Within the few scattered “markers” - (a word which Anne Brontë herself used to describe her occasional way-marking poems) - - within the undisputed facts punctuating her short life, there exists more than enough space for an author to conjure up a plausible account of her final six years, 1843-49, and of her relationship with Branwell, her wayward brother, without arousing too deep an animosity - I hope - amongst her biographers and admirers.

Foreword

Am I mad to fall in love with a woman dead for one hundred and fifty-six years? Whenever I read Agnes Grey and hear Anne’s clear voice whispering again, self-effacing and yet so assured, across all those missing years, it seems to speak directly to me. I admire her principles of goodness and kindness, of commonsense and modesty; she abhors materialism, artificiality, superficiality, philistinism, vanity and greed. When she praises the simple delights of the natural world, it is as if I walk next to her along a country lane bordered with blossom hedges. But as the incline of the path increases and she struggles for breath against her asthma, I cannot offer her my arm; neither can I ask her to do me the honour of approving my use of her as narrator in the following story. And I hope she would forgive me for inventing some tiny flaws of character for her to deprecate in herself with gentle, wry good humour. Would she think me arrogant? I have read both her novels many times and flatter myself to have acquired some feeling for her sentence patterns, rhythms of speech, idiom and diction. Might others think me arrogant? Perhaps one of her biographers - whose purpose is entirely different to mine.

Anne Brontë’s diary is lost. But this is only to mention that object; for what else is lost besides? The people and the events which she saw and experienced are lost; her eyes which saw, and her skin, nerves and mind which experienced them are lost; the thoughts and emotions they aroused; the words - on loan - which described them; her fingers and her quill which recorded the words…all lost; and only then does the image of the ink and the bound paper form in the mind - within a still wider context and matrix of air displaced and of light forever lost - before disappearing, as many of the objects in the scenes of life in which she walked, have disappeared. What remains? The ground, some of the buildings and objects in - and around - Haworth. Grim, tawdry, horridly commercialised, resentful, half-closed-down Haworth, but beyond which the eternal, cruelly beautiful and inspirational moors stretch - and in which the sensitive walker can still sense the presence of great restless spirits.

Anne is buried not in Haworth but in Scarborough where it was hoped the sea air might improve her health. The astonishing brain which witnessed, remembered, evaluated, ignored, forgot, regretted and celebrated those events, and which reshaped and re-presented them, withered in its bony case to atoms, is lost.

So what can be salvaged of that life? Of course, all of its actuality is lost and most of the facts which the diary recorded. The biographer can only depend on a very few of her letters and the few recorded comments of Anne’s contemporaries. Her novels cannot be relied on, even though Agnes Grey, main character of her first novel, is, as Anne was herself for a time, a governess.

But where does Helen Huntingdon, the abused and betrayed wife and Tenant Of Wildfell Hall come from? Anne never married and there is no evidence, my goodness, of a sexual relationship or affair. Yet the story of Helen and her debauched husband is so detailed, so compelling and so persuasively told that it is impossible to believe it is purely a work of imagination and / or of remote hearsay. Its immediacy and assured psychological insights suggest the very opposite. On what - on whose - experience does she draw? None of her sisters married before her death - and Charlotte only two years afterwards.

Like geographers and archeologists, biographers deal in facts. A *living and willing* subject of biography is only too keen to provide them, unless they have a malicious motive to deceive. A dead subject has no say, and the biographer might be accused of arrogance in assuming the right to build theories on a few facts and, indeed, the right to examine a private life at all. He is akin to a robber of grave goods, albeit a civilised one. It may be objected that a famous person is a legitimate subject for study, but does a published author relinquish all rights to privacy? Does a contemporary celebrity deserve to have their privacy invaded by a prurient press and readership? Is the criterion to be the time elapsed since the death of the person in whose remains we nose around, as we feel free to nose around in the grave of, say, a Saxon warrior?

Anne's life is a forest of shadows with very few shafts of light. If the biographer is entitled to rebuild some sort of life-framework from those few glimpses, may not the storyteller shine the light of imagination into those shadows, and paint a picture which harmonises with the scenes through which she definitely passed?

Suppose the diary is not lost, only hidden; it is in an attic…..under a floorboard……or in a cellar, in a drawer wrapped in coarse brown sacking. Follow me down…come on…..I open the drawer and take the thing up with shaking hand….and with the indescribable feeling of an explorer in the unique act of discovery, I open the book, read her easy script and am elated. Why? Because not only are there many references to him, but she has kept the letters of my actual subject, a person she especially loved and fretted over, her enigmatic brother….

BRANWELL

Thorp Green Hall, March 15th 1842

Branwell is dismissed again. His letter affirms it. His employers could not be persuaded to accept the excuses he has written to me, in the same measure as I cannot. Were he not my brother, I would even be inclined to despise him for his manifest weakness and tendency to blame every**b**ody save himself. I shudder to imagine him at his hearing, bleating like a lamb about the unreliability of the railway porter whom he left in charge of Luddenden Foot Halt while he betook himself, no doubt, to a tavern nearby in order to slake his thirst. Did Branwell honestly not foresee that the man he left in charge would be tempted to help himself to money paid in for tickets? How can such a clever person so delude himself - and be so simple as to be taken in by whatever assurances were given by the true villain? Now he is convicted not merely of incompetence and irresponsibility, serious faults enough, but is also suspected of dishonesty. Who on earth could be persuaded to employ him now, were references required? And his failings

will, no doubt, be blazoned throughout the country. Pity our poor father, crushed to the earth by a fresh disappointment. Branwell will be at home now, trying to persuade him - and Aunt Branwell - of his innocence, and Father will, as usual, forgive and almost believe him. None of them will have the courage to write to Charlotte and Emily in Brussels, therefore I must. What a disappointment Branwell is to all of us, in particular to Father, even more than his daughters must be, unmarriageable as we are and never, it seems, to be properly settled. But at least we are not a burden on his purse as now Branwell will be again; many a father would have shown such a Prodigal to the door. What new scheme will he now undertake? To paint more portraits - to stack uselessly beside his bed? It is a relief that I may confide a long-concealed truth to these silent pages; the truth that I find his work charmless and lifeless. There - it is out!

Or will he scribble more morose self-pitying verse? I hate to think that he will be conceited enough to send again to Mr Wordsworth for his support and advice, neither of which were forthcoming. It seems to be his curse to be intelligent enough to compose both with words *and* with paint, but not astute enough to perceive, by comparison with the Greats, how less a man he is; I perceive *this* truth about him as clearly as I perceive it about myself. And yet…in his heart he must glimpse and stifle that truth. Is it this which drives him to stupefy his wits with drink? Better he had been an honest toiling stupid labourer than a *near* genius!

I gaze through the window at the gathering blue gloom of twilight and my spirits fail. This cannot end well. Doctor Wheelhouse has warned Branwell about the tendency of spirits to bring on convulsions though he seems bent on destruction by his habits, and, if he persists, he will surely be our third dear sibling to follow our mother to the grave. We survivors are endowed with cleverness though not the leisure and opportunity - or self-discipline - to exploit it. Have we Brontës been singled out for special trials among mortals? Yet, I must not blame Fate as this means blaming God by another name. And it is surely wicked, as good Aunt Branwell says, to lament our tribulations when others suffer worse than we. It is tempting, however, to wonder why blessings befall certain families which appear less deserving of them, for example my employers, while misfortunes trouble others of better virtue.

Compared to Mr Robinson, a clergyman who rarely officiates, my father, though materially far less fortunate, is a better churchman - and person. And I venture to say that he and Aunt Branwell have done far better in inculcating good principles into their children than the Robinsons. And yet, now, the behaviour of Branwell suddenly flashes into my mind and near freezes my blood. What has happened to the good principles inculcated into him? Where is the cheerful boy who joined the Haworth Temperance Society?

Good principles have, in so far as I can judge, had little influence on the conduct of the Robinson girls. They are self-centered and frivolous, so much so, that I despair of replacing their shabby qualities with those I am supposed to nurture. They despise, in truth, the value of learning, for why, as they never tire of telling me, should they know the capital of Egypt, if they are to be well married to rich men who will not *give a fig* about such a fact either? Mrs Robinson bids me correct their waywardness and indolence and implies their want of discipline is my fault. And yet she sternly reminds me not to admonish them too severely, hinting that, should I do so, my

employment - “so important to a person in my situation in life” - might be terminated. What fury must I repress to hear such a woman - superior to me solely in wealth and superficial elegance - to remind me so cruelly and condescendingly of my poverty! - and of her power over me!
What example of reasonable conduct does she and her sullen husband provide? Why does it not occur to them that children will, like ducklings, follow wherever they may be led, to fresh or foul water? It is such an obvious truth that I can hardly constrain myself not to blurt it out - in particular when Mrs Robinson blames *me* for their unseemly or unruly behaviour!
Only in these moments, in peace and solitude, can I give vent to my anger - though never to a sympathetic ear, only to these cold, empty pages. I astonish myself that I can hold my tongue under such severe provocation from the girls, from the mother and even the father who generally pretends I am not present, and only throws me an occasional barely civil comment like a master would throw a bone to his dog. Branwell with his quicksilver tongue, and Emily with her temper could not resist the temptation of a retort. But I am the quiet, shy one and must forbear or lose my place. Father could not support two of us - three even, because I have little hope that Emily will have the patience or resolve to stick much longer at her studies in Brussels than she did as a pupil at Roe Head or at her teaching post in Law Hill.
Having glanced again over the foregoing, I am touched by guilt, having also glimpsed my own sullen face and eyes glittering with anger in the dark window, now transformed, as the night steals in beyond it, into a mirror. They glitter like blue flashes of lighting in darkness, sparked by malevolent thoughts and wishes harmful to the family. This demon in me I must restrain and cast out by prayer. Horrific acts I would never execute on their persons appear by devilish magic on the screen of my inner eye. Judgment is not for me, for I am not perfect, no more than the vengeful stone-throwers scattered by Our Saviour. I live in *this* world and must abide by, though I cannot admire, the conventions it holds dear. While I am ignored in my corner, Mrs Robinson is adored by her peers for her tall and noble bearing, her figure, her looks - still almost pretty for a woman of forty. If she is peevish, there must be reasons, and I venture to say that she only flirts to assure herself of her charm and ability to captivate; and, dare I say, because she is sometimes ignored and neglected by a man who prefers his horses and claret to her.
Now, having read Branwell’s letter once more, I am weary of the day and shall excuse myself from tea with a headache. I pin his letter to the diary page and shall use my poor powers to persuade Charlotte and Emily that Branwell has been made a scapegoat by the Manchester-Leeds Railway. But they will surely guess the truth. I will leave it to him to decide what more to tell them whenever they return from Brussels, after which I hope, we can make real our scheme of opening a school in the village. I pray it may be soon, for I am lonely here. What a comfort my diary is; how sad that, apart from my Bible, it is my only one. But I must learn to restrain my bitterness.

*

My Dear Anne,

I write to you in particular because you are the most patient with me. A terrible shadow hovers and whispers reproof in my ear; it is not my own conscience but the judgment of a world which has no love or care for me. I am dismissed for a few paltry shillings from my post, money which I offered to restore when called to account by the auditors. Woolven, the ticket collector who stood in for me when I went out on a matter of business - for no trains were scheduled for over two hours - keeps his job, when it was he in temporary charge. He neglected to keep an eye on the money-drawer and some scoundrel must have crept in to take the morning's takings - a pound and a few shillings. Can I be expected to stand over the dolt without relief?
Now I must explain to Aunt and Father how ill I have been treated. I beg of you Anne to have the goodness to write to Emily and Charlotte and persuade them that I am the most unfortunate of men. Please do not judge me too harshly. Can you say, hand on heart, that you have never been remiss in your duties? Have you forgotten that at the Inghams you once tied the little beast's leg to the table when he would not stay to do his lesson? My misfortune is to have been caught out in a small mistake when thousands daily escape censure - nay, even notice - for more.

Trusting in your judgment, mildness and kindness, I remain, dear sister,

Your grateful brother Patrick Branwell Brontë

Please do depict this event in the kindest light you can to Charlotte, for the frowning face on that shadowy figure pursuing me - is always hers!

*

September 10th 1842

I fear that Branwell's moral strength and any vestige of religious faith are being tested again. He writes to say he fears too that *my* faith is under strain following the recent death of our curate William Weightman, with whom he struck up a friendship firm enough to lift his low spirits after the anguish of his dismissal in the spring. He asks how God can allow the young to deteriorate and die so rapidly - "We are but ripening fruits on the tree of Life; yet we are plucked by an unexpected squall which does not discriminate; any or all might fall if some weakness in the stem is tried and found wanting; or torn from a branch where the blast comes strongest." He writes to say that he was sure I was erstwhile in love with William Weightman…..
Perhaps in the early days upon his arrival in Haworth I almost was; when I received his Valentine my heart sang until I discovered that Emily and Charlotte too had been so flattered. For he was a flatterer and a tease, as many a local girl can testify.
"Why does your God," Branwell continues "allow wicked men to live into old age while good men - like your Redeemer - (for William *was* a good man *and* His faithful servant) - are plucked so early before they can amount to anything? Why were our dear eldest sisters Maria and Elizabeth taken as little children?"

These are mysteries beyond our wit to solve, but Branwell interprets this as proof of the heartless injustice of God "..who is either a delusion or an alien Being beyond your prayers."
How thoughtless - thoughtless indeed - Branwell can be! Had I been *truly* in love with William, what pain such atheist remarks would have inflicted on a soul already lonely and bereft; whose only consolation would be that her lover now partakes of the unspeakable pleasures reserved in the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father.
Yet his thoughtlessness is not callousness; for Branwell always *means* well; so I must write to reassure him that I am less disturbed than he trembles to imagine. He was away from home in July when I was often in the company of William. His conduct was such that I learnt to persuade myself he was not, after all, serious about engaging my affections - at least in a manner *proper* for a clergyman.
To describe one event will be enough to persuade Branwell that my heart is and was not really ever at risk. If flattery can convince a young woman that she is loved, then she may, if the flatterer be not repulsive, convince herself she returns his affection; if however she sees the same charming words and wordless gazing applied to another - more pretty than herself - by the *same* flatterer, then the lovemaking is exposed as mere shallow flattery and crumbles into a foul dust which she will hasten in disgust to sweep away.
We were, one Sunday, on an outing with the Bible school children to Top Withins. There, as we sat at our picnic, William paid very marked attention to Lizzie, our new teacher from Keighley, a girl barely twenty and blessed with a sweet face swathed in blonde curls. If he thought thereby to trifle with my feelings and invite me into some kind of jealous competition for his regard, then he little understood the earnest of my character. My anger was not caused by jealousy but by abhorrence of his shallow regard for one - me - who has always been disposed to listen to him and give him counsel and support in his mission when required. For the taking all those pains, was such a dissembling foolishness justly to be my meed? I looked away from the chattering children and outwards from our hilltop upon the beautiful heather-clad moors, out upon the grazing sheep and thence to the overarching blue sky - all so patently the honest work of a loving God! - and silently despaired at such betrayal. Yet I too can dissemble! (Here at Thorp Green I must continuously dissemble in order to keep my position.) When William took my arm at a difficult place on our descent, I could have snatched it away in a pet, but I would not give his vanity such comfort. I smiled and accepted with a show of gratitude. I was not, I think, mistaken to detect a certain shadow of disappointment on his handsome face: disappointment that his deliberate neglect had *not* kindled jealousy, distress….and, in consequence, a greater intensity of passion in me.
Once home at the Parsonage, I ran to my room and sought relief in an outburst of tears. I soon realised those tears were *not* of love-lorn despair but of vexation. Then I was laughing through my misery for, unwittingly, Weightman had passed on a sign from his Maker, that marriage to such a man would be anathema! On my bed I thought then again of Lydia Robinson who, following the bad example of her flirtatious mother, trifles also with the feelings of her stupid suitors, young and old men of a frail and poor substance. What might be *her* meed for such cruel

devices? I decided then that the gulf between Lydia and William was not as wide as I might have imagined. It amuses me even to imagine an encounter* and a battle for affection between them. Branwell, as usual, was mixing sorrow and sympathy for others with pity for himself. I supposed William might have told him that he thought I loved him, perhaps one night at the Black Bull. If truth be told, he had lost a friend in William whose special attraction was not principally his generosity and warmth - genuine in most instances - but his liking for a tipple. William did not suspect that I had detected its sweet vapour once or twice on his breath. A quiet, shy woman am I - so shy that most have no inkling I have suffered the company of bad men, men like that reprehensible drunkard Mr Ingham** and the dyspeptic Mr Robinson - who is so stupid as not to understand that his indigestion would relent if he abstained from his brandy and water! And, of course, Branwell has too often smelled strongly of spirits. William did not know either that a parishioner had whispered in my ear of his younger brother's love for his tankard. This had already given me pause for thought even before our picnic.

That all said, I shall end by confiding to these silent pages that *had* William combined his good looks, wit and charm with the sincere and steady qualities of the ageing Reverend La Trobe, who attended and counselled me in my gloom and despair at Roe Head***, then the loss of such a man would have affected me quite differently. Sorely indeed. For as Miss Austen causes her lovely Elizabeth to say - and I shall take the liberty of altering her speech just a little - there were in the two men (Darcy and Wickham) just enough qualities to make out of them one good one. No. A wonderful man****. I pray now, as the house falls silent and Mr Robinson ceases to bark out his orders, that I may yet, before I grow too old, be fortunate enough, by the grace of God, to encounter such a man; that he will look up, smile at me and peer beyond my strange little countenance to perceive and love my true spirit. Amen.

* Rosalie (Lydia) leads the insincere Reverend Hatfield up the garden path in Agnes Grey.

** The Master of Blake Hall, Anne's first placement; Ingham was a drunken tyrant by all accounts.

*** Where Anne was at school. Here at the age of seventeen, she suffered a bout of depression, due to religious doubt, combined with illness - "gastric fever" and asthma.

****A combination of the two is thought to be the fictional character Mr Weston who marries Agnes Grey at the end of Anne's first novel.

<u>October 24th 1842</u>

My dearest Anne,

Charlotte has written from Brussels with shocking news - (please do not be alarmed about Emily - she is quite well.) No. That dear lively spirited Martha Taylor, sister of Charlotte's particular friend, Mary, was carried off a fortnight ago by a sudden and inexplicable illness in Brussels. Almost from the start of the month, she suffered agonies. Charlotte did not mention in her letter home to us that she had written to you of the sad affair, so I have taken it upon myself to do so. If you had ever met little Martha, as I frequently did in Bradford, you would have loved her for her

unquenchable gaiety. Unquenchable? She has been snuffed out as easily as this candle will be, for I am too tired and low in spirits to complete this now.

October 25th

Anne, I can hardly bring myself to tell you that the new, bright morning brings even worse news. Prepare yourself. Our beloved Aunt Branwell has not been very well and does not improve. In fact, the contrary. Her terrific groans kept me and the whole house awake. This morning, she finally agreed to be seen by the doctor for no traditional purges have worked. Father consulted Graham's Modern Domestic Medicine and suspects a blockage in the abdomen. When the doctor came he could only administer more syrup of figs but her pain is worse, so that she is nauseous and quite unable to eat. To look long on a face once so bonny and ruddy, now so pale and drawn is beyond my endurance. Father sits trembling in his chair below in prayer, while poor old crippled Tabby holds her hand in the room above.

2 p.m.

Doctor Wheelhouse has been again and I can see in his eyes the same shadow of helplessness with which he stared at poor Weightman. Anne, please do consider asking your Mrs Robinson for leave to return.

7 p.m.

Aunt is worse. I admit, I have been to the Black Bull for I could not bear her screams. At present, she sleeps from sheer exhaustion. It has been pitiable to hear a woman of such strong faith cry out, not in prayer, not for the peace of heaven, but to beg for release and oblivion. When I must face the Demon, I know now what medicine will be mine to deaden the pain! Father is speechless. This suffering cannot surely be of long duration. I am sending to Charlotte and Emily. I need to share these agonies with someone. Do hurry home Anne.

Your loving brother Patrick Branwell Brontë

October 28th

Branwell's letter, come at midday, was shocking to me; though scarcely less shocking than the behaviour of Mrs Robinson, for, on applying straightway for leave to return home, I was refused. Her husband has been in a fury all morning because one of his horses is lame and the groom has suffered much abuse; she too has not escaped his black looks and I know that her refusal is shamefully meant to pass on and inflict on *me* the indignation she feels.

"Tis only an aunt," said she carelessly, and I had to summon up all my self-restraint to explain to her, without a hint of reproach, that Aunt Branwell has been like a mother all my life.

"But you are required in the schoolroom, Miss Brontë, and there is no occasion to hurry away, for you have described to me symptoms no more serious than those of a stomach ache. This will surely pass."

At these last few words she smiled, as if pleased with her wit. How I loathed her then, and, as I sit here in frustration, loathe her now all the more. Finally, I had no choice but to let her see Branwell's letter and at last she relented and gave me leave to go the day *after* tomorrow. I pray fervently that Branwell, as is usual with his feverish, excited temper, exaggerates the matter. Aunt has suffered all her life in this way and has had recourse to laxatives. I expect I shall go home hear myself cheerily admonished by her for getting into such a panic. Now I must compose myself for the agonised silence of the dinner table.

At last I can shut myself away in grateful and peaceful solitude. Dinner was a trial for my nerves. Mr Robinson sent for and humiliated Cook for overcooking the mutton.
"It is no fit to be eaten!" he roared, and I thought his dingy eyes would start from his ugly face, ruddier than I have ever seen it. "And for pity's sake, bring me soda water."
The meat was perfectly edible but he insisted on everyone's plate being removed and cold beef being served, which was far less palatable. His indigestion added to his former displeasure but he would still insist on his wine. Mrs Robinson and the children were too downcast to speak, but I could tell from his wife's face that she hated him at that moment. When I witness a family scene like this I wonder whether there are many happy marriages. Here they live in luxury and gloom. The cheer of their poor tenants puts them to shame. Enough. I have to get through one more drear and anxious morrow and will now try to sleep.

<u>November 10th</u>
I read my last entry - for, in the flurry of departure, I left my diary here - and smart with shame over my false hopes. I returned home to find the house in stunned mourning. After almost twenty days in severe pain, it finally pleased the Almighty to take my beloved Aunt home. Our maid Tabby quietly contradicted Branwell, telling me that she *had* prayed and had neither doubted her salvation nor abandoned her faith; that she had prayed to God for forgiveness and accepted her pain as the meed of "Adam's folly."
"Her agony seemed to ease whenever she prayed, Miss Anne." These words, told to me in a whisper by Tabby as we stood over the coffin were as great a comfort to me, as Branwell's loud and morbid comments were a bane. Why must my brother always selfishly - almost proudly - identify some proof of his irreligious theories in the suffering of Mankind, even in the instance of a dear relative? As if suffering can be a proof of the cruelty of God! Branwell knows full well the verse "Suffer little children to come to me." What are twenty days of suffering to an Eternity of bliss? What agonies can *we* suffer, compared to Our Saviour's on Calvary? I have read again his letter. I was to go home to share *his* agonies, not to be a comfort to a dying Aunt. Oh, Branwell, you are a selfish being! I am ashamed of you. Charlotte could scarce bring herself to speak to you because you had been drinking - and at such a time. Her face told me she was as shocked as I to see how much you are altered in appearance since February. You should be a comfort to Father now and not vice-versa. Yet who is there now, without our Aunt, to speak to you sternly? As the eldest, Charlotte should, but is too proud; Emily is too distant and within herself; Father is

too indulgent with his favourite. And I am too young and unworldly. Of which of us would you take notice anyway, with your mockery and jests? I would pray to God to speak to you, but your ears are tight shut. Your friends - friends! - count not one amongst them a *true* friend, chosen are they are for their dissolute ways; a friend would be willing to counsel you to draw back from the abyss to which drink is leading you. Tabby told me you are begging Father for sovereigns to supply your needs, and that your conduct is fast becoming the chief subject of gossip in the village. This cannot be tolerated and you must be got away from Haworth, for the sake of everyone, but principally your own; away from its *pall of death and your cronies. At twenty-five you are still young enough to make a useful, respectable man; a steady income and a new situation would produce assured and calm surroundings in which your literary ambitions might yet be realised, for I sense a frustrated hope in *that* direction lies at the heart of your self-contempt. I shall pray for guidance.

*Sickness was endemic to Haworth due to the hilltop position of the graveyard which contaminated the water flowing into the streets below. The Rev Brontë engaged a London engineer who immediately pointed this out. Grave slabs were raised and trees planted to absorb the corruption

Before dinner, Mr Robinson set Edmund several sums to do and he failed. His stern comments to me at table about the ignorance of the boy were meant to warn me, and him, of a change. At eleven, he was *of an age where many boys were sent to school. Should he persist in his ignorance, a place would be sought away in York where a stricter regime* - and here he paused to fix me with a withering stare - *might provide redress.* There ensued a numb silence in which little Edmund stole anxious glances at me and his mother, from whom smiles of comfort were ostentatiously withheld.

I could eat little more and would have excused myself early from the table, were it not for Mr Robinson's strict rule against this.

As I made my way back up the dark backstairs I could at last mutter aloud my resentment; had I not been engaged to instruct the girls, the care of the boy being an afterthought? How often had little Edmund resented my firmness when I had insisted on him repeating a shabby piece of work, a procedure prevented by his own mother whenever he could appeal to her? How often had he reminded me that he wanted to do little else, like his own father, but ride to hounds and shoot partridge and pheasant? Shameful. Why should I be blamed, indeed almost threatened, when the best solution would be, as was the case with many of the family's neighbours, to engage the services of a tutor?

Here I came to a halt on the stair, as if transfixed. How mysterious are the ways of The Almighty! I almost fell to my knees in gratitude to Him for answering my prayers in such a strange way, and so promptly!

The next day, after breakfast, I approached Mrs Robinson and in my most shy, disarming manner craved an interview with her and her husband - *on a most important matter to me.* Having lain awake long into the night in thought, I felt well prepared to state my case. I was shown into their drawing room and found Mrs Robinson at her embroidery and Mr Robinson bolt upright in his chair, legs apart, affording room for his paunch. I began with a tremor in my voice and even a tear close to my eye which both suited my purpose well.

"It troubles me a great deal that Edmund makes little progress in certain branches of learning. Mary and Bessy - (*Lydia, at near eighteen, was virtually beyond my supervision*) - have responded…better…since the summer. I trust you would agree."

Mr Robinson sat forward, took out his pocket watch and blew a long breath down his nose. His wife nodded and encouraged me to go on.

"Edmund, I feel, is now almost too old to accept the authority of a governess. He is a spirited, enthusiastic boy who will make a fine man…."

(In reality, he was a dunce and destined to make a fine brute.)

"….though a guiding and firm hand, and a mind he can respect, are becoming in my view - as I sense it coincides with yours, Sir - of prime importance."

"So, Miss Brontë, you would advise me to send him to school?"

"No, Sir."

"No?"

"Decidedly not. For he would miss the horses and the woods where he can roam and learn lessons just as valuable as those he might at a desk in a schoolroom. And I well know that schools can be cruel, lonely places, and Edmund, being a sensitive boy may suffer."

At this, Robinson started forward to look me more intently in the eye.

"Then you would have the boy become a milksop, Miss Brontë!"

His wife held up her hand.

"Edmund, for goodness sake! That he is decidedly not. You have seen him in rough and tumble with the stable boys and the boys on the farm. Miss Brontë makes a good point. Edmund is not, I think, marked out for a university career, for he has not the patience to stick at things and would rather have a whip than a book to hand. I would not have him unhappily tied to a desk for hours at a time."

Her husband looked at his watch again and then miserably over his shoulder to stare at the rain, before asking what was then to be done. I took this as my cue.

"It would be my advice to advertise for a tutor to begin work in the new year. Now, if you would excuse me, I am needed in the schoolroom to correct the children's essay work."

I walked along the corridor with a lighter step, having planted my seed. I managed to settle my charges quietly to their tasks and was then at leisure to imagine in what direction the thoughts of the parents might now be tending. As the morning wore on, even the sun, suddenly breaking free of clouds and slanting a beam onto the carpet, seemed to bless my project. At luncheon, Mr Robinson was in unusually affable spirits and was even attentive to me, urging me to take more potatoes. I felt encouraged to praise the girls and Edmund for their improved spelling and work

at the pianoforte (but, in truth, the earlier wet weather had dulled their inclination to escape to the stables and the woods). At table we were easy and relaxed, almost gay. Mr Robinson drank only soda water and his dyspepsia seemed not to trouble him. At length, he put down his knife and fork and bade Edmund to leave the dining room, commissioning him to fetch his newspaper.
"I have excused Edmund, Miss Brontë, because I wish to ask you if you could recommend a suitable person to be his tutor. We have decided to accept your advice which we found very persuasive."
"I thank you Sir! - and Madam - I shall make prompt enquiries, beginning with my sisters. All have been engaged in the care of the young, and may have heard of an excellent young man, a man not too bookish who would encourage Edmund in his other pursuits as reward for good work at his desk."
"Such a person would be ideal," he replied "for I know that Edmund is not blessed with great determination and is not as quick in perception as his sisters - particularly our eldest, Lydia - but I *will* have him numerate enough to do accounts, and rational enough, as my heir, to understand the running and economy of the estate and its farms; in addition, of course, he must be well versed in the principles of religion to lead a moral, Christian life…..Ah, Edmund, come here, m'boy. It is decided. You shall not go to school."
At this, the boy's rosy round face beamed like a sun as he handed his father the newspaper.
"You shall not, *as long as* you are a good and obedient boy with Miss Brontë, while she looks for a tutor for you - a gentleman whom you can respect."
Young Edmund turned to smile at me, full knowing, it seemed, that it was I who had persuaded his parents not to send him away.
The first hurdle cleared, the second and third though now seemed even more formidable, for not only had Branwell to be convinced, after his first failure in Cumberland, to accept a second post as tutor, but he had also to be prevailed on to amend his dissolute habits so thoroughly that a radical improvement in his health and appearance could be effected before January. The overcoming of such obstacles I doubted almost as much as I feared a request for references; though I prayed that it would not occur to my employer to ask, he being a man lacking in thoroughness and consistency, in truth almost as indolent as his son. My other comfort was that Cumberland was so far off that Branwell's shortcomings there would have no resonance in York.
A third, more distant, hurdle seemed - at least it seemed *then* - much easier to clear, to wit, the *permanent* restraining of Branwell's weaknesses while in a position of responsibility; but I could put my mind at rest on that count, reasoning that my watchful and guiding presence, in harness with his own improving conscience and maturity, and not least a separation from bad influences, would act as extra bridles on his impulsive nature.
But where to begin? After much thought, it seemed most sensible to write first to Father to enlist his support, for I feared that my brother would dismiss out of hand the suggestions of his little sister, if they seemed to come to him from her direct. Accordingly, I sat down to write of the idea to Father, instancing what methods of persuasion I thought it best to employ, and within five days I had his reply.

My dear Anne,

I thank you most heartily for thinking of Branwell. You are, as always, the kindest and most thoughtful of my daughters. Following your clever advice, I put it to him that you had mentioned, as an afterthought in a letter to me, that a position as tutor to the youngest child would most likely be advertised from Thorp Green. I urged him to apply but, being low again in spirits, he was at first adamant that he would not waste his talents again on "a stupid boy". Gradually, however, by dint of repetition and what your dear late lamented Aunt would have called gnawing him, I have brought him round at least to consider it. For, as you say, what else is there for him to do? He has now, albeit reluctantly, agreed to write to you for more particulars. If you could, meantime, represent to the Robinsons all of his many strengths and none of his weaknesses, I pray that the Good Lord will bless the enterprise and help me to induce and sustain an improvement in Branwell's conduct; for, as you suggest, there needs to be much undoing of damage if he is to appear before the family as his former self next January. To this end, I shall enlist, as you also suggested, the support of Charlotte and Emily when I write to them in Brussels, urging them to mention the good sense of the project in their own particular correspondence with him. I have also sent word by Tabby to his particular friend, John Brown, to be a brake on his impulses. By such a concerted attack, I am sure he can be prevailed upon to reform,

Your appreciative and ever-loving Father ,

Patrick Brontë

That evening, I planned my next moves and even wrote down how my speech should unfold - and what to reply to the Robinsons' questions and comments, so far as my imagination could conceive of them. I slipped the paper under my pillow and slept well. After breakfast with the children, I went to their mother and was secretly pleased that her husband had gone out early, for the interrogation by one parent would be less an ordeal.

"Mrs Robinson, my sister Charlotte has written to me and recommended a person whom I have quite inexplicably overlooked. He has been lately in Bradford seeking commissions to paint the portraits of respectable families, with some success. He is well versed in mathematics, French and German, is an excellent shot and horseman and loves the moors. He is also a poet, though as yet unpublished; an energetic young man of twenty-five, he is of an impeccable character and loves children -"

"Goodness me! Is he a saint? Whom can you mean?"

"A saint he is not, Madam…I mean my brother, Patrick Branwell Brontë. My sister informs me he is now keen to try his hand in a respectable family as a tutor."

"But is your sister not from home - in Brussels?"

“Y-yes,” I hastened to rejoin “but……in consequence of them being the two eldest…they are very close and correspond regularly”
“Your eldest sister died in childhood, did you not once say?”
“Two, Madame. My two eldest. Of consumption. When I was but five years old and they eleven.”
At this, my Mistress looked away through the window at the distant woods. The unexplained death of her baby Georgiana in March the previous year, 1841, had left the poor woman wretched. I decided therefore not to give further explanation of the deaths of our poor Maria and Elizabeth. Although I had judged her rather selfish and heartless in feeling where others were concerned, in matters related to her own sphere, Mrs Robinson was sentimental, verging on self-pitying. In that respect, she and Branwell would harmonise.
Now she sighed, put out her hand for me to take and I joined her at the window.
“We seem, Miss Brontë, to be never too far away from the reach of that Dark Angel…”
I did not wish, by a show of sentiment, to encourage her to indulge in any tearful display which I had witnessed on occasion, even though my own heart still struggled to contain the anguish of three recent deaths of dear people known to me. I therefore stood awkwardly at her side, wishing she would release my hand, conscious of her gazing down sadly on my head, dwarfed by her, and feeling therefore almost like a child of hers myself.
“And yet…and yet, for you Miss Brontë, perhaps the *frequency* of visits of that, that… *monster*, might somehow draw his sting, in that you become inured to the pain he inflicts, while I…while I had only known him to be a *kind* angel…bringing only relief to an elderly and suffering relation, as he did to your aunt…..until he crept into the nursery and snatched my beloved G-g-georgiana..”
She took a deep breath and trembled while I stood rigid in indignation. How dare she belittle my grief? I forced myself to reply, however, with sentiments I could barely bring myself to share with such a woman.
“One grief can never be overtaken and extinguished by another, Madam. Our consolation must be that those we lose are gained by God - and are the happier for it.”
I dared to look up at here and found her smiling through her tears. Yet there was an unbearable smugness in her expression, as if, beyond grief, she were more concerned to have gained, by her display of feeling, my admiration of her emotional depth. She let go my hand and sat down gracefully in an armchair, leaving me standing.
“Tell me, Miss Brontë, what kind of young man is your brother? You say he is a poet? I too have dabbled in that fine art…perhaps he could give his opinion of my poor efforts and show me his own verse. Mr Robinson quite detests poetry, I am sorry to say.”
Mendacious words would not be held back - and I must confess to feeling a little guilty afterwards.
“It is difficult for a young poet to achieve recognition today, when the novel is so fashionable. Branwell has written to Mr Wordsworth himself…….and received encouragement.”
“Indeed! There is not a poet I admire more than he.”

She hesitated, as if wondering how to cross most naturally to the subject she was truly interested in.

"And what kind of young man is he, besides, your brother? You say he rides and hunts…is he then of athletic build? Is he tall? Is he……thought handsome?"

She instantly flushed to see my reaction to this latter question, but I had prepared my speech nonetheless.

"He is not held to be especially handsome, though his countenance is pleasing and friendly. He is blessed with reddish golden hair and large, animated eyes which mitigate the effects of other rather common features. He is only somewhat taller than I am though his personality gives him presence and makes up for a lack of stature. His conversation is witty and charming…..I am sure his joviality will appeal much more to Edmund than…than…."

My pride would not allow my dissembling self to finish the sentence.

"Miss Brontë. You should not hold yourself responsible for Edmund's failure to shine. He responds better to men."

I had observed her closely while I described Branwell and saw with satisfaction that she smiled to herself in conjuring up from my words an image of him which she could like.

"I think Edmund…will like him very well too," she said in conclusion as she looked significantly at her watch. It was time for me to be about my business.

I returned to the schoolroom and settled my boisterous pupils to work, before mentally revisiting my discourse with their mother. Her interest in Branwell was encouraging. Observing her slyly at parties, I had studied her ability to engage the interest of her male friends by her charm and vivacity, and had seen how it delighted her to be the object of their attention. During those gatherings, while Mr Robinson, ever seated, with glass ever to hand, conversed with some worthy but elderly and dull gentleman, it had more than once crossed my mind how ill-suited the spouses were. I do not wish here to denigrate too unkindly my Master - for he *could* be in a good temper on fine, sunny days when not troubled by his indigestion and not depressed by previous over-indulgence - and he was usually kind to his children and servants - but, for the life of me, I could not comprehend, as I am sure many of their friends and relatives could not, what Mrs Robinson found to love in Mr Robinson. A portrait of him, gun and pheasant in hand, at his coming of age, hung in the library; he had been slender and handsome enough then. But now, at forty, grown dull of eye, ruddy in cheek and fleshy of nose, lips and cheeks, with an extra chin to rest on his collar to match the paunch which rested on his lap, he could surely not engage as easily as he once had the affections of such a brilliant woman who had clearly taken great pains to preserve her attractions. Indeed - and I cannot deny it shames me to record the thought - it filled me with revulsion whenever I entertained the notion of them in moments of intimacy - and I always instantly banished such vile conjectures. How Lydia Robinson could bear to be touched by her spouse astonished me, as his aura too, on some occasions when I had been close to him, had been less than fragrant. My reverie was interrupted by a slight cough at the door, and I looked up to see there one of those very objects of my thoughts. My Mistress wished to ask another question about a *certain person.*

“I omitted to enquire Miss Brontë,” whispered she, beckoning me out into the corridor “as to your brother’s *character and religious disposition* - for Mr Robinson charged me especially to make such enquiry before he rode off to York this morning. He would have insisted on a reference…..but I persuaded him that your sisterly recommendation would suffice.”
This so startled me that I must have flushed as I struggled to find a form of words neither injurious to Branwell’s prospects nor too damaging to the truth. A hint of alarm was creeping into my Mistress’s face.
“Come, Miss Brontë, you *are* his sister and must know him better even than he himself!”
“I was just taken by surprise, Madam, for I assumed you were come to ask about the children. ……Branwell…..is a dear and loving brother - and yet he can be a tease, as brothers are wont to be of sisters” - so saying, I turned to admonish young Edmund who was just then, propitiously, snatching a piece of Bessy’s handwriting, making her squeal.
“And is he of an even temper? ……Edmund! - *desist*! …… Is he patient and kind?”
“He is normally in good spirits, Madam, though bad weather which prevents his outings onto the moors can provoke a mood…..”
“Yes, yes….but you see how impulsive and vexatious Edmund can be! Does Mr Brontë enforce discipline with self-restraint……and is he punctual and reliable?”
“I have never personally found him to be otherwise…in any of those aspects.”
“Of temperate habits?”
“He has long been a member of the Haworth Temperance Society.”
(*Indeed, he was still on the rolls of that body*.)
“A churchgoer of course?”
“Mostly when he is in Haworth he attends. I cannot speak for his times in Bradford and Halifax though I have no reason to suspect otherwise. He and Father will speak for hours on matters of Theology”……(*Father trying in vain to convince him of his atheistic errors.)*
My Mistress smiled and told me she was satisfied. She would speak to her husband directly on his return from his ride.
At last, in the afternoon, I was charged by the Master to write to Branwell to invite him to apply for the post. But it weighed heavily on my conscience that I had misled Mrs Robinson, making me all the more determined to bring about the reformation of his character to the one I had reported - for it was not only *his* reputation - and *his* employment - which would be at stake, should he prove to be contrary of the glowing testimonial I had given.

That evening, when my charges had finally left my care and I could be thankfully alone, I imagined her with Branwell, he declaiming one of his poems and she in rapt attention; or both light-heartedly engaged in a song, he playing pianoforte, she singing in her mellifluous alto, and a certainty filled me that both would be pleased with one another. He would at last meet a person with taste, even if she was rather shallow - but less shallow than those would-be artists and poets amongst his acquaintances in Halifax with whom he shared a liking for taverns. Here, there were no such distractions, and under steady influences and amidst fairly respectable people, the

permanent improvement in a young man who had gone a little astray would, I prayed, be achieved. My chief concern was the unpredictable temper of Mr Robinson which might provoke a hasty reaction in Branwell. My only other worry was the coquettish tendency of Miss Lydia, who at eighteen was wont to experiment to see what effect her charms - and she had them in abundance - would have on the men of her acquaintance.

