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Family Plays

Charlotte Brontë's

JANE EYRE

Drama adapted by

THOMAS HISCHAK

(85-minute version)



JANE EYRE

Thomas Hischak once again affirms his abilities as a playwright in this skillful retelling of Charlotte Brontë's classic story. As with his best-selling adaptation, *Little Women*, Hischak preserves the heart-tugging emotions of the original novel while altering the work to give it an intrinsically dramatic feel. From a novel of more than 300 pages, this is a two-act play with a running time of approximately 85 minutes and suggestions for further cuttings. A 100-minute version is also available. Be sure to specify the version you prefer.

Drama. Adapted by Thomas Hischak. Based on the story by Charlotte Brontë. Cast: 6m., 20w., extras (Without doubling, the cast size would be in the range of 30-35 players, depending upon the number of girls one chooses to use at Lowood School. However, many of these roles are small parts, making double- and even triple-casting a matter of relative ease. This script includes suggested doubling to obtain a cast of 4 men, 14 women and a variable group of girls for use at both the Lowood and Morton schools). One of Hischak's changes that has made the script such an accomplished work is the fact that he uses three different actresses to handle the part of Jane. We see her as a child as she suffers under the control of a cold-hearted aunt and as she grows into maturity at Lowood School. We see her later as a young woman who experiences both life's difficult trials and the love that makes those trials worth enduring. We see her as a mature woman, 12 years into a happy marriage, looking back on the past and guiding us through her memories. This final Jane remains on stage throughout the course of the entire play and is the audience's insight into thoughts and emotions which could otherwise have been easily lost in the transition from novel to play. An added benefit of the older Jane Eyre is that her narration continues throughout the scene changes, allowing the play to proceed without breaks in the action. *Time: 19th century. Place: England. Costumes: period. Approximate running time: 85 minutes. Code: J58.*

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ISBN-13 978-0-88680-465-7



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Jane Eyre

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THOMAS HISCHAK

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THOMAS HISCHAK

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(JANE EYRE)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-465-7

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About the Play

Thomas Hischak has condensed the timeless classic *Jane Eyre*, originally a novel of over three hundred pages, into a two-act play with a running time of approximately eighty-five minutes and suggestions for further cuttings. Hischak has handled the adaptation in such a way that the plot maintains the emotions, the grandeur, and the majority of the original story line intended by Charlotte Bronte, yet at the same time allows *Jane Eyre* to successfully depart from the realm of the novel and take on a new form that is entirely and powerfully dramatic.

One of Hischak's changes that has made the script such an accomplished work is the fact that he uses three different actresses to handle the part of Jane. There is a young Jane at the age of 10, an older actress to play Jane at ages 18 and 19, and a third Jane looking back at events from 12 years in the future. This final Jane remains on stage throughout the course of the entire play and is the audience's insight into thoughts and emotions which could otherwise have been easily lost in the transition from novel to play. An added benefit of the older Jane Eyre is that her narration continues throughout the scene changes, allowing the play to proceed without breaks in the action.

Without doubling, the cast size would be in the range of 30-35 players, depending upon the number of girls one chooses to use at Lowood school. However, many of these roles are small parts, making double- and even triple-casting a matter of relative ease. This script includes suggested doubling to obtain a cast of 4 men, 14 women, and a variable group of girls for use at both the Lowood and Morton schools.

Thomas Hischak is a professor of theatre at the State University of New York College at Cortland. He is the author of numerous published plays and three books on the American Musical Theatre. With *Jane Eyre*, he has further enhanced a reputation already highly regarded. I. E. Clark Publications has also published his delightful dramatization of *Little Women*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Jane Eyre, a young woman

At Gateshead

Young Jane, ten years old
 Mrs. Reed, her aunt
 Georgiana and Eliza, her cousins
 Bessie, a housemaid
 The Ghost of Mr. Reed

At Lowood

Mr. Brocklehurst, president of the school
 Miss Temple, superintendent of the school
 Miss Miller, a teacher
 Helen Burns, a student
 Girls at Lowood School
 Jane, eighteen years old

