

The Brontë Cycle

By

John O'Keefe

CAST

REV. PATRICK BRONTË. FATHER OF THE BRONTË FAMILY. MINISTER TO HAWORTH CHURCH. HE WAS A PUBLISHED AUTHOR OF POETRY AND ESSAYS. UNCOMMON IN HIS NURTURING OF HIS DAUGHTER'S EDUCATION. BORN IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

MARIA BRONTË (MOTHER). WIFE OF PATRICK, DELICATE, PLAIN, VERY INTELLIGENT AND WITTY. OF A MERCHANT'S FAMILY, ACCUSTOMED TO GOOD SOCIETY. DIED AT 37 DUE TO UTERINE CANCER.

MARIA BRONTË. ELDEST DAUGHTER. CONSIDERED TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MOST BRILLIANT OF THE BRONTË'S. DIED AT 11 OF CONSUMPTION. SHE WAS HELEN BURNS IN *JANE EYRE*.

ELIZABETH BRONTË. SECOND ELDEST DAUGHTER. DIED AT 10 OF CONSUMPTION.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË. THIRD CHILD. SHE WAS TINY (FOUR FOOT NINE INCHES) AND PLAIN. INCREDIBLY SHY AND SELF-CONSCIOUS ABOUT HER LOOKS. AUTHOR OF *THE PROFESSOR*, *JANE EYRE*, *SHIRLEY*, AND *VILLETTE*. SHE DIED AT 38, POSSIBLY FROM COMPLICATIONS DUE TO PREGNANCY.

BRANWELL BRONTË. FOURTH CHILD AND ONLY SON. AN OUTGOING AND LOVABLE PERSONALITY IN HIS BEST TIMES, A NIGHTMARE IN HIS WORST. AN ALCOHOLIC AND OPIUM ADDICT. DIED AT 31 OF CONSUMPTION.

EMILY BRONTË. FIFTH CHILD. WAS TALL FOR THE PERIOD, WITH HANDSOME MASCULINE FEATURES, SOFT BROWN HAIR AND PIERCING SLATE BLUE EYES. INTENSELY PRIVATE AND ALOOF TO EVERYONE BUT HER IMMEDIATE FAMILY, WITH A STRANGE COMBINATION OF POWER AND VULNERABILITY. A DEEPLY SPIRITUAL PANTHEIST. THE MOST ORIGINAL AND POWERFUL GENIUS OF THE BRONTË CLAN. ONE OF THE GREAT VICTORIAN POETS AND AUTHOR OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*.

ANNE BRONTË. LAST BORN OF THE BRONTË CHILDREN AND PERHAPS THE PRETTIEST. GENTLE AND WITHDRAWN WITH AN UNCANNY WAY OF GETTING HER POINT ACROSS OR AMELIORATING A SITUATION. UNDERESTIMATED BY HER LATER CRITICS; NONETHELESS, THE BRILLIANT AND COURAGEOUS AUTHOR OF *AGNES GREY* AND *THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL*. SHE HAD A TENDENCY TO BEAR RELIGIOUS GUILT. DIED OF CONSUMPTION AT AGE 28.

AUNT BRANWELL (ELIZABETH). A SLIGHT, SPINSTER, WORE A LACE CAP AND FALSE AUBURN FRONT CURLS AND OUT OF DATE BLACK SILK GOWNS. SHE ALSO WORE PATTENS, ELEVATED WOODEN SHOES TO KEEP HER FEET FROM THE MUD AND THE COLD STONE PARSONAGE FLOOR. A STRICT CALVINIST, YET, WITTY AND KIND. TOOK A SPECIAL INTEREST IN ANNE. SHE SNORTED SNUFF FROM A GOLD SNUFF BOX AND READ LURID METHODIST MAGAZINES. DIED OF OBSTRUCTION OF THE BOWELS AT 66.

MARY TAYLOR. PRETTY, VIBRANT, BLUNT. EMIGRATED TO NEW ZEALAND, WHENCE SHE CORRESPONDED WITH CHARLOTTE. VERY DETERMINED AND INDEPENDENT.

ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS. CURATE TO PATRICK. A LARGE SQUARELY-BUILT MAN WITH THICK DARK HAIR AND MUTTON CHOPS, A FINELY FORMED NOSE, PALE BLUE EYES AND CLEAR SKIN. A STURDY, STEADY, PRACTICAL MAN, NOT MUCH GIVEN TO THOUGHT, BUT HONEST AND POSSESSING DEEP FEELINGS. HE IS RATHER HANDSOME IN A BEARISH WAY.

MISS WOOLER. A SHORT, STOUT, MOTHERLY LOOKING, MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN. DIRECTOR OF ROE HEAD SCHOOL. IN HER 40'S.

WILLIAM WEIGHTMAN. CURATE TO PATRICK. A CHARMING, CHEERFUL, HANDSOME, ALMOST PRETTY MAN IN HIS EARLY TWENTIES WITH CURLY BLACK HAIR AND LONG SIDEBURNS. WITTY AND FLIRTATIOUS, HARD WORKING AND DEDICATED. HELD IN HIGH REGARD BY THE HAWORTH PARISH. DIED OF CHOLERA AT 26.

MISS ANDREWS. TEACHER AT COWEN BRIDGE SCHOOL. HARSH AND ABUSIVE TO LITTLE MARIA BRONTË.

GEORGE SMITH. OWNER OF SMITH/ELDER PUBLISHING CO. PUBLISHER OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S NOVELS.

WILLIAM SMITH WILLIAMS. READER FOR SMITH.

ACT ONE

THE STAGE IS DARK. FROM THE DARKNESS COMES THE TICKING SOUND OF THE PARSONAGE CLOCK. A GRAVE SLIDES OPEN. FOG RISES FROM IT, IGNITED BY AN EERIE LIGHT. A LONG SCARLET VEIL EMERGES FROM THE GRAVE, DRAPPED AROUND A LONG TWISTING BRANCH. AS THE BRANCH EMERGES WE SEE THAT IT IS HELD ALOFT BY A SILENT, GLOWING PARADE OF GHOSTS, WHITE AS BUTHO DANCERS. THEY ARE MEMBERS OF THE BRONTË FAMILY; BRANWELL, EMILY AND ANNE. EACH IS COVERED BY LONG WHITE VEIL. THEY MOVE SILENTLY THROUGH THE GRAVEYARD. MOONLIGHT FADES UP ON CHARLOTTE'S BED, UPSTAIRS.

ANNE

(Whispering)

CHARLOTTE, CHARLOTTE...CHARLOTTE, WAKE UP.

CHARLOTTE RUNS TO THE WINDOW AND LOOKS DOWN AT ANNE.

CHARLOTTE

ANNE?

ANNE

Don't be afraid, Charlotte. Emily and I
have had the most brilliant idea.

CHARLOTTE

EMILY?

EMILY

YES, CHARLOTTE, I'M HERE.

ANNE

TELL HER OUR IDEA, EMILY.

EMILY

WE'VE DECIDED WE SHOULD COLLABORATE.

CHARLOTTE

COLLABORATE?

ANNE

I THINK IT IS A MOST WONDERFUL IDEA.

EMILY

We'll write a novel, all three of us
together. Our nom de plume will be
Thanatasia.

ANNE

Get up, Charlotte. Come down to the parlor
with us. Let's begin now.

CHARLOTTE

NOW?

EMILY

YES, MY DARLING.

CHARLOTTE

DO YOU REALLY MEAN IT?

EMILY

COME DOWN.

*CHARLOTTE STARTS FOR THE STAIRS WHEN THERE IS A THUNDEROUS KNOCKING AT
THE DOOR.*

CHARLOTTE

THERE'S SOMEONE IN THE HOUSE.

ANNE

IT'S DEATH!

The pounding occurs again.

CHARLOTTE

THIS IS DEATH? HE IS HERE?

ANNE

GO MEET HIM.

EMILY

YES, YES, GO MEET HIM..

A glowing figure emerges from the open grave. He wears a white suit with waistcoat, appropriate for a wedding. He is Arthur Bell Nicholls. Charlotte runs out into the graveyard. She stops short of the glowing figure.

NICHOLLS

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW WHEN YOU ARE GOING TO DIE?

HE BENDS TOWARD HER AS IF TO WHISPER THE DATE.

CHARLOTTE

PLEASE, I DON'T WANT TO KNOW.

NICHOLLS

Then why are you here? No one sees Death and lives to tell the tale.

CHARLOTTE

(SHE FALLS TO HER KNEES AND BEGINS PLEADING.)

PLEASE, PLEASE, I'M SORRY. LET ME GO, JUST THIS ONE TIME.

NICHOLLS

I'll let you go, but when I come for you next, I want you to be ready and go quietly, without complaint. Is that understood?

CHARLOTTE

YES, YES.

NICHOLLS

Stand up. *(Charlotte stands. Nicholls takes her in his arms and runs his mouth along her throat. Charlotte yields.)* Do you want to be my wife?

CHARLOTTE

YES! YES!

NICHOLLS

What shall you bring into the world, the child of Death?

CHARLOTTE

Yes. I don't care! I don't care! *(He kisses her passionately.)* Take me.

NICHOLLS RELEASES HER AND BACKS DOWN INTO THE OPEN GRAVE. CHARLOTTE FALLS TO HER KNEES. HER EYES ARE CLOSED, HER ARMS REACHING FOR HER

VANISHED LOVER. THE GHOST OF CHARLOTTE'S MOTHER APPEARS AT THE WINDOW OF CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM. SHE IS DRAPED IN A WHITE VEIL. SHE SINGS AS EMILY, ANNE AND BRANWELL DESCEND INTO THE OPEN GRAVE.

MOTHER MARIA

I knew 'twas a bridal, for under a bower
Of roses and the myrtle and the fair lily flower
Stood that stately noble in pluméd pride,
And the sweet, fair lady, his plighted bride.

Charlotte's mother backs into the darkness and the grave closes. Suddenly Charlotte snaps awake and looks about the graveyard, disoriented. Gradually it dawns on her that she has been sleepwalking.

CHARLOTTE

MY GOD!

She starts toward the parsonage, stops and gazes at the grave that has just closed. then runs for the door. The lights rise in the parlor. Charlotte enters. She puts her hands on the table and braces herself, catching her breath. She crosses to the window and looks out at the graveyard. She shudders. The wind picks up, blowing lightly through the sky. She backs toward the table, dread and confusion on her face. She paces, trying to calm herself. She looks at her writing desk. She opens it takes out a sheet of paper and a pen and begins to write.

CHARLOTTE

My Dear Mary Taylor,-
It has been so long since I last wrote you.
Forgive me, sometimes I forget that you're in
New Zealand and not just over the way in
Gomersal.

The lights shift to an open space. Roe Head School, 1831. It is day. The birds are singing. A pretty, vibrant Mary Taylor runs onto the stage with a ball. She addresses the space a few yards from her. Mary is always quite blunt and to the point.

MARY

Who are you?

Charlotte crosses D.S. a few yards from Mary Taylor, turns her face away and barely audibly answers. She is overcome with shyness.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte Brontë.

MARY

I'm Mary Taylor. Where are you from?

CHARLOTTE

Haworth.

MARY

IS YOUR FAMILY RICH?

CHARLOTTE

NO.

MARY

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Charlotte practically turns her back to her, near tears.

CHARLOTTE

FOURTEEN.

MARY

WELL, CHARLOTTE BRONTË, COME PLAY WITH ME.

CHARLOTTE

NO, I'D RATHER STAND HERE. I LIKE THE TREES.

MARY

Like the trees? What a strange little toad you are, come on and play catch.

Mary throws the ball at her. Charlotte simply stands there. The ball hits her.

MARY (CONT.)

What's the matter with you, you don't even try.

Charlotte hangs her head.

CHARLOTTE

I'M SORRY, BUT I CAN'T SEE IT.

MARY

Can't see a great ball like that? You should be wearing spectacles. God knows they wouldn't make you any uglier than you already are.

Charlotte runs to the pool of water D.S. and looks into it. Mary crosses to Charlotte. Mary gazes at Charlotte's reflection, her voice softened and tinged with affection.

MARY

Your hair has a most silky beauty. All you need to do is brush away these old-fashioned curls.

CHARLOTTE

(Addressing Mary's reflection)

I AM UGLY. I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN IT.

The lights fade on Mary.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Mary, you have always had that uncanny combination of tolerance and distain. I love you and yet you, more than anyone else, can raise my ire to the very contemplation of homicide. Unfortunately I find myself in a most disadvantageous situation. I can only trust in your natural sympathies. Tonight, I fear I must appeal even more deeply to your patience, for tonight, my sweet Mary Taylor I am afraid, sorely afraid. I know you will think me melodramatic, but tonight I dreamed I kissed Death. I can't sleep. I have not slept for days. Mary, now listen to me and please don't dismiss me out of hand. Tomorrow morning I am taking a most disastrous step, and so I'm going to set my life in order. Be with me tonight and listen.

There is the sound of horses' hooves. The lights rise on a slab stone. As Charlotte speaks the characters she mentions create the wagon, Patrick at the head.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

A covered wagon, six carts behind it. A hill so steep the horse's hooves are slipping on the flag-stones. The sky is leaden. Father's the new minister, handsome, tall and not much under forty. He's grinning. No, he's laughing. With Branwell. The wind is blowing through their hair, our hair. My mother, Maria, 37, delicate, diminutive, accustomed to "Good Society," is holding Anne, as the carts creep up the steep hill. Lovely Anne, four years old, light brown hair and blue eyes. And Maria, my eldest sister. She is ten and so precocious, standing behind Papa. She looks like our mother. Elizabeth, nine, her violet eyes peeping through her thick black hair as she picks up books that have fallen from a trunk. Emily, my younger sister, with eyes the color of a gray-blue sea, rubbing her face against a tomcat. She is tall for her age and she is only six. Branwell, our only brother, his arms around Papa's neck. His bright red hair. He is small for his age. He's only 7, but avid, so avid. And me, Charlotte, peeking through a flap at

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

the outside. *(She joins her family on the wagon.)* I am 8 and I am so small, so very small for my age. I think I shall grow up to be a midget.

MARIA (THE DAUGHTER)

You shall be the greatest minister of them all, Papa. You have already published.

BRANWELL

This hill is the steepest I've ever encountered.

PATRICK

It shall succumb.

BRANWELL

Shall I become as great as you, Papa?

PATRICK

Greater, my boy.

CHARLOTTE

Shabby worker's cottages made of stone, listless men in tattered clothes eyeing us suspiciously as we pass. "There's goes the new parson and his family" Manure and waste running through the gutters. And then, the turning up the church lane...gravestones as far as the eye can see. There is fear in my mother's eyes.

The lights fade on them but remain up on Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

I have one clear recollection of my mother. She is sitting in the parsonage, singing to Branwell, the sun, streaming into the dusky, empty parlor. Holding him and saying, "Soon this will be full candles and treasure."

A light rises behind a closed door. Charlotte turns towards the door. There is the sound of a woman crying in agony.

MARIA (THE MOTHER) (OS)

It hurts when you touch me!

PATRICK (OS)

Pray to God.

MARIA (OS)

I don't want to die!

PATRICK (OS)

You're not going to die. Pray, my love.

MARIA

I don't want to pray. What do you know about anything?

Charlotte turns away from the door and looks down at her letter.

MARIA (THE MOTHER)

(OS)

You've killed me with children.

PATRICK (OS)

My darling, my darling...

MARIA (THE MOTHER) (OS)

I hate them! (*Charlotte covers her eyes with her hand.*) Oh God, my poor children! Oh God, my poor children!

She crosses to the door. She pushes the door open. Patrick is closing the dead eyes of his wife. He looks up from his wife's corpse. He crosses to the window of his study and gazes gravely out on the graveyard.

VOICE OF ELIZABETH FIRTH (OS)

Dear Sir,
Although I esteem you, I am appalled by your proposal of marriage. Your wife has been passed away scarcely three months. How could you dare even think of such an idea. My answer is a definite "no." Please do not write me again.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Firth

VOICE OF MARY BRUDER (OS)

As you must reasonably suppose, a letter from you presented to me, naturally produced sensations of surprise and agitation. A union with you would embitter my future days. I know no ties of friendship ever existing between us which the last eleven or twelve years have not severed. Indeed, I must give you a decided negative.

Sincerely, your Well Wisher, Mary D. Bruder.

VOICE OF ISABELLE DURY (OS)

(*Laughing*)

My dear Sir,
What can you be thinking? I would never be so very
silly as to marry a man with no future and
encumbered by six children.
Very sincerely,
Esabelle Dury

The lights fade on Patrick and the graveyard.

CHARLOTTE

Had Papa secured the hands of any one of
these women, our lives would have been very
different.

*The lights rise on a spinster woman wearing revealing a
spinster woman (over 45), wearing a lace cap and false
auburn front curls and buried in an out of date black silk
gown. Charlotte joins the other Brontë children. They gaze
at her, bewildered and afraid.*

AUNT BRANWELL

I do not like the weather of Haworth. It is not
at all as salubrious as that of my home in
Penzance where the air is soft and warm and
filled with the gaities of spring flowers. I
fear I shall not live long in this environment.
I was a belle in my home town. *(She pulls a gold
snuffbox from her gown, pinches some snuff,
then snorts it.)* Matrimony is not my objective,
however. I have not come to you as your
father's wife. It is my chief desire to follow
the commandments our Lord has set down as

AUNT BRANWELL (CONT.)

regards the proper proportioning of good deeds
in a Christian life. And since your mother, my
dear sister Maria, has passed into a more
glorious sphere, I feel that it is my duty as a
Christian gentlewoman to take her place, as it
were, and seek to turn away from everlasting
perdition the persons committed to my care --
especially the young, ignorant and idle --
namely, yourselves. *(She raises her feet to
show her pattens)* You will notice that I wear
pattens. They will serve as a reminder that I
and what I stand for, are near. Anne, as the
youngest, you will sleep with me. I will care
for your soul even as you slumber. Don't be
frightened, my dear child, this is your Auntie
Branwell. I will guide your soul to the Elect

of Christ. If you die with me, you will go to Heaven. To live is Christ; to die is gain.

Patrick's voice is heard in the dark as he recites the lines from "The Iliad". As he speaks the lights rise on him. He has arm around Branwell. Branwell is entranced by his father's delivery.

PATRICK

Sing, O goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Peleus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Many a brave soul did it send hurrying down to Hades...

Aunt Branwell crosses into a special. Charlotte takes a seat and thrusts her index finger in the air. There is a thimble on it.

AUNT BRANWELL

Hold it that thimble.

Charlotte holds an index finger. It is capped with a thimble.

AUNT BRANWELL (CONT.)

