

# MASSENET

## WERTHER

English Version by Donald Pippin

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

**WERTHER** – a highly sensitive, very serious youth who will unknowingly inaugurate a new era.

**THE BAILIFF** – a widower, father of innumerable children of nearly all ages.

**CHARLOTTE** – his oldest daughter, beloved by all.

**SOPHIA** – her somewhat younger and (almost) ever cheerful sister.

**EUGENE** – fated by a mother on her deathbed to become Charlotte's husband.

**JOHANN and SCHMIDT** -- jovial friends of the bailiff.

**BRUNO and KATHLEEN** – enamored teenagers, aware of no one else.

**SIX CHILDREN**

### ACT I – The Bailiff's House, July 178---

*A pleasant, genial setting, the front of the house, with bay window and terrace covered with foliage, with garden, fountain and distant view of town and countryside. The bailiff is seated, surrounded by his six children, as he makes an uphill effort to lead them in song. Loud and prolonged laughter.*

**THE BAILIFF, impatiently**

Enough! Enough!

Kindly pay attention for once.

Let's concentrate and start again.

With feeling, and sing as if you mean it.

**CHILDREN, absent-mindedly**

Noel! Noel! Rejoice! Rejoice!

Hearing happy voices,

All the world today rejoices ...

**THE BAILIFF, annoyed**

No, no! That will not do.

No, no! You fail the test.  
If your sister Charlotte were watching, soon  
We would hear a change of tune,  
You would snap to attention and give her your best.

*(The children perk up at the mention of Charlotte's name, and resume more seriously.)*

**CHILDREN**

Noel! Noel!  
To us God has given  
His beloved son from heaven  
As the blessed angels sing  
From the skies above  
Of the coming messenger of peace and love.  
Shepherd and king  
Rejoice together as they sing, Noel! Noel!

**THE BAILIFF**

Go on ... well done.  
Just what I want!

**CHILDREN**

Hearing happy voices,  
All the world today rejoices,  
Certain now that all is well.  
Noel! Noel!

*(Johann and Schmidt, old friends of the bailiff, listen from the sidelines, then enter.)*

**JOHANN**

Bravo, my little friends!

**SCHMIDT**

You do your teacher proud.

**CHILDREN**

*(running joyfully to greet them)*

Thank you, Herr Schmidt, and you, too, Johann.

**JOHANN, to bailiff**

But why the Christmas preparations now in mid July?  
You expect snow and sleighbells in August?

**THE BAILIFF**

Laughter is unneeded for now.  
Besides ... Sad to say, few are quite as talented as you.  
*(with a touch of self-importance)*  
Trust me, this is no laughing matter,  
Introducing the art of song  
To these light-headed triflers.

**SCHMIDT**

*(to Sophia, who enters)*  
How now, Sophia?  
I'll bet Charlotte's not far off.

**SOPHIA** *(with a curtsey)*

Once again, you are right.  
Since our mother died,  
Charlotte and I have taken over.

**JOHANN**

Friend, we are dining out -- with you!

**THE BAILIFF**

Yes, by and by.

**SOPHIA**

My sister's getting dressed for the ball.

**THE BAILIFF**

Yes, a ball with relatives and friends  
That will take place in town.  
They will come for Carlotta.

**SCHMIDT**

A grand event!  
Young Koffel in his velvet jacket,  
And Madeline attired in her neat Sunday best,  
On hired coach and four setting out for the fest.  
They say even Werther would wipe away his frown.

**THE BAILIFF**

A high-minded youth.

**JOHANN**

Hardly the life of the party.

**THE BAILIFF**

Said to have read Latin and Greek.

**SCHMIDT**

Give me a game of poker.

**JOHANN**

He wrestles with the world.

**THE BAILIFF**

I've heard the prince has promised him  
A post of importance,  
Proof enough of his high esteem.

**JOHANN, scornfully**

A high position! Bah!  
That doesn't make him lighter.

**SCHMIDT**

Always shy and awkward at the table.

**JOHANN**

Apropos, we'll meet at the café. ...

**SCHMIDT**

... Yes, and your turn to tip the waiters.

**THE BAILIFF**

Again?

**JOHANN**

Listen! Here's the day that lobster's on the menu,  
Taken fresh from the sea.  
The barmaid spread the word.

**THE BAILIFF**

Greedy gourmets! Two hopeless gluttons,  
*(as the two are about to leave)*  
Not even waiting for Charlotte to appear.

**SCHMIDT**

We'll see her at the ball.  
But now we're off for a stroll around the town.

**THE BAILIFF, jokingly**

Working up an appetite?

**JOHANN, disgruntled**  
He's all too fond of teasing.  
Come along ... getting late ...

**SCHMIDT**  
By the way, is Eugene returning soon?

**THE BAILIFF**  
Who's to know?  
So far he hasn't even hinted,  
But recent letters tell me all is going well.

**SCHMIDT**  
Good man! An honest bloke with common sense and courage,  
In fact the perfect husband  
For your Charlotte.  
And us ... old men well past the prime  
And prone to forgetting,  
Will be dancing at their wedding.  
(*to children*) Nighty night, little pups.

**JOHANN**  
Good night, little pups.

**SCHMIDT (*to Bailiff*)**  
See you soon.

**JOHANN**  
See you soon.

**TUTTI**  
Good night, good night, good night!

**SCHMIDT & JOHANN**  
(*while leaving arm in arm*)  
Hooray for Bacchus, god of wine!  
Hooray for Bacchus, dear friend of mine.

**THE BAILIFF (*to children*)**  
Inside! This evening we'll rehearse the song again.  
And no dessert till it is mastered.  
Sophia, go and see what detains Charlotte.

