

# **MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN**

**The New American Musical  
By  
Rockwell & Rose**

Music by Eric Rockwell \* Book & Lyrics by Margaret Rose

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## SETTING

**The action takes place on the American Frontier, from Missouri to California, from the Spring of 1846 through the Spring of 1847.**

It is intended the musical be played on a unit set, with scenic props and elements which are moved around by the characters to establish the ever-changing locales, allowing the action to flow seamlessly from scene to scene.

### ACT ONE

A single covered wagon represents all the wagons the travelers took on their journey. As the play progresses, the wagon is dismantled piece by piece, as the pieces are used for other purposes and eventually discarded.

### ACT TWO

Only remnants of the set props remain, and these have been rearranged to represent improvised shelter in the mountains. Much of the action takes place in the Mountain Camp just east of the summit. Additional action takes place on the western slopes of the Sierras; at times action takes place in both locations simultaneously. A few times, we glimpse one character, alone, in the settlements of the Central Valley.

### EPILOGUE

An ideal Spring day in the abundant vegetation and pristine weather of California's Central Valley.

## CHARACTERS

### The Men

#### **Reed**

*James Reed. Wealthy farmer and entrepreneur of Protestant Irish descent, traveling with his wife Margaret, three children, and his mother-in-law. Age 38. Voice: Bari-tenor C3-G4*

#### **Donner**

*George Donner. Friend of Reed, traveling with his wife Tamsen and 5 daughters. Age 53. Voice: Baritone Bb2-F4*

#### **Keseberg**

*Luke Keseberg. German immigrant, traveling with his wife and infant son. Age 40. Voice: Bass-Baritone Bb2-F4*

#### **Charlie**

*Charlie Stanton. Single man, a writer, a friend of George Donner's. Age 25. Voice: Baritone C3-F4*

#### **Patrick**

*Patrick Dolan. Irish immigrant, happy-go-lucky, traveling with the Breens. Age 30. Voice: Tenor C3-Ab4*

#### **John**

*John Snyder. Strong, hard working teamster for the Graves family. Age 26. Voice: Baritone C3-E4*

#### **Luke**

*Luke Halloran. A Northeastern shopkeeper, traveling alone and terminally ill. Age 57. Voice: Baritone B2-E4*

#### **Tommy**

*Tommy Reed. Son of James Reed, age 8. Voice: Mezzo Bb3-Db5*

### The Women

#### **Margaret**

*Margaret Reed. Wife of James Reed, traveling with their three children and her mother Sarah Keyes. Age 36. Voice: Soprano/Belt C4-G5*

#### **Tamsen**

*Tamsen Donner. Wife of George Donner, traveling with their five daughters. Age 42. Voice: Mezzo-Soprano F3-E5*

#### **Sarah**

*Sarah Keyes. Margaret's mother, of declining health. Age 68. Voice: Belt F#3-Db5*

#### **Mary Ann**

*Mary Ann Graves. Young woman traveling with her parents and their large family. Age 22. Voice: Soprano B3-E5*

#### **Peggy**

*Peggy Breen. Irish Catholic, pregnant, traveling with her husband and six sons. Age 36. Voice: Belt Ab3-C5*

#### **Virginia**

*Virginia Reed. James and Margaret's teenage daughter Age 13. Voice: Mezzo-Soprano Bb3-Db5*

#### **Patty**

*Patty Reed. James and Margaret's young daughter. Age 9. Voice: Mezzo-Soprano Bb3-Db5*

#### **Frances**

*Frances Donner. George and Tamsen's young daughter. Age 6. Voice: Mezzo-Soprano C4-D5*

MUSICAL SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

"The Hymn / The Jumping Off Point" ..... Donner and Company  
"Wagons Roll" ..... Reed and Company  
"The Logic of the Lupine" ..... Tamsen  
"Hymn for Sarah" ..... Company  
"Waltz on the Prairie With Me" ..... Charlie & Mary Ann  
"A Thousand Miles From Home" ..... Company  
"The Shortcut Square" ..... Donner, Company, & Keseberg  
"Only One Man" ..... Reed & The Men  
"He's The Man I Chose" ... Margaret, Tamsen, Peggy, Mary Ann  
"What Good Is A Box To A Dead Man?" ..... The Men  
"Hymn For Luke" ..... Company  
"Wagons Roll," reprise ..... Children and Company  
"He's The Man I Chose," reprise ..... Mary Ann  
"The Truth" ..... Keseberg  
"We Walk The Same Road" ..... Reed & Margaret  
"Falling Apart" ..... Company  
"Just Me" ..... Margaret  
"Charlie's Return" ..... Charlie  
"Believe" ..... Company

ACT TWO

"Meet Your Mountain" ..... Sarah, Luke, & John  
"Just Me," reprise ..... Margaret  
"Pull Yourself Up By The Bootstraps" ..... Charlie & Company  
"What Little Hope We Have" ..... Company  
"I'm All In" ..... Donner  
"A Christmas Yet To Come" ..... Margaret, Children, & Reed  
"The Endless Hunger" ..... Company  
"Full Of Life" ..... Tamsen and Company  
"Give Me More" ..... Reed  
"Hymn," reprise ..... Frances and Company  
"A Thousand Miles From Home," reprise ..... Reed and Donner  
"Wagon's Roll," reprise ..... Reed, The Children, & Margaret  
"We Walk The Same Road," reprise ..... Reed & Margaret  
"Epilogue / Full Of Life," reprise ..... Company  
Bows / "Meet Your Mountain," reprise ..... Company

ACT ONE: SCENE ONE

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI IN THE SPRING OF 1846.

*(A covered wagon sits on stage in front of a warm neutral background, the icon of the Westward Movement.*

*The lights dim to black. From the darkness we hear the woosh of a GUST OF WIND and the tinkling of a windchime. Then, from the silence, 16 voices sing in hushed anticipation.)*

**Music: OPENING HYMN**

PIONEERS  
OUR JOURNEY WILL NOT END  
WITH HEAVEN ON OUR SIDE  
WE ASK, O LORD, TO BLESS THIS ROAD  
AND FAITH TO BE OUR GUIDE

*(Music segues and the lighting brightens to a springtime morning, as the stage bursts with action. The Pioneers enter, carrying supplies to pack for their journey.*

*The stage becomes filled with crates, barrels, bolts of fabric, tools, clothing, saddles, bottles of wine, books, quilts, and all the "stuff" which the Pioneers will ultimately lose during their journey. The supplies are piled and arranged everywhere - on the wagon, inside the wagon, spilling out from the wagon, on the ground in stacks and in piles. These stacks and piles create levels and playing areas for the action which unfolds throughout the act.)*

**Music: THE JUMPING OFF POINT**

*(Donner and Charlie enter. Donner carries a crate filled with*

*supplies; Charlie carries a barrel.  
Tamsen follows behind carrying a  
stack of books.)*

DONNER

The choice is yours, Charlie.  
*(He puts the crate down)*

CHARLIE

And my choice is to remain here.

DONNER

*(Spreading his arms wide to survey  
the surroundings)*  
Independence, Missouri ain't a destination!  
*(He sings)*

-- AND IT AIN'T A PLACE TO STAY  
WON'T YOU COME WITH ME  
WHERE WE BOTH WILL SEE  
THE DAWN OF A BRAND NEW DAY?!

C'mon, you're at "The Jumping Off Point!..."

*(Tamsen sets down the books and  
exits for another load, while  
Charlie stacks the barrel with the  
other supplies near the wagon)*

CHARLIE

Yes, but I'm not inclined to jump!

DONNER

THE JUMPING OFF POINT, WHERE OUR JOURNEY STARTS  
COME ALONG, OR STAY AND WEEP  
THERE'S A WORLD OUT THERE  
IF YOU'LL ONLY DARE  
TO PART WITH YOUR PAST, AND LEAP!

CHARLIE

George Donner, do you consider me a civilized man?

DONNER

Yessiree!

CHARLIE

--Therefore I don't belong in California!

*(They laugh. As they exit, the Reed  
children enter gleefully with  
packages, singing. Margaret  
interrupts their song when she sees*

*Virginia's attire. Virginia wears a man's fringed leather coat -- or some other masculine clothing matching what James Reed wears)*

VIRGINIA / TOMMY / PATTY  
THE JUMPING OFF POINT, WHERE OUR JOURNEY STARTS  
COME ALONG, OR STAY AND --

MARGARET  
Virginia Reed! What are you wearing?

VIRGINIA  
I'm ready for life on the trail, Mama!

MARGARET  
We'll only be "on the trail" for six months.

VIRGINIA  
Papa says I can ride my pony all the way there!

MARGARET  
Don't be silly!

VIRGINIA  
Papa says we'll be roughing it and --

MARGARET  
Your father and the menfolk will be "roughing it,"  
*(She removes the masculine jacket from Virginia)*

BUT YOU AND I AND THE LITTLE ONES  
WILL BE RIDING IN STYLE  
LIKE GRACIOUS GENTLEMEN AND LADIES

*(She adjusts the bonnet on Patty, and tucks in Tommy's shirt, as she now speaks earnestly to her children)*

We may be moving to a wild, unsettled land--  
*(She sings)*

BUT WE DON'T NEED TO LET THAT CHANGE  
WHO WE ARE

*(John and Mary Ann enter; John is carrying Mary Ann's packages)*

JOHN

Cheer up, Mary Ann! Ol' Man Graves -- I'm mean, your father! He's a smart man. *(music)* He chose this move 'cause it's the best thing for your family.

*(John sets down the packages and exits)*

MARY ANN

Walking on a dusty trail across prairies, deserts, and mountains -- it's not what I would choose.

*(She sings, slowly, pondering...)*

THE JUMPING OFF POINT, AND I HAVE TO JUMP  
SINCE I CAN'T STAY HERE ALONE  
BUT I FEAR IN MY HEART  
WE'RE ABOUT TO START  
DOWN A PATH THAT IS NOT MY OWN

*(Mary Ann exits, as Donner enters, carrying Frances, whom he sets on top of a large barrel.)*

DONNER

Yessiree, little Frances! We'll be in California before you know it!

*(Donner gives her a quick tweak on the nose and turns to exit for more supplies. Tamsen has entered, carrying more supplies, and the two stop in their errands for a moment together.)*

TAMSEN

George Donner, I'm happy you decided we should go.

*(Donner gives her a quick kiss and exits as Tamsen moves on to store the supplies she carries.)*

FRANCES

Are we there yet?

**Music: WAGONS ROLL!**



*(Donner's booming voice is heard calling out, from offstage)*

DONNER  
*(Offstage)*  
 Wagons, roll!

JOHN  
*(Offstage)*  
 Wagons, roll!

REED  
*(Entering)*  
 WAGONS ROLL!  
 THAT'S THE CALL THAT'S BEEN RINGING IN MY HEART  
 WAGONS ROLL!  
 CAN'T STOP GRINNIN 'CAUSE TODAY IT'S TIME TO START  
 AND AT LAST  
 WHEN WE STEP OUT ON THE TRAIL THE DIE IS CAST  
 AFTER LONG ANTICIPATION  
 HOPE YOU'LL PARDON MY ELATION  
 ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL!

*(John has entered from a different direction, with supplies to add to the wagon)*

JOHN  
 I'VE BEEN WAITING MY WHOLE LIFE FOR THIS!

REED  
*(Extending his hand, and the two men shake hands)*  
 PLEASED TO MEET A KINDRED SOUL!

*(Extending his hand)*  
 NAME'S JAMES REED

*(Shaking hands)*

JOHN  
 JOHN SNYDER

REED / JOHN  
 GLAD TO KNOW YOU AS OUR WAGONS ROLL!

*(Charlie has entered with Donner, both carrying tools)*

CHARLIE

Your enthusiasm's infectious, George! But my answer remains, "No, nothing on God's earth could persuade me to leave civilization and head west."

*(Charlie and Donner exit, as a pregnant Peggy Breen has entered, carrying a kettle and kitchen utensils. Patrick rushes over to her.)*

PATRICK

PUT THAT DOWN, MRS. BREEN  
FOR THE LOVE OF PETE!  
A WOMAN IN YOUR CONDITION  
SHOULD HEED THIS ADMONITION:  
STAY OFF YOUR FEET!

PEGGY

Now, Patrick, you've been a friend to our family a long time; you should know by now:

*(Shaking a ladle in Patricks' face to punctuate her words)*

I AIN'T AFRAID OF A CHORE  
MANY TIMES I'VE GIVEN BIRTH BEFORE  
*(Counting on her fingers)*

THERE WAS PETER, SIMON, JAMES, AND JOHN  
GOOD LORD! THE LIST GOES ON AND ON  
*(continuing to count)*

... AND ON!

SO NOW THAT I'M WITH CHILD AGAIN  
STAY OFF MY FEET, YOU SAY!  
BUT THAT'S THE VERY THING THAT PUT  
ME IN THE "FAMILY WAY"!

*(Reed enters, assisting the weak Sarah Keyes)*

SARAH

I didn't come on this trip to be a burden! I came to be a help!

MARGARET

Mother, you shouldn't have come on this trip at all!

SARAH

Nonsense! You wouldn't last five days on this trail without me!

MARGARET

Go back home and stay in Springfield, where you'll be comfortable.

SARAH

Comfortable?! Margaret! Did you look inside our wagon?!

*(She sings)*

AIN'T YOU SEEN?

HE HAS MADE A FEATHER BED FIT FOR A QUEEN

I'LL BE COMFY AS I SET THERE

SO JUST WAKE ME WHEN WE GET THERE

ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL!

VIRGINIA / TOMMY / PATTY

WAGONS ROLL!

VIRGINIA

DO YOU THINK WE'LL SEE IND'IANS, DO YOU KNOW?

REED / SARAH / MARGARET

WAGONS ROLL!

SARAH

WE'LL SEE IND'IANS!

REED

WE'LL SEE DESERTS!

MARGARET

WE'LL SEE SNOW!

REED

AND WHAT'S MORE

AS WE SEIZE THIS NEW ADVENTURE THAT'S IN STORE

ALL THE REED FAMILY

IF WE COME ON STORMY WEATHER

WE WILL WEATHER IT TOGETHER

ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL!

*(Margaret puts her hand to her forehead, wincing in pain)*

SARAH

What's wrong, Margaret?

MARGARET

Just one of my headaches, Mother.

REED

One breath of that California air will cure you of these blasted attacks! You shouldn't have to suffer through such pain!

MARGARET

"SHALL WE RECEIVE BLESSINGS AT THE HAND OF GOD AND SHALL WE NOT RECEIVE EVIL?"

REED

Children, your mother is quoting from the Book of Job.

SARAH

Yes, the story of Job is a great comfort. To think that no matter how bad you have it, God might have even worse in store!

*(Peggy and Patrick enter, carrying supplies)*

PEGGY

Did you see the size of that Reed family wagon?!

PATRICK

Well, the Reeds may have all the wealth... but I tell you: Patrick Dolan has all the luck!

*(he sings)*

WAGONS ROLL!

PEGGY

I'M AFRAID WE'LL BE NEEDING MORE THAN LUCK!

PATRICK

WAGONS ROLL!

PEGGY

FOR WITHOUT A BIT OF MUSCLE WE'LL BE STUCK!  
WHILE I PRAY  
THAT ST. CHRISTOPHER WILL BLESS US ON THE WAY

PEGGY AND PATRICK

WHAT I'M MOST ANTICIPATING  
IS THE PROMISED LAND THAT'S WAITING  
ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL!

*(Tamsen and Margaret are arranging supplies at the wagon)*

TAMSEN

Can you keep a secret, Margaret?

MARGARET

Yes, of course.

TAMSEN

GEORGE THINKS IT WAS HIS DECISION  
FOR US TO GO TO CALIFORNIA  
BUT IT WAS MINE

MARGARET

Tamsen, that's preposterous! Why would you want to leave home?

TAMSEN

Do you know, in California there are trees that are 250 feet tall? And I have a chance to see them with my own eyes!... I couldn't be happy if I passed that up.

*(From the other side of the supply piles, Donner gazes at his wife)*

DONNER

I DON'T CARE IF I'M HERE OR THERE  
AS LONG AS I AM HERE OR THERE -- WITH HER  
THIS NEW ROAD MIGHT LEAD ANYWHERE  
BUT I'LL GO ANYWHERE -- FOR HER

WAGONS ROLL!  
ON THE TRAIL WITH THE ONES I HOLD MOST DEAR

KESEBERG

WAGONS ROLL!  
ON A TRAIL TO TAKE ME FAR AWAY FROM HERE

JOHN

AIN'T IT GRAND?!  
IN THE TERRITORY I CAN OWN SOME LAND!

PATRICK

AS FOR ME I HAVE A NOTION  
TO BE SPLASHING IN THE OCEAN

ALL

ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL!

WAGONS ROLL!

KESEBERG

THERE'S A PLACE I CAN LIVE WITHOUT REGRET

ALL

WAGONS ROLL!

KESEBERG

I KEEP LOOKING 'CAUSE I HAVEN'T FOUND IT YET!

MARY ANN

COULD IT BE?

THAT THIS JOURNEY WILL PROVE WONDERFUL FOR ME?

I MAY FIND SOMETHING EXCITING

MARY ANN / KESEBERG

DARE I EVEN HOPE, INVITING?

*(Virginia sneaks over to where  
Margaret left the buckskin coat,  
and sings as she swirls it around  
her shoulders and puts it on again)*

SMALL GROUP

ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL!

*(Tamsen and Charlie enter, adding  
more items to the stacks of  
supplies that have now filled the  
stage)*

TAMSEN

Mr. Stanton, what's wonderful about choices is we're always free to make a new one.

CHARLIE

*(Laughing at her persistence)*

I will miss your family, Tamsen Donner! But nothing -- nothing -- can prompt me to go --

*(He notices Mary Ann)*

TAMSEN

Well, you stay here, then.

*(She sings, as Frances scampers up  
with a bouquet of fresh-picked  
asters, which she gives to Tamsen.)*

BUT I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO THE JOURNEY  
THE FLOWERS, THE FOLIAGE, THE TREES  
I FEEL IT MY DUTY  
TO STUDY THINGS OF BEAUTY  
TO LEARN OF THE THINGS THAT PLEASE  
LIKE THESE

TAMSEN (cont'd)

*(She holds out the flowers to show to him, and then presses them into her scrapbook, whose pages are already filled with pressed flowers)*

Can you understand that, Mr. Stanton?

*(Charlie doesn't respond; he still stares at Mary Ann)*

DONNER

*(Entering, carrying supplies)*

Ain't no use, Tammy. Charlie Stanton's a stubborn mule an' dang it if he don't insist that --

CHARLIE

--I'm going with you!

DONNER

--he's staying here!

DONNER

*(a double-take of surprise)*

-- going with us?!

FRANCES

Mr. Charlie's coming with us?

TAMSEN

I guess he is! Though I'm not sure why...

DONNER

But, you were goin' to stay here!

CHARLIE

*(Singing slowly at first, then at tempo)*

WHEN YOU'VE MADE THE WRONG SELECTION  
YOU CAN ALWAYS CHANGE DIRECTION

*(Charlie takes another glance at Mary Ann then exits to get his bags. The full company joins in singing, as the final preparations are completed)*

ALL

WAGONS ROLL!  
HOW I'VE DREAMT OF THE PLACE WE'RE HEADED TO  
WAGONS ROLL!  
MAY I LIVE TO SEE THE DAY MY DREAM COMES TRUE  
WE DON'T KNOW  
WHAT THE ROAD AHEAD WILL BRING US BUT WE GO!

*(Charlie re-enters, packed and ready to go)*

TAMSEN / CHARLIE  
TO DISCOVER THINGS OF BEAUTY

REED / VIRGINIA / PATRICK / SARAH  
TO EXPLORE WHAT'S THERE TO SEE

MARGARET / LUKE  
TO FIND HEALTH

JOHN / KESEBERG / PEGGY  
TO MAKE WEALTH

ALL  
TO BE FREE  
TO LIVE AND BREATHE AND WORK AND EAT  
AND PRAY AND LOVE AND DREAM  
WE GO --  
ROLL OUT!  
WE GO --  
ROLL ON!  
WE GO--  
WAGONS ROLL!