(Holding her bethimbled finger in the air.)

This is your armor. If you are to make yourself useful in this life you must learn the nature of your duties.

Charlotte begins sewing as Branwell declaims the lines from "The Illiad" to his father.

BRANWELL

"Sons of Atreus," he cried, "and all other Achaeans, may the gods who dwell in Olympus grant you to sack the city of Priam, and to reach your homes in safety; but free my daughter, and accept a ransom for her, in reverence to Apollo, son of Jove."

A special remains on Charlotte, she looks up from her sewing and gazes enviously at Branwell. Branwell looks at her from his book and grins. The lights fade on him.

The lights shift to night in the parsonage in the present time. Charlotte continues sewing.

CHARLOTTE

Five dowerless girls with crooked features and unhealthy skin. Well, save Anni, that is, but her nose was too big.

There is the sound of the wind coming up. Nicholls appears in the shadows in the graveyard. Charlotte senses his presence and shrinks back from the window. She looks out the window again. Nicholls is gone. She crosses to the table and sits over her letter to Mary Taylor.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Mary, you never were a governess. I know you hate self-pity, but you never were a governess. A private governess has no existence. Without looks, without a dowry, without a man's protection, what's left to us.

Charlotte's mother appears under a special. She is as she was when she was alive.

MARIA

If children of the poor...

MOTHER MARIA & CHARLOTTE

...are famished and cold it is by their own bad conduct.

MARIA

Poverty is deserved.

CHARLOTTE

My own mother said this, never conceiving that her own daughters might now, themselves suffer "the evils of poverty." And thus we were sent, save Anne, who was too young, to the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge, to be trained as...governesses.

There is the harsh sound of a bell clanging. The lights rise on Miss Andrews a small, dark, smartly dressed woman. Her face is covered with a black mesh mask. She wears a bonnet. She stands over a dormitory bed with a bell in her hand. A girl is coughing in the bed. It is little Maria. She has the whooping cough. She struggles out of bed.

ANDREWS

Clean yourself. (She points at a pitcher and a basin) There!

MARIA CROSSES TO THE PITCHER. SHE PICKS IT UP AND TRIES TO POUR WATER FROM IT BUT NOTHING COMES OUT. MARIA TURNS TO ANDREWS AND SAYS HELPLESSLY...

MARIA

THE WATER'S FROZEN, MA'AM.

ANDREWS

You heard what I said. (*Grabbing Maria's hand.*) You dirty, disagreeable girl! You have not cleaned your nails this morning.

The lights remain up on Andrews and Maria as Charlotte crosses to a chair near them. She pulls a skein from the yarn and begins rolling between her fingers.

CHARLOTTE

Maria, the brightest, the purest of us all, had become the focus of Miss Andrews' venomous attention.

ANDREWS

(*TO MARIA*)

There is an inner room where the books are kept. Do you know where I mean?

MARIA

YES, MA'AM.

ANDREWS

Good. There is a set of drawers there also. Do you know which I mean?

MARIA

YES, MA'AM.

ANDREWS

Very good. Go there and open the top drawer. There is only one item in it. Bring that item to me, if you would.

MARIA

YES, MA'AM.

Maria exits. Charlotte continues to loop the yarn around her fingers as she speaks.

CHARLOTTE

THERE'S NO USE IN WEEPING,
THOUGH WE ARE CONDEMNED TO PART;
THERE'S SUCH A THING AS KEEPING
A REMEMBRANCE IN ONE'S HEART:

THERE'S SUCH A THING AS DWELLING
ON THE THOUGHT OURSELVES HAVE NURSED,
AND WITH SCORN AND COURAGE TELLING
THE WORLD TO DO ITS WORST.

Maria returns. She is carrying a bundle of twigs tied together at one end.

ANDREWS

Very good. Now give them to me. Unloosen your pinafore. (*Maria unloosens her pinafore.*) Bare your neck.

Maria bares her neck. Andrews delivers blow after blow until Charlotte springs from her chair and rushes at Miss Andrews as the lights fade on Miss Andrews and Maria.

CHARLOTTE

LEAVE HER ALONE!

Charlotte looks about her, realizing that she alone in the parsonage. There is the sound of the wind. Little Maria calls from the dark.

MARIA

Charlotte.

Charlotte starts.

CHARLOTTE

MARIA?

MARIA

Come lie with me.

Charlotte crosses to the dormitory cot and climbs under the covers. Maria is in shadow.

CHARLOTTE

Are you dying? (*Maria doesn't answer.*) I don't want you to go. Elizabeth is ill. She will not survive if you leave us. Why must you leave us?

MARIA

BECAUSE GOD IS CALLING ME TO HIM HEAVEN.

CHARLOTTE

YOU ARE SURE THAT THERE IS SUCH A PLACE AS HEAVEN?

MARIA

I am sure there is a future state.

CHARLOTTE

AND SHALL I SEE YOU AGAIN, MARIA, WHEN I DIE?

MARIA

You will come to the same region of happiness.

CHARLOTTE

Don't die! I hate that God you love!

Maria strokes Charlotte's hair and gently shushes her.

MARIA

Shhhh. If I can reach you and comfort you, I
promise with all my heart, that I will try.
Put your arms around me and sleep.

*Charlotte puts her arms around Maria's neck and cradles
her face in Maria's throat. Maria strokes Charlotte hair,
then turns away into the shadows. There is the sound of
someone walking on the roof. Charlotte starts. She
listens, silence, then again, the sound of someone walking
on the roof. Charlotte sits bolt upright and looks up at
the ceiling. She slips out of bed and looks out the
window. Above on the roof of the parsonage there appears
the shadow of a girl walking.*

CHARLOTTE
(CALLING SOFTLY)

MARIA?

*Charlotte climbs onto the roof. Charlotte sees the
silhouette of the girl. There is a strange somnambulistic
smoothness to the dark figure's walk. The dark figure stops
just short of the end of the roof. Charlotte can contain
herself no longer.*

CHARLOTTE
(CALLING SOFTLY)

MARIA, HAVE YOU COME BACK?

THE DARK FIGURE FREEZES, THEN SLOWLY TURNS AROUND.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

ELIZABETH, IS THAT YOU? YOU MUST COME TO BED.

ELIZABETH
(QUITE NATURALLY AS IF SHE WAS AWAKE.)

I LIKE IT UP HERE.

ELIZABETH WALKS PAST CHARLOTTE TO THE END OF THE ROOF AND STANDS AT
THE EDGE.

CHARLOTTE

BUT IT'S DANGEROUS.

ELIZABETH

FOR ME, NOTHING IS DANGEROUS. I'M GOING TO DIE LIKE MARIA.

CHARLOTTE

IF YOU JUMP IT MIGHT NOT KILL YOU.

ELIZABETH

NO, BUT THEY WILL SEND ME HOME.

Elizabeth stands erect. She leans forward and falls, disappearing from the roof. The lights fade and rise on Elizabeth as she crosses to a bier and lies down on it. Across from her is Maria's corpse. All of the family, in turn, kiss Elizabeth's corpse. When it is Branwell's turn he begins shaking.

PATRICK

KISS YOUR SISTER ELIZABETH GOOD-BYE.

He gently pushes Branwell toward the corpse. Branwell begins to whimper. He stops moving forward. Patrick puts his hands on Branwell's shoulders. He is stern.

PATRICK

DO YOU LOVE YOUR SISTER?

Branwell nods his terror stricken face in affirmation.

PATRICK (CONT.)

THEN BID HER FAREWELL.

Patrick forcibly directs Branwell towards the corpse. Branwell begins screaming and struggling in his father's arms.

BRANWELL

NO! NO!

CHARLOTTE

Seven girls died that year due to malnutrition, which brought on fever and consumption, one died at Cowan Bridge, eleven were sent home, and six soon died afterward.

The grave slides open, Maria and Elizabeth rise from their biers. They look at each other and begin quietly laughing as they descend into the grave. The grave sides shut.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

I am of a family of death crypt angels who beckon me at every turn with promise of release from a life I have never lived. I shall live this life, gruesome and grotesque as it is, no matter how unsightly it makes me. Why would I be here otherwise, than to be

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

used up by it. You shall not have me, Maria, none of you shall have me. I shan't be broken, no matter if you starve me of love or bludgeon me with boredom.

She sits at her desk and puts her face in her hands. The lights rise in Patrick's study on Patrick and Aunt Branwell. The lights fade on Charlotte as Patrick speaks.

PATRICK

I'm keeping the children at home. I'm going to educate them myself and keep an eye on their health. I'm going to teach them History, not just English history, but World History and literature and geography. Nature, Greek, Latin, Music and Drawing.

AUNT BRANWELL

Do you want to ruin them? A modicum of music and drawing are attractive, but there is nothing more irritating to a future husband than an educated wife. Why, he wouldn't know what to do with her.

PATRICK

And arithmetic as well. My girls have suffered enough. If they have no other power, then let it be knowledge.

AUNT BRANWELL

Mr. Brontë.

PATRICK

Elizabeth, it shall be done!

There is the sound of Branwell footsteps running up the stairs as the lights fade on Patrick. There is a loud knocking at the door upstairs. The lights on Branwell with his wild crop of red hair. He is holding a box of 12 wooden soldiers. He pounds on the door again. He is strangely excited, a state, normal to him.

BRANWELL

Wake up! Wake up!

He pounds the door harder. He can barely contain himself.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Charlotte! Emily! Look what Papa gave me!

He pounds on the door.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Wake up! Wake up! Soldiers!

CHARLOTTE

(From behind the door)

Go back to sleep.

BRANWELL

Toy soldiers! Open the door! Hurry! Hurry!

CHARLOTTE

(The door still closed)

Hush! You'll wake up Auntie.

BRANWELL

Toy soldiers!

The door opens and Charlotte sticks her head out.

CHARLOTTE

What are you shouting about?

BRANWELL

Look!

He holds the box of toy soldiers up for her to inspect.

Emily sticks her head out the door above Charlotte's.

EMILY

WHO CARES ABOUT STUPID TOY SOLDIERS?

Charlotte noticing the soldier's beauty.

CHARLOTTE

THEY'RE PRETTY.

EMILY

SOLDIERS AREN'T PRETTY.

BRANWELL

LET ME IN!

Charlotte opens the door and Branwell runs into the room.

He puts the box down on the floor and sits with it.

Charlotte closes the door. Emily and Charlotte stand over Branwell and the box.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Papa brought them from Leeds. He walked forty miles!

EMILY

FORTY MILES! ARE THEY NEW?

BRANWELL

YES!

There is a knocking at the door. They look at the door.

Charlotte opens the door. Anne is standing on the other side rubbing her eyes sleepily.

ANNE

AUNTIE SAYS BE QUIET, YOU'LL WAKE PAPA.

BRANWELL

(SHOUTING)

ANNE! LOOK, TOY SOLDIERS!

ANNE

SHHHH.

*Charlotte pulls Anne into the room and closes the door.
Anne sees the soldiers.*

ANNE

Oh, they're handsome.

*Anne reaches for one of the soldiers. Charlotte beats her
to it and seizes one.*

CHARLOTTE

This is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be
the Duke!

*Emily then seizes one, then Anne, then Branwell. For a
moment they sit and gaze at them as if they were alien
jewels.*

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Mine's the prettiest one! And the tallest,
the most perfect in every part.

Emily studies the soldier in her hands.

EMILY

Mine's a grave-looking fellow. I'll call him
Gravey.

ANNE

Mine's a queer-looking thing.

CHARLOTTE

LIKE YOU!

ANNE

I'LL CALL HIM...WAITING BOY!

Branwell thrusts his toy soldier out and shouts...

BRANWELL

I KNOW MINE! MINE'S BONAPARTE!

*The children break into a laugh of delight. Charlotte puts
her toy soldier on the floor and stands over it.*

CHARLOTTE

In measuring the difference in our size
between the little wooden soldiers and
ourselves, we determined that if the soldiers
were in our dimension, we would be ten miles
high, except for lanky Emily, who declared
herself a mere four miles above them. We were
the Genii, a concept discovered by Branwell
while reading the "The Arabian Nights."

Respectively, we were Branni, Emmi, Anni and myself, Talli.

The lights rise to a bright day on the exterior of the parsonage. Aunt Branwell is just opening the front door. Branwell is tagging along. He is wearing a bright cape.

BRANWELL

How long will you be in Keighley, Auntie?

Aunt Branwell totters down the lane as she speaks

AUNT BRANWELL

Most of the day. Sit by the fire. Read. Don't burn the house down or your father will be quite angry. Take care of little Annie.

She disappears down the lane. Branwell turns towards the parsonage. Pulls out a paper war hat and puts it on. The rest of the Brontë children fill the doorway and peer out after her. They are wearing fantasy hats and bright capes.

BRANWELL

THE HOUSE IS OURS!

BRANWELL RUNS INTO THE PARSONAGE. THERE ARE TERRIFIED SCREAMS WITHIN. SOMETHING IS SPOOKING THEM. THEY TEAR THROUGH THE HOUSE SCREAMING AND HOLLERING, WITH SHOUTS OF...

There are ghosts in the house!
GHOSTS ARE COMING UP THROUGH THE FLOORS!
THERE ARE CORPSES UNDER THE KITCHEN!

On the speakers come war cries, gun fire, cannons, the neighing of horses and the charging of horse's feet. The "1812 Overture" soon follows. While this is going on Charlotte runs to the window and looks out at the great graveyard. She wears a make-shift war helmet.

CHARLOTTE

LOOK! THEY'RE ALL AROUND US!

EMILY APPEARS AT THE DOOR. SHE TOO IS CLAD IN HOMEMADE WAR GEAR.

EMILY

THEY'RE ALL AROUND US!

Anne runs out of the house and sits on a grave. Anne is wearing a folded paper hat. Charlotte and Branwell (wearing a Napoleonic hat) appear at the door with Emily. Charlotte runs out to Anne.

CHARLOTTE

DON'T STAY OUT THERE, YOU'LL DIE.

It starts to rain. Anne jumps up and down in delight.

ANNE

I'M GOING TO DIE, AUNTIE LET ME KNOW!

Charlotte rescues Anne from the gravestone. The four Brontës gather about the doorway and watch the rain. Branwell grabs Anne's hand.

BRANWELL

NO YOU WON'T. WE ARE THE FOUR GENII. BRANNI!

CHARLOTTE

TALLI!

EMILY

EMMI!

ANNE

ANNI!

BRANWELL

From this day forward we shall each own a kingdom and we shall call these kingdoms The Great Glasstown Confederacy. And this will be the capitol of Glasstown. And it shall be called Verdopolis. Charge!

They charge into the house as the lights around grow dark. The war sounds return, guns, cannons, horses, war cries and the "1812 Overture". Their shadows dart past the windows as they scream their war cries. "Death! Death to the ghosts!" Charlotte bursts from the parsonage and runs DS, laughing wildly as the lights fade on the house.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The lights rise on Patrick standing above at his window, holding a pistol. He fires it and the lights crossfade to John Brown.

JOHN

Six o'clock in the morning. Old man Brontë's blown off his pistol like he's done for the past forty years. The town sets its clock by it. The right Reverend Patrick Brontë, minister to our hearty Haworth flock, was born in Ireland on Saint Patrick's day, March 17, 1777, and worked his way up from a weaver to the halls of Cambridge and a degree in Divinity. Now how does an Irish ditchdigger's son get from a weaver's loom to the land of the genteel English? By working from dawn to dusk, then reading all night by candlelight. And that's how he did it. Told me how he changed his name from Brunty to Brontë. Seems like his brogue was so thick it got miss spelled and instead of writing "Brunty", the snooty Cambridge bastards wrote "Branty". And feeling somewhat self-conscious of his Irish background in that hallowed place of the English aristocracy, he let the error go. Well, he thought about it a long time, it being a curse to be an Irishman and all, and having a soldier's heart and remembering that Admiral Nelson had been named "Duke of Bronti" in Sicily, and that the name meant "thunder" in Greek; he went back to the Registry and rewrote his name as "Patrick Brontë." And from that name his children grew and some are famous now, especially the little one, the only one left, Miss Charlotte. "Currer Bell" she calls herself in print. Perhaps a soul should keep the name his parents gave him, for I fear the name Brontë was cursed from the start. And who am I, you ask? Why, I'm John Brown, the sexton. I dug their graves.

The lights fade and Patrick's voice can be heard in the darkness. The lights rise, revealing Patrick holding forth for his enraptured daughters and son while he cleans his pistol. The siblings are sitting Charlotte's bed. They are wearing their brightly colored capes and their fantasy hats.

PATRICK

Hannibal was wily and perservering; Alexander the Great was bold and rapid; Caesar was wise to combine, and swift to execute; but Wellington, the Duke of Wellington, as a general, is wily, perservering, bold and rapid. You all must know that if I had come from a higher station in life, if I had not been an Irishman, I would not have been a pastor, but a military man. Yes, children, I believe that that was my true predilection. But the paths of fate laid at my feet by the Almighty, "my calling", was to be a minister. It does not mean, however, that I am barred from the pursuit of military interests; and by that, I mean, the study and invention of weaponry.

Aunt Branwell's pattons can be heard clacking as she crosses to Patrick's study.

AUNT BRANWELL

PATRICK BRONTË!

PATRICK

YES, MISS BRANWELL?

AUNT BRANWELL

COME DOWN HERE.

PATRICK

WHERE ARE YOU?

AUNT BRANWELL

WHERE DO YOU THINK I AM, IN THE STUDY, NO DOUBT.

Patrick rises.

PATRICK

EXCUSE ME, CHILDREN.

The lights crossfade to a special on Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Those days are so sweet in my memory, Mary. All of us at home. Family prayers, breakfast in the dining-room with Papa, lessons in Papa's study, tea in the kitchen, followed by sewing in Auntie's room, while

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Auntie read to us from the newspapers. Those days were our best. Those days, when we were one.

BRANWELL (OS)
(Shouting)

Talli! Talli, come in here!

The lights rise on Branwell hunched over something on a table across from Charlotte. She rises and crosses to Branwell.

CHARLOTTE
What in heaven's name are you screaming about, Branni?

Branwell steps back from the object. Charlotte approaches it.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)
What is this? (She looks more closely at it.)
It's a little book. May I touch it?

Branwell nods his head in avid affirmation. Charlotte picks it up. Its pages, only an inch or two in size, have been cut from an exercise book and folded down the middle.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)
(Reading)

"THE GLASSTOWN CONFEDERACY".

Branwell gazes at her in anticipation. Charlotte opens the little book. As is her custom, she reads with her nose almost grazing the pages.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)
(Without taking her eyes from the little book)
IT'S MARVELOUS. THIS WRITING, IT LOOKS SO REAL. WAIT...

