

# ETHAN FROME

## A LYRIC OPERA IN THREE ACTS

*Music by Douglass Allanbrook*

*The Cambridge Chamber Orchestra  
conducted by John Allanbrook*

*Libretto by John Hunt  
from the novel by Edith Wharton*

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## ACT I

*The kitchen of the Frome farm—towards evening—ETHAN FROME, a man of about 33 years, is looking out the window of the kitchen as the curtain rises. His wife, ZEENA is in a rocking chair in front of the stove.*

**ETHAN** The land is cold and dead. There's too much winter here, what with summer late and an early fall, and then the snow again. There's too much cold. The trees stand bare in the wind. Even the firs are breaking with ice. And mind those down by the graves—do you hear the wind amongst them, sounds almost like voices, like old Ethan and Endurance, like maybe they was cold and crying out!

**ZEENA** If you worked the farm like you talked maybe things wouldn't be so bad. It was goin to school and down south put those ideas in your head. This country was good enough for the old people—and what have you to complain of—if you had just half the ailments I have.

**ETHAN** It's not that, Zeena. When's she s'posed to get here, its been dark a long time.

**ZEENA** She'll turn up. Bad pennies always do, they say; and she's got no place else to go.

**ETHAN** It's a hard place for a girl.

**ZEENA** Not for the likes of her. And where else would she go, I'd like to know? Who else would have her? Oh, they always were a bad lot, those Silvers. Her father, there was a fine one for you. I always said that his schemes would come to nothing—dyin' broke, Broke!—and not a cent for any of us, mind you. All he left us was the care of his daughter and a saddle of debts that would break a mule's back

**ETHAN** *[Soliloquy]* I mind the time when I wanted her to talk. Oh, her words were sweet then, like music in a house where music has never been. And God, how silent it used to be. I thought that maybe I'd forgotten how to hear, that I was deaf. I remember Mother with her finger to her lips. She was listening to the wind~ she said. And the silence stood between us like a wall. And when Zeena first came to tend her—Oh, it was like the breaking through of brooks in spring, like the first April morning when the birds sing you out of sleep. It was human sound, it was music. And after Mother went and we were married, it stayed awhile. I remember coming home from the fields a little early; almost like I couldn't believe it. And then almost before I knew it, it wasn't music any more. Oh! maybe it was me, maybe the silence crept out of me

where it lay and got into me. The wall was there again, and now when she talks the wall is there—I cannot hear. The wind wails in my mind and I am deaf!

**ZEENA**     *[Interrupting ETHAN's soliloquy]* Ethan! Ethan! Why don't you ever listen to me? Looks like you wouldn't begrudge me a few words. It's little enough pleasure I have, God knows!

**ETHAN**     I'm sorry Zeena. I was thinking, I guess. Looks like the train was late.

**ZEENA**     What ain't around these parts. Good way to start work, late the first night.

**ETHAN**     There's been a lot of snow, likely the train was slowed up.

**ZEENA**     It's always somethin', ain't it. Always a day late and a dollar short. I never knowed such troubles before I came here, and to think what I gave up. Bettsbridge and kin and health, all for this. Looks like trouble began for me when I heard the name Frome! When you gonna' get the money for the Wood?

**ETHAN**     You know I get paid at the end of the job same as always. What makes you ask me a question like that?

**ZEENA**     All I know is I gotta have some doctorin' soon. The pains in my back are so bad I can hardly move. You'll have to find the money someplace. Its not much I ask of you, you know.

**ETHAN**     You didn't seem to ail like this before we were married; you were strong enough then. How much more can I do?

**ZEENA**     And that's my thanks?

**ETHAN**     Thanks! for what, Zeena, for what?

**ZEENA**     For wearing myself to the bone, tendin' your idiot mother!

**ETHAN**     *[In deep and bitter anger]* Zeena!

*[Offstage the sound of a horse and sleigh, followed by a knock on the door interrupts the quarrel and leaves it suspended]*

**MATTIE**    *[Offstage]* Good night and thank you.

*[Another knock on the door]*

**ZEENA**     *[To ETHAN]* You gonna let her stand out there all night?

**MATTIE**    *[MATTIE SILVER enters. She is a young girl.]* You must be Ethan; and you're Zeena.

**ZEENA**     You're late; it's past suppertime.

**MATTIE**    *[Aria]* Yes, the train was late; I thought it would never get here. Such a beautiful day—the sun was dancing everywhere; and the sky was as big and blue as a meadow of violets—and the snow so clean and fresh and full of light. Why you'd think the world was one great diamond.

