

Rochester



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drama in five acts after Charlotte Brontë

by Christian Lanciai (2008),
translated 2018.

dramatis personae:

The father
Edward Rochester
Richard Mason
Bertha Mason
Their father
A butler
Céline Varens
A vicomte, her lover
Adèle, her daughter
Mrs Fairfax
Jane Eyre
Blanche Ingram
Grace Poole
Doctor Carter
Fanny, maid
The priest
Briggs, lawyer

Aunts and uncles

The action is in north England, in Paris
and on Jamaica during the first half of the 19th century.

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Act I scene 1. At home.

Father I only want to keep you out of harm's way, my son.

Edward But my brother gets everything! I get nothing! Is that fair? Are we not equally your sons?

Father Of course, but you must understand. I can't split the estate. It must be kept intact generation after generation. But you will not be without compensation.

Edward You disinherit me and promise me a compensation. What kind of double standard is that?

Father I have an old friend on Jamaica. His family is among the oldest and richest on the island, and his eldest daughter is worth 80,000 pounds. I have contacted him. You will go there and make your fortune.

Edward What's the name of the family?

Father Mason.

Edward So you exile me to an island of jungles of fever and mosquitoes to compensate me for my disinheritance?

Father You evade remaining at home getting mouldy and gloomy from the humidity, the bad weather and the boredom here. You avoid your brother's destiny to get stuck here. You will see the world and new horizons. Do you follow? Can you believe, that I only want the best for you?

Edward (resigns) I guess I have no choice.

Father I would never offer you this if I weren't sure of the deal. To convince you of your security I managed to get a miniature portrait of her. (*produces a miniature portrait and shows it to Edward, who is astounded.*) Well, what do you say, my son? Isn't she beautiful?

Edward What is her name?

Father Bertha.

Edward (tastes the name) Bertha Mason.

Father Honestly, my son, I think you are more fortunate than your brother, who also has no choice but has to take care of our estates. He will be stuck as a patron for life, while you will get on an adventure to Jamaica where you actually by the connections of the Mason family could make a much more considerable career and fortune.

Edward I don't know what is right, father. You bereave me of my rights to the family estate and instead cast me out on a venture of unknown prospects. It is taking a risk on your side, and I am the one to risk my life. But I have to accept that I have no choice, like my brother has to accept it. He gets it all but maybe a dull life into the bargain. Whatever I get there doesn't seem to be any risk of dullness in it.

Father That's the spirit, my son. Then we are agreed. You will leave by the first opportunity, and you will hardly see me alive again. I tried to do the best of a difficult deal with two sons without splitting the estate. And I also ask both of you to

each one make the best of it. Which one will be the happier winner is impossible to say. You are different and each other's contraries, and I tried to give each of you the kind of destination that would suit you best. That's all, my son. I am glad I didn't make you an enemy. (*embraces him*)

Edward But you almost succeeded. Only Bertha's portrait maybe saved the situation.

Father I bet on a winning horse for you. Ride her gently when the day comes, don't let her run wild, and make the best of it.

Edward Yes, father. (*They embrace again.*)

Father Now it's time for some sherry before dinner. Or do you prefer port?

Edward I'll take whatever you take, father. If you can select my destiny you can also select my proper apéritif.

Father Then sherry it is. (*takes a bottle and pours two glasses.*) Cheers, my son, to your hopefully long, happy and rewarding marriage! (*They drink.*)

Scene 2. Kingston, Jamaica. The Mason family.

Richard What do we really know about him, father?

Mason Rochester is one of my oldest friends and has always been reliability himself like all his family. It is waterproof.

Richard And what does he know about us?

Mason Enough.

Bertha What does he know about me?

Mason Quite enough, Bertha. I provided him with your portrait. He doesn't have to know any more than that, and neither does his son.

Richard A decoy, in other words.

Mason He must nibble at it.

Richard And what does he know about our brother?

Mason Nothing.

Bertha And our mother?

Mason Nothing.

Richard And he is coming here?

Mason Yes, the son is on his way. He must be treated as he deserves. We must not disappoint him. We must keep up appearances as far as possible.

Bertha What's his name?

Mason Edward.

Bertha An ordinary name.

Mason He is better and looks better than it sounds.

Bertha I hope so indeed.

Richard Play your cards well, Bertha. Don't let him in on you until you are married.

Bertha How old is he?

Mason Five years younger than you, but he doesn't need to know. Just make him gloat and drivel on you, and you don't have to say anything. Just catch him. We need new and better blood in the family.

Bertha Trust me. I know my arts.

Richard We trust you, Bertha.

Mason So we only have to wait for Bertha's azure knight in shining armour and take well care of him. He is perhaps the best chance you ever could get, Bertha.

Bertha I will take care of him well enough. Just leave him to me, and I promise you he shall marry me.

Mason That's all we want.

Richard Good luck, Bertha.

Bertha You don't have to wish me good luck. My success is infallible.

A butler (enters) Master Edward Fairfax Rochester, Sir.

Mason Perfect punctuality! I knew we could trust him! Show him in. (*rising*) Now just don't say anything unnecessary. Just caress him with your silk gloves. All we have to do now is to spoil him.

(*Enter Rochester*)

Mason My dear friend, my best friend's son, welcome to Kingston, Jamaica! I hope you could rest after your journey.

Edward Thank you, the journey was easier than expected, since we had favourable winds all the way and no bad weather. I think we made the crossing in record time.

Mason Meet my son, Richard Mason.

Richard (getting up, shaking his hand cordially) We could hardly have found any more suitable candidate for a brother-in-law.

Mason And my beloved daughter.

Edward An honour to see you in reality, Miss Bertha.

Mason Do you mean to say that you have seen her before but not in reality?

Edward My father managed to procure for me a miniature portrait. I am not exaggerating when I say that she is even more beautiful in reality.

Bertha My father combed the whole world for a proper suitor for me that he could accept. We never guessed that his best friend had a son eager to get married.

Edward That's overstating it. It was my father who was eager to get me married.

Bertha That's just as good.

Mason Don't say too much, Bertha. You are not married yet, but it seems as if an engagement was as good as obvious.

Edward Didn't my father and you already agree on that over our heads?

Mason If you don't have anything against it.

Bertha I have nothing against it.

Edward Whatever could I have against it, except that I still don't know her?

Mason There will be time enough for you to get to know each other. You should never hurry into each other's arms. On the contrary – the longer you postpone the engagement, the sweeter it becomes.

Edward But certainly Bertha and I have to get to know each other before we marry?
Mason Of course, but not more than necessary, only as friends at a proper distance and without any temptations being unnecessarily conjured.
Edward No risk, Sir. I always could control myself.
Mason Then it's settled. We announce the engagement tomorrow.
Richard (*cordially, clapping him*) Welcome into our family, my friend!
Edward Thanks, brother.
Bertha And welcome to Jamaica. You don't know what is expecting you.
Edward Actually I know nothing about the island. I presume there are all kinds of mysteries and occult practices here that we have no idea of in England.
Mason Follow me, my future son-in-law, and I will show you around our house, since it will also be your home in time. I must show you the park and the garden above all. (*takes Edward out for an inspection round.*)
Richard Come, Bertha. You have done your bit for the moment.
Bertha Did I manage all right?
Richard You were close enough to the border, but we managed. (*leads out his sister.*)

Scene 3. The wedding dinner.

Mason (*rising*) It is with the greatest joy that we welcome this day with its glorious light focussed on the happiest couple in the world and, as we may hope, its longest marriage. Of all the world's possible sons-in-law I happened to get the best one, and I hope that you, Edward, will find full satisfaction and joy with the wife you so well deserved, the most beautiful woman in the world. May you live long, be happy in all your days and get many children, grandchildren and grandchildren's children! (*raises his glass. All give great cheer.*)
Edward (*rising*) Thank you, father-in-law, but to tell the truth I honestly don't know what I have ventured on. (*some laughter*) This island is an alien world to me with its exotic mysteries and impenetrable jungle, its warm-blooded people are too hot for me and the mentality too fast and too impulsive for me to be able to catch on to, I am just an Englishman from the country accustomed to rain and chill and the constant cold showers of a rough and paralysing climate; but one thing I know for sure, and that is that I actually happened to win the most beautiful wife in the world for myself, and what I promised my father before going here I will stick to, namely, that I can't do any better than make the best of it.
Mason That's enough, my dear son-in-law! It's good enough! My beloved daughter has won the world's most honest and decent gentleman, and what more could we wish for?
Richard Cheers, Edward, to a long life of a happy community and collaboration!
One guest (*to another*) What does he really know about the family?
The other Nothing except that they have money.
1 That's also the only thing they have.