Branwell beams at Charlotte. Charlotte squints at a page. She looks up at her brother filled with genuine admiration.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)
THIS IS REAL WRITING!

BRANWELL
YES, EVERY WORD CAN BE READ.

He holds a soldier next to the little book.

BRANWELL (CONT.)
It's for them. It's just their size. (He giggles) Papa can't read it. Auntie can't read it. It's too small. Nobody can read it but us!

Charlotte stands turning the little pages over and over in her fingers.

CHARLOTTE

IT'S A REAL BOOK.

BRANWELL

YES, IT'S MY FIRST.

CHARLOTTE

LET'S SHOW THE OTHERS.

Charlotte starts for the door. Branwell stops her.

BRANWELL

(Oddly)

No, not just yet.

CHARLOTTE

(Bemused)

WHY?

BRANWELL

I WANT TO KEEP IT JUST BETWEEN US.

CHARLOTTE

WE CAN'T BRANNI, THE OTHERS SHOULD KNOW.

BRANWELL

Just an hour then, just between us. I want you and me to have a secret.

Branwell smiles at Charlotte. Charlotte smiles and takes him in her arms and strokes his hair.

CHARLOTTE

FOR AN HOUR THEN.

As the lights crossfade from Charlotte and Branwell to Patrick and Aunt Branwell in Patrick's study.

PATRICK

It's not enough that they pay me so scant a salary, but to take the repairs and maintenance of the parsonage and the Church lands from it is untenable.

AUNT BRANWELL

IT WAS A HARD WINTER, MR. BRONTË.

PATRICK

Hard or easy, the Trustees are wealthy men. The Baptists down the road rent out their pews to supplement their salaries. I'll never rent out the chairs in God's house, you know that, Elizabeth. What am I going to do? With these expenses I'll never be able to support my family. The Trustees at Bradford

don't give a damn about the people of Haworth who work the factories dark to dark, nor their Minister!

AUNT BRANWELL

REVEREND BRONTË!

PATRICK

I'm sorry, Elizabeth, it's the god's honest truth. Bind another Haworth child to a machine and forget us!

Patrick puts his head in his hands. Aunt Branwell puts out a hand to comfort him, thinks better on it and then withdraws it. The lights crossfade to upstairs in the "Children's Room."

Outside the wind is howling, but inside the little room it is cozy. The three sisters are huddled below Branwell, who stands over them on the bed as he enacts his writing.

BRANWELL

The first man was nearly 8 feet high, bony, haggard, his nose and chin were hooked like the beak of a hawk, his eyes small, deep sunk, and of a sinister, malignant expression. His face was covered with tremendous scars!

Branwell spreads his cape and leaps down on his astonished sisters who scream in response. Charlotte climbs on to the bed with her little book and holds forth.

CHARLOTTE

...upon thrones of pure and massive gold in the midst of an immense hall surrounded by pillars of fine and brilliant diamond, the pavement sparkles with amethyst, jasper and sapphire; a large and cloudlike

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

canopy hangs over the heads of the Genii, all studded with bright rubies...

The lights fade to black.

In the darkness Patrick's voice can be heard giving a sermon. As he speaks the lights rise on him. He stands at a high pulpit. As he speaks a man all in black, his face covered with a black cloth mask, carrying an open umbrella, crosses D.S. and walks through the pool of water. There is the sound of rain.

PATRICK

Forty thousand! Yes, congregation, there are forty thousand bodies buried in this graveyard, six layers deep. I bury one six year old a week. The mortality rate in this village is as bad as the worst parts of London and it is the water which accounts for much of it, for all the water we drink comes down to you from this graveyard. This is the water of Death! Yet there are certain churchgoers who have fresh water who don't care about the more humble of their brethren. Instead, they have written to The Board of Health requesting that the hamlet of Haworth be overlooked as to the digging of two wells. Is it so dear, this little rate that you would pay for the lives of children? Where is your Christian Charity? Has it gone down your wells with you? My friends, the summer is coming and with it typhoid. I beg you, help us!

The lights fade on Patrick but remain up on the man in black. The man in black crosses to the parsonage door and knocks on it. Charlotte opens the door.

MAN IN BLACK

DOES THE PARSON LIVE HERE?

CHARLOTTE

YES.

MAN IN BLACK

I WISH TO SEE HIM.

CHARLOTTE

HE IS POORLY IN BED.

MAN IN BLACK

INDEED, I HAVE A MESSAGE FOR HIM.

CHARLOTTE

FROM WHOM?

MAN IN BLACK

FROM THE LORD.

CHARLOTTE

WHO?

MAN IN BLACK

The LORD. He desires me to say that the bridegroom is coming and that he must prepare to meet him; that the cords are about to be loosed and the golden bowl broken; the pitcher broken at the fountain and the wheel stopped at the cistern.

That spoken, the man in black abruptly turns and leaves. Charlotte closes the door and lays against it. She is frightened. She becomes sick at her stomach.

The lights rise on Aunt Branwell clacking carefully down the stairs to the parlor. As she crosses to the parlor, the parlor lights rise, revealing Charlotte at the table. She is writing.

AUNT BRANWELL

I CANNOT TAKE CARE OF YOU.

CHARLOTTE

TAKE CARE OF US?

AUNT BRANWELL

The parsonage is his as long as he is active pastor.

CHARLOTTE

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, AUNTIE?

AUNT BRANWELL

He is 53, child. You would lose everything, even the roof over your heads.

Charlotte watches her. Aunt Branwell beckons her to the stairs. Charlotte climbs the stairs to Patrick's bedroom. Patrick's door is open. Patrick is lying in bed. He gestures her to his bedside.

PATRICK

We have found a school for you.

Charlotte is suddenly frightened.

CHARLOTTE

A SCHOOL, SIR?

PATRICK

I know the school personally. I walked past the building many times on my parish rounds when I was a curate at Dewsbury. It is healthy and open. I know the parents of many of the pupils and they are men of wealth and power. Other schools are easily within their income and yet they chose this school.

CHARLOTTE

BUT PAPA, I'M LEARNING EVER SO MUCH HERE.

PATRICK

It is called Roe Head. It is run and owned by Miss Margaret Wooler. She is a clever, decent and motherly woman.

CHARLOTTE

BUT PAPA.

PATRICK

You are the eldest. You must be capable of earning your own living. You must go to school. You must work hard. You must bring back what you've learned and share it with your sisters. Will you do that for me, Charlotte?

Patrick looks up at Charlotte, and although she tries, can't tear her eyes away from his.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Papa.

She turns from his bed. The lights fade on Patrick. Charlotte runs down the stairs and picks up her carpet bag, while the lights shift to a gray morning. Branwell appears at the doorway. He grabs Charlotte and holds her back.

BRANWELL

Talli! Talli! Take me with you! I shan't live without you!

CHARLOTTE

YOU CAN'T COME WITH ME BRANNI.

BRANWELL

YOU'LL DIE IN THAT SCHOOL LIKE MARIA DID.

CHARLOTTE

IT'S NOT THE SAME THERE, BRANNI, IT'S A BETTER PLACE.

BRANWELL

BUT WHY MUST YOU GO?

CHARLOTTE

I'VE GOT TO BE CAPABLE OF MAKING MY WAY.

BRANWELL

It's my place to take care of us, I'm the man. I'll make money for all of us. I shall be an artist. I shall Talli.

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to leave. *(She begins crying.)* I shall miss our plays. But it shall be only a half year. In the summer I shall be back with vast new ideas for Glasstown and Verdopolis.

Branwell's face reddens with rage and frustration.

BRANWELL

I shall destroy Glasstown and Verdopolis! I shall tear fire from the heavens and cast it down on The

Great Glasstown Confederacy! I shall destroy everything! I shall build a new city and I shall call it Angria!

Charlotte looks at him with horror.

CHARLOTTE

WOULD YOU DESTROY ALL OF THE LITTLE BOOKS AND MAGAZINES?

Branwell glares at her, then suddenly throws his arms around her and cries.

BRANWELL

I LOVE YOU, TALLI. OH, PLEASE DON'T DIE.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't die at Cowan Bridge and I won't die at Roe Head.

She grabs Branwell by the shoulders.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

PLEASE DON'T DESTROY OUR LITTLE BOOKS.

Branwell smiles at her, even as he wipes away his tears.

BRANWELL

No, we'll keep them as vestiges of an ancient civilization.

The driver calls from off stage.

DRIVER (OS)

GET IN THE WAGON, GIRL.

Branwell and Charlotte gaze at each other.

BRANWELL

I shall be the leader while you're gone. And I will create a new hero.

CHARLOTTE

WHAT WILL BE HIS NAME?

Branwell grins wickedly.

BRANWELL

ROGUE!

The lights fade on Branwell but remain up on Charlotte. Charlotte begins crying. The lights rise on a woman in her 40's, wearing an embroidered white dress - like an abbess - with hair plaited in a coronet above long ringlets to her shoulders. It is Margaret Wooler, the head of Roe Head School.

MISS WOOLER

I am so sorry, child, but I cannot possibly put you in the senior class. Your knowledge of history, of

grammar and geography is woefully behind the other girls.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, please, please, Miss Wooler, I shan't bear it. I am one of the oldest girls in the school. I should die of shame.

Miss Wooler looks down at the pathetic little creature. She pulls out a handkerchief and gives it to Charlotte. Charlotte raises her tear-stained face up to Miss Wooler's.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

I promise you, I will apply myself night and day. I know I can catch up.

Miss Wooler looks down at Charlotte and sees behind the tears a fierce determination.

MISS WOOLER

All right. I will let you try for the next few weeks. But if you cannot catch up, I must put you back with the junior classes.

Charlotte suddenly grabs Miss Wooler's hand and kisses it. Miss Wooler's face softens with wonder and compassion for this strange, tormented girl.

The lights shift to an open space. A pretty, vibrant Mary Taylor runs up to Charlotte. Mary is always quite blunt and to the point.

MARY

WHO ARE YOU?

Charlotte turns her face away and barely audibly answers.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte Brontë.

MARY

I'm Mary Taylor. Where are you from?

CHARLOTTE

HAWORTH.

MARY

IS YOUR FAMILY RICH?

CHARLOTTE

(Barely audible)

No.

MARY

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

Charlotte practically turns her back to her, near tears.

CHARLOTTE

FOURTEEN.

MARY

WELL CHARLOTTE BRONTË, COME PLAY WITH ME.

CHARLOTTE

NO, I'D RATHER STAND HERE. I LIKE THE TREES.

MARY

Like the trees? What a strange little toad you are.

Charlotte smiles at Mary. Mary runs and grabs Charlotte's arm.

CHARLOTTE

AND THEN I MET YOU, MY DEAR ABRASIVE, MARY TAYLOR

MARY

Take my arm. You will sit next to me in class.

Mary walks briskly with Charlotte.

MARY

I wish to travel, first this hemisphere where we live; then the other. I am resolved that my life shall be a life: not a black trance like the toad's. Monotony and death are the same to me and I shall not have death until it is my time. *(She stops.)* Tell me, Charlotte, if people knew that the women in the churchyards were alive - those in the coffins I mean - and were waiting for us to dig them up, do you think anyone would do it?

CHARLOTTE

DON'T BE SILLY.

Charlotte and Mary cross to their desks in the classroom.

MARY TAYLOR

ANSWER!

CHARLOTTE

WELL, OF COURSE THEY WOULD.

MARY TAYLOR

No, they would not! They would say ladies did not want to get up - that they had all they wanted, and that men did not like them to get out of their graves.

Mary sits, Charlotte remains standing, bemused by Mary's boldness. Mary tugs at Charlotte's elbow and pulls her down to her seat as Miss Wooler enters. She surveys the class.

Her eyes finally alight on Charlotte whose nose is almost grazing the pages of a book.

MISS WOOLER

MISS BRONTË?

CHARLOTTE

(Her face buried in her book)

Yes, ma'am?

MISS WOOLER

Please face me when you speak.

Charlotte lifts her face to Miss Wooler, but up goes the book with it.

MISS WOOLER (CONT.)

Would you please remove the book from your face?

(Mary titters. Charlotte slowly lowers the book from her face. Mary laughs.) That is enough, Miss Taylor. *(Addressing Charlotte)* Miss Brontë, are you familiar with any of the works of Sheridan or Johnson?

CHARLOTTE

A bit, ma'am. But I am not quite fond of either.

Mary titters. Miss Wooler looks over her spectacles a bit sharply at Charlotte.

MISS WOOLER

AND WHAT DO MEAN BY THAT, MY DEAR.

Charlotte clears her throat and is barely able to look at Miss Wooler, but musters her strength.

CHARLOTTE

I THINK...

MISS WOOLER

STAND WHEN ADDRESSING THE CLASS, MISS BRONTË.

CHARLOTTE

EXCUSE ME, MA'AM.

Charlotte awkwardly gets to her feet.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Sheridan might be clever; yes, Sheridan was clever--scamps often are--but Johnson hadn't a spark of cleverality in him.

MISS WOOLER

"Cleverality?" *(She observes Charlotte sardonically)* Pray tell, what would you recommend we should read?

Mary grins mockingly at Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

(Quite earnestly)

For poetry, Milton, Shakespeare, Tompson, Goldsmith, Pope (although I don't admire him), Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth and Southey.

As Charlotte speaks Mary's grin vanishes.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

For biography, Johnson's Lives of the Poets, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Southey's Life of Nelson, Lockhart's Life of Burns, Moore's Life of Sheridan, Moore's Life of Byron...

Miss Wooler's mouth is ajar. Mary is amazed.

MISS WOOLER

AND YOU HAVE READ THESE BOOKS?

CHARLOTTE

WE ALL HAVE.

MISS WOOLER

"WE?"

CHARLOTTE

MY SISTERS AND MY BROTHER.

The lights fade. In the darkness there is the sound of a girl crying. The lights rise, shining out from a bay window, bathing a weeping girl with evening light. Charlotte appears from the shadows. She notices the girl and approaches her carefully. The girl hears Charlotte approaching. She turns briefly towards her, then quickly away and attempts to stop her tears, but ends up only crying more. She buries her face in her hands.

CHARLOTTE

(Quietly)

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

The girl continues crying. She is Ellen Nussey.

ELLEN

I'M SORRY.

CHARLOTTE

OH, DON'T BE. I CRY ALL THE TIME.

Ellen wipes her eyes and turns to Charlotte..

ELLEN

DO YOU?

CHARLOTTE

(Her eyes averted)

OH, YES, MOST CERTAINLY.

ELLEN

WHY...DO YOU CRY?

CHARLOTTE

(EYES STILL AVERTED, YET SMILING)

FROM HOME-SICKNESS.

At the words "home-sickness" Ellen is sent into a barrage of sobs. Charlotte approaches her cautiously. She pulls a handkerchief from her pocket and extends it awkwardly to Ellen as if extending food to a shy animal. Ellen cautiously takes the handkerchief and buries her face in it as if it were her mother's sleeve and turns away from Charlotte towards the window.

ELLEN

THERE ARE SO MANY BOOKS HERE.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, there are.

ELLEN

I WON'T BE ABLE TO READ ALL OF THEM.

CHARLOTTE

Neither will I, but I don't think we'll have to.

ELLEN

No?

CHARLOTTE

I should like to be able to, but I'm sure we won't.
(*She looks down at her feet.*) I'm Charlotte Brontë.

Ellen wipes her eyes and for the first time is able to see her comforter. She gazes at her. Charlotte turns her face away. Suddenly Ellen curtsies.

ELLEN

I'm Ellen Nussey. I've come late in the half. I shan't be able to catch up.

CHARLOTTE

(*Her eyes still averted*)

Yes, you will, Miss Wooler, she's the head mistress, is very kind and patient. She helped me, and I was very much behind the others.

Finally, Charlotte turns her face to Ellen. Ellen blinks her eyes, her tears abating. In spite of her tears, it is obvious that Ellen Nussey is beautiful. Charlotte gazes at her.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)
(Awestruck)

YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL.

ELLEN TURNS HER FACE FROM CHARLOTTE. THE LIGHTS FADE.

The lights rise on the sitting room at Roe Head. It is spring. Charlotte is sitting at a table her face buried in a French grammar book when Mary Taylor comes running in, half out of breath.

MARY TAYLOR

CHARLOTTE, THERE'S SOMEONE COME TO SEE YOU.

CHARLOTTE

WHOEVER COULD IT BE?

MARY

I don't know, but he's completely filthy.
Shall I let him in?

CHARLOTTE IS BEFUDDLED, THEN...

CHARLOTTE

OF COURSE, MARY.

MARY

Well, I didn't know. I don't know what kind of admirers you have on your side of the Yorkshire hills.

CHARLOTTE

SHOW HIM IN, FOR GOD'S SAKE.

Mary makes a mock curtsy.

MARY

Yes, ma'am. *(She goes to the door and opens it.)*

Come in, sir, Miss Brontë will see you. *(There seems to be no action on the other side of the door.)* Come in.

Charlotte rises in anticipation. Mary pulls a dirt-covered boy into the room. It is none other than Branwell Brontë. He's wearing his cape. He is now wearing spectacles. He stands with a bag. Charlotte gazes at him. Mary stares at him as if he had just flown down from a tree.

MARY

WHO IS HE?

CHARLOTTE

HE'S MY BROTHER.

MARY

THE BROTHER?

CHARLOTTE

YES.

Mary curtsies to Branwell. Branwell looks her up and down in a quick vertical nod of the head, then turns back to Charlotte.

MARY

BRANWELL, I PRESUME.

BRANWELL

(Not taking his eyes from Charlotte's)

YES.

MARY

Nice to meet you, Mr. Brontë.

Branwell glances at Mary anonymously and turns back to Charlotte.

BRANWELL

YES.

Mary grins at Charlotte, then exits. Branwell and Charlotte take each other in, then fly into each other's arms. Branwell's spectacles slip off in the process. Branwell reaches down to search for the fallen spectacles so does Charlotte and they bump their heads in the process. Charlotte and Branwell laugh. Charlotte puts them on Branwell and brushes his dirty red locks back from his face.

CHARLOTTE

BRANWELL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

BRANWELL

I couldn't wait any longer. I walked from Haworth to see you.

CHARLOTTE

FROM HAWORTH? THAT'S MORE THAN TWENTY MILES ONE WAY! EMILY AND ANNE, HOW ARE THEY?

Branwell stops, suddenly serious.

BRANWELL

THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS I'VE COME TO SEE YOU.

CHARLOTTE

(Concerned)

ARE THEY ILL?

BRANWELL

Talli, they're seceding from Angria, from the Confederacy altogether. They've founded their own

nation somewhere in the North Pacific. They call it Gondal.