*(Lighting transitions to following scene)*



SCENE TWO

*(A week later. The company is camped for the evening and the lights focus on Reed and Donner, who are playing poker with John and Keseberg. Tamsen sits nearby, pressing wildflowers into a scrapbook as Frances looks on.)*

JOHN

*(Shuffling the cards)*

Ante up, fellas! Last hand!

*(The men each put in a quarter)*

DONNER

One more chance to win it all back from Reed!

JOHN

*(As he deals the cards)*

Ol' Man Graves is joinin' up with the Russell Party.

REED

Graves is a smart man. It's a great advantage to travel with a large company.

TAMSEN

Why?

*(Donner and Reed look over to her as the poker game continues with the first round of bets and the draw, under the following)*

Why is traveling with a large group an advantage?

DONNER

Tamsen, the advantage is obvious, ain't it?

TAMSEN

No. A large wagon train is slower.

REED

Why do you think that?

TAMSEN

Observation, Mr. Reed! We've made fifty miles in less than a week, despite all the rain. The Russell Party left Independence well before us, and we've already caught up with them.

DONNER

Well, dang it, that's true! Um... But still, the advantages are obvious: ...

*(Unable to think of any, he turns to Reed)*

Tell her 'bout the advantages!

*(Reed hesitates just a beat, then ignores Tamsen and continues the game)*

REED

Raise you four bits.

*(All look to Donner)*

DONNER

*(Sighs, and puts down his cards)*

I fold.

KESEBERG

No surprise.

*(The men chuckle, affectionately)*

DONNER

Just not gettin' the cards.

REED

*(Speaking to the men, knowing Tamsen is listening)*

We're coming up on Indian country. A large wagon train won't be attacked.

TAMSEN

The fact is the Indians will give us safe passage if we give them something in trade.

REED

But some tribes can be savage.

TOMMY

*(Entering excitedly)*

Papa! Papa! Me and Virginia found a big ol' beehive in a cottonwood tree!

REED

Well, son, you just leave 'em well enough alone.

TAMSEN

Yes, Tommy --

TAMSEN (cont'd)

*(With a meaningful look to Reed)*

--if you don't bother them, they won't bother you.

*(Tommy exits)*

REED

George, we'll apply to Russell after this hand.

*(Keseberg reveals his hand)*

KESEBERG

Pair. Jacks.

JOHN

*(folding his cards)*

That takes it.

*(Keseberg about to take the pot--)*

REED

Wait.

*(Laying out his cards)*

Three of kind.

KESEBERG

*(Slamming down his fist and standing up to leave)*

Damn!

*(John and Keseberg exit. Reed scoops up his latest winnings)*

REED

*(To Donner)*

I keep tellin' you ... if you want to win the game, you gotta be willing to take a risk.

*(He exits, and Donner follows.)*

DONNER

I dunno James, that seems kinda .. uh ... risky.

FRANCES

Mama, why don't you like Mr. Reed?

TAMSEN

On the contrary, Sweetpea, I like him very much.

FRANCES

He don't act like he likes you very much.

TAMSEN

*(picks up another flower)*

It's because I respect him that I challenge his notions.

FRANCES

He don't like it when you do that.

***Music: THE LOGIC OF THE LUPINE***

TAMSEN

No, there aren't many people who think the way your mama does. Take this wildflower ...

A PURPLE BLOSSOM STANDING TALL  
IS ALL THAT YOU CAN SEE  
IT BRIGHTENS A DUSTY WORLD  
BUT SOMETHING ELSE IS CLEAR TO ME:

THERE IS BEAUTY IN THE LOGIC OF THE LUPINE  
AN EXQUISITE SYSTEMATIC GRAND DESIGN  
EV'RY SEEDLING WILL FULFILL ITS BEST POTENTIAL  
IT'S A FACT THAT'S SCIENTIFICALLY DIVINE!

IT'S PREDICTABLE, THE LOGIC OF THE LUPINE  
THERE'S AN OUTCOME YOU ASSUREDLY FORETELL  
BY EVALUATING ALL OF THE CONDITIONS  
AND WHAT'S WRITTEN IN THE CODE OF EV'RY CELL

AND OH! IT'S NOT THE SAME WITH PEOPLE  
ALL LOGIC THEY DEFY  
THEY WILL ACT ON WHIM AND EMOTION  
WITHOUT GOOD REASON WHY

I FIND COMFORT IN THE LOGIC OF THE LUPINE  
WITH A FLOWER I CAN KNOW WHAT IT WILL DO  
WE'RE AFRAID OF THE UNKNOWN, UNCERTAIN FUTURE  
BUT THE FLOWERS, EV'RY SPRINGTIME, WILL RENEW  
YES, THE FLOWERS, EV'RY SPRINGTIME, WILL RENEW

*(The lights fade)*

SCENE THREE

*(Two weeks later. Lights brighten on the men, wiping sweat from their brows from their heavy work. Charlie crosses from offstage right, carrying a large log balanced on his shoulder. He is followed by Keseberg, also balancing a heavy log, as Donner enters from stage left, empty handed)*

DONNER

*(Crossing left to right)*

A few more logs and we'll have enough to build the dang rafts!

CHARLIE

*(Crossing right to left)*

Three weeks - unrelenting rain! And now this!

KESEBERG

A flooded river. What'd you expect, a stroll in the sunshine?

DONNER

*(Exiting right)*

That's right, y'all! We'll get our wagons over it!

*(Charlie has exited stage left with his log. Keseberg follows him off left as Patrick and John enter from stage right, both carrying logs. Patrick struggles under the weight of his log, while John follows easily with his own log)*

JOHN

Patrick! It's easier if you carry that from one end. Move on up to the front of your log!

*(Patrick adjusts his log so he is holding only the front end of the log, while unseen by Patrick, John has reached a hand out to easily support the back end of Patrick's log while still carrying his own. Immediately Patrick straightens up and they continue crossing)*

PATRICK

*(Oblivious to the assistance from John)*

Glory be! You're right, John! So much easier!

*(They exit stage left with their logs as Reed and Donner cross from stage right to stage left, carrying another log and some tools)*

REED

We might be delayed here a bit longer, George.

DONNER

Margaret's mother...?

REED

*(Nodding)*

'Fraid she's not long for this world.

DONNER

You jus' keep her comfortable. We'll wait as long as you need.

*(The men exit to their work, revealing Sarah, who is laying down, surrounded by the Reed children)*

SARAH

*(Near death)*

Margaret?

PATTY

No, Grandma. It's me -- Patty.

SARAH

I want to give you something, dear.

*(Sarah hands Patty a little doll)*

Now you take good care of her, Patty Reed.

PATTY

I promise, Grandma.

*(Hugging the doll tightly)*

I'm going to call her Sarah, after you!

SARAH

Where's that brother of yours?

TOMMY

I'm here!

SARAH

I've something for you, too! But shhhh, now! It's a secret!  
*(She hands Tommy a small packet)*  
 Seeds, Tommy. Sunflower seeds, you plant in California.

TOMMY

*(Puts his finger to his mouth in a "shhhh!" gesture. He whispers, as a fellow conspirator)*

A secret. Shhhh!

*(Margaret and Reed have entered and observe the scene, Margaret visibly shaken)*

SARAH

Where's my Virginia...?

VIRGINIA

I don't want a gift. I want you to stay.

SARAH

You're right, you're a mite too old for dolls. But listen to me now:

*(She motions Virginia closer and she speaks with difficulty, but with urgency)*

You know I can't stay. But I won't ever leave you.

*(Sarah looks up and sees Margaret. Pointedly, with her last bit of energy:)*

I'll always be here, if you know how to listen.

MARGARET

*(Moving to Sarah's bedside, as the children step aside)*

Mama, you mustn't talk. You must rest now. You can talk to the children tomorrow.

SARAH

*(Almost delirious)*

There's no guarantee of tomorrow. And yesterday's far, far away...

*(Sarah drifts off. A GUST OF WIND is heard and the tinkling of a windchime. Sarah stands up, letting her robe fall and remain where she had been laying. Sarah is clothed in a lighter, pristine version of her previous travel costume. She is energetic in contrast to the*

*sickly, dying woman she had been moments before. Margaret still sobs over the robe that lays where Sarah rested, as if her mother's body is still there.)*

MARGARET

I wish it were true, what you told Virginia, that you'll always be here. Why, why can't it be true?

SARAH

It is true, Margaret. Listen for me, and I'll never leave.

*(As the Company sings, Reed and the men have lifted the board/plank on which Sara's "body" (the robe) lays, and carry it offstage. The rest of the Company follows along in procession, with Margaret, Tommy, Patty, and Virginia bringing up the rear. Sarah stands near the Company, unseen by them.)*

**MUSIC: HYMN FOR SARAH**

COMPANY

OUR JOURNEY WILL NOT END  
WHEN LAST WE BREATHE THE AIR  
A BETTER HOME AWAITS FOR US  
AND FAITH WILL LEAD US THERE

*(Sarah now directly addresses the audience)*

SARAH

They take three days, making a place for me to rest out eternity. It's a real pretty place.

*(A pause, then)*

But I'm not staying here. I've got a family to look after.

*(Sarah watches the action continue as Peggy approaches Tamsen)*

PEGGY

I am sorry for their loss. Let me know if there is anything I can do to help.

TAMSEN

I think it will be us who will be helping you. Those six boys of yours won't be much help when it comes your time!



*(The two women share a laugh as they exit, following the funeral procession.)*

*(Sarah continues to address the audience. In the background, a few of the Pioneers are making camp. Charlie sits off to the side, writing in a journal. Mary Ann carries a heavy kettle. John unfolds a well-worn document, which he shows to Keseberg)*

SARAH

At each landmark, the men consult their maps. Will they make it over the final mountain summit before the winter?

*(Pause. Then, pointedly)*

They won't. But in their innocence, they walk, and walk, ever westward.

*(Lighting transitions to following scene)*

SCENE FOUR

*(Two weeks later, near twilight.  
Sarah watches as Mary Ann  
approaches Charlie)*

MARY ANN

Why are you always writing in that book?

CHARLIE

*(Unnerved in her presence)*

Er -- uh. Well, I-- uh, I --

*(feebly)*

--I write.

MARY ANN

*(laughing)*

Well, yes, I see that. But: why?

CHARLIE

I'm a-- I'm a-- I'm a writer.

MARY ANN

I've never met a writer before!

CHARLIE

I'm a writer.

MARY ANN

*(laughing again, enjoying him)*

Well, yes, we've established that.

CHARLIE

*(Recovering a bit)*

That is to say... I want to be a writer. Well, I am a writer, because I write, as you see. But ... well ... some day I want to write a book!

MARY ANN

A book?

CHARLIE

A real book. ...The kind people keep on a bookshelf.

SARAH

Even on a tedious, dreary journey some folks know how to find the beauty.

*(She exits.)*

MARY ANN

What were you writing about just now?

CHARLIE

*(Embarrassed)*

Oh, only a -- only a little narrative potraiture of someone -- something that caught my eye.

MARY ANN

Let me read it!

*(Mary Ann grabs the book)*

CHARLIE

No, I --

MARY ANN

*(Reading with expressiveness)*

"As she carried the kettle to the campfire, the twilight rays of sunshine illuminated her calico dress and gave the illusion of a young lady gracefully waltzing across a dance floor."

*(Embarrassed at what she has read, and at how it makes her feel, she closes the journal and hands it back to Charlie and turns away)*

I should not have read it. I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

I meant no offense to you, Miss Graves.

MARY ANN

On the contrary, *(turning to face him)* your words have charmed me.

*(Sincerely, with intimacy, she places touches the journal he holds)*

When it is published, I want your book on my bookshelf, Mr. Stanton.

CHARLIE

*(Lost in her beauty)*

Please, -- call me Charlie.

MARY ANN

*(Lost in the connection with him)*

Charlie.

*(Changing the subject)*

I wish I was on a dance floor now. I miss civilization!

CHARLIE

Well, Mary Ann -- we could imagine a dance floor!

MARY ANN

What, now?

**MUSIC: WALTZ ON THE PRAIRIE WITH ME**

CHARLIE  
 IMAGINE THE MUSIC  
 IMAGINE THE HALL  
 IMAGINE YOU'RE THERE AT AN ELEGANT BALL  
 NOW COME OUT OF THAT TRANCE  
 AND DANCE!

Here?!  
 MARY ANN

*(Charlie takes her in his arms and  
 they dance)*

CHARLIE  
 I'VE YOU ALL TO MYSELF AS WE GO FOR A SPIN  
 WHERE THERE AREN'T OTHER BOYS WHO WOULD TRY TO CUT  
 IN  
 A PARLOR WITH WALLS CAN BE ONLY SO WIDE  
 THERE ARE NO LIMITATIONS WHEN DANCING OUTSIDE  
 COME AND WALTZ ON THE PRAIRIE WITH ME

MARY ANN  
 SO WHO CARES IF MY GOWN'S NOT A FLATTERING HUE  
 WAS THERE EVER A CEILING SO BEAUTIFUL BLUE?  
 WHO KNEW MOTHER NATURE HAD SO MANY CHARMS?  
 AND WHO KNEW I COULD FEEL QUITE SO SAFE IN YOUR  
 ARMS  
 AS YOU WALTZ ON THE PRAIRIE WITH ME

CHARLIE / MARY ANN  
 WE DON'T NEED A FLOOR  
 WE DON'T NEED A BAND  
 WE HAVE SOMETHING MORE  
 AND ALL THAT WE NEED IS YOUR HAND IN MY HAND  
  
 WHEN BLACKBIRDS SING ALONG TO THE BEAT OF MY HEART  
 IT'S NOT MUCH OF A TUNE BUT AT LEAST IT'S A START  
 THE FLICKERING LAMPS SIMPLY WOULDN'T COMPARE  
 TO THE GLITTERING STARS THAT ARE DAWNING UP THERE  
 AS YOU WALTZ ON THE PRAIRIE WITH ME  
 ALWAYS WALTZ ON THE PRAIRIE WITH ME  
 ALWAYS WALTZ ON THE PRAIRIE WITH ME

*(Lights fade)*

SCENE FIVE

*(A month later. Lights brighten on Virginia as she pulls Margaret by the hand, to the place where Reed sits on the lower edge of a big granite hill)*

VIRGINIA

Do you see it, Mama? Everyone who passes by Independence Rock, they carve their names on it. Papa already wrote his! Do you see?

MARGARET

*(Reading the inscription on the rock)*

"JFR - 12 July 1846"

REED

Just think of it, Margaret, all the folks who will pass by this rock in the years ahead!

MARGARET

And there it is, James, carved in stone: proof that you got here first!

*(They laugh. Reed offers his knife to Virginia and helps her sit next to him on the granite.)*

REED

C'mon, Virginia, hold my knife just the way I showed you, and scratch at the rock over and over to make your "V."  
*(Reed sits with Virginia as she carves the rock)*

MARGARET

James, what did you hear from that old frontiersman?

REED

Oh he just warned me about Hastings' shortcut. Thinks it's only good for pack mules, not wagons. But keep that to yourself.

MARGARET

You don't still mean to take the shortcut? Even after hearing that warning?

REED

I trust my instincts, Margaret. The others may be fearful, but I gotta go with my gut.

REED (cont'd)

*(Reed turns back to Virginia)*

Do you hear that, Virginia? The only way you get anywhere in this life is by making bold choices!

SARAH

Slowly, slowly, with wagon wheels rumbling through ruts on the trail, step by dusty step, they walk, they eat, they sleep, they walk.

*(The Company is going through the motions of their progress on the trail as she speaks. Walking, shifting gear around the wagon, making camp...)*

They reach the Continental Divide...and it's a lonely place, where they are neither here nor there. Even Tamsen's book of flowers seems forlorn.

FRANCES

Mama, why are these pages empty?

TAMSEN

Here, only the wild sage grows, and I don't have flowers to press.

**MUSIC: A THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME**

PATRICK

AH, FOR THE GREEN OF SPRINGFIELD  
INSTEAD OF UNENDING GREY  
OH, FOR SOMETHING FAMILIAR  
INSTEAD OF THE LONELINESS THAT GROWS EVERY DAY

DONNER

I HAVE TRUDGED OVER PLAINS, OVER PRAIRIES  
AS THE RIVERS FLOWED BACK TO THE EAST  
AND THEY CARRIED MY HEART IN THEIR CURRENTS  
AS THE DISTANCE I TRAVELED INCREASED  
A THOUSAND MILES FROM ALL I KNEW  
A THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME

TAMSEN

I CAN'T HELP BUT TO THINK OF THE OTHERS  
ALL THE FOLKS WHO DECIDED TO STAY  
DO YOU THINK THEY WOULD EVER BELIEVE IT?:  
THAT ALREADY WE'VE COME A LONG WAY!  
A THOUSAND MILES FROM A DAY IN MAY  
A THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME

REED

Let's drink to them!

*(Reed pours brandy into glasses;  
Margaret passes them out to others)*

Drink?  
PATRICK

REED  
*(Toasting)*  
TO OUR FRIENDS BACK HOME!

ALL  
TO OUR FRIENDS!

REED  
HERE I STAND ON THE ROOF OF THE COUNTRY  
LIFT A GLASS FOR THE BRANDY I POUR  
MAKE A TOAST WITH MY FACE TO THE SUNRISE  
TO THE FOLKS WHO WILL SEE ME NO MORE  
A THOUSAND MILES FROM THOSE I'VE LOVED  
A THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME

ALL (SOLOS/SMALL GROUPS)  
I HEAR WE'RE MOVING SLOWLY  
I HEAR THE TRAIL TURNS HARSH  
THEY SAY A WEALTH OF WATER  
THEY SAY A FERTILE SOIL  
THEY SAY WE'LL LIVE IN THE SUNSHINE  
THEY SAY IT'S WORTH THE TOIL

ALL  
SO THEY SAY  
DO THEY KNOW?  
OUR CHOICE IS RETURN-- OR GO!

WHERE THE WATERS ALL GREET THE PACIFIC  
WHERE THE SUN LIES DOWN FOR A REST  
WE WILL WALK WITH THE FLOW OF THE RIVERS  
FOR A NEW WORLD DAWNS IN THE WEST

PATRICK  
A THOUSAND MILES WE'VE YET TO ROAM

ALL  
A THOUSAND MILES ... TO HOME!

DONNER

Halfway there, folks! We're halfway there!

*(Cheers from the crowd, and Reed joins Donner addressing the group)*

REED

Now it's time to decide about the shortcut.

*(Grumblings from the crowd: "There he goes again..." "Will this man ever give up?!")*

DONNER

Dang it, let James speak! There might be something to this.

*(The crowd quiets down and listens to Reed)*

REED

In a few days, we will come to a fork in the road. The shortcut will shave 300 miles off the trip!

*(Impressed mutterings from the crowd: "300 miles?!", "Well, that's more like it!")*

KESEBERG

If it's a shortcut, why doesn't everyone go that way?

REED

Because not everyone has the courage. Hastings guarantees the shortcut will save time!

TAMSEN

Time we lost by joining the Russell Party?

DONNER

*(Gently chastising his wife)*

Tammy!

KESEBERG

And who will lead us on this new route? You?

REED

Here's the best part.

*(Waving the book)*

Lansford Hastings himself has promised to meet us at the next fort. He'll guide us 'cross the new route!



*(Murmerings from the crowd of awe and approval)*

DONNER

The Donners'll join you!

JOHN

And the Graves family!

CHARLIE

My gal back home says, "Your destiny waits on whatever road you choose."

*(The crowd looks at him, puzzled. He explains:)*

Count me in!

*(Mary Ann startles at the mention of Charlie's gal, but Charlie is oblivious to her reaction)*

PATRICK

I'm in! You know, I bring good luck wherever I go.

PEGGY

The Breen wagons will take the left turn as well.

TAMSEN

Wait! Everyone! This is an important matter. Let's weigh the options, to make the wise choice.

*(With a judgmental glance towards Reed)*

It should not be done on whim.

KESEBERG

I agree.

TAMSEN

There is no evidence that this shortcut is safe.

REED

The evidence is right here!

*(He waves the Hastings book in the air)*

TAMSEN

That is not proof of anything.

VIRGINIA

Proved or not proved, my papa is right! Why take the known path when there's a better one to try? "The only way you get anywhere in this life is by making bold choices!"

TOMMY

My papa, he's been a successful man his whole life. He's made a fortune, you know! And ya know how my papa got so rich? By taking chances, that's how!