At Thornfield

Mrs. Fairfax, housekeeper at Thornfield
 Mr. Edward Rochester, owner of Thornfield
 Adele, his ward
 Leah, a housemaid
 Grace Poole, a servant
 Lady Ingram, a dowager
 Blanche and Mary Ingram, her daughters
 Other lady guests
 Richard Mason, a visitor from Jamaica
 Rev. Wood, a minister
 Bertha Rochester, a madwoman

At Marsh End

St. John Rivers, a young clergyman
 Diana and Marie, his sisters
 Girls at Morton School

Time and Place: 19th Century England

*Suggestions for doubling available in the Production Notes (p. 57)

PRODUCTION NOTES*Cast Doubling*

[The following suggested doubling combinations can be used to reduce the size of the cast]

Men

Ghost of Uncle Reed, Mr. Mason
Mr. Brocklehurst, Reverend Wood

Women

Diana Rivers, Lady at Party
Marie Rivers, Lady at Party
Miss Temple, Lady Ingram
Miss Miller, Mary Ingram
Helen Burns, girl at Morton
Adele, girl at Lowood
Bessie, Bertha Rochester
Mrs. Reed, Grace Poole
Georgiana, girl at Lowood, girl at Morton
Eliza, girl at Lowood, girl at Morton
Girls at Lowood, Girls at Morton

Scenery

The epic sweep of the tale of *Jane Eyre* calls for suggested scenery that does not change very much so that the action is not slowed by scene changes. The play is written so that *Jane Eyre's* narration should cover the setting up or striking of furniture pieces.

For the original production, the action was played in front of a large panorama of the Yorkshire countryside. Cutout silhouettes of Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield, Marsh End, and Ferndean were placed on the landscape at various points in the show to denote the location of the scenes

being played downstage. This proved to be an atmospheric, economic, and practical way to handle the scenery for the play.

Furniture

Act I

Prologue (bare stage)

Scenes 1-2

Gateshead

Red Room: large bed

Young Jane's Bedroom: small bed

Sitting Room: two chairs, table

Scenes 3-6

Lowood School

Schoolroom: long table, stool

Infirmery: small bed

Scenes 7-11

Thornfield Hall

Library: settee, long table, armchair, footstool,
end table, two chairs

Rochester's Bedroom: large bed, bedside table

Grace's Bedroom: bed

Act II

Scene 1

Thornfield Hall

Garden: bench

Gateshead

Red Room: large bed

Scene 2-4

Thornfield Hall

Jane's Bedroom: bed, chair

Chapel: bare stage

Scenes 5-6

Marsh End

Jane's Bedroom: bed

Sitting Room: rocker, chair

Schoolroom: two long benches, teacher's desk

Scenes 7-8

Ferndean

Parlor: armchair, end table, window seat

Properties

In addition to the furniture listed previously, these hand props are needed for the play.

3 jump ropes	Young Jane, Adele, Girl
travel bag	Jane, Young Jane
book	Young Jane
hairbrush	Bessie
2 large crude wash basins	on Lowood School table
large porridge pot with ladle	monitors
wooden bowls	monitors
book	Helen
chalk slate	Miss Miller
bread roll	Helen
large picture book	Temple
sketch pad, pencil	Jane
period newspaper	Jane
opened letter	Jane
3 candlesticks	Fairfax, Jane, Rochester
wine glass	Rochester
tray with covered plate and mug	Grace
3 large skeleton keys	Rochester, Grace, Mrs. Fairfax
6 loose sketches	library table
elegant washbasin	Rochester bedroom
bloodied bandages and dressing	Mason
worn letter	Mrs. Reed
picture book	Adele
long lace veil	Bertha
prayer book	Wood
small hand bouquet	Jane
old, faded marriage certificate	Mason
opened letter	St. John
small tray with glass of water	Mrs. Fairfax
sling	Rochester

Costumes

Most characters have only one costume. Maids, governesses, housekeepers, teachers, school girls, and others often had one “uniform” outfit that they wore every day so it is not necessary for most characters to have costume changes. Jane, Adele, and Rochester are the only characters to have two completely different costumes. Here is a brief costume plot for the play.