2 Wait until Pandora opens the lid to her dowry!

1 So they tricked him?

2 Their only chance of getting her married was with a greenhorn from abroad.

1 Poor devil!

2 But the family have reasons enough to be happy.

1 How did he get here?

2 His father sent him down and died afterwards leaving all his fortune to the elder brother. He knew the Masons since his youth and knew naught else than what he remembered of Mason's best sides. He sent away his younger son to this marriage to "save" him.

1 What a fate!

2 Don't talk about it.

Bertha So your father left you nothing when he died?

Edward He entrusted me to you.

Bertha So we are all you have in the world?

Edward Yes, I suppose you are.

Bertha Then, as you said, we should indeed make the best of it!

Edward Bertha, I truly love you and want to do anything I can to deserve you. You accepted me whole-heartedly although I brought you nothing, my inferiority is total, I am completely at your mercy, and all I have is my honour and my good name. But I promise you, that you shall always be able to trust my honour.

Bertha It won't be necessary.

Edward What do you mean?

Bertha We are married now, Edward. You have accepted me for what I am. Nothing else is needed.

Mason Yet another toast to the happy couple! May they live forever and always remain in love with each other! (*All share the toast.*)

Edward Why have you never mentioned your mother?

Bertha She is dead since many years.

Edward What did she die of?

Bertha Illness.

Richard We haven't talked about her, Edward, since she is our greatest sorrow.

Bertha The less said about her, the better.

Edward That sounds almost heartless.

Bertha It is *our* wedding, Edward. She has nothing to do with it.

Edward Do you fear her as dead?

Bertha Don't talk rubbish. We shall love each other now, and that is all that matters now.

Richard Cheers, Edward! Welcome into the family! (*Edward answers the toast with some thought.*)

Act II scene 1. Bed-chamber scene.

Edward You have fooled me! Why have you deceived me?

Bertha I have not deceived you.

Edward You are five years older than me! Why didn't you tell me?

Bertha Of what consequence is age in the matter of love?

Edward Your mother is locked up in a mental institution! Why wasn't I informed?

Bertha We didn't want to scare you away.

Edward So you were all privy to the plot! And you have a younger brother who is a retarded idiot! Have you nothing but skeletons in all your cupboards?

Bertha Edward, don't complain, you got me! We love each other! Isn't that all we need?

Edward How could I love someone who deliberately deceived me? How could I feel like belonging to a family that lured me into an abysmal heritage trap of family diseases!

Bertha Edward, we are married now. You will never be rid of me. Be satisfied with that and accept the situation. You have no other choice.

Edward But why? Why me?

Bertha We hoped that new blood in our family would cure the family curse.

Edward And what then is your curse exactly? Hereditary mental disease?

Bertha Among other things. I will never let you go, Edward. You are mine. And you are a gentleman. You can't let me down. You can't desert me. You must put up with me and my family, which is all you have. You can't manage without us, a family of monsters and lunatics. Only you could promote our blood, for my brother is impotent.

Edward You want children with me? You want to promote your sick degenerated unsound blood?

Bertha It's our only hope. Or else the family will go extinct, and all our greatness and fortune was just an effort in vain. Only you can save us.

Edward Bertha, your deception ruined your possibilities from the start. You played with false cards while all my cards were open. That difference could never be undone.

Bertha So you prefer turning yourself into a useless and impotent husband?

Edward All the love I felt for you were illusions inspired by a portrait of your mask of false beauty. Never judge a human being from her outward looks, since it is only the invisible inside of her that is true. And in this case the outward show with all your splendour and beauty and wealth was as blinding as the inside was as rotten as a corpse infested with swarming maggots. How could I ever love you after having learned your deception?

Bertha Are then not all families as rotten as ours? What family does not keep some idiots hidden or buried alive somewhere? What family does not carry heritable

diseases? Where is a home without a skeleton in the wardrobe? You are shocked, Edward, and judge us by prejudice. We are neither better nor worse than all others.

Edward Bertha, I am married to you and must accept it, and I will try to live with you and make the best of it. I will help you keeping up an appearance of decency as far as possible, but don't expect me to ever be able to love you. (*drops her, leaves, and bangs the door behind.*)

Bertha He has seen us through and is blinded and shocked by the truth of his discovery. But there are other means. I will certainly make him randy again. (*finds a voodoo doll*) You are mine, Edward. I own you soul and body. You cannot escape me. You must love me. You have no other choice. We will never let you go. If I must go under like my mother, I will bring you with me in the destruction. We have paid for your life, it belongs to us, and we will never give it back. (*sticks a needle into the doll and laughs diabolically.*)

Scene 2. A pub. Edward at the bar. Richard turns up.

Richard There you are, Edward. I heard the news.

Edward What would you do in my place?

Richard You are free now. You have your own money. You can do what you want. You are no longer dependent on us.

Edward Independence and freedom implies an entire world of responsibilities. I don't want to make any more mistakes, Richard.

Richard It wasn't your fault. You were tricked into a trap by our fathers, who didn't know better. Most accountable was my father, who was the only one who knew what he was doing. Your father knew nothing. Now they are both gone, and I am the head of the family. I am partly responsible, since I took part of the conspiracy against you without warning you. Therefore I owe you something.

Edward You haven't answered my question. What would you advise me to do?

Richard As I view the matter there is only thing to do. Lock her up, like our father did with her mother. In her case it's easy to get a certificate.

Edward You give me allowance to do it?

Richard Without question. You will sooner or later be forced to take that step anyway. Our father endured for ten years and hoped desperately in vain for an improvement. Those were ten lost years.

Edward I have endured for four. I can't make it any longer, Richard.

Richard I understand you.

Edward I must home to England to take care of the family property. Who could guess that my brother would leave us so soon? I take her with me and get her there under qualified care. No one knows her in England or even know that I am married. I could have a free life and go on travelling as much as I please and have her hidden away in Thornfield Hall without anyone noticing, like a skeleton buried alive in the

wardrobe, but I can never remarry as long as she lives. You also saw to it that our marriage was Catholic.

Richard You mean, that you can't desert her.

Edward Exactly.

Richard Would you mind that I came across sometimes for occasional visits?

Edward Of course not. You are her brother and my brother-in-law.

Richard Then we are agreed and can remain friends although we are related and I tricked you into marrying an unsound wife.

Edward It was your father, Richard, who contrived the deceit, but you are always responsible yourself if you are stupid enough to let yourself be deceived.

Richard The deceiver though can never be pardoned.

Edward No, he can't.

(They poculate.)

Richard When did you first realize something was wrong?

Edward Directly after the wedding. The wedding night turned out a nightmare. She turned into an animal.

Richard Did you have no previous experience of women?

Edward No.

Richard And Bertha became the first one. What a shock!

Edward I never thought I would come out alive from her grips. She refused to let me go, and she refused to let me sleep, while she only worked herself up to hysteria all the time.

Richard Couldn't you consummate the marriage?

Edward She wouldn't allow me. She wanted to do anything except that. "Don't you want children?" I asked her astonished. "Never in my life!" she cried. All she wanted was to use me sexually as an object for perverted enjoyment. Perhaps I could have taken her naturally if I had used force, but I never could and never would.

Richard That's where you failed. She always dreamed about having a rapist.

Edward Why couldn't you give her one then instead of me?

Richard It was difficult to find one with a good name and of a decent family. She had to entertain herself with lower creatures in the meantime, until we found a candidate who could keep us decent.

Edward So she wasn't even a virgin?

Richard Did you think that for a moment?

Edward I thought it all the time.

Richard You were the perfect greenhorn.

Edward And you really set the perfect trap. Nothing appeared before the wedding, and not until gradually one worm after the other crept forth: her true age, her voodoo contacts and practices, that your mother was still alive, that she was locked up for life, her more than primitive orgies, and so on. It took me six months to realize that I had made my life's mistake.

Richard Well, you are saved now. You can detach yourself. Take her away from here, take her money with you, lock her up where no one ever will know about her existence, and recover the years you have lost.

Edward Your father lost ten. Maybe I was lucky to get away with only four.

Richard But you will never be rid of her.

Edward Don't remind me. *(They drink.)*

Scene 3. Paris. A luxury suite. An amorous scene.

Edward Céline, I love you.

Céline I know. You do everything for me.