November 30th

My dear Anne,

I must now give up hope that my new connection - I mean the brother of my sculptor friend Leyland - will lead to the publication of my poems; the brother was among the company in the inn to whom I lately read my work, and he is a printer and bookseller; I have heard nothing from him and must conclude he sees either no merit in them - or not enough to turn a profit. Or was drunker than I thought. Or more sober?
I find myself in consequence much depressed as well as financially embarrassed for Aunt Branwell has left me not one farthing, favouring only her nieces with legacies. Father pities me of course, and he reasons with me that she meant me no ill, confident of my ability to make my own way on the rocky road we must travel. And yet she saw how impecunious I was after my dismissal from Luddendon Foot, but this did not persuade her to change her will in my favour. I have but her old Japan dressing-box for consolation!
My efforts to get new employment on the Leeds railway have come to naught. So, it appears that I must apply after all, as you have urged, to the Robinsons to be their boy's tutor, a prospect which fills me with little pleasure, only the thought that I will, at least, have a source of income. You have written that the children and mother are essentially good creatures - though - as most wealthy people are - somewhat overindulged. If the father is as cold and aloof as you say, then it would not be unwelcome to me that I avoid him, especially if his dyspepsia lends sharpness to his tongue. Besides, I often clashed with the father of my former charge in Cumberland as to the proper means of bringing his son out of a slough of ignorance - in which, I fear, he is forever condemned to founder. Perhaps you could arrange that I report to the mother at Thorp in whatever matter relates to young Edmund.
My goodness, Anne! I have read again your commendations of me to the mother and am almost terrified now that I must come up to them. I shall have to address my letter of application in my steadiest hand! Do not worry that I shall improve, for in the absence of Aunt, Father has taken over her gnawing of me, begging me to reform for her memory's sake, for she never gave up her hope I would make something in the world. Accordingly, I have determined that I shall reduce my visits to the Black Bull and be out of home more in the fresh air while this unseasonably mild weather persists.
You make Thorp Green sound almost a better Eden than in Genesis! And I must concede, upon longer reflection, that the prospect of fresh surroundings and gay company does begin to attract

me. I am confident that some improvement in my habits and in my situation will provide me with the time and space in which to finish my novel And The Weary Are At Rest. Perhaps the close observation of such fine folk will engender new lines and traits to add to my canvas.
Further reflection causes me to admit that I am ashamed of myself to have been such an ingrate, while you have striven so hard - more like a mother than a sister - for my sake.
Such loyalty, dear Anne, I shall now endeavour to repay,

Your everloving brother,

Patrick Branwell Brontë

December At Home

We spent a cheerful Christmas in spite of our recent sad loss. Father's spirits rose on seeing me returned from Thorp, and Charlotte and Emily returned from Brussels. It was never said in Branwell's presence, though we mentioned it amongst ourselves, that he was much improved in humour and appearance since he foreswore his drinking bouts at the Black Bull. Charlotte in particular was quick to praise me for the pains I had taken in procuring the position as tutor for him, and, in consequence, the improvement in his health. Her approval was reward enough, and it gratified me further to see her speaking softly and affably to him again after the coldness she showed him in the autumn. They had become again the good friends I used to admire sitting with heads together, dreaming into being their chronicles of Angria. And I was delighted to sit with Emily- for once in better spirits too - one afternoon and add a little to our tales of Gondal. Whether any of our stories merited publication was another matter.

Of course, we sorely missed the cheerful presence of Aunt Branwell by the fire roasting chestnuts for us. We left her chair empty. Emily cheered Father even more by announcing her decision not to return to Brussels. Although Charlotte advised her to reconsider, Emily was quite adamant that her French was now improved enough to be of a standard adequate to the teaching of it to *mere children*. Alas, her dislike of children surpassed even mine and I could not think that our school project would be a success.

Emily confided in me that Charlotte had a secret motive for returning to Belgium; that she had conceived a liking for her Professor Héger beyond what was usual in a pupil for a teacher. This quite shocked me - especially as the man had a wife. I could only think that Emily was confusing fantasy and reality, as was her wont. For me, the land of Gondal was then only a pleasant distraction but it still quite fascinated Emily. Indeed, after Christmas, she spent most of her time shut up in her bedroom absorbed in her papers. When I ventured to ask her if she had a new theme, she told me mysteriously - and seeming not a little to resent the question - that it would be a shocking novel. This I took as a veiled rebuke, as if to say that my collaboration with her on Gondal was no longer of true significance to her. No matter. I too was forming a project of my own based on my *own* experiences. It would not be in the least romantic - how could it be!? - but would be a critique of the values of those who judge themselves superior to others purely on the

grounds of wealth or breeding; poorer in purse those others are, of course, though frequently richer in spirit, in knowledge and in wisdom than those who despise them.

Which one of us will, I wonder, ever achieve renown as a writer? Will it be Branwell, the cleverest of us all? The day after tomorrow we leave together for Thorp. May God give His blessing to our enterprise!

A New Beginning At Thorp Green

We left the highway, crossed the stream, and, with the great park on our left, took a turn into the drive. Branwell sighed and said that he thought he would regret the moors in the flatness of the country in which the hall was situated. We rounded the pine-clad bend and, at last, the dwelling and its impressive portico came into view.

"My word! A very impressive pile," exclaimed Branwell. "and how unusual and attractive the yellow and pink brick!"

The cart stopped and he jumped down over the side to proffer the promised florin to the driver. Our trunks having been carried in, we met the family in the hall and were welcomed with warmth. Mr Robinson even made a little speech which Branwell, taking and shaking the man's hand with - I thought - an excess of familiarity, clearly appreciated. He then took in turn the hand of each girl and of Edmund before bowing to Mrs Robinson who was clearly flattered by the reverence. The family seemed pleased with him and he, in turn, seemed pleased with them. We were invited to take tea and cakes in the sitting room. Soon, Branwell was beguiling them with his genial conversation.

"Now, let me see….you, young lady, are Lydia."

Bessie laughed and pointed to her elder sister who had bedecked her hair with pink ribbons which suited beautifully her green satin dress. She shook her curls and smiled very sweetly at him and I could tell he was flattered.

"Ah!" said he, looking at Mary "then you must be Bessie. No?"

Mrs Robinson, as well as the girls, thought the game delightful. Mr Robinson affected to laugh which did not conceal very well a little impatience. Little Edmund had not the wit to perceive that it was a teasing game and whispered something into his mother's ear which led her to reassure him that his tutor was *not* a forgetful man. She stroked his hair and Branwell smiled winningly at him, though the smile was not returned.

Later, I sat with Branwell in my private sitting room,

"The boy seems a dunce. What can be made of him?"

"I would not worry. As long as he can be brought to grasp basic ideas and arithmetic, the parents will be pleased enough. Is it not often the case that intellect declines steadily between the eldest and the youngest?"

He turned to me and smiled. "You should not so denigrate yourself, dear sister. You are quite as clever as Charlotte - and almost as clever as me."

I slapped him playfully on the wrist and he turned back to look out of the window at the dwindling afternoon light.
“Miss Robinson is certainly a very lively and pretty girl. Even prettier than you gave me to believe. Are her affections engaged?”
I searched his face for a motive in the question. “There are many suitors amongst the men hereabouts. She is yet a child in a grown body and it amuses her to exploit her charms and, by flirting, to observe their effect. Her behaviour shows a want of propriety and I have cautioned her - though she is officially no longer under my supervision. Her mother seems to see no wrong in flirting.”
Branwell screwed up his eyes behind his spectacles and tugged his ear in thought.
“But Anne, it is for the *mother* to insist that the daughter behave with decorum - and the father is a clergyman after all.”
“Mr Robinson takes less interest in the conduct of his offspring than he should. And Lydia, I’m afraid, follows the example of her mother who, as you have just observed, loves nothing better than to startle with her great brown cow eyes and to see their effect. I was pleased to see that you held your admiration in check.”
“Come and see the sunset.”
I rose to join him at the window, taking his hand. The sky was astonishing; the chalky east stood accused of drabness by the fiery coals of black cloud on the opposite horizon. Through the trees, I pointed out the gilded roofs of the Monks House where he was to sleep and take his meals. There were bedrooms enough in the Hall but none had been offered to Branwell, and in this I saw the hand of Mr Robinson who would have, no doubt, reservations permitting the proximity of a handsome, charming young man - but a staircase or a corridor away - to the rooms of his daughters. I could not censure this precaution.
“Tell me again the ages of the….children,” he said.
“Lydia will be eighteen in the summer; Bessie is already over fifteen and a half, and Mary will be fifteen in March. Edmund is eleven.”
“Bessie seems quite the hoyden.”
“Yes. She is ever impatient to get out to the stables to her horse and likes nothing better than the company of the grooms. She will, I fear, require a deal of finishing - quite beyond my powers - before she is fit to appear in society. Mary, as you see, is timid and plain. Sometimes she is truculent but usually the most obedient.”
“She will no doubt make some curate happy with her thousand pounds or so. I was surprised to find Mr Robinson quite….affable, considering the warning you gave me. Though I could detect he was making an effort to subdue his impatience. He does not seem to enjoy company.”
“His mood varies according to the state of his digestion and the amount of wine he has inside him. There seems to be an ideal level to render him almost agreeable, but a little more or less destroys the illusion.”
He laughed and told me to take care that I did not cut the inside of my cheek with my tongue.

“Well,” I replied “at last I have someone nearby to whom I can utter my thoughts aloud rather than consign them to a diary. But let me counsel you to save your barbs for me entirely - in this room.”
“But would Robinson understand my little ironies? He seems a dull creature.”
“He is not as clever as he thinks - but not as dull as he looks. And his wife is sharp enough, so you must curb your natural ebullience in their company.”
“You mean to improve my character, little sister!”
I did not answer him and retreated to my trunk to begin unpacking. As the light was fading, I lit a lantern and bade him to follow me across the lawn to his quarters.

Mr Sewell, the steward, and his wife were excellent people. They received Branwell into their lodge with great hospitality, setting out fresh baked bread, hot beef and home-brewed ale, which he pronounced excellent. Mrs Sewell was quite a tall, talkative, friendly woman, and whose sharp, perceptive eyes reminded me of Aunt Branwell’s. Branwell was soon engaged in conversation with her more reserved husband about what birds there were to shoot and where the best hides were.
“There’s dacent coverts in yonder woods, Mister Branwell, and Maister sells favours odd Saturdays to locals and sich days you would be allowed as the grooms to bag yoursen a few birds - as long as they end up in Mrs Cooper’s kitchen..well….maybe the odd un might fly in here to Missus for hanging,” he added with a wink. I could tell Branwell was delighted with his hosts and they with him. With a stern, sisterly look at his tankard - which he acknowledged with a wry smile - I took my leave and wished them all a good night.

Work Begins
And so, the next morning, at nine, after breakfast, our term began. I sat with the two girls in one corner of the schoolroom reading of the Tudors, while Branwell sat with Edmund in the corner opposite, by the piano and the deep window. He was soon astonishing his pupil with his special trick - that of writing different sentences with a pen in each hand simultaneously. And the girls simply had to go over and watch. He did look charming with his ringlets of golden red hair, his noble nose, sparkling eyes and wide, bumpy brow, so charming that both Bessie and Mary could not help but find him adorable. He performed his trick of pinching his nose and speaking with a ridiculously broad Yorkshire accent. Mrs Robinson came in to see what the peals of laughter betokened and I could tell she was also beguiled. Had it not been for the marked difference in their stature, their ages - she was almost twenty years older than Branwell - and, not least, their station in life, I might have given myself concerns over her obvious delight with him; furthermore, I knew her predisposition to engage the admiration of men was only a game and never went farther. And, of course, how wretched would I have felt, had she taken a *dislike* to my brother? To see him then, the centre of attention, filled me with such pride in his genius - revitalised and delivered from the low spirits caused by his bad habits and self-obsession - and I

also felt much encouraged by the smile which my Mistress turned to beam at me, which said more clearly than words how grateful she felt for my recommending him.
Edmund's handwriting - previously almost indecipherable - began to improve under Branwell's supervision. This was not achieved by censure and severe instructions to repeat work - methods which I had tried in vain - but by a game! Branwell showed him how to complete the alphabet all joined up, without taking the pencil from the paper - a feat which his pupil was only too keen to emulate. Branwell could achieve this in a matter of seconds and the boy was encouraged to do likewise, with the proviso that every letter should be legible. As soon as this was achieved before the count of ten, he received the penny which he had been promised. The girls too were soon clamouring to do likewise.
Branwell turned out to be an inspirational teacher. He, of all the Brontës, was the only one to have a natural liking for children - (amply demonstrated in the main street of Haworth where he had delighted in throwing farthings and halfpennies into the air for small boys to scramble over). And children liked him in return. With his merry tricks and learning games, gaiety soon ousted reluctance and truculence from the school room. My heart filled further with pride when even Mr Robinson, attracted by sounds of merriment, paid us a rare visit and admired the work, particularly of Edmund, whose ignorance had so troubled him. Even Edmund's music improved - (he had hated sitting with me at the keyboard) - as he tried to copy the Irish airs which Branwell could play and sing so beautifully.
And so, the early weeks passed pleasantly enough as the spring approached, and our routine became established. The church at Little Ouseburn was within a mile of the hall along a very narrow lane - a pleasant coach drive or a walk on dry days. Branwell attended dutifully in the family box pew and sat by his charge, whispering in his ear explanations of some of the more difficult passages in the sermons of the Reverend Lascelles - which tended to be more verbose and complicated than the villagers' spiritual improvement required. Branwell's gift for mimicry delighted Edmund and the girls, and on certain Mondays, when the sermon had been particularly tedious and ridiculous, he began his lesson in the verbal style and with the sonorous accent of said pompous clergyman. Branwell's naïve pretence that he was quite unconscious of the reason for the hilarity surrounding him caused the laughter to increase the more. A shake of the head from me - inwardly bursting so much with the urge to laugh aloud that I was sure I had turned red - was usually enough to curb him; for what would Mr Robinson say, were he to be told that a fellow cleric was being mocked - albeit gently - by no other than his son's tutor?
Ever since childhood, he had loved to play the jester, which role - in order to allay his other tendency towards deep melancholy - had been more actively encouraged by his sisters in recent years, for from this low state he had too often tried to extract himself by recourse to alcohol, a "remedy" which would leave him temporarily cheerful before an inevitable plunge back into despair. At Thorp, such remedies - apart from a glass of wine at lunch and his evening tankard - (I had stipulated *but one* quietly to Mrs Sewell) - were not to be had.
I had warned Branwell to be careful and to desist from his japes. However, one Monday, the laughter became so loud as to attract the attention of the father, just passing in the corridor, and

when it was intimated to him by Bessy that “Mr Brontë could speak just like the vicar” - and Branwell blushed - our employer’s glower demonstrated that he had at once realised what Branwell had been about. He shut the door with a slam and Branwell shot me a look which communicated both regret and anxiety.
A little later, a servant brought him a note, clearly a summons, and soon afterwards my crestfallen brother left the room, not returning for a good quarter-of-an-hour, and then red in the face.

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“Branwell…..you really *must* learn to curb your high spirits,” I said to him later in my sitting room as he stood looking out at the rain, having told me disconsolately of his dressing-down.
“Pooh, the man is as dry and ridiculous as Lascelles. How dare he lecture me on respect for religion when he never officiates as a clergyman?”
“He has no living, Branwell. How can he officiate?”
“No. He has no living - and needs none - because he had the good fortune to inherit *a fortune*, for he has not the talent to make his own! Anne, how unjust the world is! *We* linger in obscurity - and in servitude to a man who is to me - and to you and our sisters - as dim as a candle is to the sun! He has no wit, no charm, no conversation, no talent…..how can Mrs Robinson bear to…to…to...*be* with him? How can people of merit ever succeed in such a perverse world?”
“Branwell, I beg you…Mr Robinson is not, I admit, a particularly gifted man, but we must accept our status in *this* life, in the knowledge that unimaginable rewards are promised in the next.”
“Do spare me, dear Anne, any more sermons! Yesterday’s was quite enough at nearly an hour! *And* then *this* morning’s lecture! Lascelles and Robinson attack my ears aplenty with their abominable……abstractions and their hypocrisy. Religion teaches us lesser mortals quietude - while fat rectors and bishops sit down at their groaning tables. I should like to see Robinson trying to fit his paunch through the eye of a needle!”
“It pains me to hear you speak so, brother. Though you have contempt for religion, you must allow that you have no right to inculcate - directly or indirectly - such irreligious thoughts into young and impressionable minds, particularly one so blank as Edmund’s. No, stay and listen! Be grateful you were not dismissed out of hand this morning. You are an excellent tutor and do not need to impress Edmund with the fullness of your wit. Express it to me in privacy here - if you must - as I have already said.”
“An excellent tutor indeed. Yes, a *tutor*. Just a few pounds richer than Robinson’s groom who is barely coherent - and more than a few pounds poorer than Sewell - who is, I admit, a stout fellow, able to manage his coverts and collect the rents…and….oh, oh, I despair.”
I pleaded with him not to be so bitter, fearing on onset of his melancholia.
“It is difficult for persons of ability to accept a lowly status and the obscurity it imposes - I know it too well, for I too have struggled with the angry beast of envy, but we must remember the words of the poet - *Full many a flower is born to blush unseen…..”*

"…*and waste its sweetness on the desert air*…. Yes, yes! But Gray was a fortunate man - whose own uncle taught at Eton and secured his future at Cambridge. What education have I had? The attentions of Father and Aunt! Am I not a poet too? Who knows how I would have fared with the right connections, like Gray - and Coleridge? I sense only irony and ridicule in those clever lines. *Here* is my desert. And yours too - earning but forty pounds a year. Where are our just *desserts?* It is more than a sensible soul can endure."
So saying, in such great pity of himself, almost in tears, he left me to walk across the park to the Sewells.

Mr Robinson, as it turned out, had warned him that his "sneering" mockery was not entirely, in his opinion, "unprecedented" since his arrival. He had noted a "certain tone of irony" in his comments at table, and, in the school room, a "want of gravity and decorum incompatible with the profession of tutor;" he would have "such displays of levity and frivolity forthwith suppressed". He "appreciated" the progress his boy had made under his supervision but this should not be "at the expense of traditional principles which truly nourish the man."
And, of course, he was right. I had already conceived a secret fear that the chief pleasure Branwell took in teaching was not due to the progress made by his pupil - as mine was - and the Almighty alone knew how infrequent such pleasures were! - but due the opportunity to demonstrate, in the act of teaching, his own cleverness; this burning desire for this petty admiration and recognition was, I reasoned, resultant partly from the lack of acclaim of his gifts by the wider, greater world beyond Thorp Green.
I began to wonder again why he had truly lost his position in Cumberland. In the carriage as we had made our way to York, I found the courage to ask him why - (it had never been a subject for conversation at home) - he had been dismissed. He would only say - as he had stated previously in a letter - that he had clashed with the master of the house in matters of "ways and means".
Although I believed there was a great deal more of the truth to be told, I decided not to press him more. Now, this setback for Branwell and his humiliation - the children had sensed it somewhat too - and the mood it had provoked, caused me to sleep badly. What cure for his lowness of spirit might he seek in the tavern of the nearby hamlet of Little Ouseburn this coming Saturday when he had a half-day holiday? Had the clash with his previous employer led him to seek solace in his cups? Might this pattern now recur?
As I stood, sleepless, at two of the night, watching the bright moon try to free itself and race ahead of the dark clouds, I resolved to raise with him my concerns on the next day, Tuesday, in an effort to preempt such a dreadful turn of events. Branwell was too clever to feel but feigned respect for such dull people, although he had really no choice - like that moon above the waving pine tops shining through clouds in vain - but to be surrounded and suffocated by lesser spirits
On the morrow, after a quiet breakfast, where he had been lost in thought, he seemed a little subdued in the school room but not down-at-heart. He praised Edmund's efforts in arithmetic and corrected his spelling errors with patience. The early March weather remained so cold and dull that Edmund was not like a puppy straining at the leash to be out and about. To my relief,

the day passed off well and we soon found ourselves taking tea alone in my sitting room. I ventured to remark that Mr Robinson had been pleasant at lunch.
“I was glad there was no tension in the dining room as I had feared. My dearest hope is that you will settle - and that you will find the time and space, as I have, through quiet reflection and a lack of distraction, to continue your novel.”
“If a novel can be achieved through lack of distraction,” he said wearily with a yawn “then all would-be novelists should beat a path here. And Dickens would become an even more unassailable monument!”
Truly, it was dull. An occasional wagon and the squabbling rooks were, with the clouds, the only signs that the actions of the world had not been frozen. I wondered sometimes that Miss Lydia - who occasionally wandered in to sit and observe us - before returning to her embroidery frame or painting - did not die of boredom when the weather prevented her walking about the grounds, for she had no love of reading; for me a book was the entire answer to idle and tedious hours - for it took me into other worlds, other times. I did try to impress my girls with this notion of access to other places. But in vain. Their feet were planted firmly and muddily in this one and I felt very sorry for them.

My relief that Branwell could manage to control his tongue and his looks at the luncheon table under even the most absurd, irksome assertions and displays of pique from Mr Robinson obscured from me for a while that a permanent change had indeed affected him. I realised this, in retrospect, somewhat later, I think in mid-April. I saw then his chastening as a turning-point in that neither his spirits were rarely so buoyant as beforehand, and nor, in consequence, were the children as enthusiastic in their responses to learning - and toward him. As the season advanced and the grounds, drying, filled with fresh grass and sweet flowers, our charges’ impatience to be outside with their skittles and hoops further overwhelmed any new-kindled love of learning, and the fading ebullience of their teacher in complexion and sparkle of eye - put into the shade more and more by the strengthening light of the sun - meant that his status as hero - god even - was marked down nearer to the level of schoolmaster, and even to taskmaster as the darker side of Branwell - his tendency to irritability - came further to the fore; on more than one occasion, there crept a tear into young Edmund’s eye when his slowness, his unwilling or stupid, wrong answers taxed Branwell’s patience and provoked a sarcastic remark. My raising of eyebrows had become a signal agreed between us that he should then relent and humour the boy.
“You know the mother spoils her son,” I said to him, one lovely evening as the lengthening shadows came creeping from the woods aslant the park, “particularly as he is become again the baby of the brood since the unfortunate death of little Georgiana. You know he is dull and can never become the pupil you may have imagined. Why risk your position by exerting too much pressure on him?”
“But it is not fair!” he cried, turning away from the beautiful canvas outside. “The father expects the boy…..the colt to be as sure-footed as he - even though such a small step is, I fear, beyond him! - but neither the mother, in particular, nor he, when the whim takes him to show an interest

- will allow me to use the spur and the whip. Had he gone to school after all, he would have been daily…..no hourly thrashed for his sullen reluctance and surly inattention. Yet am I…..to be judged on results I am not allowed to influence by any normal practices of upbringing and correction? It can scarcely be, it cannot be endured, Anne!"
"I do not need to be told this, Branwell. With patience I *have* endured such unreasonableness. And so must you, for my sake…..no,no…for your own sake, and for Father's. You must retain this post at all costs. You must settle on a method which allows enough progress to satisfy the parents, but which does not alarm the boy. Try incentives - a walk into the woods, a game of catch, a little target practice…whenever a lesson has been pretty well accomplished."
In his lethargy and depression, Branwell seemed to have forgotten or abandoned such excellent principles of encouragement. But I had a greater fear.
"Branwell, may I ask - are you quite well? You do not look as……"
My voice trailed away. Like a youth whose bloom had faded, his pleasing January self was now a memory. His skin was dull, his eyes were clouded, his speech often hesitant and gloomy. I feared a return to bad habits.
"Branwell. It will soon be summer. We will go to Scarborough with the family. The air will do us both good. Try to fix your eye on a farther point and use your time here both to establish a reputation for yourself and to finish your novel. Does it come along as you wish?"
"Sometimes."
"Say to yourself - I will finish it and *then* look to leave here - as I too have decided. I hope, next year. Promise me this!"
"Your novel is quite far on then? May I read a little of it?"
I hesitated but finally gave him a few pages of my manuscript which he took to the window to peruse while I nervously looked on. After he had finished, he smiled and patted the papers square again.
"Well?"
"It is finely and unpretentiously written…..but the title? Passages in the Life of an Individual? Pooh."
"Why?"
"It is too long, too unmemorable…too dull!"
"And what should it then be?"
He glanced through it again until his eyes lit up with an idea.
"Call it by the name of your heroine - whom I take to be you. Call it Agnes Grey!"

A few days later, my ardent prayers that all would turn out well for our project at Thorp seemed to be answered when Mrs Robinson took us aside and asked if our dear Father might be persuaded to pay us a visit for ten days in early May.
"My husband has offered to send our carriage to collect him if he can be prevailed upon to come. We are both truly delighted that you have settled so well, Mr Brontë, and that Edmund makes progress, and would wish to meet your father in order to congratulate him."

Branwell eyes near filled with tears at this unsuspected honour and in the evening I was delighted to see his spirits still buoyant over the invitation.
"You see, brother…you let little vexations bring you down. Please promise me that you will try to banish your morbid thoughts. You *are* liked here. Why else would such a gesture be made? All *will* be well. I prayed for a sign and this is proof that God blesses our enterprise."
"I see in this more the hand of the wife than of the husband - or even of the Almighty……but, sister…I do not deserve you. You truly are my guardian angel."

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Our father graciously accepted the invitation and was graciously received. The weather smiled on the days he spent with us and we could stroll in the woods and by the stream at our ease in the balmy air. He was delightfully entertaining for the family with his many Irish tales and was equally delighted to be complimented on our characters and on our work, so that all seemed well. He took me to one side and said how pleased he was to see Branwell so well - and so well settled.
His visit was, however, over all too quickly and we were soon waving in farewell to the receding carriage until it turned left and out of sight. And so we returned to our normal routine with renewed determination.
During Father's stay, Branwell had been virtually abstemious at table for Father hated to see him drinking, being a total non-imbiber himself. Over those ten days, my previous suspicions seemed to be confirmed because his dullness of eye and complexion gradually vanished, and he regained his wit and sparkle in conversation. I found an opportunity to ask Mrs Sewell whether she had been pleased with Branwell as a guest, and observed her closely as a slight blush crept into her cheeks, which I knew how to interpret.
"Please, Mrs Sewell, do try to restrict him henceforth to his one tankard at supper."
"I do an' all, Miss, but he do insist on a second - an' sometime a third…..and the maid has found wine bottles empty in his room….."
She was about to say more but curtailed herself. I begged her to tell me what else concerned her.
"I hear him cry out in the night for an Elizabeth or a Mary. Are they friends or family, Miss Brontë?"
"They are our own dead sisters, dead these twenty years. It has given him a great fear of death."
"Good gracious, poor lamb. I was thinking it might be the wine. Or when he has been out with Dr Crosby."
With a heavy heart I heard of his Saturday excursions to the tavern in Little Ouseburn.
"His friend, Doctor Crosby, is famous in these parts as a toper, Miss. Mr Branwell has oft o'erstayed there…and has begun to again since your dear Faither's departure."
I said I would speak to him and left, more dismayed than I allowed her to see. It was a family secret that Branwell had been prone, since childhood, to seizures; I had more than once witnessed an attack when he had returned drunk from the Black Bull and had helped to restrain

him. If he were drinking to great excess, an attack was much more likely - and it terrified me that one could occur in church after a Saturday spent in the tavern or in the schoolroom any morning. That would be calamitous indeed.

"If you are capable of restraining, as I surmise, your consumption during Father's visit, and *still* be in excellent spirits, then can you not see that you only need drink in strict moderation? Is not Mr Robinson a perfect example of what ills excessive drinking can bring? You are aware of your tendency to gloom and morbid obsession - not to mention your illness. Can you not understand that drink, by bringing it all on, is your false friend?"
I confessed, when pressed by Branwell, that I had been speaking to the wife of his host, and stressed that he must not blame her for thinking of his best interests.
"I raised the matter with her, and not vice-versa. But I am bound to say that you abuse her hospitality by drinking in your room. Promise me that you will curb this weakness! Confess it - some mornings you are worse for it - which brings on in turn your irritation with Edmund."
"Anne, please! Such nagging and gnawing! I am not a child!"
"No, stay and hear me out!" So saying, I seized him by the coat tail. "If I must not treat you as a child, then you must not behave like one! You take Edmund to task for his sullenness and lack of willing - but do not realise that your demeanour exactly mirrors his - and may even provoke it. Sit on Saturdays for an hour or two with Dr Crosby if you must, but do consider your duties in church the next day and at all other times in the week. Your behaviour should be impeccable and your responsibilities as a tutor should override all other considerations."
He shook himself free and was gone. I was sure I had made my point but at what cost to my nerves? Not a night passed when I did not worry about him; not a day when I could look entirely away from his corner and concentrate solely on mine. I began again to wish myself with all my heart away, engaged with my own projects and relieved of these burdens. I envied my sisters; Charlotte was indulging her fancies in Belgium and Emily was free to roam the moors. Branwell was my heavy load - yet I had volunteered to carry it; and so be it. But if all was to come crashing to the ground, I consoled myself that it would not be for the want of my trying.
With these and other dismal thoughts in mind, I watched the following days creep by - bright spring days which warranted celebration - dreading his relapse into bad habits. I prayed earnestly that my harsh words - which had driven him away in such anger - would stay in his ears and gently speak wisdom to him. I watched for a return of dismal signs in his appearance and speech, but saw none - much to my relief, though it came to me - making me smile wryly - that to my little flock of three wayward and impetuous spirits a fourth had been added.

But it was from an unexpected quarter that a new spectre rose up to terrify me.

Suspicion

During his visit, Father had praised Branwell's talents as a poet and a painter, at which Bessie had made the unexpected though excellent suggestion that he should paint the portrait of the family. The mother instantly took up the idea with joy and enthusiasm and the father was quick to add his approbation, even if his eyes told a different story. Once all the exclamations had died in everyone's throats, there seemed to hang in the silent air the question of remuneration. This was rather foolishly given expression by Mrs Robinson who at once declared that, were they to like the picture, the artist should be paid 10 *l* - and if it was generally acclaimed as a masterpiece, then 20 *l.* At this, Mr Robinson almost turned pale, and I perceived that Branwell was stifling a giggle. Mrs Sewell had confided to us at Easter that "the Maister" needed to sell some peripheral land (the tenant had died) to a wealthy neighbour. I had already noticed less extravagant fare on the dinner table and Mrs Sewell's indiscreet remark led me to suspect that the family was somewhat financially straitened. It occurred to me further that Mr Robinson's magnanimity towards his son, in sparing him the ordeal of school, might be motivated less by paternal concern than by cost; a tutor at a mere 80 *l* per annum represented a considerable saving on school fees. The embarrassment caused by the mother's impetuosity made me feel hot, and I was endeavouring to find a counter-suggestion when Branwell took the initiative and made the generous proposal that he would undertake the commission for nothing, in view of the family's generosity towards our father.

"It will be a pleasure, Madam, to apply my poor skills to such a delightful task!"

Protestations were of course voiced, though perhaps less forcefully and less sincerely than they might have been, yet the maestro's offer was not to be overturned. Miss Lydia gazed at him in undisguised admiration, blushed and looked down at her napkin. She was especially pretty that day, I remember, attired in pale pink satin with her creamy-white shoulders perhaps a little too amply displayed - and I had been a little disconcerted that my father - ever an unashamed lover of beauty in people and in nature – had looked at her overlong as we dined.

When the plates had been cleared, Branwell proposed to sketch in pencil each member of the family in turn and to paint therefrom a composite.

"Who will volunteer first?" he asked gaily.

"I will!" chorused the youngest daughters. Young Edmund looked darkly at them both and at his tutor. He, like his father, was the least enamoured of the project.

And so it was settled, although Mr Robinson, clearly affected by dyspepsia - having consumed many glasses of wine - asserted, less than affably, that he would sit *when it was convenient* to himself in view of *the many commitments* he had - (which consisted mainly in riding about the parish to no obvious purpose).

It was agreed that the artist would do his sketching at intervals in the schoolroom, and within a week, he had produced a pretty good likeness of Bessie, catching her roguish air well, and a fair one of Mary, considering the insipidity of her features. Edmund's likeness proved more elusive for he could not be persuaded to smile. Finally, with a look of irritation, Branwell gave up, muttering to me that he would place the boy *diagonally opposite to the father* - "He will be a perfect mirror of *his* sour expression."

The two Lydias, mother and daughter, desired their likeness to be taken together, the former seated on the couch, the latter standing behind, and one late afternoon after lessons were over, they entered the schoolroom and arranged themselves as planned. Both had taken great care with their toilet, but the daughter outdid the dame in beauty and radiance by a considerable margin. Her cheeks were healthily rosy and her blue eyes sparkled in that peach of a visage, swirled about by silken blonde hair, which she had clearly inherited from her father - if the youthful portrait of him in the library was a true likeness - and fortunately for her the only feature he had bestowed. The mother had tied back her dark brown hair to emphasize the strong features of her face, particularly her startlingly large brown eyes.

Branwell proposed to begin with the mother and after a while Miss Robinson begged to be allowed to oversee the progress of the sketch. Accordingly, she went to stand just behind Branwell's left shoulder. I judged that her proximity and lavender scent were particularly pleasing to him - of which fact she herself must have been fully aware. Though she maintained her smile, the mother seemed to find, as I did, this lack of proper distance between them a matter of concern, until finally she bade the daughter to come away in case she was *a bother to Mr Brontë.* At that very instant a light tap came at the door and Janet, the timid maid, announced that Madam was required urgently below by Cook *regarding the state of the codfish.*

"Cook is suspicious, Ma'am, and would have your own 'pinion on it."

"Oh, very well……Lydia, *do* come and stand here!….I am determined to find a new purveyor of fish if Mrs Cooper's nose and mine are in agreement."

She left the room very irritated and Lydia became the new subject. A few moments later, Branwell broke his pencil, and, there being no more of the necessary quality in the schoolroom, I volunteered to fetch one from my room along the corridor, to spare his crossing to the Monks House for one of his own. I left them alone, little imagining the scene I would witness on my return.

I searched through my pencil box and eventually found two at the bottom equal to the task, then hurried back to the room. As the door opened I was in time to see Lydia turn quickly away from him, in a flurry of curls, and he standing rigid, red in the face and startled. I was too shocked to make any sound save a gasp, but Branwell, with great presence of mind, as if he had even prepared the speech, remonstrated playfully with Lydia - that she should *not* keep coming over to see how the sketch progressed - "Otherwise I shall not finish before Christmas!"

As she crimsoned, he laughed, and I straightway deduced that her blush was *not* entirely due to the fact of being discovered in such a delicate situation. Branwell began to hum a tune as he sketched again and she bit her lip.

"Should I show you biting your lip, Miss, or in your natural state of beauty?"

Lydia laughed in relief and stole a quick glance at me in which I saw reproach mingled with defiance. Rapid footsteps announced the return of the mother.

"Cook's nose is over-sensitive," she announced regaining her seat. "The fish is not foul….oh, not foul! Not *fowl* indeed!"

She laughed long at her unconscious wit and I felt obliged to join in. I could scarce conceal my joy when the session came to an end. Both admired their likenesses though my eyes could hardly look on Lydia's, it was so much the face of a young woman in love. Branwell excused himself from taking tea with me in my sitting room - as was our wont in the early evening - saying he was particularly tired. I sensed his dread that he would be interrogated over what had appeared to transpire between him and Lydia.

During the previous week or two, as the days lengthened and evenings grew less chill, I had noticed her strolling in the park, book in hand, whenever Branwell had bid me good night. The book had puzzled me, given her avowed distaste for reading, and given also the loveliness of the spring flowers in the park which would have outbid any book for the attention and admiration of even the most ardent lover of literature. After tea, an idea almost too horrible to entertain now swept over me and plagued me long into the night. I reviewed past scenes in the house - or rather they invaded my inner eye - and I looked for signs which might corroborate or allay my grim suspicion. To my utter dismay, a further puzzle now seemed explained; I had deemed it odd that Branwell and Lydia had hardly exchanged a word or a glance at table, though both were the principle exponents around it of beauty and charm. Lydia was nowhere near the equal of Branwell in intellect but she was easily the most superior of the girls and had grown to excel the mother in attraction. So why did he persist in addressing his attentions to the latter or Bessie - or even plain Mary?

Oh my poor heart and mind! In vain did I attempt to persuade myself, that torturing night, to put those worries to rest - beyond any resolution as I lay there writhing in bed - with plans to keep the pair under secret observation the following day and beyond, and the grey of dawn was glimmering at the window when I fell asleep.

I looked closely for clues which I thought would inevitably and eventually be left by secret lovers. I also studied Mrs Robinson closely, trying to detect any sign in her that she had stumbled on the same truth as I. Yet I saw none. To Branwell she was as affable as ever. To Lydia he paid depressingly little attention and she to him. (Mr Robinson was too interested in his plate and glass to detect any subtleties or deceit in the behaviour of any in his company).

On many occasions I almost raised my doubts with Branwell but, in view of his descent into gloom again, brought on by dissatisfaction with the progress of his portrait, I could not bring myself to utter the obscene accusation - that he had been so absurdly foolish as to seduce the eldest daughter - a minor - of his employer. I almost persuaded myself to accept the innocent "explanation" Branwell had so casually allowed me to have in the schoolroom, although my old awareness of his ingenuity in making excuses for his faults and misdemeanours argued fiercely with such an easy means of putting my sore mind to rest. Asthma, a bad cough and a fever were the result of all these mental qualms and half-slept nights; so Doctor Crosby, my brother's particular friend, was summoned.

I had seen him once far off and had not given him a second thought; now, close to, I realised he was a good deal more handsome than I had judged him to be. His eyes were dark blue and his hair black and curly; he had a good nose, a strong chin, ruddy cheeks and a genial smile.

“Well, Miss Brontë, if you have been as often troubled with your chest as you say, I think it wise you keep to room until you are better. And you would not wish your charges to catch your cold and cough.”
With faint voice I dared to ask him how he found Branwell.
“He seems to me a little preoccupied,” I whispered. “He mentions the portrait he is painting as a cause of despondency. Has he said anything to you?”
I studied his honest face for any sign of deceit. He went to speak and then paused, as if choosing more careful words than had first come to him.
“Your brother, Miss, is an enigma. He is by turn cheerful and then cheerless, like an April day in the dales. There seems to be no reason for such changes of mood, as there is no reason for there to be a cloud and a rain shower, or none. The brain is a mystery. One day, cleverer men than I may understand its workings, though I have observed similar tendencies in other people of a strongly creative bent. Now then, this linctus will soothe your cough - keep to your bed a day or two, and I shall call again on Thursday or Friday.”
He was getting ready to take his leave but I was not satisfied.
“I have seen this behaviour most particularly when he fancies himself in love and thwarted in some way,” I said with a feigned smile “has he mentioned any attachment to you?”
He gave me a look of surprise which I knew not how to interpret; was he startled by the very idea or by my perceptiveness? He shook his head and snapped his medical bag shut.
“If Branwell has not confessed to his own dear sister an emotional attachment, why would *she* think him likely to confide in a person of no longstanding acquaintance such as me? Good morning, Miss Brontë.”
Such evasiveness finally persuaded me, after much meditation, that I had hit on the truth.
The next few days away from the schoolroom were a relief to me. June can be an unreliable month - either unbearably hot or more like winter; in fact the next few days were so wet and cold that any secret meeting of illicit lovers in the Thorp woods was unthinkable; and what a joy it was to take a rest from the effort of subduing Bessie - akin to taming the animal to which she was most fervently attached - and which, I could not help thinking, because of her toothy grin and large mouth, she resembled. Branwell offered to set and supervise work for both girls and everyone was satisfied. I was able to make progress with Agnes, and the solitude was like a draught of fresh, cool water to me. I was soon feeling better and well enough to go back to my duties earlier than recommended by Crosby, but I decided to give the appearance of illness whenever the maid entered to attend to my needs, until the doctor came again.

“Does my brother ever take a stroll after his dinner?” I said to Mrs Sewell as casually as I could, having slyly introduced the topics of fresh air and exercise, now June had regained her splendid best attire. “It is a relief to me to get out again now I am well. And Branwell loves nothing better than the shady woods on a hot day, as you have no doubt observed.”
“No, Miss,” said she, untying her apron. “He allus keeps to his room, and writes or paints. Now try this baked apple with sultanas - it’ll do your poor throat good.”

I left the house thanking God and reassured - until another barb of thought made me stop. Unobserved, I made my way around the back of the building and picked out his bedroom. An ancient wisteria came close to his window. His agility and love of climbing was legend. It would be easy for him to step out onto the ledge and seize a thick branch. Instantly my heart beat at my ribs like a bird at the bars of a cage. I felt certain that I had discovered his trick. As I walked back imagining the insupportable, the wysteria which clambered over the back wall, past Lydia's bedroom up the roof of the Hall came into view and other thoughts even more disgusting to me made me almost fall weeping to the ground.