Women

Jane Eyre..... late Victorian skirt and jacket, white blouse
Young Jane plain dress and pinafore (add white bonnet and collar for Lowood scenes), black tights, cloak, bonnet
Jane..... dark skirt, white blouse (add jacket for some scenes), cloak, bonnet; simple white wedding dress with veil; full-length dressing gown
Georgiana & Eliza colorful and frilly frocks, big bows in hair, white stockings
Mrs. Reed fashionable skirt and jacket; nightgown (for Act II)
Bessie black housemaid dress with white apron and mop cap (remove apron and cap for act II)
Miss Temple black skirt, white blouse
Miss Miller black skirt, white blouse and bonnet
Helen Burns plain dress, white bonnet and collar, black tights
Mrs. Fairfax dark dress, quality material but not too fancy
Leah black housemaid dress, white apron and mop cap
Adele pink fashionable dress, bows in hair, white stockings; second dress for party and wedding scenes
Grace Poole black housemaid dress, white apron and mop cap
Lady Ingram fashionable dress; expensive jewelry
Blanche fashionable dress with plenty of frills; jewelry
Mary somewhat less fashionable dress
Party guests fashionable dresses
Bertha dirty white nightgown
Diana & Marie Rivers practical dark skirts, white blouses
Girls at Lowood drab dresses, white bonnets and collars, black tights
Girls at Morton..... add colorful pinafores over the Lowood clothes

Men

Ghost	gray suit
Rochester	dark three-piece suit; black tux with tails (for party and wedding scenes); coat, hat
Mr. Brocklehurst	black tailcoat and trousers, white shirt, top hat
Mason	light three-piece suit
Rev. Wood	dark clerical suit or black cassock, white surplice over it
St. John	gray three-piece suit

Suggestions for Shortening

In its original form *Jane Eyre* has a playing time of around 115 minutes. The following cuttings will result in a play with a length of approximately 90 minutes.

Act I

Scene 1: Cut from entrance of Mrs. Reed and Bessie on page 4 and pick up with Jane Eyre's narration at the beginning of Scene 2.

Scene 2: Cut after Jane Eyre's line "Mrs. Reed was as good as her word and made arrangements for me to leave for Lowood within the week" on page 7 and pick up with Jane Eyre's narration at the beginning of Scene 3.

Scene 3: Cut after Jane Eyre's opening narration at the beginning of Scene 3 and pick up with her narration "I did not see any of the other girls at the school until morning" on page 8.

Scene 4: Cut opening of Scene 4 and begin with Brocklehurst's line "So what have we here? You are all thankful..." on page 12.

Scene 5: Cut after Jane Eyre's narration at the beginning of Scene 5 and pick up with Young Jane's line on page 13 which should be altered to "Where is Helen today, Miss Temple?"

Scene 8: Cut after Rochester's line "Oh, yes you did. Don't deny it." on page 24 and pick up with his line "I am a restless man..."

Scene 10: Cut after Jane's line "I do not know the game. Perhaps Mr. Rochester..." on page 31 and pick up with Rochester's line "Miss Eyre, won't you join us?" on page 33.

Scene 11: Cut after Rochester's line "Good. Down the steps" on page 35 then add to his speech: "Jane, I shall never forget what you have done for me this night." Jane, Rochester, and Mason exit then cut to Voices at the end of Act One on page 36.

Act II

Scene 1: Cut after Jane's line "How did you find me, Bessie?" on page 38 and add this exchange:

BESSIE. It was that school. Mrs. Reed wrote to the school before she died and asked where you were.

JANE. Mrs. Reed?

BESSIE. Strange, isn't it? She was acting peculiar those last few weeks. She even took to sleeping in the red room. And sometimes in her sleep she'd call out your name.

JANE. It's all so puzzling.

BESSIE. Then when she died I found this. *[Takes out an old, worn letter]* It was hidden under her pillow. Read it.

JANE. *[Reads]* "Madam, will you have the goodness to send me the address of my niece Jane Eyre and to tell me how she is? As I am unmarried and childless, I hope to see her before I die and secure a competency for her. John Eyre."

BESSIE. You hear that?

JANE. But this letter is dated three years ago. John Eyre may be dead by now.

BESSIE. More than likely. But she kept it hid under her pillow all the same.

[Lights out on Bessie and Jane]

JANE EYRE. My aunt's strange behavior was a surprise to me. Why had she never told me about the letter? And was John Eyre dead? Should I try to find him? Then a few days later something happened that put all thoughts about the letter out of my mind."