Edward What more could you demand? I give you everything you want, clothes, a luxury suite, I ruin myself for your sake, just tell me whatever you want more.

Céline Marriage.

Edward I am already married.

Céline They are always already married! Is that the only reason why they all want me – because they are already married and can't remarry?

Edward You can't doubt the sincerity of my love.

Céline I don't. What's wrong then with your wife, since you so desperately abandon yourself to orgies with me?

Edward She is locked up for good as hopelessly mentally ill.

Céline And that is all? Get rid of her then, and marry me.

Edward I am a lover, not a murderer.

Céline How could you get mixed up with a mental case? How could you commit such a mistake?

Edward Why do you marry at all? Others demand it. Society demands it. Parents arrange it.

Céline Didn't you love her?

Edward I thought I did but didn't learn to know her until it was too late. I was trapped into it by my father and her father.

Céline Poor dear. And you can't bring yourself to kill such an unhappy marriage by mere charity.

Edward Let's talk about something else.

Céline That's why you are so brooding and introverted, like a Lord Byron carrying around the darkest secret in the world, like a suicidal Manfred.

Edward It's not that bad. I make the best of it.

Céline Then perhaps I dare divulge a secret.

Edward Well?

Céline I have a daughter.

Edward Whose?

Céline Yours, perhaps, or someone else's. No one wants to take the responsibility. She could be the daughter of anyone.

Edward What is her name? How old is she?
Céline As old as our friendship. Her name is Adèle.
Edward Have you had other lovers at the same time as me?
Céline Fie, Edouard, such foul questions you don't put to your mistress!
Edward So you have.
Céline Are you jealous?
Edward Terribly. Dangerously. Immediately.
Céline Love me then. Prove that I am yours.
Edward Do I need to prove it?
Céline No man is credible who doesn't prove it.
Edward The greatest lovers need never prove it.
Céline Nonsense.
Edward If there is anything I know anything about, it is love.
Céline That proves you know nothing about love.
Edward I want you for myself, Céline, or not at all.
Céline Keep me for yourself, then, and don't let me down.
Edward I never let anyone down.
Céline Except your wife.
Edward Not even her. I am responsible for her qualified care.
Céline What did she do to make you mad?
Edward She went too far with abnormal perversions.
Céline Isn't all love a perversion? Educate me in her advanced perversions!
Edward Céline!
Céline I am just teasing you.
Edward I don't want to lose you as well.
Céline I'll see what I can do.
Edward Let's do something about it.
(They start making love.)

Scene 4. Same place.
 Rochester enters with a key of his own.

Edward No one here? Then I'll wait. She will enter eventually.
(sits down, makes himself at home, takes a sherry, starts smoking.)

I just hope she doesn't derail like Bertha. What did I do wrong? Was it my fault that she turned megalomaniac by our marriage and pervert enough to penetrate herself with a crucifix? Was it my fault that she not only believed in the black magic of voodoo but even committed herself to it? Was it my fault that she turned so extremely foul-mouthed that I couldn't appear with her in public? Did I have any choice to locking her up and separating her for good from society? That question will keep following me until I die.

(merry laughter outside: Céline with a cavalier)

She is coming! But not alone! (*hides*)

Céline (*appearing slightly tipsy with a vicomte*) No, I assure you, my dear vicomte, he is not so stupid that he would meddle in my affairs!

Vicomte But are you married to him or not?

Céline Of course I am not. He is married already to a wife whom he has locked up for discovering that he was impotent.

Vicomte So he has no right to make any demands on you?

Céline None whatsoever! He is not even the father of my daughter!

Vicomte So we can forget all about him. Where is he now?

Céline I guess he is at home brooding as usual, that bore. That's all he can do: brooding on his failed marriage. He is himself a failure altogether, and he is not capable of realizing it. Come to bed with me now, my friend.

Vicomte With your permission... (*they proceed to bed*)

Edward (*pulling the curtain behind which he was hidden*) Ha! In flagrancia! Céline! You swore that I was your only lover!

Céline That was some time ago.

Edward You lousy vicomte, couldn't you find a better slut to amuse yourself with?

Vicomte You dare insult my mistress!

Edward Don't be ridiculous, or rather, don't make yourself more ridiculous than you already are. Couldn't you find a better cock to henpeck, Céline, for my deception?

Vicomte Cock indeed to henpeck! This calls for blood!

Céline I love cock fights! Go for it, peacocks, and strike hard to make the feathers fly!

Edward It will be my pleasure to let your blood to the extreme! Pistol, sword, or balloon with blunderbuss?

Vicomte Pistol! Unto death!

Edward Unto death, of course. Can you aim?

Vicomte I am sure you can see that I am not one-eyed.

Edward Sorry, I mistook your ridiculous monocle for a glass eye.

Céline Don't kill each other, gentlemen. I want you both.

Edward Céline, your word is my law, I hereby refrain from killing him, no matter how much he deserved that honour. I submit him entirely to you, that puerile bore, and drop you down the drain with him. Amuse yourself as well as you can with him, but you will probably soon tire of him as you did with me.

Vicomte (*almost disappointed*) No duel then?

Edward I allow the honour of spilling your blood to others. Without doubt they will be disappointed when they discover it was only water. (*leaves outraged*)

Céline (*after him*) Edouard! Think of our child!

Vicomte He has left, Céline. He was not worthy. He can't have loved you since he didn't even want to duel with me.

Céline Yes, he really loved me, but too much. He made too much of it. His marriage was such a terrible disappointment that he had too much to recover, which

frightened me. He needed to wallow in me. That's why I had to find some counterpoise not to drown in his passion. But without him you are now worthless to me, vicomte. I think I will go to Italy.

Vicomte (upset) And your daughter? Our life? Our plans? Your position? Our prospects?

Céline You have already grown too dull for me, vicomte. The wild dark Rochester was at least dramatic. *(goes to her room and locks herself in)*

Vicomte It takes a devil to understand women, if even he is a match for them! Did she then love me just to get away from Rochester? And is she ditching me because Rochester ditched her? Must I then ditch her? No, I am already ditched. Well, vicomte, better luck next time, and may my next lady not have another Rochester in the cupboard! *(takes his hat and leaves.)*

Act III scene 1. Thornfield Hall, in the kitchen.

Mrs Fairfax Mr Rochester! What are you doing here?

Edward (cautiously) I notice that the new governess is sitting in the salon.

Fairfax Have you met her?

Edward We met out on the moor. I almost rode her down, and for that I was punished instantly, when the horse slipped and threw me off. She helped me up. What does she know about me?

Fairfax Only that you are Mr Rochester.

Rochester And who is Mr Rochester?

Fairfax Little Adèle's guardian.

Edward Is that all?

Fairfax And Miss Jane Eyre's employer. I assure you, Mr Rochester, that is the only thing she knows.

Edward She knows nothing about my prisoner in the tower?

Fairfax Alas, Sir, Grace Poole is a qualified nurse, but sometimes she has something to drink, and then she becomes careless. Then anything could happen.

Edward Has anything happened?

Fairfax No, nothing has happened.

Edward So she suspects nothing?

Fairfax Absolutely nothing. She has only heard some mysterious voices sometimes, like spirited laughter. I have cautioned Grace Poole.

Edward Good. Don't let her know anything. Keep her as ignorant as possible. I know from Adèle that she is a good teacher and person. I want to spare her my tragedy as far as possible.

Fairfax Of course, Mr Rochester.

Edward I rely completely on your discretion. Thank you, Mrs Fairfax. *(leaves)*

Fairfax Edward Fairfax Rochester, you have let in a singular guest in your haunted life of demons and persecutions by destiny, something so rare as a decent virgin. Of course it's to the highest interest of all of us that she will remain so.

Scene 2. The salon, by an open fire.

Rochester Move closer to me, please, Miss Eyre. You are not afraid of me, are you?

Jane Eyre Absolutely not, Sir.

Edward My warden is very happy with you. We all hope that you will stay.

Jane She is a brilliant and talented girl and very quick at learning, although her mother tongue is not English. My I ask, Sir, how you got a French warden? She doesn't seem to be your daughter at all.

Edward Well guessed. She isn't at all. Her mother was a French variety artist whom I had the bad luck and weakness to fall hopelessly in love with. Of course she deceived me with another. They all do. She tired eventually of the extra lover, went off to Italy and left a daughter abandoned with no one to care for her and no father anywhere. Not even the mother knew who the father had been, but it could have been me. She was however quite certain that it hadn't been me.

