

Scene 1:

(The actors all speak in direct address to the audience [Any scene that is without a setting is this way]. There is a freshly buried grave at their feet and two shovels stick out of the ground.)

MINNIE/ALICE

I want to tell you a story*-a sad story.

THOMAS

I want to tell you a story*-a true story.

MINNIE/ALICE

I want to tell you a story*-a bloody story

(The Benders make their presence known, suddenly enough to scare someone. Whether this be with lights, sounds, etc. is up to the designers.)

KATE

The lawmen crash through the door.

(In silhouette, we see PA digging up earth.)

JOHN

Splinters scatter everywhere, remains from the old rotting wood.

(In silhouette, we see MA welcoming in travels through a doorway.)

PA

Three police an' eight civilian men 'splode through the doorway.

(In silhouette, we see KATE fanning out cards.)

MA

The old floor creaking under the weight. And the men find...

(In silhouette, we see JOHN strike the air in front of him with a hammer, violently.)

BENDERS

(Quietly, spookily) Nothing.

KATE

An empty cabin.

PA

An empty inn.

KATE

An inn in Osage Township, Labette County, Kansas. Fourteen miles east of Independence Township on the road from Independence to Osage Mission, 1 ½ miles southeast of Norahead Station.

JOHN

Nothing inside--

MA

‘cept a white curtain, danglin’ in the breeze.

JOHN

The men search and find a trapdoor.

KATE

When opened, it reveals that the dirt floor of the basement--

PA

Was stained red. Blood red.

KATE

The men split up.

MA

Some search the orchard at the back of the inn--

JOHN

As their neighbor made reports of how the ground of their orchard was always freshly--

BENDERS

Dug up.

PA

There were eleven mounds of earth.

JOHN

Some of them were fresh.

KATE

All of them contained bodies. Each body had a head wound and their throat was cut open--

MA

‘cept two.

JOHN

A young woman who seemed to have been buried alive.

KATE

And another girl. She was seven-years-old. Just a slit open throat.

PA

The men find plenty of bodies under the earth.

KATE

But none of them are they bodies the lawmen are looking for.

MA

For the Bender family is nowhere to be found.

PA

John Bender, or “Pa”. He was from Germany. Some reports said he had a thick German accent. Others said he only spoke German. Others say that when he got ‘specially angry, he’d break out in perfect English, cussin’ someone out--

MA

Elvira Bender. Or “Ma”. She was the wife of Mr. Bender. He was Elvira’s fourth husband. The past three all had died from “mysterious causes”. She met John when she came to America from Germany with her son.

JOHN

John Jr. Bender, the “son”. Everyone knew he was slow and dumb. Barely said a word. Did most of the labor around the inn. Quiet. Had a wife, but no one could know she was his wife.

KATE

Kate Bender, the “daughter”. The attraction of the area, her being a spiritualist and a medium. She often did readings for travelers going through the area. It was also said that she would give them a night of pure pleasure for a few cents. These could be rumors, however, made by the travelers she refused to court. They never knew why she refused them.

PA

The Benders were well-known in their area. But what the area knew of the Benders didn’t always seem true.

JOHN

They fled in the middle of a storm, before they could be asked to answer anything truthfully.

KATE

Almost as if they never were around.

MA

Ah, but they were there. The bodies in the ground can tell you that.

Scene 2: The Orchard

(PA and JOHN pick up the shovels and continue work filling in a shallow grave in their orchard with MA and KATE looking on. The men look disheveled and JOHN has a little blood on his face. This goes on for a while in silence, until the men finish and exit, with MA following behind them. This leaves KATE, looking over the grave. MA comes back out.)

MA

Kate!? Kate! What are you still doing out here? The sun is coming up! We need to go back into the house before anyone sees--

KATE

Yes, mama.

MA

And you must get ready, I heard from someone in town that heard from a motel a few towns away that another traveler is on his way. He saw our ad and will be here soon. You must be ready!

KATE

Why must I be, mama?