**ETHAN** We were beginning to get a little worried.

**MATTIE** Worried?

**ETHAN** When the snow is bad, sometimes the train can't make it.

**MATTIE** [*Aria cont.*] Such a cunning little train; it whistled at every crossing. And you could hear the echo from the mountains. And it was like country people passing each other on the road shouting "Hi there" back and forth. And when we got to the town, day was turning dark and all the lamps were lit. And riding from the station with everything seeming so snug and warm, the town looked like a town in books—a town with toy houses and little crooked streets. And then the most wonderful hill, where children played at coasting. Why I wouldn't be surprised if those children turned out to be elves.

**ZEENA** It don't look like that in the daytime.

**ETHAN** No, it's pretty plain.

**MATTIE** I'm not worried. And you know, I haven't coasted since I was a girl. We'll go sometime, won't we?

**ZEENA** Not much time for coasting. That's for people that live in the town.

**ETHAN** But there are dances sometimes at the church; we don't go, but the young people do.

**MATTIE** I didn't mean to sound like I was only thinking of fun. I want to help out every way I can. I've tried a lot of things since I was left alone. I worked in stores, and went to school, but none of it was right; so when I got your letter it seemed that luck had come to me at last. It's all I'd hoped it would be—the house and the town and the land and you yourselves. I'll do everything I can to repay your kindness.

**ZEENA** All we want is hard work. It's time for bed.

**MATTIE** Yes, I'm tired. It's the country air.

**ZEENA** I'll show you where you're to sleep.

**MATTIE** It's like having a home again. Good night, Ethan.

**ETHAN** Good night, Mattie.

[*MATTIE and ZEENA exit*]

**ETHAN** [*Soliloquy*] I thought I had been in this land for too many winters. Everything had grown grey and old. But for her the sun danced, the sky was blue. And now I feel like I was waking from sleep. And suddenly I feel alive! It's like music has come into this house again!

**FINE--ATTO PRIMO**

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# ACT II

## SCENE 1

*[Evening. Downtown outside the church. At the back of the stage are large lighted windows, the windows of the church social hall. There is a dance going on inside and one can both see the couples dancing and hear the music of the dance as the curtain rises. ETHAN is outside in the shadows and from time to time gazes in through the windows and sings his phrases against the music of the dance and the CHORUS of dancers.]*

**CHORUS** Oh the ball is bright and the scene is gay. The dancers sing and the fiddlers play; And we won't stop till the break of day. Let the night go on forever.

*[SOLO]* Oh I hitched my team and I drove five miles  
Through cold and stormy weather.  
Now I hope this dance goes on  
Till I need shoe leather.

**CHORUS** Oh the hall is bright . . . . . (etc.)

**ETHAN** *[Against the above]* I see her, sweet Mattie. So bright and gay. I've never seen her like that.

*[SOLO]* Day comes fast when the night is done  
And the hill towards home is long and steep.  
But when the fiddler saws like that  
I just can't think of sleeping.

**ETHAN** Oh Mattie dear, I shant stand in your way. I'll leave you free.

**CHORUS** Oh the hall is bright...

*[A village boy DENNIS, one of the dancers, opens the door of the social hall and looks out at the weather.]*

**DENNIS** The moon is high, and the snow is dry. Get your wraps for a sleigh ride.

*[CHORUS gradually floods onto the stage]*

**CHORUS** Oh the snow is hard, hard and dry;  
The moon is bright, bright and clear.  
Here's for a sleigh ride, a sleigh ride to the Inn.  
Oh the moon is bright and the snow is white.  
The moon is bright and the snow is white.

*[CHORUS moves offstage leaving MATTIE and DENNIS alone in the center of the stage. ETHAN hides in the shadows]*

**DENNIS** Looks like we're alone, Mattie.

**MATTIE** Yes, it seems there's no one else around.

**DENNIS** Gentleman friend gone back on you?

**MATTIE** Now what could you mean by that? Well, I'd better get started home.

**DENNIS** Mattie! Why you were the queen of the dance. It's early yet and look at that sky. It's the night for a ride if I ever saw one. Come on—into the sleigh.