Scene 2: Pick up with Rochester's line: "As soon as I am married and Adele is sent off to school..." on page 40.

Jane Eyre

BY THOMAS HISCHAK

Act I Prologue

[YOUNG JANE is seen in a pool of light, jumping rope and chanting to herself]

YOUNG JANE. January, February,
June and July,
How many months
Must pass me by?
Winter, spring,
Summer, fall;
When, oh when
Will my true love call?

MRS. REED'S VOICE. *[Sharply]* Jane Eyre! *[YOUNG JANE stops jumping]* Do you hear me, Jane Eyre!

[YOUNG JANE drops her rope and covers her ears with her hands, freezes. JANE enters in traveling clothes and bag, wearily trudging her way as quickly as she can]

MR. ROCHESTER'S VOICE. *[Pleading]* Jane! *[JANE stops]* Come back, Jane! Please come back—!

[JANE drops her travel bag and covers her ears as well. The ENTIRE CAST enters (or are already on stage but are now lit) and calls out, a chorus of different shouts that gets more and more chaotic as they get louder]

ALL. Jane Eyre!... Where are you, Jane?... Come back, Jane!... Look at this, Miss Jane!... You terrible sinner! Come here when I call you!... Miss Eyre! Miss Eyre!... Mademoiselle Jane!... Please come back!... Don't forget me, Jane!... Look at the girl! Look at the liar!... Dearest Jane!

[YOUNG JANE and JANE run from the noise, end up Center with JANE EYRE, whom they cling to for safety. The shouting stops. Silence. JANE EYRE addresses the audience]

JANE EYRE. This is the story of Jane Eyre. It is a story that happened over one hundred and fifty years ago. The world was very different

then. But people do not change all that much. They still long for the same things. Sometimes those things are very simple, sometimes they are difficult to describe. As in the case of Jane Eyre. It is a story that I know well. It is my story.

JANE. And mine.

YOUNG JANE. And mine.

Scene 1

[All exit except JANE EYRE, JANE, YOUNG JANE, MRS. REED, BESSIE, GEORGIANA, and ELIZA. A large fourposter bed is brought out and placed center stage]

JANE EYRE. I was born the daughter of a clergyman but both my parents died when I was very young.

JANE. So I was sent to live at Gateshead, the home of my Uncle Reed.

YOUNG JANE. I remember him. He always smelled like oranges and tobacco. And he would read to me.

JANE EYRE. But when I was only six he died too.

JANE. He was my only friend. On his deathbed he made my aunt promise that she would never send me away and would raise me with her own two daughters...

YOUNG JANE. Georgiana and Eliza! I hate them.

JANE. From the day my uncle died, I was always an unwanted relative at Gateshead.

JANE EYRE. I dined with the servants and was never included in family activities.

YOUNG JANE. I don't care. I hate them all.

JANE. Except Bessie.

YOUNG JANE. Except Bessie.

[BESSIE can be most any age but at least twenty years old. She wears a maid's uniform. BESSIE goes to YOUNG JANE and combs her hair. JANE exits and JANE EYRE stands to the side of the stage.]

JANE. *[At the exit]* A servant, but the only one who was not always after me.

BESSIE. *[Finished with the combing]* There you go, Miss Jane. Now you keep out of mischief today. Mrs. Reed was in a frightful mood at breakfast this morning. And no quarreling with Miss Georgiana or Miss Eliza or you'll have the whole house in an uproar. *[Exits]*

YOUNG JANE. It's not me who starts it! Oh. I'll hide myself in the library with Uncle Reed's books.

[YOUNG JANE sits on the floor and looks through a picture book. GEORGIANA and ELIZA leave Mrs. Reed and come into the scene. Both can be any age between eight and fifteen years old. They are dressed better than Young Jane]

GEORGIANA. There she is!

YOUNG JANE. What do you want?

GEORGIANA. Say "What do you want, Miss Georgiana?" Come here when I call for you.

ELIZA. What are you reading now?

YOUNG JANE. Bewick's *History of British Birds*.

GEORGIANA. Show me. *[Puts out her hand]*

ELIZA. It's one of father's books. You know not a one of these books belongs to you.

