



# Riders of the Purple Sage

*Zane Grey*

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## **Riders of the Purple Sage** Zane Grey

“Where I was raised a woman's word was law. I ain't quite outgrown that yet.”

‘Riders of the Purple Sage’ tells the story of Jane Withersteen and her battle to overcome her persecution by members of her polygamous Mormon fundamentalist church, a leader of which, Elder Tull, wants to marry her. Withersteen is supported by a number of Gentile friends, including Bern Venters and Lassiter, a famous gunman and killer of Mormons. Unlike many Western novels, which are often straightforward and stylized morality tales, ‘Riders’ is a long novel with a complex plot that develops in many threads. The story is set in the cañon country of southern Utah in 1871.

Throughout most of the novel Jane Withersteen struggles with her "blindness" in seeing the evil nature of her church and its leaders, trying to keep both Venters and Lassiter from killing her adversaries, who are slowly ruining her. Through the adoption of a child, Fay, she abandons her false beliefs and discovers her true love. A second plot strand tells of Venters and his escape to the wilderness with a girl named Bess, "the rustler's girl," whom he has accidentally shot. While caring for her, Venters falls in love with the girl, and together they escape to the East, while Lassiter, Fay, and Jane, pursued by both Mormons and rustlers, escape into a paradise-like valley by toppling a giant balancing rock, forever closing off the only way in or out.

‘The Rainbow Trail’, a sequel to ‘Riders of the Purple Sage’ that reveals the fate of Jane and Lassiter and their adopted daughter, was published in 1915. Both novels are notable for their protagonists' strong opposition to Mormon polygamy, but in ‘Rainbow Trail’ this theme is treated more explicitly. The plots of both books revolve around the victimization of women in the Mormon culture: events in ‘Riders of the Purple Sage’ are centered on the struggle of a Mormon woman who sacrifices her wealth and social status to avoid becoming a junior wife of the head of the local church, while ‘Rainbow Trail’ contrasts the fanatical older Mormons with the rising generation of Mormon women who will not tolerate polygamy and Mormon men who will not seek it.

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