**MATTIE** You'd better get a town girl, Mister Eady. Have a lovely ride, I'm walking.

**DENNIS** Look here, a queen can't just walk home. I'll see you to the door.

**MATTIE** Oh no, I'm only the queen till the dance is over. You'd better hurry, they're waiting for you.

**DENNIS** Ah, Matt! But wait—will you be coming to the dance next Saturday night?

**MATTIE** I hope so. Why?

**DENNIS** Why—then I'll have the first dance and the last. Goodnight. *[EXITS]*

**MATTIE** Goodnight.

#### **DUET AND SCENA**

*[ETHAN remains hidden in the shadows on one side of the stage and MATTIE pauses on the other side of the stage, worried at not finding ETHAN who always walks her home after the dances.]*

**ETHAN** So what I thought, and hoped against is true. It's Dennis. Oh I should have seen it before.

**MATTIE** He said he'd come, and he always does, and he's never been late before.

**ETHAN** I heard her singing from way down the hill, and she doesn't at home.

**MATTIE** It's strange. It's as though I danced as hard as I could to make the evening pass more swiftly.

**ETHAN** And still, this silence chills my veins like ice.

**MATTIE** ...so the dance would end, and we might go home together.

**ETHAN** I cannot speak. What is there to say?

**MATTIE** For Saturday night for me is when the dance is o'er, the singing done, and Ethan is there at the door.

**ETHAN** I should be glad, and I am angry! I should be proud, and I am jealous.

**MATTIE** We walk half a mile without a word.

**ETHAN** I cannot think nor understand I can only feel! And what I don't know.

**MATTIE** There's something wrong when he looks at me; I know that there is something wrong somewhere.

*[ETHAN comes out of the shadows and reveals himself to MATTIE.]*

**ETHAN** Matt! I'm here!

**MATTIE** Ethan! You frightened me.

**ETHAN** I'm sorry. Guess I'm a little late.

**MATTIE** Oh no. The others left; I waited a bit.

**ETHAN** Didn't anyone offer to take you home? Oh what I mean, if there was someone—you wanted to go with you should have gone.

**MATTIE** Ethan Frome! Can't a girl do what she wants?

**ETHAN** You're right, oh you're right, you're right. I guess we should be grateful for having you with us so long. But I guess you'll be leaving us soon if what folks say is true.

**MATTIE** Why Ethan, what do you mean?

**ETHAN** Just that you'll be keeping house for somebody else.

**MATTIE** You mean that Zeena ain't suited with me anymore? Oh I know I ain't as smart as I might be; but I try, Ethan, and nobody ever tells me anything. You ought to tell me Ethan, you ought to tell me; unless you want me to go too.

**ETHAN** You mean—you mean you don't want to go?

**MATTIE** Where else would I go?

*[ETHAN takes MATTIE in his arms]*

**ETHAN** Oh Matt! If only the winter that locks my heart would break; if only Spring were here; and the newness and the beginning of things—if only—oh Matt, come along.

*[They EXIT slowly, leaving the stage empty. The curtain comes down and the orchestra has an instrumental interlude which leads without pause to SCENE 2.]*

## SCENE 2

*[Again, in the Frome kitchen. It is some weeks later and ZEENA is on stage alone. Her bags are packed and she is all prepared for an unannounced trip to Bettsbridge to see a new doctor.]*

**ZEENA**      *[Aria]* I've had enough. Oh my pains are worse.  
I can hardly walk. And much care those two,  
with all their dancing and sledding.  
I'm ailin' bad. Oh, my pains, my pains.  
I've had enough of these two. I'm an ailin' woman.  
There's trouble, oh there's trouble, trouble!  
If nobody cares, I have my own ways.  
Oh my shooting pains are worse.  
I've been patient for too long not.  
There'll be a stop!  
She's got to go or I'll know why!  
It's my right, and what can they do!

*[Enter MATTIE and ETHAN]*

**ETHAN**      But why didn't you tell us, Zeena, if you was plannin' to go?

**ZEENA**      There's nothing to tell. I'm going to Bettsbridge. There's a new doctor there. I'll be spendin' the night. And if you're too busy, Jotham can take rue to the train.