Charlotte looks relieved.

CHARLOTTE

OH, IS THAT ALL?

Branwell is shocked by Charlotte's complacency. He takes her by her arms and sits her down.

BRANWELL

YOU CAN'T MEAN YOU'VE FORGOTTEN OUR WORLD?

Charlotte looks away

CHARLOTTE

Branni, you don't know how hard I've had to work here and what I've accomplished. I've had little time for anything else.

Branwell pulls opens the bag he's been carrying.

BRANWELL

What's there to learn in a bloody school for girls? I have written more than two volumes. Rogue is now the greatest man in all Angria. I have renamed him, "Alexander Percy, Earl of Northangerland." He is a great drinker, fighter, womanizer, especially married women. He is red-haired and over six feet tall. *(He opens his bag, pulls out a one of his little homemade books and begins reading. As he reads he becomes more and more excited; by the end he is standing.)* "In my opinion this head embodies the most vivid ideas we can conceive of Lucifer, the rebellious archangel. There is such a total absence of human feeling and sympathy; such a cold frozen pride; such a fathomless power of intellect; such a passionless yet perfect beauty. God, if there be a god, Chance, if there is none, has gifted me with an intellect, strong, vigorous powers of reason and thinking. Ha! And it is from thence, from this mind uniting with this body that I am what I am. Not a mere madman, not a mere profligate, not a mere enthusiast or poet or painter or musician or soldier. I am--Alexander Percy. Aye, for by no other name can you call me. If there be a Satan, I am he!"

CHARLOTTE

That's very dramatic. But this Percy is doomed.

BRANWELL

How so?

CHARLOTTE

It is a precarious role. Percy is a demagogue.

BRANWELL

(Grinning)

It is true. He embodies for his followers their private ambitions, avarice and secret desires. He obtains what they covet and can never obtain and thus must worship him for the obtaining.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, but only until and as long as he obtains from the established order, but once obtained, he, himself becomes that very order he has overthrown.

BRANWELL

(Laughs)

Then he shall overthrow himself! That's the problem with your dowdy Duke of Wellington. Society and domesticity are his covert proposals, hidden in the bleached bones of a dead god in a dead desert. All the while the aristocracy continues, not by hereditary title but by those with the will and cunning to create themselves as such. Wellington knows this, but sugar-coats it with idealistic babble. Percy knows there is no where to go outside himself.

CHARLOTTE

THEN YOU HAVE NO BELIEF IN GOD?

BRANWELL

My dear sister, are you deaf and dumb as well as blind? I ceased believing in god the day our sister Maria died.

AWAY WITH ALL SUCH PHANTASIES!--
JUST TRUST YOUR REASON AND YOUR EYES!--
BELIEVE THAT GOD EXISTS WHEN I
WHO, HERE--THIS HOUR--HIS NAME DENY,
SHALL BEAR A HARDER PUNISHMENT
THAN THOSE WHOSE KNEES TO HIM HAVE BENT.
BELIEVE THAT HE CAN RULE ABOVE
WHEN YOU SHALL SEE HIM RULE BELOW;
BELIEVE THAT HE'S THE GOD OF LOVE
WHEN HE SHALL END HIS CHILDREN'S WOE...'

CHARLOTTE

YOU WROTE THAT?

BRANWELL

YES.

CHARLOTTE

(Impressed unto envy)

IT IS HIDEOUS, BRANNI, BUT GOOD, VERY GOOD.

BRANWELL

If God can descend into one's body and inform it with sweetness of grace, then so can the Devil infest that same body with the sin of brilliance. *(He takes a pugilistic pose. Charlotte starts.)* I'm learning to box, Charlotte. John and William Brown say I'm quite good. They say they will be taking me to the Black Bull Inn for a drink after I've had a bout.

Charlotte is concerned.

CHARLOTTE

John Brown, the sexton? He's a rough lad and a known drinker.

Branwell backs away from her. The lights begin to fade on him.

BRANWELL

He's a sportsman, just as I shall be, and a writer to boot. And my painting, my painting has improved. You must come home soon, you're falling behind us.

Darkness swallows him. Charlotte stands alone before the parsonage.

CHARLOTTE

In a little over six months I won no less than three prizes for being the best student in the school. I was awarded the silver medal of achievement. "Emulation", it said. While the rest of them slept, I knelt by the window reading. Mary said, she swore I could see in the dark. I could not. I could barely see at all...in the light. I had been gone eighteen months without a visit home. Ellen and Mary had become like sisters. It was time to return home and bring what I had learned to my real sisters. My sisters...and my brother...who seemed so far away.

The lights rise on the parsonage. It is Spring. Charlotte turns towards the door. A massive bull-mastiff bounds from the door and charges at Charlotte. It is a Bunraku puppet, manipulated by a figure in black. The dog snaps his large sharp fangs at her. Charlotte stifles her scream so as not to incite the animal to greater violence. A barefoot

figure, wearing a velveteen royal purple gown and a large gold inlaid teapot lid on her head comes running out the door. The purple clad figure is Emily.

EMILY

KEEPER DOWN!

The great dog immediately submits to Emily's command. Keeper lies down at Charlotte's feet.

EMILY (CONT.)

ISN'T HE CLEVER?

A creature in a white petticoat and a pewter teapot lid on her head appears in the doorway smiling. She is also shoeless. It is Anne. She runs and stands beside Emily.

ANNE

You are one of us, he knows what it significates. We're preparing for Emmi's coronation as the Queen of Gondal. I'm her Maid of Honor.

CHARLOTTE

What is that you have upon your heads?

ANNE

Teapot lids. Welcome home, Talli.

CHARLOTTE

HIS NAME AGAIN?

EMILY

KEEPER.

Charlotte whispers his name.

CHARLOTTE

KEEPER.

Charlotte pats the great dog's head. Keeper responds by wagging his tail, then licking her hand. He suddenly jumps up and begins smearing Charlotte's face with great and eager licks of his tongue. Charlotte suddenly shouting in a voice which is surprisingly loud for her size.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

KEEPER DOWN!

Keeper immediately lies down at Charlotte's feet. Emily runs at Charlotte screaming.

EMILY

It is my prerogative and mine only to command this animal!

Keeper suddenly begins growling at Charlotte. Charlotte looks steadily into Emily's face. Emily begins shuddering

and Keeper begins growling more intensely at Charlotte. Charlotte looks sharply at Emily.

CHARLOTTE

I shall not let a dog drive me from my house.

Emily watches Charlotte. Charlotte meets her her eyes. There is a standoff.

ANNE

Emily, don't be absurd. *(She touches Emily's hand.)* Em, it's Talli, she's come home.

Emily blinks, her gaze unlocks from Charlotte. Charlotte begins shaking, but keeps her eyes locked on Emily.

EMILY

(Her voice low and hard)

Keeper, you shall now and forever listen to Charlotte's voice.

Keeper immediately stops growling. Emily abruptly turns and walks back into the parsonage. Keeper follows her. Charlotte looks at Anne. Anne smiles. The lights fade to black.

In the night the full moon shines, clouds blowing across its face. The graveyard glows frosted by moonlight. The wind blows.

The lights rise. Charlotte and Anne are lying in bed in the "Children's room" on their backs looking up at the ceiling. The moonlight shines on their faces.

ANNE

And so Emmi and me have this great island, not grand really, only 50 miles in diameter. It is scarcely striking. Low long moor, dark with heath.

CHARLOTTE

IT SOUNDS LIKE THE HAWORTH MOORS.

ANNE

YES.

CHARLOTTE

It's not so beautiful as the our Confederacy in Africa.

ANNE

OH IT IS BEAUTIFUL, LIKE HERE, LIKE HOME.

CHARLOTTE

AND YOU CALL THIS COUNTRY, GONDAL?

ANNE

TOMORROW EMMI AND I WILL SHOW IT TO YOU.

CHARLOTTE

SHOW IT TO ME?

ANNE

YES, IT'S RIGHT OUTSIDE OUR DOOR.

CHARLOTTE

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO EMILY?

ANNE

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

CHARLOTTE

SHE HAS CHANGED.

ANNE

NO, TALLI, SHE HAS NOT.

CHARLOTTE

SHE WAS NEVER LIKE THIS BEFORE.

ANNE

PERHAPS YOU DIDN'T KNOW HER.

CHARLOTTE

ANNE, SHE IS MY SISTER. WHERE IS SHE?

ANNE

OUT ON THE MOORS.

CHARLOTTE

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT?

ANNE

YES, DON'T TELL PAPA.

There is the sound of the parsonage door opening and then closing. Patrick's voice is heard, unseen, below.

PATRICK (OS)

Where have you been? With John Brown, no doubt.

BRANWELL (OS)

YES, PAPA, I WAS HELPING HIM FINISH A FENCE.

PATRICK (OS)

In the middle of the night. I smell drink on you. It is almost midnight and here you are traipsing in drunk.

BRANWELL (OS)

I'M NOT DRUNK, FATHER. THE ALE WAS SPILLED ON ME.

PATRICK (OS)

Spilled down your throat you mean! You didn't have the courtesy to welcome your sister home.

Charlotte lights a candle and looks at Anne anxiously. Anne puts her finger to her mouth as a gesture to remain silent.

BRANWELL (OS)

I MEANT TO, FATHER. I WAS DELAYED.

PATRICK (OS)

DELAYED GETTING DRUNK. WHO GAVE IT TO YOU?

BRANWELL (OS)

(Screeching)

NOBODY GAVE ME ANYTHING!

Anne covers her mouth and laughs. She whispers in Charlotte's ear.

ANNE

He always sounds like a naughty little girl when he screams.

BRANWELL (OS)

I AM NOT DRUNK!

PATRICK (OS)

DON'T YOU LIE TO ME!

BRANWELL (OS)

DON'T CALL ME A LIAR, I'M NOT A LIAR!

PATRICK

GO TO BED!

There is the sound of a door slamming. Their door creaks open and Charlotte gasps, Anne is used to it. Branwell slips into the room. He is obviously tipsy. He tip-toes to Charlotte's side of the bed. Charlotte looks up at him alarmed.

BRANWELL

WELCOME HOME, TALLI, SEE YOU IN THE MORNING.

The lights fade to black.

The lights rise on Charlotte sitting at the table, a stack of books next to her. Emily and Anne look on ardently as Charlotte reads their little essays. Charlotte finally raises her nose from the paper.

CHARLOTTE

I have noted from personal experience that our family, the females especially, seem to be lacking in the rudiments of grammar,

punctuation and spelling. I will start with your essay, Emily.

Charlotte reads without pause for punctuation so that the words stream together.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

"I fed Rainbow Diamond Snowflake Jasper Pheasant this morning."

EMILY

I meant that I fed four creatures, the last one being my pet pheasant named Jasper. That should be quite apparent to you since you know all the animals I mentioned.

CHARLOTTE

YES, BUT WHAT IF YOU WERE WRITING TO A STRANGER?

EMILY

I don't intend writing to strangers.

Anne laughs. Charlotte gives her a severe look and Anne stops laughing.

CHARLOTTE

If you were writing a poem, a story, or a book you would be writing to a stranger.

EMILY

WHEN I WRITE, I WRITE FOR MYSELF AND NOT FOR STRANGERS

Charlotte sighs.

EMILY

LET'S HAVE A PICNIC.

CHARLOTTE

WE ARE TO HAVE DRAWING LESSONS IN THE AFTERNOON.

EMILY

Good, let's have a picnic and draw. *(She gets up and runs for the door.)* Come on, what are you waiting for?

The lights shift. Clouds move across the sky. The sisters are seen crossing the moors. Music. The lights fade, then rise on Charlotte, Anne and Emily. They are sitting in different directions. They are on a hilltop. Their lunch is finished and the remains lie about on a blanket near by. The sky is spotted with brilliant rays of light breaking from the white clouds like glowing staircases. Charlotte gets up and looks at Anne's and Emily's work.

CHARLOTTE

THIS IS VERY FINE WORK. HAVE YOU BEEN DOING MUCH DRAWING?

ANNE

WE HAVE, ESPECIALLY THE CREATURES OF GONDAL.

CHARLOTTE

(GESTURING TO THE LAND ABOUT THEM)

IS THIS NOT GONDAL?

EMILY SHAKES HER HEAD "NO."

CHARLOTTE

THEN WHERE IS GONDAL?

Anne points her finger at an area where fog is rolling in.

ANNE

THERE.

Emily jumps to her feet.

EMILY

LET'S TAKE CHARLOTTE TO IT.

CHARLOTTE IS SUDDENLY RELUCTANT.

CHARLOTTE

BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR THINGS?

EMILY

SCHOOL TIME'S OVER. NOW YOU ARE OUR GUEST.

Emily disappears into the fog. Anne grabs Charlotte's hand.

ANNE

Come along, you don't want to get lost.

Anne begins running after Emily, pulling Charlotte along. They run. Charlotte stops Anne. Anne turns to Charlotte, a little out of breath.

CHARLOTTE

I SIMPLY CAN'T RUN ANY LONGER.

ANNE SMILES AT CHARLOTTE.

ANNE

THEN YOU'LL HAVE TO WALK.

With that Anne disappears into the fog. Charlotte calls after them. There is only her echo.

CHARLOTTE

(TO HERSELF)

IF THIS ISN'T THE MOST SELFISH THING I'VE...

She is interrupted by Emily's voice coming from the fog.

EMILY

COME ON, SILLY, WE'RE WAITING FOR YOU.

Charlotte looks into the fog. It seems to have become thicker. Charlotte mutters to herself and crosses into the fog. She calls out.

CHARLOTTE

ANNE? EMILY?

SILENCE. SHE CROSSES TO SOME ROCKS AHEAD OF HER IN THE FOG, A FEW SMALL TREES BEFORE THEM. CHARLOTTE MAKES HER WAY TO THE BOTTOM OF THE ROCKS.

ANNE

BRAVO!

Charlotte looks up and starts. Anne is sitting on a rock halfway up the climb. She is swinging her legs gaily.

ANNE

THE DOORWAY IS JUST UP OVER THESE ROCKS.

CHARLOTTE

I CAN'T GET UP THERE, YOU KNOW THAT.

ANNE

I'LL HELP YOU.

CHARLOTTE

NO, NO, THE ROCKS WILL BE SLIPPERY WITH ALL THIS FOG.

Anne reaches down for Charlotte's hand. She pulls Charlotte's hand and begins helping her up the rocks.

ANNE

(AS SHE CLIMBS)

Walk each stone one at a time as if were a blinking eye.

Anne walks ahead, helping Charlotte who teeters behind her.

ANNE (CONT.)

ONE BY ONE, AS IF OVER A GIANT'S FACE.

Charlotte looks down at the stones. They seem to run in a long slow twisting line upwards.

ANNE (CONT.)

A FACE WITH EYES ALONG A CENTIPEDE'S BACK.

Charlotte glances up at Anne. Anne is completely transformed. Her usual shy, pious, self-effacing demeanor is gone. She gazes down on Charlotte with large, numinous eyes. A light shines up from the stone. Charlotte gasps. Charlotte looks up at Anne. Anne smiles.

ANNE (CONT.)

WAIT 'TILL IT CLOSSES.

Charlotte looks down. The light goes out. She gingerly steps on the stone. The next stone lights. Charlotte looks about her.

CHARLOTTE

WHERE'S EMILY?

She turns to Anne but Anne is gone.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

NOT AGAIN.

She looks down at the stone. It goes out and the stone after it lights up. Charlotte waits for it to go out and then steps on it and the next one lights. Thus Charlotte makes her way up the side of the hill. There is a sudden sound of wings breaking into flight. Charlotte cries out. She hears derisive laughter. Charlotte scrambles clumsily toward the laughter. She stops and looks up. Standing on the top of yet another stony rise is a maiden with a hood covering her face. The hooded maiden beckons to Charlotte. Charlotte starts to climb the rocks toward the maiden. Charlotte slips just as she gets to the top. She recovers herself and looks up. The Maiden has vanished. Charlotte looks about her. There, standing near a rock, is the hooded damsel. Charlotte approaches the girl cautiously, but this time with a knowing smile on her face.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

EMILY, I KNOW ITS YOU.

Charlotte laughs and rushes at the maiden. The maiden pulls back her hood. Charlotte comes face to face with a witch with white ashes on her face, her eye sockets painted black. Her hair sticks out with long black spikes. She is screaming like a banshee. The Witch points to a rocky promontory. Charlotte looks up and sees the damsel. Not only is her hood removed but frock is half open, revealing her young naked body. Charlotte gasps and climbs to her feet.

CHARLOTTE

ANNE!

The witch grabs Charlotte and throws her to the ground.

THE WITCH

THAT IS ROSABELLA!

Anne runs her fingers through her hair and looks at the sky.

THE WITCH

SHE IS ONE OF THE ESCAPING ROYALISTS.

Charlotte has had enough.

CHARLOTTE

AND PRAY TELL, WHO ARE YOU.

The witch eyes her from her black sockets. She walks around Charlotte in a half circle, examining her.

THE WITCH

I am the princess Augusta Geraldine Almeda, doomed at birth by a bad omen. Together, Rosabella and I are escaping the Anti-Royalists who wish to deny me the rightful throne of Gondal.

The lights rise on the original spot where they were drawing. It is sunset. Charlotte is doubled over laughing as Emily washes her hair in a nearby pond. Charlotte looks at Anne who is has changing into her usual dowdy attire.

CHARLOTTE

You'll never get it clean in that dirty rain water.

Emily, grunting and rubbing clumps of hair together...

EMILY

I'LL GET IT CLEAN ENOUGH.

CHARLOTTE

HOW DID YOU MAKE IT STAND OUT LIKE THAT?

Emily continues to wash her hair as she speaks.

EMILY

WITH MUD.

Charlotte cackles and rolls on her back, her dress already covered with mud.

EMILY (CONT.)

The Celts conquered Rome with their hair in much the same fashion.

Emily turns and grabs the blanket and wraps it about her hair. It makes her look queenly.

EMILY (CONT.)

TALLI?

Charlotte looks at Emily. Emily is grave.

EMILY (CONT.)

WE BROUGHT YOU HERE IN PART TO MAKE A FACT?

CHARLOTTE

A FACT?

EMILY

You and Branwell are never to enter Gondal or read any thing of Gondal unless invited.

Charlotte is taken aback.

CHARLOTTE

YOU DON'T TRUST ME?

EMILY

Gondal belongs to Anne and me. Angria belongs to you and Branwell. It must forever remain so.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I promise never to read anything from Gondal and never to enter it. I don't see why it is so important?

Emily suddenly looks savage.

EMILY

GONDAL IS ALL-IMPORTANT!