Jane So you took care of her entirely out of charity?

Rochester Someone had to do it. There was no one else. Of course I would have preferred not to. Now the matter stands as it is. At least she got away from the unsound city jungle with its depraved sedition and seduction. Here she is safe and will have a sound and healthy life and education out in the country. All that was missing was a good governess. We believe we have found her in you.

Jane I will do my best, Sir.

Edward But I know nothing about you. I understand you had a rather basic background.

Jane As an orphan I was placed by hostile relatives at the Lowood public school for girls. It was a sinister school. We were practically brought up as nuns. Since I had nowhere else to go I stayed on and continued there as a teacher, but I always looked for other possibilities, until one day I found Mrs Fairfax' advertisement. I thought she was the hostess here and my employer.

Edward I regret that I must make you disappointed. It was a man, and it was me. Mrs Fairfax is a trusted relative who always served our family most faithfully. She knows all and understands all. You can ask her about anything and trust her with everything. Thanks to her I can go travelling as much as I do.

Jane Miss Adèle is not happy about your constant absence.

Edward Do you think *I am?* (*checks himself*) I am sorry, but there are too many memories attached to this ancient family house, which sometimes have been heavy to carry. The result is my restlessness and constant need of change and renewal.

Jane That's not more than human. And were your French singer not change and refreshment enough for you?

Edward There you have me, Miss Eyre. That change and renewal turned to be a mistake, but who could know that before it was too late? My father sent me to Jamaica as a young man. My elder brother took over the property and the family responsibility, but he died suddenly after only four years. Then I was recalled to take over his duties. (*darkly*) I could have been sent further away than Jamaica.

Jane But what is missing in your life, Mr Rochester? You could easily find another better wife in your own social position.

Edward (bitterly amused) Do you say so, Miss Eyre? The wealthy Blanche Ingram is very keen on marrying and has laid some very tempting bait for me. She has everything that could be desirable in a young beautiful woman, brilliant intellect, dashing sport interest, the wealthiest family in the county with a spotless background, in brief, an ideal match in every point of view of both her family and mine.

Jane So why don't you strike? You need such a wife for your warden.

Edward You will meet her. Afterwards I want to hear your assessment of her. You inspire confidence, Miss Eyre. Your long hardy path as a severely chastised pupil and experienced teacher in a sinister school has left you with a gift more worth than all human riches, namely knowledge of human nature. I wish I had had that knowledge myself as a young man and had to go through a hard school to learn that insight before it was too late.

Jane Why do you think I have it?

Edward I already told you. Because you inspire confidence. That was also Mrs Fairfax' first impression of you. Anyone could trust you.

Jane Thank you, Mr Rochester.

Edward That's nothing. Evidently you are not used to compliments, since you blush.

Jane (embarrassed, confused) Excuse me, Mr Rochester. I think it is time for Adèle's evening lessons. (*retires in haste*)

Edward (alone) What was it now I said that was wrong?

Scene 3.

Blanche Ingram What do you know about Miss Eyre, Mrs Fairfax?

Fairfax Everything and almost nothing, Miss Ingram. She comes from the humblest possible circumstances and has lived all her life without all that you have, Miss Ingram, without missing it. She is simply a product of the hardest basic school of life and is entirely focussed only on making the best of her dedication to education.

Blanche She seems definitely to be the perfect governess.

Fairfax Everyone is pleased with her.

Blanche And Edward especially.

Fairfax I assure you, Miss Blanche, that he has no more than reason for it.

Blanche What do you mean?

Fairfax He was lucky to get such a teacher for his warden. He regards her as nothing else, and she has no hold on him.

Blanche Neither have I. He always seems to look beyond me. We try to please him in every way and do all we can for him, but he always seems to have his attention on something else or someone else.

Fairfax Be patient, Miss Blanche. We all have to be patient with him.

Blanche Especially his eventual wife, it seems.

Fairfax (low) Yes.

Edward (entering) There you are, Blanche. Were we not going out riding?

Blanche I was only waiting for you, Edward.

Edward And gossiping with Miss Fairfax in the meantime.

Blanche Only woman talk, Edward, nothing else.

Edward I understand exactly.

Jane (entering, shyly) Pardon me. I didn't know you were here. I only wanted a word with Miss Fairfax.

Blanche No, don't be ashamed, Miss Eyre, and don't be shy for being so excellent. If you only knew what a success you've already made as a governess here!

Edward She can't take compliments, Blanche.

Blanche That's because she isn't used to them. The more important that they are given. You are accepted as one of the family, Miss Eyre. Try to get used to it. (*Jane looks shyly down, well aware of her subordinate position.*)

Fairfax What was it, Jane?

Edward Jane, you must never shy to Blanche Ingram. I want you to be friends. As long as you are my warden's governess you are on the same social level as all my friends.

Jane That's not possible, Mr Rochester.

Edward Why not?

Jane Because you are my employer.

Blanche Don't try to deprive her of her sound awareness of reality, Edward. She knows where she stands and stands there firmly.

Edward Yes, so I notice. Come, Blanche. Let our mistresses discuss their domestic matters in peace. (*leaves with Blanche*)

Fairfax Well, Jane?

Jane I only wondered how I will conduct myself in relation to all the guests that Mr Rochester invited. How will you stand yourself?

Fairfax We who provide the food and stand for the organization have to remain in the background in order to manage our work in peace. I advise you to do the same.

Jane And if Mr Rochester insists on inviting me to join the guests?

Fairfax Only be yourself. You are good enough as you are. Don't dress up, and don't say anything more than necessary. Your simplicity is in its honesty a better appearance than what any nobility or dressed up opulence could show up.

Jane Thank you, Mrs Fairfax. I will appear as sparsely as possible. (*leaves*)

Fairfax Her honesty is almost going to far. However will this end?

Scene 4. The party. All kinds of dressed up noble guests.

A lady How do you manage, Blanche, to keep Mr Rochester at home so long? Earlier he never stayed at home more than at most two weeks at length.

Blanche I assure you, aunt, I didn't do anything.

Lady 2 I have never seen Mr Rochester so harmonious before, as if he was pleased with his life. He never was before.

Lady 1 Something evidently has uplifted him. It must be you, Blanche.

Blanche I hope so, aunt, but I am not too sure. The new governess in his household has worked miracles with little Adèle and the mood in the house. If I have some part in his reaching better spirits I am certainly not the only one.

Lady 2 You had better marry him soon enough before someone else does.

Blanche In such dances, *maman*, only he can be the lead.

Lady 1 Of course.

Uncle It's surely about time that he marries. He has been a bachelor far too long, he is almost forty, his warden needs a foster mother, the house needs the firm hand of a mistress, and he is the only one who can continue the family, I must point that out to him.

Edward (has turned up) You have done so all my life since I came home, uncle, but I am in no more hurry now than I was then, for as long as I lack a wife I can at least keep myself young. With a wife around your neck you never know what extra worries life will burden you with.

Blanche You decide the pace, Edward. I also am in no hurry. We are both young and have all the time in the world.

Lady 1 But we heard so much about the new governess. Couldn't we see her?

Edward She is shy in front of so many noble guests and lacks the proper dress to match them.

Blanche Call on her, Edward. Nothing suits her better than her honest simplicity.

Lady 2 Here she is I believe.

Jane (enters) Mr Rochester, an uninvited guest has announced himself. Mrs Fairfax was busy in the kitchen. Or else she would have announced him herself.

Edward What uninvited guest?

Jane A certain Richard Mason.

Edward (starts up terrified) Mason! What is he doing here? How did he find his way here?

Uncle Evidently a guest from Edward's wild past. *(to Edward)* I hope we may see him, Edward, so we may learn a little more about your bachelor life abroad.

Edward I promise you that he has nothing of interest to reveal even if he were to sit up all night with you. *(goes immediately out of the salon and meets Richard outside)*

Richard! What are you doing here?

Richard I was just anxious to remain in touch and pay a visit of courtesy. Is my sister still alive?

Edward She is well taken care of, I assure you.

Richard I hope to see her myself.

Edward At your own risk, Richard, at your own risk. You turn up in the middle of my greatest and only party I have ever given.

Richard Yes, I read about it in the paper. There is talk about an engagement with a rich heiress. That made me curious.

Edward You may only enter, Richard, under extreme obligation of silence.

Richard You can trust me, Edward. We have our agreement. I am the head of my family and know how to behave.

Edward As long as you do you are most welcome, but take no chances!