**ETHAN**      It ain't that I'm too busy, Zeena, it's just...

**ZEENA**      If anyone was interested, they'd have seen it right along. I'm ailin', ailin'. There's trouble, Ethan. You've got to face it.

**ETHAN:**

We know you ain't feeling well, and it ain't  
as if we didn't care.

Yes, Zeena, stay home,  
stay home.

**MATTIE:**

I'm the one to blame. I didn't know how  
Sick you were. I've been selfish and thought-less.  
But let me make it up to you.  
Stay home Zeena. I'll tend you ever so  
you ever so good.

**ZEENA**      It's too late for pretty speeches. My bag is packed and my mind is set. I don't reckon the place will change too much before I get back.

*[JOTHAM, the hired man, enters.]*

**JOTHAM**    You ready, Miss' Zeena?

**ETHAN**      I'm takin' her, Jotham. You stay here with Matt. You're sure you want to go, Zeena?

**ZEENA**      I've missed enough as it is. Don't make me lose my train.

*[Exit ETHAN and ZEENA]*

**JOTHAM** Zeena going doctorin'?

**MATTIE** Yes. Oh Jotham, something's gone all wrong. I feel like Zeena hates me, like she hates everything. I'm afraid all the time. I don't know what to do or say.

**JOTHAM** That's Zeena's way. Don't pay her no mind.

**MATTIE** Maybe it's the house; maybe there's been so much suffering that no one can ever be happy here again.

*[INTRODUCTION, SCENE, and ARIA]*

**JOTHAM** It's not the house or the land, Matt. Houses and land can be as old or as young, as sick or as happy as the people that live in them. There've been too many old folks here. No children since Ethan grew up. A house will die without children.

**MATTIE** But Ethan's young.

**JOTHAM** No, he's old, he's been old for years.

**MATTIE** Ethan's never had a chance. I know him, Jotham. His heart's as young as it's ever been.

**JOTHAM** Yes, he's like a seed in the earth and the sun not shining. I needn't tell you this.

**MATTIE** No, we've said too much already.

**JOTHAM** No, my child. Listen to me. I'm an old man. We are proud here at our silence. Would we be proud if snow covered our fields all year? There's a time for snow and a time for the sun. And the sun must shine when the fields are planted and ready. The time for sun is Spring, and in this house you've been the Spring. Of all the noble seasons Spring goes the quickest. Listen, my child, and let the sun glow and grow warm within you. It's easy for an old man to talk of spring when his land is forever dead. I've too much time alone for thinking.

*[Exit JOTHAM]*

**MATTIE** *[Soliloquy]* His words were like the murmur of my heart. It's not the house, it's us, the three of us, born to summer and dying in the cold. It all seems too far gone—and yet, maybe there's still time. My blood still flows, I blush and feel the Spring—oh, there's still a chance, if we've the courage.

*[SCENA and DUET FINALE]*

*[ETHAN enters]*

**MATTIE** Ethan has she gone?

**ETHAN** Yes, she's gone. Anything wrong?

**MATTIE** No, nothing's wrong. I'll put supper on.

**ETHAN** It seemed to get colder as we drove. I was thinking of the night you came; how you said the town looked, with kids coastin' and light makin' everything seem warm.

**MATTIE** I remember that night. Things were so simple. I was to do the housework in return for a place to live. I had such beautiful things on my mind. Let's have a special dinner tonight. Let's make things pretty. Wait. I know—the pickle dish, the red glass pickle dish. Let's get it, Ethan. Reach it down for me.

**ETHAN** You're right, Matt. It's time we had things pretty. I'd almost forgotten that pickle dish. It was a wedding present to Zeena. I don't think we've ever used it. Where is it?

**MATTIE** In the cupboard, the top shelf.

**ETHAN** I'll get it. *[He reaches up and gets the pickle dish.]* Here!

**MATTIE** Wonderful. Oh you know, Ethan, I feel like maybe it was the beginning of something new for all of us.

**ETHAN** I hope you're right, Mattie. It's been a blessing you're coming here. I never knew how a man could feel about his work until you came.

**MATTIE** It's been the same with me; just the little things, they're good when I connect them up with you. By themselves, they're nothing. I don't know how to say it. I don't know how to say it.