CHARLOTTE

I'M SORRY IF I'VE OFFENDED YOU.

ANNE

YOU HAVEN'T. HAS SHE, EMILY?

Emily's face remains hard.

EMILY

JUST PROMISE ME.

CHARLOTTE

I PROMISE.

The lights have shifted to a brilliant sunset. Emily and Anne take Charlotte's hand. Anne puts her head on Charlotte's shoulder. And they gaze out at the sunset.

CHARLOTTE

We are fortunate. We can make out stories while other girls our age work in the mills.

Charlotte looks at her sisters, then looks down at the valley of Haworth.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

WE WOVE A WEB IN CHILDHOOD
A WEB OF SUNNY AIR;
WE DUG A SPRING IN INFANCY
OF WATER PURE AND FAIR...

Anne looks at Charlotte with renewed love and kisses her on the cheek. Emily clutches Charlotte's hand. The lights fade.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

In the darkness there is the sound of wind mixed with rain. From inside the parsonage the silhouette of a woman is seen pacing back and forth past the parlor windows. The moon unbinds from the clouds and shines down grimly on the graveyard. The sound of whispering is heard in the graveyard. The whispering goes silent as if the wind had blown it away, for when the wind dies the whispering is heard again. The woman in silhouette stops at the window and peers out at the graveyard. The light's rise on the woman's face. It is Charlotte, wide-eyed. The lights dim on the graveyard. The whispering goes silent as the lights rise on the interior of the parlor.

CHARLOTTE

What plots the plots we plot, divine and infernal? What agency beyond ourselves moves us to devise them with such resolve? What blots from all consciousness the rue we that will surely feel years after the plot has spawned intrigue, like a web in the glorious sun? For plot I did. It must have been hidden in my bones, for I didn't sense it, not then, for first we had to fail.

The lights fade on Charlotte and then rise again in that same parlor in the past. It is day, clear and bright. The three sisters are posing for a portrait. Anne and Emily are standing close together on one side. There is a space between themselves and Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

WHY CAN'T I STAND BY MY SISTERS?

BRANWELL IS NOW BUSILY WORKING HIS BRUSH OVER THE CANVAS.

BRANWELL

BECAUSE I'M STANDING THERE.

The three sisters stand obediently as Branwell furiously paints.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

If I'm to be accepted into the Royal Academy I need practice.

Branwell is becoming frustrated as he paints. Emily and Charlotte are becoming impatient. Anne endures.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

YOU COULD LOOK A LITTLE MORE CHEERY.

EMILY

I DON'T FEEL 'CHEERY'!

Branwell grabs a cloth and pours turpentine on it and begins furiously rubbing out one of the figures.

CHARLOTTE

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

BRANWELL

(Screeching)

IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

Branwell throws down the cloth and stalks out of the room. The three sisters look at each other and then approach the painting. It is the "Pillar Portrait." because the figure of Branwell has been rubbed out, leaving Anne and Emily on one side divided by what looks like a hazy apparition of

*Branwell and then Charlotte, looking none too pleased.
Emily begins laughing.*

ANNE

DON'T BE CRUEL.

EMILY

CHARLOTTE IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE PUT ON A STONE OR TWO.

*Charlotte stomps out of the room. Anne examines the
portrait more closely. She is troubled.*

ANNE

HE'S RUBBED HIMSELF OUT.

*Anne looks at Emily. Emily stops laughing, a look of
disquiet crosses her face.*

*Royal Academy of Art in London (1836): A large, open frame
comes down representing a great portrait. Branwell enters,
clutching his portfolio to him. Tears begin to run down his
cheeks. Branwell begins to shake. Finally, he can bare it
no longer. He runs from the Museum to...*

*Tom Springs Tavern: the lights rise on a series of
paintings of famous pugilists. Branwell pulls off his coat.
Tom pours him a drink. He is a large tough looking man.*

BRANWELL

ROY GIBSON WAS A FIGHTER. HE WASN'T FAST, BUT HE COULD LAST.

TOM

AND YOU SAW HIM FIGHT?

BRANWELL

THAT I DID, ONLY LAST YEAR.

TOM

YOU TRAVELED DOWN FROM THE NORTH TO SEE IT, DID YOU?

BRANWELL

ASK ME ANY STREET IN THIS BABYLON AND I'LL TELL YOU WHERE IT IS.

TOM

WHERE IS ABLINGDON SQUARE?

Branwell half downs his glass of gin.

BRANWELL

In your mind. There is no such Square. There
is however, Abingdon Square and Herford
Square not two miles from here. And as for
Ablingdon, it is a street lining a string of
whore houses which, no doubt, you have
frequented. And by the telling of your accent
you are from the south side of this great
city. *(He strides over to the pictures of the*

fighters.) I've just been to the Royal Academy, the land of the effete. They know nothing of blood and pain and fortitude. These should be the portraits lining the walls of the Royal Academy.

He gestures to the pictures of the pugilists lining the walls

TOM

WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF BLOOD AND PAIN?

BRANWELL

Plenty. I come from the West Ryding, Yorkshire, my beefy friend. It's a different breed up there, nothing like you anemic city slugs. Give me another drink.

TOM

YOU'VE HAD ENOUGH.

BRANWELL

WHO ARE YOU TO TELL ME WHAT I'VE HAD?

Tom Spring leans over the bar.

TOM

YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A PANSY.

Branwell looks at big Tom Spring. Branwell picks up his glass and throws what's left of his drink into Spring's face. Spring gazes down at Branwell, the gin dripping from his face. Branwell looks up into Spring's face and laughs. Spring reaches out, grabs Branwell's shirt and pulls Branwell to him. Branwell gives Spring a roundhouse and clips him on the chin. Spring's face snaps to the right. Spring slowly turns his face back to Branwell. He gently reaches for Branwell's lapels, draws him over the bar to him, then head-butts Branwell. Branwell flies away from him and lands on the floor. Spring takes off his apron and slowly rounds the bar. He bends down with a fatherly embrace and lifts Branwell to his feet, then looses a punch on Branwell's face that sends the boy against the bar and bends him backward. Branwell surprisingly rebounds and throws a lucky punch into Spring's jaw, snapping his face back. Blood flows out from his mouth. Spring puts his fingers to his mouth. He looks at the blood on his fingers and then smiles at Branwell. Branwell takes a pugilistic pose. Spring laughs and takes a pose. They circle around. Branwell swings at Spring who simply steps back. Branwell is spun around by the momentum of his swing. Spring grabs Branwell by the back of the shirt and flings him like a

child onto the floor. Branwell, despite his diminutive size, rushes the boxer who side-steps him neatly so that Branwell flies across the room and onto the floor. Spring grins down at the groveling boy. Branwell looks up at the large man. He starts to get up, but Spring puts his foot on Branwell's chest and pushes him to the floor. Spring glowers at Branwell. Branwell looks up into Spring's face. The two hold each other's gaze. It dawns on Branwell that a famous boxer is standing over him.

BRANWELL

My god, you're Tom Spring.

Slowly a smile spreads on Spring's face.

TOM

THAT'S RIGHT.

BRANWELL

Whistling Jesus, you could've killed me.

TOM

You've got spirit, boy. (He pulls Branwell to his feet and throws an arm around his shoulder.) Drinks all around.

Branwell grasps Spring around the shoulders and screams.

BRANWELL

IT'S ON ME!

Branwell staggers to a table, sits and begins writing two different letters at the same time. Tom crosses to Branwell with a bottle and sits next to him.

TOM

WHAT ARE YOU DOIN', LAD?

BRANWELL

(Speaking as he writes)

Writing two letters at the same time, one in Greek and one in Latin. My right hand's praising Tom Spring, my left one, recording how I beat the piss out of him.

Tom laughs. As Branwell writes he bends over and picks his glass of gin up with his teeth and drinks. The lights fade and then rise. Branwell and Tom are sitting at a table hunkered over their drinks, both inebriated.

BRANWELL

I've got to tell you the truth, Tommy, this is my first time to London.

TOM

HOW DO YOU KNOW IT SO WELL?

Branwell taps his index finger against his temple.

BRANWELL

I've got a perfect memory. I memorized every street and alley.

TOM

(AMAZED)

IN LONDON?

BRANWELL

IN LONDON.

TOM

WHAT'S A BRIGHT BOY LIKE YOU DOIN' HERE?

BRANWELL

Drinking my father's money away and the poor bastard's going blind. And my sister's; *(He chuckles bitterly)* poor ugly witches, they skimped and saved and mended my shirts. *(He suddenly becomes serious.)* They sent me here to apply to the Royal Academy of Art. I walked into the museum, took one look around and knew where I belonged.

TOM

AND WHERE IS THAT?

Branwell cracks a crooked grin.

BRANWELL

RIGHT HERE WITH YOU.

Spring puts his big hand into Branwell's tousled red hair and brings Branwell's face close to his.

TOM

GO HOME, LAD, THIS IS NO PLACE FOR YOU.

Spring gives Branwell a loving slap on the face. The lights fade to black.

In the darkness there is the sound of wind. The lights rise on Branwell climbing a hill toward the parsonage. He is crying. He is talking to himself, prompting himself for his reentry into the house. His face still showing the battering Tom Spring gave it.

BRANWELL

(To himself)

"I was robbed, I can't be blamed, It wasn't my fault. I was just a Yorkshire boy. Father, you must know this. If you only knew how I handled myself with a champion, you would forgive me. I am no painter, I am an adventurer, a writer."

The lights shift to night and the present. Charlotte is standing in the same place as she was at the top of the act. It is as if no time had passed for her.

CHARLOTTE

What blinds us to conscience and fixes resolve? Resentment and glee. "Branni," "The Lad," "The Man of the house," "Lord Percy," had failed. *(She laughs)* No, he hadn't failed, he hadn't even tried. *(She is not laughing now)* And yet Papa, took him back! And Emily, the "Queen", wild and strong, went back with me to Roe Head as a student and withered in a matter of months and was sent back home. *(Pause, she smiles bitterly)* And I was glad.

Anne speaks from the darkness.

ANNE

CHARLOTTE?

CHARLOTTE STARTS. THE LIGHTS RISE ON ANNE. IT IS NIGHT IN THE PAST.

CHARLOTTE

ANNIE?

ANNE

I've applied for a position as governess. *(Pause)* I've been accepted. I'm leaving on April 8th. It is with the Ingrahms of Blake Hall, at Mirfield.

Charlotte stops and looks at Anne.

CHARLOTTE

WHO?

ANNE

THE INGRAMS.

CHARLOTTE

THE INGRAMS?

ANNE

APRIL 8TH.

CHARLOTTE

YOU'RE NOT SERIOUS?

ANNE

YES.

CHARLOTTE

ANNE, YOU'RE BARELY OLDER THAN YOUR CHARGES.

ANNE

The boy is six; the girl, five. It is time for me to earn my own living. I don't see anything extraordinary in it. I am above eighteen, and quite able to take care of myself, and others, too.

CHARLOTTE

WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN A HOUSE FULL OF STRANGERS WITH NO ONE TO LOOK TO FOR ADVICE? (PAUSE) HAVE YOU TOLD EMILY?

ANNE

NOT YET.

The lights rise on Emily above in the bedroom.

EMILY

Why didn't you tell me first?

Anne runs up stairs. Emily grabs her by the shoulders and shakes her.

EMILY (CONT.)

You can't trust Charlotte. She doesn't know what to do with herself. Do you understand?

Anne clasps Emily.

ANNE

Don't say that. She is Charlotte. (*Emily looks hard at Anne.*) You don't love her?

Emily throws herself on the floor. Anne begins laughing.

ANNE (CONT.)

OH, SHUSH!

EMILY

IT'S NOT FAIR.

ANNE

GET UP, YOU FOOL.

Emily gets up.

ANNE (CONT.)

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING.

EMILY

THEN I WILL DO IT, TOO.

ANNE

WHAT?

EMILY

I will get a position. I will not stay here without you.

ANNE

BUT WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF PAPA?

EMILY

CHARLOTTE!

The lights fade on Anne, but remain up on Emily. Branwell is heard calling her from the darkness.

BRANWELL

Emily!

Emily can hear Branwell calling outside her window. She goes to the window and looks out. The lights rise on Branwell standing in the graveyard.

BRANWELL

EMILY! EMILY! COME DOWN.

EMILY

BRANNI! BRANNI! I'M COMING.

Branwell runs for the moors. Emily flies out of the house, emits an unearthly animal-like screech tearing out after Branwell on the moors.

EMILY

I'm going to catch you, Branwell Brontë. I'm going to kill you and eat you alive!

BRANWELL

OH, I'M SO FRIGHTENED!

Emily runs, catches Branwell and pulls him to the ground. They roll in each other's arms, laughing. Emily pins Branwell down.

EMILY

Now I'm going to tear into your throat and drink all of your blood! *(She bites him on the throat, then spits.)* Yuck, your blood is as thin as water. *(Emily releases Branwell and rolls over, sits up.)* Little wonder, all you do is sit around with your lily-white hands in your lap.

BRANWELL GRABS EMILY AND BEGINS TICKLING HER.

BRANWELL

I HAVE TO DO A LOT OF THINGS.

EMILY
(LAUGHING)

LIKE WHAT!

BRANWELL
I have to look beautiful and be clever and
pious and far-reaching and docile and
entertaining all at the same time.

She scrambles away from Branwell.

EMILY
Oh, you're so very entertaining. (Pause)
Sometimes I positively despise Aunt Branwell.

BRANWELL
OH, HOW UN-CHRISTIAN.

EMILY
GOOD! I'M NOT CHRISTIAN.

BRANWELL
WHAT ARE YOU, A HEATHEN THEN?

EMILY
No. You're the heathen. I'm an animal. (*She
stands and spreads her arms out like wings.*)
I'm a peregrine falcon and I can fly. I can
see every single wonderful place in the

EMILY (CONT.)
world. All I have to do is take off. And
every time I try, Aunt Branwell grabs me by
my tailfeathers and makes me sew.

BRANWELL
LAST ONE TO PENISTONE CRAG IS A TOADSTOOL!
*There is a foot race to the crag. Branwell reaches the
crag before she does. Emily comes up behind him, out of
breath.*

EMILY
THAT WASN'T FAIR!

**BRANWELL CLIMBS TO THE TOP OF THE CRAG, SPREADS HIS ARMS AND SPEAKS
INTO THE DISTANCE.**

BRANWELL
NOTHING'S FAIR! NOT IN THIS WHOLE, WIDE WORLD.
Emily stands beside him.

EMILY
I don't understand how anyone could live in
heaven and stay indoors.

BRANWELL

Yorkshire as heaven. That's a new one for the "Good Book."

EMILY

You can die if you're not in the right place, Branni. You can die same as if you were locked away in a room without air. Jane Grimmerton died when they sent her away to school at Kingswood, died from home-sickness, died yearning for the freedom of the moors. She was only thirteen.

BRANWELL

I don't think she died for yearning for freedom of the moors, but for yearning's sake itself. Sometimes I think I shall die for yearning.

EMILY

(*QUIETLY*)

I ALMOST DIED FROM HOME-SICKNESS.

BRANWELL

YOU'RE EXAGGERATING.

EMILY

I'm not. They sent me back home from Roe Head, weeping and gaunt as an invalid, to laden the house.

BRANWELL

That's not true, you take damn good care of the house.

EMILY

I don't want to be a housekeeper, I want to be queen.

BRANWELL

The queen of what?

EMILY

THE QUEEN OF GONDAL. IF PRINCESS VICTORIA CAN BE QUEEN, SO CAN I. SHE'S A YEAR YOUNGER THAN ME.

BRANWELL

OH, THAT MEANS A LOT. (*HE SITS*) COME, SIT YOUR SOVEREIGN BUCKET NEXT TO ME, YOUR MAJESTY. I MUST TELL YOU SOMETHING.

EMILY

AND I YOU. WHO SHOULD GO FIRST?

BRANWELL

(Making a sweeping gesture)

AFTER YOU.

EMILY

Of course, "after me." Branni, I'm afraid. I couldn't stand it at Roe Head. Empty-headed girls sitting in a classroom chanting dates and facts in a monotone for hours, clacking their teeth like so many skeletons in a box. All the rambling on the moors confined to one little square of ground, while "Miss Wooler" watched to make sure we were good little "misses", all proper and congenial. "Play hour", that's what they called it. And all around us was the wildering land full of sun and sky. Walking on Sundays to church, hand in hand, like tethered pets in a cat show. And outside I

EMILY (CONT.)

could hear the birds sing and imagine the woods of Kirkless Park and the peaty ground of Mirfield. But it wasn't just that. It was the hole that opened around my bed at night after everyone was asleep, looking into the blackness, feeling that unbearable void. That I'd never make it back home. That my soul would displace itself in fear and rage and yearning and abandon me and leave the rest there at Roe Head withered and white and empty. (pause) I don't think I can conform to the "contemporary" standards of female education, Branni.

She looks up at Branwell, her face sincere and innocent. Branwell, touched by Emily's sweet simplicity, strokes her hair.

BRANWELL

I think not, my sweet sister. Who would want to cage a raven in a parlor?

They look at each other.

EMILY

WE'RE BOTH FAILURES.

BRANWELL

YES, BUT I'M THE PRETTIER.

EMILY

PRETTY SORRIER.

THEY LAUGH. EMILY SUDDENLY TURNS TO HIM.

EMILY (CONT.)

I'M TAKING A POSITION, BRANNI.

BRANWELL STARTS. EMILY STANDS.

EMILY (CONT.)

I'm going to try again. I'm leaving home. I'm going to work as a teacher at a school for girls at Law Hill.

Branwell begins laughing. He rises, stands behind her and puts his arms around her waist.

EMILY (CONT.)

WHY ARE YOU LAUGHING?

BRANWELL

I'M LEAVING TOO.

Emily turns around and faces him.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

I'm setting up a portrait studio in Bradford.

EMILY BEGINS LAUGHING.

BRANWELL

Why are you laughing?

EMILY

Charlotte.

BRANWELL

Charlotte?

EMILY

Charlotte has quit her job and is coming home. She'll be the only one out of work.

Branwell begins laughing.

BRANWELL

Talli, oh, dear ever pushy Talli, at home alone at last with nothing to do but housework.

The lights crossfade to night in the present as Charlotte repeats Branwell's words.

CHARLOTTE

"With nothing to do but housework."

The lights bump out.

The lights rise on Branwell's studio in Bradford. It is night. Branwell is writing furiously. A half-empty bottle of gin is near him as well as a half-empty glass. Behind him, in an open frame stands Mrs. Kirby, her face covered by a black mesh mask, surrounded by a bonnet. She is richly dressed and holds a pose as if she were a painting.

