Standing Her Ground

An Opera in Two Acts

Libretto and Music by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (ages are approximate)

Emma Wingate, 24, niece of Henry Wingate	Mezzo-soprano
Diego De La Rosa, 30, doctor	Tenor
Victor Ralston, 27, outlaw	Baritone
Anna Roberts, 18, Mayor's daughter & Diego's niece	Soprano
Henry Wingate, 57, town marshal	Baritone
Bud Jackson, 50, handyman	Baritone
Maria Roberts, 40, Frank's wife and Diego's sister	Soprano
Chorus of townspeople	SATB

The chorus could be as small as four singers, with eight or more preferred.

ORCHESTRA
2 Flutes
2 Clarinets in B-flat
Bassoon
2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets in C
Trombone
Strings
Violins 1
Violins 2
Violas
Violoncellos
Double basses

Notes: The orchestration emphasizes the strings. All string sections (except the double bass) divide in two in multiple places in the opera. A suggested minimum number is 43221. String sections of 44332 or larger are welcome.

No gunshot sounds are imitated in the orchestration. Loud chords occur at those two places. Whether more realistic sound effects are used is up to the stage director.

String octave harmonics on open strings are notated with the traditional small circle. All other harmonics are notated in tablature that indicates the string in roman numerals (for example, IV) and places a small diamond at the point on the string to be touched.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A ballroom in a grand hotel in a city in the American West, c. 1900. Onstage are well-dressed citizens, including merchants, bankers, mine owners, ranchers, and their families. The curtain opens on townspeople waltzing. The clothing and hairstyles reflect the fashions of the late Gilded Age.

During the opening, we meet Mayor Frank Roberts and his daughter, Anna (in her late teens), who have been dancing. The dance ends. Marshal Henry Wingate has been enjoying watching. Anna is thrilled when her uncle, Doctor Diego De La Rosa, arrives because he is young (27) and a great dancer.

Henry's niece, Emma Wingate (24), is visiting from the East and arrives at the dance. Most people there have never met her, and her fashionable dress and poise draw attention. She joins the mayor's group. She has met everyone in this group except Diego, to whom she confidently introduces herself.

Henry apologizes for not having introduced Emma to Diego, whom he now introduces as the finest doctor he has known. Anna pipes up that Uncle Diego studied medicine in Edinburgh. Emma is impressed, having heard it is one of the finest medical schools in the world.

When Diego asks, Emma says she grew up in Pittsburgh, and she has come to visit her Uncle Henry to see the small ranch he has purchased. It has a lovely view of the mountains, and Henry has promised to take her horseback riding there.

When new waltz music begins, Diego asks Emma if she would like to dance, and they dance gracefully around the room. Soon, in a moment of magic realism, the stage action and/or lighting change, and Emma emerges as the stage focus. She sings about the thrill of dancing and the feeling that the world is spinning around them.

At the end of Emma's aria, the stage focus shifts to Diego, who becomes isolated from the other stage action. He finds himself enchanted by Emma, but he pulls himself out of his reverie and tells himself to stop imagining an impossible romance. Emma will soon leave and go back East.

Henry walks over to Diego. As they talk, Henry reveals that Emma grew up a tomboy. While Emma's father was building a fortune in coal, her mother was social climbing. Left on her own, Emma hung out with her two older brothers. Henry would take the trio hunting, and when Emma learned to shoot, she proved naturally gifted. By the time she was fifteen, she was beating Henry and all comers in shooting contests. Men couldn't believe a teenage girl could outshoot them, and Henry and her brothers made money betting on her.

As young adults, Emma's brothers died of cholera while working for her father in Memphis. Heartbroken, her parents grew ill and soon died.

Emma was willed a good-sized fortune. Feeling lost, she enrolled at the newly established Radcliffe. Henry now finds it hard to get used to her as a fashionable young woman, but he's thrilled she still likes to hunt.

Victor Ralston, 28, enters. Dressed stylishly, Victor wears a gun underneath his dress coat. He moves directly to Emma. He approached Emma on the train coming west, but she rebuffed his advances. Once again, she tells him she has no interest in him.

Anna asks Victor if he is staying for the dance, and he turns his attention to her. Anna enjoys a chance to flirt, but when things get too familiar, Emma tells Anna not to trust this man.

Henry asks Victor what his purpose is, and Victor replies that the night is cold, and he wishes to bathe in the warmth of the women at the dance. Henry tells Victor that he looks familiar, but he can't recall his name. Victor tells him they played cards once and that his name is Victor.