*[Duet]* **ETHAN:**

Yes you do, Matt.  
It's what you said about there  
being someone else.  
Nothing alone is any good.  
Nor rain nor sunshine nor fall.

Things have got to connect.  
That's what you've meant to me...  
That there's something more  
than just yourself.

That's what I didn't have before you came.  
Your place is here.  
Your place is here,  
I know this.  
With you here there's more than just tomorrow.  
You're the feeling that ties  
things all together.  
Without you I am separate and alone.  
You're the one that gives my life meaning.

**MATTIE:**

Yes, it's someone else.  
Nothing goes right by itself.

Meeting you gave me something  
to work for. For I could see  
you and touch you and know that you were there.

You were the feeling, you  
were the thread that bound  
the patches together.  
And when I think of you then the feeling  
is there.

I know that my place is here.  
My place is here, I know, I know that my place  
is here, in this kitchen beside you.

You're the feeling that ties  
things all together.  
Without you I am separate and alone.  
You're the one that gives my life meaning.

**ETHAN** It was what I tried to say that night at the church—that the two of us—Matt, oh Matt!

*[He starts to rise to embrace MATTIE and knocks the pickle dish on the floor. It breaks!]*

**MATTIE** Ethan—it's all to pieces. What will Zeena say!

**ETHAN** Well, let her say it!

**MATTIE** But she never meant to use it. She'll want to know why we had it out at all.

*[MATTIE begins to cry. She kneels and starts picking up the pieces.]*

**ETHAN** Don't, Matt, Don't. Here give them to me. She needn't ever know it happened. I'll have it glued when she gets back. She'll never know the difference.

**MATTIE** It's always something, her going away, and now the dish. Oh, what's she up to. What does she mean to do to us.

**ETHAN** I don't know, Matt. Like it's been, it ain't. been too much fun for you, Mattie.

**MATTIE** I'm not complainin', Ethan.

**ETHAN** I know you ain't, Matt. It's when I'm with you Matt; those are the times for me. That's when I can see the stars.

**MATTIE** Oh, Ethan; if we only had the strength. The stars are there all the time. They're for us to find, it's up to us, nothing will change. It's like the feeling—we have that and we can have the sun.

**ETHAN** And the stars and the Spring and everything else. I've been sitting in this kitchen waiting, waiting for life to come to me. And then you came.

*[Duet]* **ETHAN:**

It takes courage.  
There's still time.  
When April comes and winter snows are gone  
We'll find a way.

**MATTIE:**

When the feeling comes—you've got to  
hold on to it.  
It takes courage.  
There's still time.  
When April comes and winter snows are gone  
We'll find a way.

**FINE - ATTO SECONDO**

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# ACT III

## SCENE 1

*[The kitchen, next afternoon. MATTIE is alone on stage.]*

**MATTIE** Oh, I wish that he would hurry. Hews out there in the rain, and Zeena's back, and something's on her mind; for she didn't say a word. It's the kind of day when terrible things happen, grey and gloomy, such a miserable day. Poor Ethan—he's always out in rain or snow, and never a moment's peace. What ever shall we do?

*[ETHAN enters suddenly]*

**ETHAN** See here. I've got glue to mend the dish. Let me fix it quick.

**MATTIE** On, Ethan. Zeena's back.

**ETHAN** But the sorrel's not in the barn.

**MATTIE** It was raining, so Jotham drove home with him.

**ETHAN** How is she?

**MATTIE** I don't know. She went straight upstairs to her room-

**ETHAN** And didn't say anything?

*[ZEENA appears in the doorway]*

**ZEENA** My bag is upstairs, Matt. I'm too tired to unpack it—seeing you're not doing anything.

**MATTIE** I'll get it, Zeena. *[Exit MATTIE]*

**ETHAN** Well, Zeena, got an appetite from your trip?

**ZEENA** I couldn't touch a morsel. I'm a great deal sicker than you think.

**ETHAN** I hope that's not so.

**ZEENA** The doctor says I should have an operation.

**ETHAN** You must do just what he tells you.

**ZEENA** I mean to. He wants I should have a hired girl. So Aunt Martha Pierce found me a girl right off. She'll be over tomorrow afternoon.