BRANWELL

(Speaking as he writes)

"Now, my girls," he said, " let me see your Lady as soon as you can..."

Branwell stops writing and glances at the portrait then goes back to his writing.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

"...Percy strode to the fire, standing with his back toward it on the hearth, and placing his hat on a table..."

BRANWELL GLANCES AT THE PORTRAIT AGAIN. HE SNEERS AND HISSES AT IT, DOWNS THE GLASS OF GIN, REFILLS IT AND CONTINUES WRITING.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

"...the servants crowded together, giggling to note the celebrated man, and he looked a noble fellow enough, with his superb white forehead and head of auburn curls and cheeks so richly haloed..."

Branwell looks at the portrait. He downs the glass. He addresses the painting.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

STOP STARING AT ME, YOU BARREN HUSSY!

He fills the glass again, drinks half of it and continues writing.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

"...though their marked lines of dissipation and the athwart glance of his eyes took somewhat from the gazers' admirations, and left a sensation akin to fear."

Branwell can't stand it any longer. He throws his manuscript about the room.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Everything that is, has all been written. I pray to no god, but to the tincture of opium and alcohol, *(He uncorks a bottle laudanum and salutes the ceiling)* "Laudanum", the spittle of the gods! It was good enough for Coleridge and de Quincy. May it bring me there too.

He takes a generous swig. He pops the cork back in the bottle and puts it back in the drawer. He staggers to the portrait. As the laudanum takes affect both he and the woman in the frame begin to reel. The woman in the painting reaches out to him. He blinks slowly, then his eyes roll

back in his head and he falls to the floor. Mr. Kirby enters with a black mesh mask over his face. He is well-dressed. Mrs. Kirby leaves the frame and joins her husband as he raps his cane on the floor outside Branwell's door. He raps again. Branwell's eyelids snap open. He realizes someone is outside his door.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

WAIT A BLOODY MOMENT!

MR. KIRBY (OS)

IT'S MR. AND MRS. KIRBY.

BRANWELL TRIES TO GET HIS ROOM TOGETHER, BUT ENDS UP ONLY MAKING MORE CHAOS. HE RUNS TO THE DOOR BEFORE THE BELLIGERENT KNOCKING BEGINS AGAIN. HE GAZES AT MRS. KIRBY WITH HATE AND FASCINATION.

MR. KIRBY

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, SIR?

BRANWELL

I'VE BEEN ILL.

MR. KIRBY

ILL? IS THAT WHAT YOU CALL IT? COME, MRS. KIRBY.

BRANWELL

PLEASE WAIT, THE PORTRAIT IS ALMOST COMPLETED.

BRANWELL GRABS THE FRAME AND RUNS AFTER THEM, HOLDING IT OVER HIS HEAD TO SHOW WHAT HE HAS DONE.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

PLEASE, COME BACK!

Branwell stands in the street in his dirty, disheveled clothes, the portrait still over his head. The lights fade. The lights cross-fade to Mrs. Inghram standing before Anne. Mrs. Inghram is finely dressed and wears a black mesh mask over her face with a bonnet.

MRS. INGRAM

It is our belief that a child's character can only be developed to its fullest if it is not restricted. Therefore, you are not empowered

MRS. INGRAM

to inflict any punishment. However, I do not want you running to me every time there is a problem. If you gain their respect, they will ultimately behave. Now, let me introduce you to Joshua and Mary. Joshua? Mary?

Joshua and Mary come on stage as Bunraku puppets. Joshua is large fat child with little eyes. Mary is also large with

carefully groomed curls and big red cheeks. The puppeteers make Joshua and Mary scream and laugh like little monsters.

MRS. INGRAM (CONT.)

JOSHUA? JOSHUA?

Joshua finally notices that his mother is saying his name. He grabs his sister by the hair and both look up mutely at their mother.

MRS. INGRAM (CONT.)

JOSHUA, MARY, MEET YOUR NEW GOVERNESS, ANNE BRONTË.

Joshua and Mary give her a dull look and immediately resume their antics. Mrs. Inghram walks to Anne unperturbed.

MRS. INGRAM (CONT.)

WELCOME TO BLAKE HALL.

Anne's face is filled with dismay as the lights fade to black.

The lights rise on the parlor. There is a knocking at the door. Charlotte is scrubbing the floor in the parlor. She gets up, goes to the mirror and adjusts her hair. Again there is a knocking. She goes to the door and opens it and standing there, hat in hand, is William Weightman, (aged 25) charming, cheerful, and handsome. He is an almost pretty man with curly black hair and long sideburns. Charlotte is taken aback by the handsome young man.

WEIGHTMAN

Good evening, I'm the new curate William Weightman.

CHARLOTTE STANDS THERE, NOT MOVING, GAZING AT THE BEAUTIFUL CURATE.

CHARLOTTE

NEW CURATE?

WEIGHTMAN

Entirely, I've barely graduated from the University. I've come to help you're father.

CHARLOTTE

My father?

WEIGHTMAN

Please excuse me, I don't mean to seem presumptuous, but I understand he has three daughters. You are one of them, I presume.

CHARLOTTE

Your presumption is correct. I am Charlotte Brontë.

He stands and smiles at Charlotte. Charlotte's eyes meet his and then dart away. She still has not let him enter. Weightman, still smiling, turns and looks out into the graveyard.

WEIGHTMAN (CONT.)

*A beautiful spring evening, don't you think?
A bit on the nippy side, however.*

Charlotte, realizing that she has all but blocked his way into the house, opens the door and steps aside.

CHARLOTTE

DO COME IN.

Weightman raises his eyebrows as if the idea was quite novel.

WEIGHTMAN

OH, THANK YOU. I'VE COME TO HELP YOUR FATHER.

LAW HILL SCHOOL, A CLASSROOM. THE LIGHTS RISE ON EMILY. SHE IS PACING THE ROOM. SHE IS READING FROM A BOOK. SUDDENLY EMILY STOPS READING. SHE PUTS HER FACE IN THE BOOK. EMILY INHALES THE SMELL OF THE BOOK.

EMILY

Don't you love the smell of a book? (There is tittering off stage from the girls in the class. Emily draws the book away from her face.) Some people are so clever. It is humbling. (She crosses to a window and, as she does, light begins streaming through it.

EMILY (CONT.)

She is bathed with light. She looks out of the window.) Few can write poems. Some us can read them and, in the cast of their light, see the world afresh. To illuminate something long past and make it as real as the veriest present...

Tears begin to fall from Emily's eyes and down her face. There is nervous laughter off stage. Emily doesn't notice it.

EMILY (CONT.)

...a picnic, a taste of an orange, the sound of the wind in the trees..(The girls begin to laugh outright.)...a sunny day like this one...captured from the dead and passed onto the living. This is the power of a poem...

Finally, Emily notices the girls laughter. She steps from the light of the window into the diffuse glow of the

classroom. She turns and addresses the audience observing them as if they were zoo animals. Gradually the laughter goes silent.

EMILY (CONT.)

You are apes and the daughters of apes. I am more devoted to the house dog than I am to any of you.

EMILY CROSSES TO HER DESK. THERE IS A FOLDED PIECE OF PAPER STICKING OUT OF A BOOK. SHE UNFOLDS THE NOTE AND READS IT.

EMILY

"Your eyes are lovely. Meet me. Queensbury Moor, Afternoon, Saturday"

Emily looks up from the note, bewildered as the lights fade. There is the sound of rain.

The sound of rain continues. In the dark Joshua and Mary are dashing around, laughing wildly. Anne stands helplessly watching them.

JOSHUA

WE INTEND TO BE NAUGHTY! DON'T WE, MARY?

He turns to his sister.

MARY

Yes, we do, indeed.

Mary runs over to Anne's work bag and begins kicking it.

ANNE

MARY, LEAVE MY BAG ALONE.

JOSHUA

KICK IT, MARY!

Mary runs to the bag.

JOSHUA (CONT.)

MARY, KICK IT OUT IN THE WATER!

Mary kicks Anne's bag into the pool of water. Mrs. Inghram enters.

MRS. INGHAM

Miss Brontë! What, in the devil's name, can you be thinking about?

ANNE

I CAN'T GET THEM IN, MA'AM.

MRS. INGHAM

BUT I INSIST UPON THEIR BEING GOT IN!

ANNE

Then, ma'am, you must call them yourself, for they won't listen to me.

Mr. Inghram calls to the two children who are jumping up and down in the rain.

MRS. INGHAM

(Shouting at the top of her voice)

Come in with you, you filthy brats; or I'll horse-whip you every one!

The children instantly obey.

MARY

SORRY, MISS BRONTË.

WITH THAT THEY DISAPPEAR INTO THE HOUSE. MRS. INGHAM HUFFS.

MRS. INGHAM

THERE, YOU SEE! THEY COME AT THE FIRST WORD.

Mrs. Inghram turns on Anne and she and the children exit, leaving Anne standing in the rain. As the lights fade the sound of the rain segues into the sounds of birds.

The lights rise on a hilltop. It is afternoon. Emily steps out of the trees and looks cautiously about her. A girl in a bonnet and a white mesh mask steps out of the shadows. Emily gazes at her for a long time, then touches the girl's face.

EMILY

I am so lonely.

GIRL

ARE YOU, MISS BRONTË? I'M SO SORRY.

EMILY

ARE YOU REALLY?

The girl touches Emily's hand which has remained on her face.

GIRL

OH, YES.

Emily falters, then touches the girl's face with her other hand, the words escape her before she has a chance to stop them...

EMILY

I LOVE YOU.

The girl abruptly withdraws from Emily. She laughs.

GIRL

(Mocking and shocked)

LOVE ME? WHY MISS BRONTË, THAT IS UNNATURAL.

The girl turns and disappears into the trees. Emily turns out, her face blanked with shock. There is the sound of rain. The lights crossfade to the parlor.

Weightman sits in an academic gown, beside him is a pile of carefully placed ecclesiastical books. Charlotte sits across from him, drawing his portrait.

WEIGHTMAN

This particular medallion specifies that I have an M.A. And this one...

CHARLOTTE (OS)

(Interrupting him)

SIT STILL.

WEIGHTMAN

(IGNORING HER, CONTINUES WITH MOCK POMPOSITIVITY)

...SIGNIFIES THAT I READ IN THE CLASSICS.

The door opens. Anne Brontë stands in the parlor doorway.

CHARLOTTE

ANNE!

Charlotte throws her arms around Anne.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

YOUR LETTER SAID YOU WERE ARRIVING TOMORROW.

ANNE

I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAVE A DAY EARLIER SO I TOOK IT.

Charlotte looks into Anne's face. A look of concern crosses it. Anne's eyes have dark circles around them.

CHARLOTTE

YOU LOOK VERY TIRED, MY LOVE.

Weightman clears his throat. Charlotte turns to Weightman.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

ANNE, THIS IS WILLIAM WEIGHTMAN, OUR NEW CURATE.

WEIGHTMAN RISES TO GREET ANNE AND AS HE DOES SOME OF THE BOOKS ON HIS LAP FALL TO THE FLOOR.

WEIGHTMAN

ENCHANTÉ, MADEMOISELLE.

Charlotte laughs. Anne doesn't. She is barely aware of him as she offers him her hand.

CHARLOTTE

THIS IS MY LITTLE SISTER, ANNE. *(WEIGHTMAN SMILES AND GENTLY SHAKES ANNE'S HAND AND RELEASES IT.)* I'M AFRAID WE MUST CEASE OUR SESSION FOR TODAY.

WEIGHTMAN

OF COURSE.

Weightman gives Anne a lingering look. Anne, doesn't notice it. The lights crossfade to Law Hill School.

Emily is carrying her bag of belongs. She turns to exit when the girl from Queensbury moor enters. Emily turns away from her.

GIRL

MISS BRONTË...I NEVER WANTED THIS TO HAPPEN.

EMILY

(STILL TURNED AWAY.)

You had nothing to do with it. I just couldn't adjust.

Emily starts to leave.

GIRL

MISS BRONTË?

Emily stops and looks down. The girl catches Emily by the hand.

GIRL

I WAS PUT UP TO IT.

EMILY

I KNOW.

Emily starts to leave. The girl doesn't release Emily's hand.

GIRL

I've been reading poems. They're like you said they were.

The girl releases Emily's hand and Emily heads for the door.

GIRL

MISS BRONTË?

Emily stops at the doorway. The girl's eyes are filled with admiration. Emily, with her back turned does not see the girl's face.

GIRL

MY NAME IS EMMA.

Emily, with her back still turned away.

EMILY

I KNOW.

The lights fade.

The lights rise on the moors. A stone fence builder is setting a stone. Emily appears out of the fog, rejuvenated. The fencer maker stops his work and looks at her.

FENCE MAKER

HAVE 'BIN OUT ALL NIGHT, LITTLE BAIRN?

EMILY

YES.

FENCE MAKER

AND WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

EMILY

TO THE LAND.

FENCE MAKER

HAVE YOU SEEN THE FAIRIES?

EMILY

I HAVE .

The Fence Maker goes back to his work.

FENCE MAKER

GOD BLESS YOU THEN.

EMILY

GOD BLESS YOU.

The lights fade to black.

The lights rise on the parlor.

CHARLOTTE

I did not plan it. I did not make it. It was made of itself. And it was made for me and it was because of you, Mary Taylor, that the plot rose out of my bones. You wrote me from Brussels of the pictures and cathedrals you had seen; pictures most exquisite. I hardly know what swelled to my throat as I read your letters, such a strong wish for wings, wings as only wealth can furnish, such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn. Something internal seemed to expand boldly for a minute. I was tantalized with the consciousness of faculties unexercised. Then all collapsed and I despaired. I did not have your wealth, but I had a plan. Anne had

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

gotten a new position...*(She laughs)*...not only for herself, but for Branwell as well.

The lights shift to the past, day (1841). Charlotte is standing in the same place. Emily and Anne are sitting at

the parlor table, looking expectantly at Charlotte. Charlotte's eyes are shining. She turns to her sisters.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Aunt Branwell has offered to give us £150's to set up a school. A school of our own. We'd work for ourselves.

Emily and Anne look at each other, then at Charlotte.

ANNE

Where would this school be?

CHARLOTTE

Anywhere. It could be here. (*Emily's eyes brighten.*) But there's a problem.

EMILY

WHAT PROBLEM?

CHARLOTTE

There are so many schools in England, competition is so great we need something that will make our school stand out.

EMILY

WHAT WOULD THAT BE?

CHARLOTTE

French, perhaps German and a little Italian, and music. Emily, you're a natural musician. With a little study, you would become quite proficient.

EMILY

Where would we learn these things?

CHARLOTTE

IN BRUSSELS.

Anne's eyes brighten.

ANNE

On the Continent?

CHARLOTTE

YES.

Anne looks at Emily.

EMILY

I DON'T LIKE THE CONTINENT.

ANNE

If we were all there, it would be just like home. *(To Charlotte)* I think it's exciting, Talli.

Charlotte smiles uncomfortably at Anne.

CHARLOTTE

THERE'S A PROBLEM.

EMILY

(Exasperated)

WHAT?

CHARLOTTE

There's only enough money for two. *(Crosses to Anne, suddenly enthusiastic.)* Anne, you been so tenacious and single focused. I doubt that I could have acquired a position so quickly and at such a good fee. Not only for yourself, but for Branwell as well.

Emily rises from her chair.

EMILY

I don't want to go without Anne.

Anne glances at Emily then down at her hands.

ANNE

Charlotte's right. Now that I am situated with the Robinson family, it would be impractical for me to give up the position.

CHARLOTTE

Emily, it will only be for a few months. In the end, Anne will benefit from our knowledge.

EMILY

I don't want to go without Anne!

CHARLOTTE

(Shouting)

You must!

Emily turns her back to Charlotte. Charlotte changes her tactic, she crosses to Emily and pleads with her.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Aunt Branwell won't let me go alone. Emily, if you don't do this we'll always have to work for other people. We'll always be slaves.

ANNE

(Quietly)

Charlotte's right, Em.

Anne crosses to Emily and looks into her eyes and smiles mysteriously.

ANNE (CONT.)

(Whispering to Emily)

If we have our own school, we'll be together,
near Gondal.

The lights crossfade to the moors. Anne exits the parsonage and crosses to the area of the opening grave. It is closed now. The lights shift to the moors as Anne lies down and goes to sleep. The grave opens and fog rolls out. Little Maria emerges from the grave and begins pulling Anne into it. Anne screams and struggles. Weightman is heard calling off stage.

WEIGHTMAN(O.S.)

(CALLING SOFTLY)

ANNE? ANNE?

Little Maria releases Anne and disappears into the grave.

WEIGHTMAN(O.S.)

(Calling softly)

ANNE? ANNE?

The grave closes. Weightman enters. He has been grouse hunting and is holding a rifle. Anne snaps awake.

WEIGHTMAN

I'm sorry if I startled you. I've been
hunting. You seemed to be having a bad dream.

Anne is disoriented.

ANNE

MR. WEIGHTMAN?

WEIGHTMAN

WE'RE YOU HAVING A BAD DREAM?

Anne sits up and composes herself as best she can.

ANNE

I WAS NAPPING.

Weightman sits next to her.

WEIGHTMAN

I HEAR YOU AND BRANWELL ARE LEAVING SOON.

ANNE

YES.

WEIGHTMAN

I will be losing a good hunting partner.
Charlotte and Emily, going to the
continent... I shall be quite alone.

ANNE

I DON'T THINK SO. EVERYONE LIKES YOU.

WEIGHTMAN

AND YOU, DO YOU LIKE ME?

Anne looks away.

ANNE

WHY, MR. WEIGHTMAN, WHAT A QUESTION.

WEIGHTMAN GENTLY TOUCHES HER FACE.

WEIGHTMAN

DO YOU? (*ANNE TURNS TOWARDS HIM AND LOOKS INTO HIS EYES*) YOUR
EYES ARE SO LOVELY.

Anne turns away.

ANNE

DON'T BE FOOLISH, I'M QUITE PLAIN.

Weightman turns Anne's face to his and smiles at her.

WEIGHTMAN

Don't you be foolish. You are lovely. (*Anne
laughs softly and tries to turn away.
Weightman doesn't let her.*) Say it. Say, "I'm
lovely."

ANNE

You are so silly. (*She rises.*) You know we
have a nickname for you.

WEIGHTMAN

WHO?

ANNE

MY SISTERS AND I.

WEIGHTMAN

ALL RIGHT, LET'S HAVE IT. WHAT IS IT?

ANNE

DO YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW?

Weightman stands.

WEIGHTMAN

OF COURSE I WANT TO KNOW.

ANNE

YOU WON'T TAKE OFFENCE?