*(As Sophia exits, the bailiff takes a seat with his two youngest on his knees, and continues the lesson to which they listen religiously. Accompanied by a young peasant, Werther enters and regards the house with great interest.*

**WERTHER**

The house ... is it the place where the bailiff resides?  
With thanks. *(dismissing the guide, with a small purse)*  
I'm not sure if I'm standing  
Or floating in a dream,  
But surely I'm inhaling the scent of paradise.  
A rustle in the trees fills the air with soft music. ...  
A new and brighter world  
Has dazzled my eyes.

Boundless nature! Soul of creation.  
Queen of an infinite dominion,  
Kindly receive my adoration,  
An humble servant, trembling in awe.  
I fear to break the silence,  
The calm serenity ...  
Charmed by all that I see.  
The wall ... the simple garden,  
The fountain so clear,  
Mid cool, refreshing shadows,  
And beyond, in the fields  
Every bush, every hedge  
Bearing flowers that bloom  
While caressed by the breeze ...

Timeless nature!  
Pour on my soul sweet perfume.  
Goddess/mother, ever youthful,  
Let me stop and gaze.  
Source of beauty! O glorious sun!  
Inflame my heart with golden rays.

**CHILDREN** *(offstage)*

Unto us is given, *etc.*

**WERTHER** *(listening)*

Children singing ...  
Nothing else here on earth is so dear.  
How sublime!  
A soul-searching life can be bitter,  
But children at play is my reward,  
Their laughter reaches up to heaven.

**Ah! They are greater far than I!**

**CHILDREN** (*entering*)  
**Charlotte! Charlotte!**

**CHARLOTTE**, (*affectionately*)  
**Well, well, tyrant! How did they do?**

**THE BAILIFF**  
**I'm pleased, of course ... well, up to a point.**

**CHILDREN**, *surrounding Charlotte*  
**He said that he was pleased,  
Yes he did, yes he did!**

**THE BAILIFF**  
*(embracing his daughter)*  
**Lovelier than ever! My darling!**

**CHILDREN**  
**She really is!**

**THE BAILIFF**  
**Come here, my Cinderella, let me admire you ...  
Jealous friends will grind their teeth.**

**CHARLOTTA**  
**These jealous friends are in no rush to be on time.  
For penance I shall make them wait  
While I give these poor, starving rascals  
Their daily bread.**

*(Producing a huge loaf of bread, Charlotte slices it and distributes the pieces. Carriage wheels are heard in the distance.)*

**THE BAILIFF**  
**Hurry up! I detect carriage wheels.**

**CHILDREN**  
**My turn! My turn! I'm waiting in line.  
And me! And me! I'm ready for more.  
Some more! Some more!**

**THE BAILIFF**  
**Ah! Welcome, Werther!  
So you've come to look in on my small, cloistered dwelling?**

Or, you could say, my kingdom.  
Call me lord of the realm.  
*(introducing Charlotte)* My daughter,  
Guardian angel of the household.  
Spoiling the children, need I add,  
As she has done since their dear mother passed away.

CHARLOTTE, *with charming simplicity*  
You must forgive me, sir, if I appear unfriendly,  
But my children come first.  
I'm now their only mother,  
And they refuse to take their buttered bread  
From any hand except my own.

*(guests arrive on their way to the party, including young Bruno and Kathleen,  
totally absorbed in each other)*

**THE BAILIFF**

Welcome to all! Step in!  
Charlotte's all dressed and ready to go.

BRUNO, *with an ecstatic sigh*  
Shakespeare!

KATHLEEN, *equally entranced*  
Too, too divine!

THE BAILIFF, *in the best of humor*  
Hold on! Continue your talk at the ball.  
Otherwise I'm afraid you'll not get there at all.

*(While Charlotte is putting on her stole, Werther approaches the youngest of  
the children and impulsively embraces her. She starts to cry.)*

CHARLOTTE, *to the rescue*  
Come, give your cousin a kiss.

WERTHER, *taken aback*  
A cousin? Am I deserving of the name?

CHARLOTTE, *playfully*  
Maybe not! No need.  
We've cousins by the dozen, so –  
Who would even notice if we add one more?  
I'm sure that you're not the worst of them.  
*(with quiet authority, Sophia)*

Tonight you will take my place, Sophia.  
Your judgment I've always trusted.  
*(to children)* And you'll behave as if I were here.

SOPHIA

Yes, but they would much prefer  
If really it were you.

WERTHER,

*(ecstatically observing, as the children cluster around Charlotte)*  
What a heart-warming scene of love and pure devotion!  
The true and simple joy tells me where I belong.  
I envision with rapture  
A lifetime spent together,  
Inspired by her smile and charmed by her song.

THE BAILIFF

*(to Walther, as others are leaving)*  
Have a good time.

CHARLOTTE

Kiss me, father.

THE BAILIFF

God bless you, my darling.

*(Charlotte and Werther leave, followed by Bruno and Kathleen, gazing at each other in trancelike bliss as they depart without a word)*

Two at least are feeling no pain.  
Shakespeare! Too, too divine!  
The thrill of youthful passion ...  
A silence no elders can fathom.  
*(humming while searching for his pipe)*  
Hooray for Bacchus, god of wine!  
A merry fellow and a friend of mine.  
Hooray for Bacchus, god of wine!

SOPHIA

*(quietly entering with the bailiff's cane and hat)*  
Did you not tell your friends  
You would join them at the inn?

THE BAILIFF

Me? Go? And leave you alone? No!