KESEBERG

*(Under his breath)*

Even his children are braggarts.

DONNER

There's only one thing left to do, my friends! This new company of ours -- we gotta elect a leader. And I nominate James Reed!

JOHN

The Reed Party! Hear, hear!

*(There are a few half-hearted cheers, but not much enthusiasm from the crowd)*

KESEBERG

I won't follow that man as the leader.

PEGGY

*(Aside, to Patrick)*

He is a bit of a know-it-all, that Mr. Reed.

DONNER

But Reed's the fella for the job! He's the one who read the book!

KESEBERG

How 'bout yourself, Mr. Donner? You're well-liked and respected.

*(Murmurings of agreement from the crowd)*

We'll turn left on this shortcut ... with you as our leader.

*(Cheers from the crowd of encouragement and agreement)*

DONNER

Dang it, I --

*(Reed extends a hand to shake Donner's hand)*

REED

The company's chosen, George, and it's an excellent choice!  
*(Addressing the crowd)*

We begin today as a new company: The Donner Party!

*(Reed raises Donner's hand high in triumph as the company cheers)*

JOHN

This calls for a celebration!

PEGGY

Yes, a party for the Donner Party!

*(Charlie has made his way next to Mary Ann in the crowd, and gets an idea. He calls out)*

CHARLIE

How 'bout a dance?

*(Now that he has the group's attention, Charlie forges ahead)*

Back home, George Donner's known as the best square dance caller in the county!

*(Cheers and encouragement from the crowd. Charlie continues, with a deliberate wink to Mary Ann, who smiles back at him)*

We could use a bit of a dance, couldn't we, folks?

*(Charlie offers his arm to Mary Ann, and the two prepare for the dance.)*

DONNER

Well, fellas, find a gal! Tammy, Peggy - you and the little ones, keep a rhythm for me. C'mon, y'all!

*(Tamsen, Peggy, Frances, and Tommy play rhythm "instruments" using found objects. Keseberg remains off to the side. Four couples take their places: Charlie and Mary Ann, Reed and Margaret, Patrick and little Patty, John and Virginia)*

**MUSIC: THE SHORTCUT SQUARE**

DONNER

BOW TO YOUR PARTNER  
AND YOUR CORNERS, THERE  
VISIT IN THE MIDDLE, THEN I WILL SHARE  
A DANCE I CALL THE SHORTCUT SQUARE

ALAMANDE LEFT YOUR CORNER, FRIENDS  
CALIFORNIA IS WHERE THIS ENDS

DONNER (cont'd)

NOW PROMENADE TO WHERE YOU BELONG  
A TURN TO THE RIGHT IS WHAT IS WRONG  
WHEN YOU GET BACK HOME YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO  
SWING YOUR PARTNER, AND SHE'LL SWING YOU

TURN THE OTHER LADY WITH A RIGHT HAND TWIRL  
A LEFT HAND TURN WITH YOUR OWN SWEET GIRL  
THEN TURN WITH THE RIGHT WITH THE OTHER GAL  
TURN WITH YOUR PARTNER, THEN YOUR CORNER PAL  
A RIGHT-HAND TURN WITH YOUR CORNER  
EVERYBODY SWING THEN GIVE A CHEER!

ALL

TAKE THE SHORTCUT, LEFT WE VEER!

*(The dance changes to a version of  
a circle reel, with the dancers  
singing an almost-whispered  
rhythmic patter underneath  
Keseberg's lament)*

DANCERS

*(Hushed, under soloist)*

HEEL AND TOE, HEEL AND TOE  
SLIDE TO THE MIDDLE AND TO AND FRO  
OUT AND IN, OUT AND IN  
SLIDE TO THE OUTER RING BACK AGAIN  
SKIP ALONG, SKIP ALONG  
ONE IS WEAK BUT THE GROUP IS STRONG  
HEEL AND TOE, HEEL AND TOE  
SLIDE WITH YOUR PARTNER UP AND DOWN THE ROW  
OUT AND IN, OUT AND IN  
SLIDE TO THE OUTER RING BACK AGAIN  
HEEL AND TOE, HEEL AND TOE  
SLIDE TO THE MIDDLE AND TO AND FRO

KESEBERG

*(Aside, not participating in the  
dance)*

I MUST BE MAD  
TO JOIN THESE FOOLS  
THEY PROCEED WITHOUT LOGIC OR REASON OR RULES  
AND WORST OF THE LOT  
THE PROUD MR. REED  
IT'S NOT FAIR THAT THE FOOLS ARE THE ONES WHO  
SUCCEED

*(The dancing couples are completing  
the reel, preparing to resume the  
square dance)*

CHARLIE

My gal back home says, "There are shortcuts to happiness,  
and dancing is one of them."

MARY ANN

Your, "gal back home" ...?

*(The square dance resumes with a  
vigor, but Mary Ann ignores  
Charlie's hand and she stands still  
while the "Alamande Left" swirls  
around her)*

DONNER

ALAMANDE LEFT AND BLAZE A TRAIL  
YEARS FROM NOW, THEY'LL BE TELLING OUR TALE  
NOW GRAND RIGHT AND LEFT AND STAKE YOUR CLAIM  
THE DONNER PARTY'S ON ITS WAY TO FAME  
WHEN YOU GET BACK HOME TAKE HER LOVELY HAND  
AND SPIN HER ROUND TO SEE THE LAND

*(As the dance brings Charlie back  
to Mary Ann -- who still stands in  
the same place, Mary Ann pointedly  
turns away from Charlie and cuts in  
on Virginia, taking John for her  
dance partner. Virginia, now  
without a partner, grabs Reed, and  
Margaret sits down for a rest.  
Left without a partner, Charlie  
grabs Peggy's hand, swirling her  
into the square dance.*

*The group dances a square to music,  
without Donner's calls; as they  
dance, Virginia and Reed have a  
conversation)*

REED

Ginny, I want to talk to you.

VIRGINIA

You should have been elected leader, Papa!

REED

Well, sometimes we have to live with other people's  
decisions, and that can be hard.

*(Reed pulls Virginia aside, out of  
the dance, while the three couples  
continue the dance without them)*

Listen, Ginny, there's something I gotta tell you.

REED (cont'd)

*(Sighs)*

Your pony --

VIRGINIA

Billy! Papa, he's more than a pony, he's my best friend!

REED

We have to leave Billy behind. He can't keep up.

VIRGINIA

No, he can, Papa, he can!! Please! I can't live without Billy!

*(Virginia begins to cry. Reed draws her close, trying to comfort her.)*

REED

You can, Ginny. And you will. Think of Billy! You see how he limps. Life on the road will be too hard for him.

VIRGINIA

But you promised! You promised Billy would go to California with us!

REED

*(Sighs)*

I'm sorry. It's a promise I can't keep.

VIRGINIA

It's not fair!

*(Sobbing, she runs off. Margaret, concerned, crosses to Reed. But the square dance is in full force now, with Donner resuming his calls. Margaret and Reed get swept up in the dance)*

DONNER

TURN YOUR FRIENDLY CORNER WITH A RIGHT HAND SPIN  
A LEFT HAND TURN BRINGS YOU BACK AGAIN  
THEN TURN WITH THE RIGHT WITH YOUR CORNER FRIEND  
BACK TO YOUR PARTNER AND WE'RE NEAR THE END  
A DO SI DO WITH YOUR CORNER  
EVERYBODY SWING AND WE'RE ALL AGREED

ALL

TAKE THE SHORTCUT, MAKE GOOD SPEED!

DONNER

FAREWELL TO YOUR CORNER  
LINK ARMS WITH YOUR MATE

DONNER (cont'd)  
OFF TO CALIFORNIA AND I'LL SEE YOU THERE

ALL  
WHERE WE'LL DANCE AGAIN THE SHORTCUT SQUARE  
WHERE WE'LL DANCE AGAIN  
THE SHORTCUT SQUARE

*(At the conclusion of the dance,  
the company hold a joyous tableau.)*

SCENE SIX

*(Sarah observes the company, and addresses the audience)*

SARAH

Look at 'em! They feel invincible! ...mighty proud of their choice to turn left; secure in their faith in a man they don't even know...

*(The tableau comes to life now, with joy turned to anger and disappointment as it is now two weeks later. They are at Fort Bridger, near the end of July)*

JOHN

Damn that Hastings!

PEGGY

Three days since Reed went to look for him -- still no word!

DONNER

*(Trying to calm the crowd)*

Everything's gonna be fine. I'm sure Mr. Hastings had a good reason for going ahead, and --

PATRICK

But the man gave his word!

PEGGY

If we can't trust the man, we shouldn't trust his shortcut!

*(As the crowd disperses, Virginia enters with Luke)*

VIRGINIA

Ma! This is Luke! He was left behind here by another company.

LUKE

Yup. Account of my health.  
*(Removing his hat)*  
It's a pleasure, Mrs. Reed.

VIRGINIA

Can we take him in, Ma?  
*(Luke coughs)*  
We have Grandma's bed, empty now! It's like it was "meant to be" that we help Mr. Luke.



MARGARET

Well, such a decision would be up to your father. Without him here, there's nothing I can do.

*(Tamsen has overheard this, and interrupts)*

TAMSEN

Well, there's something I can do!

*(To Luke)*

We'll make room for you.

LUKE

'S kind of you. *(coughs)* Doctors say the California climate is a cure.

DONNER

*(Shouting)*

Gather 'round, y'all, gather 'round! Look who's come back!

*(Reed enters to great cheers and excitement. Margaret and the children run to his arms)*

JOHN

Well, did you find Hastings?

REED

Yes.

*(The crowd reacts with enthusiasm)*

PEGGY

I hope you gave the scalawag a piece of my mind!

REED

There's bad news. Hastings' shortcut is impossible for wagons to get through.

*(Groans and exclamations from the crowd as Keseberg speaks aloud)*

KESEBERG

Impossible, for you perhaps, for your gargantuan wagon. Impossible, for the rich. But it might be fine for us lowly commoners!

*(More cheers)*

DONNER

Now, hold your horses! If Reed here says it's impossible, I believe him!

*(Some mutterings of agreement)*

JOHN

He's just worried 'bout that luxury wagon of his!

KESEBERG

So like the rich to not give a damn about the rest of us!

REED

But there's good news, too! Hastings pointed out another way we can try. It's a good level route through the Wasatch Canyon. But it needs to be cleared. We'll have to chop down trees and clear all the brush to make the new road.

KESEBERG

Clear a new road?!

REED

It'll mean a lot of work.

KESEBERG

And a long delay.

CHARLIE

It seems the only option's to make the new road.

KESEBERG

No. Follow the route that's already made. Leave behind the bigger wagons!

*(An argument breaks out. Tamsen steps up and gets their attention)*

TAMSEN

Silence! You talk as if there are only two options: either take Hastings' shortcut, or hack our way through Mr. Reed's new route. *(beat)* There is a third option!

*(The crowd looks hopeful)*

Turn around and go back to the main road!

*(Some mutterings of possible agreement)*

It's the only reasonable choice. I move we abandon the shortcut!

DONNER

I second the motion! That is ... if y'all agree.  
*(Cheers and agreement.)*

TAMSEN

Yes! I always trust in reason.

**MUSIC: ONLY ONE MAN**

Well, I'm not like you.  
 REED  
 I TRUST IN MY GUT  
 LET MY HEART LEAD THE WAY  
 GO FORWARD, MY HEART IS DEMANDING  
 I WANT TO OBEY  
 BUT I'M ONLY ONE MAN

I THINK YOU'RE LIKE ME  
 WITH A DREAM OF YOUR OWN  
 BUT BLAZING A TRAIL TO TOMORROW  
 IS NOT DONE ALONE:  
 IT TAKES MORE THAN ONE MAN

TO GIVE UP AND GO BACK  
 WOULD BE EASY TO DO  
 IT'S THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR SOME  
 BUT NOT A DREAMER LIKE YOU

BELIEVE IN YOUR DREAM!  
 BELIEVE, AND SAY YES!

Yes!  
 JOHN

REED  
 BELIEVE ME THAT YOU'LL MAKE A DIFF'RENCE  
 FOR ALL GREAT SUCCESS  
 WILL BEGIN WITH ONE MAN

I'm in!  
 DONNER

REED / DONNER  
 ONLY ONE MAN

Me too!  
 PATRICK

REED / DONNER / PATRICK  
 ONLY ONE MAN

And me!  
 CHARLIE

THE MEN  
 WHAT ONE MAN CANNOT  
 ALL TOGETHER WE CAN  
 IT BEGINS WITH ONE -- ONE -- ONE -- ONE  
 ONLY ONE MAN

*(The men form a tableau on the  
final note, and hold the tableau)*

SCENE SEVEN

*(The tableau comes to life. It's two weeks later now, and the men take off to continue clearing their way through the Wasatch. The women, children, and Luke remain in camp. The girls quietly play with dolls, while Tommy listens to what the women say.)*

PEGGY

For ten days now the men have been chopping that blasted road through the canyon, and we're getting nowhere!

TAMSEN

But they're too bull-headed to admit they made an error in judgment!

VIRGINIA

While we're stuck in camp, cooking and tending to the little ones...

*(Luke coughs)*

... and to the sick.

LUKE

Don't mean to be *(coughs)* a burden.

TAMSEN

You're not a burden, dear, the other men are.

*(Virginia helps Luke to stand, and escorts him off)*

MARY ANN

We shouldn't be critical of the men! Aren't you happy to be married to them?

**MUSIC: HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE**

TAMSEN / MARGARET / PEGGY

HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE  
TO ME THE CHOICE WAS CLEAR  
OH, HE WAS HEADED SOMEWHERE  
NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE HERE

TAMSEN

I ADMIT THAT HE IS BRAVE  
I ADMIT THAT HE IS STRONG  
BUT WHAT I'D GIVE TO HEAR  
HIM ADMIT THAT HE IS WRONG

MARGARET  
 HE'LL INSIST THAT HE IS RIGHT  
 AND IT HAS ME MYSTIFIED  
 FOR A MAN WITH SUCH AN APPETITE  
 HE CAN'T SWALLOW HIS PRIDE

TAMSEN / MARGARET / PEGGY  
 HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE  
 I REALLY CAN'T COMPLAIN  
 HE TRIES TO BE SO HUMBLE  
 YES HE TRIES, BUT ALL IN VAIN

MARY ANN  
 Are all men good for nothing?

PEGGY  
 No!  
 WITH A TWINKLE IN HIS EYE  
 ON THE NIGHT THAT WE WERE WED  
 HE TWINKLED ALL THE NIGHT  
 WHEN HE TOOK ME OFF TO BED  
 YOU CAN TELL THAT HE'S NOT RICH  
 HAD HIS FAILURES, IT IS TRUE  
 BUT WE'VE GOT SIX SONS TO PROVE AT LEAST  
 THERE'S ONE THING HE CAN DO!

ALL THREE  
 HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE  
 HE'S LOYAL, TRUE AND GOOD

PEGGY  
 OH, HE WOULD NEVER LEAVE ME  
 THOUGH AT TIMES I WISH HE WOULD

ALL THREE  
 HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE  
 I GAVE HIM ALL MY LOVE  
 AND NOW SOMETIMES I WONDER  
 OH! WHAT WAS I THINKING OF?!

PEGGY  
 I REMEMBER ONE FINE DAY  
 WHEN HE CAME HOME FROM A HUNT  
 I ASKED HIM HOW IT WENT  
 HIS RESPONSE WAS JUST A GRUNT

MARGARET  
 WHEN AT LAST THAT HE WILL TALK  
 AND HIS WORDS BEGIN TO FLOW  
 THERE ARE CERTAIN WORDS HE CAN'T PRONOUNCE  
 THE WORDS ARE "I DON'T KNOW"

MARY ANN  
OR, "I NEED HELP!"

PEGGY  
OR, "WHAT DO YOU THINK, DEAR?"

TAMSEN  
OR, "I AM STOPPING TO ASK FOR DIRECTIONS!"

TOMMY  
My papa never has to say those things because he knows everything and he's always right! Isn't that true, Mama? Papa always gets it right. And I'm gonna grow up to be just like him! I ain't never, ever, ever, EVER gonna be wrong about anything.

*(He exits, proud and defiant)*

PEGGY  
*(Rubbing her belly)*  
I just hope my next one is a girl.

ALL FOUR  
*(whisper)*  
HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE  
BUT WE CAN ALL AGREE  
HE HAD A STROKE OF BRILLIANCE  
*(full, at tempo)*  
ON THE DAY THAT HE CHOSE ME  
*(broad ending)*  
ON THE DAY THAT HE CHOSE ME

*(Lights dissolve to the following scene)*

SCENE EIGHT

*(Two weeks later. Late August. Lights up on the men entering, hot and sweaty and proud of themselves, excitedly all talking at once)*

DONNER

Dangit, we did it!

PATRICK

We hacked our way through it, we did!

CHARLIE

Cleared the trail all the way through the Wasatch canyon!

*(The Company cheers)*

REED

We'll move the wagons through in the mornin'... we're moving forward again!

PATRICK

We're sure to beat the snow, now!

*(More cheers. Out of the men's cheering we hear coughing. Lights up in a small spotlight area at one side, revealing Luke, who is lying down while Frances stands near his bed. Sarah is nearby.)*

LUKE

*(Coughing)*

Frances, when we get to California, I'm going to build a Mercantile.

*(Coughing more)*

FRANCES

Yes, sir. A store just like your Papa's.

*(Tamsen enters and sits down to tend to Luke while Frances moves in closer to Tamsen, to snuggle in for comfort as she watches Luke die)*

TAMSEN

Luke, you should rest now, dear.



*(Sarah crosses to the opposite side of the stage, focused on some activity happening offstage in that direction. Coming from that direction, we hear Peggy wail in extreme pain)*

PEGGY

*(offstage)*

Ohhhhh-argh.....!

SARAH

And the men thought their labor was hard!

*(The men shudder uncomfortably at the sound of Peggy's cries)*

PEGGY

God in Heaven! This one's fighting me just like all the boys before him!

*(Some of the men chuckle at this)*

LUKE

*(coughing throughout)*

Mrs. Donner, when your little girls come by the Mercantile, they can pick out a piece of penny candy from a clear glass jar on the counter.

TAMSEN

Shhhh. Try to rest.

*(Luke continues coughing as lights fade to black on Luke's deathbed. In the darkness, the coughing stops and there is silence. A GUST OF WIND and the tinkling of a windchime. A moment later, we hear a newborn baby cry.)*

*(Lights to full on the Company at center as the baby cries again.)*

VIRGINIA

*(Rushing in excitedly)*

It's a girl!

*(Crowd cheers, and Virginia exits.)*

DONNER

A new life. That's a good sign.

*(A hearty baby cry)*

Ain't sure what she's cryin' 'bout. She didn't have to chop through the Wasatch!

*(Crowd laughs)*

KESEBERG

She missed all the fun.

DONNER

Now, folks, let's get rollin'!

PATRICK

To California!

*(Crowd cheers and prepares to travel. In the flurry of activity, we see Luke, now dressed in the "spirit" version of his costume. As Tamsen speaks quietly to Donner, Sarah crosses to Luke.)*

LUKE

*(Adjusting to this new sense)*

...It's over? Just like that?

SARAH

*(Nodding)*

Just like that.

DONNER

Hold on! Hold on! We ain't gonna start up as yet.

*(Crowd stills to listen to him)*

Luke Halloran has passed.

LUKE

But I wasn't finished yet.

DONNER

We gotta build him a nice coffin and lay 'im to rest.

LUKE

I didn't have enough time.

JOHN

But we ain't got the time if'n we're gonna beat the first snowfall.

LUKE

*(Speaking to Donner and the men, but they do not hear him)*

Listen to him. Don't waste the time!

DONNER

No, fellas, we gotta pay proper respect to the dead.

LUKE

No, there's no need.

DONNER

We'll leave tomorrow. What difference'll one day make?

LUKE

*(Shaking his head)*

One day.

SARAH

One day.

*(Sarah moves off to the side. Luke follows in her general direction, but lingers a bit near Frances, who still sits off to the side.)*

DONNER

Fellas, get to work!

**MUSIC: WHAT GOOD IS A BOX TO A DEAD MAN**

**MUSIC: HYMN FOR LUKE**

*(The men go to work, setting up tools to construct a coffin. Their hammers and tools add to the percussion of the song)*

MEN

HAMMER? (X!)  
 NAILS? (X!)  
 WOOD? (X! X!)