**ETHAN** Did the doctor tell you how to pay her wages?

**ZEENA** No, he didn't.

**ETHAN** Listen, Zeena, you're a poor man's wife.

**ZEENA** Well there'll be Mattie's board less.

**ETHAN** Mattie's board...less?

**ZEENA** You didn't suppose I was goin' to keep two girls, did you? No wonder you were scared at the expense.

**ETHAN** I don't know what you mean, Zeena. Mattie Silvers's not a hired girl. She's your relation, just a poor girl without friends or money. She's got no place else to go. It you do a thing like that, what do you suppose folks'll say of you?

**ZEENA** I know well enough what they're saying now.

**ETHAN** What are you trying to say, Zeena?

*[ZEENA looks triumphantly at ETHAN, goes to the hall door and calls upstairs to MATTIE.]*

**ZEENA** Guess we're 'bout ready for supper, Matt.

*[ZEENA exits leaving ETHAN alone]*

**ETHAN** *[Aria]* So now the time is here. All the fine words, courage, strength, and facing the truth... They've all been said; and now the time for words is gone forever. It's just what it's always been. Out of the suffering something must be done, and what can result but more misery and more pain. Oh, what right thing can be done in this blind and wretched house!

*[MATTIE enters]*

**MATTIE** Oh, Ethan, what's the matter? Something's happened, something bad. What is it? What is it?

*[ETHAN holds her in his arms]*

**ETHAN** Oh Matt, you can't go away. I'll never let you go.

**MATTIE** Go? Go? Must I go? Oh Ethan what's happened? Is Zeena mad with me?

**ETHAN** Oh no it's not that; it's her new doctor—he's scared her. He told her "Don't do a thing, not for months."

**MATTIE** She wants someone handier in my place.

**ETHAN** That's what she says tonight.

**MATTIE** If she says it tonight she'll say it tomorrow. Don't be too sorry, Ethan.

**ETHAN** Where? Where? Where will you go? What? What? What will you do?

**ETHAN:**

You'll be lost.

I can't think of you being alone.

You'll be lost—you'll be lost.

**MATTIE:**

You musn't worry; it's just the loneliness, the being by yourself.

You mustn't worry, you mustn't worry.

*[ZEENA enters by the hall door. She is holding in her hands the fragments of the red-glass pickle dish.]*

**ZEENA** I'd like to know who did this? It takes a chair to get to the top shelf. I put that pickle dish up there on purpose when we was married, and it's never been down since. I want to know who done this.

**ETHAN** I can tell you, I did it! It was settin' on the table and I went to get up and I knocked it off.

**ZEENA** What was it doin' on the table.

**MATTIE** It wasn't Ethan's fault, Zeena. He did break the dish, but I got it down from the china closet and I'm to blame for its getting broke.

**ZEENA** You got down the pickle dish, what for?!

**MATTIE** I wanted to make the supper table pretty.

*[Trio]*

**ETHAN:**

Is there anything wrong wit  
wanting things nice?  
And what if the dish was broken.

You never used it; how can a  
Thing be precious if it's never  
Used. And we're the ones that's  
Bad, not Mattie.

We brought her here and expected  
her to be like we are.

**MATTIE:**

It was such a little thing, Zeena.  
I didn't know it was so precious  
to you. I wasn't trying to hide it.  
I just didn't think, I just didn't think.  
Maybe I was silly for wanting to  
make the table pretty.

But I didn't do it out of meanness  
To you. I meant to mend it. I  
meant to mend it.

**ZEENA:**

You wanted to make the supper  
Table nice and j\you waited until  
my back was turned.

You waited until my back was  
turned and took the one thing I  
put most store by of anything that  
I've got of all my things. I  
wouldn't even use it for the minister.  
You're a bad girl, Mattie  
Silver. I've always known it!

And the blame is not on her or her Father. The blame is on us. The only things we kept from her were what she wanted most, kindness and affection. The only thing she's taken from you is what you've never cared for.

I'm not a bad girl, I always did like you wanted done. If there's any blame to come it's me and not my father.

Just like your father was! I was warned of it when I took you. I tried to keep my things where you wouldn't find them; and now you took the thing that I place most stock in.

I won't take anything away from you, Zeena. No, not ever—ever—ever, no not ever...