Richard The only chance about this I have already taken, and that was to come here.

Edward Come in then, and meet my poultry-yard. (*shows him in to the salon*)
Meet a colleague of mine from my years in Jamaica! (*presents him*)

Richard Richard Mason, plantation owner.

Uncle We have always wondered what you really did on Jamaica, Edward. Now perhaps we shall at last learn something about it.

Edward My father sent me there on business. I managed them until I was recalled back home after my father's and brother's death. That's the whole story.

Richard (*discovers Jane Eyre*) And who is this?

Blanche Edward's warden's governess, Mr Mason, Miss Jane Eyre.

Richard Have you been married, Edward?

Edward I am not the father of my warden, if that's what you wonder, Richard. Adèle is the daughter of a friend I had in Paris who abandoned her daughter without protection. No one could take care of her except me.

Richard Yes, I heard about that. You were always the self-sacrificing type, Edward, even if you never volunteered for it. Miss Jane Eyre, you were a positive surprise as a welcome contrast to all these society decorations. Edward is without any doubt grateful for your support.

Jane I can't do more than what is expected of me.

Richard And you are Edward's intended future, I presume? (*turning to Blanche*)

Blanche I take it easy. Edward hasn't decided yet.

Richard The papers have written about the probable union of your families.

Lady 2 Yes, I read about it too. Isn't it exciting? (*Jane wants to retire.*)

Edward (*to Jane*) Jane, stay, please. Don't be shy to the ignominious vanity of all these peacocks.

Jane There is nothing for me to do here, Mr Rochester.

Edward I am Edward to you like to everyone else here. You are the only one dressed decently in this entire poultry yard. (*Jane is embarrassed and hurries out.*)
Whatever I say I just scare her away. What turns on her extreme sensitivity?

Blanche What blunt stupidity did you say to her, Edward?

Edward Just that she was the only decently dressed around here.

Blanche Fie, Edward. You know she can't take compliments. Your friend Richard Mason arrived just in the right moment as our most exotic guest. Or else she would have stolen the whole party by her simplicity.

Edward She is only one of us, Blanche, and I want her to feel it.

Blanche No harm in that, but she seems to attach greater importance to her plight as governess and not risk it for alien intrusive feelings.

(The party continues.)

Scene 5. A dark corridor.

Grace Poole sitting outside a close door. Mason enters.

Richard There you are.

Poole The master spoke about you and said you wanted to visit her. But you shouldn't come alone.

Richard I wanted to speak alone with her, if possible.

Poole It's not advisable

Richard I am her brother.

Poole At your own risk then. *(lets him in. The scene opens to Bertha's cell, an ordinary room with all facilities and designed to give an impression of comfort and homeliness. Bertha sits in a corner with her hair very long and grizzled.)*

Richard Bertha! *(She does not react.)*

Poole She has not been in her best mood today.

Richard Does she know that I am here?

Poole Yes, I told her.

Richard (tries again) Bertha!

Bertha (slowly turning her head) Have you come for a visit, my brother?

Richard She recognizes me!

Bertha Would I not recognize the one who had me certified?

Richard Bertha, I just wanted to see how you were.

Bertha To see how I managed in my degradation?

Richard I only wanted to see that you were well.

Bertha Well, am I not? Could I have it better? Fenced in like a wild animal, completely deprived of all human dignity, only because I was forced into a marriage! *(suddenly rushing on the door with roaring fury)*

Richard No, Bertha! *(holds her back, is attacked, Bertha assaults him like a wild animal, tears his clothes to shreds, buries her teeth in his shoulder. Grace Poole takes her from behind, locks her arms and gets the better of her.)*

Poole You had better leave at once, Sir. I will tell the master as soon as I get her calmed down.

Richard (beside himself) Bertha! Bertha! *(stumbles out. The door and scene is closed behind him, and he disappears in the darkness.)*

Scene 6.

(Edward in a nightgown appearing with a candelabrum, approaches Jane Eyre's bed, wakes her up.)

Edward Jane, could you come with me, please?

Jane Mr Rochester! What is it?

Edward Ask no questions. Keep quiet. Just be observant, like you always are. We could need your help.

(shows her out into the corridor to another room, where Richard is sitting almost unconscious, shocked and in pain, in an armchair.)

Richard (showing some life as they come) Edward!

Edward Keep quite still, Richard. The doctor is on his way. We must get you out of here. How could you get in there alone?

Richard I had to see her! But I could hardly recognize her. What have we done to deserve such a wild animal?

Edward No one can answer that question, Richard. – Do you think we could get him out into a carriage without raising curiosity among the guests?

Jane We can take him out the back way. Mrs Fairfax will help us.

Richard She attacked me! She bit me, Edward! And the moment before she was perfectly sensible!

Edward I warned you. You should have waited until I could come with you.

Richard She will have the best possible care, won't she?

Edward We have our agreement. It's to the best interest of both of us that no one ever breaks it.

Richard Of course. We are both equally accountable. *(passes out. There is a very prudent knock.)*

Edward The doctor! *(lets him in)* Can we get him out of here, doctor?

Doctor Carter (makes a quick examination) Only flesh wounds. He has suffered no harm except shock. A few days' rest, and he will be all right.

Edward Can I trust him to your care until we can get him out of the country?

Carter Of course.

Edward No one must be disturbed. No guest is to be wakened. You will keep quiet, doctor?

Carter I am obliged to silence.

Edward Thank you, doctor. Hold the candelabrum, Jane, and light us out while we help him on his feet. Can you walk, Richard?

Richard (gets awake again) I am glad that I survived.

Edward We had perhaps a narrow escape this time, but I hope you will never risk it again. We must get you out of the country, Dick. Until then none of us could feel safe. *(The doctor helps in getting up Richard and brings him out.)*

Do you understand anything of this, Jane?

Jane Absolutely nothing.

Edward It's better that way. Forget that it ever happened.

Jane Just one question, Sir.

Edward Well?

Jane Is it wise to keep Grace Poole in the house under such circumstances?

Edward (nonplussed) Grace Poole?

Jane Yes. I am also thinking of that night when someone set your bed on fire. If I hadn't woken up then and felt the smoke in the air you would have been lost.

Edward An accident. Forget that also, Jane. Grace Poole knows what she is doing when she is sober. It's only when she sometimes pass out that things could happen. I will tell her sharply. Don't worry about her. She is implicitly reliable and the best one for her task.

Jane Perhaps it's best for me to understand nothing, Sir.

Edward It certainly is. Continue that way and be my friend. Only you have seen the scene tonight except doctor Carter. Could you keep quiet about the whole thing?

Jane Yes, but not without remembering.

Edward That's fair. Save your experience for times to come. We know nothing about the future, and only experience can help us. That's all, Jane. Thanks for tonight.

Jane Nothing to thank me for, Sir.

Edward Say Edward.

Jane Mr Rochester...

Edward Say Edward.

Jane Sir, Edward.

Edward No, just Edward.

Jane As you wish, Sir.

Edward Your persistency is incurable. That's good. You can trust it. Good night now, Jane. I follow the doctor home with his patient.

Jane Good night, *(shyly)* Edward.

Edward (reacts) That's good, Jane. – Can you manage, doctor?

Carter Yes, he can almost walk by himself.

Edward I follow you. *(disappears with the doctor)*

Jane What hair-raising mysteries are concealed in this wonderful house? The wounds on his shoulder were of teeth, and if it isn't Grace Poole raving about, what kind of a fury or vampire or female beast is it then that she is guarding, which only a stranger from Jamaica knows anything about and obviously even stands in intimate contact with? Could voodoo find its way here? No, I had better concentrate on Adèle and what I am here for. Mr Rochester obviously could drive anyone mad with his secrets. *(returns with her light to her room and returns to bed but can't sleep.)*

It's hopeless. The intrigues are too dense, and the mysteries are amassing in restlessness that fill the entire house with nightmares. Incertitude is the worst of all, and the impossibility to get any clearance in what is going on must lead to chaos in my mind. But who is scratching at my door? *(There is a scratch at the door, that opens slowly, while Jane stares at it with horror. Finally there is Rochester.)*

Again, – Edward? New nightly performances? Who has been bitten by whom this time?

Edward (coming to her bed) Jane, forget all these phantoms that have nothing to do with us. Mason will leave the country, and then no one will disturb us any more, not even Grace Poole, who has been equally affected as me and Mason this night by what none of us deserved. Spare me, Jane. There is nothing for you in my past, and I want to keep you away from it. Spare yourself above all, as I wish to spare you, for you are the most valuable thing I have to resort to as the only true friend I can trust.