RULER? (X!)  
 SAW? (X!)  
 GOOD! (X! X!)

THEY SAY WE GOTTA GET STARTED  
 FOR THE SAKE OF THE DEPARTED  
 BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE FUSS! (X! X!)  
 WE WILL BUILD HIM A COFFIN

MEN (cont'd)

(AWFUL NICE TO SEND HIM OFF IN)  
 BUT WHAT GOOD IS A BOX TO A DEAD MAN?  
 AND IT'S EXTRA WORK (X! X!) FOR US!

AND NOW HE'S GONE TO MEET HIS MAKER  
 SO I'M PLAYIN' UNDERTAKER  
 DO YOU SEE HOW ABSURD THIS IS? (X! X!)  
 GIVE A ROPE TO A SAILOR  
 GIVE A NEEDLE TO A TAILOR  
 BUT WHAT GOOD IS A BOX TO A DEAD MAN?  
 HE WON'T EVER KNOW (X! X!) IT'S HIS!

WHERE EACH OF US CAME FROM WE'LL ALL RETURN  
 LIKE ASHES TO ASHES OR DUST IN AN URN  
 BUT I WON'T NEED A CASKET, I'LL SAVE YOU THE TOIL  
 JUST DIG ME A GRAVE AND THROW IN THE SOIL!

DONNER

To Luke Halloran, who knew he was going to die, but never gave up!

*(The men stand upstage of the casket, remove their hats respectfully)*

So dangit -- let's be like Luke and die tryin'!

*(The impromptu eulogy completed, the men take a moment to look down at the casket, pondering their own mortality. Unnoticed by the men, Luke crosses to the casket and sits down on the lid)*

LUKE

A MAN HAS DONE AND EXPIRED  
 IN HIS BEST HE IS ATTIRED  
 ALL CLEANED UP, NOT A BIT OF GRIME (X! X!)  
 THEY WILL SING, SAY A PRAYER  
 BUT I DON'T THINK THAT I CARE  
 CAUSE WHAT GOOD IS A BOX TO A DEAD MAN  
 IF IT DON'T COME FILLED WITH TIME!

*(Luke moves to the side to watch the men)*

MEN

TO THINK THE ITEMS THAT I TREASURE  
 WON'T PROVIDE ME ANY PLEASURE  
 WHEN I'M THERE, UNDERNEATH THE GROUND  
 AT MY FUNERAL PROCESSION  
 I'LL HAVE ONLY ONE POSSESSION  
 AND WHAT GOOD IS A BOX TO A DEAD MAN?

LUKE AND MEN  
IT WON'T BRING ME BACK AROUND  
WON'T BRING ME BACK (X! X!)  
WON'T BRING ME BACK (X! X!)  
WON'T BRING ME BACK AROUND

*(After the number, the men shoulder  
the casket and carry it offstage,  
as the company sings and follows  
the casket procession.)*

**MUSIC: HYMN FOR LUKE**

COMPANY

A BETTER HOME AWAITS FOR US  
AND FAITH WILL LEAD US THERE

*(Lights fade as Luke and Sarah  
watch them go)*

SCENE NINE

*(Early September. Lights up on the Reeds, Donners, Breens, and all the Company as they trudge through the desert. Sarah and Luke observe.)*

FRANCES

I'm thirsty, Mama.

LUKE

For three days and three nights, trudging across a barren alkaline sand --

SARAH

The Great Salt Desert.

TAMSEN

Keep looking ahead, Sweetpea. Look at that peak on the horizon: that's where the water is.

LUKE

Struggling through heat each day --

SARAH

--and bitter cold each night.

KESEBERG

Your Mr. Hastings has failed us again, Reed. You've failed us.

FRANCES

I'm still thirsty, Mama.

*(The Reed family is struggling.  
Patty falls, and Reed scoops her up)*

LUKE

Grown men despairing, children stumbling along --  
*(Peggy holds her baby as she fights  
to keep moving)*

SARAH

-- Mothers who can barely walk themselves, carrying babies.

MARGARET

No, James, I can't. You and the men and the cattle are strong. But I'm not strong, James. Another night of this, it's more than I can bear.

MARGARET (cont'd)  
*(Margaret breaks down in tears)*

*(The Company is seen arriving at the Springs, eagerly drinking the water.)*

LUKE  
 But the desert isn't endless. They reach the spring at last.

SARAH  
 Revived by the water, they make adjustments to journey on.  
*(Lights up on Patty, speaking authoritatively to some dolls she has set in a semi-circle around her)*

PATTY  
 Papa said we're only going to have one wagon instead of three, and I have to leave all of you dolls here.  
*(Softening in her tone, she arranges the dolls close together)*  
 You all stay close together, because the night gets really cold.  
*(Standing up, knowing she must hurry)*  
 Be brave.

REED  
*(Calling from offstage)*  
 Patty?

PATTY  
 Oh, how I'm going to miss you all!

REED  
*(Calling from offstage)*  
 Patty Reed!

PATTY  
*(Reaches out and picks up the smallest of the dolls.)*  
 Little Sarah, I can't bear to say good bye to you, so I'm not going to. Shhhh! It will be our secret!

*(She tucks the doll into her apron, and hurries away.)*

**MUSIC: WAGONS ROLL, REPRISE**

CHILDREN  
 WAGONS ROLL!  
 ON WE GO, BUT WE'RE GOING SORTA SLOW  
 WAGONS ROLL!

TOMMY  
ARE WE THERE YET?

CHILDREN  
HOW MUCH LONGER STILL TO GO?

VIRGINIA  
I'm hot.

TOMMY  
I'm tired.

FRANCES  
I'm hungry.

COMPANY  
ROLL OUT! ROLL ON! WAGONS ROLL

DONNER  
The Humboldt River, at last! We're back to the main road!

*(Some mild cheering from the crowd)*

KESEBERG  
Some shortcut that was.

DONNER  
Well, at least the shortcut's over!

REED  
We're back on course.

KESEBERG  
But at what cost?

JOHN  
We're running out of food.

KESEBERG  
Food? We're running out of time. How much time, before snow blocks the pass?

*(Dismissively)*  
Food!

PEGGY  
If we don't have food, all the time in the world won't help us.

TAMSEN  
Send someone ahead to get help from Captain Sutter. He can return with supplies.



REED

There's no one to send.

CHARLIE

I'll go! I'll go to Captain Sutter!  
*(All turn to look doubtfully at  
 Charlie, feeling hesitant,  
 contemplating his offer)*

KESEBERG

Ha! The bookworm will save us all.

CHARLIE

My gal back home says, "You can only lay a burden on a willing horse."

KESEBERG

What's to keep you from staying in California? Don't have family. You don't have reason to come back.

*(Some murmurings of agreement from  
 the crowd)*

CHARLIE

No reason.  
*(Offering his hand to Keseberg)*  
 Other than I give you my word.

*(An uncomfortable silence as  
 Keseberg ignores Charlie's hand)*

REED

*(Stepping in to shake Charlie's hand)*  
 So it's settled. Charlie will go on ahead. Make haste!

CHARLIE

I will!  
*(As he shoulders a pack and prepares  
 for his journey)*  
 And ... I'll return!

DONNER

I do believe the worst is over.

*{As the company disperses, Mary Ann  
 approaches Charlie, wanting to be  
 tender, but still hurting over  
 learning he has a sweetheart back  
 home}*

MARY ANN

Be careful, Charlie. If something happened to you, you'd break the heart of -- of your gal back home.

CHARLIE

*(Taken aback)*

Well, yes. Yes, she would be broken-hearted.

MARY ANN

*(Truly concerned for him)*

It's dangerous, what you're doing. I mean, you're an excellent dancer, but-- *(sweetly)* you're not much of a mountain man.

CHARLIE

*(Quietly)*

You ... you don't think I can make it.

MARY ANN

You'll be alone in the wilderness, without the protection of the Company. I just--

*(She hesitates)*

I have a feeling I will never see you again.

CHARLIE

*(Stung)*

You ... you believe what Keseberg said?

MARY ANN

No, I --

*(Unsure)*

Well -- I --

CHARLIE

*(Put off by Mary Ann's lack of belief in him and pulling himself up)*

Miss Graves, I must depart. Believe what you will.

*(Charlie starts to go, but turns back to call out)*

My mother, by the way. My "gal back home" is my mother.

*(Charlie exits, while Mary Ann reels from this revelation)*

**MUSIC: THE MAN I CHOSE, REPRISE**

MARY ANN

HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE  
AND HOW I LOVE HIM SO  
BUT ALL THIS TIME I'VE WASTED

MARY ANN (cont'd)  
AND NOW HE WILL NEVER KNOW

*(Lights fade to black)*

SCENE TEN

*(Early October. The lights come up dimly or in silhouette on John, yielding a bullwhip, and trying to get past Reed and his wagon. Luke and Sarah observe the action from different parts of the stage.)*

JOHN

*(Whip crack!)*

Move those damned oxen and let me pass!

*(whip crack! again as dramatic underscoring begins.)*

REED

It's a narrow hill, John, wait your turn!

JOHN

It is my turn!

*(whip crack!)*

REED

Whipping the oxen won't help.

JOHN

Tend yer own team!

*(John and Reed freeze as lights focus on Luke)*

LUKE

You wonder what could cause a man to kill another man. Is it the agonizing pain of a physical injury?

*(Dramatic underscoring resumes and lights focus on Reed and John as the fight action continues)*

JOHN

No, dammit. We'll settle this now!

*(John swings the whip handle and it hits Reed, who falls to the ground from the force. John and Reed freeze.)*

LUKE

Or, is it an emotional response? An act of passion, based in pure love?

*(Margaret rushes in, coming between the two men just as John raises the whip handle again to strike Reed)*

MARGARET

James! John!

REED

*(Trying to stand but unable)*

What are you doing here?!

MARGARET

John, stop this at --

*(her words are silenced John's whip handle hits Margaret and she falls to the ground)*

JOHN

Let go!

*(The action freezes with John towering over Margaret slumped on the ground while Reed looks on, helpless)*

LUKE

Which is it? A gut reaction, or a conscious choice?

*(Action resumes)*

REED

Nooooooooo!

*(Reed pulls out a knife and rushes John, plunging the knife into John's abdomen. The action freezes with the two men staring in horror at each other, as one instrument from the orchestra plays the refrain of THE HYMN.*

*Lights fade to black. As the HYMN tune fade, we hear a GUST OF WIND and tinkling of a windchime.*

*The lights come up and it is several minutes later. John is now standing, dressed as a Spirit. Reed stands apart, with Margaret*

*clinging to him. Keseber and others  
are just entering.)*

KESEBERG  
We have a murderer among us!

PEGGY  
"Murderer"?!

PATRICK  
"Murderer"?!

MARGARET  
It was an accident!

KESEBERG  
He killed a man.

*(Reed silently crosses away from  
the others, lost in thought.  
Margaret follows Reed, pleading  
with him)*

MARGARET  
Say something, James!

JOHN  
Dammit! I just wanted to get up that hill! I wanted to hurry  
and finish the damn journey!

LUKE  
*(Aside, to audience)*  
They're all in a hurry to finish the journey.

*(At this, John notices Luke, but  
addresses Reed, who cannot hear  
him)*

MARGARET / JOHN  
James, it wasn't your fault!  
*(John crosses away and sits, near  
Luke, watching the action)*

MARGARET  
... You were defending your wife!

KESEBERG  
There's no defense for murder! And that fool George Donner  
isn't here to defend him, either.

MARGARET  
He's innocent! Innocent 'til proven guilty!

**MUSIC: THE TRUTH**

KESEBERG

"PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE" IS NOT A FACT  
 IT IS ONLY A CHOICE  
 YOU CHOOSE, BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BELIEVE IT'S TRUE!  
 BUT THE TRUTH?  
 THE TRUTH IS  
 THAT MAN'S KNIFE TOOK THE LIFE OF OUR FRIEND.

THE TRUTH DOESN'T CHANGE  
 NO MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE  
 THE TRUTH IS THE TRUTH  
 NO MATTER WHAT YOU PRESUME

So let's look at the facts of the case:

THE TRUTH IS THAT MAN IS PRIVILEGED  
 HAS MORE THAN HIS SHARE OF THE PIE  
 THINK OF HOW HE HAS FLAUNTED  
 ALL HIS WEALTH; IT'S NOT IMPRESSIVE  
 IT IS MORE THAN A BIT EXCESSIVE  
 HE IS VAIN!  
 HE IS RUDE!  
 HE'S AGGRESSIVE!

CROWD

AGGRESSIVE! AGGRESSIVE! AGGRESSIVE!

MARGARET

Why won't you say something, James!  
*(Desperate, to the crowd)*  
 WHAT WE HAVE, JAMES AND I  
 SHOULD NOT OFFEND YOU  
 WHAT WE ARE, JAMES AND I  
 WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS  
 JAMES SCOUTED THE TRAILS....  
 JAMES WORKED BY YOUR SIDE...

AND YOUR WAILS, PEGGY, AND YOUR WAILS  
 WHEN YOU GAVE BIRTH  
 I WIPED YOUR BROW, PEGGY  
 WHEN YOU GAVE BIRTH!

WE'RE YOUR FRIENDS ...

KESEBERG

JOHN WAS YOUR FRIEND!  
 JUSTICE FOR JOHN!

CROWD

JUSTICE! JUSTICE! JUSTICE!

KESEBERG

JOHN DIDN'T DESERVE THIS!  
AND WE DON'T DESERVE THIS!  
BUT STILL THEY ABUSE THEIR POWER  
AND STILL THEY ABUSE THE WEAK  
AND WE ARE REDUCED TO NOTHING OF IMPORTANCE  
AND STILL  
THEY KILL

BUT TODAY WE STAND FOR WHAT IS RIGHT!  
TODAY WE STAND FOR JUSTICE!

*(Keseberg pulls open the wagon and  
we see he has tied a noose to the  
top of it.)*

That man shall hang for his crime!

CROWD

HANG HIM! HANG HIM! HANG HIM!

*(Lights fade to black)*



SCENE ELEVEN

*(Two days later. Lights up on a campfire at nighttime, where Tamsen is pouring coffee into two mugs. Luke and John have moved off to the side, observing. Donner enters and sits at the fire)*

DONNER

We're a few days ahead of the others now. Kinda nice to be the lead wagons!

TAMSEN

Don't you miss your poker games?  
*(She hands him a mug and sits next to him at the fireside)*

DONNER

Nah. With the cards I get, I don't like taking the risk.

TAMSEN

Is that why you always fold early?! Funny, you took the risk in marrying me. I warned you: I told you life would always be an adventure!

DONNER

*(laughing)*  
Yessiree! Taking wagons across flooded rivers ...

TAMSEN

Hacking your way through an overgrown canyon! Almost dying in the desert...

DONNER

Yessiree! A grand adventure with you.

*(They share a sweet kiss, and then Reed staggers up to the campfire)*

TAMSEN

Mr. Reed! What -- ? What's wrong?

*(Tamsen takes a cloth to wipe blood from Reed's temple, and tends to his wound throughout the following)*

REED

They said it was murder.

DONNER

Murder?

REED

John Snyder's dead. Wasn't murder... self defense.

TAMSEN

Self defense?

REED

But Keseberg -- if he had prevailed, they would've hanged me, but it's worse. Doomed to die alone on the trail.

DONNER

What?! What -- what happened?

REED

I'm banished from the company. No supplies. No weapons.

DONNER

James! How will you survive?

TAMSEN

And your family?!

REED

Keseberg won't harm Margaret and the children. It's me he banished.

*(Suddenly, Virginia appears at the campfire, out of breath, and holding up Reed's rifle triumphantly)*

VIRGINIA

Banished. But you won't be unarmed!

REED

Virginia! What are you doing here?

VIRGINIA

You need your gun, papa, to hunt for food. You have to have your gun!

REED

*(still dumbfounded Virginia is here)*

How did you get here?

*(Sarah has entered, following Virginia, and she stands nearby, observing their exchange.)*

VIRGINIA

I slipped out in the night. I took one of the Breens' horses, and I rode hard to catch up to you.

REED

*(Pulling Virginia into a big hug)*

Oh, my sweet girl. You are braver, and stronger than any of us.

*(He holds her at arms length now and looks her in the eyes)*

Does this mean you've forgiven me?

VIRGINIA

No.

*(A pause.)*

I mean -- I don't know. But you can't die, papa. They want to kill you.

REED

*(Taking his gun from her.)*

Now I can survive on my own.

VIRGINIA

*(Urgently)*

But you have to go, now. Keseberg started talking again. He's got Mr. Graves and some of the others all set on revenge.

JOHN

It was self defense!

VIRGINIA

I heard Keseberg say, when he catches up to you, you'll be dead.

REED

If he catches up to me, it's Keseberg who'll be dead.

JOHN

*(Standing now)*

Damn it, Reed, isn't my death enough? Don't waste time on revenge!

SARAH

*(shaking her head)*

Revenge.

DONNER

Best get a move on, James.

TAMSEN

We'll look after Margaret and the children.

VIRGINIA

Go, Papa, go now!

REED

*(Shouldering his gun)*

Take care of your mother. She is weak, and she needs your strength.

*(A final hug, then, sincerely)*

Virginia, I will get supplies and come back for you, I promise.

VIRGINIA

*(Emphatically)*

I don't want your promises.

REED

Virginia, I --

VIRGINIA

No. Don't make promises to me, you don't keep them. Just go.

*(Reed, hurt, turns away and exits.)*

*(Virginia speaks softly, looking after him)*

Stay alive, Papa, stay alive.

*(The lights fade to black.)*

SCENE TWELVE

*(A week later. As the lights come up, the Company is trudging along the trail)*

DONNER

Hold up, folks! Looks like a piece of paper over there!

PATRICK

You mean this?

*(Patrick retrieves a small piece of paper and a handful of goose feathers, all of which he hands it to Donner)*

DONNER

Another note from Hastings, after all this time! But what's all this?

PATRICK

Goose feathers! There's a mess o' them.

*(The Company has gathered around the two men)*

What's it say?

DONNER

*(Reading)*

"There are still blessings at the hand of God"

*(puzzled, he turns it over to see if there is more)*

Well, dang it! That's a funny note from Hastings!

KESEBERG

Not from Hastings! Some personal note from another wagon train.

PEGGY

But who are they leaving a note for? We're the last Company on the trail, aren't we?

KESEBERG

Who cares who it's for? Doesn't do us any good. Keep moving.

DONNER

Yessirree, folks. Gotta keep moving!

*(As the company resumes their journey and exit, Margaret goes to Donner)*

MARGARET

George, may I see the note?

DONNER

*(Distracted, having already forgotten about the paper in his hand)*

Huh? Yeah, take it.

*(Donner hands Margaret the note and exits, as Virginia peers over her shoulder to read it)*

VIRGINIA

Mama? Isn't that your Bible verse from Job?

MARGARET

Yes! It's a secret message to us: he's alive, Virginia! Tell Tommy and Patty!

VIRGINIA

*(Calling back, as she exits)*

He's alive, and he had a good meal -- the goose!

MARGARET

Thank heavens you took him his gun! James is alive.