**SOPHIA, gravely**  
**But you must! Both of your friends are waiting as we speak.**

**THE BAILIFF**  
**Well, I suppose you're right.**  
**I made that stupid promise ...**

*(He leaves grumbling. Night is gradually falling. Eugene enters from the garden, and surveys the house with evident nostalgia. Sophia sees him.)*

**EUGENE, entering**  
**Sophia!**

**SOPHIA**  
**Eugene! What a surprise!**

**EUGENE**  
**At last! Good to be home again.**

**SOPHIA**  
**Your Charlotte will run to greet you with open arms.**

**EUGENE**  
**Is she not here?**

**SOPHIA**  
**No, not for now. She who never goes out for the evening.**  
**Too bad! But why did you not let us know?**

**EUGENE**  
**Just a hope to surprise you.**  
**Come, let us talk of her.**  
**I'm impatient to know if she has been longing for me.**  
**For half a year each day I missed her.**

**SOPHIA**  
**Beca assured you have not been forgotten.**  
**After all, are you not her fiance?**

**EUGENE**  
**My dearest child! Do tell me all the news.**

**SOPHIA**  
**Well, we have much to do, preparing for your wedding.**

**EUGENE**

Preparing for the wedding ...

**SOPHIA**

Dancing on the green, no?

**EUGENE**

For sure! Dancing and feasting!  
All I want is happiness and good will to all,  
For you mean so much to me.  
Go. Hurry, before they come out ...  
And discover I am here, Not a word!  
But I shall return before the break of day.

**SOPHIA**

Until then ... try to sleep ... so goodnight,  
My new older brother. (*she reenters the house*)

**EUGENE, his mind on Charlotte**

Charlotte loves me ... still thinks of me ...  
More than my life,  
I cherish this unearned gift of love,  
Bountiful as waves of the ocean.

Home again, this time to stay.  
Controlling a world of emotions,  
A horde of snarly demons  
I now can put to rest.

Ah! Hand in hand, side by side,  
Together we have started a life-long journey,  
Refortified by tried and true devotion.

*(Time has elapsed. Night has fallen, the moon has risen, illuminating the house. Werther and Charlotte slowly return arm in arm. A long silence.)*

**CHARLOTTE**

It's time we say goodnight.  
Here we are, home again,  
And time for eyes to close.

**WERTHER**

Ah! Your eyes I can see forever burning bright.  
Sparkling beacons of light  
That inspire and renew.  
My only source of joy,

Too dear to squander in wasteful sleep.  
I come alive when you are near me.  
As the moon and the stars bow in turn to your beauty.  
But whether night or day,  
I'm guided by your light.  
Sun, moon and stars I can ignore;  
My universe is you.

CHARLOTTA, *smiling*  
Friend, do recall we've barely met.

WERTHER  
My soul has found itself in yours.  
Charlotte, I have known you long enough  
To be certain you're all that you seem.

CHARLOTTE  
And what do you conclude?

WERTHER. *gravely and tenderly*  
Not just the finest, but the loveliest  
Of all women ever living.

CHARLOTTE, *embarrassed*  
Stop!

WERTHER  
Perhaps I must go ask those children  
You fondly call your own?

CHARLOTTE, *pensively*  
Alas! Yes ... so naïve! With you they would agree.  
When I'm with them my mother lives;  
Then I feel her spirit close at hand,  
Hear the voice, soft and gentle.  
When they smile, she too is smiling,  
Her joys reflected in her children,  
Children now mine.  
With every breath I draw I long to hug and hold her.  
Not letting go!  
I often wonder if she knows  
I have kept the solemn vow I made that final hour?  
O mother, mother, tell me why you left so soon.

WERTHER  
O Charlotte! Angel that you are,

May heaven comfort you and dry those tears of mourning.

**CHARLOTTE**

If only you had known her!  
What pain could be more cruel  
Than losing the dearest mother in all the world?  
Sweet memories come to mind,  
But soon dissolve in tears.  
Without her, the house feels so vacant.  
And I know that the children feel the same as I.  
Unconsoled and confused,  
They ask in childlike wonder:  
Why did those men in black  
Take our mommy away?

**WERTHER**

Rapture, renewal, a dream ...  
My life I would surrender  
If I could call you my own --  
Your eyes, your lovely face,  
Your delectable voice  
Full of charm and compassion.  
Let me shout to the world,  
"She is mine, mine alone!"  
Ah, the smile so celestial!  
O Charlotte, my beloved! Yes, I adore you,  
Worship and admire you!

**CHARLOTTE**, *composing herself*  
We both are mad! Good night!

**WERTHER**

Soon ... can we meet again?

**THE BAILIFF**

*calling out from inside the house*  
Charlotte! Charlotte! Eugene has come back!

**CHARLOTTE**

Eugene!

**WERTHER**

Eugene?

**CHARLOTTE**. *sadly, in a low voice*  
The man whom my mother as she lay dying

Had me promise to wed.  
Yet God forgive, I confess: close to you,  
I forget entirely the vow that I must keep.

WERTHER, *with an effort*  
A sacred vow must be upheld.  
Though I may not survive it.  
(*alone, in despair*) That promise is my curse!

## ACT II -- The Linden Trees

*In Wetzlar, September of the same year. A town square, with church and inn. in front of which Johann and Schmidt are seated at a table, glass in hand.)*

JOHANN

Salute the merry god of wine! On a Sunday!

SCHMIDT

Salute the merry god of wine! On a Sunday!

BOTH

Salute our god of wine!  
And friend of mine!  
Salute the merry god of wine!  
Salute this friend of mine!  
Salute our god of wine!  
Salute the god, the god of wine!

JOHANN

Ah, what a day! Perfect weather!  
The sun is out, and friend to friend, we drink together.

SCHMIDT

Good to be alive, old chap,  
Not among the dead.  
The sky so blue, the wine so red.