Jane But aren't you engaged to Blanche Ingram?

Edward Who is Blanche Ingram? Just a superficial entertainment of flair and glitter, a spoilt perfection without anything in it, the best match of north England but only visibly, while the inside is just a void blank. I don't love her, Jane, and never did. You are the one I love.

Jane But, Sir...

Edward Please, Jane, don't say no. Adèle and I could never have found a better educator. When I first saw you I thought it couldn't be true that there could be an ideal woman, and I decided to test you thoroughly during all the time it would take, since I am the one who least of all could afford or have nerves enough to take any risks. I have hit too many trains to be run over by yet another one, but you have saved me. If Blanche had seen what you have seen tonight she would never have been satisfied with less than a full explanation, and that explanation would have jerked her out of my life forever. You not even hinted at any question but just accepted all without missing one detail of the manifestations of the mystery, while Blanche is blind to everything except her own desires. You so far have accepted all, Jane, without even suggesting any question or doubt. Could you also accept me as I am?

Jane Do you mean, Mr Rochester, that you are proposing to me?

Edward Yes, Jane, that's just what I mean, and I do so on my knees. Only you have saved me so far, and only you could continue saving me.

Jane (tenderly stroking his hair) Edward, for the first time I dare to call you by that name without timidity, you were everything to me from the beginning. Your troubled brooding personality filled me with motherly feelings that I couldn't damper but only increased all the time. Of course I accept you as you are without any questions. I need not ask any questions, because I know you as you are. There is something of the dilemma of the beauty and the beast over you, but like the beast never could get the better of the prince no matter how hard it manifested itself, so can nothing put down your supreme handsomeness both inside and out. Yes, I happen to be knowledgeable enough about human nature, it's a gift I had for free as a compensation for my outrageously cruel childhood, and it's natural to me, and I saw from the beginning not only your beautiful appearance but above all your extremely deep and difficult inner being, and that was what I as a woman directly fell for. You have me, Edward, without reservations with all the little I own with my body and soul but with a heart so full of love that it is more inexhaustible than anything else in the universe.

Edward Jane, little Jane, is it true, or am I dreaming? Could such a love be mine after all the mistakes I committed?

Jane It is here, and it is here to stay.

Edward Not even Blanche Ingram will be able to come with any objections to such a sincerity and purity of love.

Jane I am at your disposal, Mr Rochester, with salary or without, but most of all in greatest earnest as your wife, Edward.

Edward Thank God for this heavenly blessed gift! (*kisses her*) We announce our engagement and ask to have the banns published tomorrow.

Jane As you wish, Edward. You have me now and forever.

(They kiss again before Edward retires to his room with a last gesture of tenderness.)

Jane (alone) At last I can sleep, but this night has almost cost me my mind.

(She falls peacefully asleep, but her sleep is troubled, as when you dream although you are awake. Little Adèle comes gliding in like an elf.)

Adèle I am so happy, mademoiselle, for your sake that you at last will become one of us! I am so happy that I will have a new mother instead of the one I lost and that it will be you, mademoiselle! I am so happy for Mr Rochester, who at last will be able to stay at home and perhaps become happy! I am so glad for you and for mine and for the sake of all of us! Never desert us, mademoiselle!

(A dark shadow darkens the scene, and Adèle glides out.)

(Bertha appears, long and awesome with her extremely long black grizzled hair almost to the bum and in disorder, dressed in a white nightshirt reaching down to her feet. She comes stealing in with a candle, nosing about, sniffing and finds the cupboard which she opens. Jane wakes up and sees her at once but not her face.)

Jane (cautiously) Grace Poole?

(Bertha doesn't hear her, finds a wedding gown, gets merry and halloas, dances grotesquely around the wedding gown as if it was hers, laughs out scarily loud and uncontrolled and almost hysterically shrill, the mad laugh of a maniac, then drops the gown but keeps the veil, throws it around her head, dances around with it on, while Jane all the time horror-struck looks on, then suddenly removes the veil and tears it up brutally, throws it on the floor, jumps and stamps on it.)

Jane (a second time, terrified) Grace Poole?

Bertha (harkens, turns around, fixes her attention on Jane, like as if to penetrate her with her wild eyes, then swiftly approaches the bed and comes straight up to Jane, putting her light to her face. Jane is shocked into a faint. Bertha still examines her for a moment, then retires, chuckles, jumps and stamps on the torn veil once again, suddenly stops and listens, the door opens from the outside, and Grace Poole shows up, entering resolutely and taking care of Bertha with a firm experienced hand.)

Poole Naughty girl! (*takes out Bertha and disappears.*)

Jane is still lying without moving, unconscious.)

(Gradually there is a dawn, she awakens, sits up, shakes her head as if to liberate herself from nightmare hangovers, and tries to get settled.)

Jane How will this end? What is wrong? Everything is wrong, but I don't know what. (*calls for a maid, who immediately appears.*)

Fanny O Madame, haven't you slept well? No wonder on your own wedding day!

Jane Fanny, I will be late. I have had terrible nightmares and been haunted tonight, so it will take time to get dressed. We must find another veil.

Fanny (*discovers the torn veil on the floor*) Oh!

Jane Tell Mr Rochester to go to church in advance. I will be there as soon as I can.

Fanny Of course, Madame. I will tell him everything. (*curtseys and leaves.*)

Jane What is wrong? If only I knew! But I have no choice but to go through with it, I must for Edward's sake, and that is perhaps the only way to learn what is wrong.

Act IV scene 1. In church.

Edward (*dressed up as a groom*) So she was haunted by Grace Poole?

Fairfax That's what she says, Sir.

Edward She never met Grace Poole, but we know who tore her bridal veil. She will come, Mrs Fairfax, will she not?

Fairfax As surely as amen in church. She is quite as determined as you.

Edward It's because we love each other, Mrs Fairfax, in pure honest, and nothing may come between us to stain that love, not even old ghosts.

Fairfax I think she is coming now. I will welcome you afterwards at home. (*withdraws.*)

Edward (*to himself*) Would I then refrain from life for the sake of a mistake? Would I banish love from my life because it once was abused and ended in disaster? Shall I be haunted all my life for something I was not guilty of myself but was sacrificed to like a pawn that was struck out? Yes, I was prepared to accept such a destiny and not strive for anything more but to live with it, endure and survive it, until this untarnished and untouched lady came along, climbing straight down from heaven into my hell, maybe just to save me and show me a possibility of a release from my fate, and she arrived not just from any heaven but from the simplest possible background of only poverty and hard work. Who would have the heart to make me reject such a possibility? At least not any heart that was human.

(*The gates are opened, and Jane enters as a bride.*)

Jane (*coming slowly up to him but with a clear direction, allows herself to be tenderly embraced by him.*)

Priest You can do all that later.

Jane Sorry I am late.

Edward You had a terrible night.

Jane I survived it, and nothing can stop me.

Edward Thanks for those words, Jane. They save my life. (*to the priest*) We are ready, Reverend.

Priest May I then announce to this congregation, as the ritual prescribes according to proper procedure, that if anyone knows any impediment to make this marriage impossible, by the authority of law or other circumstances, may he then step forth and present his case or forever remain silent.

Briggs (invisible until now, treading out of the shadows) This marriage cannot take place since the bridegroom is already married. I bring documents that legally confirm this fact.

Priest Who are you, Sir?

Briggs Attorney Briggs, Sir, from London representing my client Richard Mason from Jamaica. His sister Bertha Mason is Mr Rochester's lawfully wedded wife since many years.

Priest And she is still alive?

Briggs In his own home at Thornfield Hall. Aforementioned Richard Mason could himself recently confirm this fact.

Priest Is this true, Mr Rochester?

Rochester (has never let go of Jane's hand) I ask you all to follow me home to Thornfield Hall to judge with your own eyes whether this is true or not. The more witnesses to this case, the better, so that all then can be agreed on the facts. Come with me, Jane. It is not over yet. You must also be a witness to a most debatable reality. *(refuses to let go of her hand. She just nods and follows. All immediately break up from church.)*

Priest (to Briggs) Could this really be true? They were such a promising young couple.

Briggs We shall see, Reverend, we shall see. *(leaves after the others.)*

Scene 2.