The next day was warm and promised to be fine till nightfall. It was a struggle to keep the children in check and finally we decided, as Bessie pined again for release, to take them on a nature walk in the woods. Branwell was in decent spirits as the children chased about with shouts of joy in search of the various leaves and flowers we had sketched for them.
"Do you ever come into the woods of an evening now?" I asked nonchalantly.
For a while he did not answer as he cautioned Edward about swinging on a mossy branch and splashing Mary with a puddle.
"You know I am damned busy with that damned portrait. I almost curse Father for mentioning painting. And Bessie for the idea."
"Can I come up to see it after tea? Perhaps my opinion or advice might help?"
When I pressed him further, he reluctantly agreed.
It was a novelty to enter his room. I smiled to see the same disorder about which our poor maid Tabby quietly complained at home. I glanced around for bottles full or empty and was relieved to find none. An easel stood by the window and upon it a canvas covered with hessian. He went to remove it and hesitated.
"Are you so ashamed of it, Branwell?"
"Not entirely….I think you will soon see the problem."
The hessian was snatched away and I could only gasp. Mr Robinson, to the right of the couch consisted only of a pair of legs and a trunk; the face had been painted out and left blank; Bessie, on the right of the couch, had acquired a decent likeness though the spirit he had captured in the sketch had not penetrated the oils; young Edmund glowered on the extreme left with whip in hand, as if he was about to scourge someone; he would have to be toned down, for he clearly demonstrated his creator's dislike of him The mother was accurate but looked quite haughty, her eyes revealing too much distaste for the onlooker. To her right, poor Mary looked as shy and unremarkable as a servant. But it was Lydia, standing centre behind those seated, and dominant over all, who made me gasp. She was brilliantly depicted, as if Reubens himself had been at his elbow; her curls shone gold in the ray of sunlight aslant through the window and her eyes were as bright as gemstones. It was the work of a man in love. My heart raced and words failed me. Here was revealed the secret of all his previous flat dull subjects; they had never inspired him.

“I have painted out Robinson several times. I can never get him without his grimace - he looks dyspeptic…but it would never do to show it. Mary looks set to weep…...but have you nothing to say, sister? Is it really too bad?”
“Well….you have the likenesses well, but you must try to flatter more…you would not wish to give offence…..”
Lydia continued to stare coquettishly at me direct, as if challenging me to criticize *her*. He threw the sacking back over the canvas and sighed. He had quite lost the will to finish it, he said.
“But how will I look? A man not to be relied on. Yet if I can only paint in Robinson and the boy half-heartedly, it cannot be presented to them.”
He had not seen the main problem. Any fool would see, even Robinson, in what especial regard the artist held his eldest daughter. What dared I say?
“You have made Lydia - young Lydia - the darling of the piece, as she truly is of the family. If you could animate the faces of the others a little more - to steal some of her…glory….the portrait would be a complete success. I would offer to try my hand but have no experience with oils. Shall I look again in a week? No-one mentions any impatience to see it completed. Do not be despondent. I am sure it will come right. The summer is on us and all thoughts will be of Scarborough. Surely it can wait till the autumn.”
At lunch the next day I was tense in case anyone would remember the accursed commission but none did. For Mr Robinson was in high dudgeon. And it was during his rant that I saw the sign which I had looked for and yet dreaded to see. Mrs Cooper had attempted a ragout - which divided the table; Mr Robinson grumbled that it was too heavily peppered but his wife dared to call it delicious; all three girls nodded in agreement but Edmund, needing little excuse - for his appetite was generally poor - refused to eat it. Branwell saw an opportunity to provoke the father by encouraging the son, telling him he should eat it as it was very tasty.
“Mr Brontë,” said the father sternly in his ridiculous high-pitched voice - which did not suit at all such a corpulent man “It is not your place to utter an opinion - an unsolicited one - on the quality of my cook’s recipes. Edmund is quite right. The pepper may well upset his stomach like mine. He too will doubtless have problems with his digestion.”
Edmund looked triumphant at his tutor’s humiliation and reddened countenance. A glance from me, sitting opposite with the girls, told him to suppress his indignation, and, after a slow intake of breath he delivered a response with calm and assurance.
“I am sorry, Sir, but I never meant to give you offence. I was merely thinking of Edmund’s being hungry this afternoon, for hunger is well known to interfere with the brain’s ability to concentrate, and hence to learn.”
“I quite understand, Mr Brontë. Mrs Robinson will ensure that cheese or what-not will be sent up from the kitchen to the schoolroom should there be need of sustenance. I would appreciate however that you devote your solicitations henceforth to my son’s mind and not to his stomach.”
Satisfied with this remonstrance, he gave the stew a final stir with his fork, threw it down in disgust and reached for his glass. Branwell stopped eating immediately and put down his knife without a word. Lydia who sat on the other side of the mother looked furious and straightway

followed Branwell's example. At that precise moment it came to me how they arranged their meetings. Her cutlery mirrored his absolutely. The plate was a clock, the fork the minute hand and the knife told the hour; they were set at a quarter-to-eight. In horror, I trembled to see whether anyone else had noticed, but all were either eating with relish - or contemplating their plates in marked abhorrence.

During the hours of the afternoon, the certainty which had seized me gave way to doubt. I argued with myself that the alignment had been pure chance and decided that I needed to ascertain that very evening whether my imagination was to blame - or my brother. I had no choice but to go out into the park before the appointed hour. Branwell had again refused my invitation to take a cup of tea, citing a pressing matter of correspondence.

As the evening shadows lengthened I watched from my window and at a quarter-past-seven I was dismayed to see Lydia come sauntering into the parkland from the right, dressed beautifully in pale red, arms and shoulders bare, with book in hand. As soon as she had entered the wood, I descended by the back stairs and went out through the servants' entrance. Within five minutes, I was standing concealed by a great oak observing Branwell's window and praying that my suspicion was a misconception. Alas, at twenty-to-eight, I saw the window open and a face peer out left and right and watched in disbelief as my brother made horribly real the image I had repeatedly witnessed in my sleepless bed. He alighted from the great wysteria and walked rapidly away. I waited two minutes and set off whither he had directed his steps and, passing the first trees, took a little while to adjust to the gloom of the wood which the sun, being now quite low, neglected. I found a path and took each step very carefully, since all disputes and contests for territory between the songbirds being long since settled, the silence was intense. I watched carefully for twigs lest I should snap one and alert the lovers. At the centre of the wood was a huge rhododendron covered in glorious apricot blooms now almost grey in the failing light. It would make a perfect place for an assignation. Holding my breath in order to hear more acutely, I came closer and saw something square lying on a fallen tree. It was a volume of poetry by Wordsworth which I had once encouraged Lydia to borrow from her father's library. I listened harder still and peered into the great shrub. There then came to me what at first I took to be sweet singing; but it was wordless, like a soft breeze blowing through trees. It was the soprano voice of Lydia coming in waves. My mind instantly conjured up a vile vision which I had not the power of dismissing. I began to shiver in my whole being and felt weak and as impotent as in a nightmare when urgent action should be taken. Instead of rushing into the dark centre of the rhododendron - as I later regretted not doing - I staggered away and retreated to press myself against a nearby tree as the sighing reached a crescendo and stopped. To my intense abhorrence, I realised the sound had affected me in a quite unexpected way over which I had scant power; my heart throbbed and my head ached; all my long-held and practised principles of rectitude were almost overturned in a second, as I struggled not to succumb to a terrific and urgent temptation. Afterwards I had to retch in the grass, silently pleading for forgiveness. As the gloom increased, I dared to peep out and was rewarded with a glimpse of a slim figure, now clad in darkened red.

following Branwell, in a white shirt, along the path and thence into obscurity. As soon as I was sure they had gone, I crept out and hurried home.
I shall not dwell on the miseries of the night and of the day which ensued, save to say that Branwell's blithe spirits and silly jokes drove me to the edge of madness. I could not wait to get him inside my sitting room, for the weather having again been fine and warm and looking to remain so, the same time had been arranged again on their plates at luncheon.
"Branwell," said I shutting the door quite tight "I am ashamed of you."
He wheeled around from the window in amusement, and then in amazement, seeing I was in earnest. He demanded an explanation.
"I know your secret. I was present last night in the wood and heard everything."
His glasses slipped down his nose and he began to perspire and crimson. His mouth gaped open.
"Are you quite mad?" I demanded. "To repay the trust of your employers by seducing their eldest daughter?"
"How did you find out?"
I lied. I told him that I had wanted fresh air before retiring. "You know what I saw that afternoon when you deliberately broke your pencil. I suspected then. Your intelligence is too arrogant for your own good for it underrates mine. If you do not promise to sever this disgusting and immoral connection now and forever, I shall go this moment to Mrs Robinson and apprise her of it."
He walked around the room in mental turmoil and silence, running his hand through his hair. Then he turned to me with a look of defiance.
"Do not blame only me, Anne! Our sister is obsessed with a married man in Belgium….Why does she escape your censure? And what of you and Emily? Your Gondal saga is run through with vice and corruption - where do those impure thoughts come from? You must have private longings -"
"Stop it!"
" - And what of Father and Aunt Branwell? Did they not, when we were children…you heard as well as I! And….and what of Charlotte's unnatural liking for her school friend Ellen Nussey?"
"Be silent, Branwell. That is pure speculation. Your misdemeanour is *real*. You cannot go through life excusing your own bad behaviour by blaming that of others. If you do not swear this instant to do as I have demanded….."
I threw open the door, making to leave, and he fell to his knees.
"But we love each other, Anne. We plan to elope. She hates her father as I do and her dull life here."
"She is mentally a child, you fool - however precocious she is in her physique. She cannot know her own mind. Believe me, I taught the vain, silly girl. She does not love you - she is only infatuated - as is our own sister with her French professor - and only flattered by the attentions of an older man. Yes, Charlotte makes herself ridiculous too, I agree, but have you once paused to consider the dreadful consequences of Lydia being with child?"
He began to stammer and almost choke. I feared the onset of a seizure. I made him drink some water, sat him down and encouraged him to breathe slowly.

“Anne, you cannot believe that we - oh no, Anne, you are entirely wrong.”
“Wrong? After what I heard yesterday?”
“No, Anne, we have not……”
“THEN WHAT?”
He raised and lowered his arms and finally put his blushing head between his hands.
“Surely, sister, you can guess….you are a woman and can imagine….oh it is too…I cannot be more explicit……there are no words, no proper way of explaining….”
“No proper way to explain an improper act? Quite so. Now you will swear to me on the lives of our dear sisters to desist, for this can be managed if there has been no…… fullness of relations. No, do not look away! Swear to me now to have no further contact with Lydia beyond the normal intercourse of society here.”
I stood in the doorway to prevent his leaving. He stood shaking and sobbing while I urged him again and again to listen to the dictates of his conscience and reason; gradually he could be brought into a calmer state and when I assured him he need say nothing to the girl, that I would undertake the task of making her see sense, he at last nodded. He waited till the back stairs were quiet and then departed, leaving me to consider the most rational course of action to be taken not long afterwards.

I listened hard in the gloom and was finally rewarded by the sound of a twig snapping. I stepped out of the bush and amazed my former pupil by handing her the volume of poetry I had picked up the night before. She looked delightful in turquoise with white ribbons in her hair either side, and her arms and shoulders sunburnt a light bronze. I did not wonder that Branwell imagined himself head over heels.
“Miss Brontë, you gave me a fright!” she exclaimed, taking the book. “Oh, I am so glad that you have found it. I set it down on yonder log last night in a reverie and quite forgot it.”
“Lydia. What I have to say to you is serious and you must be a sensible girl and listen. Branwell is not coming. He has been very stupid as you have been thoughtless. Would you truly jeopardise your own marriage prospects by exposing yourself to him, to his advances? What would be the consequences if your affair was discovered - and if your virtue - or lack of it - became a commonplace of gossip hereabout?”
She gasped. She assured me almost in tears that he and she only sat together on the log reading poetry to each other.
“You will be pleased to know that your brother has succeeded where you failed in encouraging my interest in verse. Though I do concede that I am now older and I must admit -”
“LYDIA! Do not attempt dissembling. You should strike it from your character as it is a skill quite beyond you. I followed you here last night having guessed your device with the plate. I saw nothing here but did not need to. Listening was enough.”
She was stricken with embarrassment but also very pettish.
“You followed us here? And stayed to listen? How dare you? How dare you be so inquisitive, so intrusive on my privacy?” She paused as a further insult entered her head. “Why, I do believe it

made you jealous to hear sounds which have been quite unknown to you - and probably will so remain!"
"Lydia, that will do. I was your governess and deserve your respect. My purpose was merely to confirm my worst fears - and *confirmed* they were."
But she was not to be silenced. I was *jealous of her charms* and of her *ability to fascinate men.*
"And I saw your wretched old father staring at me as I know you saw him too! *And* I notice you staring at me in an unnatural way"
I drew back my hand but suppressed the urge to slap her - a measure sadly neglected in an upbringing marked by over-indulgence and selfishness. This gesture so silenced her that I could then have my say. She was taller than me but I knew how to make myself fierce and stepped towards her with determination.
"Now you *will* listen. The gulf between Branwell and you - in *society* - is unbridgeable. Such a match would be disgusting to your family and all their connections."
"Match? Did I hear you say match?"
"My brother even spoke of an elopement."
She laughed with unaffected delight. She could not believe, she said, between gasps, he might think her serious.
"Mr Branwell is entertaining and amusing. I do not love him, but only enjoyed leading him on and teasing him. I am curious about men and what responses I can produce in them. I would die of ennui here without a diversion. Is even such a *paltry* one as this now to be denied to me by a self-righteous governess who could not resist interfering?"
I saw with horror what kind of girl she really was - or had become. She walked past me, head proudly raised, and glanced defiantly back as another thought struck her.
"If you do interfere, Miss Brontë, and prevent my seeing your brother, I shall tell Papa that he imposed himself upon me on this log while I was walking here in all innocence."

I thought all night of what choices lay before me but all - save one - ended with Branwell's dismissal and my humiliation and resignation. The exception was the unthinkable one - of turning a blind eye and letting the liaison continue, hoping that it would remain secret and that Lydia would soon grow weary of him - as her shallowness and meanness of spirit implied she surely must. Could I prevail on Branwell to resign for some trumped-up reason and seek a good reference from Robinson to carry him into a safer post? I feared the wicked girl was quite serious in her threat to expose him; who would believe him if he protested that she had seduced him and not vice-versa? Even were it half-credible a protest, how would it benefit him? As an employee and a grown man, he had trespassed *whatever* the circumstances and whatever the mitigation. I loathed the girl. Since she had been fifteen, I had seen her spoilt, petted, indulged, and excused all the blame and punishment she so richly deserved - and, indeed, *required* in order to make a sensible and virtuous woman out of her. I knew her to be vain, self-centred and conceited, as if the moon and stars and flowers and all the glories of the earth were nothing to her; before the age of sixteen even she had become a flirt, but to discover her so lacking in morality, restraint and,

yes, respect for herself and her body was astonishing to me. If the mother had failed, then, as her governess, so had I - and I would doubtless have all the blame hung around my shoulders were her repulsive behaviour ever to come to light.
There were but ten days left before we were allowed our fortnight at home before rejoining the family in Scarborough. I knew that Lydia, soon to turn eighteen, was looking forward to being out in society there strolling out on display, twirling her tiny Chinese parasol along the promenade; attending parties, the theatre and balls. Surely there would be handsome young men in abundance there, fellows of wealth and prospects, falling over themselves to make her notice them? They would engage her entire attention and Branwell would be forgotten. Here at Thorp he stood out only because he had no rivals at all; in Scarborough he would seem commonplace, merely her brother's tutor - her father's servant. If he truly had been only a diversion to her, and a plaything of her feminine wiles, then, by making him fall in love with her, the novelty and the challenge of the project were surely exhausted.
Eventually I was so tired and alarmed to hear my chest wheezing with asthma that I forced myself to think on other matters, and was soon mentally within the great walls of Yorkminster, marvelling at its grandeur; the last inner picture I remembered was of the stained glass above the altar……..and then I slept.

"I had hoped," said Branwell at lunch the next day "to have your portrait complete before the end of June, Madam, but have had too many distractions. I shall now apply myself entirely to the task *every* evening."
He placed his knife and fork virtuously together on his plate, folded his arms and sat back. No-one seemed in a hurry to comment on his remarks. Lydia shot me a malicious glance and looked away through the window. She seemed to receive this intelligence, obviously meant for her, with equanimity; indifference even. I dared to hope that she had made her angry remarks only to alarm me, and that hours of reflection in silence and solitude had introduced wiser counsel. Such an extreme threat as she had impetuously proposed would, if carried out, throw the whole house into disarray and distress, cause huge inconvenience and invite undreamt of repercussions above and below stairs, and - worst for her - lead to the possible cancellation of the holiday.
However, her threat still troubling my inner peace, I decided after tea to send her a note by way of Mary the maid.

Dear Lydia,

You know your powers and must try to use them wisely. You are a fortunate girl to be endowed with such loveliness of visage and figure and must thank God for His generosity by rewarding Him with respect for His Commandments, but also with respect for yourself. Your present conduct is bad, but may be excused on the grounds of your youth, and if you are still intact, as Branwell swears you are, then no great harm is done to your future marriage prospects. You should now save yourself entirely for the man you will one day marry and not waste your charms

on childish games with the affections of any of his predecessors, whom you will one day, upon mature reflection, come to despise as much as you might, in the grip of inexpiable guilt, despise yourself for the unwise bestowing of improper favours. Consider also what might be the consequences of the repetition of such reckless behaviour, and of your carrying out of the threat you made last night. Such rumours and allegations could not be kept long a secret at Thorp. Our neighbours adore scandal; wicked tongues love nothing better than to twist and bloat the truth. Yes, if you took such a step, you would hurt Branwell and possibly cause him to lose his liberty; but you would do far greater harm to yourself - it is a well-known fact that you like to flirt and your involvement with Branwell would be readily misconstrued or exaggerated - and you would do harm to the good name of your family and father, a minister of religion. Any taint would ruin your prospects of an advantageous match, for who would wish to connect themselves with such a family?
I have convinced Branwell that you do not love him. I urge you now to consider the wise arguments of the above, for they are well meant for the benefit of all concerned,

Anne Brontë

Within an hour, Mary had brought me her reply.

Miss Brontë,

I really did not need for you to bring such obvious arguments to my attention. You really must not alarm yourself, though I detect that you are not a bit concerned for my welfare, and only use it as an excuse in seeking to protect your own. I spoke in justifiable anger last night but I do regret my outspoken insinuations regarding your motives. I realise, of course, your brother is now depressed to find out from you that there is no serious intent on my side, but I cannot feel sorry for him, as he has had his pleasure and will no doubt treasure such memories. The remedy for any present disappointment will not be difficult or of long duration, and, indeed, if his cold demeanour at table today was genuine, it has already begun.
If I have shocked you, Miss Brontë, I do not care a fig; as to marriage, I have no plans. The model I am forced to witness daily of that state in every particular dissuades me from desiring an early abandonment of my freedom to do as I please. I acknowledge I am frivolous but know that there will be too many years spent in respectable and matronly boredom and confinement when my bloom is faded. I intend to postpone and keep to a minimum such dread years while I have energy to do so.

Finally, I congratulate you on your perceptiveness, for I was sure our secret was secure; however, and though I accept - with reservations - your concerns for my virtue and your brother's selfish interests, I am still not convinced that you needed to go beyond watching us enter the wood in order to have your suspicions confirmed; I have no idea whether your

affections are or ever have been engaged - in what manner or to what degree, but I cannot help wondering whether your decision to penetrate the wood and come so close to us was inspired solely or even mainly by an attack of moral outrage. Is it possible that vulgar curiosity also played some part?

Yours etc, etc,

L.R.

Insolent girl! I instantly crushed the letter in my fist and hurled it into the fire.

The days stubbornly crept by. On the final one of our term at Thorp, Branwell at last unveiled his portrait. To my immense relief, his idealisation of Lydia, the apotheosis of the young woman, had been toned down, and the others made more expressive, less stern. The two Edmunds were certainly still rather lifeless but this did not seem to cause either one of them any offence. Mrs Robinson declared herself *pleased* with the result, indeed, she at the centre, and not her daughter behind her, was now the figure which first drew the onlooker's eye. She was very handsome. Bessie could scarce suppress a giggle to see her sister Mary so glumly and faintly portrayed and it was comic that the latter, in staring so miserably at her depiction, resembled it exactly; the former, seeming to catch that very irony, giggled the more, and, in so doing looked as naughty as she did in the frame.
Mr Robinson had made no comment but all of a sudden called James the butler rather irritably into the drawing room and had him carry the picture out *until a proper place could be found for it.* I had a feeling that the place he had in mind was somewhere at the back outside in the rain. Lydia seemed to have a similar thought for she raised her eyebrows at me and Branwell, smiled archly and turned her back on the company to stare out of the window at the park. My brother looked ill that morning and I was suspecting the usual, dismal causes.
What sweet relief the morrow would bring!

Early the next day, William, the coachman, drove us the few miles into York where we caught a train for Keighley. Not one word had been exchanged between us. We had the railway compartment entirely to ourselves save a stout matron who fell asleep as soon as we left the station. Branwell stared resolutely out of the window at the passing flat meadows, avoiding my gaze. Then I noticed a tear drip from his nose onto his lap; I immediately grasped his hand and was not resisted.
"Lydia meant only to trifle with your affections," I whispered hoarsely. "She is decidedly a bad girl and not worth a tear of yours. She assured me she never had the least intention of an elopement, though I dare say she is quite capable of such a disgraceful step, in future, if - no, *when* - it suits her."

“I beg of you Anne, whatever the temptation or circumstance, never to reveal a word of this to anyone, least of all the family. I do not weep with a broken heart, dear sister,” he added, gripping my tiny hand with emphasis “but for shame - not for what I have done with Lydia for she was entirely willing - and more! - but for giving you such torment. I saw at breakfast how altered you are for want of sleep and I can tell that your chest is not entirely well again.”
“The sea air will do me good.”
“I am a selfish, selfish being and am determined to change….this time”
To his declaration I made no reply for he *should* suffer. I knew his remorse would soon pass and I did not mean to hasten it away by any easy words of forgiveness.
“Well, you must prepare yourself to see her flirt shamelessly in Scarborough, the more determinedly if you are nearby, for it will give her equal pleasure to injure you as to flatter others.”
This was all I intended to say farther on the matter for I knew the sordid romance was at an end, and thanked God for it.

We arrived in Keighley about midday and the uncertain weather turned out so favourable that we decided to have our trunk sent on and walk the five miles to Haworth. The fresh air and warm sun revived our spirits as we encountered and passed familiar landmarks and characters who greeted us cheerfully. To see the wild flanks and ridges of the heather-clad hills, and the white patches of the sheep grazing contentedly on what grass they could find, made me realise just how much I had missed our home country. Branwell took my hand and swung it to and fro. His genial smile had returned and there was even a roguish twinkle in his eye.
“My own miseries made me quite forget that I have a secret to tell you.”
“I am not sure I wish to discover any more secrets of yours.”
He stopped and laughed at me. “Oh no. It is a secret which pertains entirely to you. You have a secret admirer.”
My heart fluttered and I felt my cheeks warming.
“Can you not guess?”
My inner eye surveyed the congregation at Little Ouseburn church - for this was the only place where I came into contact with society; the male faces I could recollect were polite but indifferent. I tried to think of a person who was a mutual friend or acquaintance. Who could he mean? He began to sing one of his favourite airs and did a little jig in front to tease me.
“You mean to keep me in suspense then?”
“I see only too well how intrigued - and pleased you are. It will cost you a sixpence to know.”
I felt my temper rise and picked up a stone to hurl at him.
“No. I said a sixpence!”
I bowled myself at his legs and knocked him over, then climbed onto his chest until he was laughing helplessly.
“Tell me!”

“Very well…it is Paul Crosby who took such good care of you. He told me he had not realised how pretty you were until he came up close to you.”
“Is that *all*? He thinks me pretty?”
“Is that not enough? Perhaps I should have deterred him by telling the poor deluded man what an Irish temper you have. Perhaps I still shall - unless you let me up this instant.”
We stood up and he dusted himself down while I walked on in indignation, though I could not absolutely decide whether I was thoroughly disgusted by the pretended attentions of Dr Crosby or not.
Soon we were climbing the final steep hill to the parsonage - me so breathlessly that Branwell picked me up and put me on his back. At the front door we were welcomed with laughter and tears, not least by dear old Tabby.
“Oh, how much you ha’ both been missed. Your Faither has asked every day since Christmas if there were letters - an’ now here ye both stand, large as life agin. Come into the kitchen for a cup o‘ tea.”
Branwell refused, but remembered to embrace Father and Emily before hurrying off to call on John Brown. Emily stayed in the kitchen while Tabby helped Father back to his study. She studied me closely and finally asked what was ailing me.
“You seem tired, Anne. Is it honestly worth wasting yourself on such weary, dreary work?”
I was indeed *very* tired and felt a surge of resentment against one who did not scruple to rely on another’s purse. But the Christian thought that it was Emily who bore the burden of our father’s loss of independence made me quell those few intemperate words I would have later regretted.
“Little ails me, Emily. I did have a bad cold and a fever which kept me abed a while. A cough still disturbs my sleep.”
“And Branwell?” said she, coming closer to look down on me. “Is he truly a reformed character?”
I knew that I would be subject to such scrutiny. Emily’s directness and bluntness alarmed most people who did not know and love her for her sincere, amiable qualities; and a sharp word from her had made more than one child go running in tears from a pianoforte lesson. As she waited for my reply, I pretended to divert my thoughts to consider Branwell’s conduct, as if it had not been of primary import in my mind on our arrival.
“Oh, he is much improved in matters pertaining to his….*old* habits. He is reliable and steady with the boy - indeed, he has worked wonders with him, and the family is even astonished at his progress. The father can be stupid and cross, yet Branwell abides him tolerably well and bears his most idiotic comments with equanimity - on all those scores I am proud of him.”
This was the truthful if somewhat evasive speech I had prepared to spare both Branwell and my own conscience. I instantly saw that Emily had seen through the pretence of my remarks, delivered casually as if ex-tempore. Her sharp eyes had tried to spear mine and I had avoided them.

“And how do the *rest* of the family like him?” she asked shrewdly, coming even closer so that I felt almost overwhelmed. “The female members of the family? Are his old habits in that regard improved too?”
We had never been so impertinent or tactless as to speculate openly on the true reasons for Branwell’s dismissal from his post in Cumberland, though a scrap of poetry - a sonnet to a young woman - dated of that time had fallen out of his hand one night as he slept in the chair by the kitchen fire after a miserable sojourn at the Black Bull, aforesaid sonnet being returned to him by way of a subterfuge I had arranged with an unsuspecting Tabby.
Now Emily seemed to be sharing those very thoughts inside my head, so intrusive were her beacon eyes. I pretended to be distracted by a bird in the garden and went to peer out, saying that the *others* at Thorp Green seemed well disposed towards him.
“In particular Mrs Robinson who admires his painting and singing…….well, has Father been well since his return from Thorp - apart from his eyes? Have you been very busy with your writing?”
When she made no reply I turned to find that she had already left the room.

Branwell left for Halifax two days later to see his sculptor friend Leyland and his circle of aesthetes who made a point of visiting certain choice taverns - choosing only those which felt able to offer them credit. He had promised to return by Friday but could only manage to roll in on Saturday evening, proclaiming himself poorly, but his frowning, dull expression told all too clearly what the cause of his present symptoms had been. Perhaps the sole blessing of Father’s failing sight - and I even supposed that Branwell took advantage of it - was that he was unable to detect what condition his favourite child could achieve through lack of moderation. Upon his return, Emily was quick to take in his lowness of spirits, the greyness about his pupils and his dingy complexion. She shot me a wry glance which asked me how proud I was of him *now* on the score of “improved” old habits, before announcing, coldly, her intention of going to her room *to continue her novel.* As she lit a candle, Branwell went to kiss her goodnight but she did not tarry for the pleasure of it, averting her face from his mouth at the attempt and showing by a grimace what disgust she felt at his breath.
“Emily replaces Charlotte in matters of scorn and disapproving,” said he with a look designed to humour me.
“You know it lowers my spirits to see you have such scant respect for your health. Yet I tire of speaking on this subject.”
“Not as much as I tire of hearing it!” he cried in a pet, before recollecting himself and adding with a wan smile “You *know* I shall have to be entirely respectable in Scarborough - allow your scamp of a brother just a little holiday from the grinding demands of formality and gravity…..besides I must explain that I was so alarmed and pained in Halifax by an attack of tic that I had no choice but to have a dose of laudanum sent out for to calm me….”
“Laudanum? No choice? I beg of you, Branwell, not to get into the habit of taking that again. It is addictive!”

“But it is only a temporary measure to prevent and alleviate what -”
“No! The cause of your seizures is preventable by safer measures - moderation is the panacea, not opium.”
“Please do not lecture me anymore, Anne.”
I left him in the kitchen and went to bed. Just before I extinguished my candle I saw a note slid under my door. I read:

Please do not let concern for me keep you awake, dear Anne. I promise to keep my evil tendencies now in check and am determined, feeling presently so ill, to behave with sobriety in Scarborough. You need trouble yourself neither that my affair with Lydia shall be renewed, nor fear any other future association with any relation of hers - for one, Bessie, is repulsively masculine and smells of horses, and the other repulsively plain!
Jesting apart, your strength contrasts markedly with my weakness and with you close by to keep me under strict supervision, I shall learn to profit by your example and achieve the inner command and contentment which all admire in you.

I threw the letter down in despair. Contentment? How little he understood me. If only he could realise my innermost yearnings to be free of servitude, for the love of a good companion, for a child of my own to raise on good, sound principles. My show of fortitude under continual disappointment was only borrowed from One immeasurably stronger than I; to His Support my wayward brother had denied himself access and I was convinced that by his own puny efforts he was ever likely to fail. Who could prevail upon him otherwise to alter his ways? Any slight improvement could only be brought about by his maturing in years and by a realisation that only sensible conduct might satisfy his aspirations for literary success and hence bring in true contentment. Soon he would be twenty-seven though he looked much younger. His present conduct - I told myself as the early morning hours crawled by, marked by our sad church chimes - conduct characterised by selfishness, excess and impropriety would, if maintained ten years hence, be open only to public ridicule and contempt. Surely this thought would dawn eventually on him too; I could only pray that, until those days of wiser counsel, no act of imprudence would cause a true calamity to befall him. If only others in the family would join me in a concerted effort to improve him! Father was too poorly and too indulgent, Emily too self-absorbed and Charlotte too distant. As the night wore farther on and threatened to give way to a light I resented, and the sound of Branwell snoring penetrated even as far as my room, I could only console myself with the conviction that his avowal of there being no other in the Robinson family to tempt him - however tastelessly expressed in his message to me - was entirely credible. But I needed to sleep. The constant effort, anxiety and disappointment were telling on my health and spirits. I prayed for a change in my circumstances - for a chance to devote myself to a worthy man with whom I could share my life; the only model for such bliss, among all the couples I knew, were the Sewells. I wanted neither fame, nor fortune nor ease - all of these I

would have swapped willingly for homely contentment. But selfishness seemed to rule the world and God knew I was heartily sick of it.

*

In early July we joined the Robinsons in York and went on by coach to Scarborough. Nothing occurred or was said on the journey worth reporting, and soon, from my high window, I was surveying with delight the wide sea under the low grey clouds, and taking in deep draughts of that wonderful tangy air, hearing the welcoming cries of the diving and soaring gulls. I knew them to be greedy and capable of snatching food from unwary beach-picknickers, but their vices, compared to ours, were uncalculating and born solely of impulses over which they had no control. I looked down and watched the dogs, large and small, racing madly across the sands, swept up by the sheer joy of being; and a great exhilaration surged through me; and I was overcome with love for a Creation with which we, in our wisdom, dared to be dissatisfied, and dared to improve. Here was I in Scarborough again, with beautiful walks to look forward to, and all manner of natural features to admire and to sketch, and to draw to the attention of two girls whom I still hoped to fascinate and raise above a shabby self-obsession.

We had been there almost two weeks when a beautiful dawn drew me out of bed to look out of the window. In a state of euphoria, I dressed quickly and went out into the bright new day, to run down the grassy slope to the beach where not one earlier footprint than my tiny one could stake a claim to it. Shielding my eyes against the risen sun, shimmering like a yolk on an immense plate of blue china, I discerned tiny black figures at the water's edge swabbing down five bathing machines - and another stooping with a pail to collect what I supposed were cockles. The white parish church clock showed it to be ten past five and I rejoiced that I could enjoy almost three hours of solitude and meditation before my duties recalled me to the hotel. The sun was strengthening and casting showers of golden gemstones across a sea so calm that I foolishly conceived of it as a monstrous beast oversleeping in spite of all those impulses to awaken. I imagined the algae covered rocks as its teeth and the great cliffs as its shoulders. The image made me laugh out aloud and I began to skip along towards the water's edge which the tide had removed to quite a distance. Although I walked steadily, stopping only now and then to pick up a pretty cream or faint orange shell - which I planned to have the girls make up into bracelets - and although I never deviated from a straight line - the sea never appeared to come closer, as if deliberately running with the tide farther out to tease me; this soon inspired in me an unaccountable emotion of despair - and throwing down all the shells I had gathered in the folds of my dress, I began to run until I could go no faster and was so short of breath that I had to stop and bend to breathe in deeply and slowly. I felt my chest wheeze and close up, so I laid myself down to look into the sky where I hoped to find, in its inscrutable depth, the means of composing myself. Soon, I found I could sit up - and with relief saw the tamely lapping water within a few yards of where I had stopped.

“You venture out very early this morning, Miss Brontë.”
I recognised the rich dark voice and I turned to look up at the very man who, ever since my walk with Branwell from Keighley, had been returning to my thoughts.
“Doctor Crosby!”
“Are you quite wise to run so fast with your chest having been in so fragile a condition?”
I crimsoned to realise he had watched me hurtle headlong across the sands like a girl, and, seeing my embarrassment, he laughed pleasantly while thrusting out his hand to pull me to my feet. Then he offered me his arm and I could not bring myself to refuse. To be standing so close to him was an exhilarating experience, but the disparity in our height was the first thing to strike me. Could he really be so interested in such a tiny person as me? Only with the late William Weightman had I been so close as this, and I had forgotten how pleasing the proximity was. My spine tingled and I felt a warm inner glow. Our conversation came with difficulty at first, with a series of commonplace remarks with which neither felt at ease - about the weather, our dates of arrival and departure, our impressions of the resort - but soon he turned it to more personal matters.
“And where are you staying so that I might pay the Robinsons - and you - a visit?”
I turned and pointed to the great white house on the cliff.
“It is the residence of Mr Wood where we always stay.”
“So very grand! I can only manage to afford lodgings - there - near the Theatre Royal in Thomas-street. I wonder at Mr Robinson’s extravagance - for I had heard that he was somewhat……*constrained*…..I, for one, am awaiting payment of a bill for attending him for his dyspepsia….”
Such want of tact was shocking, and for a while I was lost for an answer which would not be impertinent for an employee of that gentleman to make, but polite enough for my companion to hear without offence.
“As the mere governess I have no knowledge of such matters, nor would I honestly wish to acquire any. I am here only here - with Branwell - because young minds need to be stimulated even on holiday - and we also have charge of supervision when the parents are invited out. I have never seen you here before in July, Doctor…..do you come here for a special reason?”
Some old university friends of his, he said, were on a walking tour and he had arranged to meet up with them.
“And has your breathing improved lately with the sea air? - I quite forgot to enquire.”
“These few days have made it much easier, thank you. I even forget sometimes I have asthma - and you yourself have just witnessed…..my impetuosity.”
He looked down at me and his ruddy cheeks broke into a winning smile. “Believe me, Miss Brontë, knowing you to be so reserved, it was a sight quite unexpected - and, for that, equally charming.”
He escorted me back to the promenade, desired to be remembered to Branwell and the family and left me with a wish to walk out again, even though I had made it clear that such an arrangement would be difficult, if not impossible.

“Perhaps on another fine morning then?” he said, giving me back my arm. “Let us leave it to serendipity. I shall depart on Sunday.”
I watched him stroll towards town and with a final wave he was gone.

Lydia Robinson, the daughter, had struck up a friendship with a girl in our hotel called Victoria whose family was faintly related by marriage to the Thompsons of Kirkby Hall, the nearest great residence to Thorp Green. She too was all blonde curls and had it not been for a rather square chin, a pronounced nose and narrow brow, the two might have been taken for sisters or cousins. Lydia was delighted to be superior in prettiness, which disparity made Victoria into an ideal companion for Lydia’s own fine features were not outshone - and indeed were only emphasized by her proximity - and Victoria was not so ugly as to utterly deter the attention of young men to the pair of them.
Mrs Millington, Victoria’s mother, was a widow of four years standing and had once been quite pretty too. Her eyes and nose where sharp and the edges of her mouth a little turned down as if she had had more reason in her life to scowl rather than to smile. I soon realised she was a very proud lady for she showed no inclination to acknowledge me save by a condescending, suspicious nod of the head; the mother however exceeded the daughter in good manners, for *she* behaved as if I was entirely invisible. I gathered by a frequent allusion to the Thompsons that the dame valued the faint connection immensely as a way of pretending a status beyond that one which her rather unfashionable dresses - even I noticed! - betrayed to anyone with usual discernment; I surmised that her own brilliance of attire had been sacrificed for the benefit of the daughter’s. This conclusion was confirmed by the mother herself one early evening when she told Mrs Robinson how urgent it was for Victoria to make a good match. By continuing to ignore me so steadfastly, she quite forgot I was looking over the children’s work in a corner of my employer’s apartment, so that her tasteless and improper comments were aired as if I was no more sensible than a candlestick or a tallboy.
“Yes, poor Mr Millington left his affairs rather muddled, I’m afraid, and there were…some *debts*. I advise you, dear Mrs Robinson, to have some influence on your own husband’s liking for his wine - for I have observed how often he has his glass refilled - for dear old Doctor Warrilow gave Mr Millington fair warning - how I would hate to think the love of your life might be took off as suddenly - and so unpreparing for his wife - as was mine, with his heart! My own dear Victoria an orphan at barely fifteen - only a trip to York and a promise of a new dress could assuage her grief - can you imagine? As for your kind invitation to stay at Thorp after Harry Thompson‘s forthcoming wedding party- well, I have considered it long and have no choice but to decline - for I must consider the disposition of my Aunt Fairbrother in Ripon - she is quite infirm now and I have to suppose I may have an interest in her fortune - (she is reckoned to have nigh-on thirty…..*thousand* …..pounds) - and my sister Mathilda - who has rarely visited her and done as little for her as she can - has lately been in contact, having heard she is ailing - her selfishness and impudence disgusts me! - so that I must go and attend her as soon as the wedding is over - only for dear Victoria’s sake, you understand. But, as I meant to say, it would

be delightful to me if Victoria could stay with you for a few weeks in the autumn - for in your society and with your connections, and if she shines as I expect at Kirkby Hall, then who knows? If it could be got about that she has good prospects, even if they are less good than I am hoping for, then maybe a rich fellow or two would come a-calling. And perhaps something might rub off her for Lydia - or even for Bessie."
This speech was delivered or with scarce a pause for breath, leaving my Mistress almost bewildered and with little choice but to accept the proposal.
"Well," said she at last. "I despair of Lydia being married - for she shows no interest in any of the bachelors or widowers in our vicinity. Indeed, she does not seem interested in men at all, and wanders around our park in a dream with a *book* - and as for Bessie…she would rather marry a horse!"
I saw a sly look steal across the face of her companion as this welcome intelligence sank in.

The arrival of a playmate at Thorp for Lydia would be a great relief to me - for I had been anxious that Lydia, once restored to the tedious routine of home, might set her cap again at Branwell. I had no qualms about Victoria on that score, for she treated him with the same arrogant disdain as she treated me, by absolutely ignoring him - and she was too ignorant and stupid for me to suspect any deceit similar to that adopted in the spring by Lydia.
By day, the two selfish girls were allowed to roam the resort together, go sea-bathing and shopping without their mothers; they were pleased to be admired and in demand at an evening ball, and gazed up at from the stalls at a Mozart concert given in the Town Hall - which had bored them otherwise *beyond endurance*. At the Theatre Royal they swooned over a handsome young actor called Roxby who, they swore, *had deliberately delivered his lines in the direction of their box.*
And what of Branwell? Did he behave? Young Edmund was too young to be out in society of an evening and was expected in bed by eight o' clock at the latest. Branwell therefore had care of him whenever the rest of us were invited out - which was very often. To my surprise and delight, he bore this very well, telling me that he welcomed the peace and quiet to write his novel. I envied him this, for I was to chaperone the younger sisters and occupy them while their mother played cards, danced, conversed and thoroughly enjoyed herself while her husband sat gloomily with his glass, exchanging infrequent comments with one or two companions sitting down the side of the room. Yes, I was proud again of Branwell, for the sea air restored his glow of health and he drank only one glass of wine at dinner. My encounters with Mr Robinson were gratifyingly seldom, restricted mainly to meal-times, where he seemed to have made a resolution to say as little as possible - an unnecessary one as it turned out, as the conversation was almost entirely dominated by the absurd topics Mrs Millington saw fit to introduce, for she who had invited herself to lunch and dine with our party. At times, I dared not look at Branwell, and once almost choked on my pudding when she declared Shakespeare - (a performance of Richard the Third being imminent) - to be a *most tedious* author.