WEIGHTMAN

I'M SURE I WILL.

ANNE

THEN, I WON'T TELL IT TO YOU.

WEIGHTMAN

I BELONGS TO ME.

ANNE

WHAT?

WEIGHTMAN

MY NICKNAME. COME ON, LET'S HAVE IT.

ANNE

CELIA AMELIA.

WEIGHTMAN

CELIA AMELIA? THAT'S A GIRL'S NAME.

Anne laughs.

ANNE

YES.

WEIGHTMAN

WHY A GIRL'S NAME?

ANNE

(STILL TURNED AWAY)

BECAUSE...YOU'RE SO PRETTY.

Weightman laughs and crosses behind Anne.

WEIGHTMAN

YOU THINK I'M PRETTY?

ANNE

You're a terrible flirt, Mr. Weightman. Half the girls in the parish are in love with you. And no, I'm not in love with you, Mr. Weightman. But you are pretty, almost too pretty.

Weightman puts his hands on Anne's shoulders.

WEIGHTMAN

I WILL MISS YOU.

ANNE

YOU'VE ONLY JUST MET ME.

WEIGHTMAN

AND EVEN THAT IS ENOUGH FOR ME TO MISS YOU.

ANNE

I WILL BE BACK IN THE AUTUMN.

WEIGHTMAN

I WILL BE WAITING FOR YOU.

Anne turns around and looks at him, suddenly serious.

ANNE

MR. WEIGHTMAN, YOU SAY SUCH WORDS SO LIGHTLY.

WEIGHTMAN

DO YOU THINK SO?

ANNE

Yes. Beware the hearts you break, sir. They are alive, they beat. We are here for such a brief time. We should bear carefully what we say, and to whom we say it. I am not lovely, but you are. And that, that is the truth.

WEIGHTMAN

Now you are taking liberties, madam. I say, you are lovely and I want you to know I mean it. *(He gently kisses Anne on the forehead)*
May I walk you back?

Anne looks up into Weighman's eyes, studying him, then turns and takes his arm as the lights fade.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

The lights rise on Aunt Branwell's corpse. It lies on the slab stone buried in an old fashioned silk dress and bonnet with false auburn curls. A solicitor's voice is heard off stage, reading Aunt Branwell's will. Above, Emily stands in the window and looks out into the night. She is transfixed. She is clasping a notebook to her breast.

SOLICITOR (OS)

I divide my estate of £'s 1200 equally between my four nieces, Anne, Emily, and Charlotte Brontë and Eliza Kingstone. To Branwell Brontë I leave my japanned dressing box.

Branwell exits the house in a huff and enters the graveyard. He gazes down at Aunt Branwell's corpse with bitter disappointment. As Emily speaks Anne, Charlotte, and Patrick exit the house and stand looking down at Aunt Branwell's corpse. The grave slides open and Aunt Branwell rises and descends into the grave as Emily speaks.

EMILY

All through the night, your glorious eyes
Were gazing down in mine,
And with a full heart's thankful sighs
I blessed that watch divine!

Branwell and Anne exit.

EMILY (CONT.)

I was at peace--and drank your beams
As they were life to me
And revelled in my changeful dreams
Like petrel on the sea--

Patrick sits on the slab stone. Charlotte begins wrapping a long white scarf around his neck while Emily continues to speak.

EMILY (CONT.)

Thought followed thought--star followed star
Through boundless regions on,
While one sweet influence, near an far,
Thrilled through and proved us one.

The birds begin to sing in the dark. Dawn begins to break.

EMILY (CONT.)

Blood-red he rose, and arrow-straight
His fierce beams struck my brow:
The soul of Nature sprang elate,
But mine sank sad and low!

Patrick enters the parsonage. Charlotte remains in the graveyard.

EMILY (CONT.)

My lids closed down--yet through their veil
I saw him blazing still;
And steep in gold the misty dale,
And flash upon the hill--

The lights fade on Emily.

CHARLOTTE

Emily and I returned to bury our Aunt Branwell.
Our adventure in Brussels was over. Emily was
home, the only place she could live in the entire
world. To know that, Mary, to know where your
home is.

Charlotte crosses to the parsonage. As she does the lights rise on the parlor. She places a teapot and cups on a nearby table. Just then Emily enters. She puts her notebook on the table and crosses to the teapot and pours herself a cup of tea. Charlotte turns and looks at Emily's notebook. Emily turns and notices Charlotte looking at her notebook. She crosses to the table, picks the notebook up and clasps it to her breast. Charlotte turns away.

CHARLOTTE

I couldn't sleep last night. It's the third night going. I've had this terrible tooth-ache.

Emily exits the parlor and climbs the stairs even as Charlotte speaks.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

I really don't understand how you can work all day and sleep so...

Charlotte turns to Emily. Emily is gone. Charlotte gazes at the vacant window where Emily had been standing. The lights fade to night in the present. There is the sound of long case clock ticking. The lights rise on Patrick's study. Patrick gazes out the window, half-blind as he sits at his table, a breakfast tray on the table before him.

CHARLOTTE

I didn't know it then, but I was "home"
...forever.

Crossfade to Emily's room. She is just finishing her writing. She looks out and recites her verse.

EMILY

O, Stars and Dreams and Gentle Night--
O, Night and Stars, return!
And hide me from the hostile light
That does not warm, but burn---

Anne enters the graveyard carrying two candles. She crosses to the slab stone and places the candles at the end of it. The lights fade on Emily as Anne stretches herself full length on the grave. Charlotte exits the parsonage and stands by the door looking out at Anne. She crosses to the grave, shrinking back into the shadows.

ANNE

Charlotte?

Charlotte steps out of the shadows.

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing, Anni?

Anne reads from the slabstone.

ANNE

"This Monument was erected by the Inhabitants of
Haworth in Memory of the Late William Weightman--
who died September 6th, 1842, aged 26 yrs."
(Pause) Cholera?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

ANNE

From visiting the laborers.

CHARLOTTE

Come to bed.

Anne doesn't move.

ANNE

Did you love him?

Charlotte starts at Anne's uncharacteristic boldness.

CHARLOTTE

For all his goodness, he was a terrible flirt.

Anne runs her fingers over the slab stone.

ANNE

Did that anger you? *(She rises)* He was a good man. A plaque from the town. *(She picks up the candles and crosses to Charlotte. She gives one of the candles to Charlotte and looks back at the slab-stone.)* I don't want to be buried in here.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean?

She blows Charlotte's candle out.

ANNE

It's too crowded.

Anne kisses Charlotte on the forehead, then blows her candle out.

Patrick and Branwell can be heard laughing in the darkness. It is a bit forced. The lights rise on Patrick's study. Patrick and Branwell are sitting across from each other, almost knee to knee.

PATRICK

You see? You see how Latin has served you?
(Recovering himself) You say he's not a bright pupil?

BRANWELL

(LAUGHING)

"Filmy" might be a better description.

PATRICK

(Laughing, then recovering himself)
You mustn't belittle people, Branwell. He's your student and in your guidance. *(He gazes fondly in Branwell's direction.)* You've done well. Your

employers like you, your student worships you.
You're taking good care of your sister?

BRANWELL

Anne needs little protection.

PATRICK

It seems like an admirable situation. (*He averts his face, near tears.*) I hold myself responsible for what's happened in the past. I didn't have the resources to send you to school. I've kept you home out of the company of men. You've had to learn to struggle on your own without them.

BRANWELL

You are more of a man than I have met yet, and a great classical scholar to boot. Not a bad grouse shooter either.

Patrick, still unable to look at his son, reaches out and searches for Branwell's hand. Branwell puts his own hand under Patrick's so that Patrick can find it. Patrick puts his hand over Branwell's hand.

PATRICK

This position is a beginning.

BRANWELL

I shall not disappoint you, father, I promise you. I think soon I will have found a way to provide for my sisters.

PATRICK

(*STANDS*)

You have a plan?

BRANWELL

Yes, father.

PATRICK

What is it?

BRANWELL

I'd rather not say, Father, but you may depend upon it.

PATRICK

It involves Thorp Green?

BRANWELL

It does indeed.

Patrick crosses the short distance between them. He knocks into Branwell's knees. He fumbles his fingers through Branwell's hair.

PATRICK

Oh, Branwell, you don't know what hope this brings to my heart. I wish your mother could see you.

Unable to endure this fondling any longer, Branwell stands, but finds himself face to face with his father. He turns from his father and crosses to the window.

BRANWELL

So how about you? Have you been working on any new military inventions? Any new and exciting bombs?

PATRICK

Do you really want to know?

BRANWELL

Why yes, father, my employer, Mr. Robinson, is a sickly man, near death, I fear. He cuts a poor figure next to you.

PATRICK

(Cinching up)

I would have been a soldier had I not become a clergyman. *(He turns in Branwell's direction.)* My eyes have become so rotten that I have had to use this. *(He picks up a huge magnifying glass)* I have a few plans. Would you like to see them?

BRANWELL

(GENUINELY ENTHUSED)

Yes, father.

PATRICK

Reach into that desk over there. There are several large sheets of paper. Draw them out.

Branwell crosses to the desk as the lights crossfade to Charlotte's bedroom. Emily is standing over the sleeping Anne. Emily kisses Anne's face. Anne stirs. Emily strokes Anne's hair. Anne opens her eyes and cries out..

EMILY

Anni, it's all right. It's me, Emily.

Anne throws her arms around Emily.

ANNE

Em!

She begins crying.

EMILY

What's the matter, Anni?

SHE KISSES EMILY'S EYELIDS THEN HOLDS HER CLOSE.

ANNE

I've missed you, Em, I've missed you!

EMILY

I've missed you, my darling, terribly, but not quite so much as you've missed me. Whatever is the matter?

Anne looks at Emily as if she wanted to blurt out some dark truth, then at the last moment looks down.

ANNE

I've missed you.

EMILY

(LIFTING ANNE'S FACE TO HERS)

Are you sure that's all?

ANNE

(HER PROBLEMS MOMENTARILY ERASED BY EMILY'S EYES)

That's all.

They put their arms around each other.

EMILY

Is it true that you might stay?

ANNE

Yes.

EMILY

Oh, Anni.

They lie down together as the lights crossfade to the parlor. Charlotte is sitting at the table reading a letter she has written to Monsieur.

CHARLOTTE

Monsieur-I am well aware that it is not my turn to write to you, but as Mrs. Wheelwright is going to Brussels and is kind enough to take charge of a letter-it seems to me that I ought not to neglect so favorable an opportunity of writing to you.

Charlotte crosses to the mirror. She fusses with her hair. She tilts her head slightly, tries to smile, but fails. She isn't pleased by what she sees. Suddenly she rushes back to the table, takes up pen and hastily begins writing again. This time her delivery is impassioned.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

I hope I am not appearing to beg you to write to me--I wish it--yes, I wish it greatly. Enough; after all, do as you wish, Monsieur. Once more good-bye. It hurts to say good-bye even in a letter. I know I will see you again one day - I know I will.

The birds segue into distant wind as the lights crossfade to Branwell standing in the shadows on the side of the parsonage. Anne enters the graveyard. She doesn't see Branwell as she crosses to the slab stone. Suddenly he rushes at her. He throws one arm around her waist, the other around her throat. He lifts her up in the air.

BRANWELL

Startle! *(He whispers in Anne's ear, imitating her heart beat.)* Bum-bum bum-bum bum-bum. Your heart is beating so fast, Anni, my love. I can feel your very ghost throbbing beneath my fingers.

Anne struggles to get loose.

ANNE

Let me go, Branwell.

BRANWELL

Why, I feel so close to you. Don't you feel close to me?

Anne struggles frantically. He releases her. Anne runs from him a short distance and falls to the ground. He swaggers toward her.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

So your going to stay back with your sisters?

ANNE

I should have told you first.

BRANWELL

Should you have?

ANNE

It's just that I've been unable to reach you.

He extends his arms out to her in a strange robotic way.

BRANWELL

Reach me, reach me then.

He walks toward her with his arms outstretched.

ANNE
(AFRAID)

Branwell, stop.

He stops, his arms still outstretched to her.

BRANWELL
(SARCASTICALLY)

Do we need love, my little mitten?

He walks toward her, his arms still outstretched.

ANNE

Branni, stop!

BRANWELL
(CAUSTICALLY)

"Branni," "Branni," isn't that sweet, my little childhood name. "Branni," Emmi," "Talli," and *(Drawing her name out)* "Anni." Talk to me, Anni, tell Branni what you want from him. Should he stay back with you and play "house?" Yes, I'll play the "boy" and you can play the "girls." What should we play, Anni? *(His voice growing angry.)* You want to "play" don't you, you want to "play?"

ANNE

Stop it!

Branwell lies on the slab stone and imitates a corpse.

BRANWELL
(IN A PLAYFUL VOICE)

Look at me? What do I look like? *(Anne doesn't look at him. He stops playing the corpse)* Come on, little sister, what do I look like? *(He plays the corpse. Anne still doesn't look at him. He stops playing the corpse)* I'm just teasing you. I understand. It's fine with me. Do what you like. *(He plays the corpse. She doesn't look. He stops playing the corpse)* Look at me, come on. *(Anne slowly lifts her face from her hands.)* You can't help it, can you, you've got to look. *(He plays the corpse. Anne slowly turns around toward him. He keeps the corpse look and speaks in a corpsey, dead way.)* What do I look like? *(Anne can't help it, she looks at him He suddenly shouts)* A Brontë!

He jumps from his place.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

(GLEEFULLY)

Startle! *(He laughs)* I got you again. *(Branwell runs about the graveyard laughing and making ghostly sounds.)* A Brontë! A Brontë! A Brontë!

He disappears. She looks frantically about for him, but can't see him. He creeps around her and slips into the pool of water. Anne crosses to the pool and peers down at it. Suddenly he flies out of the water and screams...

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Startle!! *(He walks toward her. She backs away.)* I'm wonderful and don't you forget it. I may not have given you much cause to trust me but you must not cross me. You must not play with my life. *(He shakes her)* Do you understand? You must not tell me what to do, whether to stay or leave, where to work or where to abide. *(He releases her. Anne can't take her eyes from him)* And you must not, I repeat, you must not connive behind my back.

ANNE

I have not...connived. I've said nothing.

BRANWELL

(GLARING AT HER)

That's because there is nothing to say.

ANNE

Branwell you can't go back there.

BRANWELL

I have plans for this household. You don't understand them now, but when I have brought them to fruition you will thank me; all of you will thank me. *(He crosses to the Parsonage)* Now I will go in the morning without you. It's good that you don't come with me. I'll fair better alone. I shall leave in the morning. *(He stops at the door and turns back to her. He calls to her in a whisper across the graveyard)* You should have told me first.

He enters the Parsonage. Anne looks out into the graveyard, her eyes wide. The lights crossfade to the outside of the parsonage.

A shadowy figure appears in the doorway. He is lit from behind so his shadow stretches out into the graveyard. It

is Patrick. He pulls a paper from his vest and addresses the silent graveyard as if they were his congregation.

PATRICK

I will not impinge long upon your rest, my sleeping children. We've spent many years together and I fear I've not brought much good news to you. But I have good news for you tonight. We're getting new bells, six new bells. I just receive affirmation from the Board of Trustees. Can you believe it? *(He laughs in delight and wags the paper in the air)* May they stand until Judgment Day and call you forth, call you all to bear witness to the shining glory of our Lord! *(He chuckles and pats a gravestone.)* What do you think, Samuel? I know you don't like to waste money on frivolous things. *(To a nearby gravestone)* Does he, Hanna? You should know, *(He chuckles)* you watched him drink his wages away. *(Addressing another grave.)* Not to worry, Timothy, Mildred is almost with you. *(He gets to his knees with difficulty. He brushes the dirt away from a tiny grave.)* Martha, you died before you learned to speak the mother-tongue. Child, you will learn to speak the language of Angels instead. *(He gets to his feet. Addressing a group of graves)* My children have returned, my son is employed. We can all rest tonight.

He hobbles to the Parsonage as the lights fade on him. Darkness, then gradual twilight. The wind segues into the sound of birds awaking. The lights rise on the moors. It is morning. Emily is standing. Anne is sitting next to her.

EMILY

It's been a most magical season. I've written a lot of rhymes. They're not very good, but they're the best I've done so far. I've had such...feelings. *(She looks out at the landscape)* I've walked the moors at night under the moon and in the rain, walked for hours until all my thoughts were walked away.

ANNE

I should like to read your poems.

EMILY

(Suddenly turning on her)

No! They're not for anyone but me!

Anne flinches and turns away. Emily reaches and turns Anne's face to hers.

EMILY (CONT.)

There are some things no one else should see, things secret, you say only to yourself. If someone were to see them they wouldn't be secret any more. You couldn't say them ever again. *(She looks up into the sky.)* Do you believe the soul can leave the body?

ANNE

In death?

EMILY

No, in life?*(She points to the heavens)* Look up there. How far does it go?

ANNE

Forever.

EMILY

I've felt myself go there, have felt my soul leave my body. I've flown above the rain. It walks over the land on long tiny legs. And the moon spreads the hills with thin silver butter, singing all the while, singing silly songs like some old demented spinster. I don't want the pearly insipid twinkle of heaven. I want to die buried in God's blazing heart with nothing separating us. I swear to you, if things were to become intolerable I would release my soul until my body went dry and dropped of it's own. I swear that to you, Anni.

ANNE

What do you mean, Emily?

EMILY

It's my right, perhaps my only right! *(Seeing that Anne is disturbed)* Don't worry, my love, I won't fly anywhere without you. *(She takes Anne's hands in hers.)* Something's the matter, Anni. What is it?

Anne turns away.

ANNE

(STRUGGLING FOR WORDS)

No matter what happens in the future do you think we might find a way to be happy?

EMILY

There's no reason for us not to be happy, we're all together again. Let's pray.

ANNE

(*INCREDULOUS*)

Pray? You, Emily?

EMILY

(*GRINNING*)

Yes, I've taken to doing it, when I leave the hills. (*Anne starts to kneel. Emily stops her*) No, no, no, not on your knees; with your eyes. Take it all in. It will be here forever, but you...and I, we will be here only for a little while.

They look out on the landscape as the lights fade. The sound of the birds remains up, then fades to silence. The lights fade to black.

In the darkness there is the sound of a hard downpour. The front door opens. Branwell is standing in the doorway. He steps into hallway. His eyes are wide, his face, deathly pale. Patrick appears on the landing with a candle.

PATRICK

Who's there?

Charlotte appears at the head of the stairs. She has a candle. Branwell looks down at his muddy shoes. He sits on the floor and unties them. Branwell crawls to the door and puts his shoes out into the rain and closes the door. He crawls to the puddle left by his shoes and tries to mop it up with hem of his coat.