JOHANN

Here together ...

SCHMIDT

(*as the organ sounds from the church*)  
On a Sunday! Sing out and hallelujah  
While the pipe organ's playing!

**You sinners, all aboard!  
Sing out and praise the Lord!**

**BOTH**

**A hymn to God on high/ Praise be to God!  
From better men than I.  
Praise be to God, who has given  
The gift of wine,  
That has made the earth our heaven.  
You sinners, all aboard!  
Sing out and praise the Lord!**

**JOHANN**

**More people, and more to come,  
On foot from far and wide.  
And here to hail the pastor  
For his fifty golden years of marriage.**

**SCHMIDT**

**Good heavens, fifty years!  
A test of faith and courage,  
We all agree.  
No doubt a bold adventure,  
Yes, but not my cup of tea.**

**JOHANN**

**The same for me,  
Although I've heard of lads and lasses  
Who would gladly go down that road.  
(as Eugene and Charlotte stroll in, arm in arm)  
Ha! These two, for example ...**

**SCHMIDT**

**So brave! Despite the odds,  
To their success we lift out glasses. (they go into the church)**

**EUGENE, tenderly**

**Three months!  
Look at us now --- loving husband and wife.  
Time has gone by like lightning  
Yet I barely remember  
Living alone before we came together.**

**CARLOTTA, gently**

**My dear...**

**EUGENE**

How can I tell you how blessed I feel!  
I well recall the cheerful daughter,  
So poised, happy and smiling, in idyllic surroundings.  
Have you left hearth and home with no tinge of regret?

**CARLOTTA**

A fortunate lady, protected and humored  
By the finest of men,  
Sincere, warm and kind-hearted,  
Has little room for regret.

**EUGENE**

Words so soothing and tender!  
Words refreshing as water  
Flood my heart with delight.  
How could I live without you?

*(They slowly walk towards the church, then enter. Werther observes from a distance.)*

**WERTHER**

My one, my only love  
Now lost to another man!  
Turning to God:  
If fate had but allowed me  
To journey through life with this angel by my side,  
I'd dedicate my all  
To her on whom I gaze with eternal devotion.  
Yet I confess . . . at times ...  
Ungodly thoughts drive me wild.  
I implore ... plead ... pray for what might have been.

I dream of life together  
When days of doubt are over:  
Husband, brother, friend and lover –  
All of these I long to be,  
For her! For her!  
For lost love that could have been.

At heaven's gate the door flew briefly open,  
Then slammed shut beyond recall ...  
Only a dream, after all,  
For her! For me!  
Love that might have been.

Ah! Though I dream of life together,  
The days of hope are over:  
Husband, brother, friend and lover –  
None of these are meant to be.  
And yet, and yet  
I could have won her love,  
In time, I could have won her love ...  
But I've lost her forever.  
Ah! Youthful dreams of happiness are over.

*(He sinks down upon a bench, his head buried in his hands. Schmidt and Johann enter with Bruno, who is broken hearted.)*

**SCHMIDT**

Yes, I promise! Kathleen will come back.

**JOHANN**

Maybe not right away --  
Any time, who's to say?  
Why worry about a short delay?

**SCHMIDT**

Just wait and you will see.

**JOHANN**

A seven year's betrothal  
I doubt that one forgets in a hurry.  
*(pulling Bruno along)*  
Come along, chap, the festivities call.

**SCHMIDT**

The last into the church, we'll show up first at the ball!

*(The three leave together. Eugene returns and puts his hand on Werther's shoulder, who recoils and makes a move as if leaving.)*

**EUGENE**

Mid the blessings I've been granted, my friend,  
At times I'm troubled by a twinge of remorse.

**WERTHER, *astonished***

Why remorse?

**EUGENE**

Knowing you are loyal and sincere ...  
So about the lady now my wife

Day by day you crossed her path  
When she was free to choose.  
Drawn by youth, charm and beauty  
You had, perhaps, a dream  
That became a mirage ...

She is sweet, so docile, so lovely --  
The more I appreciate what God has given me,  
The more I feel for you  
And for your cruel loss ...  
*(takes his hand affectionately)*  
How well I understand your grief and bear no grudge.

**WERTHER**

You said it well:  
I'm loyal, sincere, though a dreamer.  
If the pain from the past were too sharp to be borne,  
My own hand I'd withdraw  
From the hand you're extending.  
And flee far from you, nevermore to return.  
But now the storm is waning;  
Rough waters have subsided.  
My thoughts no longer dwell  
On the death of a dream.  
For the one who can read  
My inner thoughts and feelings,  
By delving, you may find  
Goodwill and brotherhood.  
With this I claim my share  
Of the joys here on earth.

**SOPHIA,**

*(running in with flowers in hand, to Eugene)*  
Brother, do look! A lovely autumn bouquet!  
A gift the pastor deserves.  
So I looted the garden.  
But now, on to the dance!  
*(to Werther)* For the first minuet I want you as my partner!  
Ah! But what a long face!  
Pardon me, but let me be clear:  
Such a beautiful day calls for laughter and cheer.

Out in the sun, brightly shining,  
Not a trace of cloud in sight,  
With roses still in bloom,  
Who has time for gloom and pining?