Henry recognizes him as Victor Ralston, who is wanted for train robbery and murder. When Henry orders Victor to drop his gun belt, Victor refuses, and in a gun duel, Victor kills Henry.

Victor exits, gun in hand, but he tells Emma that he will return for her, "for I have fallen in love."

SCENE 2

Night. Two weeks later. The interior of Henry's house, which Emily has inherited. She is living there now, unsure what she will do next.

The stage reveals the main room of the ranch house. The moon lights the room softly. Emma emerges from the bedroom, carrying a lamp. She loves living at the ranch, but at

night she sometimes has dark dreams. She has just awakened from a dream in which she thought someone was in the house, but she convinces herself that she is alone.

Victor steps out of the shadows and says, “You are never alone, my beauty.”

To Emma’s horror, Victor begins trying to woo her. She orders him to leave. He tells her he will leave, but first he must plead his case. He tells her he is sorry her uncle died, but he had to defend himself and acted by instinct.

Victor tries to convince Emma that they are twins in spirit and belong together. He knows of her skills with guns and wants her to be his partner in crime. He tells her they belong together and are bound by fate.

She calls him insane. He says, “I am insane. Insane with desire for you.” She orders him to leave, and he says, “I will leave for the moment. But I will return for you. I am the air you need to breathe. You know I can make you blaze like the sun.”

After Victor leaves, Emma locks the door, exits, and returns with a pistol in her hand. As her anger swells, she says, “This madman hopes to possess me. But I’ll never let him take me. I would rather die!” She swears that if Victor returns, she will avenge her uncle’s death and that Victor will die.

SCENE 3

Anna Roberts runs into the street, crying for help. Mayor Roberts is pushed out of his mercantile by Bud Jackson, who is holding a knife to the mayor’s throat. The townspeople began crying for someone to do something.

Diego calls for everyone to stay calm. He soon discovers that Bud has been drinking and is upset that the mayor called him a thief. Bud says he carried a sack of flour out to his wagon, where he hid his money. Diego can tell Bud is drunk, and whiskey makes him confused. He tells Bud to turn the mayor loose so they can straighten things out.

Bud says he won’t be called a thief. Emma steps out of the crowd and puts her pistol to Bud’s head. She says he *is* a thief. She saw him carry out the flour. Bud claims he told Anna he had to get his money, but in his confusion, he failed to do that.

Emma tells Bud to turn the mayor loose, or she’ll put a bullet in his head. She begins to count. Bud turns the mayor loose and goes off to get his money.

Diego asks Emma if she’s gone mad. “You can’t just put a gun to someone’s head,”

Emma responds that someone had to do something. Diego says, “I have dealt with Bud before. If you had been more patient, I could have calmed him down.

Emma says, “If I had been more patient, then the mayor might be dead.”

In their ongoing argument, Diego calls Emma reckless. And she tells him, “You need someone reckless to face a gunman like Ralston!”

Bud, still drunk, returns wearing a gun. He shouts, “Hey, lady! Let's see how fast you are.” When Emma turns to face Bud, her gun is already in her hand.

Bud says, “Damn! Ain’t no way that was fair!”

Emma asks Diego to bring her Bud’s gun, which he does. Emma asks Diego if she can trust Bud when he’s sober. Diego tells her she can. Her Uncle Henry did.

Emma tells Bud he can have his gun back when he’s sober. Emma addresses the townspeople and asks, “Which of you men will help me hunt Ralston down?

When no one volunteers. Emma says, “Then I will face him alone,” and then storms offstage.

The mayor tells everyone the excitement is over. “Let’s get on with our day.”

(The townspeople gradually exit. The mayor goes back into his store. Anna lingers outside.)

Bud says, “That woman’s loco.” Diego tells him he’s lucky Miss Wingate didn’t kill him.

Now, Bud realizes the woman he riled up is Marshal Wingate’s niece, and he feels remorse. He felt Henry was a good friend. Diego asks Bud what Henry would tell him if he were still here.

Bud says, “Go home, sleep, and sober up.” After paying Anna the money he owes, he exits.

Anna asks Diego if he is okay. Diego says he needs time to calm down. Left alone on stage, Diego expresses his concern that Miss Wingate “seems out of control—like a raging wildfire.” But he confesses that this fiery woman fascinates me. He calls her an enchantress. He wonders if he has already fallen under her spell.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Diego is outside, watching the street. Bud comes walking down the street.

Diego asks him how he is, saying that he hasn't seen him for weeks. Bud says he is great. He and Miss Wingate patched things up, and she's hired him to help fix up her place.

Diego asks if Miss Wingate is planning to stay. Bud says, "She ain't said," but he hopes she does. He calls her a "downright agreeable lady" and then says she's giving him shooting lessons.