For the third Saturday of our stay, two days after I had met Dr Crosby, invitations had been brought round for a party farther along The Cliff at a large house which had been taken by a rich manufacturer of pulleys, a Mr Peacock, from Manchester. Mrs Millington, who had speculated on *rough hands and rougher manners*, declared herself too tired to attend as the hour approached, but begged that her daughter could accompany us in our carriage. (We were but ten minutes away on foot, but let that pass). When we arrived the two young ladies were very excited to find that their young actor Henry Roxby was also among the guests - and that he kept staring in their direction. The main room was filling rapidly and the different voices soon joined to become a cacophony as each strove to be heard above his neighbour. Glumly I tracked the progress of the two belles across the room, wondering how I could endure three hours - at least - of such torment.

Then, to my surprise and delight, I discovered Doctor Crosby to be amongst the great throng - in fact we almost collided with each other in a doorway. His eyes shone with pleasure to see me - and to see the effect the encounter produced on my blushing cheeks. He offered immediately to get me a glass of wine but I refused, saying it made me cough and even brought on my asthma. But he decided to insist.

“Just a little, diluted, will do no harm. Come, it is a merry gathering - and the old buffer, Peacock, has forked out liberally. As your physician, I recommend it - NO - insist on it!”

He had a merry eye himself and I detected in his over-familiarity that the glass he was gripping so tight was not the first to sway in his hand.

“And where,” he said, looking round “is that scapegrace of a brother of yours hiding?”

He grabbed a glass of wine from the tray of a passing waiter, added some water from a nearby carafe, and passed it to me with a gallant bow.

“Branwell, I am pleased to say, has acquitted himself in a thoroughly gentlemanly manner these two weeks and is entirely given up this evening to the supervision of his tutee….”

“Oh come, come Miss Brontë…..may I call you Anne? Not so stern! Where is the girl I saw rushing madly up to the water? Branwell in check, you say. God, he must be dreadful bored if I know him.”

“Are you alone here Dr Crosby?”

“Nay. As I said, I have met some old friends in Scarborough passing through - and one happens to know the son of old Peacock there.”

An outburst of laughter in a far corner drew our attention and drowned out the other conversations in the room. Five young men were engaging the attention of Victoria and Lydia.

“Come on Crosby!” shouted a voice. “You must come and listen to this story.”

“My friends are very gay tonight, Miss Anne. It is Fred’s birthday - he who stands closest to us with the orange side-whiskers and spectacles. Would you excuse me? I am wanted. Perhaps we could dance together after supper at ten?”

Before I could refuse he was gone, leaving me quite alone amongst a sea of strangers. I looked in vain for Mrs Robinson and the younger girls and finally left the room for the welcome cool of

the corridor. In a quieter room near the front door, where a few parties were at cards, I found the daughters gathered around Mrs Robinson who had her head in her hands.
“The noise and the bad air have given Mother a terrible headache,” said Mary coming to me. “Father has gone out to summon the carriage.”
“It is smoky in here, Mary. Come Bessie, help me to get your mother out into the fresh air.”
This was soon accomplished, and we found ourselves on the steps with the cooling breeze on our faces, blown in from the distant sea which seemed to whisper, particularly to me, an urgent appeal to come - and leave behind that horrendous human jangle and tangle.
“Poor Lydia.” murmured Mrs Robinson, rising from a step as soon as the carriage came “*And* Victoria. They will be so disappointed to be fetched away from such a gay party. But I dare not leave them here amongst so many strangers and young men. Lydia is so entirely innocent, as you well know. And I have guaranteed Victoria’s safety to her mother. Oh dear…” And she began to weep.
“Well, I for one shall be entirely satisfied to be home,” said Bessie, mounting the steps after Mary “for I hate to make stupid conversation and drum my brains for something witty to say.”
Mrs Robinson had a word in the ear of her husband, whose face was showing he agreed with his daughter’s sentiments about parties - and that he considered his wife’s headache as not such a bad thing.
“Miss Brontë,” said she “would it greatly trouble you to remain here and chaperone the girls? I see too clearly how they turn the heads of the young men. And Lydia can be so impetuous and flirty when she senses herself admired - though she means nothing by it.”
Mr Robinson regarded me in such a way that gave me little choice but to comply, and though my heart was heavy, I nodded and smiled. The servant was sent to fetch Lydia who seemed very cross to be dragged away from her companions. All was quickly explained to her and a time determined for the return of the carriage to bring us home.
“Half-past-ten?” she groaned. “So early? It is gone half-past-eight already.”
“You will respect Miss Brontë’s instructions as if they came direct from me!” declared her mother. “You are not to leave Victoria’s side - and neither is to venture out of doors or indeed away from the main salon.”
“Very well. But must it be half-past-ten? Even Cinderella could stay until midnight.”
Her father looked at her sternly and she concurred, turning to smile ever so sweetly and maliciously at me, before raising her skirts to remount the steps. I watched the carriage dawdle and dwindle to a dot, wishing I could be inside it, and then went back into the stuffy heat of the building and into an air which mingled perfume with smoke and the more unpleasant natural vapours of mankind.
Now I was sentenced to sit alone in a dark corner or else be pestered by unwanted enquiries and solicitations for my comfort or welfare by some well-meaning ancient dame or gentleman. I had no desire to shout aloud inane comments about the weather above the tumult and then be forced to repeat them when they went unheard. Neither had I any inclination to seek out Dr Crosby, as his company of friends seemed quite adequate for his entertainment, and I had seen to what end

their conviviality was tending. I half closed my eyes, managing always to keep a glimpse of Lydia's mint green dress in view through the forest of legs. The chatter, the laughter, the heat, the raw violin music and the jigging turmoil of the scene before me reminded me of paintings I had seen in books depicting the Last Judgment, and in order to amuse myself I began to sketch the phenomenon before me in words. A sudden incident close by - a woman of about thirty had just torn herself away in fury from a fellow who was swaying about intoxicated, - probably her husband - set me to thinking again about a plot for a new novel beyond my modest Agnes Grey. I could imagine that lady's early delight in being proposed to, and I then set it against her later - too late - abominable discovery of the beguiling suitor's true nature which had been deceitfully concealed from her; then I imagined all the stages of disillusion - and dissolution - and I saw at once not only what a powerful tale could be told, but what a *moral* tale it could be, and what lessons could be drawn for naïve young women in particular, but also for spoilt young men whose characters might be selfish, unwholesome, callous - and ultimately self-destructive. I had there enough material before me, as I observed the restless heads, dancing bodies and mouths gaping with laughter, lies, flattery, silly remarks and false sentiments, to depict such scenes realistically, and, I hoped, the skill. I watched eyes glancing slyly at other eyes, making private bargains and signs of contempt and ridicule, and imagined the true thoughts behind those fake smiles. Like a view of the countryside or the sea, here was a scene I was ready and eager to sketch out and only the tools and the time were wanting.

The flash of a green dress disappearing through the far door whence I had first entered roused me from my reveries. I stood up at once and fought my way through the halloo-ing and protesting throng, but the corridor was empty save a servant or two carrying tables and a drunken guest leaning against the wall. I looked up the staircase, seized by alarming and disgusting thoughts, and climbed up a few risers before a servant blocked my way. I asked him if two girls had passed him by and he assured me that there was no-one on the first floor, save a large gentleman who had been taken ill and was resting. A helpless giggle drew me back down and I heard a door slam. Were they playing games with me? I entered every room on the ground floor but they were nowhere to be seen. They *had* to have found another way upstairs, so as soon as there was no-one near the staircase, I ascended rapidly and immediately noticed the curtain at the front end of the corridor moving in the breeze. I pulled the curtain aside and to my horror found them on the balcony - each sitting, with their legs bare, on a knee of the actor Roxby whose shirt was open down to his navel. Immediately they stood up in confusion while he got drunkenly to his feet, bowed to me calmly and went back inside. Lydia decided to look cross.

"We were only playing hide and seek with Henry, were we not Vicky?"

Her friend never looked at me but turned rudely away to look in the direction of the darkening sea, though I doubted the self-obsessed girl could notice it.

"Well, Lydia, you decidedly found whom you were looking for. I doubt though this would be a version of the game your parents would approve of."

"Oh, la!" she retorted. "Henry is quite respectable and what harm is done? Mother herself flirts with the damned fool. Did you not enjoy the scene, Miss Brontë?"

“Hold your tongue, you insolent girl! Whatever the harm done or not done, I require you now to return to the main rooms. It is close to ten and if you want supper, the tables are being brought in.”
“Supper? Who wants supper?” was all that Miss Millington could say, and I detected a horrible slur in her scornful voice. This impudence now emboldened her friend who laughed and went to stand by her at the railing, entwining her arm around her thicker waist.
“My former *governess*, dear Vicky, is only employed to follow us around…..”
She leant across then to whisper in her ear and the girl shrieked and put her hand to her face. I had little doubt as to the nature of that whispered intelligence and I dreaded the consequences of it being divulged by such a vulgar, stupid girl.
“If you do not follow me back forthwith to the party, your mothers will be told of your brazen conduct. You have respectable families to consider and your behaviour should be better than this.”
“As if my *mother* cares what I do!” retorted Victoria. “She would have me married off to the devil if he were rich enough - and then she could do as she pleases.”
“That is a quite shocking thing to say! I insist that you both follow me now.”
“Very well,” said Lydia pertly and with mock ceremony. “We will retrace our steps - and I shall follow *you* for once, Miss Brontë.”
“And I absolutely forbid you to drink any more wine. Come now.”
I led on and they followed at a half-obedient distance.
The main salon was now very raucous with laughter; hot cheeks, stuffed with food, were chewing greedily, and glasses were being impatiently raised and filled by harassed waiters. As I turned to look for the girls behind me, I saw nearby the long back of Dr Crosby at a table with his company of friends. He was holding his empty glass aloft and looking around for service.
“Here isn’t half enough wine,” he cried. “Where are the bloody waiters? We must send one of them down to the cellar for bottles just for us. What good does the occasional passing blockhead with one accursed glass do?”
At this point he saw me and tried to compose himself.
“Miss Brontë….I had not…I thought you had not…I was told you had left the party as I heard your lady was indisposed. Now then, shall we have our little dance after all, when supper is done?”
All his friends were regarding me now with undisguised impertinence and frankness.
“Dance with *her*, Rick?” said one, aiming a bread roll at his head perfectly. “The maid is much too tall for you!”
“Be careful, young lady, if you value your tiny toes, for Rick….will break them in this state,” said another, roaring at his own wit, before gasping and adding “But at least he has the skill to reset them.”
“But not tonight though!”
The whole table guffawed at the jest.

“I beg you to sit down, Doctor Crosby,” said I privately in his ear “before you fall down. I will not dance. I wish to play no part in such a humiliation for you.”
“Then may we dance some other time then, when…..when….when I…..”
Close to tears, I managed to say enough to placate him and move away, and began to look around again in anxiety for those stupid girls. To my relief they had stayed in the corridor for Victoria was sick. At least she had eaten nothing, and a servant was busy cleaning up the mess. I instructed Lydia, who seemed close to retching herself, to bring her outside. I feared the censure of Mrs Millington who despised me already enough.
Once outside, the fresh air seemed to revive her.
“Tell *her* not to breathe a word of this to my mother, Lydia - or I shall be confined to the damn hotel.”
My indignation was thoroughly roused by such gross impertinence.
“And tell *her* not to breathe a word herself, Lydia, of what has taken place - when she is sober - to anyone - for I shall have plenty to relate if she does.”
I found some pastilles in my bag for the girl to sweeten her breath and gave one to Lydia too. I drew her aside as her friend drooped over the rail, crying.
“You will both say you were faint because of the stuffy air. If you betray me, I shall betray you. It would not bother me a fig to be sent away; can you both say the same with a full week of your holiday to go? And would this girl be allowed to stay at Thorp if I told your parents what a bad influence she is?”
She went to say something in defiance but I was ready for her.
“You are a thoroughly naughty girl, Lydia Robinson, yet your mother suspects nothing, Do not threaten me ever again, do not speak to me ever again unnecessarily and do not think about carrying out your former threat, for you have more to lose than I. If you do not promise me, as we stand here, never to speak again on a certain matter to anyone, I shall expose the deceitful and disgusting behaviour you have exhibited here - and that, confirmed by the host with whom I spoke to try and ascertain your hiding place, will be enough to cause the scales to fall from the eyes of your mother and render any accusation against my brother a despicable and malicious lie. Here comes the carriage. If this….*girl* here asks you tomorrow to confirm the remarks I think you made about Branwell - if and when she regains her paltry senses and her memory - then you will refute them and explain them as the result of intoxication. Do I have your word? Did you hear me? Do I have your word and *solemn* undertaking?”
“Yes!” she snapped
“Help your friend. For I am far too far beneath her to be of assistance. I shall walk. Make my excuses - explain that I was dizzy and needed to have fresh air.”
On my way home I cried bitter tears of disappointment. Part of me was ready to make excuses for Crosby, for I had seen enough of him to think he came close, even closer than William Weightman, to being the person I could marry. My hope that Mrs Sewell had exaggerated his toping was shattered. Yet my heart still argued for him - once married, he would reform, once a father he would take his paternal responsibilities seriously - but my head, clearer now in the

breezy air as the tide swept in and darkness showed up all the wonderful stars and planets in the east, could not be persuaded. The image of the disgusted, angry woman at the party would not be erased and I even imagined I was she. Drink was in Crosby's blood, like Branwell's; they were only friends, like John Brown in Haworth and Joe Leyland in Halifax, because of their love of the rotten stuff. It was as impossible to suppress their alcoholism as to suppress my symptoms of asthma - it might lie in abeyance, it might pretend to be reformed a little, it might even seem to have vanished as my own clear chest seemed to prove at the coast - but when foul conditions were ripe, when the heavier and gloomier air of disappointment beset the victim, when crisis oppressed his spirits and no lifting of them seemed possible, then the bottle would again provide an easy and available option, and its opening would be readily justified. But for what? Was the alcoholic spirit become the only point of existence? Was the man created only to pass it through his mouth and into his arteries, his veins and out again? What about the wonders all around us? I stopped to cry out in fury and agony at the futility of such an existence and the wind carried my shout away.

I turned my face to look up at the moon racing through the clouds and prayed for an explanation. An unsteady elderly gentleman bade me goodnight. I watched him totter along, feeling for the pavement with his cane, taking one pace to the side for every pace forward. Should I forgive Crosby's behaviour? Had God not provided me with another warning sign that night? Would it be a sacrilege to overlook it?

I knocked at the hotel door and was admitted. Mrs Robinson had retired early with her headache and her husband, still absorbed in his newspaper in the lounge when I looked in, seemed to have got no suspicion of the girls' true state. He was drinking brandy and water and looking sour for it

"Lydia looked in and said she was fatigued and was going straight to bed. I hope *you* are feeling better, Miss Brontë. It was dreadful warm in the house and no wonder some of us felt the effect. Are you recovered?"

"Quite recovered, Sir, thank you. Please tell your wife that the girls behaved impeccably and give her my best wishes for a speedy recovery."

"I will indeed, Miss…….I know I sometimes seem out of spirits, but I do suffer - and Doctor Crosby cannot cure it. I am very grateful for your loyalty and devotion to us. I promise I shall buy you a little token of my appreciation for your extraordinary efforts tonight."

"There is no need, Sir. Have you seen my brother?"

"No, not at all. Good night."

Candle light was flickering under his door when I passed by and I could hear him softly reading aloud what he had written. I listened but could not make it out. I would have knocked but I was exhausted, and full of images and snippets of dialogue which might fill my own novel, I retired. The name Huntingdon came to mind - I had seen it on an invitation card carelessly tossed onto a table - and it was the last thing I remembered before sleep overwhelmed me like the tide I had yearned to join with.

The next morning, when we had returned from church, the servant gave me a letter which had been delivered by the boots boy from a hotel near the theatre. I went to my chamber to open it.

My Dear Miss Brontë,

When I woke this morning, amply punished by a headache for my unwonted excesses of the previous evening, I felt an even greater anguish to recall that you had had the misfortune of witnessing my disorderly state and behaviour. Words cannot express my grief and guilt over that fact, and that you were treated with such unpardonable insolence by my - I would have written "friends", but their conduct demeans the word. In my defence I can only cite the unusual circumstances pertaining to my reunion with them after so long an absence of view, as well as the disappointment of learning of your early departure.
I sense, dear Anne, that you do have some regard for me, and hope with all my heart that, if it is indeed equal to mine, you may overlook this one exception and forgive me. I know of no other in the environs of Ouseburn who would suit me better as my companion and helpmeet in life. I pray that this letter will encourage you to think as well of me and - dare I hope? - treat last night as if it never took place,

Your obedient servant, Richard Crosby.

These sentiments were so reminiscent of Branwell's excuses that my first impulse was to tear the letter into shreds. Resisting this, I folded it and put it into my reticule. The bell sounded for luncheon and though I had no appetite for food or conversation, I had no option but to go down to the dining room. Victoria Millington sat in a wan silence while her mother would not let up interrogating Lydia about the evening's proceedings. (The shabbiness of the woman's attire was only exceeded by the shabbiness of her conversation, in which so far I had detected no other objects but concern for her own and her daughter's welfare).
"Victoria is so silent this morning that I sense she is keeping a secret, Miss Robinson. Pray do tell, were there any nice rich young men paying her particular attention last night? You can whisper to me if you please."
Lydia shot me a scowl and shook her head petulantly.
"Oh dear. Why are mothers kept so in the dark these days, Mrs Robinson? I fear daughters are too encouraged now to be independent and even defiant - and it *must* come from the schoolroom, for it could not come from their mothers who wish them all compliance. From *my* governess, dear Miss Tiler, it was just the keyboard and embroidery and a little French. It is not *healthy* that young women are encouraged to think and have opinions, do you not agree? The next thing is that they will wish to vote!"
On and on and on she went until a good slice of beef and potatoes arrived to occupy her disdainful mouth. I did not need to dread her turning her questions to me and I had absolutely no intention of making any unsolicited remarks about an evening so abhorrent in every way. At last,

pudding was dispatched and the table cleared. I begged Mr Robinson to be excused from the serving of coffee, citing an urgent matter of correspondence. I hurried back to my room, seized my pen and desk and, after many false starts, composed the following reply.

Dear Doctor Crosby,

I thank you for your letter. You need not concern yourself over the events of yesterday for I am pleased that you behaved in the way you did, for I found out, without having the pain of experiencing it directly, exactly what kind of life I would have as your wife. I admit to feeling a little distress - but it is nothing in comparison to the distress I would have of adding a husband to a brother in need of reform. The latter has already exhausted my energies, and it would be well beyond my power to tolerate and support the former. In view of the above, I hope you will realise that it would be entirely useless for you renew your addresses to me, and I entreat you therefore, for the sake of us both, not to trouble yourself therewith,

With a heavy heart, Anne Brontë

We went out that afternoon for our usual stroll across the Mill Beck bridge into the grounds of the spa. When I was unobserved I called a boy across who had been selling lottery tickets and tasked him with delivering the letter for a sixpence.

*

We returned to Thorp a week earlier than normal from Scarborough for Harry Thompson's wedding. I shall not repeat myself in describing some of the immature behaviour exhibited by some of the young men at the wedding breakfast; Doctor Crosby attempted once to engage me in conversation but I persuaded him by my short answers and by assurances that I was charged with the supervision of Bessie and Mary, and that further discourse was useless. He mingled back with the crowd, and tried to encourage Branwell to take a toast with him, but to my delight he refused. He too was tasked with keeping an eye on Edmund who was out on the lawn racing around with other boys. Dr Crosby's evident enjoyment of the party was sign enough for me that his unrequited love was not troubling him as much as his letter had given me to fear. His later jig with a *brother* of the groom confirmed it.

I noted that Lydia and Victoria were much in demand for dancing but their mothers were present to supervise, so I took no notice when they slipped out of the glass doors into the garden. No doubt they were only getting fresh air; I did care a fig whether they were getting something less innocent in Mr Thompson's woods.

The next day, Mrs Millington went off to tend to her rich aunt and Victoria was transferred to our care. Our routines were re-established and only Lydia had a different life at Thorp to look

forward to. She and her new friend were often out riding and were even trusted to go to York and beyond.

Branwell read me excerpts from his novel - And The Weary Are At Rest - and I told him of my idea for a new novel. He told me it was a risky undertaking to describe a bad and abusive marriage, but I was not dissuaded.

“A novel should not simply entertain, Branwell. If it is honest and truthful, it will not need defending, but will be capable of standing up to censure as long as it is persuasive and its characters believable. If it describes abhorrent things, it does not follow that it will be abhorrent in itself. Macbeth describes appalling events but is judged a wonderful play.”

“Nevertheless, dear sister, I would hate to think you are wasting your time because the public is so fickle and lily-livered; and never forget that most novel readers are women. Would their husbands permit them to read such a disturbing book? Concentrate rather on Agnes.”

“But it is a book that needs to be written, for too many women are trapped in bad marriages without redress. Our Mistress is, I think, an example. How she dissembles!”

He looked darkly and shook his head. “He is little more than a tyrant. How can she bear to….oh, it is too appalling to contemplate. I sense she wishes to know me better and share her aesthetic interests with me - for what sympathy can she expect from such a Philistine?”

“Well, I would not encourage you to interfere. Robinson dislikes you and would love an excuse to dismiss you.”

I turned the subject back to my novel and described to him my new heroine whom I had called Helen Huntingdon. He smiled as I described her elegant beauty, her cool intelligence, her reserve, her love of painting, her piety, her quietude, her tolerance of and even pity for a dissolute husband.

“Well,” he said at last with a twinkling eye “were it not for her elegance, I could almost fancy her modelled on a sister of mine.”

I launched an apple at him and just missed his ear.

“Has she also a temper and absolutely no ability to laugh at herself?”

“You are a bad man, Branwell.”

“But seriously, how can you get under the skin of such a woman if you have never experienced such pangs yourself?”

“Do I have to become a dog to know what a stick on the back feels like? Besides, I had my model at the Peacocks’ party. The woman’s face expressed everything bad and I could feel her grief. I have seen often enough the cause - to bring the cause and the effect together requires only a little effort of imagination.”

“But your book must also have a hero for the heroine to be married to. Have you not considered that? All saleable novels must end with a happy marriage. Think only of Miss Austen.”

“I am working that out. To be sure, she *will* find the correct man, though I mean to make him far from perfect; and thereby I shall prompt the reader to consider whether she should not better remain a *single* woman after *one* tormenter is dead.”

“Shocking! Mrs Silly-Millington was entirely right about you when casting aspersions about governesses. You are a free-thinker and a witch!”
“Nonsense! Women will not always be as downtrodden as they are now. If my paltry story can persuade just one woman to choose a husband wisely then its writing will have been worthwhile.”

To Lydia’s chagrin, her companion had only been with us five weeks when the occasion of her great-aunt’s death called her away to Ripon. Victoria’s grief at the loss of her relative was only exceeded by her grief of having to leave Lydia. She was wanted urgently, not in particular to attend the funeral, but because her mother had made the acquaintance of a woman lately moved to the town, married to a prospering railway engineer at York, and they had a son of twenty who was very eligible and attracting the attention of young women thereabouts. I learnt, by overhearing Lydia, that Victoria was due to inherit only two thousand pounds, and another fifteen when her own dear mother would breathe her last, an event - happily, of course, for the adoring daughter - far into the future given the mother’s stubbornly rude health. I conjectured the said engineer to be a talented man of great commonsense and supposed that only a cursory look through Victoria’s prettyish veneer would lead him to perceive what kind of girl his dear son would be condemned to abide until death did part them. But I somehow doubted this would be an obstacle for an eager, young, red-blooded suitor, and it struck me, when returning to my ideas of Helen Huntingdon, that young men, like young women, had better choose their spouses wisely too. In October it was duly announced by Mrs Robinson that Victoria was indeed engaged to the man in question.
“I could only wish that our dear Lydia could be so easily settled.” said Mrs Robinson in passing one day to me. “But she shows no inclination. The men who have tried have all been repulsed. I ought to have been more strict with her. Mrs Millington was quite right. Lydia *must* have her own way.”
Since her friend’s departure, Lydia had been very morose, particularly as the weather had prevented her from riding. I had seen her glance more than once meaningfully in Branwell’s direction and I was alarmed again. Now, having listened with a show of sympathy to Mrs Robinson’s lament, I was quick to see an opportunity.
“Indeed it is a pity, Madam, that she seems to find no-one in the vicinity to her liking. Perhaps - I do not know whether it would be improper of me even to suggest it - perhaps if she could change her scenery by visiting one of your brothers or your sister in Lichfield, where there would be a greater variety of entertainment and socialising, perhaps she would find a romantic interest there - with proper chaperoning of course…”
“My dear Miss Brontë! What a godsend you are! If such a visit could take that dismal expression from her face - oh, how I tire of seeing it every day - and if the removal would bring about the desired result ….”
And if I could see the back of the petulant, spoiled, nasty creature….
“…Then it would be an ideal solution for all concerned. I shall consult Mr Robinson forthwith.”

And so Lydia was packed off with great ceremony to Staffordshire, to be away at least until Christmas. How much less complicated and fraught our affairs now seemed. Even Branwell expressed pleasure to see the back of her. The early autumn passed by with little incident. My brother seemed composed and of an even temper - which seemed to vindicate my theory that excesses of alcohol were the main cause of his moods and even the onset of his tic. He never saw Dr Crosby on Saturdays and spent most of his spare time writing. He was determined to be published and I saw a lot of merit in his work, though privately doubted its commercial appeal. I even suggested that we should consider - all four of us - offering to pay a publisher - at least in part - for our books to be made up and brought out.

"Charlotte often spoke to me of a collection of our poetry. Perhaps that would be an ideal starting point."

"No fear! I have had enough disappointment on that score."

I had said the wrong thing and he sat looking grimly out of the window. Poor soul - how he still suffered for want of recognition. Even with the approbation of Hartley Coleridge, son of the great man, his translations of Horace's odes had been serially rejected. And he had been entirely snubbed in his approach to Wordsworth.

"For every successful poet there are a thousand failures, many destined to die of grief or starvation in a garret. For the world is not poetic! There is an excess of poets and a dearth of readers. You see for yourself, Anne, the kind of people who predominate, the Millingtons, and all those people in the hotel who can only read nonsense and *spout* nonsense on the weather and their dinners….as all the family here - save the mother who has *some* taste…..There will come a time when no poetry will be written, when all the world wants is…*information* and newspapers and technical manuals. The world will be in such a hurry to acquire more and more material comforts, that there will be no time for imagination, meditation and the muse. All will be *prose.* It tends that way now….and I am obliged to write an accursed novel."

"You must not despise so your fellow men. Consider, you are cleverer than most, so of course you find their conversation stupid. It is not their fault that they cannot appreciate great art and literature - you should rather pity them than despise them. I fear you have become a misanthrope, Branwell. Be thankful to God that you have been given the talent to create; consider, it is a blessing given to few."

"But I am not given the opportunity to have it appreciated! It is a curse rather than a blessing. God taunts me!"

"How can He, if you believe He does not exist?"

He looked at me long and to my relief smiled.

"What amuses you?"

"You do, Anne. I know you are *just* as disgusted as me with the behaviour and utterances of our fellow creatures. Truth told, you are a bit of a hypocrite, feeling obliged to forgive and excuse what you secretly despise - simply because, as a Christian, you feel it would be wrong not to love what the creator has fashioned….."

"That is a terrible lie!"

"….While *I* of course have a clear conscience to tell the truth about them, for there is no-one to condemn me for my honesty!"
"Not true!"
"If I am wrong, why do you get so heated…….put the book down!"
He grabbed my wrist and took the missile away.
"You are in a passion because I have discovered your secret! As you discovered mine. Admit it!"
My head drooped - for he had indeed stumbled on the Question which caused me the most religious doubt: how could a good and beautiful God have created such an ugly and bad race of beings? Who had stood and scoffed at my Saviour's crucifixion?
"I do grapple with such problems, Branwell." I said at last. "Not least the cruel predicament *I* find myself in."
"How *cruel*? You are better appreciated here than I."
"No, I mean it differently. I am too high to find contentment with a toiling man - and too low for a gentleman. Governesses marry curates and teachers and junior doctors. Can you recommend one? No stop! - do not dare mention Crosby again! I dread to hear myself say that horrid word which is redolent of *sinister* and s*pider*s. I long for my own family but fear that is not to be my fate. Why has God made me the way I am?"
He took my hand and sighed.
"Do not be depressed, dear sister. Perhaps one of us *will* live to enjoy fame as a poet or a novelist. I fear it will not be me."

*

Bessie, having reached the age of seventeen, was no longer much under my wing. Her mother was now determined to make her marriageable and insisted she sit at least an hour at her embroidery and an hour at the piano. This went against the grain and could be but grudgingly achieved by permission to mount her horse only after luncheon.
One evening, when I called in to see Mrs Sewell at the Monks House she was anxious to share a rumour she had heard.
"I ain't a body to gossip, Miss Brontë, but as it is about your charge, Miss Elizabeth, I feel obliged to tell it you."
Bessie had been seen by Mr Sewell riding in the direction of Home Farm, property of a well-to-do farmer - and a groom had confirmed seeing her by the river hand in hand with Paul Shuttlewood, the eldest son.
As soon as I saw fit the next morning, I sent Mary out on an errand and broached the subject with her. She tossed back her head and at first denied knowing Paul Shuttlewood.
"Shall I then send for John the groom and have him dismissed for spreading lies about you?"
This gave her pause for thought and a tear of vexation entered her eye.
"I only spoke to Paul when he offered to catch me a fish; he is a pleasant sort of fellow. There is nothing to suspect!"

“Then why were you holding hands? Do not deny it.”
Privately, I felt sorry, because such a down-to-earth companion would have suited Bessie perfectly. Knowledge of the soil, of livestock, of plough-horses and crops would have been much more useful and appealing to her than the rag-bag of facts and skills she had acquired imperfectly from me.
“Promise you will not tell my mother……please.”
But I had no choice - the story was abroad - and it might get back to my Mistress that Mrs Sewell had acquainted me - her governess still - with the details. Regretfully, I told her to follow me and we found the mother in the drawing room. While Bessie stood in a sullen silence, I reported, with a heavy heart, what I had found out. The lady’s face maintained a serene calm which surprised me.
“Thank you Miss Brontë - no, please stay - for what I have to say pertains in part to you. I am sorry indeed that three, no four years under your supervision have not had the effect on Elizabeth that I wished. I find I have a second headstrong daughter but not one yet fit to be the wife of a gentleman - as *must* become the case. Would you *really* be Elizabeth *Shuttlewood* and go through life with broken and dirty nails, smelling of cheese and hay and pigs? Would you have the Robinsons made to look ridiculous in the eyes of their neighbours and inferiors? Would you wish never to see your mother again - for I would not visit, and you certainly would not set your muddy feet in our hallway again!”
She put down the screen she had been painting and rose to her full height.
“*Now* I am quite determined, for gentle persuasion and encouragement have failed. You have had your romp, Elizabeth, and this marks the beginning of a new chapter. You are quite a pretty girl - if you would take better care of your hair and use the lotions I have recommended on your complexion. You *will* improve, you will *not* follow the selfish example of Lydia, you *will* find a good husband. You *will* speak properly - for you have been raised so to do - and you *will* eat with decorum. Miss Brontë has, I know, shown you proper manners, but you willfully choose to ignore them. There is a finishing school in Harrogate which Mrs Millington was recommending. There you will attend until you are eighteen and your horse will be sold -”
“No, please Mama, not Dandy….”
“….Your horse and saddle will be sold…..*unless* you yourself produce the required amendment. Furthermore, you will be not allowed again out of the house until you move to Harrogate…..”
“Oh, Mama….I p-p-romise I will not be naughty anymore….please do not s-sell Dan-dy-y-y-y--y……oh, no-o-o-o.”
Mrs Robinson looked at me in triumph, as if to show me how *I* should have dealt with the recalcitrant girl - I, who had not the power to secure her banishment to Harrogate - let alone sell a horse.
In consequence of this philippic, I was tasked with hearing Bessie read aloud for a quarter-of-an-hour every morning and reporting any deviation from good pronunciation. The stables were declared out of bounds. The maid cut and styled her hair. Her old romping clothes were burnt. If

only the mother had decided to punish the girl adequately on the many occasions I had drawn her misdemeanours to her attention!
Within a week, a transformation was brought about, and it only wanted a nice smile to make it complete.
“Now come to the mirror, Miss Elizabeth,” ordered Mrs Robinson. “Now dare tell me you prefer your old self. In celebration, we have decided to give a ball at Christmas for the return of Lydia and to show you off. Only last week Mrs Milner was dropping hints about her second son for one of you.”
”Eddie Milner? He is a coxcomb and a simpering booby!”
“Silence. *Edward* Milner is to receive a very good settlement from his father and will have a commission in the Yorkshire Regiment. I know Lydia is out of the question, because he is not handsome enough for her - but he is ideal for you and if you can remove that thunder cloud from your countenance, he will surely be over his ears before the New Year. Ah, Mr Robinson! Come in and admire your new daughter.”
He came in from the corridor and studied her. “Is it really you, Bessie, with ribbands and curls - and such a pretty blue dress? A lady shall be made of you yet.”
Pecking her on her cheek, he went off to read his newspaper, and I was sent out with her to practise her Haydn piece - which she began with a slamming and banging until I mouthed the word *Harrogate?*

*

Lydia returned from Staffordshire with a certain look in her eye which I recognised from the time of her encounter with Branwell. I could only suppose that she had not been as closely supervised as she should have been - but let that pass, for I had neither the desire nor the power to enquire into the state of her heart. I was only pleased that she showed absolutely no renewal of interest in my brother. The ball came and went and Bessie was very much admired - which pleased her much more than anyone – particularly she herself - expected. Her eyes, merry and bright blue, were her chief attraction, and they complemented well her spirited lack of reserve. She had an energy and roguish sense of humour which seemed equally to alarm and beguile the younger men. Edward, the second youngest Milner boy, with a shock of dark wiry hair and fat red cheeks - and a premature paunch - had indeed not been blessed with much beauty or wit, but over the other lovelier youths in the locality he had the advantage of better material prospects. In the course of the New Year, Mrs Robinson took every opportunity to present to her reformed daughter the evils of rejecting him.
“Handsome he is not, I agree with you absolutely, dear Bessie, but he could be prevailed on to take better care of himself - as indeed *you* were - and his clumsiness and boyishness will fade with time. You must bear in mind that Father can settle but three thousand pounds on you, and that if you insist on keeping a stable, a good income is of necessity. The friendship between our families goes back many years and such a match would be delightful to both mothers. And in a

marriage, the matter of *looks* is a trivial thing by comparison with all the other joys matrimony can offer. Edward is of impeccable character from a family beyond reproach. To reject his proposals - and I have not the slightest doubt of their imminence - would be a decision you would bitterly regret."

And so it came about, by dint of repetition, that Bessie's sensible objections to the fat booby were worn down and eradicated; in July 1844 the engagement was announced in Scarborough whither the Milner family had also condescended to spend their summer holiday.

During those weeks, Lydia, who had been looking forward to our stay with great enthusiasm, became very dejected and I was not long in discovering the reason. While Branwell walked on the beach, kicking a ball with Edmund, I was asked to join the females on a favourite walk to the castle. As the slope grew steeper and my breathing became more arduous, I fell behind the others and *Lydia* turned to wait for me. It was a beautiful day and the views over the sea were splendid. I was trying to think of something easy to say but it was she who began.

"I expect you have noticed how low my spirits are, Miss Brontë……"

"Well, I put it down at first to the inclemency of the weather - but for many days now the sun has been shining…yet you are not altered…….Does something ail you?"

"Let us sit down on this bench until you have your breath back."

Mrs Robinson and the two daughters turned to see where we were and Lydia waved and shouted that I needed a rest.

"There. We can join them later for an ice. Will you promise not to tell, if I tell you what it is? I have no-one else I can tell and it troubles me."

"Are you sure you wish to share a confidence with one whom you despise?"

She looked at me with a crimson face and tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, Miss Brontë, I am ashamed of my conduct last year. Please forgive me."

"If you are truly ashamed, then of course you are forgiven. But you must allow that I have a strict obligation to your parents in matters pertaining to their children. Is your confession very bad? If so, you had better not tell me."

"It pertains to Henry Roxby, the actor you found me and Vicky with last year. I think I am in love with him - and I find upon our arrival that he is performing with his father's company in Harrogate - and worse, that he is engaged to one of the actresses."

I gave her my handkerchief and let her have her sob out.

"Does he know of your feelings?"

"I was secretly corresponding with him from Lichfield."

"And did he declare his affection for you?"

"He did - well, in his teasing way. Now you see why no-one there could interest me. We were looking forward to meeting here - and now I find this out."

"Well, if he is such an unreliable young man, it is better you find out now, instead of later when any vow made cannot be unsworn. Come, think on this; you know Bessie does not really love Mr Milner - "

“Indeed, for I overheard her telling Mary that, were he to prove as...unsatisfactory…a husband as she expected, she would not hesitate to…..but I should not say, it is too disgusting. I know she has a secret understanding with one of our grooms.”
“Then she is entirely wrong to marry!”
“But Mother wishes it. I shall resist all her pressures on me until I am of age - and then do entirely as I please. I cannot but marry for love….and now…oh, it is too vexing.”
I encouraged her to follow me. Ten minutes later she was devouring her ice with evident pleasure. It only struck me on the way back down, that Lydia, Bessie and I - three manifestly differing characters - were similar, as so many of our sex, in the one regard; we were all frustrated by a dearth of reliable and deserving young men.

September came round again and found Branwell once more lower in spirits. Edmund, though a decent sort of boy, was not the kind to be inspired by Branwell’s genius, and thus exemplified the want of understanding and appreciation he so lamented in mankind. He had lately tried some Latin with Edmund as a novelty and thought that Mr Robinson, as a cleric, would be impressed. But he had come to him one morning, while I was out with Bessie and Mary on a nature walk, and interrupted their geography lesson. He had been *given to understand* by his son that *Mr Brontë* had been *trying out some Latin on him*.
“Oh Anne. You should have been there. With his usual disgusting superior sneer, he said, in that stupid shrill whine of his, that Latin was making his son somewhat anxious. *“Indeed, Mr Brontëh, he finds the cases quite perplexing, and cannot understand the point of it as he is never to do Classics, but only destined to inherit Thorp Green when his Pa is no more. You may persevere a while longer, ahem, ahem, for it might nonetheless prove a good mental discipline, but as an end in itself it could only be of importance to a scholar…..*which Edmund decidedly is not, but what else can I do with him, Anne? I am sick of long division, dynasties and such tedium.”
“Was that the end of it?”
“Oh no. The great Genius said he had near forgotten his *amos, amasses and amats* - but was not a farthing poorer for it! This so incensed me - this sordid, practical view of learning - that I could not leave it there.”
“Oh Branwell! What have you said now?”
“I did keep my temper, sister. I begged to be allowed to offer an alternative view - (as he turned his fat, very kickable behind on me to leave the room); that such great beauty as resides in the odes of Horace - “*most of which I have translated, Sir”* - was the end which entirely justified the effort and the self-discipline of learning Latin.”
“And what did he say then?”
“He looked at Edmund - who was only too delighted to see me humiliated again - and said - *Well, young Edmund, should you like to endure the odours of Mr Horace?* And of course the young Philistine shook his head at the older one - and the interview was over. I despair of such brute stupidity!”

Within a week, the suspension of Latin was ordered. I watched for and dreaded to see further and worse signs of despondency which he would have difficulty in disguising. I dreaded to see the corners of his mouth turned down, and his eyebrows meeting in the wrinkle of skin over his prominent nose to arch in amazement above those sharp eyes disgusted by the crass, dyspeptic remarks of Mr Robinson; and disgusted by the unambitious lack of enthusiasm of Edmund - eyes staring relentlessly at some inner hopeless wilderness. I knew only too well from home what sighs and terse words of resignation could follow such looks. Here, amongst strangers, such exclamations of discontent, being denied expression, might turn into phantoms and wander, I feared, into ever deeper inner glooms, where, without egress, they would be impervious to exorcism.

"Pour out whatever distresses you to me here every evening, dear brother. Do not retire to bed nursing grudges or dwelling on what you might have said in response to slights. Behind these walls, we can be our real selves. All employees who are superior to their employers must learn to hold their tongues and set their faces. Let me be your sounding board and you mine."

"Next year Edmund will be fourteen." I said, one late afternoon, soon afterwards, as Branwell sat sifting mournfully through the new pages he had written. "He is not the most stimulating of pupils, I admit, but neither is Mary. At least he is generally docile. If I can put up with his sister one more year, let that be your aim too. Mary will be seventeen next March and I mean to tender my resignation in June. There is little more I can teach her. If we say that our father, with his failing health, requires the return of both of us to Haworth, it will not be questioned. You will be given a good reference and might find a similar situation then in Halifax or Keighley which suits you better. I am proud of you that you have stuck at the task, and I know from her letters that Charlotte's assessment of your character is greatly altered. Between now and June, why do you not resolve to finish your novel and then send it off to a publisher in London? This would concentrate your mind and leave no time for self-pity."

"It is a fine idea, but I cannot decide how to resolve the love Mr Percy has for my heroine. I would it could end happily, but have scattered too many seeds of tragedy. I would kill off her mean husband but such a deus ex machina is disgusting to all my principles. If I leave you my latest pages, might you find time to make some suggestions? A heart attack? A thunderbolt? A poisoning? It all smacks of the Penny Dreadful."