**Have a laugh and have fun  
On a day in the sun.**

**See the tireless birds in flight,  
Over hills and valleys soaring,  
Bearing a message straight from heaven:  
You people down below, enjoy!  
There's a God-given plan  
For each woman and man:  
Live and love while you can!**

**WERTHER**

**(She's right! Am I to mourn forever?)**

**EUGENE**

**(to Sophia) Go, present your bouquet.  
Dear little sister, run!**

**I'll join you soon.**

**(to Werther) My friend, there's a secret to happiness,  
How it comes, how it goes,  
You may search, then implore,**

***(with pointed meaning)***

**When all the while it could be waiting  
Under your nose,  
With a smile from the heart,  
Bearing flowers meant for you.**

**SOPHIA**

**Come, brother, now we must hurry!**

**(to Werther) Don't you forget**

**You're dancing with me,**

**My Prince Charming, in the first minuet!**

**Out in the sun, etc.**

***(she leaves with Eugene)***

**WERTHER, alone**

**Can I be sure?**

**My feeling for Charlotte has been pure as the dew,  
Reverent and sanctified,**

**Love untainted by intrusive desire,**

**Or tyrannized by lust ...**

**Oh, what a lie! What a laugh! My God!**

**Can I continue to live a brazen lie?**

**Covering up! Hiding my shame!**

**I must be brave and depart!**

*(Charlotte enters)* Away? No!  
All I want instead is to draw closer.

**CHARLOTTE**  
*(not yet noticing Werther)*  
Only in prayer do I find  
New resolve and courage.

**WERTHER**  
Charlotte!

**CHARLOTTE**  
Are you here to join the festive crowd?

**WERTHER**  
And for what?  
Just to see you there with another?  
So long ago, that sweet unforgettable night,  
For it was then I first beheld your eyes,  
And they were drawn to mine.  
In a trance, there we gazed, you and I,  
Oh so close ... so still ... Not even speaking.  
High above was a moon so bright  
That lighted the sky like a signal from heaven  
Blessing a love needing no words.

**CHARLOTTE, coldly**  
Eugene loves me, and I am his wife.

**WERTHER, carried away**  
Of course he loves you!  
Who could help loving you?

**CHARLOTTE, more gently**  
My friend ... go look around.  
Are there not other girls, willing, waiting for someone,  
And clearly meant for you?  
No longer free to choose,  
Why have you chosen me?

**WERTHER**  
Ask a lunatic or fool  
To explain why he lost his reason.

**CHARLOTTE, firmly**  
Enough! Fate has decreed that we cannot continue;

**You have to go. You must! You must!**

**WERTHER**

**Ah, you mean never again?**

**CHARLOTTE**

**I mean just what I say.**

**You understand me.**

**WERTHER, *rebelliously***

**Why am I bound to obey you?**

**CHARLOTTE**

**For us both.**

**The pain of separation in time grows less bitter.**

**WERTHER**

**You think I would forget**

**If you were out of sight?**

**CHARLOTTE, *still more gently***

**But why forget?**

**Think kindly of me, taking comfort**

**In knowing I am at peace.**

**Be strong ... say goodbye.**

**WERTHER, *somewhat calmer***

**Your peace of mind and happiness are all I've wanted.**

**But to never meet again? Out of the question! No!**

**CHARLOTTE, *most tenderly***

**Dear friend, I'm not so hard hearted,**

**Stern and severe.**

**It's only for a while that you must stay away.**

**You will return ... in time ... of course!**

**On Christmas eve!**

**WERTHER, *imploring***

**Charlotte!**

**CHARLOTTE**

**Christmas will come ... *(exit)***

**WERTHER**

***(discouraged and defeated, he is suddenly decisive)***

**Yes, it must be done.**

When she commands I shall comply.  
And when my power are exhausted,  
I perhaps may find the way  
To everlasting peace.  
Why cringe in fear, waiting for death,  
If at the end the veil is drawn aside  
Revealing the great beyond?  
What is death but a union with God?  
Do we offend the Lord  
By cutting short grief and pain?  
What if a child comes home somewhat sooner than planned?  
He's greeted not with wrath and punishment, oh no!  
When he opens the door  
He's met with cries of welcome,  
And the proud happy father reaches out his arms.  
O God of all the living,  
Is your love less than theirs?  
No, I cannot believe  
You would reject and abandon to the tortures of hell  
Your lost, wandering son. Your son!  
By your smile casting light to the stars in their glory,  
Let him know and confirm that he is dear to you.  
Father! Father! Father, whom I am yet to know,  
And yet in whom I trust,  
Open your arms and welcome me ... accept me, O Lord ...  
Welcome me home ...

**SOPHIA**

*(returning bright and chipper as ever)*

You will be late! The procession has started.  
You're neglecting the party with unfriendly delay.

**WERTHER, brusquely**

Pardon me, please ... I must go!

**SOPHIA**

Leaving now?

**WERTHER**

Right away!

**SOPHIA**

Right away? ... But of course you'll soon be back.  
A week ... or two? ...

WERTHER

No! A last farewell! (*he runs off*)

SOPHIA,

*starting to run after him*

What are you saying?...

At the turn of the road ...

He's disappeared! .. he's gone ... (*bursting into tears*)

O God! And to think, just now I was so happy!

(*The golden wedding party comes in*)

CHARLOTTE, *noticing Sophia*

Dear! What is wrong? You are sobbing ... Sophia!

SOPHIA, *falling into Charlotte's arms*

Oh, sister! Werther's gone, gone for good.

EUGENE

Gone!

SOPHIA

He'll not be back ... he told me so himself.

And then hurried away, like a madman.

CHARLOTTE,

(Gone for good ...)

EUGENE, *somberly*

(He loves her!)

(*The wedding party crosses the square with cheers and jubilation*)

### ACT III –

Charlotte and Werther, December 24, 178---

*A room in Eugene's house. Carlotta is seated alone, near a work table, in a reflective, indeed anguished, mood.*

CHARLOTTE

Werther! Werther!

How little did I know

The special place you hold in my heart.

