

Jane Eyre

An Opera in Three Acts

Music by Louis Karchin

Libretto by Diane Osen

Based on the novel by Charlotte Brontë

CD 1

ACT 1

[1] SCENE 1

The curtains part to reveal a darkened stage. At center stage, flames are beginning to spiral up the curtains of the massive canopy bed in which MR. ROCHESTER sleeps; smoke wafts through the air. JANE, wearing only a night dress and a shawl, enters at a run from a door at the left.

JANE, bending over the bed, and shaking MR. ROCHESTER'S shoulder:

Mr. Rochester! Mr. Rochester!

Fearing that MR. ROCHESTER has been overcome, she dashes to the bureau opposite the bed, where a basin and ewer sit. She splashes the water from the basin onto the bed curtains, dousing the fire. Next she hurls the flowers and water from a nearby vase onto MR. ROCHESTER'S recumbent form. As the flames begin to sputter, he stirs.

MR. ROCHESTER, sitting up:

What the devil has happened here?

And who stands panting by the chair?

Has a storm, or flood, perhaps come near?

But no – that's smoke that fouls the air.

JANE:

A fire has been set tonight;

Your very bed has been set alight.

MR. ROCHESTER:

What's this? An elf come to save me?

JANE:

I thank God you're alive, sir!

Shall I light you a candle?

MR. ROCHESTER:

And at these bedclothes have you stare?

I think not; wait a bit, Miss Eyre.

JANE turns her back and walks toward the bureau as MR.

ROCHESTER gets out of bed and quickly puts on a dressing gown hanging from one of the bed posts. JANE lights the candle and the room is illuminated.

MR. ROCHESTER:

You may bring the candle here now.

JANE (Walking toward MR. ROCHESTER):

Sir, there is a plot against you!

You must protect yourself, and soon!

MR. ROCHESTER, taking the candle from her and placing it on his desk:

I shall protect us all, I swear!

First tell me what you know, Miss Eyre.

JANE:

I was dreaming in peace, sir,

When startled quite awake

By a low, gurgling murmur

That made my senses quake.

All else was hushed; the clock struck two;

Then footsteps sounded, very near.

A demon laughed – a goblin true!

My marrow froze; I ached with fear.

Still I rose, and called "Who's there?"

Something moaned, then hissed; the footsteps turned.

With trembling hands the lock I dared;

Saw in your room a fire burned.

MR. ROCHESTER:

You've heard that laugh before, I think?

Or a ghoulish sound quite like it?

JANE:

You've heard it too! It is Grace Poole,

Who sews and mends in the attic.

Catch her, Sir, lest she strike again –

She's a creature quite Satanic!

MR. ROCHESTER:

I've little fear of that seamstress,

But I shall follow your advice.

I'll lock her in, so you'll be safe;

And then return here in a trice.

MR. ROCHESTER departs. JANE wraps her shawl more tightly around her shoulders and begins to pace the room.

JANE:

That mirthless laugh, so weird and low;

A lifetime since I trembled so –

I was but six, an angry child;

Abhorred by all, I acted wild.

Locked in the Red Room, how I cried,

Afraid and trapped where Uncle died.

My jailer? His wife.

Her heart? A stone.

Have pity, I begged; don't leave me alone.

But proud Aunt Reed refused to stay;

"Jane Eyre," she said, "You must obey,

You mad, rebellious cat;

You loathsome pest;

The devil's own."

A soul without a friend, was I;

There in the Red Room, I yearned to die.

JANE sits down on a chair beside the desk.

But off to school I was sent instead,

To learn among other poor orphans.

How famished we were, eating only stale bread!

No wonder we died by the dozens.

Dear Helen Burns, how I loved her!

Bless those who curse you, she urged me;

Use the power of faith and of prayer.

So I prayed and I drew, I studied and taught;

Aunt Reed, I am now Miss Jane Eyre.
A governess in this great house,
For my master's charming young ward.
No more haunted by the past,
And blessed in all things by the Lord.

MR. ROCHESTER enters the room.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Still here I see? And quite alone?

JANE, walking toward him:
Is Mrs. Poole locked up? Are we
Now quite safe from her villainy?

MR. ROCHESTER:
Yes, indeed – all thanks to you.
This mistake Grace Poole will rue.

JANE:
What shall you do, sir?

MR. ROCHESTER, leading her back to the chair by the desk, and
motioning for her to sit:
You must leave that to me, Miss Eyre.
I trust that meets your approval?

JANE:
By all means, sir. I wouldn't care
To deal with that fiendish servant.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Yet brave enough to douse a fire!

JANE:
Most men assume women are calm
And content to be left alone
With their knitting or their scones.
But the truth is we crave action!
Just like you, we must be free
To exercise our faculties.

MR. ROCHESTER:
That well may be true; but I trust
You shall not exercise your right
To share tomorrow with the staff
All that's happened here tonight.

JANE, rising:
You have my word, Sir.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Nor can my house guests be alarmed
By tales of fire in the night.
I know Miss Ingram won't be charmed
By the story of your courage.
A lady she was bred to be:
Sweet, gentle, accomplished,
A paragon of modesty.
But why do we discuss my guests?
You're quite fatigued; you need your rest.
Pray wait here just a minute more.
It would not do to have you seen;
I'll scout the way back to your door.

He closes the door softly, leaving JANE alone again.

JANE, resuming her seat:
My master is a mystery:
Moody; imperious; often severe.

It's said he has a history
Of bending others to his will.
He does not care for compliments,
And makes no effort to impress.
And yet he can be quite at ease:
He calls me "Witch" and "Sorceress,"
And very slowly, by degrees,
He takes me in his confidence.

*JANE rises and begins to pace again, pulling her shawl around her
shoulders.*

Though our stations be unequal
He hears the music in my soul
As I hear his, despite his growl.
How odd it is, this sympathy:
I dare not hope – but could it be
That we are linked by destiny?

*The curtain closes as JANE continues to pace, waiting for MR.
ROCHESTER to return.*

[2] SCENE 2

*The curtains part to reveal the drawing room of Thornfield
Hall, MR. ROCHESTER'S home. It is an opulent space, distinguished
by elegant furniture and pictures. At stage left, on an overstuffed
damask sofa, sit JANE and MRS. FAIRFAX, the housekeeper. Both of
the ladies are dressed in plain gray gowns, their embroidery bags in
their laps. To the right sit MR. ROCHESTER, MISS BLANCHE
INGRAM and MR. RODERICK INGRAM, siblings, and their mother
MRS. INGRAM. All four are attired in evening dress, and engaged in a
desultory game of cards. Behind them sit two ladies and two
gentlemen, similarly attired and also playing cards.*

INGRAM:
I'm duly impressed, Rochester!
I thought all you did in Venice
Was woo the beautiful women –

MRS. INGRAM:
And beat the gentleman at whist!