He left me to return to the Monks House and when I had eaten some supper I cast an eye over his latest pages. I had no plans to carry on with Agnes that evening and had put off writing to Charlotte for too long so I took out my desk; as I was taxing my brains for something encouraging to say about our situation, I thought it a good idea to ask my eldest sister for her opinion on the prose he had written, as well as to outline the plot and seek her ideas for a sensible ending. Accordingly, I copied out for her some of what he had written, just as it appears here below.

I cannot be expected to dissect Mr Percy's feelings or emotions during his rapid walk to Darkwell, as I believe he scarce left time to do so himself, but with a scorn of his morning's employment at the shoot, a distaste towards his morning's companions, and a revulsion of thoughts which made the whole Twelfth a day of black chalks, he sprang over the first stile and strode over the first causeway through the twenty-acre pasture of green land stolen from the heather and made part and parcel of Darkwell Farm.
Percy did not make any halt in his intrusion so soon and unexpectedly upon the quietude of the Hall, which expected domestic slumber till evening brought in such visitors as might be willing to turn night into day.

[I puzzled often over this last sentence but could not make out its full meaning]

He made his return known to the Lady of the Mansion and was received by her in the breakfast room….
During the first moments of her meeting with the unexpectedly arrived guest, no servant about the establishment could have been so dull as not to perceive the embarrassment of their usually calm and sweet-tempered Mistress. The eye which usually had a dove-like glance for all, the voice which had a gentle tone, and the steps which were so quiet, now changed into a phase of irritation in manner, trouble in the eyes, and hesitation both in voice and step; but a ready key might have been given to these changes had the observers been aware of the promise given to her furious husband and meant to be kept as faithfully as made and the revulsion of all hospitable or ladylike feeling should she keep to the letter of her promise, as well as the still, small voice, scarce daring to whisper amid conflicting winds, which told a woman's and a lady's heart that a visitor was sheltered under her roof whose mind possessed some mettle more attractive than ebullitions of sour reproach; whose feelings had a wider, higher and deeper range than what would be exercised in attempts to ruin others or oneself; whose person likewise had animated instead of cloudy looks, gentle flexibility of tone instead of bilious snappishness, eyes of mobile imaginativeness instead of acerb ill-temper - that she might now, in fact, have hoped for one happy afternoon after so many blank or blotted ones but for the grim, threatening scowl which, from neighbouring moors, frowned upon her companionship the thunder shadows of resentment and revenge.

As one who liked to write simply and directly, I had an urge to bring this high-blown prose closer down to earth; for it did not read easily and the style seemed to me to be more apposite to epic narratives of royal or aristocratic personages than those inhabiting Darkwell *Farm*. It was too redolent of the melodramic sagas of Angria which he and Charlotte had conspired to write when much younger. Privately, I despaired for him, for though Charlotte might approve, I feared that this style of writing would never find a publisher.
As I was sealing the letter, the scales fell from my eyes. The "furious husband….of <u>bilious</u> snappishness……of acerb ill-temper" - who else could he be based on? And who possessed "the

mind (of) mettle more attractive (with) feelings (of) a wider, higher and deeper range….”? And the Lady of the Hall? Who must she be in reality? Branwell had been giving Mrs Robinson painting lessons in private since our return from Scarborough. Had he conceived a true passion for her? Or were these words merely the product of his creative fantasy? The material of a novelist must be drawn from the real world, but it did not follow that fiction should mirror *exactly* fact; for my own Rosalie Murray in Agnes was a creature composed of aspects of Lydia, Bessie and other girls whose governess I had been. Perhaps Branwell’s association of his fictional characters with the real ones he met every day was an unconscious one - or at worst a fantasy which he knew to be unrealisable - and even undesirable. For Mrs Robinson was forty-six years old and he a mere twenty-eight, she nearly a foot taller and though still handsome - when most of her peers were showing the signs of ageing - she had none of the freshness of visage or smoothness of skin attractive to young men. And would even *my* brother be so impetuous as dare set his cap at such a respectable dame, who would of course reject such an unnatural advance with disgust and fly to her husband to have him instantly dismissed? These arguments set my mind at rest, though in my diary I represented all the days until the end of next June as strokes and did nothing else upon waking until I had struck through the very next one.

*

Another Christmas came and went. Charlotte stayed in Brussels which disappointed us all. However in January, I received a letter from her to announce her sudden decision to return to Haworth. Branwell knew instantly how to interpret this: her professor and his wife had joined forces to repel her advances.
“Under some pretext she has been sent packing.”
“Why think the worst? Why can it not be that she feels lonely there without Emily?”
For myself, I was very pleased. No longer would I feel guilty to give Emily all the burden of Father’s care.

One day in early April, Mary was complaining of a toothache and was too dejected to attend to the lesson. She needed a tincture and a rummage through the medicine drawer in the schoolroom threw up every item save the one required. Edmund had been given leave, having delighted his father by reciting his multiplication tables almost perfectly, to accompany him to the next town that fine day, to be bought a new whip as reward. Since luncheon, Branwell had been closeted with our Mistress in her private appartment, improving her technique with oils. In all innocence I hurried thither to tell her of Mary’s distress and seek a remedy. As I raised my hand to knock the door, I heard soft sounds which I had not heard since that evening in the woods, and at first I construed them as proof of a renewal of affection between Lydia and Branwell. My hand froze and I recoiled - for then the whole wicked truth seized my being; it was the older Lydia who now made those sighings……

I stood at my sitting room window; an unnatural darkness was bringing that lovely day to a premature end, for a great thick woollen cloud had enveloped the world, leaving only one bright ring of sky uncovered. Branwell was mired in sin and beyond help. He came into my room and was pleasant, even gay. I could not turn around.
"I heard you, brother. Or rather our Mistress sighing. I was at her door on an errand. I am greatly shocked. I can scarce think. I only know I must leave. How long as this been going on? Do not insult me by pretending otherwise……."
I heard him give a low chuckle which sounded almost demonic.
"How long? Since before Christmas. Hardly at all at first; but now whenever he goes out riding and I have no charge of the boy. She is a much neglected wife as her passion proves; I am her comforter; I love her Anne, and she returns it. I hope she will leave him."
I watched the eastern band of gold light fade and saw candles lit in the windows of the Monks House and of a distant farm on a hill-slope.
"That she will never do. You deceive yourself again. Would she ever divide herself from her children, her home, her comforts - her fortune? What income would you have, you fool? How can such a clever person as you so easily delude himself? I have fleetingly been apprehensive of this….but you gave me no signal to suspect it to be true. Oh, how I long for June, and to be far away. Can the affair not be broken off?"
"How can it be, when she is my employer and desires it - possibly even more ardently than I?"
"I curse the day, when I pleaded your cause here. I never imagined that……"
I could not finish the sentence for weeping. I began to cough and my breath was short. He came and assisted me to a chair. I breathed in and out slowly until the attack eased.
"Of course I reasoned that it would be an unimaginable event for you; I therefore had no fear of your discovering it. You did so by chance. But, Anne, you are too….*pure*….to understand affairs of the heart."
I bit my lip; how presumptuous of him! to think *he* could fathom my heart! How little he knew how eager I was to bestow it - when it only needed a worthy object for the bestowing.
"An unimaginable event? Aye - unimaginable for anyone not cursed with a sordid mind! But do not accuse me of naivety - I understood perfectly what drove you into the arms of the daughter. Not her intellect! But this is even worse. What if it is discovered?"
"Who would be the discoverer?"
"I heard plain enough at the door."
"The servants have been given strict instructions…"
"That *per se* is enough to inspire conjecture; the servants are not automata! This can only turn out bad. I beg you, never to mention to her that I know. As matters stand, I shall scarce know how to look at her."

The day arrived when the lady's painting, completed, an autumnal view of the park, was carried into the dining room by two servants for display. There it hung, a continual reminder, a provocation and a torment.

The masterpiece was more or less competent though it lacked warmth and animation, thus bearing the mark of the teacher. When Mr Robinson praised it excessively I thought I would die, the more so to see a secret smile exchanged between the lovers. The triumph on his perfidious wife's face showed only too clearly what a bad woman she was at heart, scarred by a marriage though she might be to an *acerb, bilious* man. I knew he had a kinder heart than he often showed and he did certainly not deserve this - and - good heavens! - under his own roof. The painting was disgusting to me. Symbolic of the adultery it had dissembled to conceal over many weeks, it seemed to bear the colours and shapes of sin and hypocrisy; I loathed it more than Mr Robinson stupidly - and falsely? - admired it. It had been placed exactly opposite my place at table so that I could never raise a spoon or a fork without seeing it.
"Are you ill, Miss Brontë?" enquired the Master one lunchtime. "You look exceeding pale? Is the soup not to your taste?"
Branwell smiled at me ironically, his head almost centred on the vile canvas behind him so that a crudely executed tree trunk seemed to grow grotesquely out of his skull. I felt nauseated and almost choked.
"Mrs Robinson," continued my inquisitor "I fear Miss Brontë is poorly."
"Not at all, Sir. Only a little tired….for I sleep quite badly of late." These last few words I uttered slowly while looking steadily at Branwell. How I hated him then.

"Would you cast the first stone, sister?" he asked after I had ignored him the whole afternoon. This was too much. I threw my work down and put my head in my hands.
"You would have me excuse her conduct on such spurious, hypocritical grounds?"
"I only remind you of your Saviour's words."
"Jesus instructed the guilty woman to leave her old life and sin no more….You deliberately and selfishly misconstrue scripture - not to defend yourself, for you know you are wrong! - but to offend me. Is it not enough that you rob me of my sleep?"
"Do not lose a wink on my behalf. All will yet be well."
"You invite eternal damnation, Branwell."
"Oh really? What, then, of your Universal Salvation? Does that not apply in my case? Do not my virtues outshine my vices?"
"Do not presume to know how God will bestow his Grace. Do not add blasphemy to your list of vices - for God will surely see through any insincere repentance at the last."
"My *last* will be a long time yet, I trust. There will be plenty of time to repent when I am ancient and bent. Hello! Here is a new poem! Repent….and bent….how might it proceed?"
"Branwell, please…."
"Peace! I only tease you a little. While the Mistress is my Mistress I cannot escape, even if I wished too. Besides, there is another matter you are quite unaware of which throws an entirely different light on the affair. I will tell you of it tomorrow. Until then I beg you to peruse a poem I have written pertaining to the picture. It is quite the best thing I have written for months. Confound my hopeless novel! I am a *poet*!"

Her effort shows a picture made
To contradict its meaning:
Where should be sunshine, painting shade
And smiles with sadness screening;
Where God has given a cheerful view,
A gloomy vista showing;
Where heart and face are fair and true,
A shade of doubt bestowing.

(The fifth line, I noted straightway, was anomalous with nine syllables when eight were required. "*Made*" was better than "*given").*

Ah. Lady, if to me you give
The power your sketch to adorn, Too many. Eight, not seven: *means*?
How little of it shall I leave
Save smiles that shine like morn. Only six, not seven: *With your images forlorn??*
I'd keep the view of happy light
That shines from summer skies; Only six: *summery*?
I'd drive the shades from smiles so bright
And dry such shining eyes.

I'd give a calm to one whose heart
Has banished calm from mine Only six: *the calm*?
I'd brighten up God's work of art
Where thou hast dimmed its shine,
And all the wages I should ask
For such a happy toil - Only six: *?*
I'll name them - far beyond my task - A weak line: *Beyond the value of my task* ?
Thy Presence and Thy Smile. Only six*: ?* I did not care….

To criticize thus his verse and metre was perhaps presumptuous, even unsisterly, but to do so distracted, however temporarily, my attention away from sentiments wholly abhorrent to me. But still, after several readings, I did not know quite what to make of it all. The picture alluded to in the poem did not really resemble the one on the wall. Granted, *autumnal* its shades were, but made up of bright gold and yellow oils with a blue sky and white billows of cloud as a backdrop, it was hardly *gloomy*. The October scene did contrast markedly with the scene as it appeared to us then in April, where the bared trees were flecked with tender and fresh green leaf and blossom. Branwell had tried to imply that his lady needed only his inspiring touch to render her landscape - and her life - gay and bright, but to my way of thinking, he had unconsciously

implied something else: the hopelessness of their affair - she was in her late autumn, and would be fifty in four years! - and he at eight-and-twenty in his summer. Their ages were so incompatible that their liaison was more than a sin. It was a monstrous freak.
If the poet claimed to detect in his lady's aspect *doubt* and *gloom,* at table she only evidenced *smiles so bright*: indeed, in five years I had rarely seen her in such good spirits. If he was implying that at some level she gloomily understood that their absurd affair was doomed to founder on the rocks of realism, then he was entirely in the right. Branwell was an enthusiastic and vigorous poet but not a very meticulous or perceptive one.

"Have you shown it to *her*?" I asked the next day, handing the poem back to him.
"Of course. She prizes it so highly, she keeps a copy next to her bosom."
"That is too much to know. Why do I sense that you derive some sadistic pleasure in this - in terrifying me? I doubt your sanity, Branwell. I wish I were at home. What would Father say to this? And dear Aunt Branwell? You *do* have a conscience…it is all too much for me. Please go. Leave me. I am ill."
"So…you have no wish to hear what else pertains to our situation? Then I shall bid you good night…."
I was trapped - between curiosity and disgust. As I hesitated, that familiar rascally gleam came into his eye.
"Stay and explain." I cried, jumping up from my seat. "If it pertains to how this can be resolved, then you have my undivided attention. If it is merely to boast or provide more sordid details, then I shall not endure it and you had better go."
"It pertains to Robinson. To his inadequacy as a man - and to his health. You have seen how he drinks. You see how fat he is. What sort of husband can he be?"
"Branwell - whatever his wife has confided, I should not hear it. Such information revolts me!"
"Then cover your ears and I will tell it to the walls - for it must be let out nevertheless! He is no longer a proper man. He cannot…..do as he should, even if Lydia would wish it, which she don't. His bad temper is not only explained by his indigestion but by his frustration. Even before he began to fail, he provided little pleasure. Knowing this, can you still blame her?"
"Yes! For she made vows - in sickness and in health - for better, for worse."
"Nonsense! If he is no longer the man she wed, then her vows are null and void. By his own vices he renders himself incapable of *loving and cherishing.* His own vow is broken! Should she restrain her own natural impulses under such a sorry arrangement?"
"Yes! For the sake of her children; for the sake of her immortal soul."
"Nonsense, I say again. She goes only to church for the sake of appearances. She knows as well as I that beyond the darkness and the mould of the grave there is nothing. Absurd! Will the Mr Robinsons of *this* world be transformed from their ugly, stout selves into beauteous lights on their way to the *next*? Will *he* twinkle like a star for the glory of God? Is this the state of heaven for eternity? How can Robinson shine without his brandy and water?"

“This is dreadful blasphemy, Branwell. No-one knows how heaven is, and it is vain to speculate.”
“Well, heaven seems damnable tedious to me!”
“Not as tedious as damnation.”
“Fairy tales! Why should we fear to follow our inclinations? Why should Lydia forebear? At her age? After such deprivation? Is she not flesh and blood? To hell with souls and spirits!”
“I cannot hear this!”
“You will, for there is still more. Lydia knows precisely where his horse rides tended. Have you never wondered why he was always cantering about? The canting hypocrite! Two years ago, in a low tavern near York, he made a wench with child. He was recognised and had to pay out a great deal to support the child and silence the woman. This is why he is so lacking in tin! And he still pays. Now condemn her for despising him.”
“Is this credible? He, a man of religion and of good breeding? Why would he ever run such a risk?”
“Because he is idle, and idleness breeds vice. He is in every way a loathsome creature - what disease might he have passed on to his wife?”
“And she forgave him?”
“What alternative did she have? She could never divorce him. She could not leave. *Now* condemn her! He takes no interest in his appearance, in his rude effect on others, in his wife and in his children - save that dolt of a son. He sits and pours brandy or gin and water down his gizzard, suffers heartburn and bemoans his own doctor’s failure to provide a remedy when it is in his own power to cork the bottle. If a reprobate like I can do so, then so can he!……(*he was getting more and more excited as he spoke and I was afraid*)……..I am *glad* I spite him with his wife for how many insults have I had to bear from him - more than *you* have ever witnessed! - without the freedom to respond with a volley of wit which would have squashed him instantly. I imagine with relish how his fat red face would gawp if he witnessed or knew what strokes were really behind the paltry painting he affects to admire! His transparent efforts to pay compliments he does not mean disgust me….oh…..”
Clenching and unclenching his fists, he fell into a chair and put a hand to his throat; his eyes began to roll around like marbles, and I urged him to breathe deep and calm himself. But no, the attack could not be fended off. His head went from side to side and his back arched like a bow; a lamb-like bleating came from his loose mouth. There was no remedy. I embraced him tight and kissed him until at last the fit subsided.
“Oh Branwell, dear, dear brother! This cannot end well. I have my quarter wages in the drawer. Let us pack a few things in the night and fly from here. The spring weather will surely hold and we can walk to York for a train. Let us leave these people to their selfish and futile lives. The moors are our country, not these flat wastes. Not this suffocating place. I do not care anymore about income or status. We shall all be poor together and be happier for it!”
He revived and returned my kisses and pulled me onto his lap. But I soon found to my dismay that my wise words had not penetrated to the essence of that boy whom Aunt Branwell had

declared to be the most charming on earth. I knew then the boy had gone forever. He had something else to tell me which he said *clinched* the matter.
“It concerns Robinson’s health. Rick Crosby confided in me before Christmas that he thinks his patient is destroying himself in his drinking.”
“You should not share this private knowledge with me. Dr Crosby was quite wrong to betray it.”
“A glass or two loosens his mouth. Anyway…..Robinson’s *eyes*. Have you studied them? Have you seen how dull and yellowish the whites are? This suggests liverishness. And his constant biliousness and burning is inflaming and narrowing his gullet. Have you not seen how he struggles to swallow sometimes, and almost chokes and sweats? This is why he loses his temper with the food, the fool. Crosby saw exactly the same symptoms in a patient in the village. The gullet closed up with a malignant tumour and he could no longer eat. A terrible death followed within a week. This will surely happen in Robinson’s case as he will not reform himself.”
“This is shocking indeed. Has he been told all this?”
“Yes, but he thinks Crosby exaggerates. He even blames him for not relieving his symptoms.”
“Is his wife aware of the danger?”
“No. At least, I have not told her. I have no motive to do so.”
“Then I shall.”
“You shall not! For how would your intervention be sensibly explained? Crosby, I assure you, has laid this all before him.”
“But what is then your purpose in telling me?”
“Only this. That if - no when he dies, my way shall be clear. By marriage to his widow I shall have all the ease and leisure I need to collect together my verse and have it published, paying for it if necessary. I shall not need the help of that pompous old fool, Wordsworth.”
I could not reply. As he inwardly contemplated his prospects of success, there was a madness in his stare. I had seen this alarming expression before - usually after a bout of drinking when the intoxicating effect was to convince him that his problems were soon to be solved. If I had not heard sighing at her door, I would have almost believed his affair with Lydia Robinson the Elder to be a phantom, a fantasy like the love of Percy for the mistress of Darkwell Farm, or an episode from Angria.

*

At last, the long desired month of May arrived. The strokes in my journal were now over half turned to crosses. In March, Mary had become seventeen. Her advance into young womanhood had not significantly improved her appeal. She had stayed rather plain and her long face, rarely relieved by a smile, made her look more morose than she really was. She had no inner spark, unlike Bessie, to animate her eyes and her figure was as straight as a boy’s. Her conversation, what little there was, remained rather commonplace and dull. Had she been of a religious and pious inclination, she would have been like Miss Austen’s creature Mary in Pride and Prejudice. She knew a few facts, could recite her kings and queens, could sew and draw quite prettily and

could work her way through a few unchallenging piano pieces but she got her French and German rather confused; a polite Alsatian might have understood her.
One bright morning, after I had set her to work, while Branwell laboured with Edmund over the battles of the Civil War, I left the schoolroom to seek an interview with their mother in her apartment. Since my unpleasant discovery, I had only exchanged words with her in the presence of others; to be alone with her - and in that notorious room - with nothing but her parrot, on whom she doted - was a challenge. She made room for me on the silken chaise longue and offered me a cushion. Understandably, I was reluctant to sit on that guilty couch and sat as close to the edge as I could.
“Mary is presently absorbed in her essay, Madam. It is principally with regard to her that I am come to speak with you. Her birthday was in March. With Lydia and Elizabeth, the age of seventeen formed the borne at which my influence as governess receded. I hesitate to say anything to Mary’s discredit, but I am of the opinion that her young mind is more or less formed and that it only wants further reading on *her* part for her knowledge to increase. I can draw up a recommended reading list, of course. In her practical skills she has come on well, and again, they only need her resolve to practise them for her level of competence to be maintained - and perhaps - increased…”
“What you are trying to tell me so tactfully, Miss Brontë - so beautifully and *so* tactfully - is that you can achieve little more with the girl. Mary is Mary - quiet and obedient - pleasing qualities - and she only wants a *little* more cheerfulness in her demeanour to be more appealing to…..our circle of acquaintances.”
“Such a result - apart from usual words of encouragement - is beyond my power. I have taught her, I think, as much as she wishes to absorb, and am therefore come to respectfully hand in my notice.”
“I thought that was your purpose.”
I took the note from my pocket and passed it to her. She drew up her long legs underneath her and broke the seal. While she read my resignation over I stared at that gaudy beast, beadily eyeing me from its perch, and wondered what scenes it had witnessed from its prison of bamboo. Had he perhaps been shrouded by a towel?
“Thank you Miss Brontë. Your kind words are much appreciated. I hesitate to raise the topic of your own - how shall I say? - state of mind? Health? You have not seemed lately to have been as happy as you once were to be amongst us.”
My face grew hot and I managed to suppress a surge of emotion. I hated to dissemble, and afterwards prayed for forgiveness for using a beloved relative to excuse my discomposure; to the very person who was half the cause of it.
“In my note I hope you noticed the main reason for my departure. My father’s eyesight grows ever worse. My sister Emily needs another of us to assist her. That person can only be me.”
“I shall - we shall miss you. The girls have turned out well - pretty well - under your guidance and have become attached to you. Even Lydia speaks well of you - now her period of insolence and arrogance has - thankfully - elapsed. They would willingly correspond with you, I think.

Governesses are rarely so well loved. Say at least that you will accompany us to Scarborough - at our expense and, of course, as our equal."
This time I could not prevent my tears flowing. She took my hand and, although part of me resented it, I had not the strength to withdraw it. I eventually thanked her for her kindness and her invitation, but steadfastly refused it in spite of more entreaties.

Ah, why was the world arranged so ill, with time, place, character and wealth so badly in turmoil and confusion? With great relief, I closed the door to behind me and stood with eyes closed in the silent and half-gloomy corridor. A new chapter in my life was soon to open and I felt elated.

*

Early June days being warm and long, after my supper I took every opportunity to wander in the woods, no longer apprehensive that I would stumble on anything else to distress me. The woods were so deafeningly silent that they even suppressed thought. I was become a detached viewer of the world and the quiet in my head did me good.
One Sunday afternoon, between luncheon and evensong, I was deeper in the trees than normal and could only wonder at the frequent popping of what sounded like a shotgun, for this was the breeding season when the Robinson birds should be entirely safe. As I sauntered back towards the hall and past the Monks House, I heard a slight commotion of voices coming from the trees and soon saw a protesting Edmund emerge, being ushered along by an ashen-faced Mr Sewell, who was holding a gun and looking much aggrieved.
"Oh please do not tell Papa, Mr Sewell! I shan't do it again!" sobbed Edmund.
"Ah, Miss Brontë!" cried the steward. "Ah'm not queet sure what to do. Young maister here 'as been reet naughty, shooting at nestin' birds in yonder woods. He 'as wrecked one nest as *I* knows to - and damn near killt me."
In fine weather, Branwell had been taking Edmond into the park to shoot at targets. Mr Robinson had set strict rules about his son's use of a gun - the main one being he should only shoot under supervision. But the naughty boy had taken advantage of his father's snoozing after lunch to creep into his gun room and take a rifle. He confessed to me tearfully, as we walked to the house, that he had thought himself far enough removed from the house to escape detection. But he had not reckoned with the sharp ears of our steward.
His father was predictably incensed by this wanton act of disobedience and sent his son straight to his room, saying that he should stay there, unfed, at least till the morrow. I thought no more about it and got ready for church.
The next morning, the last Monday of my five-year employment at Thorp Green, I entered the schoolroom after breakfast with a new zest, but found only a bemused Branwell and a patient Mary. Mr Robinson's anger had not relented overnight, and soon Branwell was summoned to his study.

Almost a half-hour later, he returned, red-faced and spluttering with rage. I immediately told him to come into the corridor so that Mary would not hear him.
“Be calm, Branwell. I fear for your tic.”
“Be calm? Calm? Anne, you will scarce believe what I have been subjected to. It would tax Job, all the saints, the prophets, and even Jesus himself to stay calm. The man blames me for the lad’s misdemeanour.”
“But how can he?”
“Oh, he can! He maintains that I have not emphasized enough to him the rules to be followed.”
“That is absurd.”
“That is *sensible* compared to the next thing. He wants me….how much worse can the man be?…..He wants me…to thrash his own son! “*You are his tutor, Mr Brontë…as you are responsible for his behaviour, good and bad, as you are in charge of his punishment, as you are paid by me to carry out my instructions relating to the boy - I require that he be thrashed.* The man is nothing but a coward and a tyrant!”
“Peace! What did you reply?”
“When I had recovered my power of speech - a good minute - I told him I would not do it. That I did not believe in thrashings. That he was his father and should thrash him himself. I walked out and left him blustering in the room.”
“Now calm yourself. Go in, sit down and pour some cordial. You have behaved perfectly properly and should not relent!”
Of course, I hoped to procure, by such advice, a doubling of his goatish stubbornness which would surely bring about his dismissal. He would return home with me and the grim affair would be over.
“Come in and sit down with Mary and me until Edmund is sent down.”
But he was not sent down and the morning wore on. At about half-past-eleven, an anxious Mrs Robinson put her head around the door and asked Branwell to follow her. He did not return and when the luncheon bell rang I went up and found him sitting pale and morose at the table where Mr Robinson, vexed, with arms crossed also sat, next to his wife who was trying to cover her discomposure with a look of nonchalance. The three girls took their seats but Edmund’s remained horribly vacant. The meal was taken in silence and everyone was relieved to have it over. Branwell did not return to the schoolroom, and I wondered if he was at the Monks House packing his belongings. At least, I hoped he was.
At past five, the tea tray was brought into my sitting room; I had half given him up when Branwell entered.
“Where have you been?”
“With Edmund in his room. He is denied contact with his family. Until further notice.”
“And is that to be his punishment after all?”
“By no means - as you soon shall hear. Please pour me a cup, for my hand trembles.”
After he had taken a few gulps, I was informed of what had taken place before luncheon.

“Lydia did her best to reason with the ogre. Eventually, I told him that I would do anything they liked to punish the boy, short of a thrashing. What a hostage to fortune! For what has been substituted is almost as disgusting to me. And it was Lydia‘s idea - at first a stroke of pure genius, but subsequently proving to be an elephant trap”
Edmund had been summoned to the study to hear his sentence pronounced. He was to forfeit the first week of his holiday and remain at Thorp while the rest of them went to Scarborough as usual. Edmund would stay at home with schoolwork to do, to be set, supervised and marked - by Branwell. At the end of that week, providing Edmund reached a satisfactory standard, Branwell would accompany him by carriage to the coast.
“Lydia proposed it and said in the same breath that she too would remain behind - for, as his mother, she would feel obliged to do so, unable to rest without him close. My heart thumped against my ribs to see and hear how ardently she urged her husband to accept a proposal so reasonable - and yet so secretly delightful to her and to me. She would remain behind too. Can you imagine a plan more clever, more devious, more pleasant to a lover -”
“And more disgusting to his sister?”
“Do not worry. The man was adamant in his refusal. “*Edmund, ahem, shall feel the entire loss of his family - his conduct being so very bad and disobedient - and it will be a week he shall never forget.* ” And so the bargain was concluded. So that *I* am punished in losing a week‘s holiday! - and I feel so angry and frustrated that I almost wish now I *had* thrashed him.”
This was said with such a woebegone look that I could not suppress a giggle, and soon I was lying helpless on the floor beset with grateful laughter - grateful for the unconscious wisdom of Mr Robinson which had surely come direct from the Lord - and then straight out of his blubbery mouth.
But it turned out for Branwell better than he feared, for the next day, summoned again by the father, he was conceded the favour of spending a further week in Haworth after Edmund‘s punishment, before rejoining the family in Scarborough in mid July. Edmund would be brought thither separately by William in a hired gig. I thought this arrangement very fair and reasonable in every way, and told him so.
“Edmund has been very naughty and could have killed poor Mr Sewell. This is an enlightened punishment and I am pleased that the father begins - at last - to see the errors of his lax parenting. And you have a whole week restored to you.”

Friday dawned and my final stroke was crossed! After breakfast, the family and some servants assembled before the great doors to say farewell to us. Young Edmund stood as stiff as a soldier and at first I only proffered him my hand, which he took rather nervously. I saw a tear glisten in his eye, and, conscious of the possibility that we would never meet again, I bent down to kiss his cheek - which so surprised him that he did not recoil.
“Now, be a good boy and remember the good principles we have taught you.”
“I shall try M-Miss Brontë.”

Then, recalling his misconduct, he retreated frostily from me. Bessie tittered then hugged me so tight I could hardly breathe. Mary hung back, very shy and undecided. Lydia was away from home, staying with Victoria Barnes, née Millington, in Ripon. Mr Robinson took my hand and, with a formal nod, wished me well. His wife was the last to approach as we made for the carriage. She bestowed upon me a gracious if somewhat haughty smile while I tried to put her adultery out of mind. The effort did not succeed however and I felt a blush crimson my face. There entered then a slight question into her expression which she promptly decided to answer herself.

"Ah, I perceive that you are sadder to leave us than your natural reserve allows us to see, Miss Brontë."

My feelings were warm and confused and I could only whisper *Yes Madam*. I quickly took my seat next to Branwell and, after that ceremony of less than five minutes, with a wave and a smile, my five years at Thorp came to a close; with a final backward glance, taking in the house, the people, the park and the Sewells, waving at their front door, I sat back to relax as the carriage turned and joined the York road, while Branwell hummed a tune with a sardonic grin.

Back in Haworth

After a week with us, Branwell left as usual to see Joseph Leyland *et alia* in Halifax, whence he would journey back direct to Thorp Green for the second week of July, the term of Edmund's punishment. One last evening in the company of John and William Brown and others of the Haworth Masonic Lodge (which he had joined years before) had not turned into the drunken stir I feared. He returned from the Black Bull in good spirits, but fairly sober, much to the surprise and delight of Emily and Charlotte.

The next morning I walked with him as far as the crossroads where he would wait for the coach. "Try to remember," I said as a cloud of dust showed the advance of the horses "if you cannot be sensible, try at least to be discreet. Remember that the reputation of more than one person rests on your shoulders."

He winked, blew me a kiss and waved goodbye.

Emily had never been to York and a few days later expressed a strong desire to see the Minster which I had greatly praised upon my return home. Charlotte encouraged us to go together; she had been there already with Ellen Nussey and thought that Emily and I deserved a rest after our recent exertions.

"I and Tabby will have charge of Father," she said. "We will be very quiet and peaceful."

We promised to be gone only two days.

It was delightful to be away from home with my sister. We had always been very much together as children, being the two youngest, and had spent many hours on the moors or at home making up our stories. Of late, we had been less close, and to roam the streets of York and invent lives for the people who passed us by was one of our chief amusements. I was once very tempted to tell her of Branwell's adventures at Thorp, but her lack of curiosity kept my mouth closed on that

subject; for one thing, I did not wish to spoil her rare excursion from home with anxiety over matters she could hardly influence.
Two more peaceful weeks passed us by; I made good progress with Agnes Grey on dull days and walked the moors with my sisters when the sun shone. I sometimes thought of Branwell at Thorp Green, bending - patiently? - over his reluctant scholar, as we walked amongst the heather, and I had to smile to myself. At least, with the mother away, there would be no further temptation of one kind; of other kinds, I was less sure, though his yearning for the bottle - possibly under the influence of another yearning - had markedly diminished. The housekeeper, I was sure, would be no less watchful for infractions of house rules than she normally was - and, indeed, had doubtless been charged with the extraordinary supervision of tutor and tutee, as well as of the circumstances pertaining to Edmund's washing, rising and retiring routines. As to Branwell's conduct in Scarborough, I could not foresee any opportunity for temptation in the cramped conditions of The Cliff Hotel. Whatever might transpire after that was beyond my influence now - and I decided therefore to be less anxious.
As I stood at my favourite spot on the stone bridge above the stream, and admired the silver twists of water swirling above and between the flat stones which reminded me of sovereigns, pennies and florins, all remaining burdens of care were lifted from my shoulders. Below me and all around were all the riches I desired, and I thanked God to have them restored to my exchequer.

*

Branwell returned from Thorp Green on July 14th late in the afternoon, looked ashen and heavy-lidded, whether through some distress or weariness we could not tell. We rose and went into the passage to greet him; he took one look at Charlotte, then me, went to say something, thought better of it and climbed the stairs a little unsteadily, before slamming his door. We looked at each other in some alarm.
"Has he been drinking?" whispered Charlotte.
"In Keighley, perhaps. Surely not at Thorp. He had charge of the boy."
Father had been roused by the noise from a sleep in his study.
"Is that Branwell?" he cried. "Why has he not looked in?"
I went in to reassure him. "He is tired - he walked from Keighley and went straight to his room."
"I would have thought he could have just looked in as he came past."
For the next two days he complained of a headache and asked for his food to be sent up. Father, though almost sightless, detected a change in us and in the air.
"Why has Branwell taken to his room? He refuses to see me."
"We do not know, Father." said Charlotte. "Something ails him. Best to let him stay there until he revives…."
"….at least he is quiet." I added.
Emily too had been to rattle his door but had been told to leave him be.

“He is in one of his humours, Anne,” said she coming across the landing.
“But this is his week off. He has to go to Scarborough in a few days. What can have happened?”
I began to wonder if his despondency had anything to do with Lydia Robinson - the mother. Despite my resolve not to worry, my mind ran through a list of possibilities, each more alarming than its predecessor. Had the affair been somehow discovered? Had Branwell said something indiscreet to the boy? This idea filled me with cold dismay - that the child might be the means of conveying, in whatever terms, the news of his own mother’s infidelity……to his father! Surely, surely this could never be!

The next morning a letter arrived for Branwell and I instantly recognised the looping handwriting. With quivering voice I summoned Tabby, who was just about to take up some porridge to the recluse, and asked her to give him the letter.
She looked at me with her kindly eyes and put it into her apron.
“I will - but I jest hope he’ll eat summat this morning, Miss Anne. For a bird’d starve on the few morsels he teks to his’sen.”
I went into the dining room where Emily was breakfasting still. Charlotte had gone to the apothecary for Father’s eye drops.
“Branwell has a letter.” I said, walking to the window. “I have a terrible presentiment.”
Emily looked up from her porridge. “Why so?”
“The writing on the letter. It looked very familiar.”
For five minutes there was silence - as if the very house was holding its breath. Then there was a shriek and a wailing. I turned to look at Emily whose face was strangely triumphant.
“I knew it could not last,” she said. “I will go to Father and make some excuse.”
I crept upstairs to his door and listened to him sobbing. I was about to knock when he emerged looking dreadfully ill.
“Branwell! What on earth…”
“Oh do not ask, Anne. The worst news possible.”
“What? Is someone dead?”
“No! But I only wish it was that canting hypocrite! Or better me!”
He pushed past me and ran down the stairs.
“Where are you going?”
“Where do you think?”
“Not to Scarborough?”
“No. The Black Bull.”
“Oh no, Branwell! Not this again!! You had conquered that demon….”
But the front door had already slammed. Emily came to the foot of the stairs.
“What bad news has he had?”
“He wouldn’t tell me.”
“Stay! Your face tells me you know. Do not pretend with me.”
“What did you tell Father?”

“That he has toothache. How stupid. Oh here is Charlotte.”
She came in looking grave. Branwell had passed her in the lane without a word.
“Has he gone quite mad?”
“Probably.” I said. “The answer lies in the letter he received while you were out. I fear it came from Mr Robinson. It is lying on the floor in his room.”
Emily went past me up the stairs and Charlotte looked severely at my hot, guilty face.
“I knew something was wrong, Anne! What have you been hiding? What has happened at Thorp?”
The strain of keeping secrets to spare everyone perturbation could no longer be suppressed.
“I - it is not fair - that I have had to bear all this and keep up pretences. While you and Emily have pleased your *selves*!”
Charlotte recoiled at my fierceness. Then her face collapsed in misery.
“Surely we are not to experience new calamities from him. Come Anne - share your burden with me.”
“I can hardly bring myself to describe his…it is almost too absurd to believe what he has told me of …his…..crime…...”
“Crime? Surely not. Not one of the daughters??”
“No, Charlotte. He claims the mother.”
I went to sit in the dining room, trying to get my breath. Charlotte sat down by me on the settle and took my hand.
“I am so sorry for you Anne.”
“Oh, sister…if you only knew what has been my lot these past years and what worry….slights from the children…cold insults from the parents…and sleepless nights due to my own brother. Oh…I can hardly breathe.”
She went to the window and threw it open, then shouted to Tabby for a glass of water.
Emily returned to us - letter in hand, looking more than usually grave. She closed the door tight and sat down in the corner seat.
“This is very wrong, Emily,” I managed to wheeze. “To take his letter.”
She smiled darkly. “I do what others wish to do but never dare. I shall replace it exactly where it was.”
A while later, when I had regained my breath and composure, she passed the letter for us to read on my lap.

Mr Brontë

This afternoon Edmund arrived with our coachman, William Gooch, at The Cliff in a very shaken and distressed state. He gave me a note, penned by our housekeeper, which was quite shocking. It told of conduct quite unbecoming in a tutor and of a man whose father is a minister of religion; in truth, of conduct of which even a very lowly person should be very heartily

ashamed. You, Sir, have been welcomed into the bosom of our family and entrusted with the care of our son. Your betrayal of that trust exceeds my verbal powers to condemn it. Edmund immediately confirmed what was written. Now I have discovered your proceedings, by letter, and by word of my own son who, at his age, should be entirely innocent of such matters, matters bad beyond expression, I hereby dismiss you from our service. You shall break off instantly and forever all communication - on pain of exposure - with our family. Your name shall never more be mentioned and your insolent picture shall be destroyed. In short, Sir, it shall be as if you never existed,

Edmund Robinson D.D.

"Oh," said Charlotte, aghast, coming to the same conclusion as I, "can it be that by our own brother's indiscretion, the son has learnt of his own mother's shameful conduct? What could be more abhorrent?"
Emily's face - normally of an austere and impenetrable cast - could not prevent a show of amazement. She took the letter back from my lap and rapidly scanned it again for clues.
"Is that the nub of it, Anne? Did Branwell confess an affair to you?"
I looked away for shame, but shook my head. The scene I pictured in Scarborough was too much to bear. But Emily began to pace up and down, laying the letter absent-mindedly on the table.
"Could such a terrific piece of news be contained in the house where they stay - even by such reserved people as the Robinsons? Surely the whole place would be in uproar…the wife abused…perhaps knocked down….dismissed from his sight…and the children all in a shriek at their mother's distress….the other guests - and all the servants - completely amazed? Surely not."
I read in her face not horror and disgust, but a kind of fascination, relish even, in conceiving and describing such events. I told her, with an effort at restraint, to return the letter instantly to Branwell's room. I went into Father's study, where he sat perturbed, his magnifying glass shaking in his hand.
"Branwell would not cry out so shrill with a mere toothache! Please tell me what has happened, Anne."
"He is neither to go to Scarborough, nor any more to Thorp. He is dismissed."
"Oh, all the saints preserve us! Has he been drinking again?"
"I think so. You must ask him yourself when he comes home."
"He would not tell me. He would be too ashamed."
"It is perhaps best then not to speculate - but just to accept he is dismissed."
"For the third time? What will become of him when I am dead?"
"Do not distress yourself Father. This time he must learn from it. He cannot be a teacher anymore. He has not the patience. Or the self-restraint. Some good, I hope, will come of this. We can only pray for him."

A few hours later, Branwell returned unsteady and dishevelled. John Brown had helped him along our lane, and, being in a better state than his companion, managed to shoulder him up the stairs and put him onto his bed. We left him there. Within less than a minute, doubtless returned to the harsh contents of his letter, he began to moan and mutter and occasionally cry out words such as *hypocrite* and *for shame.* Before we could attempt to get him quiet, I had to get John Brown, who was looking at me in quite an alarming way, to leave the house, protesting over and over that he had no need of the thanks I kept pressing on him - for Branwell was a friend for whom he would *readily lay down his life.*

"And so would he for me, Miss Anne. Ah, it is wretched to be crossed in love - as I hope such a pretty one as you shall never know - haw, haw! Poor wretch though - how he do suffer for his unobtainable lady…but he has swore me to silence….burp….beg pardon..He arn't said a name…but I reckon I might guess."