But since the day he left,

I've been tired and depressed,

Ever restless, longing for him ...  
*(rising slowly as if drawn to the writing desk which she opens)*  
His letters! His letters!  
Ah! I read and then reread them, almost with hunger.  
Though I smile, I'm close to weeping.  
I should burn or destroy them!  
But I can't ...  
*(returning to the table, her eyes fixed on the letter she is reading)*

"I write to you from my solitary chamber  
With the grey of dark December  
Wrapped around me like a shroud.  
Here I'm alone ... numb ... always alone."  
Life in an isolated cell!  
Not a soul there for solace,  
No kind word of tenderness and warmth ...  
God! How could I have been so stiff and unyielding  
When I sent him away, cast out into the cold?

*(after a while she takes out another letter and reads)*  
"Now cries of childish glee  
Steal through my open window.  
The sound of joy ... they remind me of times gone by ...  
Your laughing little ones inviting me to play.  
No doubt they've now forgotten ..."

Not so at all!  
Memories of those happy days  
Are still much alive!  
You'll see when you return ...  
Yes, but *should* he return?  
His recent letter frightens me, making me tremble.  
"Till Christmas eve', you said.  
My cry was, 'Nevermore!'  
We soon will know for sure who was right,  
You or I?  
And if I should fail to appear  
On the festive day that you chose,  
I need no reproach, only tears."

*(repeating his words in horror, reluctant to take in their meaning)*  
"I need no reproach, only tears"  
And when you read these lines, remember  
The love I'll carry to my grave,  
There to find repose everlasting.  
Dear Charlotte! Then tremble no more. ..."  
Tremble no more ... tremble no more ...

*(Sophia enters, lively as ever. Charlotte, taken by surprise, quickly hides the letters.)*

**SOPHIA**

Dear sister, I'm here! And panting for news.  
Your husband away, we see you no more,  
And your father is starting to fret.

**CHARLOTTE**

My news?

**SOPHIA**

Dear... are you ill?...

**CHARLOTTE**

Dismiss that foolish notion.

**SOPHIA, taking her hand**

Dear, your hand is so icy  
And your eyes are so red.  
I am not a fool!

**CHARLOTTE**

I'm well enough,  
Although from time to time rather weary ... maybe lonely.  
But when I'm feeling low and winter days are dreary,  
I quickly shake it off. *(with slightly forced playfulness)*  
See for yourself! I'm smiling again.

**SOPHIA, cajoling**

What you need is laughter,  
As we laughed not so long ago.

**CHARLOTTE, aside, meaningfully**  
(Not long ago ...)

**SOPHIA, merrily**

For laughter is joy,  
And fun is not for scorning.  
A running brook, or a bird in flight,  
The sparkling dew of early morning,  
When all it right.  
It makes the garden shine  
With playful rays of light.  
Ah, for laughter is joy, *etc.*

Now frankly  
I'm old enough to know why you've become so moody.  
But --- everyone around is moping, me included,  
*(after hesitating)* Ever since he went away ...  
Yet why, O why has he not written? *(lowering her eyes)*  
Does he not know how much we love him?

CHARLOTTE

*(Each word is a reminder, a stab at the heart.)*

SOPHIA

Those tears? Ah, forgive me. Have I hurt you?  
Please! My fault, for bringing up his name.

CHARLOTTE

*(no longer containing herself)*

No! Sweet are the tears that flow;  
Let then freely fall, my darling.  
The scalding tears locked up inside  
Day by day will ply their poison;  
These thwarted tears that show no mercy  
Will batter the heart till it's broken.  
Soon overpowered, too sorely tested,  
The heart at last can fight no more.  
A broken part beyond repair,  
Too frail to stir, it cries surrender,  
Cries surrender ...

SOPHIA, *frightened*

Please, do listen to me!  
Here's not \the place for you.  
Come with me. Home again,  
You'll soon be yourself, like before.  
The children will go wild!  
So excited, they'll insist you hear  
What they've prepared for Christmas eve.

CHARLOTTE

*(Christmas eve! Ah! And that letter ...*  
"And if I should fail to appear  
On the festive day that you chose,  
I need no reproach, only tears."

SOPHIA

Then now we are agreed --- you're coming home!

**CHARLOTTE**

Well, perhaps ...

**SOPHIA**

No, no! No backing out!

**CHARLOTTE**

No backing out!

**SOPHIA**

For sure?

**CHARLOTTE**

Yes, for sure. I give you my word, my darling.

**SOPHIA**

You will come? ...

**CHARLOTTE**

Very soon.

**SOPHIA**

So it's yes??

**CHARLOTTE**, *as Sophia starts to leave*  
First, come back and give me one more kiss!  
*(Sophia leaves)*

**CHARLOTTE**

*(in a burst of despair)*

Ah! My courage is fading fast.  
Dear Lord! My God! To thee, O Lord, I pray.  
I have kept my word  
I and tried my best to do what is right.  
On my faith I rely.  
Sweet and strong the temptation,  
All too frail is my heart.  
O Lord, hear! O God!  
Mighty God, all-knowing,  
Heal my wounded spirit,  
My soul so bombarded by fear and confusion.  
Left to wander in darkness;  
Reinforce my resolve, O Lord!  
Heed my cry for help,  
My frantic prayer, my appeal for mercy,  
Only that, O Lord, only that.

Hear my plea for help.  
Hear, O Lord! Hear me, Lord!

*(The door opens, Werther appears)*  
Ah! Werther!

WERTHER,  
*(standing at the door, pale, nearly fainting, scarcely looking at Charlotte)*  
Yes! I'm here, back again.  
Though I swear ... while away,  
Never did an hour go by,  
When sleeping or awake,  
Without thinking I'd sooner die  
Than see you again.  
Yet ... at last ... came the day that you had settled on  
For my return. A day of dread ...  
Standing here on your threshold,  
Again I fought the fight, wishing to flee.  
But fine resolutions be damned!  
*(in defeat)* Here I am ...