*[MATTIE runs crying from the room.]*

**ZEENA** If I listened to folks, you'd have gone before now. And this would never have happened.

*[CURTAIN]*

## SCENE 2

*[The next day, late afternoon. The scene is the top of the coast-my hill, overlooking the town. At left center is a bench. At right rear a toboggan under a pine tree. MATTIE and ETHAN have stopped here to say goodbye on their way to the station.]*

**ETHAN** It's funny how you remember things, I was thinking just now of Shadow Pond.

**MATTIE** That's where we had our picnic.

**ETHAN** And I found your locket in the blueberry bushes.

**MATTIE** I never saw anyone with such sharp eyes.

**ETHAN** You were pretty as a picture in that pink hat.

**MATTIE** Such a nice hat...

*[Suddenly MATTIE draws forth a letter from her purse.]*

Ethan, I found this, the letter you had started to Zeena.

**ETHAN** Matt, if I could have done it, would you?

**MATTIE** Ethan, oh Ethan, what's the use.

**ETHAN** Tell me, Matt—tell me!

*[Duet]*

**ETHAN**

**MATTIE**

I used to think of it, sometimes on summer nights when the 'noon lay bright as glass around the house, I would think of us toge-

I knew you felt the same. Somehow  
I knew it was so. One person couldn't  
feel so strong and be alone. The same  
summer nights I was thinking about it  
too, our going away, you and me, some-  
place where it wasn't cold most the year  
round. Some place where things weren't  
so old. Where hands wouldn't pull at you  
from the grave.

Our roads ran together awhile, and now  
they turn apart.

If only there'd been some sign post to  
guide us.

Our roads ran together and now they  
turn apart.

ther, just the two of us—going somewhere  
else, just the two of us, alone, alone.  
Going somewhere and starting new, and  
Going somewhere and starting new,  
having what's called an ordinary life. That  
would have been enough for me with you.  
But it does not look as though we were meant  
for that.

Our roads ran together for awhile, and now they  
turn apart.

There's no good in thinking what might have  
been.

Our roads ran together and now they turn  
apart.

**ETHAN** But I'm tied hand and foot, Matt, there's not a thing I can do.

**MATTIE** You must write to me sometimes, Ethan.

**ETHAN** What good will writing do. I want to put out my hand and touch you. I want to do for you  
and care for you. I want to be there when you're sick and when you're lonesome.

**MATTIE** You mustn't think but what I'll do all right.

**ETHAN** I s'pose you'll marry?

**MATTIE** Oh Ethan!

**ETHAN** I'd rather have you dead than that.

**MATTIE** I wish I was, I wish I was.

**ETHAN** Don't lets talk that way

**MATTIE** Why not when it's time; I've been wishing it all day.

**ETHAN** Matt, be quiet, don't you say it.

**MATTIE** Why not say it. If there ever was a time for saying things it's now. There's never anyone been  
good to me but you.

**ETHAN** Don't say that either when I can't lift a hand to help you Come on; we've got to go.

*(As they walk very slowly to the other side of the stage they both glance back at the toboggan.)*

**ETHAN** The skies look mild tonight. Ain't it funny, we haven't been down together but just that once  
last winter. How'd you like me to take you down now?

**MATTIE** But the new Girl? She be waiting at the station.

**ETHAN** Well let her wait. You'd have to, if she didn't. Come on—they're sleds there under the elm.

**MATTIE** And it's dreadfully dark. Are you sure you can?

**ETHAN** I could go down this coast with my eyes tied. Are you scared that I'll run you to the elm?

**MATTIE** I told you I was never scared with you.

**ETHAN** It's a tricky place; the least swerve and we'd never come up again.

**MATTIE** I always said you had the sharpest eyes. And this is our last hour. Oh Ethan, good-bye.

*(She throws her arms about him and kisses him.)*

**MATTIE** And I can't go; but it's time, Ethan, it's time.

**ETHAN** Time for what? You don't suppose I'm going to leave you now.

**MATTIE** But if I missed my train; where would I go?

**ETHAN** Where would you go if you caught it? What's the good of us going anywhere without the other now.

**MATTIE** Ethan, Ethan, I want you should take me down the coast. Right off, so't we'll never come up again.

**ETHAN** Matt! What on earth do you mean?

**MATTIE** Right into the big elm so we'd never have to leave each other any more.

**ETHAN** What are you talking of? You're crazy.

**MATTIE** I'm not crazy but I will be if I leave you now.

**ETHAN** Matt, oh Matt!

**MATTIE** Where will I go if I have to leave you now?

*[Duet]*

**ETHAN**

**MATTIE**

The house will be empty without you, a tomb as sure as any tomb could be. Nothing to return to but a dead house. And the nights long and the days without direction. To live a life that's not a life but memory, and empty days and lonely nights. And hounded by the thought of what might have been; and instead the blank and empty road leading nowhere.