INGRAM:
Quite so! You've nearly wiped me out.
But I never knew till now, sir,
That you had devoted yourself
To Lucia de Lammermoor,
Or the treacherous Anne Boleyn,
Or the poisonous Lucretia.

MRS. INGRAM:
And who are these frightful ladies?

INGRAM:
Marvelous creatures brought to life
By an Italian composer.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Donizetti, to be exact.
A composer,
Mrs. Ingram,
For the opera:
The most sublime art
Invented by man.

MRS. INGRAM:
Mr. Ingram never cared for
Music, nor for Italians.

BLANCHE:

But Papa never went abroad;
He did not like to leave the shire.
Our host has seen and heard marvels
Our father could not imagine.

INGRAM:

And what do you know of these, Blanche?
You've never heard an opera!

MR. ROCHESTER:

One need not hear an orchestra
To apprehend the majesty
Of a work by Donizetti.
It has been my honor to whet
Your sister's appetite
For noted musical delights.

BLANCHE:

And my pleasure to hear you sing!

INGRAM:

You are a man of many parts.

ROCHESTER, *rising*:

I am a slave to novelty –
And to that end, pray excuse me;
I must see to the arrangements
For this evening's entertainment.

MRS. INGRAM:

How delightful!

MR. ROCHESTER:

Miss Eyre, come here and take my place.

JANE, *surprised*:

I?

MR. ROCHESTER:

You long for action, do you not?

JANE, *rising*:

But I –

MR. ROCHESTER, *cutting her off*:

No excuses!
I shall return!
Ladies... Ingram...
Mrs. Fairfax,
Follow me.

As MR. ROCHESTER and MRS. FAIRFAX depart, JANE walks to the games table, clearly uncomfortable.

MRS. INGRAM:

This is most unsettling.

JANE:

For me as well, Madame.
I fear I cannot play.

MRS. INGRAM, *coldly, as she turns her cards face down*:

We shall not be playing;
You may resume your place.

JANE walks back to the sofa and sits down in the corner.

INGRAM:

I wonder what he plans?

BLANCHE:

Edward knows I love surprises;
It is sweet how he tries to please.
Most of you men fail to realize
That ladies wish to be worshipped.
You gaze at your own reflections,
Stroking your whiskers and sighing.
But Edward needs no correction:
He revels in feminine charms.
And yet, Mama, he plays the fool:
He doesn't send his ward to school –
She learns here with a governess!
Pathetic creatures, every one –
Timid and drab, with naught to say!
Were I the mistress, she'd be gone,
And then the child, without delay.
But I do not wish to compel
Any man to do what is right;
Whomever I marry must be
commanding, resourceful and manly –
Yet willing to yield,
Without my demanding.

MRS. INGRAM, *patting her daughter's hand*:

Very well said, my dearest Blanche.

The ladies playing behind them suddenly begin to applaud, as one of the men quite dramatically throws down his cards and the other stands to take a small bow. BLANCHE, INGRAM and MRS. INGRAM join in, to general merriment. As the company begins to murmur among themselves, a strange figure enters the Library: a GYPSY, limping and coughing, and enveloped by a cloak and hood that hide everything but her eyes. All conversation ceases as she makes a deep bow to BLANCHE.

GYPSY, *in a high-pitched voice*:

Fear ye not, Lady, nor ye men.
Your host, he has sent me to you,
Your fortune to tell and explain.
Know all that I say will come true.

The gypsy reaches out to take BLANCHE'S hand, but she backs off in disgust.

BLANCHE:

You ugly old creature! I'll go
Where you lead; just don't touch me, I say!
My fate is what I wish to know,
For 'tis best to prepare, come what may.

BLANCHE strides to the door as the gypsy bows once again and follows her outside.

MRS. INGRAM:

How strange that Mr. Rochester
Is acquainted with a gypsy!

INGRAM:

They camp all about the country,
And will do anything for lucre.
Let us resume our game, Mama:
We shall take our turns next, I'm sure.

INGRAM gathers the cards and proceeds to shuffle them, while MRS. INGRAM takes a sip of her wine. As he begins to deal, the game is interrupted by the unexpected return of BLANCHE to the drawing room. All turn to face her.

BLANCHE, *visibly upset*:

Pray, do not ask me what was said;
It was all that one might expect
From a filthy old crone in rags.
And yet I cannot help but fear
That what she revealed is the truth.
Our host has played an awful trick!

BLANCHE turns on her heel and exits the room.

INGRAM, *throwing down his cards and following after her*:
Blanche, I'm sure it was all in fun!

MRS. INGRAM, *placing her cards on the table and rising*:
Don't upset yourself, dearest!
You don't look well when you're angry!
I say, children, wait for your Mama!

Turning toward the other players:
Don't just sit there like mannequins!
Find that gypsy and throw her out!

As MRS. INGRAM strides out of the room, the other players follow quickly behind her, leaving JANE alone.

JANE, *rising from her spot on the sofa*:
Truly her beauty is eloquent,
Just like her voice, her slashing wit.
What a pupil she must have been:
Apt, of course, but quietly cruel –
That such as she should be his wife!
Mere paste, beside a rough diamond.
What have I wanted all my life?
To love and be loved, equally!
Surely he wishes for this too?
Yet it's Miss Ingram he does woo.

As JANE turns toward the doorway to depart, the GYPSY enters the drawing room.

GYPSY, *making a deep bow, then drawing near*:
Time for your fortune to be told –
But first, cross my palm with silver.
I do but what your host demands.
Are you brave enough to linger?

JANE, *reaching into her purse for a coin, which she hands to the gypsy*:
Surely, you think not to scare me!

GYPSY, *pocketing the coin, and bowing again*:
Who knows what real ladies may fear?
You saw the bride run out of here.

JANE, *stiffly*:
Miss Ingram is still unattached,
And Mr. Rochester quite free.

The GYPSY and JANE sit down at the table.

GYPSY, *gathering the cards into a pile*:
Miss Blanche may no longer be so keen:
I've foretold she'll not get her wish.
Your master is said to be rich,
But his wealth is not what it seems.

The GYPSY gestures to JANE to give him her hand.

JANE:
I've no interest in my master's wealth.

GYPSY:
Any fool could see your future:
The hand is soft; the lifelines clear;
The brow untroubled by regret;
The eyes are bright; the gaze, sincere;
The skin is smooth, the cheeks quite pink;
The mouth, it is quite generous;
Yet what the heart feels is obscured
By a worry without purpose.
Will she seize the joy that beckons
Or persist in guarding her heart?
Will she seek the one who loves her?
Or let scruples keep them apart?
One word, a glance, would pave the way;
The question is: will Miss Eyre try?
If she but wished to, she would find
True happiness in wait close by.

JANE, *withdrawing her hand*:
You've asked many questions, old Gypsy,
But what are the answers? Do tell me!