CHARLOTTE  
*(Though greatly moved, she tries to appear casual.)*  
But why, why such a hostile greeting?  
Why wish to stay away  
When we've waited so for your return?  
My father ... the children, too ...

WERTHER  
And you? ... You as well? ...

CHARLOTTE  
*(cutting him off by changing the subject)*  
But look ... the old house still remains  
Just as the day you went away.  
At times I like to think  
That the house is alive and can also remember ...

WERTHER  
I can see that here nothing has changed ...  
Except the hearts. *(sadly)*  
All in place as before just the way that I knew it.

CHARLOTTE, *tenderly*  
All in place as before just the way that you knew it.

**WERTHER**

The harpsichord as well, turning joy into song,  
Or at times, heartache and sorrow.  
Then your voice with my own  
Would be blended together.

**CHARLOTTE, *moved***

Then your voice with my own  
Would be blended together.

**WERTHER**

These volumes! How often we sat,  
You and I, side by side,  
While reading to each other.  
*(going over to a box of pistols)*  
And the pistols ... that day I held them in my hands,  
With more than just a fleeting thought  
Of that awaited final rest.

**CHARLOTTE**

Here they are! The poems of Ossian.  
Loving them so, you began a translation.

**WERTHER**

My favorite!  
Ah! Many times while reading, I would soar  
Upon his winged words.  
It was you, noble poet, who lifted me  
To heights never imagined.  
There I could find my soul.

“O why awaken me.  
You tender breath of May?  
Why must I wake again  
With your soft and soothing caresses,  
For I know the time draws near  
When the storm strikes with crash of thunder?  
Why must I wake again?  
You tender breath of May?  
Tomorrow from the hills  
The trav’ler who descends,  
Recalling me in the prime of my glory.  
May search in vain for the splendor of old,  
All in vain, for nothing now remains  
But loss and desolation.  
Always! Why must I wake again,

You sweet murmurs of May?"

**CHARLOTTE**, *in great distress*  
Tell me no more! Enough! What can I say?  
My tears, my despair and confusion ...

**WERTHER**  
Ah! Can I believe ... Can it be true?  
In your sweet trembling voice,  
And your eyes that fill with melting tears,  
Do I read what you dare not reveal?

**CHARLOTTE**, *trembling*  
Please! Say no more!

**WERTHER**, *with increasing joy*  
We have gone well beyond denial and deception.

**CHARLOTTE**  
Stop, I implore you!

**WERTHER**, *ardently*  
Come, let us face the truth:  
You and I are both consumed  
By a fierce, exalted fire  
No control can contain.

**CHARLOTTE**  
Werther!

**WERTHER**  
Grant me the kiss I crave!  
How long I've dreamed and waited  
For joy inspired by love,  
Till this day only a dream.  
I burn, hardly daring to hope  
As I wait for your answer  
From the heart.  
Grant the ultimate gift,  
The first kiss of love.

**CHARLOTTE**  
Ah! Have I lost all reason?

**WERTHER**  
You love me! You love me! You love me!

**CHARLOTTE**  
No! Can all that stands between us  
Be ignored and forgotten?

**WERTHER**  
You love me!

**CHARLOTTE**  
Have mercy!

**WERTHER**  
We've gone beyond remorse.

**CHARLOTTE**  
No!

**WERTHER**  
Too long have we been tortured.

**CHARLOTTE**  
Please, no more!

**WERTHER**  
We must live for each other,  
Let all the rest go hang!

**CHARLOTTE**  
Ah! Dear Lord! Help me be strong!

**WERTHER**  
Let love alone prevail,  
Divine and sanctified.  
Yield, my darling!  
Obey a higher law,  
Revealed by love alone.  
I love you! I love you! I love you!

**CHARLOTTE**  
Watch over me, dear Lord,  
And save me from myself.  
Save me, O Lord, from him.  
From him, and from myself.  
Too late! Too late!  
Ah! Me! Me! In his arms!

**WERTHER**

*(suddenly coming to his senses)*

Forgive me.

**CHARLOTTE**

*(resolute, finally getting hold of herself)*

No! You will not see me again.

**WERTHER**

Charlotte!

**CHARLOTTE**

From *you* I must escape.

Though I wonder how to go on ...

Goodbye! Goodbye! Now and forevermore! *(she rushes out)*

**WERTHER, alone**

No, no! How can you leave me?

You are my life!

I call but no answer. Return!

For me you're all that's sacred.

No! Not a word ... nothing to say ...

So! It's goodbye! She issues the sentence of death.

Mourn for me, a son of nature.

O nature! Forgive a wayward soul,

Your good servant who dies,

Heading homeward with nothing but tears and despair

To fill an empty grave. *(he flees)*

*(Eugene returns, troubled and somber)*

**EUGENE,**

Werther is back again,

Lately seen passing by.

*(taken aback)*

Nobody home? And the front door left wide open? ...

Something odd going on ...

Charlotte! Charlotte!

*(she returns, frightened and alarmed at the sight of her husband)*

What is wrong?

**CHARLOTTE**

Oh, nothing ...

**EUGENE**

You appear so uneasy, so troubled ...

**CHARLOTTE**

*(valiantly trying to compose herself)*  
No, merely startled.

**EUGENE, almost vehemently**  
I want to know who was here.

**CHARLOTTE**

Here?

**EUGENE**

Speak out! *(a servant enters and hands him a message)*  
You've a message? *(all the time looking fixedly at Charlotte)*  
From Werther.