Edward (with the whole company at the entrance of Bertha's boudoir) Welcome to my hell! I would have spared you the scene that you will all presently be witnesses of, but the good Richard Mason, who wisely kept away on this day, since he during his last visit here was subject to a murder attempt by the person in question, his own sister, has anyway in his absence succeeded in making it unavoidable. Open the scene, Grace Poole!

(The scene is opened and displays the known interior of Bertha's living-room. She is herself barely visible in the other end of the room in her long nightshirt and wild long grizzled hair.)

How is our patient, today, Grace Poole?

Poole She is somewhat unpredictable, Sir, you never know what she is up to, so take care, Sir. Watch out, Sir. Now she has spotted you.

Bertha (rising and becoming visible enough when she sees Rochester, advancing slowly, like a stealing leopard preparing an attack.) Well, isn't it my own husband who dares to visit me with the whole village behind him including even the intended

bride! You can see for yourselves, good people, (*purring like a cat*) there is nothing wrong with me. I just happen to be married to that fine gentleman there, (*pointing at Rochester*) which he can never forgive me, which is why he locked me up for life, just because I dared to play some advanced games with him. Can you forgive me, Edward? It doesn't matter, for I can never forgive you! (*rushes forth in an attack like a fury with a knife aimed at Rochester, who is on his guard and manages to avert the attack. They struggle in a fight of life and death.*)

Fairfax She has a knife!

Briggs Disarm her!

(*Grace Poole manages to disarm her, which only increases Bertha's rage, who tries both to bite and strangle Rochester, like a wild animal, but he has struggled with her before.*)

Edward A rope! Quickly! (*Grace Poole provides a rope. He succeeds in pinioning Bertha, forces her down into a chair and binds her to it, where she desperately struggles and sputters.*)

Ladies and gentlemen, may I present my wife since fifteen years, pressed on me by a cheating family of madmen and idiots; her mother, a Creole, was like her, which I didn't learn until after my Catholic wedding, which nothing can dissolve. You see yourselves what a paragon of representative and social talent my wife is. Can anyone transcend her? She also mastered other rare talents in arts like voodoo, Satanism and necrophilia just to mention a few of them, in which fields of self-indulgence she used to celebrate extraordinary bloody orgies. For a change I longed for a human being for a female company and found one in an exceptionally wise and prudent governess for my warden Adèle, the young Miss Jane Eyre here, who would have been my wife today instead of this one. Look at this honest bride, how patient and quiet she stands in perfect composure in front of the not until now revealed hell of a marriage in its most monstrous horrors of aborted perversions. This (*indicating Bertha*) I wished to bypass in order to secure this (*indicating Jane*). Can you blame me?

(*Jane wants to retire. Briggs turns to her.*)

Briggs Miss Jane Eyre, you are absolutely without blame in this, since you obviously knew nothing.

Fairfax Come, Jane. It's partly my fault, who was obliged to obey orders.

(*Jane runs off with her hands covering her face. Fairfax follows her.*)

Edward Take care of her, Mrs Fairfax! I must also ask all the rest of you to leave, since I must take care of my wife.

(*All retire. Rochester closes the door. The scene is shut.*)

Priest (to Briggs) We were all acquainted with the rumour that a mysterious madman was kept at Thornfield Hall, but never could anyone guess that it was Mr Rochester's wife!

Briggs His tragedy is that the law lacks power to take into consideration such extreme aggravating circumstances as these. If I had known about this I would never

have come here but refused to accept Mr Mason's errand. I must see what I can do for the completely innocent Miss Eyre.

(When all have left, the scene is reopened to Bertha's living-room.)

Edward Well, poor hag, are you satisfied now, when you succeeded in ruining even another happier marriage than your own, and before it even got a chance? Are you happy about ruining even other people's lives than your own? How does it feel to let innocents suffer and have their lives destroyed because you please to be a hopeless case? Answer, Bertha, if you are at all answerable for yourself! Or have you really reduced yourself to a soulless animal?

Poole You speak to deaf ears, Sir. She has no human feelings and no decency left, if she ever had any.

Edward But she was eloquent enough when we first entered.

Poole All she can think of is escape and revenge, if she can think at all. She saw a chance in your visit, like she saw a chance in Mr Mason's. Her female slyness and calculation is still without limits, but that is all she has left.

Edward What good does your voodoo expertise and your sorcery do you now, Bertha? Who will you now invoke to come to your rescue when not even the Devil himself wants to help you? You are washed up, Bertha. In front of witnesses you have tried to kill both your brother and your husband, the two who most of all tried to do you good and wished the best in the world for you. All you can do for your defence is to growl, spit and sputter, like a shackled monster.

Poole I am afraid I dare not release her from the ropes for some time now, Sir.

Edward Keep her also without food until releasing her is without risks, if it ever will be.

Bertha I will never release you, pathetic fool of a hopeless idiot. You are mine now and forever. I will drag you along down all the way to hell.

Edward I cannot doubt that you really will try to do that, but you can be sure that I will never follow you willingly. *(to Poole)* I can't stand it any more, Grace. Inform me as usual if there is any change. *(rises tired out and leaves.)*

Poole Take it easy now, naughty girl, and you will soon be out of your ropes.

Scene 3.

Jane alone in her room crying on her bed. She has not undressed.

Enter Rochester.

Edward Jane, can you forgive me?

Jane It's not your fault, Edward. It's the force of circumstances. Don't you think I understand that without explanations?

Edward Whatever you do, Jane, don't desert me now.

Jane Your fate has struck me a worse blow and rape than any physical harm could have done! You must give me time to recover from the shock.

Edward I give you all the time you need and all the time in the world.

Jane That's not enough. I must get away, Edward, and find a necessary detachment. This cruel game of destiny with me has gone too far. I understand that you couldn't tell me anything. You did it to spare me. But everything will ultimately be revealed anyway, and it was nobody's fault. It just happened that way. It was the force of circumstances.

Edward Ask me of anything, and I will do anything for you.

Jane There is only one thing I have to ask of you. Leave me in peace. I must be left alone to be able to recover after the fall.

Edward Your wish is my law.

Jane You said in church that it wasn't over yet. I just hope, especially for your part, Edward, that it one day will be over. Leave now.

Edward I leave. (*leaves*)

Jane (alone) I must leave you, Edward, completely and at once. That's the only way out of this black hole. (*cries a bit more, wipes her tears, gets settled and starts preparing for her departure.*)

Act V scene 1. The following morning

Edward (in despair after a sleepless night, still undressed) Is then my entire life lost and forfeited, just because I tried to change it? Am I then condemned to slavery for life, just because I obeyed my father and submitted to getting married? How can any human relationship work at length, if one single relationship could turn out so tremendously unhappy without deserving it? Is then my marriage just a caricature of every marriage, and is that marriage, which everyone dreams of and lives for, like the ideal marriage prospect with Jane Eyre, doomed to fail, be damned, punished and aborted from the start by the cruel realism of an unreasonable reality?

Fairfax (entering prudently) Sir, you haven't slept in your bed tonight.

Edward Is that so strange?

Fairfax I am sorry, Sir, but I have some bad news.

Edward What could be worse than what has already happened?

Fairfax Miss Jane Eyre has left.

Edward Has she deserted us?

Fairfax Without explanation, without saying good-bye, without a single word.

Edward Don't blame her. What bride wouldn't have done the same under such circumstances?

Fairfax Little Adèle wonders when she will be coming back. What shall I tell her?

Edward (with hesitation) Tell her as it is. Tell her that Miss Jane Eyre has taken leave of absence for some uncertain length of time. I am sure she will understand.

Fairfax Yes, Sir.

Edward She didn't leave in the middle of the night, did she?

Fairfax No, she left at dawn, Sir. Her room is in perfect order. She didn't own much, and she has taken everything with her, except the bridal dress.

Edward Of course. That's all right, Mrs Fairfax. Let's take care of the wreckage that still floats around, and especially little Adèle. (*Fairfax leaves.*)

She has left me alone chained to my unblessed wife to leave me in peace with my marriage. She has done wisely, for she has chosen to survive herself by leaving my ship to sink in anguish and despair with all its curses. Live well, Jane Eyre, I leave you in peace. If only wish I could find some peace myself.

What more have I to live for now? How could I ever again meet anyone with my eyes, after my marriage has been exposed in all its outrage to the whole county? I must send little Adèle to school. There is nothing else to do. I will only keep the most indispensable servants and send Mrs Fairfax on her way – she has done well and as well as anyone could have done and can't do anything more. I will be practically alone with my wife and her jailor Grace Poole with the bottle, I will turn into a morbid hermit who only has his impossible alien dreams to live for about Jane Eyre, the only human being who ever inspired me with any hope in my constantly increasing smothering darkness. Could it be Bertha's black magic and voodoo sorcery that has locked me up in this chronically hellish situation? If so I will fight it as long as I live, if not for anything else so at least for a chance of sometime catching at least a glimpse of my only true bride once again.