GYPSY, *snatching back JANE'S hand, and replying in "her" authentic voice*:
The answers are locked within you;
Even a gypsy lacks that key.
You think I rave, yet all I've said
Is naught, Miss Eyre, but what is true.

MR. ROCHESTER removes his hood, revealing his face to JANE'S evident surprise.

JANE:
Sir! Is it you under that hood?

MR. ROCHESTER, *rising*:
It is indeed, Jane; forgive me.

JANE, *rising*:
What sort of silly trick is this?

MR. ROCHESTER:
I did not intend to trick you;
I wanted only to –

MR. ROCHESTER'S apology is interrupted by the sudden return of MRS. FAIRFAX to the drawing room.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *curtseying*:
Pray excuse me for intruding,
I did not think Miss Eyre was here.
A gentleman has come to call
And begs to know when you'll appear.

MR. ROCHESTER:
The devil he does!
What name does he give?

MRS. FAIRFAX:
He said his name is Mason, sir,
From Spanish Town, the West Indies.

MR. ROCHESTER, *gasps and nearly staggers*:
Mr. Richard Mason?

MRS. FAIRFAX:
Aye, that is what he said, sir.

MR. ROCHESTER, *righting himself*:
I'll see him in my study.

Let him know I'm on the way.

MRS. FAIRFAX curtseys again before hurriedly departing. *MR. ROCHESTER* turns toward *JANE*.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Jane, I've had a blow –

JANE, going toward him:
Lean on me, sir!
What can I do?
I'll give my all
And stand with you.

MR. ROCHESTER, taking Jane by the arm:
A comrade true!
Though oh, so slight:
Would that we could stand as one
And fly away into the night.

Releasing her, as he pulls himself up to his full height:

But wishing does not make it so:
I must face facts, and you must go.
Inform my guests the gypsy's fled,
And send them posthaste to bed.
This blasted interruption
Will not set my doom in motion.
Can I trust you with this task?

JANE, taking Mr. Rochester's proffered arm:
Need you ask?

[3] SCENE 3

The curtains part to reveal MR. ROCHESTER'S study. Bookcases ring three walls; to the left is a sofa, to the right a large desk at which two men are sitting. MR. MASON's tie is loosened, his sleeves rolled up; he is groaning miserably, and holds his head in one of his hands. MR. ROCHESTER, clearly annoyed, is doing his best to wind a bandage around MASON'S other arm, which is bleeding profusely. On the desk, beside a basin of water and several lengths of gauze, are several bottles of alcohol and crystal glasses.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Come, man, buck up!
'Tis but a scratch!

MR. MASON:
She's nearly killed me!

MR. ROCHESTER:
Courage, Mason!
You've lost a little
Blood; that's all.

MASON:
This wound was not
Made by a knife,
Sir; it's a bite!
She attacked me
Like a tigress!
!!
Her one true friend!
She sucked my blood!
Vowed she would drain
My very heart!

MR. ROCHESTER, having finished bandaging the wound:
Enough, Mason!

Ignore her sly gibberish!
What you need is
A good long nap.

MR. ROCHESTER, reaching for one of the bottles, he pours out a measure of brightly colored liquid, and hands the glass to MASON:
Drink this, Richard,
And you shall see:
All will be well.

As MASON cautiously drains the glass, neither he nor MR. ROCHESTER notices JANE, who has soundlessly entered the room and stands uncertainly behind them.

MR. MASON:
I could rest easy enough if
I knew she would come to no harm.
Promise me, Edward, come what may,
You'll always treat her tenderly.

MR. ROCHESTER takes MASON by his good arm and helps him to his feet.

I do my best; have done it
And will do it, I guarantee.

With MR. ROCHESTER'S help MASON walks to the door slowly, shakes MR. ROCHESTER'S hand and departs. MR. ROCHESTER watches him walk away before carefully closing the door. JANE moves toward him from the back of the room.

MR. ROCHESTER:
A kitten has a stouter heart;
If only he'd sleep forever!

JANE, stepping forward:
Sir!
What a thing to say!

MR. ROCHESTER, seating himself back at the desk, and pouring himself a glass of whiskey:
Ah, my good conscience has arrived!

MR. ROCHESTER knocks back his drink.

JANE, seating herself on the sofa:
But surely, sir, he must object
If Grace Poole does him injury?

MR. ROCHESTER:
Don't trouble yourself about her.

Rising, he begins to pace:

You've nothing to fear from Grace Poole!
But I stand on a precipice,
And may fall at any moment.
One careless word from Mason,
And happiness will desert me,
'Ere she ever bloomed in this house.

JANE:
I don't understand you, Sir.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Imagine, Jane, a spoiled, wild boy,
A second son with little love
From craven parents to enjoy,
And burdened with so much to prove.
Sent abroad to earn his fortune,
He learns that he has been deceived –

That those he trusted want his ruin.
His bitterness can't be conceived;
In time the wound he cannot bear:
He dissipates; he hates his life.
Debauchery claims him; then despair.
He finds no balm to cure his strife
Save in dice and tawdry affairs
With ladies always short on cash.
He loves them not; his only care
Is securing satisfaction.
But even that he soon disdains
And ventures home, hopes dashed again.
The gentry seek him out at once,
His idle, reckless past unknown;
They boast and preen, they ride and hunt
And in their midst, he's most alone.

MR. ROCHESTER sits beside JANE on the sofa.

Then, a miracle! he is blessed
With a chance to regain his soul,
Thanks to a friend who is possessed
Of a heart that is pure and whole.
Must convention stand in the way
Of transforming his sins into good?
Must he thrust all his hopes away
Because others believe he should?

JANE, kindly but firmly:
It is God alone who judges
A sinner's genuine repentance.

MR. ROCHESTER:
But first He sends us an angel,
An instrument of salvation,
And I believe you are she, Jane,
Though it is with trepidation
That I bear my soul.

A knock sounds at the door to the left and MRS. FAIRFAX immediately enters the room with a stranger dressed in mourning. MR. ROCHESTER rises as well.

MRS. FAIRFAX, curtseying:
Please forgive me, Sir:
For interrupting twice
In this long night:
I was bid make haste
By this servant from
Miss Eyre's former home.

JANE, approaching BESSIE:
Bessie, is it you?
What has happened?

BESSIE, curtseying first to MR. ROCHESTER, then to JANE:
Yes; 'tis Bessie, Miss.
I've come with bad news,
I'm afraid. Your aunt
Is nearing the end
And demands to see
You while there's still time.

MR. ROCHESTER:
She said she had no family!

BESSIE, turning to Mr. Rochester:
It is true she is an orphan,
Sir; her Uncle Reed took her in
And meant to raise her as his own.

But then he died; and left alone,
The child knew naught but misery,
And no one listened to her pleas.
Jane let her violent temper rule,
And soon they sent her off to school.