**CHARLOTTE, softly crying out**  
(Ah!)

**EUGENE, reading**

"I'm leaving on a lonely journey.  
If you would be so kind, lend me your pistols."

**CHARLOTTA, nearly fainting**  
(Oh, no!)

**EUGENE**

"And may God keep you both."

**CHARLOTTE, terrified**

(Ah! A frightful foreboding!)

**EUGENE, coldly**

Give him the guns.

**CHARLOTTE**

Who? I?

**EUGENE, sternly indifferent**

Who else?

**CHARLOTTE**

(How he glares!)

*(As if spellbound by Eugene's glare, like a robot she goes to the table and the box of pistols. Eugene crumples the letter in his hand and throws it on the floor. Charlotte, barely able to stand up, gives the box to the servant. Eugene leaves. Charlotte, as if regaining consciousness, gradually aware of what has transpired, seizes a cloak from the arm-chair and rushes out in despair.)*

**God! Grant my one request:  
Let me reach him in time! *(she hurries out)***

#### **Act IV – Christmas Eve**

*(Werther's work-room. Books and papers are scattered about. Moonlight shines through the large window. Werther, mortally wounded, lies stretched out by the table. The door opens abruptly, Charlotte enters, then stops, holding on to the door frame as if her courage were suddenly failing.)*

**CHARLOTTE, calling in anguish**  
**Werther! Werther! Gone!**  
*(She discovers his inanimate body, and throws herself on him)*  
**Blood! Ah! He's hurt ... No! No! Don't let it happen!**  
**Pray to God, not dead!**  
**Werther! Werther! Ah!**  
**Open your eyes, and speak! And speak!**  
**Ah, can I bear it?**

**WERTHER, finally opening his eyes**  
**Who is it? ... Charlotte! Ah, you came? ...**  
**Can you forgive? ...**

**CHARLOTTE**  
**Me, forgive you? When I alone am guilty?**  
**From my hands**  
**Came the pistol of execution,**  
**My hands that shed your blood.**

**WERTHER**  
**No! You've only done what is just and right.**  
*(with an effort that soon leaves him exhausted)*  
**And I shall always bless you for that service,**

Keeping you free of slander,  
Sparing me of remorse.

**CHARLOTTE**, *frantic*  
Not a moment to lose! You need help. Now!

**WERTHER**  
*(he holds her back, rising to his knees)*  
Ah, no! Stay with me, call no one.  
Any help would be too late.  
Let me take and hold your hand.  
See! You are by my side,  
I need no help from others.  
Recall ... together we've come far;  
Let no one now tear us apart.  
*(holding her hand)*  
Stay here, the way we are.  
In these few final moments, I am at peace,  
For death allows me now to say I adore you!

**CHARLOTTE**  
*(at first hesitant, but passionate)*  
And I ... I also ... can tell you ... I love you.  
Yes, from the day when first we met, I already knew,  
And I felt an unseen but unbreakable chain  
That bound us forever.  
But I honored my vows,  
Choosing to see you suffer  
In order to save myself.  
I saw you devoured by fire ...

**WERTHER**  
Please talk on! We've no time left to squander.

**CHARLOTTE**  
So as the end approaches,  
Released, now I can say it:  
Here, take the kiss, long denied,  
The kiss now I can give to you.  
May your soul with mine  
In perfect harmony blended,  
In this brief moment supreme  
Cast away former pain, former strife,  
Days and nights of despair.

**BOTH**

All ... all of the past ... all .. all ...  
*(voices of children are heard)*

**CHARLOTTE**

Their cries of joy, their laughter  
In this darkest hour ...

**CHILDREN, *from far off***

To us God has given  
His beloved son from heaven.  
Blessed angels sing for joy.

**WERTHER**

*(reviving somewhat, but with a touch of hallucination)*

Do I hear children, or angels?  
Yes, somewhere I hear a song of celebration,  
Conveyed by souls in heaven ...

**CHARLOTTE**

*(frightened by the signs of delirium)*

My dearest!

**WERTHER, *in a daze***

So why the tears?  
Though I die, are you so sure  
My life has reached the end?  
*(in ecstasy)* I see instead a rebirth!

**SOPHIA, *heard from offstage***

God sends joy on earth.  
Under skies clear and fair  
Young and old come to hear,  
A new message of cheer,  
God has sent joy on earth.

**CHARLOTTE, *anxiously***

What if his eyes no longer open?...  
Hands like ice! And death now so near.  
*(sobbing)* Help me! Almighty God!  
Don't let him die! Werther! My love!  
Try to speak ... answer ...  
Or nod if you still hear me.  
*(holding him close)* I'll hold you in my arms,  
And death cannot come near you.  
Stay alive! Stay alive!

See, I am not afraid.

WERTHER

No, Charlotte, I'm dying.  
Yes ... but ... now listen well.  
*(weak, but calm and grave)*  
Below, beside the village church,  
Two sheltering lindens grow.  
And there I wish to lie,  
Resting ever at peace.

CHARLOTTE

No, no! Say no!

WERTHER

Should my last wish be denied,  
And if hallowed ground is not for one  
Who dies by his own hand,  
Hidden away, consigned to a dark, lonely valley,  
There you will find my haven,  
And holy men can hurry by with covered eyes ...

CHARLOTTE

O God! Have mercy!

WERTHER

But there one lady will come by  
And linger at the grave  
Of the outcast at rest.  
Blessed by her gentle tears that flow,  
Light emerges from shadow,  
The dead renew the earth,  
Where trees and flowers grow.  
*(he dies and the children's voices continue, mingled with loud laughter  
and clinking of glasses)*

CHARLOTTE

Ah! My love! Now rest in peace ...

The End