When Diego asks about shooting lessons, Bud is upset that he let that slip. He was supposed to keep it a secret. Bud exits.

Emma and Anna enter, walking toward the mercantile. Diego hesitates, then calls out, "Miss Wingate, may I speak with you a moment?" Emma walks over to him.

When Diego comments that he hasn't seen her for weeks, she says she's been busy at her ranch. Diego tells her that Bud told him that she has hired him to work for her.

She confirms that she has and says, "I judged him too quickly. You were right about Bud. He's fine when he's sober."

Diego tells Emma that Bud let slip that she's giving him shooting lessons. He adds that Bud felt awful giving away that secret.

Emma asks Diego if he can keep that secret. Diego says, "Yes."

Emma hesitates, but then she tells Diego that Ralston broke into her home at night and confronted her a month ago. She tells Diego that Ralston thinks she belongs to him and that he plans to return and take her with him, by force if necessary.

Emma says she needs someone to watch her back, and Bud has gumption. Diego worries that now both Emma and Bud are in danger.

After more debate, Emma asks, "Doctor, what would you have me do? Should I submit to Ralston? Just let him take me away?

Diego responds vehemently, "No! I would never want that! How can you even say that?"

After pausing a moment to calm down. Diego tells Emma he had no idea she was in such danger. Emma says she can handle herself, and she'll be fine.

Diego tells her to "teach Bud to shoot. Protect each other!"

Emma realizes she has upset Diego and says, "I should go."

Diego asks her to stay a moment. He talks about how much has changed in her life since the night they met and danced together. He recalls that on that night, she said she hoped to explore the mountains. He tells her there's a valley he'd like to show her and asks if she would go riding with him on Saturday.

After taking a moment to absorb the change of subject, she says, "Yes, I would love to go riding."

After deciding on a time to meet, Diego excuses himself. He has a patient coming.

Anna comes out of the mercantile and comments that Diego looks happy.

Emma says, "He asked me to go riding with him."

Anna is shocked, especially when she learns that Diego is taking Emma to a special valley where he goes to be alone.

Emma says, "Not this time. This time, he wants company, and going riding sounds lovely." Then she excuses herself to go check on Bud.

Left alone, Anna is glad that Uncle Diego asked Emma out. But she wonders when she herself will meet someone who excites her. After wondering if her chances of romance are hopeless, a well-dressed gentleman tips his hat to her, and Anna begins to fantasize about meeting a handsome man and falling in love. By the time she has finished imagining how they'll meet and how he'll ask her out, she decides things are looking up.

SCENE 2

Diego is working in his office at night. His office door opens, and Victor Ralston steps in. After some tense banter, in which he praises Diego for being a doctor, Victor issues a warning: "I've seen you with Emma. Don't forget, she is mine, and soon I will take her away.

Diego responds, "Perhaps Miss Wingate will choose to stay."

Victor says, "Enough! Her future is mine to decide. Don't dare stand between us. Don't make me kill you."

Victor hears a sound and signals Diego to be silent. He moves behind Diego and aims his gun at him.

Emma has stopped by to pick up medicine for Bud. She enters the office and is shocked to see Victor there.

Holding his gun on Diego, Victor forces Emma to take off her gun belt. Once again, Victor does his best to convince Emma that the stars have ordained them to be together. He tells her she belongs to him.

Emma counters, "I belong to no one but myself!"

Victor says, "Think of the life you could have. You could be a breathtaking phantom—An enchantress who vanishes into shadows and emerges holding a gun."

Emma says she will never go off with him.

Victor responds, "Defiance must be punished. Perhaps I will shoot the doctor.

Emma: "No! Don't you touch him!"

Victor asks if she has feelings for this doctor.

Emma: "He has been a friend."

Feeling superior, Victor says, "Ah, a friend. I can see that. A sensible friend to talk with." He tells Emma that, as a gift to her, he will let her friend live. In exchange, when he comes to take her, she must do as he says. If she dares disobey him, her friend will pay the price.

Victor tells Diego, "Doctor, we must exit together; I feel safer with you beside me."

Victor takes Diego hostage as he exits.

As soon as they are gone, Emma retrieves her gun. Then she locks the door.

Emma feels Victor has her trapped. She is drawn to Diego, but her interest in him endangers his life. A showdown with Victor is the only end she can imagine. "Let one of us kill the other or let us both die."

Diego returns. He says Victor has threatened to kill him unless he stays away from Emma.

Emma, "We can't endanger your life. We have to stay apart."

Diego tries to convince Emma to move back East until Victor is dead or in prison.