BESSIE, turning now to face JANE directly:
Still your Aunt Reed's hatred grew;
And when a stranger came for you
Her enmity she did not hide:
With conscience clear, she said you'd died.

JANE:
A stranger, you say – asking for me?

BESSIE:
Aye – and a wealthy man was he!
Her guilt has turned to lunacy;
All she wants is to see Miss Eyre,
So that this wrong she may repair.

JANE, MRS. FAIRFAX, BESSIE, MR. ROCHESTER:
A stranger, you say – asking for me/her?
Aye – and a wealthy man was he!
Her guilt has turned to lunacy;
All she wants is to see Miss Eyre
So that this wrong she may repair.

JANE, turning to MR. ROCHESTER:
I must hear what she has to say!
She's dying, sir, I can't delay!

MR. ROCHESTER:
I pray you will keep well, my dear.
My heart rebels; it wants you here.

As the two older women curtsey, JANE leads the way out of the room, without a glance back. As the curtain descends MR. ROCHESTER pours himself another whiskey, his expression unreadable.

ACT 2

[4] SCENE 1

The curtains part to reveal MRS. FAIRFAX pacing back and forth in the drawing room, illuminated by the glow of several crystal candelabras.

MRS. FAIRFAX:
No!
It can't be so!
Back home at last, for but an hour
And already overpowered
By the master's 'passioned embrace.
Was it she who tried to erase
The line that surely divides them?
She will lose her reputation!

JANE now enters the drawing room, walking immediately to MRS. FAIRFAX'S side.

JANE:
Mrs. Fairfax, what upsets you?
I saw you run from the foyer
As though frightened through and through.

MRS. FAIRFAX:
Indeed, Miss Eyre, I had a fright,
I saw our master embrace you –
Claim you for his very own –
Yet you failed to resist or take flight.

JANE:
I am to be his bride, m'am;
And he is to be my husband.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *coldly*:
Equality of position
And a favorable fortune
Are what most brides bring to their grooms.
You bring him an heir, I presume?

JANE:
Your presumption is insulting.

JANE turns to leave.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *grabbing her arm*:
He is my cousin
By my late husband,
And you are a girl
In need of a friend:
Gentlemen like him
Are loathe to marry
A mere governess
With whom they dally.

JANE, *shrugging off MRS. FAIRFAX*:
I bring him nothing but myself.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *more warmly*:
I had to be sure, for your sake
As well as Mr. Rochester.
I beg you one promise to make:
To distance yourself, and deter
All entreaties till you are his wife.
His interest this surely will stir,
And virtue will guide your new life.

JANE, *extending her hand*:
I will consider your advice.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *taking her hand*:
I am glad to hear you say so!
Come, let us sit a bit and chat.

MRS. FAIRFAX leads JANE to the sofa, and both sit down.

MRS. FAIRFAX:
All the gentry thought he would wed
Miss Ingram! And I thought so too.

JANE:
I must confess I was surprised –

MR. ROCHESTER enters the room, cutting off the conversation. Both women rise.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *curtseying*:
I wish you much joy, Mr. Rochester.

MR. ROCHESTER bows, and MRS. FAIRFAX curtseys again before exiting. He then draws JANE to him, peering at her face.

MR. ROCHESTER:
You look worried, Jane; pray come near.
Do you repent already, dear?

JANE:
Repent? Of course not! How could I
Unwish what's dearest to my heart?

But others may mock us, by and by –
Even strive to keep us apart.

JANE tries to move away, but MR. ROCHESTER holds her fast.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Jane, do be still:
Don't struggle so,
Like a rare bird
Rending its own
Vivid plumage.

JANE, *relenting*:
Struggle I must:
True happiness
I cannot trust.

MR. ROCHESTER:
You can trust this.

MR. ROCHESTER kisses JANE, who staggers a bit before freeing herself from his grasp and settling herself on the sofa.

JANE:
If that be so, Sir, I pray you solve
The mystery of your sudden love.

MR. ROCHESTER, *following JANE to the sofa*:
I've loved you since the day we met;
But I feared to share my secret.
I feigned proposing to Miss Blanche
In hope that you would dare to glance
At me, the way I look at you:
As my own likeness, deep and true.

They embrace again.

MR. ROCHESTER:
But you still maintain your secret:
What did your aunt say when you met?

JANE:
It was awful, sir, to see her
So close to death, yet full of spite;
I tried my best to make things right,
But she could not undo her nature.
Still, fearing the end that awaits
A sinner who will not repent,
My Aunt Reed confessed that she'd spent
Three years denying my true fate.

MR. ROCHESTER, *grasping JANE'S hand to his heart*:
For her betrayal, I'll atone:
My soul entire will be your own.

MR. ROCHESTER pulls JANE even closer to him.

I'll drape you in diamonds and gold
And your sweet supple shape I'll hold
Closer than close, all through the night –
Let the servants say what they might.
My Maker sanctions what I do;
Mere men's opinions I eschew.
I thank the Lord you're all mine now;
You'll not elude me – that I vow.

JANE, *extricating herself a bit from his close embrace*:
Sir, you exult like a savage!
I'm not a slave in a harem:
My will is not yours to manage.

Such finery will not suit me:
I do not wish to be displayed,
I have no yen for luxury.
To be your wife is my desire!
An equal partner in your life,
The better half whom you require.

JANE tries to rise.

Release me, now – I've been remiss:
Upstairs my pupil waits to hear
A story from her governess.

JANE pulls away and walks to the door.

Sweet dreams, dear sir.

MR. ROCHESTER, *rising too*:
No goodnight kiss?

JANE smiles as she exits the Library.

MR. ROCHESTER, *calling after her*:
Nothing for your groom-to-be?

Then, to himself:

Yet she is all the world to me,
And only God can set her free
After she and I do marry.

The curtain falls as MR. ROCHESTER begins blowing out the candles.

CD 2

[1] SCENE 2

The curtains part to reveal the orchard outside Thornfield; it is evening, but a full moon clearly illuminates the scene. JANE is seated on a stone bench, drawing her shawl tightly around her shoulders, and rubbing her arms to keep warm. To the right looms an enormous, ruined chestnut tree. Its trunk has been split in half by lightning, and the burned branches on either side of the cleft nearly touch the ground. Jane regards the tree for a moment, then stands and walks toward it.

JANE, *reaching out to caress the cleft in the trunk*:
Despite your scorched bark and scarred limbs,
Some sap must course through you yet:
How fast you hold to each other!
Nothing can tear you asunder.
But what delays my other half?

Pacing back and forth now, JANE begins to sing to herself an old-fashioned tune:

"His coming was my hope each day,
His parting was my pain;
The chance that did his steps delay
Was ice in every vein."

She is so engrossed that she does not notice MR. ROCHESTER entering the orchard.

JANE:
"But wide as pathless was the space
That lay, our lives, between,
And dangerous as the foamy race
Of ocean-surges green."