*(Lights fade elsewhere, leaving Margaret in light, as a pool of light comes up on Reed)*

**MUSIC: WE WALK THE SAME ROAD**

REED

NOW UPON OUR JOURNEY THE FATES TEAR US APART  
STILL WE MUST CONTINUE UNAFRAID  
I AM UP AHEAD, YOU ARE CLOSE BEHIND  
YOUR FEET WILL STEP IN FOOTPRINTS I'LL HAVE MADE

BOTH

WE WALK THE SAME ROAD  
WE TRAVEL ONE TRAIL  
OUR FOOTSTEPS MAY FALTER  
OUR LOVE WILL NOT FAIL  
OUR LOVE WILL NOT FAIL

MARGARET

YOU WERE ON A JOURNEY, A DIFFERENT PATH FROM MINE  
YOU AND I WERE SEPARATE AND ALONE  
THEN OUR LIVES ENTWINED, WEDDING VOWS WERE SAID  
AND WITH THOSE WORDS YOUR PATH BECAME MY OWN

BOTH

WE WALK THE SAME ROAD  
WE TRAVEL ONE TRAIL  
OUR PATH MAY KEEP CHANGING  
OUR LOVE WILL NOT FAIL

BOTH (cont'd)  
EVERY STEP THAT YOU TAKE, I TAKE  
EVERY BURDEN YOU BEAR, I BEAR  
EVERY RIVER YOU FORD  
EVERY DESERT YOU CROSS  
EVERY SUMMIT YOU CLIMB, I AM THERE

REED  
IF UPON MY JOURNEY I'M TAKEN FROM THIS EARTH  
KNOW THAT I WILL ALWAYS BE YOUR GUIDE  
IN YOUR EVERY THOUGHT,

MARGARET  
IN MY EVERY THOUGHT

REED  
I WILL SHOW THE WAY

MARGARET  
YOU WILL SHOW THE WAY

REED  
FOR DEATH WILL NEVER TAKE ME FROM YOUR SIDE

BOTH  
WE WALK THE SAME ROAD  
WE TRAVEL ONE TRAIL  
THROUGH THIS LIFE AND AFTER  
OUR LOVE WILL NOT FAIL  
FOR NOW AND FOR ALWAYS WE WALK THE SAME ROAD

*(Lights fade to black)*

SCENE THIRTEEN

*(The last half of October. Lights up on Donner and Tamsen, who are busy with making camp for the evening. Keseberg is arguing with Donner)*

**MUSIC: FALLING APART**

KESEBERG  
 BUT IT'S ALMOST NOVEMBER  
 WE'RE COMING IN LAST  
 WE'RE WAY BACK ON THE TRAIL, WE'RE MEANDERING SLOW  
 WHEN WE NEED TO GO FAST

DONNER  
 THE THING TO REMEMBER - AHH  
 WHAT I MEAN TO SAY - UHH

TAMSEN  
 YOU ARE WELCOME TO LEAVE AND TO GO ON YOUR OWN  
 YOU DO NOT HAVE TO STAY

KESEBERG  
 THERE IS IMMINENT DANGER  
 I'M STAYING WITH YOU  
 THERE ARE INDIANS NEAR, I CAN'T TRAVEL ALONE  
 SO YOU'RE STUCK WITH ME TOO

DONNER  
 And we 'ppreciate your presence, really we do.

TAMSEN  
 I imagine you'll be good in an Indian fight, if it comes to that.

ALL  
 HERE THE COUNTRY IS STRANGER  
 AND I'M LOSING HEART  
 I WAS SEEKING A HOME, I WAS SEEKING MY DREAM  
 NOW IT'S FALLING APART

*(Lights focus on Patrick, as Mary Ann, out of breath, runs to him)*

MARY ANN  
 Patrick, I'm afraid! I wish Charlie were here.

PATRICK  
 Tell me what happened, Darlin'.



MARY ANN

Father and I were getting water at the creek, and there were three Indians up on the ridge, pointing at us.

PATRICK

Probably the same breed that stole half your pappy's herd!

MARY ANN

They were just pointing at us, Patrick, and laughing.

ALL

THEY HAVE STOLEN OUR CATTLE  
AND SO MUCH IS LOST  
OUR PROVISIONS ARE LOW AND WE HAVE TO SPEED UP  
AT WHATEVER THE COST

*(Lights up on Margaret, Tommy, and  
Patty. Margaret looks especially  
weary.)*

PATTY

Mama, how much longer do we have to walk?

TOMMY

When are we going to be there?

MARGARET

Children, please! I don't feel well.  
*(She sees something that catches her  
eye beside the trail)*

Virginia!

*(She sings)*

WHERE YOU ARE STEPPING, RIGHT THERE  
IS THAT A FEATHER?

*(Virginia bends down to look, and  
holds up a stick)*

VIRGINIA

AREN'T ANY FEATHERS, NOWHERE  
ONLY A STICK

MARGARET

Even so, I know he is fine. I know he'll come back for us.

VIRGINIA

IT WAS JUST AN EMPTY PROMISE

MARGARET

*(Angrily towards Virginia)*  
James will never let us down!

VIRGINIA  
 WE WERE LEFT BEHIND TO SUFFER  
 JUST LIKE LUKE  
 JUST LIKE BILLY  
 LEFT BEHIND TO SUFFER

MARGARET  
 James will come back.

VIRGINIA  
 BUT WHAT IF HE DON'T, MAMA  
 WHAT IF HE DON'T

*(Lights full on the company)*

ALL  
 WHAT WE'VE BEEN THROUGH ALREADY  
 IS CAUSE FOR DESPAIR

*[EACH PHRASE - A SOLO]*  
 WE'VE SEEN MURDER  
 AND DEATH  
 AND EXHAUSTION  
 AND THIRST

ALL  
 IT IS TOO MUCH TO BEAR

ALL  
 YES THE ONLY THING CERTAIN  
 IT'S NOT GOING WELL  
 AND WITH NO HOPE IN SIGHT IT WILL ONLY GET WORSE  
 WE ARE LIVING IN HELL

*(Lights isolate Margaret, Virginia,  
 and Mary Ann in three separate  
 pools of light.)*

MARGARET / VIRGINIA / MARY ANN  
 WATCHING THE HORIZON  
 WATCHING THE HORIZON EVERY DAY

MARGARET  
 KNOWING HE WILL BE THERE

MARY ANN  
 HOPING HE WILL BE THERE

VIRGINIA  
 DOUBTING HE WILL BE THERE

ALL THREE  
 WATCHING THE HORIZON  
 ONLY BROKEN PROMISES TO SEE THERE

*(Lights fade on the others and  
 brighten on Tamsen and Donner.)*

TAMSEN  
 These short rations are hurting us, George. I'm hungry.

DONNER  
*(Cheerfully)*  
 We just gotta keep on, keep moving.

TAMSEN  
 I'm worried about getting to that mountain pass --

DONNER  
*(Remaining overly upbeat)*  
 But we're making progress!

TAMSEN  
 Dammit, George. Wake up!  
*(She sings)*

THIS WHOLE TRIP'S A DISASTER  
 BUT ALL THAT THEY'VE HEARD  
 IS "WE'RE DOING ALRIGHT AND WE ALL WILL BE FINE"  
 'CAUSE YOU CAN'T SAY THE WORD.

"Disaster." There. I've said it for you.  
*(She storms away from him)*

ALL  
 HE'S NOT MUCH OF A LEADER  
 BUT HE'S ALL WE'VE GOT  
 SO EACH MAN FOR HIMSELF 'CAUSE YOU HAVE TO TAKE  
 CHARGE  
 WHEN A LEADER WILL NOT

*(Lights focus on Mary Ann, as  
 Keseberg sneaks into her area with  
 an empty carafe in his hand)*

MARY ANN  
 What are you doing?

KESEBERG  
 Sorry to startle you, Miss. Uh -- your father said I could  
 have a pint of water for my wife and child.

MARY ANN

You're lying. Father never said any such thing.

KESEBERG

But I know you have it. My family needs it. You have ten gallons remaining!

MARY ANN

Ten gallons or ten drops, it is no concern of yours.

*(With Keseberg looming over her, she calls out, screaming)*

Father!!! Fath--

KESEBERG

*(Clamping a hand on Mary Ann's mouth and holding her tight)*

I tell you, Miss, I will have a pint of water.

*(Still with a grip on Mary Ann, Keseberg forcibly takes the pint of water and storms away. As the company sings the final refrains, some of them are ripping apart pieces of the wagon, leaving it looking battered and rife with holes and missing pieces.)*

ALL

WHEN THE BEST HUMAN GRACES  
ARE SWALLOWED BY GREED  
THEN A MADNESS PREVAILS AND THE MADDEST OF ALL  
IS WE HAVE TO PROCEED

WE ARE DESTINED FOR FAILURE  
WE WERE FROM THE START  
WE ARE FALLING TO PIECES, WE'RE FALLING BEHIND  
AND WE'RE FALLING  
AND WE'RE FALLING  
AND WE'RE FALLING APART!

*(Black out)*

SCENE FOURTEEN

*(October 27. Lights up on Sarah. Margaret is seen near her wagon, where there are trunks and boxes filled with her family's possessions.)*

SARAH

So what's left, then, when all has fallen apart around you? One thing remains --a choice.

*(Lights full on Margaret, who has been crying alone. Donner crosses to her, timidly)*

DONNER

The other folks, um, ... some of them are throwing goods away, to make the wagons lighter. Others, they're just leaving the wagons behind.

MARGARET

Oh! How horrible for them!

DONNER

Well, Margaret... um ... Your wagon's traveling so heavy, you fall to the back each day.

*(Margaret stares at him blankly)*

You might want to make a change, yourself.

MARGARET

*(clueless)*

Make a change?

DONNER

Dang it! You have hired hands who will do whatever you tell 'em to! If you want 'em to keep driving the wagon, they will. If you want 'em to cache your goods, they will. It's up to you.

MARGARET

George, you're my husband's best friend. With him away, I'll just do whatever you say is best.

DONNER

I just gotta say it like this, Margaret: these're your possessions. Your wagon, your decision.

*(Donner exits)*

**MUSIC: JUST ME**

MARGARET

Where do I start...?

*(She looks helplessly around at her things, flinging the items around, frantically alternating between being sentimental and feeling helpless)*

A BOX OF PRETTY LITTLE BOWS  
 A BOOK OF POETRY AND PROSE  
 A GOWN I WILL GIVE TO MY DAUGHTER ONE DAY  
 AND SUGAR AND FLOUR  
 -THIS IS NOT WHAT WE PLANNED --  
 DO I TAKE OR LEAVE THE TOOLBOX?  
 DO I KEEP A POT FOR TEA?  
 AND THE WAGON THAT HE BUILT BY HAND ... FOR ME

I LEFT MY HOME BEHIND  
 AND PAID A HEAVY COST  
 FROM THAT ONE DECISION  
 NOW EV'RYTHING IS LOST  
 ONLY ONE THING REMAINS: JUST ME

WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO GO  
 I STUMBLE DOWN THE TRAIL  
 NO ONE I CAN FOLLOW,  
 IT'S CERTAIN I WILL FAIL  
 I AM LEFT ALL ALONE: JUST ME

*(Margaret holds a framed photograph of Sarah, and she speaks to her mother's image. Sarah moves in closer)*

Oh, Mama, if only you were here now.

SARAH

I'll always be here, if you know how to listen.

MARGARET

How could I leave this wagon behind? Each day I look over to the bed, and I still expect you to be there, telling me what to do, --

SARAH

Listen for me.

MARGARET

-- reminding me what's important.

SARAH

Listen for me and I'll never leave.

MARGARET

I had you, I had James, and now...

SARAH

You are not alone, not even now.

MARGARET

Each morning I wake and expect James to ride back into camp.  
Each morning I am wrong.

SARAH

You are stronger than you know.

MARGARET

And each night I go to sleep, praying that the next day will  
be the day he comes back.

SARAH

What did I always say?

*(Sarah kisses Margaret on the  
forehead)*

MARGARET

What did you always say?

SARAH / MARGARET

THERE'S NO GUARANTEE OF TOMORROW  
AND YESTERDAY'S FAR, FAR AWAY

MARGARET

ALL THAT WE HAVE IN OUR POWER  
IS NOW -- NOW! TODAY!

TODAY, I CHOOSE TO LIVE!  
AT LEAST, THEY'LL SAY I TRIED  
I DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS  
I DON'T HAVE ANY GUIDE  
BUT PERHAPS ALL I NEED IS ME  
JUST ME  
JUST ME

*(After the song, Margaret takes  
charge with a new burst of energy)*

MARGARET

*(Calling out)*

Virginia! Virginia!

*(Virginia runs in)*

Tell Milt and our other men: We're caching our goods, to  
make the wagon lighter.

VIRGINIA

Leaving everything?

MARGARET

Everything except the clothes on our back, and packs of food.

VIRGINIA

But then we won't have the --

MARGARET

We'll have everything we need. *(another thought)* No, wait! We'll leave the wagon, too, and we'll walk.

*(Proudly)*

That's my decision.

*(They are interrupted by Peggy)*

PEGGY

Glory be! Take a look at that heavenly sight!

*(Mary Ann, Patrick, and others come rushing on to see)*

By all that's holy that must be the tallest mountain on the earth!

MARY ANN

That's the mountain peak we have to climb? We'll never make it!

PATRICK

You're traveling with the lucky Patrick Dolan! Surely we'll make it!

KESEBERG

Snow on that peak, already. Dark clouds gathering.

DONNER

Well, it's a good thing we're not up there, ain't it? When we get there, that storm'll be gone and we'll just hike right over the pass before the next one comes.

KESEBERG

*(dryly)*

At last, our leader has a plan.

MARY ANN

Oh, look, look! Not at the summit, but lower down, is that-- ?

TAMSEN

I think you're right! ... a man leading a line of mules, it must be--



DONNER

Yessirree! Mules loaded with large packs! It's Charlie!

LUKE

The company eats well this night. Yup.

**MUSIC: CHARLIE'S RETURN**

CHARLIE

I'VE SEEN IT!  
I'VE BEEN THERE!  
CALIFORNIA REALLY IS AN EDEN  
A GARDEN JUST WAITING TO GROW!

DONNER

*(To Keseberg)*

See there, Mr. Keseberg? You said Charlie wouldn't come back, but here he is.

KESEBERG

Must have had some reason. Other than "kindness."

MARGARET

Charlie, what of James? Is he in California?

CHARLIE

Yes! He's securing more supplies and heading up toward the pass.

PATRICK

Did you see the ocean, Charlie?

CHARLIE

YOU'LL SEE IT  
YOU'LL BE THERE!  
CALIFORNIA'S WAITING O'ER THE SUMMIT  
ONLY ONE SUMMIT TO GO!

TAMSEN

What's the condition at the pass, Charlie?

CHARLIE

A lot of snow, but it's still passable. We have to make haste.

DONNER

Alright, you heard the man! If you still got a wagon, lighten 'em up and let's make good speed!

*(The Company goes to work)*

MARY ANN

*(Timidly, not sure how to approach  
Charlie)*

You came back!

CHARLIE

*(A little coldly)*

I'm a man of my word.

MARY ANN

Is that the only reason?

CHARLIE

Being honest and trustworthy ... that's not enough for you?

MARY ANN

Let's not fight again! I don't care why you came back, I only care that you're safe. And you're here.

*(Mary Ann impulsively gives Charlie  
a quick kiss. Charlie startles,  
then pulls Mary Ann into an embrace  
and kisses her passionately.)*

CHARLIE

I wouldn't be anywhere else.

MARY ANN

May we imagine a dance floor here, and have another waltz?

DONNER

*(Calling out in the background)*

Wagons ro-oll!

PEGGY

Whatever wagons are left, that is.

DONNER

Roll out!

CHARLIE

*(Seriously urgent now )*

We have no time. Mary Ann, help your father, make him understand: we must cross that mountain soon.

MARY ANN

But now we have the supplies you brought, and Mr. Reed is coming, we'll be alright, won't we?

CHARLIE

The summit's barely passable now. If we delay, if the next storm's bad -- we might not make it over. Tell your father: speed is imperative.

*(Charlie watches as Mary Ann exits.)*

*(A loud yelp of pain is heard from Donner, as the skeleton wagon falls onto it's side, crashing apart)*

DONNER

Ahhhhh! Dammit!

*(The crowd exclaims at the wreckage and Donner drops the chisel he was working with, as blood gushes from his hand. He wraps a kerchief around the wound quickly and returns to work.)*

Alrighty, Patrick, help me fit the wheel back on --  
*(Tamsen crosses to Donner)*

TAMSEN

George, I've made up some packs; let's take the children and get across the pass as quickly as --

*(Noticing Donner's hand)*

George, we need to clean your wound -- that's a deep gash.

DONNER

Only a scratch, Tammy, only a scratch.

*(He wraps the wound again returns to work.)*

SARAH

Tamsen is right: that wound goes far deeper than anyone thinks.

DONNER

*(Stubbornly waving Tamsen aside and continuing work on the wagon)*

Others are worse off than me -- look at Keseberg with his bum leg. 's only a scratch, Tammy, I've work to do.

CHARLIE

Even if you could repair it, the wagon won't make it up that pass.

TAMSEN

Please, George, listen to us! Forget the wagon!

DONNER

*(Reluctantly)*

Well, all right, then.

LUKE

*(Exasperated)*

Now he listens!

DONNER

*(To Charlie)*

Let's get everyone moving.

*(To Tamsen)*

Tammy, get the children. You're right. We'll take only what we can carry.

*(Keseberg, Peggy, Mary Ann, Margaret, Virginia, Tommy, Patty have entered with packs. Margaret carries Tommy. Donner carries Frances. Charlie tenderly helps Mary Ann with her pack. All appear renewed, rejuvenated.)*

SARAH

They find a renewed energy, a renewed determination to succeed.

JOHN

But all their determination can't match the cold harsh fury of a Sierra blizzard.

***MUSIC: BELIEVE /ACT ONE FINALE***

CHARLIE

THE WEATHER IS CLEAR BUT THE CLEARING WON'T LAST  
SNOW AT THE SUMMIT IS COMING DOWN FAST

SARAH / LUKE / JOHN

ALL WAGONS ABANDONED AND LEFT AT THE LAKE  
THE BAREST ESSENTIALS ARE ALL THAT THEY TAKE  
ON FOOT AND WITH PACK MULES THEY'RE STRUGGLING TO  
GO  
CLIMBING AND TRUDGING THROUGH SIX FEET OF SNOW

COMPANY

CAN WE MAKE IT?  
WILL WE GET THERE?

DONNER

WE WILL, WE CAN, WE MUST!  
BELIEVE!

DONNER (cont'd)

BELIEVE!  
 WITH EVERY STEP WE'RE CLOSER, KEEP ON WITHOUT  
 DELAY  
 JOY WILL BE RESTORED TO US TOMORROW  
 IF WE TAKE THE PASS TODAY

TAMSEN

The snow is too deep! Let's go back to the lake.

CHARLIE

No!

TAMSEN

There were two cabins. We could shelter there to wait out  
 the storm.

MARGARET

Yes! We'll wait there, for James to come with supplies!

CHARLIE

No! The pass will be blocked -- and then no one will get  
 across, not us, and not James!

*(Lights include Reed, on the  
 western side of the mountains,  
 climbing toward the summit with  
 packs of supplies)*

REED

BELIEVE!  
 BELIEVE!  
 A BLIZZARD WILL NOT BEAT ME  
 BELIEVE I'LL COME FOR YOU  
 I WILL NOT FAIL, MY LOVE  
 SOMEHOW I'LL GET THROUGH

KESEBERG

Climbing in this wind and snow. Lunacy!

TAMSEN

TURN AWAY, LIVE TO TRY ANOTHER DAY!  
 TOMORROW DAWNS ANEW  
 FOR OUR DREAMS TO PURSUE!

MARGARET

I have to get to James!

TAMSEN

You have to care for your children: give them shelter at the  
 lake!

MARGARET  
 SHELTER'S NOT ENOUGH!  
 WHEN YOU'RE ALONE  
 THE ROAD IS ROUGH  
 SO, CHILDREN, BELIEVE!  
 YOUR FATHER'S COMING SOON!  
 HE MAY BE WAITING STILL, RIGHT NOW,  
 THERE AT THE TOP OF THE HILL!  
 HE WOULD SAY, "BELIEVE!"

PIONEERS  
 THE SNOW!  
 THE WIND!  
 THE SLEET!  
 THE SNOW!  
 THE WIND!  
 THE SLEET!

*(The song continues, with all parts  
 sung together, a soaring conflict  
 of opinions about what is the best  
 course of action.)*

MARGARET  
 BELIEVE!BELIEVE! MY JAMES!

REED  
 BELIEVE! BELIEVE!  
 A BLIZZARD WILL NOT BEAT ME

DONNER / CHARLIE / SPIRITS  
 BELIEVE! BELIEVE!  
 YOU'RE ALMOST THERE

PIONEERS  
 THE SNOW  
 THE WIND  
 THE SLEET

KESEBERG  
 BELIEVE? BELIEVE?  
 THESE FOOLS KNOW NOTHING!

MARGARET  
 FATHER'S COMING SOON, VERY VERY SOON  
 BELIEVE, BELIEVE HE'LL RESCUE US ALL  
 RESCUE US ALL

REED  
 BELIEVE I'LL COME FOR YOU  
 I WILL NOT FAIL, MY LOVE!

