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Dramatic Publishing

TWO-HEADED

A Play of History

by

JULIE JENSEN



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(TWO-HEADED)

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For the 19th-century women of Mormon Utah, brave, bold and hardworking. And for Juanita Brooks, historian, writer, who told the truth.

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TWO-HEADED

A Play of History
For 2 Women

CHARACTERS

LAVINIA between the ages of 10 and 50,
from rural southern Utah, feisty, opinionated.

HETTIE between the ages of 10 and 50,
from rural southern Utah, a believer, salt-of-the-earth.

SETTING

The play is set outdoors in the back lot of a large rock house in rural southern Utah in the 19th century. The central focus is a root cellar and a tree. The action covers forty years, and in simple ways the passage of time might be suggested in the set.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In the fall of 1857, ten years after the first Mormons arrived in the Salt Lake Valley, a wagon train of 127 immigrants from Missouri and Arkansas were slaughtered in southern Utah by Mormon zealots. The event is known as the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Only one man, John D. Lee, was ever tried for the crime. The jury could not reach unanimity in his first trial, but in a second he was convicted and executed.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

This play was commissioned by ASK Theatre Projects in Los Angeles, and received an in-house reading there. It was workshopped at Shenandoah Playwrights Retreat and at ASK's Spring Retreat. It was given staged readings at Salt Lake Acting Company in Salt Lake City, Bottom's Dream in Los Angeles, New Dramatists and the Women's Project in New York City. It was given a workshop production as part of ASK's Common Ground Festival and another as winner of the playwriting competition at Mill Mountain Theatre in Roanoke, Va. Early in 2000, it was produced by Salt Lake Acting Company, and later that year by the Women's Project in New York City, where it received enthusiastic reviews. In the winter of 2001, it was produced in Los Angeles by Timescape, as a part of a series at the John Anson Ford Theatre, sponsored by LA County Arts Council and ASK Theatre Projects again to warm reviews. The play was also published in the Fall, 2000, issue of PARABASIS, the Journal for Playwrights, a publication of ASK Theatre Projects.

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TWO-HEADED

SCENE 1 – LAVINIA’S TREASURE

Date: 1857. Ages: 10.

This scene takes place out-of-doors, near a root cellar. It is evening in late summer.

LAVINIA is climbing a tree, a branch of which hangs over the cellar. Her friend HETTIE is sitting on the cellar door.

LAVINIA. If Jane was a animal, what would she be?

HETTIE (*having played this game too many times already*). Ah...Ah...Horse.

LAVINIA. No! Guess again.

HETTIE. Ah...Sheep.

LAVINIA. Hettie, you have no imagination. Horse, sheep. They are both awful. Ugly, huge and clumsy.

HETTIE. She reminds me of something I can't remember.

LAVINIA. What is it?

HETTIE. I don't know, do I? I can't remember, can I?

LAVINIA. I'll tell you what it is.

HETTIE. What?

LAVINIA. Mourning dove.

HETTIE. Oh.

LAVINIA. Remember that mourning dove I raised in a box?

HETTIE. Yeah.

LAVINIA. You never seen a smoother, softer thing than the neck of a baby mourning dove...

HETTIE. So when are we gonna see the two-headed calf?

LAVINIA. ...That's like Jane. Very smooth and soft. What do you think?

HETTIE. I guess.

LAVINIA. She acts like that, too. She acts smooth and soft. Mourning dove behavior. Don't you think?

HETTIE. I don't think I know what you're talking about.

LAVINIA. Jane! I am speaking of Jane!

HETTIE. Oh. Well, when are we gonna see the two-headed calf?

LAVINIA. I don't want to show it to you before I show it to Jane. (*HETTIE, butt in air, tries to see through the cracks in the cellar door. LAVINIA grabs the tree branch and dangles a few feet off the ground.*) When I look at Jane doing something ordinary, I think, "Oh, that ain't one bit ordinary, that is beautiful." That's how I think when I see Jane. What do you think when you see Jane?

HETTIE. Huh?

LAVINIA. What do you...Oh, never mind. (*She drops from the tree branch.*)

HETTIE. I can't stay out here too long, you know.

LAVINIA. How come?

HETTIE. That wagon train of emigrants.

LAVINIA. What about them?

HETTIE. No one knows where they are.

(A pause as LAVINIA ponders a decision.)

LAVINIA. I know where they are.

HETTIE. They ain't at Mountain Meadow. They was supposed to be camped at Mountain Meadow. But they ain't at Mountain Meadow.

LAVINIA. And...

HETTIE. And well, they could be anywheres. They could be hiding.

LAVINIA. So...

HETTIE. Well, things could get stoled.

LAVINIA. What could get stoled?