JANE is surprised to feel MR. ROCHESTER'S hand on her shoulder. As she turns around to greet him, he picks up the next verse:

MR. ROCHESTER:
"I dangers dared: I hindrance scorned;
I omens did defy;
Whatever menaced, harassed, warned,
I passed impetuous by."

MR. ROCHESTER, *taking her hands in his*:
As I recall, you scorned those lines,
When I sang them in this garden
The day you said you'd be all mine.
And lo! Tomorrow we'll be wed.

MR. ROCHESTER and JANE embrace.

MR. ROCHESTER:
But what is the matter, dear?
Your hands are cold as stone!
How strangely your eyes glitter;
How flushed and damp your face!

JANE:
I believe I am well, sir.

MR. ROCHESTER, *leading her toward the bench*:
You believe? You're not quite sure?

She rises and slowly walks toward the tree again. MR. ROCHESTER turns to listen.

JANE:
I glory in the life we'll share,
So much more stirring than my own.
No, I was fine until I found
Your gift beneath my wedding gown:
A veil that glows like angel's wings;
Diaphanous; divine.
I smiled as I unfolded it,
To think you schemed to make it mine.
I hung it on the best post, high,
To see it 'ere I closed my eyes.
The air was chilled; the bed was cold;
But I was warmed by your surprise
Until I lapsed into a dream:
A wailing babe was at my side,
And you were mounted on your horse;
Away from us we watched you ride.
I climbed a wall, to shout your name,
And will your horse to stand its ground;
When suddenly the wall gave way –
We crashed to earth, could not be found.
We breathed our last, the child and I,
And you had gone, with no good-bye.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Are you afraid I'll leave you, dear?
I'm yours forever, have no fear.

JANE resumes her seat beside MR. ROCHESTER, who takes her hand and kisses it warmly.

JANE:
Of that I have no doubt, master.
What frightened me was not that dream,
But the nightmare that came after:
A monstrous woman, growling low,
Had donned the veil you picked for me.
She leered, then snatched it off her brow.

MR. ROCHESTER:

A creature of your fevered mind;
All thoughts of her let's leave behind.

JANE, rising again from the bench:
That's what I wished; I even prayed.
But when I woke up in my bed,
I found my hopes had been betrayed:
The ghoul had ripped my veil to shreds.

JANE reaches into her pocket and extracts a strip of torn silk, which she displays to MR. ROCHESTER.

MR. ROCHESTER, *leaping off the bench to grab the remnant.*
To think I've left you like a fool
Without a word about Grace Poole!

JANE:
But it was not the seamstress, sir.

MR. ROCHESTER:
You must have been mistaken, Jane:
Grace Poole it was! Now leave it.

When we've been married for a year,
I'll share with you her secret.

JANE is silent as MR. ROCHESTER kisses her cheek.

All cares and trouble must now cease
Let's dream as one, of love and peace.

MR. ROCHESTER puts his arm around JANE and leads her offstage as the curtain closes.

[2] SCENE 3

As the curtain rises, JANE and MR. ROCHESTER are standing before the altar in the chapel at Thornfield. Facing them is MR. WOOD, a clergyman; behind them stand the witnesses: MRS. FAIRFAX and JOHN the groom. JANE is dressed in her wedding gown and a simple veil; MR. ROCHESTER in a morning coat. Apparently unseemly by the group are a pair of figures in the back of the chapel, their faces obscured. One is RICHARD MASON, MR. ROCHESTER'S erstwhile house guest; the other is MR. BRIGGS, an attorney. MR. WOOD has clearly been sermonizing for some time.

MR. WOOD:
And thus, as I hope I have demonstrated clearly,
The state of matrimony is a holy one,
Which we enter into with hope as well as faith –

MR. ROCHESTER, *interrupting*:
Get on with it, man!
We know what it is!

MR. WOOD:
Quite so! If anyone knows a reason
Why ye may not be joined together in marriage,
Do now confess it, or forever hold your peace.

As MR. WOOD pauses, the figures at the back of the chapel stride toward the bridal couple.

MR. WOOD, *to MR. ROCHESTER*:
Wilt thou have this woman for thy wedded wife?

Before MR. ROCHESTER can reply, he is interrupted by one of the two men; the other, his face still partly hidden by the brim of a large hat, hangs back.

MR. BRIGGS:
The marriage cannot go on, sir!
I declare the existence of an impediment!

JANE turns to regard the speaker, but MR. ROCHESTER remains immobile, facing the preacher.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Proceed, Mr. Wood!

MR. WOOD:
But I cannot proceed, Mr. Rochester,
Without some investigation into this charge.
What is the nature of the impediment?

MR. BRIGGS:
That the gentleman is married, and his wife alive.

MR. ROCHESTER, *still refusing to turn around*:
So you say!
But I say,
Produce a witness,
Or go straight to hell!

MR. BRIGGS:
He is here beside me, if you'd but deign to look:
It is your wife's brother, Mr. Richard Mason;
And he saw her alive, in your home, just three
months ago!

JANE looks at MR. ROCHESTER, who neither returns her gaze nor turns to look at MR. BRIGGS or MR. MASON – though judging from his expression, he is about to explode.

MR. WOOD, *to MR. BRIGGS*:
May I inquire, Sir, into your connection here?
And the basis for your shocking allegations?

MR. BRIGGS, *presenting MR. WOOD with a document he's been holding in his hand*:
I am Mr. Mason's solicitor, empow'ered
By him to protect the interests of his sister,
Who cannot protect her own, for she is mad,
And locked in the attic of her husband's home!
Just ask the groom if my account is true.

MRS. FAIRFAX and JOHN greet this declaration with a gasp, while MR. WOOD scans the document. JANE remains silent, as does MR. ROCHESTER.

MR. WOOD, *proffering the document to Mr. Rochester*:
I'm no expert, but this looks genuine to me.
Surely there is another explanation, sir?

MR. ROCHESTER neither takes the paper, nor replies. After a few moments' consideration, he spins around to face his accusers. Fearing he is about to attack them, both men retreat.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Close your book, Wood; there will be no wedding
today!

MR. WOOD immediately complies. JANE remains silent.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Now, now, Dick; don't be afraid;
It's your sister who bites!

MR. ROCHESTER paces back and forth for a few moments, trying to collect himself. JANE watches, still silent.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Bigamy is an ugly word;
Yet I confess I'm not contrite.
I meant to make Miss Eyre my own,
To salve my pain, to ease my plight.
She did not know my sinful plan;
So innocent, she thought me pure.
But what you say is God's own truth:
Toward Bertha Mason I was lured.

MR. ROCHESTER becomes more agitated, his voice louder:

For gold my father hid the truth:
Her legacy of drink and vice,
Of maniacs in asylums.
Each parent she copied precise,
My mad, bad and murderous wife!