DONNER / CHARLIE / SPIRITS  
 KEEP ON! KEEP ON!  
 BELIEVE! BELIEVE!

PIONEERS  
 THE SNOW, THE WIND, THE SLEET  
 THE SNOW, THE WIND, THE SLEET  
 THE SNOW, THE WIND, THE SLEET  
 TURN BACK!

KESEBERG  
 WE'LL DIE IN THE SNOW!  
 WHAT HAVE WE DONE?  
 WE FOLLOWED A FOOLISH MAN!

MARGARET  
 AS LONG AS WE BELIEVE

REED  
 AS LONG AS I BELIEVE

DONNER / CHARLIE / SPIRITS  
 I, FOR ONE, BELIEVE

PIONEERS  
 ALL THAT WE DO NOW IS  
 LONG FOR RELIEF FROM  
 THE SNOW, THE WIND, THE SLEET

*(The pioneers have reached their  
 limit of endurance.)*

KESEBERG  
 We must rest.

*(They stop. The adults who have  
 been carrying children put them  
 down. All the children curl up on  
 the snow and drift off to sleep.)*

CHARLIE  
*(Urgently)*  
 Cannot stop! Another mile, and we'll be over the summit!

TAMSEN  
 We cannot make another mile.

REED / MARGARET

*(From opposite sides of the mountain)*

We cannot make another step.

KESEBERG

*(Sitting down)*

We'll rest here.

TAMSEN

*(Sitting down)*

We'll cross in the morning.

DONNER

*(Sitting down)*

In the morning.

REED / MARGARET

*(Sitting down)*

In the morning.

CHARLIE

The morning will be too late.

*(At last, even Charlie gives up. With a last glance toward the summit, Charlie wraps a blanket around himself and sits down in the snow. The pioneers have all drifted off to sleep, and the spirits wander around the sleeping pioneers)*

SARAH / JOHN / LUKE

SLEEP, AND LEARN THE CONSEQUENCE TOMORROW  
OF EACH LITTLE CHOICE TODAY

*(Lights fade to black.)*

*End of Act One*



ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

*(As the audience is returning to their seats, Sarah, Luke and John have wandered across the stage, which is now set up to represent the mountain camp. Remnants of what was a covered wagon have been rearranged to represent a few makeshift lean-tos or cabins.*

*The three Spirits have taken a perch off to the side down near the audience, and they watch as the audience settles in.*

*The house lights dim out, and lights brighten on Sarah, Luke, and John, who address the audience directly:)*

**MUSIC: WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN**

SARAH / LUKE / JOHN

WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN  
WILL YOU STOP AND WONDER WHY?  
WILL YOUR THOUGHTS GO BACK AND TRACE  
WHAT HAS BROUGHT YOU TO THIS PLACE?

OR

WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN  
WILL YOU JUST SIT DOWN AND CRY?  
WILL YOU THEN BECOME IRATE?  
WILL YOU CURSE UNLUCKY FATE?

THE ROAD LEADS THROUGH MEADOWS OF SUNSHINE  
OR CANYONS OR DESERTS OR SNOW  
BUT A JOURNEY IS NOT WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU  
IT'S WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO GO

WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN  
AND ITS PEAK IS OH SO HIGH  
WILL YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE BEAT  
AND ACCEPT IT AS DEFEAT?  
OR WILL YOU SUMMON ALL YOU HAVE AND GIVE A TRY?

*(At the peak of applause, music comes up for the tag, and the Spirits sing as they move upstage, drawing attention to Margaret and*

*Peggy, sitting together in the  
middle of a discussion)*

SARAH / LUKE / JOHN  
...OR WILL YOU SUMMON ALL YOU HAVE AND GIVE A TRY?

*(The Spirits move to the side, to  
observe. It is early December.)*

MARGARET  
Seven dollars?! For half a side of beef?! That's not fair!

PEGGY  
That's my price. And that's all I can spare to sell -- half.

MARGARET  
Peggy, I have three children and four employees to feed for  
as long as we are stuck here in the mountains. I need more  
than half a side of beef!

PEGGY  
With all this snow, we may be stuck here awhile!  
*(Peggy stands, firm with her offer.)*  
And I have my own large family, Mrs. Reed. Half a side.

MARGARET  
*(With determination)*  
Instead of seven dollars, I will pay you double that.  
Fourteen dollars per half side of beef - if you will let me  
pay you when we reach Sutter's Fort...  
*(Peggy reaches out to shake hands  
on the deal, but Margaret stands  
firmly, in a position of strength  
over Peggy)*  
...and if you sell me the entire side of beef, not just half.

PEGGY  
*(Hesitates for a moment, then)*  
Twenty-eight dollars? Agreed.  
*(Shakes her hand)*  
You're a shrewd woman, Mrs. Reed.  
*(Peggy exits)*

MARGARET  
I'm a mother.

**MUSIC: JUST ME, REPRISE**

TODAY, I CHOOSE TO LIVE!  
AT LEAST, THEY'LL SAY I TRIED  
(I )DON'T HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS  
I DON'T HAVE ANY GUIDE  
BUT I HAVE ALL I NEED: JUST ME

*(Donner, Charlie, and others enter)*

DONNER

But we tried it, Charlie! Last time the weather cleared, and we couldn't make the summit then!

PATRICK

The snow drifts are too deep!

KESEBERG

Face the truth. We're stuck here until the spring thaw.

TAMSEN

We don't have food to last until the spring.

MARY ANN

But they'll be coming to rescue us ... won't they?

KESEBERG

No one can climb that summit in this snow!

CHARLIE

You're right, of course. But my gal back home says, "Where there's a will, there's a way!"

**[MUSIC: PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS]**

CHARLIE, STOP YOUR PINING  
DON'T CRY OVER SPILT MILK  
CHARLIE, STOP YOUR WHINING, AND

PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS!  
FOR ONLY A FOOL COMPLAINS  
GOOD FORTUNE'S WHAT YOU CREATE YOURSELF  
BY USING YOUR BRAWN AND BRAINS

PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS!  
AND PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE  
NO HELP THAT SOMEBODY ELSE MIGHT GIVE  
COMPARES TO WHAT YOU CAN DO

PATRICK

It's all just a matter of luck!

CHARLIE

Oh?!

*(sings)*

I KNEW A MAN, CARRIED A RABBIT'S FOOT  
RUBBED IT EACH DAY, WAS HIS HABIT  
HE BELIEVED IN THE THING  
THE GOOD LUCK IT WOULD BRING  
THOUGH IT HADN'T DONE SO FOR THE RABBIT

CHARLIE (cont'd)  
 PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS  
 WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO YOUR WAY  
 WITH NOTHING BUT INGENUITY  
 YOU'LL MAKE IT A LUCKY DAY YOURSELF  
 YOU'LL MAKE YOUR OWN LUCKY DAY

PEGGY  
 It's tough to pull yourself up when you got nothing!

PATRICK  
 We got no food, no pack mules.

CHARLIE  
 That's what we DON'T have. Tell me what we DO have!

KESEBERG  
*(sarcastic)*  
 Snow. Lots of snow.

CHARLIE  
 That's more like it! We have snow. What else?

MARY ANN  
 There's some broken ox-bows and old hides -

TAMSEN  
 What we really need, Charlie, is snowshoes.

FRANCES  
 How can you have shoes made out of snow?!

TAMSEN  
 No, no, they're for walking on snow. They're sort of wide,  
 flat soles that you'd --  
*(She reaches for the broken oxbow  
 and demonstrates the shape a  
 snowshoe would take underneath her  
 foot)*

CHARLIE  
 Tamsen Donner, you're a genius! We'll use what we have and  
 make our own snowshoes! Gather up the ox-bows and some  
 hides!

*(He sings, as the others gather up  
 the materials)*

PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS -  
 Who will join the snowshoe expedition?

*(Mary Ann, and all the kids raise  
 their hands)*

CHARLIE & CHILDREN  
PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS -

CHARLIE  
Who else will give this a shot? The choice is yours!

ALL  
PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS -  
WHAT HAPPENS IS UP TO YOU

CHARLIE  
WHEN ALL IS DONE, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE  
TO MAKE YOUR OWN DREAM COME TRUE - JUST YOU

ALL  
CAN MAKE YOUR OWN DREAM COME TRUE

KESEBERG  
A dream come true, indeed! Freezing to death crossing the  
summit!

DONNER  
We gotta stay where it's safe.

CHARLIE  
Here's a chance to get help, but you'd rather do nothing?

PEGGY  
There is help right here. We must trust in the Lord.

*[NOTE: "Charlie's Group" for the  
vocals are Mary Ann, Margaret,  
Virginia, Tamsen, Frances, Tommy,  
Patty, and John. The "Faith Group"  
is Peggy, Donner, Keseberg, Luke,  
Sarah, and Patrick -- until the  
ending, where Patrick has switched  
to Charlie's Group]*

DONNER  
FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS, I'M TOLD

PEGGY / DONNER  
AND FAITH WARMS A WORLD THAT IS COLD

FAITH GROUP  
SO I CHOOSE TO RELY  
ON A POWER GREATER THAN I

CHARLIE  
Oh, I have faith, too. But my gal back home used to say,  
"God helps those who help themselves."

*(Patrick leaves Peggy's side, and shakes hands with Charlie)*

PATRICK

Charlie, I'll throw in my good luck with your ingenuity and we'll see how far we get!

*(Charlie and Mary Ann have strapped on their snowshoes. Patrick does the same, and the three practice walking on their new snowshoes, while others sing along.)*

CHARLIE'S GROUP

PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS -  
WHAT HAPPENS IS UP TO YOU  
WHEN ALL IS DONE, YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE  
TO MAKE YOUR OWN DREAM COME TRUE

CHARLIE

SO ---

CHARLIE'S GROUP/FAITH GROUP

PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS / FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS I'M TOLD  
WHAT HAPPENS IS UP TO YOU / AND FAITH WARMS A WORLD THAT IS COLD  
WHEN ALL IS DONE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE / SO I CHOOSE TO RELY  
TO MAKE YOUR OWN DREAM COME TRUE / ON A POWER GREATER THAN I

*(The song ends with big finish.)*

FRANCES

Mama, I want to go on snowshoes! Can I go with Mr. Charlie? Please?!

TAMSEN

No, Sweetpea, Charlie has 15 folks going with him; he doesn't need you to look after, too!

CHARLIE

*(Assembling three packs, talking to Patrick and Mary Ann)*

We'll take rations for six days; that will get us below the snow line ... we hunt for food after that.

*(Charlie, Patrick, and Mary Ann have shouldered their packs, and have a few hugs of farewell with the others before setting off on their journey.)*

PATRICK  
 Good luck to you, Mrs. Breen!

PEGGY  
 Luck, Patrick? No, my faith remains in the good lord.

TAMSEN  
*(Giving Charlie a hug)*  
 And I have faith in the good Charlie Stanton.

CHARLIE  
 We'll send you help -- and supplies!

*(The Spirits watch as Charlie, Mary  
 Ann, and Patrick exit)*

**MUSIC: PULL YOURSELF UP BY THE BOOTSTRAPS, TAG**

SARAH / LUKE / JOHN  
 WHEN ALL IS DONE YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE  
 TO MAKE YOUR OWN DREAM COME TRUE

*(Segue to the following.)*

SCENE TWO

*(Lights focus on Sarah)*

SARAH

High in the mountain camp, they look to the summit for help which won't be coming.

*(Lights focus on Margaret, staring in the direction where the snowshoers left, as Tamsen approaches her, noticing her gaze)*

TAMSEN

He would be here, if he could.

MARGARET

I keep staring at the summit, wondering when I will see him.

TAMSEN

And I wonder if he will recognize you.

MARGARET

Oh, I know. I must look a mess.

TAMSEN

You look beautiful. And strong.

MARGARET

*(With gusto)*

I wanted to put on those snowshoes and go with Charlie!

TAMSEN

Hiking on snowshoes! Now I know James won't recognize you!  
*(They share a laugh)*

We have to rely on Charlie to get through to him.

*(Looking up at the summit)*

**MUSIC: WHAT LITTLE HOPE WE HAVE**

TAMSEN / MARGARET

WHAT LITTLE HOPE WE HAVE IS CLIMBING NOW  
AS CLOSE TO HEAVEN AS THEY CAN GET  
AND IF OUR HOPE CAN SCALE THAT MOUNTAIN  
WE MAY LIVE TO SEE OUR EDEN YET

*Lights focus on the snowshoe party, climbing near the summit. Patrick*



*and Mary Ann are squinting,  
shielding their eyes as they walk.*

PATRICK

THE SUN IS BRIGHT!  
TOO MUCH REFLECTION  
TOO MUCH REFLECTION FROM OFF OF THE SNOW

MARY ANN

THERE'S TOO MUCH LIGHT!  
MY EYES ARE BURNING  
BY EYES ARE BURNING, I HAVE TO GO SLOW

*(Charlie approaches, stumbling a  
bit and reaching out with his arms  
to find his way)*

CHARLIE

Mary Ann ... I need your help. Can't see: I'm snow-blind.

MARY ANN

*(Horrorified)*

Fifteen people are depending on you to lead us!

*(Lights focus on Tamsen and  
Frances, scraping oxhides and  
putting the hides into a kettle; on  
Margaret, who cuddles Tommy and  
Patty in her arms; and on Peggy,  
who rocks her baby in a makeshift  
cradle)*

TAMSEN / MARGARET / PEGGY

WHAT LITTLE HOPE WE HAVE IS FADING FAST  
WITH EVERY SNOWFALL WE'RE MORE ALONE  
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO SAVE MY CHILDREN  
FROM THE TORMENT OF A FATE UNKNOWN

*(Lights focus on Peggy, holding her  
rosary beads in her hands,  
dutifully saying the rosary over  
and over)*

PEGGY

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT  
THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH  
THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS  
THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS  
THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND LIFE EVERLASTING.  
AMEN.  
OUR FATHER WHO ART --

*(Peggy voice trails off as she continues her rosary prayer, and the lights focus on Virginia, as Tommy approaches her)*

TOMMY

Virginia, do you think Grandma can hear us? Can she - you know, can she see what we're doing?

VIRGINIA

I don't think so, Tommy.

SARAH

LISTEN FOR ME AND I'LL NEVER LEAVE

TOMMY

I don't want her to know I'm breaking my promise to her.

VIRGINIA

OH, TOMMY, NO!  
DON'T BREAK A PROMISE  
DON'T BREAK A PROMISE TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE

TOMMY

I promised Grandma I would plant them in a garden. But I think we should eat them instead.

*(Drawing out the large packet of seeds)*

VIRGINIA

Sunflower seeds! Well ...

*(Reasoning it out)*

THINGS ARE DIFFERENT  
FROM THE DAY YOU MADE YOUR PROMISE  
THAT DAY HAS TURNED TO DARKEST NIGHT  
TO BREAK A PROMISE  
MAY BE ALRIGHT

*(Lights focus on Reed)*

REED

WHAT LITTLE HOPE THEY HAVE IS NOT WITH ME  
I WISH I'D KNOWN THIS, BACK ON THE TRAIL  
THEY'RE BETTER OFF, I KNOW, WITHOUT ME  
FOR IN EVERYTHING I TRY, I FAIL

*(Lights now focus on Tamsen and Margaret, who have each handed bowls out to their children)*

MARGARET

Ox-hide stew!

TAMSEN

Maybe this broth will give Daddy his strength back.

TAMSEN / MARGARET

JUST OXEN PELTS!

THAT'S ALL WE HAVE NOW

THAT'S ALL WE HAVE NOW, WE HAVE ONLY STEW

*(The children each raise a spoon to their lips and sip. The taste is clearly repulsive.)*

TAMSEN / MARGARET

THERE'S NOTHING ELSE

TOMMY

IT HURTS MY TUMMY

TOMMY /FRANCES / PATTY / VIRGINIA

IT HURTS MY TUMMY, IT TASTES MORE LIKE GLUE

TAMSEN /MARGARET

WHAT LITTLE HOPE WE HAVE IS IN THIS BOWL

*(Fighting the urge to choke, they each force down another sip. The lights focus on Donner, who is trying to dig into the snow with a shovel, but he is clearly experiencing pain. Keseberg approaches, hobbling on a crudely-made crutch, and takes the shovel from Donner)*

KESEBERG

I will do this! I still have my upper body strength: I can at least dig a grave in the snow.

DONNER

Well, uh, thank you. My hand seems to be gettin' the better of me.

*(Keseberg takes the shovel from Donner and starts to dig)*

Don't want poor Mrs. Reed to hafta bury her own teamster --  
*(Donner exits)*

KESEBERG

*(Under his breath)*

If there was justice we'd be burying her husband.

*(Lights focus on Margaret, Virginia, and Patty, huddled together as Tommy hands out seeds to them, and they eat them one by one, while Sarah watches)*

MARGARET  
COME TASTE THE HOPE AND LOVE THAT'S IN THESE SEEDS  
AS IF YOUR GRANDMA IS WITH US HERE

TOMMY  
I hope she isn't angry with me.

SARAH  
She is not.

PATTY  
This is the most delicious thing I ever tasted!

SARAH  
AND THOUGH THIS NOURISHMENT IS FLEETING  
HOW ITS MEMORY WILL BRING YOU CHEER

*(Lights focus on the snowshoe party)*

PATRICK  
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

MARY ANN  
WE'RE LOST AND WAND'RING

PATRICK AND MARY ANN  
WE'RE LOST AND WAND'RING WITH FROSTBITTEN FEET

CHARLIE  
AND STILL, SOMEHOW  
WE HAVE TO WANDER

PATRICK / CHARLIE / MARY ANN  
WE HAVE TO WANDER WITH NOTHING TO EAT

*(Lights focus on Peggy, continuously saying the rosary)*

PEGGY  
AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION  
BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL...

*(The lights focus on Keseberg,  
talking to himself as he shovels  
snow into the body in the grave)*

KESEBERG

I DON'T BELONG!  
NOT LIKE THE OTHERS  
NOT LIKE THE OTHERS TO KEEP ME ALIVE

I MUST BE STRONG!  
DON'T SHOW THEM WEAKNESS!  
IF YOU SHOW WEAKNESS YOU'LL NEVER SURVIVE!

*(Lights shift again to focus on  
Peggy, still saying her prayers)*

PEGGY

HOLY MARY, MOTHER OF GOD PRAY FOR US SINNERS  
NOW AND AT THE HOUR OF OUR DEATH...

*(The chanting, and the musical  
lines have intensified and now the  
entire company sings, with force)*

ALL

WHAT LITTLE HOPE I HAD IS ALL BUT GONE  
I'VE KNOWN MORE SUFFERING THAN I CAN BEAR  
AND IF THE FATES DON'T SOON DELIVER  
MY LAST HOPE WILL FADE TO DARK DESPAIR  
MY LAST HOPE WILL FADE TO DARK DESPAIR.

*(The lights fade on everyone else  
and remain full on Mary Ann,  
Patrick, and Charlie, weakly  
trudging through snow)*

MARY ANN

We're going to starve to death.

PATRICK

*(Sitting down, exhausted, to adjust  
his ragged shoes)*

If we don't die of frostbite first.

MARY ANN

*(Stopping)*

I can't go on. And poor Patrick, with his swollen, blistered feet.

PATRICK  
At least they'll be able to find my body, just by following  
the track of blood-stained snow.

CHARLIE  
Stop! Shhhh!

PATRICK  
What is it?

CHARLIE  
*(Looking off stage, in a hushed tone)*  
There. In the clearing.  
*(Mary Ann and Patrick look where  
Charlie is looking. They speak in  
quiet voices but with great hushed  
excitement)*

MARY ANN  
A deer!

PATRICK  
A meal!

CHARLIE  
*(Still in hushed tones, Charlie  
speaks as if he is writing a  
journal entry, capturing the moment  
in poetic terms)*  
Look at her. Stately and beautiful on a field of fresh white  
powder.

*(He continues his poetic narrative  
while he very slowly takes action:  
he slowly lowers his pack and  
reaches for his rifle, speaking  
slowly and calmly as he does so)*  
And I must match her grace with an economy of movement in  
order not to scare her away. See how her ear twitches? Does  
she sense our presence?