As the last appendage of John, his hand, slid away, I could at last close the door with my back and then lean against it, in agony that Branwell had told him of his shameful affair. Aunt Branwell had always said - *when ale is in, wits are out*.

Emily was upstairs in Branwell's room, and as a descant to his drunken raving, I could hear her steady, sweet, calm voice of reason. Charlotte, stopping up her ears, had retreated to her room to lose herself in her writing. I retreated to the dining room with a little supper and envied our little cat snoring by the hearth.

I was nodding off when the click of the door opening awoke me. It was Emily. The evening had been chilly for July and Tabby had made a fire. Now it had burned very low. Emily took a wooden chip from the scuttle, raked the embers and threw it on. She took a candle and lit it from the golden flame and set it in the dusky window sill, before sitting down opposite me.

"I have found it all out," she said at last. "To begin with he would not tell me - just kept blaming the husband. I told him that I would sit on his bed all night and all tomorrow if he refused to tell."

She poured us both a small glass of wine and joined me on the settle.

"I have taken Father up to bed. He seems reconciled to the news. Tomorrow I will go to John Brown and persuade him to take Branwell away for a time. Anywhere. It is not fair that poor Father should endure this, when he is already wretched with his eyes. Selfish, thoughtless Branwell! He thinks only of his own grief. And Charlotte is little better."

"She has her own disappointment to nurse, Emily. It is well that we are not slighted in love - for the house would be impossible and poor Tabby would have to leave - and take our dear cat with her."

"Slighted in love? I would not have a man if his hair hung in gold! You shall never see me puling like an infant. Now to the point. What did you see to confirm what Branwell has told me of his affair with the mistress of the house? And do not be evasive."

I told her briefly of what I had heard outside the door and of Branwell's confession upon my challenge."

"So you - as I - have little more than his word for it?"

“But what he said was so persuasive and heartfelt - how could I doubt it? Do you doubt it then?”
“I wonder sometimes whether he confuses truth and fiction - the *desire* for romance with its obtaining. Do you think him quite sane, the way he carries on? Cannot the brain become confused with licquor? You have heard of delirium. And what more - besides anguish and distress to himself - do his fits portend?”
“Oh, do not call them so!”
“They are *fits*!”
I put down my glass. The aroused flames of the fire were flickering in Emily’s steady eyes and I had to look away. I told her it sounded as if she did not love him. She threw the dregs of her glass onto the fire and it flared up.
“He is my brother - for good or ill. But I will not pretend or defend him. Branwell is half-way to insanity.”
I thought immediately of his crazed eyes as he had paced my sitting room at Thorp, abhorring and cursing Mr Robinson; and then of his ensuing attack of tic. Wishing to change the subject, I said it was a wise idea to encourage John Brown to take him away.
“He needs to be distracted from these morbid obsessions. But please, when you see Mr Brown, try to make him see how important it is to curb Branwell’s excesses. John is at heart a sensible man. I am sure he can be persuaded. Now, please tell me what you have found out this evening.”
She stood up to draw the curtains, brought back the candle and stirred the fire into a fury of crackling sparks.
“He came home to us in a fright, feeling anxious about his conduct with the boy.”
“The boy! What on earth are you trying to say?”
“To be bold - he got him drunk.”
“No!”
“He excuses himself - of course - by laying the blame elsewhere - with the father. He said that lately the father had been allowing him wine - diluted - with his dinner.”
“I myself have witnessed this.”
“Well, Branwell thought he would go one stage further. At first tumblers of wine with water - and - when he kept laughing - just wine - and finally - quite shocking - and I would not relent until he confessed - he gave him a gin and hot water. Of course, by this time Branwell would be quite out of his senses. What a mistake - to leave their son in the care of an alcoholic. And we share in the guilt by pretending he was not.”
“But he had been quite moderate all year. I cannot believe this. I had thought his propensity for drink cured…….”
“By a worse vice.”
“Oh, Emily, I cannot bear it.”
“Well, the boy retched up on the floor and the housekeeper was sent for. She saw at once how things stood. She said she would tell the coachman to inform the master in Scarborough.”
“So - Branwell said nothing about the mother?”

“Nothing. As I suspected. Just as it was in Cumberland. Dismissed for insobriety. You know it as well as I. Our brother is a drunk. Our ingenious brother is little better than old Simon who begs for coppers outside the King’s Head.”
We debated what to tell Charlotte. Emily had the final word.
“She would find it far less disgusting to believe in the affair - in the seduction of a willing wife than in the corruption of a child. Leave it all as it is. If Branwell wishes to enlighten her further, so be it. I’m done with it now and am determined to think no more on it.”

*

“Is Branwell gone?”
“Yes Father.”
“Without saying goodbye?”
“I told him you were sleeping. It is better so, for he is ashamed. Shame will do him good.”
John Brown had readily agreed to take him away to Liverpool for a week or so and now we had our peace - if not our peace of mind - restored. Father studied me with his milky eyes. Was it worry that had made his hair turn completely white?
“I am lucky to have three such good, clever daughters. God willing, I might have had five - and then five accounts to choose from. Would that I could see you all properly - I can only try to decide by your voices who is telling me the truth. Is it toothache, a woman - as Charlotte said - or drink? It pains me that you think me not strong enough to hear the truth about my own son. I mean to tackle him again when he returns, so I should have it. So tell me the *truth*!”
I took his old hand and looked into those opaque eyes, once as sharp and startling as Branwell’s. The likelihood of Branwell’s ever being in charge of a boy again was so low that my father’s desire to know the absolute truth and exploit it for his son’s moral improvement did not need to be requited. For his own sake I felt obliged to lie - or rather tell only part of the truth.
“It is not clear what exact misdemeanour caused his dismissal - but he *was* drinking at Thorp while in charge of the boy Edmund. Perhaps in response to an unhappy affair of the heart. It is hard to know the truth with him. Perhaps when he returns he will be more ready to tell you.”
“What can he become? He will never be a writer. He is too wordy and slapdash. He will never be a teacher. I hoped he would take holy orders, but he is become a sworn atheist. Take holy orders! He cannot even take railway fares. How can such a brilliant boy be so unfitted for the world? Where on earth will he fit in then?”
I went to reply but there was nothing to be said.
“I always feared he would take after his great-uncle Patrick who loved his pot. It was for that reason I urged him to join our Temperance Society. I did all I could to persuade him, and so did your blessed aunt. Please do not blame me in your heart.”
“Why should I? He is a son of Adam - as well as yours - and plots his own road to ruin. But I hope you can promise us one thing. It is chiefly on that account that I wish to speak to you. When his exchequer is exhausted - as it soon must be for he had no wages in July - you must

never lend him a sovereign to take to the Black Bull, however loud a lament he raises. He will only ever become strong if those around him are strong."
"You are a wise girl, Anne. The wisest of my children. Come here."
He embraced me and I could not prevent a flood of tears. I was the wisest but never the favourite.

*

At the end of July, Charlotte received a letter from Branwell which she shared with us.

Dear Charlotte,

I awoke this morning ashamed of my conduct at home. Yet you alone know, as well as I, the excruciating and incomparable pain occasioned by a love unrequited. Were I of Emily's strong and taciturn disposition and of Anne's quietist ways, then the pain might have been more readily endured, and the eruption of my feelings would not have troubled the peace of home; yet I believe their suppression can only lead to illness, and they are better expelled than retained. Without the reins of self-restraint and reserve in my temper, only drink now and laudanum can bring about the calming effect I need - until my bark, with time, encounters less turbulent waters. For now, even when all around me is a throng of gay hubbub and gaudy colours, a dark Lady is always at my side - and she is called Misery. I tell her I would sacrifice all for a placid, stoical heart, but she is determined not to let me rest.
Anne must have told you who the dear object of my affection is and that it is equally returned. The difference in our ages and situation is no obstacle to our mutual feelings - indeed they are merely rendered thereby more poignant - for Time is always impatient to do His destructive work - and now the mountains thrown up by an Ogre she loathes to impede us only sharpen the arrows of my grief.
My sole comfort here is John Brown - ever a loyal and willing listener. By degrees, I may be lifted from this spiritual abyss where I am fallen; but only by kind words, never by censure. No doubt, when the present distractions of Liverpool, my beloved city, have ceased to bring a measure of relief, and when I am returned to the narrow, smoky streets of Haworth - though I shall endeavour to bury my head in my papers - no doubt, dear Charlotte, I shall be forced to crave the indulgence and generosity of my dear sisters whenever an excess of despair drives me to seek remedies of which none of you, I know, approve, yet, I fear, shall be - only temporarily, I hope - necessary,

Your ever devoted brother,

Patrick Branwell Brontë

Emily took the letter from Charlotte and read it with a grimace which turned into a grim smile. Then she handed it to me with a scowl.
“Poor Branwell,” whispered Charlotte.
“Poor indeed!” cried Emily.“Very poor. It is a long-winded way of saying lend me money - whenever I weep loud enough - to get drunk and drugged up. And never raise an objection.”
But Charlotte had fixed on something else. “He speaks of *unrequited* love, comparing it to mine. Anne, are you sure he told you the truth? Perhaps he only ever *aspired* to….to be the lover of Mrs Robinson, and interpreted her…affable, affectionate ways wrongly. Perhaps there were only kind words, a motherly kiss, and embrace….Father said what…a very nice woman she was.”
“He meant she is a determined and incorrigible flirt - who tries to seduce even older men with her cow eyes. I know what I heard at her door. It was disgusting.”
“But you could observe them close. Surely if she had bestowed her heart on him, there would have been signs - secret signals between them. Did she ever look in love? Were her eyes more animated? Did she glow?”
“She was in good spirits - but she usually was. She had her life and her husband had his. Branwell told me of a scandal which I never believed. That he had fathered a child with a slattern in a village near York.”
“Branwell??” e xclaimed Charlotte.
“No, Robinson!”
We looked at each other and burst out laughing. The idea was too preposterous even to be a product of Branwell’s fantasy. Emily decided though she had heard enough.
“Whether all this is fact or fantasy - or a mixture - my main concern is that we shall have to endure - and our poorly father too - the noisy effects of his selfishness. I shall tell him straight out when he returns - would a matronly woman of six-and-forty with a family and a grand circle of friends and a stately house and park, endanger all that for a hole-in-the-corner affair with a young servant? I cannot credit it - and if it is true, it is too absurd to excite anything but disgust. And if the *ogre* does decide, after all, to throw th*e slattern* onto the street, then perhaps she could come and stay here. Might we not then have a little peace?”
“That is too shocking!” we other two replied with one voice.
“And I shall move out. She can have my room! If everyone here could be as comfortable and undesponding as I, in spite of all these slings and arrows, then we should have a very tolerable, if unexciting world of it. Look there - in the letter - he must have told John Brown! So soon we will be the laughing stock of the village. What then of your plans to open a school here? Who would send their child to sit under the roof of a drunkard *and* a fornicator?”

The house was like a funeral parlour all afternoon after Emily’s frank outburst. I could hear muffled sobs from Charlotte’s room which were her restrained way of indulging in self-pity. I would have resolved to look for another situation - anywhere - but for the thought of an aged parent scarce able to relieve his solitude and tedious existence more by reading. I prayed again to God - with ever less conviction - for a solution to our predicament.

After dinner, when it had been my turn to read to Father from Scripture and he had gone up to bed, we all sat in the dining room and made a resolution. No matter what the clamour or the threats, we would not lay out one penny for Branwell to take to the Black Bull, the White Lion or the apothecary. This might compel him to move out to Halifax and plague his friends there. They were all, we gathered, in debt and one more debtor would make no difference.
"We must remain strong" I said "for Father's and Branwell's sake. What he called generosity is weakness."
I stared at Charlotte's plain, careworn face, made even more severe since she had taken to tying her fair hair back. She placed her dainty hands on the table and encouraged us to join with her. We made a solemn vow.
So that late July evening, as the last of its golden light fell on us, we swore to be an enemy, not of our brother, but of his sinful nature, and prayed for a divine blessing on our intention.

Branwell returned from Liverpool after a week looking sad, weary and ashamed. He was thinner and had a cough. We greeted him each in turn at the door and embraced him with a sisterly kiss. He went into Father and spent an hour with him after I had drawn him to one side and told him what reasons I had given for his dismissal.
Later, he came into us.
"I am a little financially embarrassed. Could I borrow some money to go to Scarborough?"
Emily and I looked to Charlotte to be our spokesman. She told him steadily and earnestly of our resolve, born of our love for him at which he melted and began to whimper a little.
"We love you too much to be the means of your ruin, brother. If you are determined to act impulsively, then you must earn such money yourself. Then the effort would surely make you be less inclined to waste it. That is our resolution. And we beg you not to trouble Father, for he is very low."
After a moment's reflection, he nodded bravely and made to go to his room. Emily bade him stay.
"What have you told John Brown of your….troubles?"
"Only that I formed an impossible attachment near York."
"Not the name of the lady?"
"Of course not! Would I wish her to become the gossip of every beggar hereabouts?"
Our hearts were gladdened.
Over the next weeks, *his bark* entered steadier waters and he threw himself into imposing some sort of order onto his mass of papers. He was determined, above all, to get his novel into a publishable shape. He told me one volume was ready - about his hero Percy - and two more needed but a little rearranging and editing - and a conclusion adding - for all to be as he wished. He began to come down to the dinner table again and all our prayers for domestic peace seemed answered.
All four of us were now hard at work at our writing desks, after a notice to advertise our little school elicited not one reply. I had made progress on my novel about Helen Huntingdon. The

sketch and plot of her life was done in my head and it only required the addition of detail and colour - and a title.
One morning an argument broke out between my sisters. Charlotte had gone to the old nursery - Emily's tiny study - to look in her, but finding her absent, had picked up a sheaf of poems from her table she had never seen before. She had shown them to me and I was immediately struck by their power, rhythm and beauty - surpassing easily all my best efforts. When Emily returned and discovered the good-natured theft, she became very irate with Charlotte. We were forced to employ all our powers of praise and enthusiasm to calm her indignation. Charlotte went to fetch her private collection, never disclosed, and I added my few.
"Shall we live ever in obscurity when so much inferior verse gets into print?" asked Charlotte rhetorically. "Let us make another vow. To edit and refine these efforts under a friendly but critical eye - together - and pool our resources - we have our legacies from Aunt Branwell - to pay for a limited number of copies to be got up and brought out."
At last, Emily could be persuaded and we went to join hands around the table again, when a new idea struck me.
"Wait! I shall fetch Branwell."
I went, blinking, into the half-light of his studio, and told him I had a surprise for him.
"Do come down!"
He sifted through our papers and declared himself much impressed. When told, however, of our plan, and of our wish that his poetry should be included, he turned most sceptical.
"First, I have no money to contribute -"
"No matter! I shall lend you some - two, three, five pounds - whatever is needed."
"No, Anne. My second point is - that you are wasting your time and money in casting your pearls before swine and asses. Concentrate rather on your novels, as I do. But I thank ye for thinking of me."
And so he left us a little sadder but with our determination undimmed. We joined our hands and made our new resolution.

More Trouble

A letter addressed to me in a hand I recognised but could not immediately place arrived in late October. It was destined, not that I could have known it, to throw the house once more into confusion and I wished with all my heart afterwards that I had just thrown it onto the fire. As it was, I opened it with growing curiosity and before I had read the first line the name of the writer flashed before me.

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Dear Miss Brontë,

I hope my secret letter finds you well and in good heart as you enjoy your retirement in Haworth - if still it be so. I am looking forward - though not really very much! - to my forthcoming wedding and resigning myself to becoming the quiet sedate lady.

This was the work of Bessie! I read on eagerly, hoping for information as to what had truly occurred in the summer.

I am however quite determined to have my own way with Edward Milner; I shall insist he drinks less and loses weight; I would not wish him as fat and disagreeable as Papa. My mother and father are well, as are Mary and Edmund. I shall come to Lydia presently.
We have missed you since July but you will be pleased to know that we have followed some of your recommendations for reading, and Mary's skills on the pianoforte now almost surpass mine - and are therefore quite poor! After what happened in July, Edmund is sent away to Somerset to some dull cleric to be improved. My word, what a stir, when William brought him into our lodgings and his indisposition was explained. Edmund looked as pale as a ghost and was quite unable to eat for two days. I never heard Father shout so loud - I had to run off to my room to laugh. Instead of a week of punishment, it had been a week of outings, gaiety, ditties, jokes and revel! Mother showed herself equally as disgusted as Father and forbade us ever again to mention your brother's name. And if Father knew I was writing to you, he would shout again! But I am not of an age to be intimidated and shall do just as I please.
But the foregoing is not my main reason for writing. You will never believe it, but Lydia has eloped with an actor. In broad daylight! She went out into the park after luncheon reading a book and never came back. Mama was frantic, and upon searching her room found a note declaring she was bound for Gretna Green and would henceforth be known as Lydia Roxby! (Do you remember him at the party? The tall beautiful blonde fellow who danced with her?) It seems they have been secretly engaged for a year. Besides the note, Mama found a diary in a drawer and summoned me to be interrogated. Had I ever observed Lydia in the company of Mr Brontë? Of course, I denied this, but afterwards did gather that he and she shared some sort of naughty secret understanding. What a scandal! Father swears he will shoot your brother if he ever sets foot in the locality again. He seems to blame him for Lydia's disgraceful conduct, and swears he will never see her again. She is cut off without a penny…

This was the main content of her letter. Shocked beyond words, I sat back and contemplated the ceiling, imagining the events described, seeing again Lydia and Victoria's unseemly conduct with Roxby, hearing again the former's dismay at his show of inconstancy; I heard again her passionate cries in Thorp Green Wood and blushed with shame to recall my reaction. My reverie was suddenly disturbed by the entry of Branwell himself - just as I was picturing him in the rhododendron bush - and this so startled me that I instantly gathered up the pages I had read into my fists. He caught sight however of the address and instantly exclaimed "Bessie."
"No!" I exclaimed. "It is from a friend of mine at Roe Head…"

“You forget - I improved her handwriting myself with my alphabet exercise. Your face tells me the truth - and I can see it is bad news. Let me see.”
“No. She only tells me of her progress and her marriage preparations.”
But my lie had only whetted his curiosity and with one step he came close and tore the letter from my grasp. With a scream I pursued him along the passage where he dashed into the privy and, laughing like a lunatic, shot the bolt. I hammered with my tiny fists and screamed that he should not read what was personal to me! The commotion drew Emily and Charlotte downstairs and I heard Father’s weak voice calling out.
“Branwell has stolen my letter and locked himself in,” I stammered, suddenly becoming short of breath. I was ushered into the dining room.
“I have tried and failed to keep him honest I the youngest have had all this and now he will read things which will destroy all our peace again.”
Emily threw open a window and thrust my head out into the fresh air. Gradually my shaking body grew calmer and the strong breeze dried my eyes of their tears of distress and fear. Emily was insisting, leaning out of the window with me, that I should consult the doctor about my chest; there was Charlotte by the garden wall, kneeling as if in prayer, her cream dress muddy at the hem, gathering into her arms a stand of yellow daisies, her body convulsed with sobs. I could only think what a passing gossip might make of such a confusing scene, made now even more strange by the distant caterwauling of Branwell, as if he were a child who had fallen down and scraped a knee. Emily ran off to rap at the privy door, calling on him to calm himself. But the lament persisted. Again, Father called out from his study and I heard Emily’s footsteps as she hurried into him. Upon hearing this, Branwell drew the bolt and followed her. His and Emily’s voices were raised, their quarrel punctuated with the hoarse pleadings of Father. Abruptly the argument subsided and Emily returned, arms folded, looking much aggrieved.
“I have done with him! Done with all this….He pleads with Father for half a sovereign *to calm his nerves.*…”
“And he has given it to him?”
“Doubtless he will.”
I went out into the garden and stood by Charlotte. Cobwebs hanging around the daisies, silvered by the sun, were lifting and settling in the breeze; she stood in quiet contemplation of this, sniffing only occasionally. I could read her gentle thoughts.
“What miracles these tiny creatures work,” I said at last. “Yet how uncomplicated and undemanding their lives. Branwell is off to drown his sorrows, I fear..”
“What has distressed him so in your letter?”
“I cannot be sure, but Lydia had eloped with an actor.”
“The mother?”
“No! The eldest daughter.”
She threw up her hands to her face. “How appalling…but….”
“How exciting?”

She stared at me in shame and turned to look over the wall at the graveyard. I told her there was more to unsettle Branwell than an elopement.
“Bessie reports that the mother was equal in her condemnation of him. Hardly the response of a lover. Can he be entirely deluded after all?”
“Yes, but she would know how to dissemble and would have no choice, if she were a deceiver, but to join the husband in condemning his conduct. And no doubt she still deceives him in her thoughts and in her heart.”
“Even more convincingly than the wretched actor, I suppose.”
She looked at me for signs of irony and began to laugh. She embraced me and kissed my cheek.
“Oh Anne, I wish I had your ability to see the absurdity in things.”
I looked past her at the dark stones, recumbent and spread out far and wide and beyond the church.
“Life is too short to make every event into an all-consuming tragedy. The world moves us onto the next before we can do justice in our lamenting for the last.”
“And yet I feel especially for Branwell, whereas you and Emily cannot…..I cannot stop thinking of someone I have left behind in Belgium, a man so far beyond the obtaining that it makes him even more undismissable from my thoughts. It is a pain so acute and beyond relief that I think it will kill me. I need the challenge of our projects as much as Branwell needs distraction.”
“Charlotte, if you could….*obtain* your…*object*, doubtless you would soon weary of him. You would see all the imperfections he has been careful to conceal from the world; notice his foibles and be irritated by his whims; you would smell his breath and….other things. Let these thoughts diminish your agony - as well as the thought of the agony it would cause his wife, not to mention the danger - in the breaking of a precious commandment - to your soul.”
We had never spoken before of Professor Héger. She crimsoned a little and then smiled.
“You are the wisest of us all, Anne. We have not always been very close - but I love you very much.”

Father had, indeed, succumbed to Branwell’s pleas and when the half sovereign was exhausted, he staggered back in the late afternoon with a bottle and went to his room, whence soon came the sound of alternate weeping and laughing. After a while, when he was quieter, I climbed the stairs and knocked on his door. He was lying on the bed staring at the ceiling.
“I hope this is an aberration and not the beginning of a new round of dissipation and distress. You must think of Father if you cannot consider us.”
“She loves me, Anne. This is a sign to us - this elopement of the daughter. How she must envy her - to be with her true love and not chained to a tyrant. How many in the world can have their true heart’s desire? I sense her, even hear her, calling out to me to come and take her away -”
“What nonsense you talk! You speak of *religion* as superstition but can believe, like Charlotte, in some irrational communion of souls? Listen to me. Whatever has or has not happened between you and Mrs Robinson, you must forget her. Elopement? It is pure fantasy to imagine she would give up rank, repute, comfort and wealth to live in sin with you! Where could you escape to - to

be beyond the knowledge and censure of the world? What would you live on? You even have to beg a coin from Father to get drunk! When will you grow up and be a proper man?"
He buried his head in the pillow but I was sure my words had hit home.
"You were improving; you were putting such thoughts behind you. This present upset is entirely your fault - acknowledge it!"
I sat down on the edge of the bed and in spite of his breath drew close and kissed him. I felt in full flow and was determined to press my argument home.
"Let this be a moment of catharsis. You deem yourself a genius. Let these afflictions then be transmuted into great poetry. We all envy your facility with words - so tell - in simple terms, not with prolixity and with over-dramatic flourish, of the human condition and of the troubles of the heart - are you listening? Would you rather transmute them into bitter ale at the Black Bull - into laudanum - into useless moping, depression and headache - or into great art, for the edification of your fellow man? Did Goethe run himself through? No, he wrote of Werther and his sorrows."
He took my hand and squeezed it, so thus encouraged, I reminded him of my offer to help with Percy and Darkwall Farm.
"Why not end the tale with its hero turning away from ideas of seduction and self-gratification? Let him reform - and determine to be of use to others - heaven knows we have need of true heroes in these parts! - let him be a Percy who has mastered his base instincts whom all can admire - a model others would willingly imitate. To bring such a novel to fruition, I would happily give up - or postpone - my own projects."
To my initial delight, he showed me his red, tear-streaked face and nodded faintly. Then he chose to concentrate on a criticism I had made.
"So, you think my writing prolix. What flourishes can you mean? How can I be a genius? For, if true, these charges are severe. Oh, I am a jagged, ill-turned piece of a puzzle I loathe, and wish I could throw myself on the fire!"
"You *are* a genius - but lack discipline. Remember your poem about the lady painting? How many lines wanted another syllable or had one too many? How often did the reader's inner voice stumble over an uneven foot? How many less commonplace and more startling rhymes could have been discovered with just a few more minutes of care? If you join the three of us below, we can suggest improvements to your verse, as you can to ours. How much more fruitful an exercise would that be than lying here wallowing in your own pity? If you continue to abuse your brain and body, then the great powers with which you were blessed will surely deteriorate. How wretched would you feel then?"
With hope renewed, I left him and went down to Father in order to beg him not to give him any more money for drink.
"But if he laments and pleads, how can I bear it? Would that I were deaf as well as blind!"
"He has heard bad news today. The lady he loves has eloped with another. But I have been up to talk sense into him. It was a hopeless case. I think now he will behave more rationally. It is vital to his health and sanity that he now abstains."
"You are a good daughter. And I am weak - a foolish father."

To this I could make no reply.

One afternoon in November, when the rain had not once let up and we already had a candle burning on the mantlepiece, Branwell came down to us and sat in the fourth chair at the table. He looked very pale for being so long indoors and he needed to shave. Emily, next to him, wrinkled up her nose but decided to say nothing.
"I cannot make any progress with Percy today," he muttered. "He ought to be better - as you said, Anne - but it is hard to find a convincing way to reform him when all his character is passion, deceit and scorn." He turned to me in particular and added "How can he begin to love the needy shepherds on the moors, and the low people in their hovels, when they have been beneath his contempt?"
I had no immediate suggestions to make. Charlotte misconstrued his words as a plea for help, not as a sullen reproach to me, and began to speak, having helped, long ago, to create Percy in their mythical land of Angria; she understood Percy and of what wickedness he was capable. Emily frowned impatiently; she seemed to think that Percy was really beyond salvation and wished for none.
In his hand Branwell held a poem and she urged him to read it to us.
"Come brother - let us hear it."
Accordingly, in a faint voice he began to declaim it.
"Her effort shows a picture made
To contradict its meaning."
I froze to hear again those poor lines first seen by me at Thorp. As I feared, his voice stumbled over the second line of the second stanza and, when Emily took a sharp breath, it faltered.
"It is a little clumsy just there, is it not?" she said, unaware of Branwell's darkening countenance. She took the page from his unresisting hand and placed it between her and Charlotte; they both whispered the verses through, pausing to point with their slender fingers at the very imperfections I had noticed, while our brother looked gloomily on, as they raised and lowered their heads in meditation, seeking improvements to the rhythm and rhyme.
"It is the emotion and meaning of the poem which you should value above all," said Branwell, scarce able to hide his irritation. "Whether there should be a syllable more or less here or there…is akin to arguing that Hamlet or Lear should be smaller or taller - or more or less hairy!"
Emily failed to notice the tear in his eye. "But if the verse sticks, then its *power* is reduced, and the reader is left dissatisfied. Those who prefer poets to novelists dwindle in number and are the most demanding and perceptive of readers. They read language for its beauty - not its information - and we dare not offend their taste."
He stood up, all in a tremble. "Oh, we dare not offend that band of angels - God help us!"
He grabbed the paper, crumpled it and threw it on the fire. We were shocked. He shoved back the chair with his legs. "I tell you, the modern reader is in too much of a hurry to count the syllables in a line! He does not know a sonnet from an ode! They seek the penny ha'penny thrill

of a seduction or a murder, and call their cats Horace. This is a waste of time…..oh, my poem! I made no copy!"
The fire had quickly scanned the poem and thrust the cinder into the chimney. I told him to calm himself.
"You showed it to me at Thorp and I made a copy. I love it, bumps and all, but not its theme. I will bring it up to you."
"You should listen to criticism, Branwell," said Charlotte severely, angered by his outburst. "It is pure arrogance otherwise."
"I will not stay to hear this. If you sell ten copies of your book, I shall be amazed. I shall retire early. If Tabby looks in, can you ask her to bring me some soup?"
After he had gone, Emily said "Well, I am determined to prove the Jeremiah wrong. But we shall need to be cunning. For a start, our names will not do. We must become men. I have chosen Bell. Ellis Bell."
We soon agreed with her. After some thought, I chose Acton and Charlotte became Currer. We laughed long at those stupid names and at the stupid people whose opinions of us might be altered by them. Would a rose smell less sweet to be called a Brontë, rather than a Bell? But we were only the roses - not the noses, and were quite determined to be inhaled.

*

As Christmas approached and the glooms of winter set in, the temporary improvement in Branwell's habits halted. Tabby discovered that "Little Nosey" the landlord of the Black Bull was allowing him credit - on the promise of some vague payment for a poem from a newspaper. And John Brown, against our advice, had pledged him the odd coin. After an evening session at the tavern, he would write through the night, muttering, declaiming, giggling, weeping, never falling silent much before dawn, then remaining asleep for most of the day before arising at dusk, when the sorry cycle would recommence. Only in daylight hours did we enjoy a kind of peace, an unnatural one to be endured in a state of tension but never enjoyed.
"An alcoholic will always find an excuse," said Emily one morning when we had slept particularly badly. "It is either too hot or too cold, too damp or too dry; a very pleasant or a very dismal day; and he will always find a way of providing the means."
These and other pessimistic comments of Emily's rang and rang in my ears, giving me no respite.
"Will you not speak to me?" Branwell would ask on odd diurnal visits to the dining room, rendered at once silent by his staggering entry. One afternoon, Emily looked up angrily from her plate.
"What use are words with you? You make us the butt of gossip in the village - Tabby says so. Your sisters are sniggered at, our father, the vicar, is ridiculed for his leniency when he should be venerated for his loving kindness. Away with you!"

The spring we craved was long overdue, for March was a cold, dismal month. Charlotte, despairing of escape onto the moors, wrote to her friend Ellen Nussey and secured by return an invitation to spend a week with her in Gomersall. I too was included, but, fearing the consequences to Father's peace of leaving Branwell and Emily bickering together, I declined; Branwell feared her occasional waspish sting less than the cold stare of Charlotte; the latter was his collaborator of old and he valued her opinion above even Father's. And was she not, after all, his fellow sufferer in unrequited love?

In her absence, he crept into Father and told him of a debt to John Brown, vowing that the five pound note would not be taken to the Black Bull. To that establishment he straightway repaired, however, and did not return till way past dinner time, rolling in as drunk as a lord, calling to Tabby to put him out *something hot* as if she were a common slave. Emily bit her tongue as I laid my cautioning hand on her trembling knee; she sprang up and cleared her end of the table. I sat back down heavily to look at him. The effects of his habits were becoming alarming; his abdomen was distended through lack of food, his eyes were dingy, his skin unhealthily pallid and his limbs bonier. His teeth were yellow, the gums receding and his hair a shock, a total stranger to a comb.

"I find I have no appetite after all, dear Tabby." said he after a vain attempt to direct his fork and trap a potato. The faithful old Tabby offered to cut it for him.

"No, damn you! I am not a child. Away with it."

Close to tears, she picked up his plate and left the two of us deeply ashamed of him. This reminded me so much of another's bad manners and ill treatment of his servants at table that I was close to making him aware of the comparison.

"Do not think me drunk, dear sisters. Just very weary. And you know that as well as a great sadness weighing me down, there are continual financial botherments which sting like mosquitos and…oh, I feel like a Gulliver pinned to the floor by little people……you should be pleased to be free of woes and en en encumbrances ….and you have prospects!" He pinched his nose with his fingers and spoke then in his absurd Yorkshire accent. "Your poetry will soon be pub burp beg pardon published, and your novels are what? near finished. Am I not fortunate indeed to have three such *clever* sisters?"

The *clever* was intoned with bitterness and irony.

"Indeed - *baaa* - I am the black sheep of the family - making you three all the whiter. Be grateful for me!"

Emily had listened in mock patience to all of this. "Well," she said at last almost pleasantly "I am very glad you are overtired; perhaps we shall have some relief tonight from your coughing and sighing."

Branwell went to laugh at this wry wit but began to choke. He stood up and a great gush of ale rippled across the table and began to drip at several points from the edge. I shall not describe the odour. Without a word, Emily took a tea towel and started to mop up while I looked with disgust at my wet dress. His eyes were as saucers and he began to tremble all over. From his throat there came a sound like a calf bleating. Such an intense fit began as I never before witnessed.

“Laudanum!” he managed to gasp.
“But the apothecary is closed,” shouted Emily.
He managed to point up to his room before collapsing, rigid and shaking, onto the floor. At once I ran to his room and in a drawer, wrapped in a vest, I found four bottles, one nearly empty. Back in the dining room, I poured some into his mouth while Emily held his head still between her knees. He spluttered but a good deal seemed to be swallowed. By degrees, his fit began to subside and he lay in cold sweat, his nose and eyes streaming.
Father crept in and stared at the scene.
“I can smell he has been drinking. I despair. He promised me he would not. He took the holy Bible and swore.”
“He has had an attack of tic.” I replied, “But is now calm.”
“He knows excess can bring it on!”
“He knows a lot of things,” said Emily, putting a cushion under his drowsy head. “But of manly self-control too little. And gradually ever less.”
We helped him to his bed and undressed him, discarding his wet underclothes. Emily fetched a flannel and washed him while he stared up at us like a dumb infant. Finally his eyes closed and he slept.
But in the night screams awoke us. He had got up past midnight and begun working again at his desk. Falling back asleep, he had knocked over a candle onto his papers which he had swept onto the floor too near his bedclothes, setting them ablaze. I saw to my horror a confusion of flickers below his door. What an infernal scene greeted me as I threw it open. Branwell was staggering amongst the burning papers trying to stamp them out while flames crept up his blanket. Emily rushed past me and, grabbing a pillow, beat out the flames until there was only smoke. I threw open the window and a welcome blast of air carried the smoke onto the landing. Emily shouted for Tabby to bring a bowl of water to drown the embers.
“My novel!” he exclaimed. “Half-burnt! What shall I do now?”
Father was shouting himself hoarse and I went in to tell him of the accident, trying to lessen Branwell’s blame.
“His room is quite uninhabitable.”
“Then he must come in to me. For his own safety.”

The next morning, a bright early April morning, when the sun had risen and made the events of the night seem but a bad dream, and when all the daffodils in the garden shone bright and cheerful, Branwell came into us, looking very contrite. He put a bundle of papers onto the fire, saying he was a poor novelist and a worse poet. Emily almost dropped her cup.
“I must seek gainful employment. I am going to Halifax to speak to Joe Leyland. He has many irons in the fire. If he could help me into a position, I could stay with him. There is nothing in the village here for me. If you could just lend me a florin or so for the train.”

We both jumped up eagerly; we would have given him a King's ransom to be rid of him for a while. He took some money from me and said he would be back that evening. Emily came back from her room with her purse and gave him five shillings, and told him to stay there a while.
"If your resolution is serious, you will need to show persistence and not give up at your first refusal."
I looked at his enfeebled frame and hollow cheeks. What employer would hire his services? What exacting labour could he undertake? Emily seemed to have the same misgivings and told him to go looking in Commercial-street, where there were many offices.
"You can write at speed - and with both hands at once! Twice the work for the same wage. Surely you could find work as a clerk?"
"A *clerk*…" he said sadly. He had begun to read a letter left out on the table which Charlotte had written before her departure to see Ellen, addressed to Aylott and Jones.
"I ask advice about a work of fiction," he read half-voice "*consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales which we are preparing for the press*….. How much are you prepared to pay?"
"We are paying 31 *l and* 10 shillings for our poems. But what a novel would cost? That is the point of our letter. We are unknowns. Mr Dickens pays nothing. …"
"More good money after bad. Better follow me and backfire everything. Save your money for your dowries."
Emily bridled at this. "I would rather squander my aunt's legacy on a dream than on ale and opium."
"Well, I had not your good fortune to be a beneficiary of her will."
"Because she was sure you would make your own way in the world."
"Well," he retorted "I might seek my fortune in America. Then you would never see me again. In Liverpool I enquired about passage."
This was simmering up into a boil, so I took Branwell by the arm - he was as light as a feather - and guided him into the kitchen. I put some ham and bread and cheese into a cloth and Tabby tied it up.
"Make sure you do not neglect yourself. I still have faith in you. Can you walk to Keighley?"
"Hardly."
I pressed another florin into his palm for the coach.
"If you leave for the crossroads soon, you will be in time."
I stood on tip-toe to kiss him, and Tabby came to do the same. Tearfully, he told her he was sorry for his former outburst and she kindly patted his cheek. Then he was gone.

When Charlotte returned the next day from Ellen's and the scorched smell was explained she sank down on the settle and closed her eyes.
"All the good of being away from here is undone in a trice," she murmured. "I should never have gone!"
"What do you imply?" retorted Emily. "That we were not fit keepers of the beast? He played Father a wicked trick. I cannot and will not supervise him all the time. He is nearly thirty."

So saying, she turned and left the room. I told Charlotte that henceforth he would sleep in Father's room.
"A good idea. He will be obliged to curtail his nocturnal habits. We might have some peace at last. Did the candle fall onto the bed?"
While I explained in more detail, her eyes took on that dreamy look I knew very well. Her mind was returning to that land which her characters inhabited. I asked her what she was thinking about and she came back to the here and now.
"Just an idle thought, Anne. A fire is such a shocking event. It might just do to terrify my new hero and heroine, Jane. But first I must finish The Professor."
"Do let it end happily. And then put Héger behind you."
She said she would try her best and then kissed me. She went to her room and stayed there until dinner.

Branwell came back after three days looking dishevelled and unshaven. But this was not the main reason I felt alarm. It was obvious he had been nowhere near Commercial-street. He jangled just a few pennies in the pockets of his old woollen trousers, now much too baggy and loose for him. Some brown paper had been glued to the bridge of his spectacles; he said he had fallen down and snapped it. What alarmed me was a new demonic gleam in his eye.
"I told Joe of my plans and he laughed himself nearly sick. *You a clerk?* - he said. *And shall I go for chambermaid?* Ha! Well, the long and the short of it is - I have a new project! Leyland told me of his ancestor - another Anne - Anne of Morley Hall near Leeds. She was the daughter of a stern father - Sir Thomas. She fell in love with a fellow called Tyldesley and planned to elope with him from the clutches of the old tyrant. She tied a rope around her waist and threw the other end to her lover and he pulled her across the moat! What a romance! And I shall be the author of the epic. Two or three stanzas are already in my head. Composed on the train!"
He tried to get out of his boots but was forced to sink back exhausted. I untied the laces and dragged them off, before leaving him by the fire to sleep - and dream of his two Lydias - one eloped and one pining to be.

Branwell's conduct at night did improve but at the expense of the day. Drinking, false gaiety followed by depression was his routine and we stayed as far apart from him as we could. We wondered where he was getting his money from, for Old Nosey at the Bull would surely only allow him so much credit. He had, of course, his old friends from the Masonic Lodge to whom he could plead poverty - and I suspected that Doctor Crosby was sending him the odd note for I recognised his handwriting on the occasional letter he received. How could all these loans be repaid? I prayed again for a happy end to all this but could anticipate none.

In May our volume of poetry appeared and we handled our three copies with pride and hope. Branwell, in a brief interval of commonsense, declared himself impressed and Father cried tears of joy and pride, to see something achieved at last by his *clever children.* However, a letter from

Aylott and Jones a few weeks later reported very luke-warm reviews and the sale of only one copy, though concluded on a weak note of optimism by talking of *early days yet*.
Emily at once sank into a grim and silent depression while Charlotte tried - not very convincingly - to raise her spirits by referring to one reviewer's particular praise of Ellis Bell. I, the least talented poet of the three, felt only sorry for the other two. We decided to say nothing to Father or to Branwell. His new found interest in The Ballad of Morley Hall meant he was a slightly less frequent patron of Little Nosey's. I was only alarmed - because my spy, Tabby told me - that he was steadily reducing his store of laudanum. The stare of his eyes and the slowness of his speech made me fear he was becoming an addict. Encouraged by Tabby, he was however eating better, and by getting out into the fresh air and sunshine, his skin was improving. He spoke occasionally with excitement of his epic, and we encouraged him - though privately were sure that it would go the same way as And The Weary Are At Rest. But while it served as a distraction from the Black Bull and as a *fictional* exercise in elopement, we could only welcome it. His decline seemed arrested for a while but in all our faces there stood the fear - nay the certainty - that some new event would wrest the brake from the carriage, causing a new plunge into a slough of despond; we feared the winter when his melancholy would be at its worst. In May, with all the blossom trees framed by deep blue skies, with gorse and heather blooming on the moors, the likelihood of respite was high. So at the end of that darling month, it was a shock to receive news which had more aptly arrived in November.