The group looks stunned by this news; but no one says a word as MR. ROCHESTER approaches them menacingly.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Away with you, Dick!
Depart, Mr. Briggs!
John, Mrs. Fairfax:
Go get the carriage!
Bolt from here, like a
Bullet from a gun!
'Ere I throttle you
All with my bare hands.

All, except for JANE, exit immediately. As MR. ROCHESTER slumps into a pew, JANE mechanically removes her veil and takes a seat beside him.

MR. ROCHESTER, *sitting up and taking her hand in his:*
I did not mean to deceive you;
Nor to stain your reputation.
Once we have arrived in Florence,
You shall have an explanation.

JANE, *releasing her hand from his grasp:*
But I cannot go to Florence:
You are wed to Bertha Mason!

MR. ROCHESTER resumes his seat beside JANE, visibly trying to collect himself.

MR. ROCHESTER:
That woman was never my wife!
Even before she lost her mind,
Body and soul were corrupted,
By gross depravities defined.
We did not share a moment's love!
Yet I've kept her fed and clothed here,
Despite her murderous nature;
Grace Poole is an expert keeper.
Which choice does your conscience teach?
Driving me to despair –
Or defying a convention
Which harms no one but us in the breach?
I've done all that God and man demand;
Why should I not be free to love,
To take you as my wife, dear Jane,
Our union blessed by Him above?

JANE:
But such a union can't be blessed;
It is immoral, sir; a sin.

MR. ROCHESTER:
No, Jane, it is not!
Whom will it injure?

MR. ROCHESTER tries once again to get in temper in check. He takes JANE'S hand again.

JANE, *withdrawing her hand:*
My love belongs to you entire,
But I cannot do what you desire.

JANE leans back her head on the pew, clearly exhausted.

MR. ROCHESTER:
You're shocked and scared, and need to think.
I'll fetch some water, while you rest.

Once MR. ROCHESTER has left the sanctuary, JANE lifts up her head, and slowly stands.

JANE:
It's he, not I, who's been deceived;
The devil's work he can't perceive:

JANE gathers her skirts, more resolute now.

To welcome sin, to tempt God's grace –
Such evil, Sir, I won't embrace.
Like plucking out my own right eye
To leave you now with no goodbye.

JANE places her shawl over her head.

I forgive you, my dear master –
I beg God to keep you from harm.
May He guide you, and comfort you,
And join us in the hereafter.

JANE runs from the chapel just a moment before MR. ROCHESTER re-enters, carrying a glass of water.

MR. ROCHESTER, *surprised:*
Jane?
Jane?

He searches the pews for a moment, before setting the glass down on the pulpit.

MR. ROCHESTER:
My hope,
My deep love,
Are you gone, then?

ACT 3

[3] SCENE 1

The curtains part to reveal a very modestly equipped one-room schoolhouse. On the back wall hangs a small slate, a map of Great Britain, and a Union Jack; a battered desk, topped with an inkwell, a globe and a bell, dominates the center of the room; arrayed in front of it are a few makeshift chairs and stools. To the right a window overlooks a rural landscape dominated by hills and heather. ST. JOHN RIVERS and his sisters MARY and DIANA are the only occupants of the room; they have only just arrived, and are still wearing cloaks and hats.

DIANA, *removing her bonnet and cloak:*
Oh, where is Jane when we want her?

MARY, removing her bonnet and cloak, and walking toward the window:

Gone with her pupils to the moor,
No doubt, to name the spring flowers
That have blossomed in the meadow.
She says they see perfectly well,
But do not apprehend at all
The beauty of their native home.

DIANA looks out the window.

ST. JOHN, removing his hat and walking among the desks:

Nor do I, if I must speak true:
Who has need to remark the hills
That have encircled us since birth?
Their dark majesty beckons Jane
Because they are new to her still;
Quite soon they will lose their allure.

MARY:

I believe you are mistaken:
Once she gives it, Jane's heart holds fast.

DIANA, looking away from the window:

So may we hope then, dear Mary,
That her heart belongs now to us –
That she will greet our news with joy,
And embrace us as her kinsmen?

MARY:

I cannot think anything else:
When we found her she was starving,
So weak she could not stand or speak,
Friendless and alone – an outcast!

ST. JOHN:

And thanks to you and Diana,
Her sense and strength have been restored.

DIANA:

And thanks to you, dear St. John,
She has once more her vocation
To pursue, and children to guide.

DIANA turns her attention once again to the scene outside the window.

ST. JOHN:

Yes, we have all done our duty:
But whether Jane stays or leaves us,
She must know we've learned her secret.

DIANA, looking out the window:

She is returned with her pupils!

The threesome move to stand beside one another as

JANE enters with five students in tow, all of them young girls. Each carries a fistful of flowers. When they see their guests all stop abruptly, and the children curtsey and bow.

JANE:

Children, look who's come to see us!
How do we greet our guests come to call?

THE CHILDREN:

Good afternoon, Mr. Rivers.
Good afternoon, Miss Rivers.
Good afternoon, Miss Diana.

JANE places the drum on the desk, and after removing her bonnet and cloak, places them on the chair behind her desk. ST. JOHN moves toward the children.

ST. JOHN:

Miss Elliot is teaching you
Botany, or so I've been told.

THE CHILDREN:

Yes, Mr. Rivers.

JANE:

They have learned a great many things,
I daresay; I'm proud of them all.
But now they must go: tea awaits!
Shall we bid our guests good evening
With the rhyme we learned together?

THE CHILDREN:

I had a little doggie that used to sit and beg,
But Doggie tumbled down the stairs
and broke his little leg
Oh Doggie, I will nurse you, and try to make you well;
And you shall have a collar with a pretty little bell.

But, Doggie, you must promise
(and mind your word you keep)
Not once to tease the little lambs or run among
the sheep.

And then the chicks that play upon the grass,
You must not even wag your tail to scare them
as you pass.

ST. JOHN, MARY and DIANA applaud, as JANE strikes a bell, signaling the end of the school day.

THE CHILDREN:

Goodbye, Miss Elliot!
Goodbye, Mr. Rivers!
Goodbye, Miss Rivers!
Goodbye, Miss Diana!

The children tumble out the door, talking excitedly among themselves. JANE follows them with more goodbyes, then turns to face her guests. She embraces DIANA, then MARY, and then extends her hand to ST. JOHN.

JANE:

What an unexpected surprise!

DIANA:

How much these children are learning!

MARY:

I see such delight in their eyes!

JANE:

I am blessed to be their teacher.

ST. JOHN:

That is a noble sentiment:
It becomes you, Miss Elliot.
But as we have come on business,
May I ask you ladies to sit?

MARY and DIANA lay down their cloaks and bonnets alongside JANE'S desk.

JANE, sitting at her desk:

What do you mean, Mr. Rivers?