GEORGIANA. Bring it to me here. *[YOUNG JANE rises, goes cautiously to Georgiana, who takes it from her]* You have no business to take our books. You are a dependent, Mama says. Now I'll teach you to rummage the book shelves. *[GEORGIANA throws the book at her. YOUNG JANE then attacks GEORGIANA, pulling her hair and wrestling her to the ground. ELIZA screams. BESSIE and MRS. REED come running in and pull YOUNG JANE off Georgiana]*

BESSIE. Dear! Dear! What fury to fly at Miss Georgiana like that!

MRS. REED. Frightful child! Take her away to the red room and lock her in there!

BESSIE. But, Mrs. Reed—

MRS. REED. The red room! Do as I say! *[To her daughters]* Come with me, girls, and tell how this shameful thing happened. *[The three exit]*

BESSIE. Didn't I say—?

YOUNG JANE. She threw that book at me!

BESSIE. Come quickly. What shocking behavior for a young girl!

[BESSIE brings YOUNG JANE to the area near the fourposter bed and leaves her there. YOUNG JANE collapses to the floor and cries]

JANE EYRE. The red room was my uncle's bedroom when he was alive. He died in that very bed. No one at Gateshead ever went in there, except for the housemaid to dust every Saturday.

YOUNG JANE. I'm not afraid!

JANE EYRE. But I was. A little. I cried myself to sleep. Then, in the middle of the night...

[The GHOST of MR. REED rises up from the bed, his face all white and wrapped in a death cloth around his jaws. He stands on the bed and stares at Young Jane]

JANE EYRE. The room was haunted! It was the ghost of my uncle!

YOUNG JANE. Uncle Reed? It's me...! Jane Eyre...!

VOICE OF GHOST. What are you doing in the red room? Why have you come here? Who are you!

YOUNG JANE. Help! Help!... It's just Jane Eyre! They locked me in here!... Help! Help! Let me out!

VOICE OF GHOST. No one sleeps in the red room but me! *[Howling]* Meeeee!

YOUNG JANE. No!! *[Collapses on the floor]*

[Suddenly it is quiet, the LIGHTS go back to shadows and the GHOST of MR. REED exits]

JANE EYRE. Then I awoke. Or was I awake the whole time?

YOUNG JANE. Mrs. Reed! Mrs. Reed! Let me out! Please, let me out! Bessie! Help me, Bessie!

[BESSIE and MRS. REED enter]

MRS. REED. What is the horrible child up to now?

BESSIE. Miss Jane? Are you all right?

YOUNG JANE. Let me out, please, Bessie!

BESSIE. Are you hurt? What is the matter?

YOUNG JANE. I saw something! I think it was Uncle Reed!

MRS. REED. Stop this screaming immediately! I will not be taken in by your tricks, Jane Eyre. I shall let you out in the morning.

YOUNG JANE. Oh, punish me some other way, Aunt! Just don't make me stay in here! I shall be killed...!

MRS. REED. Silence! Go back to bed, Bessie. *[Starts to exit]*

BESSIE. Miss Jane, you'll be all right—

MRS. REED. Bessie! Back to bed! *[BESSIE and MRS. REED exit]*

YOUNG JANE. No...! Please...! *[Falls to the floor; LIGHTS out except on Jane Eyre]*

JANE EYRE. And that is the last thing I remembered. Whether I slept any more that night or I just fainted from fright, I'll never know. But when I awoke it was late the next day and I was in my own bed once again.

[LIGHTS rise to show YOUNG JANE in a small bed with BESSIE sitting next to her. YOUNG JANE opens her eyes but is weak and confused]

YOUNG JANE. Where...? Bessie?

BESSIE. It's Bessie, Miss Jane. My, you've been asleep ever so long. It's nearly dinner time.

YOUNG JANE. Am I ill? I feel so ill...

BESSIE. The apothecary has been and gone, Miss. He says it's a fever.

YOUNG JANE. Am I going to die?

BESSIE. Goodness no, child. You'll be up and about in a week or so. You fell sick in the red room with crying, I suppose.

YOUNG JANE. It was not the crying, Bessie. It was the ghost!

BESSIE. Now now, don't upset yourself again. You need to rest.

YOUNG JANE. It was Uncle Reed! And he was all white and—!