Emma refuses to let Victor control her life. She loves living on the ranch she has inherited. "It's the first place I've lived that feels like me."

Diego tells her that if she chooses to stay, then they must stay apart.

Emma responds, “I know that. But I will not run—I will not! So, goodbye, Diego.”

Diego tries to reassure her that they won’t be apart for long, but Emma is adamant that as long as Ralston is alive, there can be no promises.

Emma exits, and Diego is left in thought.

Diego knows how much he loves Emma and hopes they can be together soon. “But until then, we must stay apart.”

SCENE 3

The Plaza. Late afternoon. The mercantile has a sign declaring a sale. Some townspeople are onstage. Bud enters, and the mayor greets him on friendly terms. Emma soon enters and is also greeted by the mayor.

In private, Emma asks Bud why he’s not wearing a gun. He tells her his gun belt broke, but he’s tucked his gun into his pants behind him. Emma says they need to buy him a new gun belt tomorrow.

Diego enters, and he and Emma exchange formal greetings.

Abruptly, Victor steps into view with Anna in his grasp. The townspeople are outraged to see Anna held at gunpoint. Victor tells everyone to lay down their guns, and the mayor urges them to comply.

Emma tells Victor, “Let Anna go. This is between the two of us.”

Victor replies, “Either come with me, Emma, or in your place, I will take this sweet young woman. You know I have won, my beauty. My gun is the law you all must obey.

Bud staggers forward, seemingly drunk. He says to Victor, “Goldarn it! Let Miss Anna go! She ain’t done nothing to you.”

As Bud and Victor exchange words, Bud seemingly stumbles into Emma, momentarily blocking Victor’s view of her. As Bud moves in front of her, Emma pulls his gun from his belt in the back. With the distractions, Anna breaks free from being directly in front of Victor.

Emma raises Bud’s gun and fires. Victor staggers back, hit in the shoulder. His gun drops, and his gun arm hangs limply, clearly useless. Anna rushes to her parents.

Bud picks up Victor’s gun. Though disarmed, Victor remains contemptuous.

He tells Emma that he's disarmed, so to kill him would be murder. Emma replies that she wants him to stand trial and hang.

Victor tells Emma he pities her. "I could have made you a legend. Now you face a lifetime of drudgery stuck on a modest ranch doing endless, dreary chores."

Diego tells Victor, "That's enough, you blowhard!

You've threatened two women I love!"

Victor dismisses Diego, "You're pathetic, doctor! The love of a friend is worthless compared to my passion!

Diego calls for men to help take Ralston to my office so I can treat his wound.

After that group exits, Emma checks to make sure that Anna is all right. Anna assures her she's just a bit shaken.

The mayor leads a cheer for Miss Wingate.

SCENE 4

Some months later. The mayor is in front of his mercantile. Late afternoon.

The mayor greets Bud cordially, and they sit together to gossip. Miss Wingate has sold her property back East, and the furniture that she's keeping is arriving by train.

The mayor mentions that Miss Wingate and Doc seem to be getting along now. Bud says there's no need to hide that "since Ralston got hung."

The mayor sees Emma and Diego coming and says, "Let's give them some privacy." The Mayor and Bud go into the mercantile.

Emma and Diego enter. Emma is holding Diego's arm.

Emma apologizes for how hectic things are. More furniture is arriving, so she must postpone their riding day.

Diego is irritated. "That's twice you've canceled." Then he goes silent.

Emma says, "I'm sorry. I should have planned better."

Diego says, "I was hoping for a day together—just the two of us."

Emma, "Perhaps we can go next weekend."

Diego weighs his options. During the following dialogue, Anna becomes visible, spying on them from the corner of a building.

Diego: "No! I can't wait that long. I'll do it now!"

Diego pulls a box from his pocket, opens it, and gets down on one knee.

EMMA: Oh, my…

DIEGO: Emily, I love you so much. Will you marry me?

EMMA: Yes, yes, a thousand times, yes.

They embrace. She takes the engagement ring out of the box and puts it on. Emma realizes that Diego had planned to ask her at their special valley. She tells him she loves his romantic surprises, and she's sorry she spoiled this one.

DIEGO: "You said, 'Yes.' I'm happy beyond words..."

EMMA: "I would have said, 'Yes,' any time or place you asked. I love you."

A love duet follows in which they name some of the things they love about each other.

Anna emerges from hiding. She yells, "Everyone! Come on out! It's official. They're engaged!"

Townspeople emerge from storefronts, alleyways, and other places. The mayor congratulates them, and the townspeople are jubilant as they imagine an engagement party.

END OF OPERA