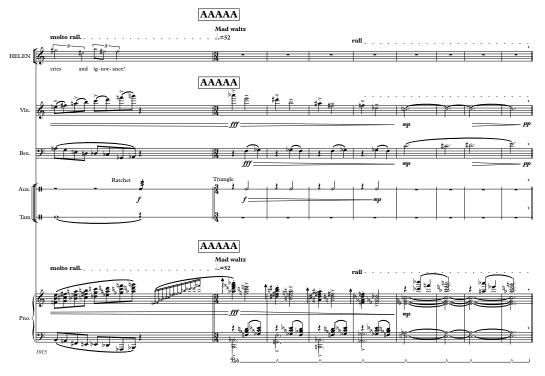




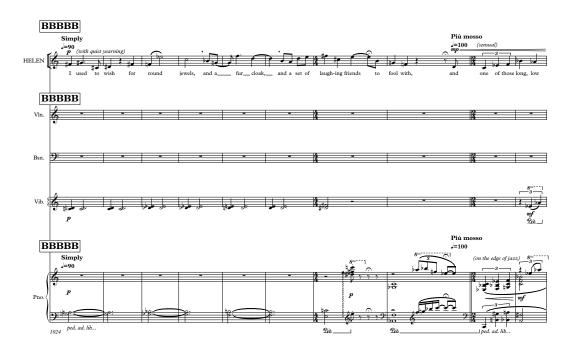


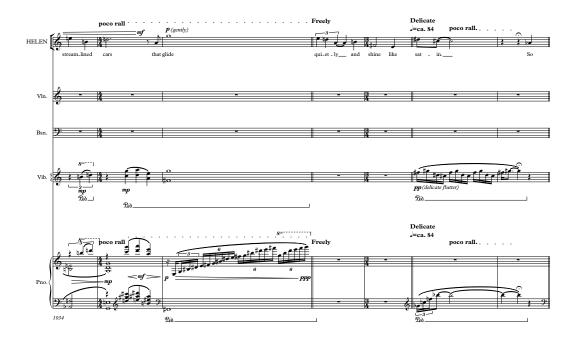


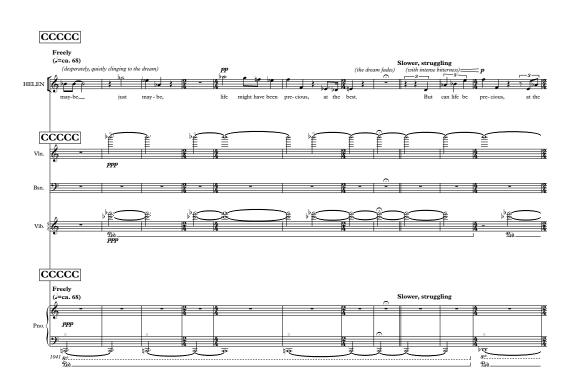




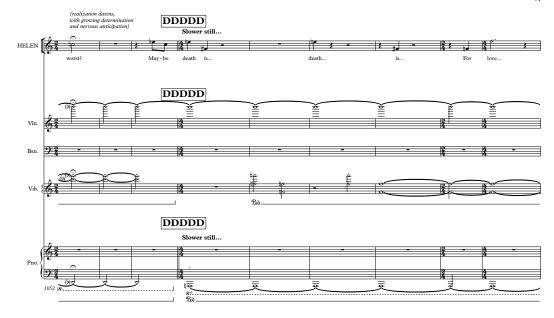




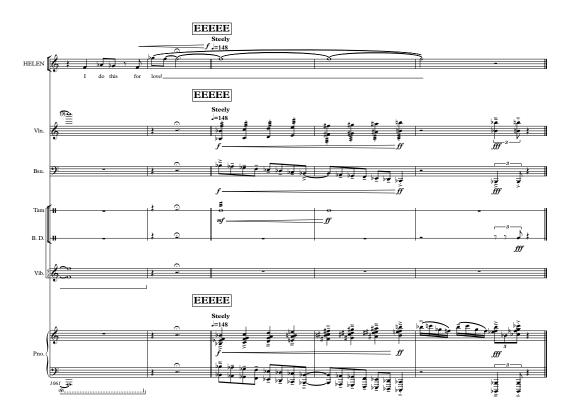












APPENDIX

Audio & Video Documentation

Audio and video documentation of a live performance of *Scenes from Thurso's Landing* that took place on Saturday March 30, 2019 at 5:30pm in Stamps Auditorium (in the Walgreen Drama Center on campus at the University of Michigan) may be accessed online at the following URL: https://shwca.se/ScenesfromThurso'sLanding_JessicaHunt_3.30.19. Please note that excerpts requiring chorus roles have been either omitted or altered from the live recordings featured at the link above.

MIDI realizations of the material omitted or altered from the above live performance may be accessed at the following URL: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ptotusynya5nb7v/
AAAjXaHIZ9UN906iLbn8z8DZa?dl=0.

In the case of a broken link, please email <u>info@jessicahuntmusic.com</u>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hunt, Tim, ed., 1928-1938. Vol. 2 of *The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989.

——— Textual Evidence and Commentary. Vol. 5 of The Collected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.