I don't know how to get on alone. No one ever was good to me but you. There'll be a strange girl in the house. She'll be sleeping in my bed where I used to lay at night and listen to you coming up the stairs. Oh, what can there be for me but empty, empty days and lonely nights. An endless road that leads to nowhere and me alone except for the memories of one short year.

And what worth are memories when they can't be felt. What's a life that has no warmth or body. Only a husk with the grain eaten up by loneliness and despair. Memory is no more than a thief. I want the moment that I can live. I don't want to remember the reflection or the brief and fiery glare. When the sun is full, there's no place for shadow.

And what worth are memories when they can't be felt. What's a life that has no warmth or body. I'm young and I'm afraid. But not afraid enough to want that empty road. I want the moment that I can live, I don't want to remember the reflection or the brief and fiery Glare. When the sun is full, there's no place for shadow.

*[As the duet ends both of the lovers are at the back of the stage. They disappear into the shadows with the toboggan.]*

*[JOTHAM comes running on to the stage]*

JOTHAM     Ah, I'm too late. They've gone to the train.

*[He goes to the back of the stage and looks down the hill.]*

One last coast...but they're off the course...the elm tree's in the way...they'll hit it...they'll hit it—God, oh God above! They've taken the wrong turn. They're gone.

*[Slow CURTAIN]*

## FINE ATTO TERZO

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## EPILOGUE

*[The Frome kitchen, many years later. MATTIE is in a wheelchair. ZEENA is in her usual rocker by the stove.]*

**MATTIE     ZEENA**

Why don't Ethan hurry; seems like he takes longer every time he goes to town. I guess pany ain't enough for him these days for he's always goin' somewhere. Lettin' the farm go to wrack and ruin. And leavin' us here in the cold, day after day. He can move around while we must stay where we are.

Hush your complainin'. There ain't anything wrong with you but what you brought on your-our comself. You had your chance to go and you didn't take it. You at least had the chance, I never did. Be grateful that you've got a roof o'er your head.

That's more than you deserve, God knows, you've always wanted what isn't yours to have,

You've no right to talk to me that way, Zeena.      same as your father.  
I was young, and it's been a long time ago, and  
I don't want to remember.

**ZEENA**      So now you're paying for it, same as anyone must who tries to steal what doesn't belong to him.

**MATTIE**      Didn't life belong to me, Zeena? Didn't I have a right to love? Or was suffering and misery my only right in this world.

**ZEENA**      That's what you asked for when you hitched up with the Fromes. You got what you wanted. You're here. You didn't want to go.

**MATTIE**      Zeena, you shouldn't!

**ZEENA**      Hush up, there's Ethan.

*[ETHAN enters]*

**MATTIE**      Where have you been so long, Ethan?

**ETHAN**      How many places are there to go. I've been into Starkfield same as always. And here's all the mail.

*[He hands a newspaper to ZEENA.]*

It's cold in here, the fire must be most out.

**MATTIE**      It's only just been made up this very minute. Zeena fell asleep and slept ever so long. I thought I'd be frozen stiff before I could wake her up and get her to tend it.

**ZEENA**      Poor Mattie has a real hard time.

**ETHAN**      I'd better get some wood in; it'll be cold tonight.

**MATTIE**      It's always cold here and winter lasts forever. When will it be Spring. Will Spring be early this year.

**ETHAN**      It's a cold land, Matt, short summers and early falls, and then the snow that locks us in; it's a silent land, and bitter and hard on those who want too much. Here you can't want more than to just get by. And Spring, why Spring comes later and is gone before you know it. We learned that together, didn't we, you and me, Matt!

**FINE DELL 'OPERA**