*(He nearly drops the rifle and  
stifles his own exclamation -- but  
saves it in time)*  
Does she know I am too weak --  
*(his poetic tone changes to despair)*  
--I can't hold the rifle steady!  
*(Frustrated, urgently)*  
I can't! Patrick, I need your help.

PATRICK  
*(Sitting with his shoe off, unable  
to stand without startling the  
deer, he speaks quietly)*  
No, I cannot!

CHARLIE

Mary Ann.

MARY ANN

No, Charlie, I can't.

CHARLIE

You're the only one who can make the shot.  
*(He inches the rifle butt in her direction)*

Take the gun.

MARY ANN  
*(Nervously, but determined. Hushed)*

Alright.

CHARLIE

Slowly, no sudden movements.  
*(Mary Ann clasps the rifle and slowly raises it to shooting position)*

Slowly ... yes! Now find your prey. Embrace her through the gun site.  
*(He is looking again at the deer)*

See how she stands, so elegant, so plump, gracefully taking her last breath.

MARY ANN

She's mine.  
*(Mary Ann pulls the trigger and recoils with the shot. There is a pause as the three stare at the deer.)*

PATRICK  
*(Crying out loud now, in excitement)*

You did it! She's fallen.  
*(Mary Ann drops to her knees in tears, overwhelmed. Patrick gets to his feet hobbles off in the direction of the deer.)*

CHARLIE  
*(Staring off at the deer)*

And still so beautiful, as her rich red blood puddles on the white carpet of snow.  
*(He turns to Mary Ann)*

A perfect shot.  
*(He reaches out his hand to her)*

Mary Ann, you've saved us: we have food!

CHARLIE (cont'd)  
*(Charlie takes Mary Ann's hand and  
pulls her off in the direction of  
the deer.)*

LUKE  
So great is their hunger, so uncontrollable, that they seize  
upon the creature...

JOHN  
...and soon they feel the life returning to their own  
bodies...

SARAH  
... Life, and strength, and renewed hope.

**MUSIC: WHAT LITTLE HOPE WE HAVE, REPRISE**

SARAH / LUKE / JOHN  
WHAT LITTLE HOPE THEY HAVE IS IN THEIR HANDS  
AND THEIR SURVIVAL IS WHAT'S AT STAKE  
FOR IF THEY LIVE TO SEE THEIR FUTURE  
ALL DEPENDS ON EVERY CHOICE THEY MAKE

*Seque to the following scene*



SCENE THREE

*(Mid-December. The Spirits exit as lights focus on Tamsen; Donner is seated nearby)*

DONNER

Amputate? ... dangit, I ... I dunno.

TAMSEN

It's a bold decision that might save your life.

DONNER

I always left the bold decisions to you.

TAMSEN

Logic tells me you might die from this infection - and I don't want to live without you. But that's just it. Is my selfish need for you clouding my better judgment? Maybe the infection isn't that bad. Maybe it is. For the first time in my life, I don't know what the answer is.

DONNER

*(Laughing)*

Now that's something I never thought I'd hear.

TAMSEN

*(Laughing with him)*

That frightens me almost as much as the thought of losing you.

*(They kiss)*

DONNER

*(Earnestly)*

Tammy ... your first instinct in that brilliant mind of yours ... you thought cutting off my hand is the right thing to do?

TAMSEN

*(Nodding)*

But it's your hand *(she kisses his hand)*, your life. It has to be your choice.

*(She exits)*

**[Music: I'M ALL IN]**

DONNER

*(Reflectively)*

WITH THIS HAND I FARMED THE LAND IN CAROLINA  
WITH THIS HAND I TILLED THE SOIL IN ILLINOIS  
WHAT'S IN STORE IN CALIFORNIA FOR AN ORDINARY MAN

DONNER (cont'd)

WITHOUT A HAND?  
 WITHOUT THE PART OF ME THAT MADE ME WHAT I AM?  
 HOW CAN I GO ON WITHOUT --  
 HOW CAN I REMOVE --  
 HOW CAN I --

Damn!

IT MIGHT DEFY ALL LOGIC  
 IT MAY NOT BE TOO SMART  
 BUT IF I'M THE ONE WHO HAS TO CHOOSE  
 I'M CHOOSING WITH MY HEART

I'M ALL IN!  
 THE HAND THAT I WAS DEALT IS WHAT I'LL PLAY  
 EVEN IF MY LUCK IS HARD  
 AIN'T GOT NOTHING TO DISCARD  
 I'LL KEEP WHAT I WAS GIVEN AND I'LL STAY

I'M ALL IN!  
 MY WAGER'S ON THE TABLE AND IT'S ME  
 AIN'T GOT NOTHING MORE TO CHANCE  
 I WILL NOT SIT OUT THE DANCE  
 WHATEVER'S IN THE CARDS IS WHAT WILL BE

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT WAITS ON THE HORIZON  
 GOTTA TAKE EACH DAY AS IT APPEARS  
 DON'T MATTER THE NUMBER OF YEARS IN YOUR LIFE  
 ONLY THE LIFE IN YOUR YEARS

I'M ALL IN!  
 AND IF I LOSE THE BET I'LL TAKE THE BLAME  
 IT WOULD STILL BE WHAT I'D CHOOSE  
 THERE AIN'T NOTHING I COULD LOSE  
 IF ALL ALONG THE WAY I LOVE THE GAME  
 AND OH, HOW I LOVE THE GAME

*(Lights fade to black)*

SCENE FOUR

*(Christmas Day. The food is gone, everyone in the mountain camp is surviving on boiled hides. The snowshoers are out of food, as well.)*

*The Spirits watch as Charlie is standing, having just paused to write something down in his journal before continuing on.)*

LUKE

When you're hopeless, one day is the same as another.

CHARLIE

*(Writing in his journal)*

December 25, and we are lost. Snow continues. Food is gone.

*(Mary Ann enters, having come back to urge Charlie to keep up. Charlie tucks away his journal and follows her off.)*

JOHN

When you're starving, Christmas ain't any comfort.

PEGGY

*(Lights reveal Peggy, who is kneeling, in prayer)*

...And on this holy day, let us be patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, and joyful in hope. In the name of the Heavenly Father, Christ his son, and the holy spirit, Amen.

*(She crosses herself and starts to stand up, but kneels again and looks heavenward)*

Mind you, Heavenly Father, I'm having a bit of trouble with the "joyful in hope" part.

*(She quickly crosses herself again and exits, as Sarah crosses to where Reed stands apart, alone.)*

SARAH

But when you've given up on yourself, and let go of every bit o' gumption that made you such a fine man, well, it might be Christmas what sparks a light of hope in your soul.

*(Lights fade on Reed as he exits, and come up on Margaret and the children huddled together)*

MARGARET

Children, we must give thanks to God for all that we have.

PATTY

We don't have anything, Mama.

MARGARET

And still we must give thanks. I'm thankful your Father made it to California alive.

TOMMY

I'm hungry, Mama.

PATTY

I don't want to eat ox-hides off the cabin roof.

MARGARET

Well, then, today we must have a feast!

*(Margaret brings out a few items of  
food, and places them one by one in  
front of the children)*

I hid away some dried apples, salt crackers, and a bit of dried meat, saving it for this special day.

VIRGINIA

Oh, Mama!

TOMMY

May we eat now, please?

MARGARET

Not yet. Bow your heads.

MARGARET / TOMMY / PATTY / VIRGINIA

WE ASK OH LORD TO BLESS THE MEAL  
THAT WE'RE ABOUT TO SHARE

TOMMY

Amen. May we eat now, please?

MARGARET

Yes, Tommy, now!

**[MUSIC: A CHRISTMAS YET TO COME]**

MARGARET

SAVOR THE FLAVOR AND MAKE IT LAST  
SAVOR THE MEMORY WHEN THE MOMENT HAS PASSED  
DON'T LET THE DARKNESS DESTROY US  
FOR A DAY WILL SOON DAWN, BRIGHT AND JOYOUS

ON A CHRISTMAS YET TO COME

MARGARET (cont'd)  
 WE'LL SPRUCE UP AND DRESS IN OUR BEST SUNDAY  
 TRAPPINGS  
 BOOTS WITHOUT HOLES AND SOME HATS AND WARM  
 WRAPPINGS  
 WALK TO THE CHURCH WHERE WE'LL WORSHIP AND PRAY  
 GIVING OUR THANKS FOR A GLORIOUS DAY

ALL  
 ON A CHRISTMAS YET TO COME

VIRGINIA  
 WE'LL SLEEP IN A HOUSE WHERE THE AIR IS NOT STUFFY

TOMMY AND PATTY  
 UNDER THICK BLANKETS WITH PILLOWS SO FLUFFY

ALL  
 OVER OUR HEADS THERE'S A ROOF, WHAT A TREAT!

TOMMY / PATTY / VIRGINIA  
 A ROOF THAT OUR MAMA WON'T FORCE US TO EAT!

ALL  
 NO MORE CEILING THAT DRIPS

MARGARET  
 NO MORE CROSS-COUNTRY TRIPS

TOMMY  
 NO MORE STEW MADE OF GLUE

PATTY  
 NO MORE LYING AWAKE WITH A FIERCE BELLYACHE

MARGARET, KIDS  
 NO MORE COLD OF TWENTY BELOW  
 NO MORE SNOW!

ALL INCLUDING REED  
 NO MORE SNOW, NO MORE SNOW, NO MORE SNOW!

*(Lights include Reed, in  
 California)*

REED  
 HEAVEN HERE ON EARTH  
 DOESN'T HOLD A BIT OF WORTH OR CHEER  
 WITHOUT THEM NEAR  
 AND CHRISTMAS DAY  
 WILL BEGIN WHEN THEY ARE HERE

MARGARET, KIDS REED  
 ON A CHRISTMAS YET TO COME / HEAVEN HERE ON EARTH  
 WE'LL FEAST ON PLUM PUDDING / DOESN'T HOLD A BIT  
 AND DUMPLINGS AND PHEASANT / OF WORTH OR CHEER

MARGARET REED  
 FEAST AT A TABLE / WITHOUT THEM NEAR  
 WITH EVERYONE PRESENT

MARGARET, KIDS REED  
 THINK OF THE FACE / AND CHRISTMAS DAY  
 WE'RE MOST LONGING TO SEE  
 THINK OF THAT DAY / WILL BEGIN WHEN THEY  
 AND HOW HAPPY WE'LL BE / ARE NEAR

ALL REED FAMILY  
 ON A CHRISTMAS YET TO COME!

*(Lights fade to black)*

SCENE FIVE

*(Early January 1847. The lights come up on the Snowshoers, as Patrick, Charlie, and Mary Ann are struggling through a snowstorm)*

PATRICK

Charlie, how far do we have to go?!

CHARLIE

Thought we'd be in the valley by now.

MARY ANN

Nothing to do but go on.

**MUSIC: THE ENDLESS HUNGER**

PATRICK / CHARLIE / MARY ANN

THE ENDLESS HUNGER  
THE ENDLESS ACHE  
THE THINKING BACK AND ASKING WHY  
TELL ME HOW DID WE GET HERE  
HERE, WHERE WE'LL DIE

*(Lights come up on the mountain camp and fade from the Snowshoers. All in the mountain camp are listless and weak. Tommy and Patty are lying down near Margaret. Tommy rolls over, trying to adjust to a more comfortable position)*

TOMMY

I'm hungry, Mama.

PATTY

Are you sure Grandma didn't give you any more seeds?

*(Nearby, Donner is laying down with Tamsen sitting with him, Frances curled up at her feet)*

TAMSEN

Your body is too weak to fight this infection.

DONNER

I only gotta hold out 'til Charlie sends back help.

ALL LIVING (NOT SPIRITS)

THE ENDLESS WAITING

ALL LIVING (NOT SPIRITS) (cont'd)  
 THE ENDLESS HOURS  
 THE DARKEST THOUGHTS WE CAN'T DENY  
 TELL ME HOW DID WE GET HERE  
 HERE, WHERE WE'LL DIE

*(Tamsen lays her head upon Donner's chest and weeps as the focus shifts back to the Snowshoers)*

PATRICK  
 We might cast lots... Draw straws.

CHARLIE  
 Why?

PATRICK  
*(Slowly, pointedly)*  
 To choose which of us will give up their life ...  
*(pause)*  
 ...so the others will have food.

*(They realize the impact of this suggestion)*

SPIRITS  
 AT LAST IT HAS BEEN SPOKEN

*(Lights up on the mountain camp, as they fade on the Snowshoers)*

MARGARET  
 We have meat. Right over there, the body of Milton Elliott.

SPIRITS  
 AT LAST IT HAS BEEN SPOKEN

KESEBERG  
 That thought we have all held in our silent, hungry minds.

ALL  
 AT LAST IT HAS BEEN SPOKEN  
 RIGHT OUT LOUD

*(The lights fade on the mountain camp and remain full on the Snowshoers, standing together in a close-knit group)*

CHARLIE  
 Then we are agreed?



*(Patrick has arranged three sticks in his hand to conceal their length. He holds them out to each of the group)*

PATRICK

We shall each draw a stick.

*(Each person sings solemnly as they draw a stick from Patrick's hand)*

CHARLIE / MARY ANN / PATRICK

THE ONE WHO DRAWS IT  
 THE SHORTEST STRAW  
 SHALL YIELD HIMSELF TO HEAVEN'S CALL  
 AND SO  
 AND SO  
 THE SACRIFICE OF ONE  
 THE SACRIFICE OF ONE  
 WILL BE THE HOPE OF ALL

*(The music ends abruptly as the three look at, then hold up the sticks they have drawn)*

PATRICK

My luck has held true to the end!

*(Charlie and Mary Ann stand motionless, disbelieving what they have all done. But Patrick springs into action. He reaches into Charlie's pack and pulls out the rifle.)*

Aye, I am the lucky one, chosen to help out my two best friends on this earth.

*(He hands the butt-end of the gun to Charlie)*

Goodbye, Charlie.

*(He takes Mary Ann's hand and kisses it playfully)*

Farewell, pretty one!

*(He takes a position in front of Charlie, spreading his arms wide in a gesture of acceptance and submission)*

Now, Charlie, don't mess this up! May your aim be true!

*(Resolved, Charlie raises the rifle to his shoulder and takes aim at Patrick's chest. After a beat, Charlie lowers the rifle, silently picks up his pack, and turns away to continue the journey.)*

LUKE

Who could have the heart to kill Patrick?

*(Mary Ann breathes a huge sigh, and gestures to Patrick to go with her as she follows Charlie)*

PATRICK

Where're you goin', Charlie?

*(Following after them, calling out)*

But, Charlie, I got the shortest straw! You were supposed to shoot me, Charlie...

JOHN

They struggle on. There's more snow. The wind blows harder, and now it's hail, wind, and snow, and they can't go on! They just stop.

*(We now see the trio sitting in a tight circle, shielding themselves from the elements with blankets.)*

LUKE

They sit there, and the storm rages through the night.

SARAH

...and all the next day...

JOHN

...and all the next night.

LUKE

And still they sit, knowing they will die and longing for the relief that death will bring.

SARAH

Patrick Dolan finds his relief at nine o'clock this night.

*(A GUST OF WIND and tinkling of a windchime. John crosses to where Patrick lies and reaches out a hand to help him up. Patrick stands, and John hands him his "spirit" outer*

*clothing which he puts on, as he joins the other spirits.)*

PATRICK

In the mornin', the storm has passed.

MARY ANN

*(Noticing what she sees as Patrick's lifeless body, what we see as the place where Patrick had been lying)*

Patrick? Patrick, no!

*(Rousing Charlie)*

Charlie, he's dead.

CHARLIE

*(Grimly)*

And again, our friend offers a grisly gift of life.

**MUSIC: FULL OF LIFE**

CHARLIE / MARY ANN

AGAIN, IT HAS BEEN SPOKEN

MARY ANN

*(Recoiling at the suggestion)*

Oh, Charlie --- I don't think I can.

CHARLIE / MARY ANN / MOUNTAIN CAMP

AGAIN, IT HAS BEEN SPOKEN  
RIGHT OUT LOUD

*(The lights fade on the Snowshoers. At the mountain camp, there is a beat, and then the music explodes in cacophony as all the mountain camp erupt into an argument. Donner participates from his sickbed; he and Peggy argue against the idea, while Margaret and Keseberg (and Virginia) argue for it. All are singing at once in a heated argument.)*

DONNER

NO! NO!

MARGARET

UNSPEAKABLE IS WHAT THIS IS

PEGGY

WHY NOT? WHY NOT?

KESEBERG  
WE'VE COME TO THIS HAVE WE?  
THE THOUGHT IS TERRIFYING

DONNER  
NO! NO!

MARGARET  
IT'S UNSPEAKABLE  
BUT WE MUST LIVE!

PEGGY  
WHY NOT? WHY NOT?

KESEBERG  
BUT WE NEED FOOD, DON'T WE?  
IF WE DON'T EAT THEN WE WILL DIE

*(Out of that cacophony, Donner's  
voice comes through.)*

DONNER  
NO, IT ISN'T RIGHT!

KESEBERG  
IT ISN'T WRONG!

DONNER / PEGGY  
IT ISN'T RIGHT!

PEGGY  
TO TAKE AN AXE AND CARVE  
A LEG, AN ARM, A THIGH  
AND BOIL THE FLESH FOR STEW

DONNER  
WHICH ONE OF YOU CAN DO  
THE DEED?

*(The energy expended in argument  
overcomes Donner, and he collapses  
back on his bed, dazed. While the  
argument rages around them, Tamsen  
tends to Donner)*

PEGGY  
IT ISN'T RIGHT!

MARGARET  
AND IF WE DON'T, WE STARVE

KESEBERG  
 A LEG, AN ARM, A THIGH  
 IS NO MORE USE TO HIM

MARGARET  
 AND THOUGH THE TASK IS GRIM INDEED  
 IT ISN'T WRONG!

PEGGY  
 IT ISN'T RIGHT!

KESEBERG  
 IT ISN'T WRONG!

*(The argument climaxes in discord,  
 and suddenly, the lights bump down  
 to a small pool of light on Tamsen,  
 still seated at Donner's bedside  
 while Frances is curled up at her  
 feet. Tamsen has just kissed Donner  
 tenderly on his lips, but without  
 any response from Donner.)*

TAMSEN  
 A MINDLESS GAZE  
 AN ICY KISS  
 IS THIS HOW WE ARE MEANT TO SAY GOODBYE?  
 AS ONE BY ONE WE DIE

*(Tamsen takes Donner's hand  
 tenderly in hers)*

A RING UPON MY FINGER  
 A SIMPLE GOLDEN BAND  
 THAT EVENING WHEN HE TOUCHED ME  
 THE WARMTH WITHIN HIS HAND  
 OUR PASSION MADE ME WONDER WHEN  
 IF EVER I WOULD FEEL AGAIN SO FULL OF LIFE

*(Her focus turns to her child; she  
 tousles Frances' hair)*

THE AGONY AND STRAINING  
 THAT ONLY MOTHERS KNOW  
 I COUNTED TEN FAT FINGERS  
 AND EACH AND EVERY TOE  
 YOU DRANK THE LOVE WITHIN MY BREAST  
 THAT MOMENT BETTERED ALL THE REST, SO FULL OF LIFE

*(With resolve, Tamsen stands.)*

TAMSEN (cont'd)  
 FROM THIS TORMENT WE MUST BE DELIVERED  
 I WILL NOT LOSE MY FAMILY, NOT NOW

*(Tamsen's solo continues, but she  
 is accompanied by vocal humming/  
 ahhs from the others)*

WE WILL LIVE TO EMBRACE OUR TOMORROW  
 WE WILL LIVE, IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW

A FARM IN CALIFORNIA  
 ORCHARDS IN THE SUN  
 HARVESTING THE BOUNTY  
 AND WHEN THE WORK IS DONE

*(The others now join Tamsen on the  
 words of the song)*

ALL LIVING  
 WE'LL GATHER ROUND A TABLE THERE  
 JOIN HANDS AND OFFER GOD A PRAYER

*(All bow their heads solemnly as  
 the Spirits speak.)*

SARAH  
 The bodies of the dead are retrieved from their icy graves.

LUKE  
 The flesh is cut from the bones --

PATRICK  
 -- and simmered in the kettle.

JOHN  
 And the miserable stew is consumed ... with hope.