ST. JOHN, *remains standing*:
The man who handles my affairs
Writes with an intriguing story
About an orphan named Jane Eyre,
Despised by her rich guardians
And sent off to earn her fortune.

JANE raises her hand to her face, clearly surprised and perturbed.

ST. JOHN:
Miss Eyre becomes a governess
In the old, secluded mansion
Of Mr. Edward Rochester.
They fall in love; are meant to wed –
Until she learns, at the altar,
Another wife has shared his bed:
A lunatic, true – but living.

JANE rises from her chair.

She flees the house that very night
And not a soul has seen her since.
Mr. Briggs wonders if I might
Prove of assistance in his search.

JANE, walking to the window.
Why does Mr. Briggs write to you?

ST. JOHN:
Because I am a clergyman
And obliged to help the needy;
And because she is our cousin,
And needs must own the connection.

JANE:
You say Jane Eyre is your cousin?

ST. JOHN:
The daughter of our long dead aunt
And niece to our late uncle John
Of Madeira, a wine merchant
Who wished to raise Jane as his own.

ST. JOHN walks toward JANE.

But her guardian interfered:
She swore the little girl was dead.

JANE grabs ST. JOHN'S hands.

JANE:
Her lie exposed – what elation!
To be claimed as a relation
By kind and generous Christian souls.

JANE turns to face MARY and DIANA as well.

Mr. Rivers, Diana, Mary:
I proudly own our new connection:
I am the governess Jane Eyre.
Please forgive my gross deception –
I told you lies to save my soul;
I had no wish to play a role.

MARY, rising:
Dear Jane, let us embrace at once!

DIANA, rising:
How glorious to see God's hand

Drawing us close together!

*JANE, MARY and DIANA embrace; ST. JOHN offers JANE his hand.
The ladies alternate for a moment between laughter and tears.*

JANE, dabbing at her eyes:
You say our uncle is deceased?

ST. JOHN:
All this must come as shocking news!
But there is more that I must share:
He left us nothing in his will:
His hard-earned wealth goes to Jane Eyre.
Twenty thousand pounds –
You're a wealthy woman now.

JANE, moving away once more from the group:
Oh my! What an enormous sum!
I can hardly take it all in!

ST. JOHN:
Briggs is the executor;
I shall write to him at once.
You shall not be cheated again.

JANE, walking back:
Oh, five thousand will do nicely!
I have no use for luxury.
The rest I gladly share with you:
My dear, devoted family
Who pitied me when no one would –
Fed me; clothed me; gave me shelter –
Shielded me from all suspicion –
All this and more – for a stranger.
For this God sent me to your door.
Allow me but to live nearby
So I may love you all the more,
And forge a brand new destiny.

DIANA, rising:
How generous you are, dear Jane!

MARY, rising:
How happy we shall be at home!

*MARY, DIANA and JANE embrace, and JANE gives ST. JOHN a kiss
on the cheek. He does not return her kiss, but rather puts on his hat,
and collects his sisters' cloaks and bonnets.*

ST. JOHN:
I fear passion overcomes you.
Reconsider your proposal
In private, and at your leisure;
We shall be at your disposal.

ST. JOHN hands MARY and DIANA their things.

Come, my dear sisters: let us now depart.
Jane must be allowed to examine her heart.

*The sisters embrace JANE again, before donning their cloaks and
following their brother's lead.*

DIANA:
Goodbye, Dearest!

MARY:
Goodbye, Sister!

JANE walks to the door behind them and stands there for a moment after the Rivers family departs. Then she returns to her desk and sits down once more. She clasps her hand, bows her head, and prays with eyes closed.

JANE:
How grateful I am to you, Lord:
You have showered me with blessings!

JANE opens her eyes and sits silently for a moment before rising from her chair.

Yet of my Edward, not one word –
I cannot help but love him still.
But better to fight temptation
Than sin by defying God's will,
I must seek solace in this choice
Though it pains me to the marrow –
To see his face, to feel his lips –
Oh, how I long to hear his voice.

[4] SCENE 2

The curtain rises to reveal the cozy sitting room of Moor House, the longtime home of the Rivers family, in the evening hours. The room is distinguished by an enormous fireplace in which a fire is burning; an overstuffed sofa and two well-worn arm chairs; and several bookcases standing beneath old family portraits. To the right, JANE is seated at a large round table piled with books; opposite her sits ST. JOHN.

ST. JOHN:
I beg of you, Jane: hear me out.
You are pious, industrious;
Very docile and heroic;
Constant; faithful; and generous.
These qualities are pure and rare –
True gifts that you're obliged to use
To make the world a better place.
What higher calling can you choose
Than teaching heathen our faith?

JANE:
I do wish to please you, St. John,
And perform my Christian duty;
But I feel as though I'm a pawn
In a scheme that does not suit me.
I have no ordination;
I have no sure vocation;
And I have no inclination
To remove myself from this place
And help convert the Hindu race.

ST. JOHN, *leaping up*:
You can change the bent of nature!
I know this from experience:
My desire to rise higher
Once eclipsed all other feelings.
But my ambition, I renounced;
Its noisome needs I could not meet.
So I obeyed, when God announced,
That I must preach in India.

JANE:
But I've had no such instruction.

ST. JOHN:
Regard me as His instrument!
God speaks through me; and I assert:
It was His will that you were sent
Here, a sickly, starving stranger.

ST. JOHN sits back down, and leans toward JANE.

We nursed you; gave you employment;
And saw you in the schoolroom hide
Your shameful disappointment.
But you need not hide anymore!
Come with me as my wife to India
And see what the Lord has in store
For one who serves him selflessly.

JANE:
This could indeed be my mission:
To serve God would be glorious.

JANE rises and walks toward the fire.

But to go in the position
Of a wife in name and custom
Leads me to a troubling question:
Ought I accept a bridal ring
From a man who feels no passion?

JANE turns to face ST. JOHN.

Every fiber of my being
Tells me no – and I must listen.
But go I will as your sister,
And toil with you as a Christian.

ST. JOHN, *rising and walking toward JANE*:
But I do not want a sister –
And this plan I'll not consider!
What I want is a lawful wife
To mold and guide throughout her life.
Passion is overrated, Jane;
Need I remind you of the pain
Caused by Mr. Rochester,
That passionate imposter?

JANE:
You have no right to speak his name!

She angrily walks away from him, back to the table.

ST. JOHN:
The love you cherish is lawless
And you long since should have crushed it.
I cannot give you up to Hell!
Repent now or die – bit by bit.
God's given you the strength to choose
The duty He's assigned to you.
Come to India as my wife:
Do as you know He wants you to.

JANE, turning away from St. John:
If I only knew God's true plan,
I could agree to marry now,
Come what may! But please don't demand
Of me to swear a solemn vow.

ST. JOHN:
As you wish, Jane – but don't forget:
Only your vow will God accept.

ST. JOHN bows his head and leaves the parlor.