BESSIE. Shhhhh. No more talking. Close your eyes. I will stay with you.

YOUNG JANE. I shall never forget it... *[weakly]* I shall... I... *[falls asleep]*

BESSIE. Poor child. *[Covers her and holds her hand]* I do believe you did see something. I believe it well.

[The LIGHTS fade out on BESSIE AND YOUNG JANE]

Scene 2

JANE EYRE. I never did forget it. Although I was only ten years old, I believe it changed my life in some way. Two months after this incident a visitor came to Gateshead.

[A table and two chairs are set up. MRS. REED sits in one chair and MR. BROCKLEHURST in the other. He is a stern, middle-aged man in a severe black suit. BESSIE and YOUNG JANE enter on the side]

BESSIE. Come along, Miss Jane. This missus has been asking for you in the parlor.

YOUNG JANE. Whatever for? She never wants to see me.

BESSIE. Hurry! *[They cross to the parlor area]*

BROCKLEHURST. Is this the girl?

MRS. REED. It is, sir. Bessie, you may leave.

BESSIE. Yes, ma'am. [*Exits hesitantly*]

BROCKLEHURST. Her size is small. What is her age?

MRS. REED. Ten years.

BROCKLEHURST. Your name, girl?

YOUNG JANE. Jane Eyre.

BROCKLEHURST. Well, Jane Eyre, are you a good child? [*A pause; she looks to Mrs. Reed*]

MRS. REED. Perhaps the less said on that subject the better, Mr. Brocklehurst.

BROCKLEHURST. Sorry indeed to hear it. Come here. [*YOUNG JANE moves closer to him*] No sight is so sad as that of a naughty child. Do you know where the wicked go after death?

YOUNG JANE. They go to hell.

BROCKLEHURST. And what is hell? Can you tell me that?

YOUNG JANE. A pit full of fire.

BROCKLEHURST. Precisely. And what must you do to avoid the everlasting fires of hell?

YOUNG JANE. [*After a pause*] I must keep in good health and not die.

BROCKLEHURST. That answer proves you have a wicked heart. You must pray to God to change it, to give you a new and clean one.

MRS. REED. You see what I referred to in my letter, Mr. Brocklehurst. Should you admit her into Lowood school, I should be glad if the teachers were requested to keep a strict eye on her. And, above all, to guard against her worst fault: a tendency to deceit!

BROCKLEHURST. Deceit is, indeed, a sad fault in a child. She shall be watched, Mrs. Reed.

MRS. REED. As for vacations, she will, with your permission, spend them always at Lowood.

BROCKLEHURST. A Perfectly judicious decision, madam. And I trust she will show herself grateful for the inestimable privilege you have given her. [*Rises*] Good day, Mrs. Reed. All shall be arranged as we spoke of.

MRS. REED. I will send her then as soon as possible, Mr. Brocklehurst. For I assure you, I feel anxious to be relieved of a responsibility that was becoming too irksome.

BROCKLEHURST. No doubt, madam. No doubt. Goodbye. [*He exits. An awkward pause*]

MRS. REED. Go out of the room, Jane Eyre. I am done with you.

YOUNG JANE. [*Starts to exit, then comes back*] I am not deceitful. If I were I should say I loved you. But I declare I do not love you. I dislike you the worst of anybody in this world!

MRS. REED. How dare you—!

YOUNG JANE. How dare I, Mrs. Reed? Because it is the truth! I will never call you “aunt” again as long as I live. Some people may think you are a good woman. But you are not. You are bad and cold-hearted. It is *you* that are deceitful!

MRS. REED. [*Controlling her temper*] My, but you are passionate. There’s a dear... Go to your room and lie down.

YOUNG JANE. I am not your dear. And I will not lie down. You had best send me to school soon, Mrs. Reed, for I hate to live here! [*Exits*]

MRS. REED. I will indeed send her to school soon.

[*MRS. REED exits. BESSIE enters with a small cloak and carpet bag*]

JANE EYRE. Mrs. Reed was as good as her word and made arrangements for me to leave for Lowood within the week. I was to depart at dawn, long before Mrs. Reed or Georgiana or Eliza were awake. I was glad of it but I did feel sad about leaving Bessie.