From Bad To Worse

Dear Anne,

I hesitate to write to you after events in Scarborough three years ago for which I was rightly rebuked. But I am now three years older and wiser and have curbed those excesses clearly so disgusting to you. I have planned several times to come and see you in Haworth, even once travelling as far as York to the station. Only the memory of your cold eyes restrained me from buying a ticket. The fact of the matter is, dear Anne, that instead of receding from my thoughts, you are ever more in them. One word of encouragement from you and I would walk all the way from Little Ouseburn to throw my unworthy self at your dainty feet.
My practice expands and I could now easily afford to keep a wife, and I know you not to be of extravagant habits; furthermore, I hear that Mrs Thompson's housekeeper at Kirkby Hall is set to retire, and should you want employment I am sure that my influence with her - for I cured her youngest of a persistent cough - could easily secure for you the position. As regards extravagant habits, if only one of your relations were of your nature! Which brings me to my second theme…. To speak plain, Branwell owes money to several people in the village and I agreed to write to you on their behalf, for he does not reply to my direct addresses. To me he owes the sum of 10 l, and I am most desirous to have the debt repaid. So if you could do me the courtesy of having a

word in his ear, I would be grateful. The landlord at the George Inn is also grumbling and threatening to take out a warrant. I believe he means to do so.
My third theme touches on a death of someone he hates and whose wife he claims would only rejoice at her release and her freedom to choose where to bestow her true heart. I could never believe such nonsense - nor could anyone else of my acquaintance. Although the lady in question, under my close observation, never made a show of affection towards her sire, I could never believe her so foolish as to throw away every advantage for someone - beg pardon for speaking plain - so insignificant, profligate and unreliable as Branwell.
Edmund Robinson D.D. expired on 26th May from exactly the causes I described to him as a warning about his own unsafe habits. His gullet, constricted and atrophied after many years of acidic dyspepsia, closed up almost completely with a sore, and he died in great pain and distress after ten days of being unable to swallow food. His widow was so broken down with grief, which persuaded me - unless it was guilt in disguise - to dismiss your brother's extravagant claims on her affection. You should decide, dearest Anne, whether to tell him of all this, for I am rather too tired of his refusal to answer me to waste more postage on him - and particularly aggrieved after showing him so much generosity in reply to his pleas for money.

Begging you to give serious consideration to my proposal,

I remain your faithful servant,

Dr Richard Crosby

Inwardly I thanked Crosby heartily for throwing such a dilemma into my way - and on *such* a beautiful morning, when I had planned to go out sketching on the moors. Without willpower, I sat entirely motionless for almost an hour as if petrified, scanning and rescanning the three pages on my desk. Eventually, I saw his main reason for writing and managed to rouse myself. I unlocked my box and took out a precious ten pound note. With two blank pages, I put it into an envelope which I then sealed and addressed. After burning Crosby's offensive letter - for one thing, I was determined that Branwell would not see it - I took my reply to the post office at the bottom of the hill. As I struggled back to the brow of the hill, I saw Branwell and John Brown coming down the parsonage lane, chattering excitedly.
"Ah, Anne! We are celebrating!" my brother exclaimed. In his hand was a newspaper. "John here has been in York. Glad tidings!"
He flourished the paper like a flag and then showed me an obituary notice.
"The wicked tyrant is no more and all will be well!"
Before I could make any reply, John had dragged him off with an arm under his shoulder. I followed them onto the square and watched them disappear into the Black Bull. At that moment, a cloud covered the sun and I shivered.

The euphoria and intoxication of the next few days were worse to endure than his glooms. He came to the dinner table in a rowdy state, singing and jigging, saying what plans he was making; what fine clothes he would buy for us when he came into his inheritance; what excursions might be undertaken and what parties and balls might be thrown. Father cautioned him not to build up his hopes too high, while we sisters, entirely sceptical, said little.
"A decent time must elapse, Branwell, even if the lady loves you as much as you say."
"But she will be forty-six in September, Father. *I hear Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near*! I have written to her and expect any day her encouraging reply."
Emily and I looked aghast at this, while Charlotte looked at him almost in admiration.
"Not two weeks a widow? You have made advances to a *widow of two weeks*?" said Emily. "Are you *utterly* insane?"
At this, Father looked very uncomfortable, while Branwell said he was indeed insane - insane with love.

A hammer blow on the door the next day made us all jump. I hurried down to find the grim lantern face of William Gooch, the Robinsons' coachman, staring through the dining room window. He had tied his horse to our gate post. I opened the door and he entered before I could ask him in.
"Good morning, Miss Brontë. I would speak urgently with your brother."
"He is not yet up."
"Then please be good enough to rouse him. I shall not intrude upon you - only find a hostelry nearby. Which would you recommend?"
"He frequents the Black Bull opposite the apothecary."
"Then pray tell him I shall hire a private room there, if such is to be had, and await his pleasure."
As he turned to leave, he hesitated and remembered he had something for me. He opened his cloak and drew out a thick letter.
"It is meant for your eyes only, Miss," said he as he left. I put it into my apron pocket and saw Branwell looking anxious in his nightgown at the top of the stairs. He asked me if it was a debt-collector and when I told him, no, it was Gooch, his face immediately lit up and he hurried off to get dressed. When he came down he asked me if I had seen his boots.
"I cannot find them. Oh, no matter - I will go barefoot."
"Be sensible. Here, under the table. And put on your coat - it is raining."
I said these words in vain to his disappearing back. The door slammed and he was gone.
Charlotte was holding the banister above me.
"Bad news?"
"I'm not sure. A servant has come from Thorp Green seeking an interview with him."
We sat together in the dining room, glancing at the clock as it struggled up to the hour, taking it in turns to go to the window for a sign of him. At just before half-past-eleven, an urgent rat-a-tat-tat made me jump again. Charlotte was at the front door in two bounds. I closed my eyes and prayed but heard the following words from Peter, the boy who worked at the Bull.

“Please, Miss. Mr Naseby sends word that you must come urgent for Maister Branwell is took reet poorly”.
We ran over in time to see the black figure of Mr Gooch riding imperiously down the main street and we rushed into the corridor of the inn. From a little room at the back we heard the all-too-familiar bleating of a calf and found Branwell shaking in a terrible fit. George Naseby, the diminutive innkeeper, was staring helplessly at him with other topers as he writhed on the floor. Ordering Peter to go at once for laudanum, I got down and hugged Branwell to stop him hurting himself on the legs of the heavy table. Peter was soon back with a bottle. At last, the dose, administered through clenched teeth while Charlotte held him steady, began to calm him and he subsided into his usual dreaminess.
“I have no idea what were said, Miss,” said Naseby, pale with shock, “but voices were raised and I thought it mun come to blows. Then t’other left of a sudden, wi’ Branwell mekkin’ terrible threats - till all this cum on. An’ I *told* him an’all it were too early for brandies and hot water……”
Somehow, with little Peter pushing, we got him home between us while half of Haworth looked on. Emily, who had been out walking since breakfast, met us in the lane.
We laid him on the settle in a stupor, half-smiling, his eyes fixed on some distant place. Father came in to look, shook his head, snorted and went back to his study. Emily said she would sit with Branwell until he was recovered. Charlotte and I went back to our rooms, and when I had lain down on my bed a moment, I remembered the letter in my apron. At first I was confused, for there were *two* letters in the envelope - the first written by Branwell and torn half through.

My dear Lydia!

So many letters have I written to you without reply - to which I have ascribed the watchfulness of a certain person. I beg you now - now that your freedom to act as you wish and please is restored - not to despise this special one, written with hope renewed, exactly as the world around us is renewed with hope this wondrous May! This very day I have learned of your husband’s death, and though, of course - for I am a naturally compassionate being - I can only hope he did not suffer, I am also naturally too honest to pretend to grieve, and am naturally too certain of your most sincere feelings to pity you in a bereavement whence only joy can flow.
Any lingering guilt and sadness you presently feel will fade more quickly, I assure you, than this morning’s dew when you raise your red-rimmed eyes to contemplate the sunny vista which even now opens up to embrace us. Forgive my impetuosity, dear Lydia, in writing such a letter with your husband so soon in his grave and attribute it only to my devotion to you. It is, I know, far too early yet - as it would offend that sacred cow, propriety - to make detailed arrangements for us to be together, but do not tarry long, my darling, before naming a time or place - perhaps Harrogate - where we can meet again.
If there be some tyrannical impediment in the will to divide us - as has been intimated to me by a mutual friend - let it not distress you; we have our natural talents which will be enough to secure

resources sufficient to our needs - perhaps on some island or abroad, where the grubby necessities of this place need not trouble us; for would not any state in Africa - in Timbuktu - be preferable to being apart and miserable in Yorkshire?

Your ever affectionate,

Patrick Branwell Brontë

I went hot to read such a stupid, shocking letter - to a woman in widow‘s weeds. Even if the recipient were passionately in love with the sender, with what feeling other than amazed disgust could she read it? That it had been returned ripped through was my one consolation. The second letter was addressed to me. My hand trembled to hold it; my heart ached to read it.

Miss Brontë,

Those of my near acquaintance would be astonished if it ever got out that I had condescended to write to a person whom I used to employ; but, whatever constraints propriety might ordinarily impose, extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary measures to be taken; though I do reassure myself that I can rely even on your discretion in keeping the very existence of this letter, as well as its contents, which are so sensitive, nay unpleasant, entirely to yourself; for to reveal them would bring neither credit to you nor, indeed, to others in your family.
This morning I have sent my coachman Mr William Gooch to make my feelings unambiguously explicit to your brother. It must be due either to intoxication or insanity that he sends me love letters; that he should write such a one - as you have doubtless just read - to me at such a time persuades me that he must be mad indeed. As you read this, Mr Gooch will be telling him that he is never to write again, let alone call here as he once wrote he intended to do. I write to you with only one purpose; that you should re-emphasize those points. Show him this by all means if he refuses to believe you.
I will concede that I am perhaps in some small way to blame for his delusions. I found your brother charming and more than once pitied him when put in his place - sometimes unjustly - by my husband when his illness was acute and he was in a fit of pique. Any affection I showed him, I assure you, was as a mother to a son, and any comforting looks, smiles, words - and I must admit - any occasional embrace were all meant to pacify in your brother what I perceived to be a very nervous and gloomy disposition. Had I known that these innocent gestures would inspire feelings so utterly offensive to propriety, towards a lady of my age and situation - who was his employer - believe me, Miss Brontë, I would have treated him only with reserve and coldness. When, one day, I sensed that his feelings were more than “filial” - I was too kind and made the mistake of only rebuking him mildly - as one would an errant child. I thought then that my mild rebuke would suffice, and would have dismissed him instantly had I foreseen all the abominable consequences of my leniency. At times, I admit I was an unhappy woman - by hiding nothing I hope to persuade you of my sincerity - and it did sometimes flatter me to have

admirers, young and old, when Edmund was out of humour. But matters never went any farther and I was ever a faithful wife. Mr Brontë's gross misconduct and abuse of my son shattered for ever all illusions I had formed of him. He is a deceiver - a SELF-deceiver - and a drunk. Since his dismissal, many other examples of immoral behaviour have come to light; debts, drinking bouts - the Sewells have told me of his secret stores in and around the Monks House - late night sorties from his window - which brings me to his biggest crime - his seduction and corruption of a person who is no longer welcome at Thorp Hall. Had she never met him, she would still be innocent, I am sure.
Finally, Miss Brontë, I come to you. I cannot believe - nay, will not believe - that you were unaware of your brother's degenerate propensities. For you to recommend him as tutor was entirely blameworthy and you should be heartily ashamed of yourself. If you are now trying – even now - after reading my last sentence, to excuse your actions on the grounds that you sincerely believed that a change of circumstances for him - to live in the midst of a respectable family with good principles - might bring about a reform - then you should feel no less shame, for you have deliberately and unconscionably involved innocent people in a dangerous experiment without their knowledge.

From this point onwards all intercourse and contact with you and your family shall be, for us, at an end. I did respect your father and can only pity him for the way his children have turned out, doubtless in contravention of all principles he has endeavoured to instil,

Mrs L. Robinson.

The letter made me feel more than wretched. I ripped all the papers into shreds and put my head on the table and wept. For shame.
After nearly an hour when my tears were dry, I tried to find some gleam of consolation. I stood at the window but the wild beauty of the moors - rippling with sunshine and with shadows in swift pursuit - soon faded. I could only envisage more outbreaks from Branwell; more failures; more silent disapproval from our neighbours; more despair over Father's blindness; more frustration over our inability to achieve recognition for our writing; the very air of the parsonage seemed stale and heavy with futility. I threw open my window to breathe in a great lungful of air - and there, once more, was a tiny pinprick of pain deep within me.
After I had gone back to my bed and hopelessly laid myself down again, slowly, like the tide returning from a distant sandbank, doubts over the truthfulness of Mrs Robinson's letter began to creep into my thoughts. Only insincere persons, surely, would insist on their sincerity. How often had I seen through her display of sentiment which was only a device to arouse admiration for her emotional depth and spirituality? And even if Branwell did exaggerate and muddy the border between truth and fantasy, could his depression and despair only be explained as a result of those fata morgana? Of utter drunken madness? Perhaps she herself, under a cloud of grievous guilt, was seeking to persuade herself - as well as me - that her sins were less than they were. I

suddenly remembered how young Edmund had sought to convince me and then his father that his shotgun crime was an accident - until he believed the lie himself. The letter Mrs Robinson had written was laced with self-justification. I heard again those cries of delight at her door. I heard again the almost identical cries of her daughter. No, there was more to this than she could admit, even to herself. I did not doubt that Branwell's thoughts of marriage were absurd; the affair - a temporary scene of amusement in her tedious play at Thorp - to *her* mind was at an end; for *him* it was his only ray of hope, a hope now dashed. How dare she lay *all* the blame for his behaviour - she a disgraceful flirt - at his door - and at mine!

I got up from bed convincing myself that Mrs Robinson was an abhorrent hypocrite; I went downstairs hating her for the disruption she had caused and would still cause to our peaceful home. What did I care if the weak and selfish woman thought ill of me? Did I give a fig for her opinion? As for Branwell, of course I could not excuse his debts and drinking, nor his treatment of young Edmund; but as I entered the dining room and found Emily and Charlotte together quietly drinking tea, I made up my mind that rather than seducing the two Lydias, Branwell was more victim of their wiles than wicked culprit.

He, in the mean time, had been put to bed. We spoke little of the day's events, grateful for the peace we could at last enjoy while he slept. I considered whether to reveal to my sisters the contents of my letters but decided not to give Emily more grist for her grim mill. She was depressed enough. Then my thoughts changed track and I knew I had to decide what to tell - or *whether* to tell Branwell of my news. I knew he had to be jolted out of his delusions with regard to the aspirations of Mrs Robinson.

At what had actually been said to him by William Gooch I could only hazard a guess; but Mr Naseby's description of their confrontation suggested that he had been sent to warn him off, not to give encouragement.

"Branwell told me" said Emily, draining her cup "when I put him to bed that the coachman said that Mrs Robinson was beside herself with anguish; that she could marry him only on pain of being disinherited. Really? Would a *coachman* be entrusted with such news? What is wrong with the post?"

Charlotte thought this over but could not bring herself to give an opinion.

"What say you, Anne?"

"What do I say, Emily? I think either he is mad - or she is mad or bad - or both are mad. Perhaps the truth will never come out. Perhaps it will remain one of a million million secrets known only to God. I only worry how Branwell will fare in the aftermath of this morning."

He did not fare well. He was taken with a kind of fever and a cough which made him half-delirious. He could hardly eat and was often sick. Finally Doctor Wheelhouse was summoned. We stood around his bed as the doctor examined him and asked him questions to which he could hardly find enough breath to respond. The good doctor, a kindly old man who had attended faithfully our Aunt Branwell and had sat by William Weightman in his final hours on earth, soon

came to a diagnosis and spoke more frankly than I had expected - and this frankness delighted me.
“Branwell Brontë. I shall spare your dear father my honest report and tell him you are improving. My *honest* report is this and I hope you will take heed, young man. I see many tragic cases - due to miasmas or whatever it is Satan sends to plague us - which I cannot help in people of your age. They are struck down with conditions which I have no skill - nor has anyone else - to amend. Your case is entirely different and of your own making and you should be ashamed, Sir. You are wasting away for want of proper nourishment. Look - I can nearly close my thumb and forefinger around your forearm. Your cough is a laudanum cough - oh yes, it might suppress it for a while but it don’t cure it and in the end makes it worse. Your feverish bad dreams are in reaction to alcohol and opium. Your tic douleuroux is made more likely to occur and made more extreme by drink. Drink is the villain here, Sir! It is at the bottom of everything. Look at your belly. It is swollen. And why? Your liver cannot manage and fluids build up down here. Your kidneys are also under strain. If you give up the drink, you will not have the tic so bad or so often and you will not need that accursed laudanum - nor have the debilitating cough - so that your appetite would improve. Drink is the cause of your parlous condition - and if you do not amend your bad habits I swear that within a year or two you will be in your grave. Drink, Branwell. Drive the demon out!”

He lay there for many days, weak and without spirit. As he scarcely had the strength to chew solids, good meaty broths were ordered and I spooned them into his mouth. Thus, I became his special carer and I sat with him, read to him, reasoned with him, prayed for him. An exclamation of despair he had once used when in the grip of one particular crisis - I forgot which - returned to trouble me. *I am too hard to die but too wretched to live.* At the time, I had dismissed this as one of his studied poetic declarations - ingenious but precious; now, as I stared at his wasted limbs, hollow, sallow cheeks and at his dejected eyes, only the second clause could convince me. Gradually, however, over the next fortnight, fortified by Tabby’s soups and milk puddings and deprived of his poisons, his cough eased and his health improved. He had no recourse to his laudanum - which the doctor had ordered to be withheld except in extremis. His hair and skin regained their shine and his eyes most of their sparkle. The swelling in his abdomen began to go down.
Then one morning in late June, a letter arrived for him from Crosby and we debated downstairs whether it should be given to him.
“I think we should let him see it,” said Emily in response to my misgivings. “It will test his resolution now he is much recovered. He cannot be protected for ever from bad news.”
“It may give him hope.” said Charlotte. “Why else would Crosby write? Perhaps as her intermediary?”
I had never told them of the two letters Gooch had given me. Emily put down her pen.
“Though he is much recovered, he is still too weak to get down to the Black Bull - to celebrate or drown his sorrows. Now is the ideal time for him to know the truth, say I.”

“Your prescription and cure are too harsh, Emily. He has made progress - through kindness. I could not bear to see him distraught again. After another two weeks he may be so weaned of alcohol that he will not be tempted to touch it again. It is a habit and like all habits it *can* be broken. Gloom would only bring on his thirst, I fear.”
“Then sit with him while he reads it - or read it too him. Talk it out with him - he sympathises most with you, Anne - and you can persuade him.”
“It might only be another demand for repayment of debt,” said Charlotte, impatiently sifting through her manuscript. Our novels had been got into good order and she was keen to get on with her covering letter so that they could be sent off.
“Go and ask Father’s advice,” concluded Emily, once more looking at her papers. I took the letter out of my apron and was tempted to burn it in the grate. I went into the kitchen and spooned out a bowl of porridge and climbed the stairs.
“Have you slept well, brother?”
“Yes, Anne. I have not dreamt - or at least of nothing I can recall to trouble me. Is that a letter for me?”
It was sticking out of my apron pocket. I hesitated but his good humour and Emily’s half-persuasive logic overcame my inclination to lie. He held out one hand eagerly while fumbling with the other for his spectacles.
“It is from Dr Crosby. At least it looks like his hand.”
“Oh,” he sighed, falling back onto his pillow with disappointment. “I can guess what he wants. But he will have to wait like all the rest till I am strong enough to untangle my affairs.”
“You do not wish to read it?”
“No….well, perhaps you can read it to me. Miss out the disagreeable bits. I keep no secrets from you, my angel. What are my other two grimmer angels about?”
I could not tell him the truth for fear of reviving bitterness and cynicism.
“Charlotte is writing to an eye surgeon in Manchester to arrange an appointment for Father to see what can be done about his cataract. Emily sits in her usual gloom and reverie.”
I opened the envelope and read out the following to him.

Dear Knave of Trumps,

At last I can thank you for the 10 l you have sent me.

“What? Has my debt been paid?”
“Yes. I paid it. He wrote to me when you failed to reply.”
“The scoundrel!
I told him not to excite himself……..then saw an opportunity.
“When you are quite well again, and have found employment, then you can me pay back five shillings a month.”
He took my hand and kissed it fervently, tears in his eyes.

“I shall, darling Anne, my guardian angel.”
“Shall I read on?”
I quickly scanned the rest, saw there were a good many snares in wait, but trusting to God for his safe passage, and to my powers of persuasion, I took a deep breath and read on. There were next some anecdotes and jests which were rather tasteless and, ignoring a voice that told me to omit the next paragraph, I looked at him bravely and said
“The next part concerns Mrs Robinson. Can you bear to hear it?”
“Yes, Dearest. I must.”

I have been attending your previous employer since the death of her husband. It was a grievous, shocking death and she is ever in want of sedatives to be able to sleep….. Forgive me if I have ever doubted your assertion as to your claim on her heart, and forgive me for allowing sheer curiosity to overcome my professional judgment and discretion….

Those last and the following words filled me with rage and disgust. That I could ever consider Crosby as a mate! I looked earnestly for a second at Branwell and his eyes urged me on

…..but I decided to contrive an excuse to bring your name into our consultation whereupon the lady promptly fainted.

“Fainted! There!” he exclaimed. “Now will you doubt me?”
“Branwell. I have not finished. Hear Crosby out. His conclusion differs from yours.”

I understand from her maid that you have written certain letters which have greatly disconcerted her in her grief. As her doctor - and your old friend - I must urge you to stop, nay, I insist upon it; otherwise I fear for her recovery. Whatever fancies you have conceived based on her friendly overtures and your association with her must be driven from your mind, not least for your own sake.… For your own sake, Branwell….*for I hear from a certain quarter* - (I assumed he referred to George Gooch) - *that your own health is very delicate.*

“Is there more?”
“No.”
“There is! Let me see.”
He grabbed the letter, scanned the conclusion and fell back. I gently retrieved it and read again

Even if Mrs Robinson were of a mind to respond to your advances there are overwhelming impediments. Give it up now, Branwell. Make an end of this folly,

Richard Crosby

“Bring me pen and paper,” he whispered after a while staring at the ceiling.
“Surely not! Surely you will not write to Thorp Hall after this! Whatever it was - it is finished Branwell. You are recovering your strength; Father might recover his sight; you have a chance to clear all your debts and make a fresh start. Do not put it all at risk. For that false woman.”
I was shouting and on my feet; he was shocked by my vehemence. I thought of Emily below. Had she spoken wisely? Had I acted wisely? He stared out at me from the pillow as if gripped by a fever; a fever of misspent talents, of confused thinking, of false conclusions. I fell to my knees and prayed fervently the fever would break. When I opened my eyes he was smiling at me.
“Are you finished scolding me? I mean to write to Halifax. To Joe. And to Francis Grundy - a friend I made at Luddenham. There might be another chance to work in Leeds. On the railway.”
I threw my arms around his neck and kissed him. The fever had broken! Having fetched him pen and ink, I descended the stairs with a light step to report to my sisters with what commonsense and stoicism he had listened to the letter - and to tell excitedly of his new resolution.
“I almost hate to give you the credit, Emily. But the forceful approach has worked. He is writing to Grundy, the engineer, for a position on the railway.”
Emily smiled almost. “Oh he is very good at making resolutions. Keeping them is another matter. We shall see.”
“I believe he has finally accepted the situation with a certain woman is hopeless. Let us attend now to our own business.”
Charlotte read out to me the final draft of her letter about our novels, Agnes Grey, The Professor and Wuthering Heights and I found no fault with it. She placed it with the manuscripts in a box and Emily bound it tight with string. The sun was shining and we gaily carried our package to the post office. Afterwards, we walked a little in the direction of Oxenhope, speculating ironically about which one of us would turn out the most famous. The exercise and fresh air gave us a good appetite for dinner and we came home at nearly five - to find Father waiting anxiously for our return.
“Branwell said he felt in need of fresh air and wanted to post a letter. I gave him a florin but he has not come home.”
I turned and marched straight to the Black Bull and found him in the company of a man I faintly recognized. Both were staggering drunk.
“Ah, John, here is my guardian angel! Anne - you remember John Heaton? Who should I bump into in the post office in all the wide, wide world, but this bumptious knave who who who - ha ha - I have not clapped eyes on in five years. Five years?”
“I told you, you deaf badger. Six!”
I turned and left to roars of laughter from others in the taproom.
“Your face says all I wish to know,” said Emily as I rushed past her in the hall. “He is a hopeless being.”

*

Father and Charlotte were away all of August in Manchester whence they returned in triumph. Father could see again. But his joy in seeing was quickly diminished by the sight of Branwell, who, by dint of begging money from his cronies, was undoing most of the good restored to him in the summer. Francis Grundy had come over to Haworth during August and could not hide from me and Emily his shock in seeing the deterioration in the old friend he had not seen for two years. Grundy departed the same day, bestowing a tipsy promise on Branwell to get him some railway employment. His final leer at me showed how empty the promise was, and it was soon after this that I gave up all hope of Branwell's improvement. He seemed to sense my dismay and became chillier in his dealings with me - his fallen angel. What he did not realise was that I had read part of his epic, Morley Hall, left out carelessly on his table. It brought tears to my eyes, but not of joy.

When life's youth, overcast by gathering clouds
Of cares, that come like funeral-following crowds,
Wearying of that which is, and cannot see
A sunbeam burst upon futurity,
It tries to cast away the joys that are
And borrows further joys from times afar.

These shambling, confused verses and the worse ones that followed spoke more clearly than any words I have been able to conjure up in this narrative, of what damage by self-neglect and by excess he had done to his intellect as well as his body. I knew the epic would never, could never and never should be completed.

To our delight, Father, with his sight restored, seemed to regain much of his old assurance and purposefulness. He began to have far less patience and sympathy with his wayward son and insisted he returned to sleep with him (for he had remained in his former room since June) so that he could keep him under supervision. Branwell, without allies, started to complain of feeling unwanted and unloved by anyone in the house; even the cat ran under the settle when he came trampling in.

Autumn days were bleak; our novels came back, refused, with scarce a comment and were sent out again and again to the diminishing number of publishers of which we knew, with ever diminishing hope of success. Emily had become virtually speechless. Charlotte sat by the fire staring at pictures in the flames. Whenever I was not recording these events, I got on with my new novel which I had decided to call The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall. I feared it would go the same way as Agnes but I was driven by the conviction that it must be written. The moors were foggy and dismal. We were confined to an unhappy and restless home. Our year begun in hope was ending in disillusion.

In December, a very unpleasant episode strained Father's patience with Branwell - and what little was left of ours - to the limit.

*

A single thump on the door one freezing morning was very shocking. Had Gooch returned to issue new warnings to Branwell over new overtures to his mistress?
“Open up in the Queen’s name!” shouted a deep voice. I glanced through the frosted window and saw a stout man in a red cloak, with black piping, stamping his feet. He saw me looking and rapped the window with his cane.
“I have a writ! I demand admittance to serve,” he yelled. I opened the door a crack and he pushed his way past me and went to seat himself in the dining room, rubbing his hands, by the fire. The others came in to stare at him in amazement. Father arrived and demanded to know his business.
“My business, Sir, is with Patrick Brontë.”
“I am he, Sir.”
“Then I have a writ to serve on you.”
Opening his cloak, he passed a scroll over into my poor father’s shaking hands and, upon breaking the seal to read it, he exclaimed “For debt? Fifteen pounds two shillings and seven pence halfpenny? For debt? I have never - in my whole life of seventy years - ever owed a farthing to any man!”
Emily’s face darkened. She stared at the Sheriff’s Officer and told him curtly he had made a mistake. He shook his round head.
“No mistake young woman.”
She took the writ and read it and her dark eyebrows shot up. A movement on the stair through the open door caught her attention - and mine - and we were just in time to see a stockinged foot disappearing out of sight onto the landing. Emily rushed out and in a frenzy of rage, long pent up, screamed “Patrick *Branwell* Brontë! You had better come down this second!”
She turned to the officer and explained that it was our brother whom he needed to speak with, before going back into the corridor to bellow “BRANWELL. Come down here at once!”
The door slammed upstairs and I ran past Emily to rap on it.
“It is a debt-collector, Branwell. You had better come down and face him.”
“No!” he screamed. “It is not fair. You must tell him I will pay after Christmas. Tell him I am too ill to come down. I fear an attack of tic….oh, oh….and cannot see the bloody bugger….oh, oh, oh. Tell him to go to the devil. Go away. Or I shall kill myself.”
I pushed open the door against the chair he had thrown down there and found him cowering in the corner. I seized a pillow and threw it at him. “Vile creature! You disgust me!”
Emily came in. “The *bloody bugger* has heard every word. He says if you will not pay, you must go with him to prison in York.”
We heard Charlotte rush past to her room, sobbing.
“I cannot bear *one* more day of *this*!” she howled.

"*You* cannot bear one more day?" shouted Emily through her door. "How often have *you* put up with him, your damned favourite? Father's damned favourite!"
She came back in, arms folded, and stared again at Branwell who was still trying to have a fit. She demanded he stop pretending.
"Come down and face the man, you bloody coward."
In response, he crept farther under his table, sobbing like a child. I left them and went downstairs. The officer had been brought some ham by Tabby and was chomping away at his bone, a revolting specimen, chubby and ruddy of face with tiny eyes - twinkling with mirth - as if he was rehearsing the tale he would tell his fellows of what jolly scenes he had been privileged to witness - *and in a parsonage, b' Gad!* He paused to belch quietly and begged our pardon.
"Kindly inform Mr *Patrick Branwell Brontë,* that it is an offence to insult a Queen's Officer."
Father was slumped over, miserable in a chair.
"Nice piece of 'am 'ock this. I wonder if you might have a glass of port or summat to wash it down?"
"No, Sir. This is a parsonage - a temperate household."
"Not 'cording to what I've bin told, haw, haw! Well - is he a-coming down or ain't he? Shall I have to go up an' fetch the blighter?"
I told him to wait. I went back upstairs to my cash box and put together the money owed, plus the five pounds imposed on the debt for charges and expenses.
He signed me a receipt, said he had enjoyed our hospitality and with one last insolent, merry look left us to our misery. Branwell was so upset that he had to be put back to bed.
"He must *always* sleep with me," said Father. "He has threatened to kill himself more than once and I must take him seriously. He will find it hard enough to meet his Maker without the heinous crime of self-destruction on his account."
That frozen day thawed out bright and beautiful - and only made our silent depression more profound.

*

January 1847. A New Year promising little change. I was hard at work on the last chapters of my novel. Charlotte had sequestered herself to write for hours and hours every day a novel she had provisionally entitled Jane. Emily had subsided into a gloomy indolence. She sat and poked the fire, made bread with Tabby, cleaned and in every way seemed bent on finding little chores to distract her mind. Once I found a poem in the dining room abandoned after its fourth line.

What heavy thoughts are these to bear
Within this hopeless stagnant air
Within me and without;
Yon wilderness to me denied

The obvious rhyme of the next line, unattempted and abandoned, made me shudder. Was she telling me - by leaving the paper there - how deeply depressed she was, and was she crying out in her undemonstrative way for help? Only two copies of our poetry had been sold; that, and the continual rejection of our novels, had drained her entirely of enthusiasm. Had she been Branwell, the house would have been shaken to its foundations with lamentation. I would have gone to her and embraced her as my lost sister, but I feared her stiff rejection. On less inclement days, she would wander on the moors for hours, as far as Top Withins farm where she was always made welcome. I knew she had founded Wuthering Heights on that windswept remote spot. Upon her return, she would curl up on the settle by the fire and sleep. I have to admit that although I loved Emily dearly, I secretly feared her intellect and her fierce, plain speaking - and beyond that, her rarely expressed conviction that all happiness and belief in a blessing God was misconception and folly; that we were poor, fragile stuff made to endure and not enjoy existence. My thoughts had been so occupied with Branwell that I had not noticed that she might be in decline; that she, even she, my strong, steadfast, brave sister was bowing down under the weight of her burdens was an idea almost too painful to contemplate.

Charlotte had become a strange concoction; she retained the romantic - I hesitate to say - even demonic notions of her youth, half played out in her fantastic Angria; in Haworth, however, she was the practical one, the organizer who mustered our resources; it was she who drove us to assert ourselves; yet she was shy and shrank from confrontation of all kinds; as a teacher she had had to don moral armour to stand before a trying class.

And Branwell? He was mostly intensely melancholy that winter - unless one of his cronies called or he received an invitation to see Leyland in Halifax, whence he always returned physically worse and lower in spirits than when he left. Doctor Wheelhouse was ever more frequently summoned to intone more sonorously and more irritably his rational warnings - which were ever more determinedly ignored. After those visits, Father would remonstrate, fulminate, plead and pray, demanding an end to his foolish ways. At seventy, Father was by no means an invalid; and since his sight was restored, along with his vigour, two daughters, being very hard at work - and the other, more and more detached from domestic griefs - shuffled off by degrees their responsibility for their brother to his care. With Branwell a nocturnal prisoner in his room, our sleep was generally uninterrupted; scenes of drunkenness by day could be avoided by stopping up our ears and keeping to our rooms. He rarely ate with us and was not sorely missed for it; Charlotte once compared him to a character in her new novel who was kept under lock and key due to insanity. We were only afraid that he must be getting into much debt again, but in March, Father found a large cache of silver coins under his bed, which Branwell tipsily explained away as the remains of a large note sent to him by the Mistress of Thorp Hall. I could not credit this. A much likelier explanation was that it was the remainder of ten pounds which his fellow profligate Joseph Leyland had been begged into donating.

April arrived at last, bringing daffodils and astonishing news. Newby of Mortimer-street in London had been the very last publisher to whom we had sent off our much thumbed and worn

manuscripts, agreeing that a refusal from him would mark the end of our dreams. The letter we had been sent - within a mere two weeks - was brought into us by Tabby. The postmark was London. Charlotte was the last to come in and we insisted that she be the one to open it. Emily closed her eyes and slowly shook her head.
"Two weeks is too short. They have not even been read," she muttered.
"Then why have the manuscripts not been returned? Only this letter?" I could barely whisper.
Charlotte seized the envelope, tore it open and read. Her mouth dropped open, her eyes lit up - and then dimmed and closed tight. She dropped the letter and rushed out. Emily bent down to pick it up, and her face, so long a face of winter, turned spring in an instant. Breathlessly, she read aloud

Dear Messrs C, E and A Bell,

We are pleased to inform you……that we have decided to accept,…….provided you accept half the cost of getting them up……the novels Agnes Grey and Wuthering Heights…. Oh Anne! But…
…..However, we are unable to make an offer as regards The Professor, considering it well-written, but of only limited appeal to the reading public. It shall be returned forthwith…..

Thus was our joy mingled with sadness - and guilt. Finding Charlotte wandering in the garden, I embraced her long and told her not to despair.
"What you have read to us of Jane is thoroughly inspiring and original."
"Original it is not - for your Agnes inspired it," she replied, wiping her eyes.
"It is a masterpiece far beyond mine. Do not let this setback deter you."
I was entirely in earnest; there was no flattery. I was pleased to give her reassurance. She promised to redouble her efforts and have the work finished in the summer. I told her I had an idea.
"Yesterday I was looking at William Weightman's grave. A grave nearby caught my eye. It was the grave of one Jane Eyre."
"Jane *Eyre*" she said, savouring the name. "Yes. I shall call it Jane Eyre."
She broke away from me then in sudden alarm.
"Please, Anne. Do not either of you tell Branwell about this news. He would jeer at me and hate you. And we must delay telling Father."

Charlotte went into a book shop in Halifax and found out a new publisher - Smith and Elder of Cornhill, London. To that address she sent her recently returned Professor. It soon came back again, however, and I was weeping for her when she found a letter within the package which gave her hope: the reader, Mr Smith, had been impressed with the narrative power and style of the author, Currer Bell, but thought the novel flawed in its plot.

"*However,"* she read on, eyes sparkling through her tears "*I would be very pleased to read any other work the author might care to forward, with kind regards, G Smith.* This strengthens my resolve, Anne!"
Indeed it did. It sent her to her room for the whole summer and by August, Jane Eyre was completed and delivered to the post office for its long journey south. Within an astonishing five days, Charlotte had her reply. Mr Smith had begun reading *the remarkable and wholly admirable* Jane Eyre after breakfast, and had not stopped once until he had finished it before evening dinner.
The book appeared in October and, with William Makepeace Thackery and the critic George Lewes fulsome in their praise, the first edition quickly sold out. Currer Bell was famous and would be rich! Ironically, while their "brother" was the toast of literary London, Acton and Ellis's works were stuck in the proof reading phase.
In early December, Emily and I finally had copies - six each - of our books to handle. We did so with pride even though they were not perfectly got up and had many printing errors.
"We must tell Papa soon of our success," I whispered one morning not long after they had arrived. "He is seventy. Who knows what may happen next year? We would hate to be in a situation where it would be impossible to tell him."
We agreed we would go to see Father, though swear him not to tell Branwell of our good news. We made Tabby understand too that the books which she had seen delivered should not be mentioned to him.
Father was delighted to handle in turn the three volumes we gave him.
"But, the state Branwell is in, should he not be told also of his sisters' achievements?"
"Precisely because of that state he should not be told," said Emily firmly. "He is in a kind of low stability at the moment. To confront him with our success would only emphasize to him his own wretched failure - then what consequences might ensue?"
"Father," added Charlotte. "Only if - no - *when* he is better should he be told."
Her eyes met mine and swerved away. We had instantly had the same dismal thought.
"When he is better," said Emily "it will be an encouragement to him to complete his ballad - or even to resurrect his novel. To tell him now…."
…might be the death of him….
"…..would not….be wise. Will you swear, Father?"
She picked up his Bible and he became angry. He would not put the good book to such a trivial use!
"You must trust to my discretion, girls. I shall judge when it is the right time to tell him. In the summer perhaps, when his spirits rise naturally. For now, I shall keep your wonderful secret! What would your dear Mama and Aunt Branwell have to say? And little Maria and Elizabeth? Oh, it fair breaks my heart…"
A sudden thought drew him back from his tearful reverie.
"But what if one of your novels should fall into his hands? He would instantly recognize the subjects and the style, despite your Bell disguises."

I told him we had considered this and decided that, his time being so much taken up with his own untidy world of papers, the chances of discovery were remote.
“I doubt whether there is much discussion of literary matters in the taproom of the Black Bull. He might find out in Halifax, I suppose, but not in Haworth. If he does happen to find out, then we will have to bear the consequences. Our names being disguised will ensure that Joseph Leyland would have no reason to mention books by any Bell to him - even if he is a reader.”
“He is a sculptor,” added Emily.
“Branwell knows only the title of my book, Agnes Gray - for he suggested it. But I am certain it will make but the faintest of ripples on the literary waters.”

In this last comment I was proved right, and I bore the modest reaction to my modest novel with fortitude and equanimity. But I felt Emily’s unspoken misery that her own efforts - first her poetry and now her novel - had aroused so little critical approbation by the end of January, 1848. The events and characters of Wuthering Heights were shocking and grotesque; so grotesque as to arouse neither sympathy nor belief in them. Charlotte, ever outspoken in literary matters, had not flinched from expressing these doubts with warmth to Emily in the previous year; just has she did not hesitate to condemn the themes and events in my second novel, The Tenant. I felt sure that Emily had taken some perverse pleasure when Charlotte’s Professor failed and her own demonic Heathcliff succeeded. Now he was just as much misunderstood and reviled by critics and the reading public as he was by Lockwood, Linton and Earnshaw. If the volume had fallen into the hands of Branwell, he would have seen his own diabolical Alexander Percy in Heathcliff from the first page.
Now, using the failure of Heathcliff as a warning, peering down from her lofty position in the tower of the Bells, Charlotte would not stop gnawing me about my villain, Arthur Huntingdon. She thought the whole enterprise *an entire mistake.*
“Can you not see, Anne? Alcoholic and abusive husbands and marital scandal will only excite repugnance.”
“Perhaps, Charlotte. And yet the pretty lace curtains which hide domestic rottenness do need to be drawn back. And if not I, who shall do it?”

*

In February, Bessie wrote to me again, saying that her mother was almost recovered from the shock of her bereavement.

She gets out now and receives her old friends. She is planning a sentimental journey south to see her kin, my aunts and uncles, in Staffordshire. To Yoxall.

I could detect no sign in her gossip that the mother was pining for a sorely missed lover, but there again, would she confess such a passion to her daughter? As a postscript, she said that she

and Mary - lately married to a Mr Clapham! - would love to come and see me - secretly - in Haworth, as they had arranged to visit a relative in Keighley, and could easily call by on the way. The appointed day arrived and they were shown into the dining room by Tabby for a tearful reunion.

Bessie was as lively as ever and particularly pleased to tell me that she had broken off her engagement to *the booby* Edward Milner.

"I used poor Father's death as an excuse. I think the fat ass probably cried for ten minutes but soon cheered when the butler brought out his port and Stilton."

I could not stop laughing at these and other outrageous comments; but my amusement was easily outstripped by the astonishment I felt at the sight of her sister. She was a transformed being; gone was the churlish, mournful face; her eyes, once dull, now sparkled and she laughed readily and charmingly at the jests of her sister, when once she would have grimaced at her mockery.