JANE:
He is as hard and cold as steel;
Trying to please him would kill me,

And he would never show me love
No matter how much I labored.
And yet the words he spoke were true:
Passion has brought me naught but shame.
If I could but know for certain
That it is God's will that I marry
My cousin and serve by his side,
I know I could forget Edward
And find solace in my duties.
Tell me, God – show me my true path!

JANE throws herself down into an armchair near the fire, burying her face in her hands. She begins to sob; her shoulders shake. But after a few moments, she raises her head and tilts it as if listening. After another moment, she leaps up from the chair as if electrified.

JANE:
Wait for me! Is that Edward's voice I hear?
I am coming!

JANE runs from the room.

[5] SCENE 3

The curtain rises on the parlor at Ferndean, the out-of-the-way hunting lodge owned by MR. ROCHESTER. It is evening, and MRS. FAIRFAX is leading JANE toward two matching sofas that have been placed opposite one another in the center of the room. MRS. FAIRFAX is carrying a silver tea service on a tray, which she places atop a table set between the sofas. A fire burns in the grate set into the back wall of the room; and a piano sits in the corner to their left, lit by a candelabra.

MRS. FAIRFAX, gesturing to JANE to be seated, as she seats herself: she leans forward to pour the tea into a china cup.

Thirty-six hours in a coach:
Such a journey I've not taken –
And then to find the house in ruins!

MRS. FAIRFAX holds the cup and saucer in her hands for a moment before passing them to Jane.

Three generations lived at Thornfield –
And now it is lost forever!
You've never been to this old lodge –
The master's father hunted here.
I never liked it much before,
But it's all we have to call home.

JANE accepts a cup of tea from MRS. FAIRFAX.

Do forgive my bab'ling, Miss Eyre;
I never thought to see you here.
With all the shocks of this long year,
I have lost my old composure.

JANE, after taking a sip of tea, and placing the cup back on the tray:

It is I who must beg pardon,
For appearing without warning.
I did not know you thought me dead;
I'd no idea there'd been a fire.
And when I heard you'd both been spared,
I had no thought but to reach you.

MRS. FAIRFAX:
I thank the Lord that you live too!
Of course, the master feared the worst,
When without a trace you vanished.
He did all he could to find you;

And when he failed, he grew distraught.
He sent Adele away to school;
Broke with every old acquaintance;
Roamed the house like a savage ghost,
Refusing to sleep or to speak.

MRS. FAIRFAX rises from her place on the sofa.

No other Rochester
Was ever brought so low:
Not by wine,
Nor by cards,
Nor racing!

JANE:
Then he must have been at home
When the fire first broke out?

MRS. FAIRFAX, *moving toward the piano*:
Aye, it was he who rescued us,
Before he went back for his wife –
Though it was she who set the blaze.
Without a thought for his own life,
He tried to coax her from the roof,
But all she did was curse and scream.
She wished to die – that is the truth –
So from his outstretched arms she sprang
And tumbled to the ground below:
Head over heels, I saw her go.

It was a fright I'll ne'er forget,
Her bloodied head, those twisted limbs –

JANE:
And Mr. Rochester?

MRS. FAIRFAX:
The walls collapsed, with him inside:
His hand was crushed, his eye knocked out.
Near-blind he is, and lame besides.
He is quite broken down, Miss Eyre.

JANE, *rising abruptly*:
I must see him without delay!

MRS. FAIRFAX, *edging toward the door of the parlor*:
As you wish.

JANE:
Pray, do not tell him I am come;
I will not be put off tonight.

MRS. FAIRFAX nods and exits.

Offstage, MR. ROCHESTER calls out for MRS. FAIRFAX, while JANE curls herself into the corner of the sofa furthest from the piano. MRS. FAIRFAX re-enters immediately with MR. ROCHESTER in tow. He is limping a bit, and holds her arm with his right hand; his left hand and forearm are hidden inside his coat. His hair is long and unruly, his left cheek is scarred, and he wears a patch over his right eye.

MRS. FAIRFAX, *leading him toward the piano, and opening the cover*:
Here you are, sir; all is ready.

MR. ROCHESTER, *awkwardly sitting down on the piano bench*:
That will be all, until I call.

MRS. FAIRFAX:
As you wish, sir.

As MRS. FAIRFAX exits, MR. ROCHESTER plays a few notes with one hand, to warm up. He waits a moment, squares his shoulders, and begins to play and sing:

MR. ROCHESTER:
The truest love that ever heart
Felt at its kindled core
Did through each vein, in quickened start,
The tide of being pour.

JANE rises from her place on the sofa and walks toward the piano.

Her coming was my hope each day,
Her parting was my pain;
The change that did her steps delay
Was ice in every vein
I dreamed it would be a nameless bliss,
As I loved, loved to be

As she nears the piano, JANE sings the last half of the verse along with MR. ROCHESTER.

And to this object did I press,
As blind as eagerly.

MR. ROCHESTER stops playing abruptly; as he rises, he knocks over the piano bench.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Who is here?

JANE, setting the bench upright again:
It is I, sir.

MR. ROCHESTER:
Who speaks?

JANE places her hand in MR. ROCHESTER'S.

JANE:
I am Jane Eyre.

MR. ROCHESTER, pulling JANE closer:
My living darling! In the flesh!
But no, I cannot be so blest:
It is a dream; you'll disappear!
My heart cannot withstand this test.

JANE:
You touch me, sir – this is no dream.

JANE places MR. ROCHESTER'S good hand on her breast.

Do you feel how my heart races?

JANE pauses a moment before moving his hand to her face.

Are my lips perhaps familiar?
Did you not memorize my face?

MR. ROCHESTER caresses JANE'S face.

Of you I have complete recall:
Of your embraces most of all.

MR. ROCHESTER, removing his hand, and taking a step back:
Can you wish to kiss me now,
Lame and ghastly as I am?

JANE takes a step forward, and kisses both of MR. ROCHESTER'S eyes, then the scar on his cheek, and then his hand.

MR. ROCHESTER:
I wronged you Jane, when I proposed
To share with you a life of sin.
I repented, and God forgave –
Can you dare to love me again?

JANE wraps her arms around MR. ROCHESTER'S neck, and the pair embrace eagerly until MR. ROCHESTER pulls back.

JANE, wrapping MR. ROCHESTER'S arm around her waist:
To feel your breath, now, in my ear,
Quite takes away my own, dear sir;
Do give me back my life again,
I love you, Edward Rochester.

JANE wraps her arms around MR. ROCHESTER'S neck, and the pair embrace eagerly until MR. ROCHESTER pulls back.

MR. ROCHESTER:
My love I pledge, with sealing kiss –
I have at last my deepest bliss.

JANE:
If I ever thought a kind word,
If I ever did a good deed,
If I ever said a pure prayer,
The Lord has now rewarded me.

The curtains close.

THE END