BESSIE. Come along, Miss Jane. The coach stops at the crossroads in ten minutes. [*YOUNG JANE enters*] Here’s your cloak. And there’s a biscuit and a bit of fruit in your bag.

YOUNG JANE. Thank you, Bessie. [*Puts on cloak*]

BESSIE. You’re such a poor, frightened little thing, for all your bold talk. Come and give me a kiss good bye.

YOUNG JANE. Good bye, Bessie! [*Kisses her*] Since Uncle Reed died, you are the only kind person I have known—!

BESSIE. Let’s not have such talk or you’ll get me crying. You do yourself proud at that school, do you hear? And watch that furious tongue of yours. For you are a good girl at heart, you are, Jane Eyre. [*They embrace as LIGHT fades on them*]

Scene 3

JANE EYRE. Fifty miles I traveled in the coach with strangers, never knowing how much longer I had to go. Then late that night the driver woke me and I was let off at the gates of Lowood Institution, a long stone building with high walls and a little light coming from the many windows.

[The SOUND of a coach driving away. LIGHTS up on YOUNG JANE and MISS MILLER. She is a middle-aged woman, a bit spinsterish and gloomy]

MILLER. Jane Eyre?

YOUNG JANE. Yes, ma'am.

MILLER. This way. *[They cross the stage to where MISS TEMPLE is waiting. She is middle-aged and has a warm if reserved personality]*

JANE EYRE. Into the dark stone building I went. All was quiet. I neither saw nor heard any other students.

MISS TEMPLE. The child is very young to be sent alone. She had better be put to bed soon. She looks tired. Are you tired?

YOUNG JANE. A little, ma'am.

TEMPLE. And hungry too, no doubt. Let her have some supper before she goes to bed, Miss Miller. *[To JANE]* Is this the first time you have left your parents to come to school, little one?

YOUNG JANE. My parents are dead.

TEMPLE. I see. Can you read and write?

YOUNG JANE. Yes, ma'am.

TEMPLE. And sew? Do you sew?

YOUNG JANE. A little.

TEMPLE. *[Touches her cheek gently]* I hope you shall be a good girl, Jane Eyre.

YOUNG JANE. Yes, ma'am.

[MISS MILLER and YOUNG JANE exit. MISS TEMPLE watches them go. A long table (or a few tables) is set up with large wash basins on it. MISS TEMPLE exits]

JANE EYRE. I did not see any of the other girls at the school until morning.

[A group of GIRLS enter noisily. There can be any number of girls. They range in age from seven to fourteen and all wear the same brown pinafore and cap. MISS MILLER enters]

MILLER. Silence! *[The girls quiet down immediately and line up]* To the wash basins! *[The girls gather around the table to wash. But when they get there they hesitate]* What is the matter? Time to wash!

GIRL. Miss Miller...

MILLER. What is it?

GIRL. The water is frozen again.

MILLER. Very well. Monitors, remove the basins.

[Two or three girls exit with wash basins as MISS TEMPLE enters with YOUNG JANE, who is dressed like the other girls now.]

MILLER. The new girl. Where shall I put her, Miss Temple?

TEMPLE. Perhaps the third form.

MILLER. Yes, Miss Temple. *[To HELEN BURNS, one of the girls]* Burns!

HELEN. Yes, Miss Miller?

MILLER. Stop slouching.

HELEN. Yes, Miss Miller.

MILLER. New girl. *[Pointing to Young Jane]* Go to her. *[YOUNG JANE joins HELEN, who gives her a quick smile. Helen is a few years older than Young Jane, but frail and reclusive. The monitors enter with bowls of porridge and place them on the tables]* Formation for morning prayers. *[The GIRLS gather in lines, put their heads down]* Miss Temple...

TEMPLE. "Dearest and forgiving God... *[Temple continues in silence as JANE EYRE speaks to the audience]*

JANE EYRE. Most of the girls were older than I. Few of them gave me any notice at all. They all appeared weary and were shivering with cold. The porridge seemed hot but it smelled terrible. I looked at the other girls and I could tell they smelled it too.

TEMPLE. ...and wait for Your everlasting reward in Heaven. Amen."

GIRLS. Amen.

MILLER. Monitors, serve the porridge. *[The same few GIRLS go to the large bowls and start to serve it into smaller bowls but soon stop]* Serve the porridge!