Scene 2. In the dark corridors of Thornfield Hall.

Edward Here I wander about like an unblessed ghost, buried alive in my own ancient family mansion together with my lost demented wife in the wreck of our tragedy, drowning and chained to a mutual destiny like to a sinking corpse, and there is nothing I can do, just wander about haunted in my deserted halls and know, that all who ever knew me laugh at me and condole my pathetic life sentence. What a clown, what a fool to walk into the trap of a Catholic marriage with a mad abnormality of a destructive woman! No, I can't go away from her by travelling, not this time, not one more time, after the dishonourable effort at an alternative marriage to the satanic aborted failure, it is enough of my efforts to run away, and it's time to at last stay on and make a stand fighting by going down with the wreck of my life. (*Gradually there are increasing flames everywhere.*) But what is this? Don't tell me she is loose again! Grace Poole! Grace Poole! (*Bertha's diabolical laughter is heard at a distance.*) Has she fallen asleep over her bottle again? She has set the house on fire! We must get the servants out!

Poole I am very sorry, Sir. I don't know where she is. She must have managed to steal my keys while I slept.

Edward It's not the first time, Grace Poole, but this could very well be the last time! Jane Eyre's room is lost to the fire! We must get the servants out! Where is that bitch now? (*Bertha becomes visible way up high above the stage.*)

Poole There she is, Sir! On top of the roof!

Bertha (dancing on the roof) Burn, my life, and consume me at last with your fire from hell, so that I may drown in the fire of love that I never was allowed to reach!

Edward We must get her down from there. Are all the servants safe?

Poole Yes, Sir. Don't go up there! She is mad!

Edward You can say that again. Thanks for the warning, but we must do what we can. (*climbs the ladders up to Bertha*)

Bertha No, don't save me! I am lost and enjoying it! Why did you never agree to marry the Devil, Rochester, like I did? It was so damned funny!

Edward Bertha! Come down from there!

Bertha Never in my life!

Edward The house is burning! You will burn with it if you stay!

Bertha Never in my life! I always kept burning and never did anything else! But I will never finish burning! I will just fly and disappear and then come back! You will never get rid of me, Rochester! I am yours forever! (*jumps into the fire*)

Edward Bertha! (*A chorus of servants cry out far below.*)

Poole (at the bottom) Massacred! Nothing can help her now! Come down, Sir, before it is too late!

(*Rochester disappears. The flames reach their climax. Then there is a great crash. The servants cry out again.*)

Poole (desperate) Mr Rochester! Mr Rochester!

Voices Perhaps he is still alive. – Dig him out from the ruins! – The fall of Thornfield Hall is complete! – And Bertha Rochester has haunted it for the last time. – No one can say that we didn't do all we could for her.

Priest She was self-destructive from the start and fulfilled her destructivity with consequence. Can we save Mr Rochester?

Poole That is the question. It is all my fault.

Priest No, Grace Poole. It was the Devil who by the bottle and Bertha Mason outwitted us all.

Scene 3. Ferndean, a simple domestic salon.

Rochester by the fire as a wreck, one-armed and blind, decayed and pathetic.

Edward Is it you, Mary? Put the water here beside me.

Jane Mary is out in the kitchen.

Edward (harkens) Who said this?

Jane One who wishes you well.

Edward Haven't I suffered enough? Shall all my agonies be doubled by hearing hallucinations from the past? Don't alter your voice, Mary. It can't be anyone but you.

Jane Sir, Mary is out in the kitchen. I bring the water to you in her place.

Edward Who are you? Who is playing tricks on me by talking to me by a voice that I still can hear but only in my wildest fantasies?

Jane Sir, I have come back.

Edward It's not possible.

Jane Yes, it is possible, and it is true.

Edward Jane? Is it really you?

Jane It doesn't look much better, Sir. Here is your glass of water.

Edward Are you mocking me? Or is it fate that mocks me? Is it my senses that play naughty tricks on me? Could it really be you?

Jane Yes, it can really be me.

Edward Let me have this wonderful fact confirmed. Give me a hug, and let me press my angel to my heart, if it is possible.

Jane It is quite possible. (*embraces him. They stay long embraced, like as if to feel each other thoroughly.*) Edward, I have learned everything that happened. I know that you are blind and have lost one hand, but that means nothing, and that is not why I have come back. I came back because I heard or felt that were calling on me.

Edward I actually did all since you deserted us. So you have heard me at last?

Jane I am free, Edward. I am not poor any more, but I am independent and need no longer work. My life belongs to you, for that I owe you, as you gave me a life.

Edward You don't owe me anything, Jane. I owe you everything, just because you came back. Do you mean that you are staying?

Jane If you still want an escaped bride.

Edward 'If' she says! I am also free, Jane. I couldn't follow my wife all the way down to her self-made grave, although I tried. I had to pay with a hand and my sight for my last effort to save her. Don't tell me that you still want a cripple.

Jane I want you, Edward, and no one else.

Edward And I want you, Jane, and no one else.

Jane You still have one eye. It seems intact, and then perhaps you can partially recover your sight.

Edward If I can recover you, Jane, I am blessed enough with that and need nothing else.

Jane You have me for life, Edward.

Edward Are you serious?

Jane Or else I wouldn't say so.

Edward My angel, then I can in spite of all reconcile myself with life and my destiny. Then life is not just suffering and misfortune after all, but there could actually be some relief and mitigation. I accept you on one condition.

Jane It is already granted.

Edward You must never desert me again.

Jane I will be your eyes and your right hand. I'll be everything to you, Edward, as long as you live and longer. I shall live to atone for all that your former wife committed against you.

Edward Then there is a tremendous work ahead of you with fifteen lost years to repair the damages of.

Jane I am still young and have only just started. We shall restore your sight,
Edward.

Edward Could it even ultimately result in a decent family?

Jane If you want. In honest love everything is possible.

Edward I am almost starting to believe you, Jane.

Jane That's why I am here.

Edward Thank you, Jane, for existing, for returning, and for your singular courage to take on a hopeless case.

Jane No case is hopeless, Edward.

Edward Not even mine?

Jane Yours least of all. Your wife is dead, Edward, but love lives on, and you have it here.

Edward Thank you, Jane. May I ask you something?

Jane Anything.

Edward Let's walk out in the light. I want to see if maybe I could start perceiving it. If not, we will continue trying until we die.

Jane Of course, Edward. *(They start on their way out.)*

Edward Welcome home, Jane.

Jane It has been a long journey.
(They walk out into the light.)

The End.

Comment

Already when I first read “Jane Eyre” at the age of ten I was struck by the Bertha Mason character as one of the most dramatic female figures in world literature. I could never forget her, but the novel appeared hopelessly impossible to dramatize, until the idea came to me to try to see everything from Rochester’s point of view.

The result became something very different from the novel. The observant reader will find that almost nothing of the conversations and discussions of the novel has been included, since the dialogue here is completely different, if the story and meaning though are the same – no one could be Charlotte Brontë more faithful than Mr Rochester.

The novel has been filmed a number of times, but none of the film versions have in my opinion rendered Bertha Mason justice – her dramatic potential has as a rule been ignored. Two of the films have been faithful enough to the novel to feature Rochester as a very large man and Jane Eyre as very small, the first version with Orson Welles and Joan Fontaine, and the version of the 70s with George C. Scott and Susannah York. None of them was convincing. In the latest version with Toby Stephens and Ruth Wilson both are depicted as rather natural and normal, and that’s the best version so far, where Bertha, though, has been reduced to irreducibility.

To stick to Rochester as 20 years older than Jane and double her size I find unnecessary, since it’s their personalities that matter. This is also the conclusion of the last version, so it should be given free allowance to give them the casting that comes natural for a production. Only Bertha Mason should be exactly as she is portrayed in the novel: large and terrifying in her long wild dark hair and the long white nightshirt – she can’t really be demonized enough. By giving her a voice to speak for herself I have tried to make it possible for her to appear as the great dramatic character she should be allowed to be.

The dramatization was written in Athens but concluded on the sea outside Greece on March 28th 2008. This translation was made in August after ten years.

*Christian Lanciai,
August 24th 2018.*