HETTIE. Children, small animals, pret-near anything. *We* could get stoled.

LAVINIA. Who would want to steal you? (*LAVINIA ducks behind the tree.*)

HETTIE. Them emigrants are from Missouri. They would steal anything. They stoled Nolan's dog. And they ate it. If they ate a dog, they could eat a child.

(*LAVINIA jumps out from behind the tree.*)

LAVINIA (*softly*). Boo. (*HETTIE leaps and screams.*) In the afterlife, the beast will eat of the man.

HETTIE. Meaning?

LAVINIA. Two words: Be. Ware.

HETTIE. Anyways, I ain't supposed to stay out past dark.

LAVINIA. Well then, you'll have to wait till tomorrow to see the two-headed calf.

HETTIE. I ain't waiting till tomorrow! I *can't* wait till tomorrow.

LAVINIA. Sorry. But you will have to.

HETTIE. I tell you, I am a crazy person when it comes to two-headed things. I just can't stand it till I see them.

LAVINIA. Then it's too bad you won't be able to see the two-headed calf till tomorrow.

HETTIE. So far, I have seen three two-headed things. 'Course, Ezra, he's seen four. I have seen a two-headed sheep, a two-headed pup, and a two-headed snake.

LAVINIA. But you ain't seen a two-headed calf.

HETTIE. No.

LAVINIA. There's lots of other things, too. Besides the two-headed calf.

HETTIE. What other things?

(LAVINIA invents an answer.)

LAVINIA. Scissors and dolls.

HETTIE. You mean, under this here cellar door, there is scissors, dolls *and* a two-headed calf?

LAVINIA. Pickled.

HETTIE. Pickled two-headed calf.

LAVINIA. In a vinegar jar.

HETTIE. In a vinegar jar.

LAVINIA. That's right.

HETTIE. I can't hardly imagine it. Where you think it come from?

LAVINIA. I think it could be a miracle.

HETTIE. Oh no.

LAVINIA. Miracle. Like pillar of salt.

HETTIE. Miracle. Like the Three Nephites. Like the Golden Plates. Like the seagulls eating the grasshoppers.

LAVINIA. Miracle. Like the answer to a prayer.

HETTIE. No! You *prayed* for a two-headed calf?

LAVINIA. God's will be done. *(LAVINIA jumps off the cellar door.)*

HETTIE. I'm gonna start praying. I tell you, I just love two-headed things.

LAVINIA. You think Jane will like it?

HETTIE. I don't think there's nothing that's two-headed I don't like.

LAVINIA. You think Jane will find it interesting?

HETTIE. Yeah. Probably.

LAVINIA. I think she will find it "irresistible."

HETTIE. If I was gonna pray for a two-headed thing, I would pray for a...a two-headed horse. (*HETTIE kneels, ready to pray.*)

LAVINIA. Wanna hear this idea?

HETTIE. Or maybe I would pray for a two-headed bobcat.

LAVINIA (*more insistent*). Wanna hear this idea?

HETTIE. Oh no. I would pray for a two-headed Ezra. Then me and Jane could divide him up.

LAVINIA. I said. Do you want to hear this idea?

HETTIE. I guess.

(LAVINIA stands up high on the cellar roof, proclaiming a great truth.)

LAVINIA. There are toads of life. And there are doves of life.

HETTIE. Oh.

LAVINIA. You wanna know what it means?

HETTIE. I know what it means.

LAVINIA. What?

HETTIE. Everyone's a dove, if they want to be.

LAVINIA. No. (*She jumps off the cellar roof.*) Everyone's toads, the whole world is toads! Except for Jane.

HETTIE. Oh. (*Pause.*) So how long we got to wait for her?

LAVINIA. As long as it takes, Hettie.

HETTIE. How long *is* that?

LAVINIA. As long as it takes to get four cows from the bottom of the pasture, put them in the shed, milk them, and come back.

HETTIE. Let me just sneak one look at the two-headed calf, and then I'll leave. You can show everything to Jane. By yourself.

LAVINIA. No. (*LAVINIA jumps up and grabs the tree branch. She dangles there.*)

HETTIE. Please...

LAVINIA. Hush up.

HETTIE. Oh please, Lavinia.

LAVINIA. No whining.

HETTIE. I'll just look at it. I won't even touch it.

LAVINIA. No!

HETTIE. I'll give you that clear glass marble with the hole in it.

LAVINIA. No.

HETTIE. I'll give you one of them robin eggs my sister found.

LAVINIA. No.

HETTIE. I'll give you them three rabbit ears on a string we got from the Indians.

LAVINIA. No. Change the subject.

HETTIE. I'll give you...

LAVINIA. Hettie.