GIRL. I think it's burnt, Miss Miller.

TEMPLE. Let me see. *[Goes to a table, tastes it]* It's inedible. *[The GIRLS all start whispering at once]*

MILLER. Silence!

TEMPLE. They cannot possibly eat this. Have them take it away, Miss Miller.

MILLER. Monitors, remove the porridge. The rest, form for classes.

[The porridge is taken away and the girls exit as TEMPLE goes to MILLER]

TEMPLE. Horrible stuff! It's shameful.

MILLER. I shall have a word with the cook.

TEMPLE. There is some bread and cheese put aside for the governors' meeting tomorrow. Give some to the girls after morning lessons.

MILLER. Yes, Miss Temple.

[MILLER and TEMPLE exit as HELEN enters, sits and reads a book]

JANE EYRE. I spoke to no one and no one spoke to me all that day. The teachers were firm but not cruel. Miss Miller always seemed to pick on the girl they called Burns. Miss Temple was the most gentle. I liked her immediately and sometimes even felt sorry for her because she seemed so concerned for us about the cold and the food. *[YOUNG JANE enters]* It wasn't until the second day that we had some free time and I sought out the girl named Burns.

YOUNG JANE. Is your book interesting?

HELEN. I like it. *[Hands it to her]* You may look at it.

YOUNG JANE. *[Takes book]* I think it is too difficult for me.

HELEN. You could manage it. You read well for one your age. I've noticed.

YOUNG JANE. My name is Jane Eyre. *[Hands book back]* What is your name besides Burns?

HELEN. Helen. Are your mother and father dead?

YOUNG JANE. Yes. A long time ago. Before I can remember.

HELEN. All the girls here have lost either one or both parents. This is a charity school for orphans, you know.

YOUNG JANE. I didn't know. Are you happy here, Helen?

HELEN. I suppose so. I am here to get an education.

YOUNG JANE. But Miss Miller keeps scolding you for every little thing!

HELEN. She dislikes my faults. That is only right. I will improve under her.

YOUNG JANE. Miss Temple does not treat you so cruelly.

HELEN. *[Smiles]* Miss Temple is full of goodness. It pains her to be severe to any one, even the worst in the school.

YOUNG JANE. Does Lowood belong to her?

HELEN. I wish it did. She has to answer to Mr. Brocklehurst for all she does.

[MISS MILLER enters with a chalk slate]

MILLER. Burns! Is this your slate? I found it was not put away with the others!

HELEN. It is mine, Miss Miller.

MILLER. Can nothing correct you of your slatternly habits?

HELEN. I am sorry, Miss Miller. I'll put it away right now.

MILLER. [*Gives her the slate*] You will write "I must improve myself" fifty times on it before you do.

HELEN. Yes, Miss Miller [*takes slate*].

MILLER. Fifty times. Then bring it and show it to me. [*Exits*]

YOUNG JANE. If I were in your place I should break the slate right under her nose!

HELEN. Miss Miller is right. I must improve myself. We all must. [*HELEN starts writing on slate as YOUNG JANE watches*]

JANE EYRE. Helen Burns seemed to be totally without malice or discontent. She seemed to rise above all the injustices in the world. She would become my close friend over the next few weeks and I soon found myself wanting to be better, to improve myself so that I could please Helen. My real education had begun.

Scene 4

[All the GIRLS enter and line up. MISS TEMPLE enters with MILLER and MR. BROCKLEHURST]

BROCKLEHURST. And Mrs. Sullivan tells me that several of the girls' woolen stockings have holes in them.

TEMPLE. That is correct, Mr. Brocklehurst.

BROCKLEHURST. That will not do. See that they are mended. What are girls taught sewing for if not to keep in repair the good gifts that charity has provided for them?

TEMPLE. Yes, Mr. Brocklehurst.

BROCKLEHURST. There is another thing which quite surprised me. In settling accounts with the housekeeper, I find that last month a lunch of bread and cheese was served to the girls. By whose authority did such a thing happen?

TEMPLE. I must be responsible for the circumstance, sir. The porridge was burnt so badly that the pupils could not possibly eat it. And I dare not allow them to remain fasting until supper.

BROCKLEHURST. Madam, you are aware that when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!