ALL (LIVING / SPIRITS)  
 I WILL LIVE TO EMBRACE MY TOMORROW  
 I WILL LIVE, IT DOES NOT MATTER HOW

*(Charlie and Mary Ann join hands.  
 Peggy cradles her baby tenderly.  
 Margaret clutches Tommy in a  
 protective hug. Virginia, watching  
 her mother and fully aware of the  
 adult decisions around her, wraps  
 her arms around Patty. With one arm  
 cuddling Frances, Tamsen reaches  
 out her other arm toward Donner,  
 who finds the strength to clasp her*

*hand in his. With hope and  
determination, the living envision  
a future for their children.)*

AND AFTER THAT TOMORROW  
LONG AFTER I AM DEAD  
MY CHILDREN'S CHILDREN'S CHILDREN  
FOR YEARS AND YEARS AHEAD  
THOUGH I AM GONE, THEY STILL GO ON, SO FULL OF  
LIFE

*(Lights to black)*

SCENE SIX

*(Mid January. Lights up on Mary Ann, who kneels beside Charlie, motionless by a dim campfire)*

CHARLIE

Take my journal, Mary Ann. When you read my words, a part of me will still be alive.

MARY ANN

I am not leaving you to die, alone in the mountains.

CHARLIE

If you stay, you will die, too. And you must live.

MARY ANN

Not without you.

*(She clings to him, sobbing)*

CHARLIE

You don't need me. You're stronger than you know.

*(He pauses)*

You have to get to the settlements. Have to tell them about our friends in the mountains.

*(Mary Ann nods through her tears, and takes the journal from Charlie)*

Keseberg was right. About why I came back: I was selfish.

MARY ANN

You've never been selfish!

CHARLIE

Came back for you. Wanted to spend the rest of my life with you.

*(He smiles weakly)*

Do you see? ... I got my wish! I was with you the rest of my life.

*(Mary Ann kisses Charlie tenderly)*

MARY ANN

Good bye, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Good bye, Mary Ann: live! Live!

*(Mary Ann exits, as the lights fade to black on Charlie)*

PATRICK

As the campfire embers slowly die, so too the life of the my friend Charlie Stanton is extinguished.



*(From the darkness we hear the GUST  
OF WIND and tinkling windchime.  
Luke continues)*

LUKE  
While one man dies, another is awakened.

*(Mary Ann enters and approaches  
Reed and talks with him.)*

JOHN  
He learns his family is suffering.

LUKE  
Worse than he ever imagined.

CHARLIE  
*(Beaming with pride as he watches  
Mary Ann)*  
She danced on the prairie, she shot the deer. She lives!

SARAH  
He sets off to reach Margaret and the children.

*(Mary Ann and Reed exit with  
urgency.)*

CHARLIE  
But it is winter still. Another blizzard's upon him. Another  
road is blocked.

*(The Spirits exit as lights  
transition to Reed, who enters  
defeated, alone, and angry)*

**[MUSIC: GIVE ME MORE]**

REED  
FIRST THERE WAS A CANYON AND A ROAD THAT WASN'T  
THERE  
THEN AN ENDLESS DESERT AND A TRIAL THAT WASN'T  
FAIR  
YOU TOOK ME FROM MY FAMILY  
YOU SENT AN EARLY SNOW  
AND NOW I HAVE TO ASK, GOD, I HAVE TO KNOW:  
WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?  
DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?  
WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME  
AFTER BLESSING ME SO LONG  
AFTER BLESSING ME WITH --

*(He stops short, remembering the  
Bible verse Margaret always quoted)*

SHALL WE RECEIVE BLESSINGS AT THE HAND OF GOD  
AND SHALL WE NOT RECEIVE EVIL

*(He laughs, in recognition of his  
situation)*

Why didn't I see this before?  
*(He sings)*

I AM JOB!  
IS THAT YOUR GAME, GOD?  
YOU'RE TESTING ME WITH CHALLENGES  
TO SEE IF I WILL FOLD?  
I'M YOUR JOB!  
WELL, IF THAT'S YOUR AIM, GOD

GIVE ME MORE!  
HOW MUCH HARDER COULD IT GET?  
GIVE ME MORE!  
MY TROUBLES HAVEN'T KILLED ME YET.  
AFTER ALL YOU SENT MY WAY  
I'M WORSE FOR WEAR BUT HERE TO STAY!  
I'LL GO ON  
WHILE EVERY DAWN NEW TRIALS WILL GREET ME

GIVE ME MORE!  
I SURRENDER TO MY FATE!  
GIVE ME MORE!  
THE EASY ROAD WILL HAVE TO WAIT.  
I WILL ALWAYS PERSEVERE;  
AND YEARS FROM NOW I'LL STILL BE HERE!  
YOU CAN TRY,  
BUT I DEFY YOU TO DEFEAT ME

EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN A WORTHY TEACHER  
EXPERIENCE HAS MADE ME SMARTER, TOO.  
EACH ORDEAL YOU'VE SENT HAS MADE ME STRONGER  
EVERY TIME, I FOUND A WAY TO GET THROUGH  
EACH ORDEAL HAS BEEN A GIFT TO ME  
A GIFT WRAPPED UP IN MISERY  
BUT STILL, A GIFT

GIVE ME MORE  
GO AHEAD, UNLEASH YOUR WORST!  
GIVE ME MORE!  
WHAT WILL YOU SEND ME FIRST?  
A THUNDERSTORM? A LOCUST SWARM?  
ANOTHER DESERT TO CROSS?  
ANOTHER MOUNTAIN PEAK TO SCALE?

REED (cont'd)  
HELL, A MOUNTAIN TWICE AS TALL  
I'LL TAKE IT ALL  
AND I WON'T FAIL  
UNTIL YOU TAKE ME THROUGH DEATH'S DOOR  
GIVE ME MORE!

*(Lights to black)*

SCENE SEVEN

*(February 19. The lights come up on the mountain camp. Dimly lit in one area, Tamsen sits at Donner's bedside. The Spirits are nearby. Peggy kneels in prayer in the background. Keseberg sits motionless on the other side of the camp. Frances, near her parents, is kneeling, with her head bowed in prayer.)*

*[Note: SPIRITS now include Sarah, Luke, John, Patrick, Charlie]*

**[MUSIC: THE HYMN, REPRISE]**

FRANCES  
 WE JOURNEY HERE ON EARTH  
 AND PAUSE TO RAISE A VOICE  
 FOR BLESSINGS OF ABUNDANT LIFE  
 AND BOUNTY, WE REJOICE

*(Frances raises her head and we see what she has become: a waif with matted hair and gaunt face; her clothes hang in tatters about her tiny frame. She takes sips from the bowl she holds in her hand while the others on stage quietly sing.)*

ALL  
 WE JOURNEY THROUGH THIS LIFE  
 AND PAUSE TO SAY A PRAYER  
 WE ASK OH LORD TO BLESS THE MEAL  
 THAT WE'RE ABOUT TO SHARE

*(Frances gazes vacantly as she sips. She becomes aware of faces, of bodies presumably on the cabin floor which we do not see. She is not startled by them, as she has seen them for weeks now and they are simply part of her world. While she eats she points to them matter-of-factly)*

FRANCES  
 Eyes! Eyes!

FRANCES (cont'd)

*(Frances, still sipping from her bowl, wanders around the camp, pointing to the eyes of the dead bodies she passes, and disappearing in search of more food. Keseberg takes up her words.)*

KESEBERG

Eyes. Eyes! Everywhere, eyes! Four companions died in this cabin. Their carcasses lay there day and night, gazing at me, judging me with their staring eyes.

*(He takes a sip from a bowl)*

I have to live. And so, I eat.

*(He takes another sip)*

And so, they stare.

*(Lights now focus on Peggy as she continues her litany of prayers)*

PEGGY

...To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of --

*(She startles, as she sees a man approaching her)*

-- valley of tears --

*(Seeing Reed)*

Merciful Mother of God! Are you a man from California? Or are you an angel?

REED

It's me, Mrs. Breen -- James Reed.

*(Reed hands Peggy a packet of dried beef, which she takes eagerly)*

PEGGY

A man from California -- and an angel!

REED

Where is Margaret?

*(They are interrupted as Tamsen rushes to Reed, takes his arm, and pulls him to Donner's bedside. Peggy exits.)*

TAMSEN

James, at last! Please, come see George.

REED

I need to see Margaret and the children.

TAMSEN

But George is-- he's dying.

TAMSEN (cont'd)

*(She takes Reed's arm and urges him  
over to Donner's bedside)*

He's almost delirious now...

DONNER

James Reed ... James Reed

TAMSEN

He's been repeating your name.

DONNER

James --

REED

I'm here. I brought you food.

DONNER

James?

*(Perking up)*

Tell me about California.

REED

The soil is rich, we can grow any crop we like! And the temperature! ... George, it's ... it's...

DONNER

Everything we hoped for!

**[MUSIC: A THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME, REPRISE]**

REED / DONNER

WHERE THE WATERS ALL GREET THE PACIFIC  
WHERE THE SUN LIES DOWN FOR A REST

REED

Wait 'til you see it!

DONNER

I won't see it but my family will -- thanks to you. Go on now, give out your food to the others.

*(Reed starts to go, but Donner  
speaks again)*

James?

*(Reed turns back)*

I wasn't a good leader.

REED

A leader needs the trust and respect of the people. George Donner, you had that and more.

DONNER

Dang it, we'd all be in California now -- all 87 of us -- if we'd been The Reed Party.

*(Lights dim on Donner. Tamsen walks a few steps away with Reed)*

REED

He's wrong, you know, about "The Reed Party." The whole journey -- all along, we should've listened to Donner.  
*(He pauses a beat, then directly to her:)*

Tamsen Donner.

*(Margaret enters excitedly, unseen by Reed, but she stops short when she sees Reed, taken aback at the reality of his presence, shy, even, to see him again. Before she has a chance to recover, the entrance of Keseberg interrupts. Reed's attention goes from Tamsen to Keseberg, who hobbles up, waving his crutch fanatically and threateningly at Reed)*

KESEBERG

You come to mock me with your riches, don't you?!

*(Margaret observes the confrontation, while Reed remains unaware of her presence)*

REED

Keseberg! I have food.

KESEBERG

I was poor and you mocked me with your elegant wagon and your wealth...

REED

*(Offering a packet of dried meat)*

Please -- take it.

KESEBERG

*(Oblivious to Reed's offer)*

Now we starve and you mock me with the food in your pack!

REED

*(Still holding out the packet for him)*

But it's for you. I'm giving it to you.

KESEBERG

But I'm not too proud to beg!

KESEBERG (cont'd)

*(Mad with hunger, he swats Reed's hand away and the food packet falls to the ground)*

I beg you, Reed, give me your food!

*(He grabs Reed by the shirt and leans in close. Desperate, in Reed's face)*

Real food and not hideous human stew. I beg you: food!

REED

*(Drops to his knee in front of Keseberg)*

Forgive me, Lewis. Forgive me for leading you to this.

*(Still not understanding Reed's offer, Keseberg sees Reed's eyes looking up at him and can't distinguish between them and the eyes of the dead)*

KESEBERG

Eyes! Eyes! Staring at me!

*(He looks away and excitedly notices the meat packet on the ground.)*

Food! Real food!

*(Keseberg hungrily grabs up the food packet and tears into it. He eats as he hobbles back to his dark corner, muttering "Eyes... eyes...")*

*The Reed children enter, and push past Margaret, who remains at a distance, observing the change in her husband. The children run to Reed who is still kneeling; Tommy and Patty cover him in hugs while Virginia stands, hesitant)*

TOMMY

Papa!

PATTY

Oh, Papa, we missed you so.

TOMMY

I'm hungry, Papa.



REED

*(Takes some dried meat from his pack  
and hands it to Tommy)*

Here you go, Tommy. Give some to the girls, too!

VIRGINIA

*(To Reed, matter-of-factly)*

You came back, just like you said you would.

REED

Virginia, I may not keep every promise, but I will always try.

*(A pause, waiting for a response,  
but Virginia is still quiet)*

Can you forgive me for how I failed you in the past? Can you forgive me for --

*(He is cut off as Virginia suddenly  
throws her arms around him in an  
intense hug)*

VIRGINIA

Yes, Papa! I forgive you!

**[MUSIC: WAGONS ROLL, REPRISE II]**

AND WHAT'S MORE

AS WE SEIZE THIS NEW ADVENTURE THAT'S IN STORE...

REED CHILDREN / REED

IF WE COME ON STORMY WEATHER

*(Margaret, overcome with many  
emotions, crosses to them at last  
and joins the singing)*

REED FAMILY

WE WILL WEATHER IT TOGETHER!

MARGARET

*(Reaching out her hand to Reed)*

And now my family is whole again.

REED

*(Tenderly clasping Margaret's hand  
in his, looking at her, taking her  
all in)*

Oh, Margaret! I can't wait to show you the land I've picked out for us in California! When you breathe that air --

*(Suddenly remembering her  
affliction, with excitement)*

That air! It'll make you well! No more headaches!

MARGARET

Headaches?

*(She laughs, remembering)*

I haven't had a headache for months.

REED

*(Puzzled)*

No headaches...?

*(Reed watches as Margaret goes to Reed's pack and takes a piece of dried meat for herself.)*

*(She carefully re-packs the food into the pack. She reaches down and re-ties Patty's bootlace, and is busy doing the little tasks of taking care of everyone, while Reed speaks)*

REED

I'm sorry, Margaret. I believed in a shortcut. I believed I could save everything and make it right. I believed in a dream.

MARGARET

Dreams take more than believing.

*(Matter-of factly)*

They take a whole lot of work.

**[MUSIC: WE WALK THE SAME ROAD, Reprise]**

REED

*(Looking at Margaret, as if seeing her for the first time)*

AS WE TOOK THIS JOURNEY I KNOW NOW I WAS WRONG:  
ALWAYS THOUGHT I HAD TO BE YOUR GUIDE

BOTH

BUT I CAN FOLLOW YOU, OR YOU CAN FOLLOW ME  
[YOU CAN FOLLOW ME / I CAN FOLLOW YOU]  
OR GO TOGETHER, WALKING SIDE BY SIDE

*(Reed takes Margaret in his arms and kisses her passionately while the music soars)*

THROUGH THIS LIFE AND AFTER  
OUR LOVE WILL NOT FAIL  
FOR NOW AND FOR ALWAYS WE WALK THE SAME ROAD

*(The Reeds have assembled packs for the children and are setting off toward the summit. Tamsen and Frances are nearby. Tamsen adjusts a small pack on Frances' shoulders)*

TAMSEN

Sweetpea, Mrs. Reed will take good care of you and your sisters.

FRANCES

Mama, I want you to come with us!

TAMSEN

I will come soon.

*(She hugs Frances)*

I'll see you in California!

*(Frances joins the Reed children, who follow Reed, exiting toward the summit. Margaret pauses to speak to Tamsen)*

MARGARET

You've done everything you can for him; come with us, Tamsen.

TAMSEN

While he still lives, I cannot leave him.

MARGARET

But that's not the logical choice, and you know it.

TAMSEN

*(Reassuring her friend)*

On the contrary. What could be more logical than to care for the man you love? I will be with him until he--

*(she breaks off and can't say the words "until he dies" Pulling herself together:)*

And then I will catch up to you before you reach the summit!

*(The two women hug, and Margaret exits, following her family. The GUST OF WIND and tinkling windchime. Donner's Spirit stands up from his deathbed and addresses the audience)*

DONNER

Three days later, I die, with my Tammy by my side. With me gone,

DONNER (cont'd)

*(Tamsen exits)*

Tamsen sets off on foot alone. Three days she had wasted, waitin' for my death, but now she's danged and determined to follow the others up the mountain pass. She falls into an icy creek, and gets sick. Tammy takes shelter in Keseberg's cabin to get her strength back. The following spring, when the last rescue party gets there only Keseberg is alive. They find him surrounded by the carcasses of his fallen companions -

*(Lights reveal a miserable but numb Keseberg, sitting in his cabin, holding a bowl of broth in his hands, but not moving...)*

with parts of Tamsen's body simmering in a pot on the fire.

*(The GUST OF WIND and tinkling windchime. Tamsen enters as a spirit. She sits down next to Keseberg, takes the spoon in her hand, and gently spoons broth into Keseberg's mouth)*

And so it is that my wife nourishes the last remaining soul in the mountain camp of the Donner Party.

*(The lights focus on Tamsen feeding Keseberg for a moment, and then Sarah enters and we begin the transition to the Epilogue.)*

EPILOGUE

(Sarah enters)

SARAH

Now, George Donner! You know that's not the end of our story.

DONNER

*(Snapping out of his memory of Tamsen's death, and seeing Frances enter, dressed in a colorful, pretty Easter-Sunday-Best dress)*

No. No, it isn't.

*(The lights fade to black on Keseberg, as Donner speaks to Sarah, nodding towards the audience)*

Tell them the ending.

SARAH

*(To the audience, thinking about it)*

...There isn't one.

FRANCES

My Mama died in the mountains that winter. But her flowers?! Her flowers return every Spring.

*(The Survivors enter -- Mary Ann, Margaret & Reed with their children and Frances, and Peggy who is pregnant again. Even Keseberg shares in the celebration of springtime, all sharing the bounty of their labors in the rich territory of California.*

*Some carry picnic baskets. Some have colorful quilts to spread on the ground. Children scamper around, laughing and playing. The picnic baskets are opened and their contents revealed: bright and colorful oranges, apples, grapes, and peaches. The stage is being transformed with greenery that seems to sprout from every corner of the stage -- vines and flowers and leaves twining around everywhere, transforming the setting from sparse cold mountain to an idyllic spring in the valley.*

*All of this has happened at once,  
the stage exploding with joy.*

*The Spirit Charlie enters, smiling  
at the abundant life around him.  
Unseen but somehow his presence  
sensed, Charlie sits next to Mary  
Ann, who reads Charlie's journal  
while he watches her face for her  
reactions.*

*The Spirit Sarah enters and settles  
in with her family. She tousles  
Tommy's hair which he feels as a  
gentle breeze and she gives Patty a  
kiss on the forehead, which Patty  
feels as if the sun has come out  
from behind a cloud to warm her  
face.*

*Spirits Luke, Patrick, and John  
enter and move among the living.  
Spirits Donner and Tamsen enter.  
Tamsen is carrying an armful of  
lupine, and she places handfuls of  
the flowers around Margaret, Reed,  
the children, Keseberg, and  
everyone. Everywhere Tamsen goes,  
there appear more and more of the  
purpley-blue lupine flowers.*

*As the festivities climax, Frances  
holds up a bright orange-colored  
peach. She takes a big bite of it,  
and while still wiping the juice  
from her chin, she says to the  
audience)*

FRANCES  
It's worth it, you know.

TAMSEN  
It is indeed!

CHARLIE / MARY ANN  
It is!

REED / MARGARET  
It is!

Aye, that it is! PATRICK

Life! ALL

It's worth it. SARAH

**[MUSIC: FULL OF LIFE REPRISE / FINALE ULTIMO]**

THE COMPANY  
 AND AS WE TAKE THE JOURNEY  
 AND GO FROM HERE TO THERE  
 WE FEAST UPON A BANQUET  
 OF MOMENTS WE ALL SHARE  
 EACH MOMENT FULL OF HOPE,  
 OR NEED,  
 FULL OF GRATITUDE,  
 OR GREED,  
 FULL OF FEARS,  
 OR LAUGHS,  
 OR TEARS,  
 FULL OF LOVE,  
 OR JOY,  
 OR STRIFE,  
 SO FULL OF LIFE

*(Margaret has scooped Tommy up into her arms as John rests a hand on Reed's shoulder. Keseberg stands with the Donners and their daughter. The Company has formed a tableau with family groups, friends, and former adversaries all together.)*

*The lights fade to black.*

CURTAIN CALL / ENCORE

**MUSIC: BOW MUSIC - MEDLEY**

*(Company takes bows. After final  
company bow, company sings encore)*

**MUSIC: WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN, ENCORE**

COMPANY

BUT A JOURNEY IS NOT WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU  
IT'S WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO GO

WHEN YOU MEET YOUR MOUNTAIN  
AND ITS PEAK IS OH SO HIGH  
WILL YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE BEAT  
AND ACCEPT IT AS DEFEAT?  
OR WILL YOU SUMMON ALL YOU HAVE AND GIVE A TRY?