HETTIE. What.

LAVINIA. CHANGE-THE-SUBJECT. (*HETTIE collapses in misery on the cellar door. LAVINIA lets herself drop from the branch, landing in front of HETTIE.*) I wonder

what I'd be saying right now if I was looking at Jane instead of you.

HETTIE. I don't know. What?

(LAVINIA looks at HETTIE for a long time.)

LAVINIA. The mind belagos!

HETTIE. What's a belago?

LAVINIA. I'll explain it to you when you're older.

HETTIE. Oh.

LAVINIA. In the meantime, you've gotta study your vocabulary words. Otherwise, life is gonna pass you by.

(HETTIE moves her attention to the lock on the cellar door. She fumbles with it.)

HETTIE. What's this lock doing here?

LAVINIA. Guarding other treasures.

HETTIE. What else you got down there?

LAVINIA. Many a marvelous work and wonder.

HETTIE. Like what?

LAVINIA. Many objects of great and exceptional beauty.

HETTIE. Name one.

LAVINIA. I am sworn to secrecy.

HETTIE. I don't believe you.

LAVINIA. I have sworn a blood-red oath.

HETTIE. To who?

LAVINIA. I am not allowed to speak of it to you or any human youth.

HETTIE. Just name one other thing you got down there.

(LAVINIA ponders whether to tell.)

LAVINIA. A locket in the shape of a heart...

HETTIE. Oh.

LAVINIA. ...That you can put two pictures in. And when you close it, they kiss.

HETTIE (*laughing*). Oh, no. If I had that, I would put Ezra in it. Kiss. (*She laughs again.*) What else you got down there?

LAVINIA. Swear you will never tell.

HETTIE. Swear.

LAVINIA. Even unto death and after.

HETTIE. Even unto death and after.

(They both do a ritual gesture of promising. Long pause.)

LAVINIA. Silk underwear.

HETTIE. Nooooo.

LAVINIA. Blue, pink, and salmon.

HETTIE. I don't believe you.

LAVINIA. I got one in my pocket.

HETTIE. You have not.

LAVINIA. You want to see it?

HETTIE. I don't know. You ain't supposed to look at other people's underwear.

LAVINIA. This here's fancy. It ain't like temple garments, nothing like that. Close your eyes. (*She pulls a salmon-colored camisole from the crotch of the tree. She stands in front of HETTIE, hands behind her back.*) Open! (*She makes a rainbow arch with the garment.*) You ever see anything like that?

HETTIE. No.

LAVINIA. You wanna see how it works? (*LAVINIA puts the camisole over her clothes.*) And in here goes the

bosoms. (*She pokes her hands in the garment.*) It is worn by women of the night.

HETTIE. Oh no!

LAVINIA. They have love in every port.

HETTIE. Is that pure real silk?

LAVINIA. Yes, it is pure real silk. It costs one dollar per thread.

HETTIE. No.

LAVINIA (*vamping*). Hey, lady, you want to make a beast with two backs?

HETTIE (*small giggle*). What does that mean?

LAVINIA. What does it sound like it means?

HETTIE. I don't know.

LAVINIA. Well then, you'll have to think about it, won't you? (*LAVINIA continues to strut around in the cami-sole.*)

HETTIE. It looks like there's light inside of it.

LAVINIA. It is magic. You put this on, and you will have your greatest love come true.

HETTIE. Oh no! They wear them things when they are sexing.

LAVINIA. And they do not wear anything else.

(*HETTIE laughs hysterically. Then she stops abruptly.*)

HETTIE. We're not supposed to be thinking about this.

LAVINIA. Why not?

HETTIE. It gives me the fan-toads.

LAVINIA. What gives you the fan-toads?

HETTIE. Just thinking...just thinking...about it gives me the fan-toads. (*HETTIE shivers.*)

LAVINIA. It gives you the fan-toads when he kisses your neck? Kiss, kiss, kiss.

(LAVINIA comes after HETTIE. HETTIE, screaming and laughing, runs away.)

HETTIE. No. No.

(LAVINIA pursues her.)

LAVINIA. It gives you the fan-toads when he rubs his face on your bosoms?

(HETTIE runs behind the tree.)

HETTIE. No. Stop.

(LAVINIA pursues her again.)

LAVINIA. It gives you the fan-toads when he wiggles around on your stomach?

(HETTIE slides to the ground in front of the cellar.)

HETTIE. Please...Please...No.

(LAVINIA jumps in front of her.)

LAVINIA. It gives you the fan-toads when he lays his thing upon your leg. *(HETTIE screams and beats her feet on the cellar door. LAVINIA watches as HETTIE's "fit" subsides, then stops abruptly.)*