"And ain't Mary a sight for sore eyes, Miss Brontë? All ribbands and curls now instead of scowls! She couldn't pull a miserable face now if she tried. Go on, try!"

Mary threw back her head and giggled, telling her to stop.

"It's all down to Mr Clapham; what a pair of lovebirds. I hear 'em cooing from my bedroom across the way and have to stick me fingers in me ears or put me head under me pillow!"

"Stop it, Bessie," she tittered.

"He's a perfect Adonis is Mr Clapham. Blonde, wavy hair…doesn't drink…well, hardly…is all politeness…decent-looking…apart from a beaky nose and a weak chin. And a hairy wart, but that ain't enough to put her off him. So soon I expect to be an auntie…well, if naughty Liddie don't get there first…though, oops, we ain't supposed to mention her."

Poor blushing Mary was fit to choke and Bessie slapped her on the back which made her laugh more. Both laughed until they were in tears and it was wonderful to have the house once more a place of mirth. But I wanted to know more about the mother, so gradually I brought our conversation round to her. First I asked about old friends - the Sewells, the grooms and my favourite maid, Anne Marshall.

"Oh, Miss Marshall is proper poorly," said Mary. "Dr Crosby has ordered her to rest - but we have learnt that she is likely to die of consumption."

"How shocking!"

Now I saw my chance. "I think she was your mother's favourite maid as she was mine. You wrote she is in Yoxall?"

"Yes. And she plans to remarry."

"Bessie!" interjected her sister. "That is wild speculation."

"Mama's cousin is quite poorly - very poorly - and her husband, Sir Edward Scott is, by her own admission - I heard her talking to that horrid Millington woman - filthy rich."

"Bessie. Don't be absurd."

"But I heard her!"

"The man is seventy."

“All the better. Rich and very old. Better than rich, young and very fat and ugly. Mama wants me to marry for money but I shan’t.”
Bessie was becoming upset. “You have no good reason to suspect Mama,” she cried. “I won’t hear it with Papa barely cold.”
“Now, now, don’t upset yourself. Why should she shut herself away? I shouldn’t. She’s a handsome woman - and Papa would not object if her new beau were rich and as old as Noah. Oh, Miss Brontë - I meant to ask, how is Mr Branwell? Is he at home?”
“No, in Halifax. He bade me give you his best wishes.”
“Mama never mentions now his conduct with Edmund. He is down in Somerset with a vicar, likely to make a choirboy or saint, so no harm done.”
“Does your mother ever mention my brother?”
“Not a word, and we are never to mention him,” said Mary. “She would be furious if she knew we were under the same roof.”
“But we ain’t, Mary. He’s in Halifax.”
We talked for over an hour. Father looked in and paid them compliments and once Charlotte put her head around the door. At length, the time came for them to get their coach, and I walked down the hill with them to the crossroads. As we embraced to say goodbye, Bessie laughed as something else occurred to her.
“I meant to tell you that Wordsworth is no more.”
I was shocked. “The poet?”
“No, the parrot! Your brother christened him and taught him a verse or two. But he said some bad things and made some very *bad* noises which a disgruntled chambermaid taught him. Mother had to have him put in another room whenever Mrs Thompson called.”
They both crimsoned and tittered. A sudden thought rushed into my head which quite stole from my lips the anodyne reply they were forming.
“He made *bad* noises?”
“Like Mary makes.”
Mary crimsoned again and playfully hit her sister. I was left speechless.
“See, Bessie! You have made Miss Brontë very embarrassed.”
“Oh, I meant nothing by it. It is only natural, after all. I have watched the horses.”
“Bessie! For shame.” said Mary.
The coach came and they climbed aboard. I waved them off and climbed slowly and disconsolately back up the hill, convinced at long last that Branwell’s affair was all delusion; at best crass misinterpretation. But any moral relief I felt was far outweighed by the conviction of his insanity. I had to stop several times to get my breath.
The prickly sensation in my lungs, as if there were nettles there, was a little worse.

Upon his return from Halifax, Branwell soon found out that two very smart young ladies had called at the parsonage. He would not rest until I had confessed who they were.
“Did you mean to keep their visit a secret from me, Anne?”

“Not at all. They came to surprise me.”
“And did they mention their mother?”
His eyes were wide and glistening. They alarmed me, but I had prepared myself for this eventuality. There could be no ideal answer; any hint of her coolness or feverishness would be equally provoking to him.
“She is in Staffordshire visiting her sisters - and feeling much better.”
He had already told us of a clause in the Robinson will forbidding remarriage on pain of disinheritance. Privately, I had dismissed this as a rumour - or as the work of his imagination upon the *impediments* Crosby had mentioned in his letter. Now he brought the matter up again.
“Feeling better? How can she be better if she cannot bestow her heart where she wishes without facing ruin? That bloody tyrant Robinson ruined her life while alive and still ruins it from the grave!”
I feared a fit. His voice was slurred and I could smell ale on his breath.
“Sit down and breathe deep. You are getting into a state.”
He breathed very deep and coughed.
“Yes, I must be calm,” he said after a while. “I had tic at The Talbot. Leyland was very anxious for me. What else did the girls say? Be honest.”
“I always am. They said everyone was well save one. Mary Marshall has consumption. And Wordsworth is dead.”
“Good riddance. The old buffoon.”
“No, Wordsworth the parrot.”
“The damned parrot? You mock me.”
“No. I never would. Go up to bed now. Rest.”
“Rest. Soon there will be nothing else but to rest for me. In peace and darkness. Help me off with my boots, will you?”
“You will not take Dr Wheelhouse’s advice, so you must suffer. Just as I suffer to see you suffer.”

*

In the spring, I sent off The Tenant to Newby and was delighted when he agreed to publish it, entirely at his own expense. But his generosity concealed a degree of roguery I would never have suspected in a professional man. I only found out about it when Mr Smith, Charlotte’s publisher - and a man of integrity - wrote to her indignantly of Newby’s practices; he had it on good authority that the latter had himself launched a rumour, on the back of the success of Jane Eyre, that Agnes Grey and Wuthering Heights were also works by Currer Bell! He had also heard that Newby planned to publish an entirely new work by that same author, which he had even forwarded to publishing contacts in America. With a cold shudder of horror, it dawned on me that this was my very own Tenant Of Wildfell Hall. This scurrilous lie might fill mine as well as

Emily's exchequer but at what cost to our reputations? We would cease to exist as literary persona! Charlotte was as outraged as we were - but for the reason, I suspected, that she did not want to be linked to two novels of which she heartily disapproved.
Emily received the news with great cynicism and resignation.
"Newby was a bad choice. But I am not surprised. Look how shabbily our books are got up. Pages are already set to fall out. No doubt what he called half-paying for was far more than he ever paid. Probably the whole amount. Now I might be rich and obscure rather than poor and obscure. If the former, I shall write to the papers and declare Ellis Bell to be Emily Brontë. But who would believe it? If I am still the latter, shall I be worse off than now?"
"Well," said Charlotte "I am disgusted. Mr Smith hints that he believes me to be a co-conspirator in Newby's plot, possibly even the instigator"
"So what is to be done?" I asked.
"I'm not sure."
"Write back immediately and tell him we are three sisters!" said Emily. "Get Father to add his word of honour and signature. But no, Branwell might then discover everything. Things go from bad to worse with him."
"Can they be much worse?" Charlotte added. "Anyway, I have an inkling that Father has already told him the truth. The books we gave him are not in his study. I looked."
This observation seemed to confirm my unspoken suspicions. His bitterness had intensified and his last visit to Halifax had sent him to bed for a week. But Charlotte was no longer thinking of Branwell's indisposition. She showed herself more and more incensed by the behaviour of Newby.
"He has the insolence to reject The Professor on spurious grounds. No doubt if I sent it to him again as Currer Bell, author of Jane Eyre, he would withdraw all his objections and rush it into print in order to make money. The man has no scruples. I hate him! The bastard. No, I shall not write to Smith and Elder. I shall go down to London and you two shall come with me. We will *show* Mr Smith we are three Brontës."
Emily snorted. "I would rather go to hell than London. Someone must stay here and help with Branwell. You two go."
We looked at each other and nodded.
"Let us get the night train from Leeds, Anne."
"Yes! Tonight."
"Good. I will tell Father the truth in confidence later. Till then I will tell him that you are both going to see Ellen in Gomersall."
We packed our trunk and a boy was hired to take it on a cart to Keighley station. We walked the four miles in and were thoroughly drenched in a downpour. We changed our clothes in the washrooms and were just in time to catch the train to Leeds. After dinner there, we bought tickets for the eight o' clock train for London Euston. When we had left behind the fires of Sheffield, the darkness of the Midland countryside soon lulled us to sleep and by dawn we were slowing down for the stations in Hertfordshire and then those to the north of the capital. We

stayed in the carriage until seven and then took a cab to the hotel where Emily, Father and Charlotte had spent the night en route for Brussels. We washed and changed and by half-past-eight were on our way to Smith and Elder's office in Cornhill.

The hustle and bustle, the hundreds of horses, the strange cries and accents of costermongers were all bewildering. How could these people endure the noise, the heat, the dust and the oppressive height of the buildings? The choking smell? And yet there they strode with confidence and purpose, young and old, rich and poor, men and women - some of hues we had never seen - all tasked with their own errands, making their way with sure step. I wondered if any of them was about an errand as strange as ours. Charlotte wondered aloud if Mr Dickens was amongst them, for he was renowned for his love of walking, night or day, to see and hear the strange characters which he could fashion and fit into his wonderful tales

"Perhaps even Felix Mendelssohn is a guest of Her Majesty again and is strolling somewhere nearby," said Charlotte, putting her head out of the cab.

I looked at her in astonishment.

"I knew you were not listening properly then. I *told* you he died last year!"

"No! When?"

"In October or November."

"How shocking!"

She fell back in the cab and closed her eyes.

"Oh, such a great genius. He can only have been in his thirties."

"He was thirty-seven or thirty-eight. The papers said he died of exhaustion. But at least he has left a great legacy. Yes, Charlotte, a genius."

We fell grimly silent. I dared not enquire whether her thoughts were tending then to the same person - another genius - as mine.

"A curious thought has just struck me, Anne. Had our school project succeeded, would we have had the time or inclination to work so very hard at our novels?"

"Probably not. So?"

"So, the failure of one project engendered the success of the other."

"Yes, perhaps…but what are you saying?

"To what - or better, to *whom* might the first failure be ascribed?"

The answer dawned on me with an awful suddenness. Charlotte smiled to see it.

"That," I said "brings me no consolation at all. In fact, the opposite."

"No consolation to me either. But on such tiny vagaries of fortune do we fail or thrive. Let us dwell on it no longer. I am sorry to have brought it up. Ah, here is Cornhill at last! Prepare yourself!"

It was not quite nine and we waited in the warm sunshine watching the street-sweeping boy at the crossroads about his loathsome task. The sweet smell of horse manure was almost pleasant in comparison with the foul odours we had smelt near the Thames and which reminded us of the lower town in Haworth.

At last the blind at the front door of the office shot up from its nail and a pasty freckled face below a mop of ginger hair scrutinised us. The door opened with a rattle and the young clerk tucked his hands inside his inky apron and bade us good morning.
“Can I be of assistance, young ladies?”
“I hope so,” said I
“Is Mr Smith in yet?”
“Indeed he is. Always at his desk by eight sharp. Do you have an appointment?”
“No. But we are sure that he would wish to see us. We have come down especially from Leeds by the night train.”
“Ah! I knew straightway you was from the north country by your voices. Right nice and rich they are too. Who shall I say? Oh, sorry, do come in.”
We walked across a polished wooden floor to a counter where there were many piles of books. On the shelves behind were scores more, some flat and some leaning to left and right. The clerk went to release the great blind at the window and instantly light flooded in, revealing a pleasant oak-panelled room and a staircase. Charlotte looked around bemused at the dust floating in the golden light and at the cosy disorder and I could read her thoughts: *how have they managed to bring out my book so well? How have they managed not to lose it?* The clerk seemed to read her thoughts too.
“Mr Smith can lay his hands instant on any title. If I cleared up, I’d be out on my ear. *On pain of dismissal* - as he likes to say, though he‘d weep to have to do it.”
From the back office came the regular, sonorous rumble of a press, like the snoring of a great beast. We were invited to sit down on a lumpy red sofa with green tassled cushions.
Charlotte opened her bag and drew out a letter.
“Kindly tell Mr Smith - and give him this letter he sent me as proof - that Currer and Acton Bell await the pleasure of his company.”
“Laws! Thems strange handles, ain’t they, for young ladies? Curry and Acting?”
“Currer and Acton. And please do not say we are ladies. We would rather like to surprise him. Just tell him Currer and Acton Bell await him below.”
Off he went up the stairs, two steps at a time. Very soon we heard a cry of surprise and a tall gentleman, with a tall, bald shiny head and grey side whiskers, wearing a beautiful black suit, came clattering down the stairs, leaving his grinning clerk waving to us impudently from the top step. Mr Smith’s eyes darted all around the room, and seeing only us, he turned to him and shouted
“Have they gone, Smythe? Did you not ask for cards, God dammit? Oo - beg pardon, ladies.”
“No need, Sir. For there they sit. Miss Curry and Miss Acting.”
He turned back and stared at us as if his eyes were sure to pop out. We rose and bowed. From my bag I took out a pristine copy of The Tenant.
“This is one of the copies of my new novel - recently delivered to me - which I understand is the subject of some controversy between you and a Mr Newby. I have signed a dedication to you on the flyleaf - see - from Anne Brontë, alias Acton Bell.”

“And I am Charlotte Brontë. Currer Bell.”
“Good *HEAVENS*! Smythe - stop tittering and come down here! Run to Mr Elder and tell him I have a wonderful surprise for him - and don’t you dare tell him what - on pain of dismissal! Off you go, young man!”
Mr Smith went towards a side office and opened a door which scraped and jammed and shook and scraped again. “Susan! Miss Baines! Please have some coffee brought up straightway to my study. Three cups. And cake! (Have you breakfasted? Do you eat cake, young ladies?)”
“It does exist in Yorkshire, Sir.” I said as broadly as I could. For a second he stared at me as if I was an imbecile and then threw back a merry head and laughed.

*

“And Ellis Bell is really Emily? Astonishing! Three geniuses in one family. Are there any more to follow?”
This was Mr Elder who spoke; a rosier, shorter, stouter and older version of his genial colleague.
“We have a brother,” said Charlotte “who is very clever but lacks the patience to stick at things. One day we hope he will.”
“I have a grandson exactly like that,” he replied. “Very well. Shall I leave you three to discuss what to do about that rogue Newby?”
“No, please stay Mr Elder,” said Smith. “You too should hear this. If only, Miss Brontë, you had written to us first! Newby is a known chiseller and exploiter of his authors. Pays precious little in royalties and has the effrontery to demand a share in the cost of getting-up.”
Charlotte told him that we planned to pay him a visit before leaving London later in the afternoon.
“Newby should be left in doubt as to our plurality.”
“Capital! And Elder and I shall accompany you. Would you do me the great honour of allowing me to speak for you, for I have been in these situations before with such frauds and know exactly what threats to make and how to make ‘em stick!”
He shouted down the stairs for Smythe to go for a cab. We helped Mr Elder down the stairs as he was rather weak at the knees; with his white hair he reminded me a little of Father.
After about ten minutes at a brisk trot, we arrived outside Newby’s premises in a more select area of town. Compared to the modesty of Smith’s offices, Mr Newby was very grand indeed. There was a portico entrance above three green marble steps - and a haughty fellow in a blue uniform stood at the door. He eyed us up and down, unimpressed no doubt by our simple creased dresses and tired faces, and had to be persuaded by our hosts to seek an immediate interview with the proprietor.
We found Mr Newby swinging idly in his swivel chair in a large office, red-carpeted and decorated with green velvet wallpaper at the height of fashion. His table was of exquisite yew wood. To have the four of us invade his space was an obvious shock to him. He stopped

swinging and stood up, looking rather indignant, a portly man with a round head, a ridge of curly hair and small, suspicious eyes.
“I was informed that a Mr Smith wished to see me!” he exclaimed, ringing his brass bell. “Not a tribe of you.”
“I shall come straight to the point, Sir,” said Smith, ignoring the insult. “These two young ladies are Acton and Currer Bell. Don’t look so dubious, Sir. It is a proven fact. Their sister, Ellis, is at home, caring for an elderly parent. We are come to ask you - no, to require you to contradict a rumour of your making - put that accursed bell DOWN, Sir! A rumour of your making - a false and wicked rumour - that Acton and Ellis are really all Currer Bell. Please show the gentleman your copy of The Tenant, Miss Acton, as he clearly thinks me insane.”
I came forward and put it into his hands, whereupon he sat down heavily, his face drained of blood.
“First, you must write to whomever you have misinformed – even in a former colony, I understand - to have your rumour quashed. Second, you will write a letter to The Times to state that you have met *two* Bell authors and are full aware of a *third*! You shall be as assiduous in the squashing of this rumour as you have been in its spreading - in all the corners and circles where you have whispered it. If you refuse or drag your feet, you shall hear from my lawyers by early next week, acting on our firm’s behalf - and of these sisters’ - to sue you for defamation - so hard that it would close you down, Sir. You will also repay all fees paid to you for getting-up and bring out decent copies of their wonderful books instead of this shabby rubbish” - (he threw a copy of my Agnes onto his table) - “or you will sell me the rights so that I may do it. Good day to you, Mr Newby. Come, ladies, let us not trespass further on this gentleman‘s time. He has letters to write and house-calls to make - on pain of, err, err, he knows what.”
I was last to leave the room. I turned at the door and smiled sweetly.
“Mr Newby, I am prepared to allow that you made an error of judgment.”
“You are *really* Acton Bell? *You* wrote The Tenant Of Wildfell Hall? I can scarce believe it. How?”
I went to his desk. “With this hand, Sir. Will you shake it?”
He took it and gasped.
“I am so very sorry…Miss?”
“Brontë. Anne Brontë. But kindly keep that to yourself for another year.”

Mr Smith would not hear of our early departure. For one thing, Charlotte had one of her sick headaches after all our exertions. He said he would have our trunk brought round from the hotel to his mansion.
“My wife would not give me a second’s rest if she knew I had allowed the great Currer Bell and, err -”
“Her sister Acton,” I added quietly.
“Indeed. I could not allow you to go without introducing you to her - on pain of her never speaking to me again”

So we were persuaded to stay and be exhibited and astounded over by a variety of friends and associates. I was happy to let Currer have the limelight, though Mrs Smith, a very handsome and pleasant woman some years younger than her husband did whisper to me that she adored my Agnes and had wept for her when she had been proposed to by her Mr Weston.
We went to the opera, to the Academy and the National Gallery. I admit, it was a wonderful feeling, after all my years of obscurity, to be admired and celebrated by such kind, intelligent people - even if I was the fainter star in our little constellation.
After three unforgettable days, we found ourselves again heading north towards its prosaic, workaday cities, feeling as if we were waking from a dream.
"Now it is inevitable that news of our true selves will creep northward," murmured Charlotte, half asleep, head rocking against the plush cushion in First Class to which we had treated ourselves.
"Might it be better if Branwell learns of it all from our lips, Charlotte? Better than from a newspaper?"
"The creeping may take a while longer yet. Better leave it a while….until…"
Her voice faltered at the idea we were both dreading to utter and striving to keep out of mind.

We found Branwell in a more parlous state than we had left him. He had taken advantage of our absence and Emily's absence of mind to beg a sovereign from Father. Emily was too furious to take pleasure from our accounts of London.
"At least Anne and I shall not suffer in the shadow of your fame now, Charlotte," she said bitterly "but linger henceforth in the obscurity of our own making. I am sorry I cannot join in your elation. I am weary. Branwell has been a great trial to us. He sleeps till midday, staggers out to the Bull, cadges drinks of whoever will listen to his tales of woe, staggers back worse - or is brought back - hardly eats, fits, pukes - oh where will it end? I could run out across Haworth moor and never come back."
Sadly, I pictured her again as a young girl - out on the moor, leaping over becks and startling up bees and butterflies from heather, whooping with joy as skylarks flew from their nests, to flutter, dissembling, in a clear blue sky. But no more. No more……
Emily's vehemence - with its undertone of reproach - distressed us. I went to Father and complained but his words shocked me. He feared that nothing could be done.
"I would rather give him the money than have him become a beggar. Another visit from a bailiff would be too shameful. You must not distress yourselves farther. He will be all my responsibility now. Until he cures or kills himself. Perhaps at thirty-one he will finally become a man."
But his face contradicted those final words of hope. Hearing Branwell groaning upstairs, I went back to Emily in the kitchen to ask if Dr Wheelhouse should be called. She left off the dough she was viciously kneading and laughed bitterly. The good doctor had been the previous morning after Branwell had passed blood.
"Branwell was unpardonly rude to him again. In his place I would never come anymore."
She pointed to the sideboard and a piece of paper which he had left in the privy for her to find.

While holy Wheelhouse far above
In heaven's unclouded light of love
Looks down with a benignant smile
That heaven and hell might reconcile,
And shouts to Satan, "Thou'art a funny 'un,
Give him sauce as well as onion,"
You bloody bugger, ram him, jam him
And with a forty horse-power damn him,
Or if your work you don't do well,
By God I'll take your place in hell.
Say Doctor Wheelhouse is a jewel
Or you and I must fight a duel.
Say that his guts are all his hitches
And I shall call you sons of bitches.
Say that he longed like me for woman
And I and all shall call you No Man.

"How can he write such shocking rubbish, Emily? What is Wheelhouse supposed to say? "Drink yourself back to health!" Do not show this to Charlotte."
I put it in my pocket and was suddenly put in mind of a passage in Wuthering Heights. I got out my copy and eventually found the page I wanted. Emily's Doctor Kenneth had gone to announce the death of Hindley Earnshaw to the narrator, Nellie Dean.

"Your old friend Hindley and my wicked gossip is dead: though he's been too wild for me this long while. But cheer up! He died true to his character: drunk as a lord. Poor lad! I'm sorry too. One can't help missing an old companion: though he had the worst tricks with him that ever man imagined, and has done me many a rascally turn. He's barely twenty-seven, it seems; that's your own age who would have thought you were born in one year."

I snapped the book shut feeling cold with fear. This - prediction - had been written two years previously, perhaps even three, when Branwell had been dismissed. I breathed in deep to calm my rapid heart and felt that ever-present sting again, a little worse.

August arrived bringing the first hints of autumn in the early morning chill air and heavy dew which bedraggled and weighed down our roses. As our tuneful summer friends took wing to depart, I wondered what sadder sounds might soon invade the silence they left. I dreaded the fall of leaves and snow and the soughing winds in our eaves at night which would mock the lamenting of Branwell and leave me more sleepless.

From the ominous and oppressive fogs which cloaked our portion of the world in September - that Janus month which can be as delightful as July - there emerged a Spectre in the form of a letter from that infernal meddler Crosby. It could not be about debts because all his carousing friend's debts in Little Ouseburn had long been cancelled; if not idle gossip, it could only bring bad news. I wished only that I had intercepted it, but Father had gone straight from his study nearest the front door and had thoughtlessly taken it up to its addressee.

Now there could be no doubt, no peace, no rest. Mrs Robinson's cousin had died and it was an open secret that she would be replaced, after a decent interval, in the marital couch of Sir Edward Scott - by the eager widow of Mr Robinson. Any vestige of self-control and sanity in our brother vanished as completely as all his claims on her heart.

Wheelhouse, urgently fetched, stayed but five minutes and ordered absolute bed-rest and abstinence.

"Lock all your doors if need be. One more drunken bout will be the end of him. And one more dose of laudanum and he will cough up his lungs. If he goes out in these damp, smoky fogs and it goes to his chest, he will never be able to fight off even a mild infection - for he has no strength."

While he was bed-ridden, an extensive search discovered another store of opium and we poured it away; likewise a bottle of brandy hidden in the privy. We agreed to take turns by the front door to prevent his leaving, no matter how loud he might protest, each one of us being far stronger than he. Privately I doubted whether he could even walk as far as The Black Bull.

But, alas, he proved me wrong! It was probably about a fortnight after the doctor's call, during Emily's shift, when she had gone momentarily to the privy, that he crept out. He had rallied enough to plan and execute the deception. As I sat by the front door in the mid-afternoon, I began to wonder at the silence upstairs. I could only hear Father snoring in his study near to me. Thinking Branwell was asleep too, I crept up to look in on him, and found his bed empty.

I rushed out into the cold drizzle and met William Brown carrying him back like a malnourished child. He had met him in the lane by the churchyard, swaying and standing still, too exhausted to put one foot in front of the other. He carried him up to his bed, chest wheezing, and put him into bed; whence he would never stir - but once - again.

Dr Wheelhouse came again, ready to give his usual lecture to his recalcitrant patient, but finding him unconscious and breathing shallow, his face, normally all wry resignation at the folly of mankind, changed instantly. He felt his pulse and his feverish forehead.

"I fear he has caught bronchitis," he told us. "I know of no cure apart from individual strength. He has none, so you must prepare yourselves for the worst. The end cannot be long in coming. A day - or two at most."

To my surprise and relief, Emily was more distraught than any of us, believing herself to blame for his escape. Father told her to hush. It was almost unbearable to behold a frail father comforting his tallest, strongest daughter whom he had last so comforted at the age of seven when first Maria, then Elizabeth had died in 1825 within a month of each other.

We kept a vigil over him. As he slept, his chest wheezed like the organ in church. It was terrifying to behold a man of thirty-one so wasted - and whose age would be an entire guess for a

passing stranger, confronted with his bush of red hair, suggestive of youth - and his haggard face and the prominence of all his bones, suggestive of senility.
Our tears flowed without sobs, for we had all, at various times, mourned him in his living death. I was furious with myself, but not surprised, to feel relief that the inevitable was at last coming to pass.
Father kneeled at his bedside and prayed for him, and I was thrilled to hear his lips, which I had deemed insensible, murmur Amen.
“Branwell!” I cried, leaping up as Father collapsed in tearful gratitude to God for his son’s belated salvation, “Say after me the Lord’s Prayer, I beg you! Our Father who art in Heaven…”
Slowly he repeated each line until I was so overcome that I could barely pronounce For Ever and Ever. Emily and Charlotte were embracing each other at the foot of the bed when the end came that evening. His eyes opened for a final time and I went as close as I could bear.
“I love Agnes above all….Acton Bell,” he barely whispered. “Anne. Let me die like a soldier. Help me to my feet.”
“He wishes to stand up! Help me sisters!”
We lifted him out and his shirt fell open, revealing how yellow and wasted he was. I was more appalled to see how bony and corpse-like already his strangely narrow feet were. We held him steady, he took in one great final breath, winced with pain, gave out a terrible bloodied cough and fell forward. The Chief Genius Brannii was dead.

That night, we sat below together after Father, weeping and praying for hours, had at last fallen asleep in his study. The silence of the house was remarkable; a peace we had scarcely known for three years had crept back in like an animal driven out awaiting its chance to return.
“Now I forgive him everything,” I said, almost afraid to speak, not knowing how to give voice to my relief without causing offence.
“I too,” said Emily. “I know I have been hardest on him but I only meant to shock and shame him into altering. To look back now at events convinces me that there could be no other pathway but this. Yes, I can forgive him and hope only that God can too - for his pathetic lack of will power.”
“Emily,” I said. “Do not judge him too harshly. I know now that addiction - for I have seen it in others - is a disease like any other. To condemn him for it - is as futile as condemning him for being defeated by bronchitis. I cannot be swayed from that opinion.”
“Let us not dispute causes,” said Charlotte, her cheeks glistening with tears for her fallen hero. “Be glad that his suffering is at an end and that his repentance was genuine. If sinful, frail beings like us can forgive him, then how much easier will forgiveness be for his Creator?”

Due to the contagious and marasmic condition of his remains, it was vital to seal our brother away the next morning. We stood bravely by, the window full open, with handkerchiefs advisedly to our mouths, and said one last farewell to that face no longer distorted by pain and

sorrow, before descending the stairs. The last nail had already been hammered into his coffin lid before my foot reached the final step.
I will record only the most moving details of his funeral. The next day, under beautiful blue skies, John and William Brown came in with four others to carry his casket the few yards into church, through a crowd of onlookers; amongst them I recognised some of those boys, now young men, whom he had delighted in happier days by throwing coppers into the air for them to scramble after. The sight of their tearful faces broke the composure I had fought to maintain, and Emily had to help me into church.
Father insisted on taking the service, refusing the kind offer of a colleague from Oxenhope. In a soft but brave and steady voice he delivered almost the same sermon he had given at the service for his curate and our friend William Weightman, almost six years to the day. It was of such rare beauty I cannot pass over it.

When good men die early, in the full tide of their usefulness, there is bewildering amazement, till we read in the scriptures, that in mercy we are taken away from the evil to come. In all such cases we want faith, and strong faith too…This world, with its false lights, eclipses in our morbid imagination the unimaginable splendour of heaven. Honour and riches, power and fame, with long life to enjoy them, frequently occupy but too much of our attention, whilst we dread the visitation of death, the darkness of the grave, the worm of corruption, the loathsome work of decomposition, eternal separation and oblivion…..We may easily comprehend why the wicked have a desire for life, and a dread of death and judgement; but that the followers of Christ should tremble at the last step of their journey, which will introduce them into His presence and His glory, can only be accounted for by the weakness of their faith, and the remains of sin, that would chain them down, or keep them from those unspeakable pleasures which He has in reserve for them in the kingdom of the Heavenly Father.

As we walked back to the parsonage afterwards, leaving Father to supervise the re-placing of the heavy slab above our family vault, Emily said what were all thinking.
“Father was not speaking to the congregation. He was speaking to the departing soul of Branwell.”

*

He had been lying scarce a week beside Aunt Branwell in that cold darkness he feared, when, in coughing after a restless night of cold sweats, I discovered speckles of blood on my handkerchief. Thoughts of poor Mary Marshall - and then a terrible word - instantly entered my head.
But, beyond the terror for myself, was the hideous thought of the effect of such a discovery on a family so low and deep in mourning. I dared not reveal my condition to them so soon, and resolved therefore to try to conceal my symptoms as long as possible under the disguise of my

old companion, asthma. My paleness and loss of weight and weariness could easily be explained away by our recent sorrow.

Then, to my intense horror, Emily, strong and sturdy Emily, coughed up blood one October evening. Dr Wheelhouse was summoned, and although he prescribed medicines and theorised that the bloody cough might be a reaction to our bereavement, his sad, cynical eye said not.

The decline of Emily was astonishing. She quickly became too weak to climb the stairs and we made up a bed for her on the settle. As if Branwell was before him again, Father alternately raged, wept and pleaded when Emily resolutely refused to take her medicines. Neither could any words of persuasion from her sisters make the slightest impression.

"You both heard what the charlatan said about infection. Nothing in his bag can cure it - only chance or bodily strength or perhaps prayer. And I do pray. Though more quietly than you two and Father. But I cannot help but wonder…."

Here she had to stop and cough and catch more fresh blood in her handkerchief…

"…I wonder why God should make a world with so many evils in it. Oh it hurts to speak. Fetch me a pencil and paper…."

She took them up and wrote with steady hand

I think of all the bad things he created. Do they outnumber the good? Some are gigantic like crocodiles; some are invisible like the seeds which are killing me. They might blow on the wind. The fortunate they miss. The unfortunate - righteous and unrighteous - can only wonder at the riddle. It troubles me very sorely. Even in a peaceful scene there is cruelty and violence; the grouse eats the worm; the fox eats the grouse; men and horses ride down the fox and tear him to pieces…

"But it is a fallen world, Emily," I said, passing her the paper back, while Charlotte turned her hot, doubtful face away. Emily scribbled again.

Fallen? Even before Adam set foot in Eden, there were fish and fowl. Did they not devour each other?

"But Genesis is God's parable, not to be taken literally," I cried. "Oh, Emily, do not remind me of Branwell's cleverness. Do not try God's patience with Free Thinking."

She smiled and tapped her forehead. Taking a slow, deep breath she growled

"He gave me intellect he cannot be amazed if I use it and….oh…"

She clumsily picked up the pencil and wrote

I would never offend him. I look forward to asking him why there must be such terrible torments on such a beautiful planet. Did you not realize what Wuthering Heights was truly about? <u>She</u> never did and I would not tell her if she is so <u>dull</u>. I think you saw it but dared not say.

I took the paper and wrote: *I think you meant the farm to be a symbol of a cruel world - predominantly of a cruel mankind. But it is too misanthropic!*

She smiled and nodded her head. She made a weary sleeping gesture with her palms against her head. I kissed her and, leaving her with the candle on the floor, followed a distraught Charlotte to bed.

"What did she write?"

“See for yourself.”
She read and began to weep. “Of course I saw it,” she sobbed. “But I did not - do not - think mankind so pestilentially bad. That is why I persuaded her to change the ending to an optimistic one - for a noble purpose.”
“And she bitterly regrets it. That is why she is cold towards you. You always think you know best. How could Heathcliff suddenly become a saint after a life of devilment?”
“But she was determined not to allow that, and I relented. She had Heathcliff die at the end - and rightly so. I only wanted the *children* to reform - free from his evil influence.”
“Well they did, but the ending is incredible and absurd and she resents it. You should apologize and make your peace before it is too late.”
“So I shall. Indeed I shall!”
Charlotte wrote in desperation to an eminent London surgeon for advice but was only told to consult local men. Emily grew steadily worse and fell into a pensive, gloomy silence. In a mockery of what Wheelhouse had said about strong constitutions - for she had been the strongest of us all - six days before Christmas, as an early twilight inked over a grey sky, she muttered a painful stoical farewell and died.
I could hardly walk across to the church in the damp air to her funeral. This time Father, struck dumb with grief, allowed his colleague to stand in for him in the pulpit. A long coughing bout and a bloody hand afterwards revealed my dreadful secret to the household. There was to be no Christmas. It was a relief when the day had passed and the wassailers had gone to bed.
Charlotte and Father begged me to take the medicines which Emily had refused, and, for their sake, I could only comply. My decline, whether due to their influence or to some ironic quirk, for I was the least significant and least robust of three sisters, halted in January. My cough was better and there were hardly any speckles of blood. If I could hold fast till the spring, said Father, better air might bring a cure…..

But I keep seeing the great church slab lifting and a tiny fourth coffin slowly descending into darkness.

April 25th 1849
Hope shrivelled is harder to bear than unremitting despair. I cannot hide from Charlotte that I am worse. I know I am dying, only more slowly than I feared. Father seems to believe in my recovery - but whether he does so only to encourage me, is hard to tell. When this April chill gives way to May I shall sit in the garden and watch butterflies and bees about their virtuous tasks, unaware of me. In their comings and goings I shall see the earthly virtue which sad Emily overlooked. I will not submit to religious gloom and doubt. I fear I shall never see June, but May is my favourite month and a good one to leave this world. My one great fear is to imagine Father standing in agony - a third time in a few months - over my lifeless body. My other dread is the gloomy crypt of Haworth church. Now I must rest.

May 17th

May has been windy and wet, the blossom spoilt. I have told Charlotte that I would love to go to Scarborough and her reaction is enthusiastic. To go there would do us all good, said she. But no, I do not wish Father to accompany us and have persuaded her that it would cheer him wonderfully to see me return in June, markedly improved. She understands, I think. And so does he. A carriage is to be booked and a letter written to The Cliff to reserve rooms.

May 25th

It was a terrible farewell. Father embraced me long and then, telling me to come safely home, staggered weeping into the house. He knows he will never see me on this side again. The journey has quite exhausted me. Charlotte and Ellen have tried to make me eat something but after two spoonfuls of soup I have had enough. Ellen has gone to her room and Charlotte has just left me disconsolately too. At last I have been honest with her and she has been weeping.

"It is too cruel, Anne. I cannot bear it."

"Do not cry for me, Charlotte. Yes, I die young and with wishes unfulfilled. But I hope to live on a little in my books. Perhaps a few people not yet born will love me then for many years to come. Perhaps an honest young man I ought to have met in this life, but never could, will take me one day as his sweetheart. Oh, what idle thoughts are these!"

May 26th

I write at the open window with a candle flickering in the light breeze. I stare out to sea as the light fades on the horizon. One or two stars are coming out. Waves turn over and it takes a second for their crash to come to my ears. Charlotte and Ellen have promised to help me down to the beach in the early morning. The tide will be far out again but perhaps we can walk a little way towards it; perhaps if I sleep well and we go slowly, I might get all the way. The darkness grows. I hope that God will understand that my worse sin, dissembling, was committed for a noble cause. I think my victims were bound to be guided into error by greater vices than mine; that their courses were as unaffected by me as our planet would be by a meteorite. But that is to excuse my sins. Only God can do that. And yet I depart this world in the sure knowledge that I have done less ill than good, though regretting that I had not the occasion to do as much good as I wished.

Few of my fellow creatures leave a permanent mark on the world. The beach is churned up and trampled now. Tomorrow it will be smooth again. Shall mine be one small footstep there?

I know I shall soon be re-united with Mother and Aunt Branwell, and with dear Mary, Elizabeth and Emily; and, I pray, re-united with my poor, hopeless, misguided brother Branwell.

***

Anne Brontë died on May 28th without leaving her couch again. She is buried in Saint Mary's churchyard, Scarborough.

Patrick Brontë outlived all his children and died in 1861 at the age of 84.
Charlotte married her father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholls. She died in 1855 in early pregnancy, either due to malnourishment from extreme morning sickness - or possibly from typhus caught from her maid Tabby who died shortly before her.
Lydia Robinson, mother, married Sir Edward Scott in 1848. Just two years later, she was left again a widow. She threatened to sue the novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte's biographer, for calling her "a bad woman." Gaskell had to apologize and withdraw. Lady Scott died in 1859 in London, aged 59. The cause of her death was given as liver failure and diarrhoea lasting ten days - ironically the very opposite cause of Aunt Branwell's death.
Edmund Robinson never married. He sold the Thorp Green estate to his neighbour, Henry Thompson, of Kirkby Hall. He died in a boating accident in 1869 at the age of 37. He left annuities to coachman, William Gooch, and to his runaway sister, Lydia Roxby.
Bessie Robinson married engineer and industrialist William Jessop.
Joseph Leyland died in a debtors prison in 1851.


Lydia Robinson


Thorp Green. It burnt down in 1898. Its replacement is now the main building of Queen Ethelberga's School

The Monks House where the Sewells and Branwell lived

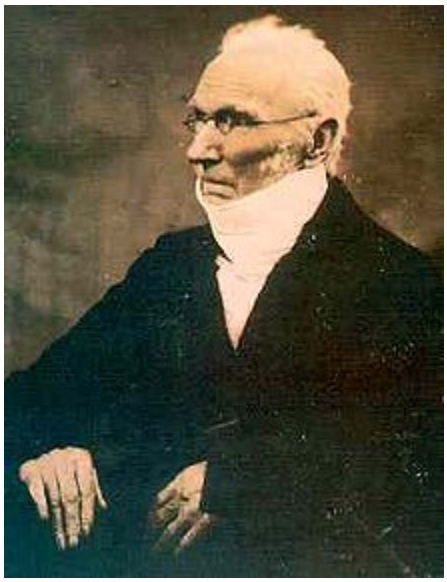
Branwell's portrait of his sisters – left to right Anne, Emily, Charlotte. Branwell painted himself out.

Branwell – a self-portrait

Emily by Branwell

Anne by Charlotte

A photograph of Charlotte in 1854

1 

Reverend Patrick Brontë in 1860

IN SAINT MARY'S CHURCHYARD SCARBOROUGH
I went to place some flowers on her grave,
Above the cliff and looking out to sea,
Where she has lain beyond the restless wave
In innocence and ignorance of me;
I thought of all her kindly, loving deeds,
Of hopes and dreams which never were fulfilled,
Of sacrifices to another's needs,
A member of the failed writers' guild.

So many other posies had been laid;
A lovely girl stood close - I was beguiled!
She bent her head of curls and gently prayed,
Then looked at me and touched my hand and smiled.

- If you had lived, you might have been my one….
But when I turned to comfort her, she'd gone.

Postscript

It is supposedly a laudable trait in an author to research his subject "extensively" and "meticulously." But such (obsessive) attention to detail can only be appreciated, logically, by a critic or reader who is himself in full or near full possession of the facts, rather as only an advanced mathematician can grasp the calculations of another in his field. When I have "explained" to me the singularity which produced the Big Bang, I can only shrug in bemusement like the other 99.9999999999% of my fellow humans. And it is a moot point as to what lengths Shakespeare went to research his subjects; any factual errors he made are rendered as naught by the sheer power and wonder of his poetry and his imagination; only if his Macduff and Henry Tudor had succumbed to MacBeth and Richard Plantagenet, might his audiences have reacted with a variety of rotten fruit and vegetables.

So my attitude is as much based on scepticism regarding meticulous research as it is in indolence. Around a few known and documented facts I created **Branwell,** and could not care less whether I got his favourite colour wrong. For me, at the age of 63, it was a waste of precious time to go on a triviality-hunt. I aimed to convince by other means, and if I failed it was not for want of unimportant details. I am the author and decided to fiddle with time, place and characters - biographers may tear their hair out - in a way which suited me.