PATRICK (CONT.)

Branwell, what are you doing home?

Branwell crawls on his hands and knees to the parlor table. He curls up by the chair and begins sobbing. Charlotte appears at the head of the stairs. She has a candle. Emily and Anne appear after her. Anne looks down with horror at Branwell, then runs upstairs into Emily's room. Emily turns and follows her. Emily enters the darkened room. She finds Anne curled up on the bed.

EMILY

Anni? Anni?

ANNE

I've failed you all. I wasn't honest with you when I came back.

EMILY

What do you mean?

ANNE

Branwell had already been dismissed when he came back with me.

EMILY

Dismissed?

ANNE

There were certain...goings on...

EMILY

What do you mean?

ANNE

...with Lydia Robinson. When she tired of him she told her husband Branwell was making improper advances. He was immediately dismissed.

EMILY

And yet he went back?

ANNE

Yes. He was going to convince Mrs. Robinson to run away with him.

Anne begins to cry. Emily strokes Anne's hair.

ANNE (CONT.)

I couldn't tell you...I just couldn't tell you...

The lights fade to black.

There is the sound of birds. The lights rise on the graveyard. Anne is spinning, holding her sheet out so that it flies in the wind. She is humming. Her eyes sparkle. Charlotte enters the graveyard from the door of parsonage. She is bemused by Anne's behavior. Anne turns to Charlotte.

ANNE

There's a letter come for you...with a foreign stamp. I believe it's from Brussels.(Charlotte starts.) It's on the parlour table.

Charlotte runs to the parlor. She crosses to the letter. She stands there looking down at it. She picks it up with trembling fingers. Charlotte sits and reads the letter, then doubles over, her head in her hands. Anne continues to play with the sheet, throwing it up in the air, putting it

over her head, spinning with it. Charlotte crosses to the parsonage door she is crying.

ANNE

I've washed every sheet in the house. I'm going to hang them all out to dry. Then I'll iron them. Isn't it novel? *(She holds the sheet out to her.)* Take it, put your face in it. It smells like heather wind.

Charlotte takes the end of the sheet and buries her face in it. Anne enfolds Charlotte with the sheet, Charlotte buries her face Anne's shoulder and sobs. Anne gently rocks Charlotte in her arms.

CHARLOTTE

He told me I must write less frequently and with more restraint. Oh, I am evil, Anni, with evil thoughts.

Anne laughs.

ANNE

Oh, you are a wicked little fairish.

She takes Charlotte's face in her hands and wipes the tears from Charlotte's eyes.

CHARLOTTE

I am wicked.

Anne begins spinning Charlotte around, still wrapped in the sheet.

ANNE

Oh, you are wicked.

CHARLOTTE

Please, stop, Anni.

Anne stops. Charlotte looks up into Anne's face.

CHARLOTTE

I'm promise I'll stop meddling and prodding.

ANNE

We can start afresh.

Anne lifts the end of the sheet and puts it over Charlotte's head like a cowl. She takes Charlotte's hand and makes her clasp the edges of the sheet under her chin.

ANNE(CONT.)

We'll find a way to survive.

Anne steps back and admires Charlotte who stands there with the sheet about her like a tiny Madonna in white. Anne

begins laughing. It is a soft, strange, continuous laugh. The lights fade to black.

There is a rapping at the door. It is day. Charlotte opens the door. Rev. Nicholls, aged 27, is standing there, his hat in his hand. He is a large squarely-built man with thick dark hair and mutton chop. He is rather handsome in a bearish way. He is quite nervous and tries to hide it but only appears stiff and aloof. Charlotte opens the door.

CHARLOTTE

Yes?

NICHOLLS

I'm Arthur Bell Nicholls.

The name doesn't seem to register with Charlotte.

NICHOLLS (CONT.)

I'm the new Curate. I've come to see Reverend Brontë.

CHARLOTTE

Oh yes, of course.

She opens the door for him.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Please come in. Wait here, please.

She knocks on Patrick's door.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Papa?

PATRICK

(From behind the closed door, gruffly)
What is it?

Charlotte looks at Nicholls, embarrassed by her father's gruff treatment of her before a stranger.

CHARLOTTE

The Reverend Nicholls is here.

PATRICK

(Gruffly, from behind the door.)
Tell him to wait.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Papa. Please, Mr. Nicholls have a seat.

As they cross into the parlor.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Would you like some tea?

NICHOLLS

No, thank you.

Nicholls sits. Charlotte sits. There is an uncomfortable silence.

CHARLOTTE

And how do you like Haworth, Mr. Nicholls?

Nicholls is unable to meet Charlotte's eyes.

NICHOLLS

I have not been able to acquaint myself with it as of yet.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, well we have a large and lively congregation.

NICHOLLS

(Stiffly)

So I have heard. A difficult group to manage.

CHARLOTTE

(Eyeing him a little coldly)

Not if you get to know them.

NICHOLLS

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

The late Reverend Weightman was quite successful.

NICHOLLS

So I have heard.

CHARLOTTE

Everyone called him, "Willie".

NICHOLLS

Being popular with the Parish is perhaps not the primary goal of the clergyman.

CHARLOTTE

What is primary goal, Mr. Nicholls?

NICHOLLS

I believe it is the shepherding of their souls and the welfare...

Charlotte interrupts him.

CHARLOTTE

I believe that it is better, more scriptural, to make the love of God, rather than the fear of hell, the ruling motive for obedience.

NICHOLLS

Well, yes, Miss Brontë.

Charlotte winces at the mention of her name. She looks at him coldly.

NICHOLLS

That may be true for those capable of pious love, but those only capable of lust,

Charlotte starts at the word "lust" and gives Nicholls a quick glance. Nicholls starts at Charlotte's withering glance and finishes his thoughts in ever decreasing volume until the sentence finishes in a mumble.

NICHOLLS

Perhaps it is not the splendor of heaven...but hell's fire that will...turn the eyes of the sinner from...Excuse me. But you did not introduce yourself and I presumed...

Charlotte interrupts him.

CHARLOTTE

You presumed correctly, Mr. Nicholls. I warn you that Papa considers Calvinism an appalling doctrine as I myself do.

Voices are heard from Patrick's study.

PATRICK

You cannot have any more money!

BRANWELL

But the Sheriff came yesterday! They'll put me in prison!

PATRICK

Then in prison you should go!

BRANWELL

(Shrieking)

You wouldn't let them do that to me Papa! You can't. My god, I wouldn't last!

PATRICK

Go to your room and sleep it off. We'll talk later.

BRANWELL

But Papa...

PATRICK

Go now!

The door to Patrick's study flies open and Branwell stands there, red-eyed and panting, strangely fixated on the newcomer, Nicholls.

BRANWELL

Who the bloody hell is he?

CHARLOTTE

(Embarrassed)

It's the new curate.

Branwell glares at Nicholls for awhile.

BRANWELL

He can't replace Willie!

He turns on Nicholls and stumbles upstairs. Nicholls is speechless. Charlotte can't look at him. Patrick calls angrily from his study.

PATRICK (OS)

Well, come in Mr. Nicholls.

Nicholls glances at Charlotte, then looks down, unable to speak. He turns and enters Patrick's study.

PATRICK (OS) (CONT.)

(Shouting)

Well, close the door will you!

Nicholls reappears at the door. He glances at Charlotte who is still looking away and then closes the door. The lights fade.

A door flies open in the darkness. Branwell appears in the doorway. He is in silhouette. Emily appears behind him. She helps him to the parlor then throws him to the floor. Branwell giggles drunkenly from the floor.

EMILY

Go to bed.

Branwell lies back on the floor.

BRANWELL

Oh, it's fine, I'll just sleep here. Tell me a story.

EMILY

Get up.

Charlotte appears on the landing. Emily lights a candle in the parlor and the lights rise. Charlotte comes down the stairs.

EMILY

(To Charlotte)

I dragged him out of the Black Bull. Keep him there. There's cold coffee in the kitchen.

Emily exits. Charlotte stares down at Branwell.

BRANWELL

I don't want any bloody cold coffee.

Charlotte looks helplessly at him. Emily returns with a cup of coffee. She hands it to Charlotte.

EMILY

Feed it to him. I'm going to bed.

Emily disappears up the stairs.

BRANWELL

She's frightening, isn't she?

Charlotte brings the cup to Branwell's mouth. Branwell knocks the cup to the floor. Charlotte turns on him and starts for the stairs. Branwell suddenly dives on her and drags her to the couch in the parlor. He throws her the couch.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Look at you, so prim and proper. You don't fool me.

He tears open her bodice and buries his face in her neck. She starts to scream. Branwell puts his hand over her mouth.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

There once was a gnome named Charlotte
Who had a habit of blushing scarlet.
In spite of her pose
she was a whore to her toes,
the first virgin to rank as a harlot.

Charlotte savagely struggles free from Branwell and runs to a corner of the room. She clasps her torn garment to her. Branwell lies back on the couch and grins at her.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Do you think I don't know what went on over there on the "continent"? (He laughs) Married was he? Very, I hear. How many children, five? (Aping sadness) Wouldn't go for it though. Not his type, eh? Oh, come now, don't look so abused. What's the difference between you and me? Except that I got what I wanted and you couldn't. What was your little professor's name, Heger? You see, I don't miss anything.

Charlotte starts for the stairs. Branwell tumbles off of the couch and catches her by her ankles. He crawls up her legs and holds her in place.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

(Now desperate)

Don't go, Talli. Please don't go. I meant no harm. Listen to me, Talli. It's not over, this thing with Thorp Green. It's only the beginning. Her husband's going to die soon and when he does Lydia will inherit everything. She'll send her coachman for me and he will take me to Green Thorp Manor. Lydia and I will be wed and I will be master. *(Charlotte tears herself free from his grasp)* Charlotte, listen to me. They have so many rooms - you can all move in with us. We'll be so happy. Don't act as if you don't understand me. We've played for days devising such games. Captain Percy and *(Cocking an eye at her)* Lady Zenobia. This is nothing compared to what we've imagined and plotted.

Charlotte breaks from his grasp and retreats to a corner.

CHARLOTTE

This is not a game.

BRANWELL

Oh, but it is. It's all a game, all of this, this house, this mopey, bedraggled, Doomsday atmosphere, Papa in his black clothes, Emily trouncing about the moors in a giddy Byronic trance. Anne, you know, pines over Willie Weightman, especially now that he's dead, only death could make him ripe enough for her fantasies; and you, you've not left our games behind. We only need a place to play, to play forever. Come play with me.

CHARLOTTE

Go to bed and sleep it off.

She starts to climb the stairs.

BRANWELL

I've been writing, Talli, have you? Oh, you must not stop. We've written thousands of pages between the four of us. There's money to be had with the writing of books. *(Charlotte stops but*

doesn't turn around.) There, I've peaked your interest. What more perfect world is there for us? I know that Anne and Emily must not have stopped...and surely you haven't. As for myself, I've begun a novel in three volumes. I'm calling it "And the Weary Are At Rest."

CHARLOTTE

I'm weary.

The lights begin to fade on her as she climbs the stairs.

BRANWELL

(CALLING OUT TO HER)

Don't go, Talli, (The lights fading on him...)

Don't go.

The lights fade to black.

In the darkness there is the sound of rain. The lights rise in the parlor. Charlotte is on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor. Charlotte pauses a moment and wipes her brow with her arm. Above her, eye-level on the table, is Emily's notebook. It is open. Charlotte's eyes appear just above the chopping block. She looks at the notebook, then resumes her scrubbing. There is the sound of distant thunder. She scrubs a little while, then stops. Again, her face appears just above the table. Charlotte gets to her feet and wipes her hands on her apron. She goes to the door and looks to see if anyone is there. She turns and gazes down at notebook across the room. She crosses to her writing and pulls out her spectacles. She slips them on. She crosses to the notebook and picks it up. On its cover is a single word, clearly written; "Gondal". Charlotte begins reading, her nose almost grazing the pages. There is the sound of distant thunder. The rain falls harder. She turns a page, then another and another. Emily's voice is heard off stage. Emily is celebrating the storm.

EMILY (OS)

Why do people fear the rain? The rain is beautiful.

Charlotte snaps the notebook shut. She frantically looks around. She can hear Emily approaching. She is too far from the chopping block to get the book back before Emily enters. She clasps it to her breast and turns away from the door. Emily appears in the doorway. She is dripping wet. There is the sound of distant thunder, but it is closer now.

EMILY

There you are. It's so dramatic outside I could laugh!

Emily spins around in the parlor, laughing.

EMILY (CONT.)

It was so bright and cheery before it made me feel terrible staying in and then it began to pour down in torrents so I had to go out.

There is the sound of thunder. Emily runs to the door and looks out.

EMILY (CONT.)

Thunder and lightening and rain. It's positively pagan.

Emily turns from the door to Charlotte.

EMILY (CONT.)

And in the midst of it all are bluebells, thousands of them.

Finally, Emily notices that Charlotte is huddling in the corner, her back to her.

EMILY (CONT.)

Is there anything the matter.

Charlotte slowly turns around, the notebook still clasped to her breast. Charlotte is almost panting with fear and excitement. Emily's eyes find the notebook.

EMILY (CONT.)

What do you have there?

Charlotte backs away, unable to speak. Emily advances toward her. Her voice is growl, her eyes, cold.

EMILY (CONT.)

I said, what do you have there?

CHARLOTTE

(Retreating)

They're beautiful.

Emily stops.

EMILY

What is beautiful?

Charlotte backs away from Emily and retreats to another side of the room, pulling the notebook tighter to her breast.

CHARLOTTE

Your poems.

Emily suddenly charges at Charlotte, screeching like a wounded animal.

EMILY

GIVE THEM TO ME!

Charlotte, with a surprising nimbleness, darts to the other side of the table.

CHARLOTTE

I had no idea...no idea.

Emily throws the table out of the way and again charges at Charlotte. Charlotte runs to the other side of the room. She clasps the notebook so tightly to her breast that it looks as if she might tear the book in half. Emily stops. Charlotte rattles her words off before Emily can move.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Oh, no, Emily, you can't keep them hidden away. We must bring them out in print. Oh, Emily, I have the most wonderful idea. You could save us all!

Emily begins shaking. The rain comes down harder.

EMILY

Give them to me!

Charlotte turns from Emily, clutching the notebook to her. She is breathing hard.

CHARLOTTE

Of course, I'll give them to you, they're not mine. Although I wish they were.

She suddenly turns and gazes at Emily in awe, then slowly, she extends the notebook to her. Emily snatches the notebook from her and runs into the graveyard. She stands at the end of the graveyard. She clasps her notebook to her. Anne's voice is heard off stage. Charlotte quickly sets the table upright and begins scrubbing the floor.

ANNE (OS)

Emily? Emily, you devil, where are you?

Anne appears at the door. She too, is dripping wet. She is carrying an armful of bluebells.

ANNE

Have you seen Emily? She stranded me out there on the moors. She's like a ghost. Look, Charlotte, bluebells. They're in bloom.

She casts the flowers onto the floor.

CHARLOTTE

You should put them in a vase.

Anne watches her.

ANNE

Is there anything the matter, Charlotte?

Charlotte continues scrubbing.

CHARLOTTE

Did you know that Emily's writing poetry?

Anne gazes back at Charlotte in disbelief.

ANNE

You didn't...? Oh, my god! Where is she.

Anne runs into the graveyard. She crosses to Emily from behind and wraps her arms around her. Charlotte appears at the doorway. She approaches Emily and Anne.

CHARLOTTE

If you could only forgive me.

EMILY

I was careless.

CHARLOTTE

Emily, we must bring them out in print.

EMILY

No!

CHARLOTTE

(Desperately)

Listen to me, listen to me, we've always dreamed of becoming writers.

EMILY

We're not writers.

CHARLOTTE

I know you think of them as yours, but you have a gift. There's no harm in sharing it.

Emily slowly turns to Charlotte.

EMILY

No, you can't wheedle me any longer. You are destroying this house.

CHARLOTTE

For God's sake Emily, listen to me! None of us have any income! What are we going to do if goes Papa blind? The Church will give the parsonage to a new Minister and we'll have no where to go. Emily, this place won't be here for us anymore. You can't sleep on the ground, you can't sleep in the rain.

Emily clutches her notebook to her, huddled around it so that it doesn't get wet. She begins crying. Anne runs into the parsonage.

EMILY

I'll bake bread. I'll clean houses. I'll even clean this house if someone else lives here. I want to be home. I just want it to be the way it was.

Charlotte reaches up and takes Emily's face in her hands.

CHARLOTTE

Things can't remain the same. This is the nearest thing we can do next to playing; we can be writers.

Emily pushes Charlotte away.

EMILY

I don't want my rhymes in print!

CHARLOTTE

They're not rhymes, Emily. I've written rhymes, not you, but I've written...a lot of them. I'm sure Anne has written some too. We wouldn't have a chance without you, but with you we could publish a small volume of poems. It would be a beginning. We could write books.

Anne enters from the parsonage.

EMILY

They're mine. They're me!

ANNE

Don't fight anymore.

Anne is holds a notebook out to Charlotte.

ANNE (CONT.)

Here...

Charlotte looks down at the notebook.

EMILY

(Savagely)

Don't let her see it!

ANNE

If she has seen yours she broken into Gondal's heart. If this will bring us together then perhaps it will be for the best.

Charlotte turns to Anne. She looks down at the notebook. She takes Anne's notebook and clasps it to her. Anne gazes at Charlotte. Charlotte looks back at Anne.

CHARLOTTE

Don't be sad, Anni.

Anne's eyes are cold and angry. She is not sad. Charlotte stops and backs away.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Annie, I'm sure they're good.

Emily and Anne gaze at Charlotte with an identical expression of icy rage.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

I'm sorry if I've done anything wrong.

EMILY

Leave us alone. Take it, they're not mine anymore.

Emily thrusts the notebook at Charlotte. Charlotte looks at Emily face and she is frightened by what she sees there.

CHARLOTTE

Emily, don't look so strangely.

Emily holds her notebook out to Charlotte. Charlotte slowly reaches for the notebook. For a moment both women hold the notebook. Charlotte, without looking into Emily's eyes, slowly draws the notebook away. Emily gazes all the while at Charlotte.

EMILY

I'll haunt you, Talli, I'll haunt you from my grave for you have taken my soul.

Charlotte clutches the notebooks to her.

CHARLOTTE

What a wicked thing to say.

EMILY

I am wicked and I shall write you a book, a wicked book straight from the heart of Gondal.

Emily runs off stage. Anne stays a moment and watches Charlotte, then runs after Emily. Charlotte clutches the

Emily's notebook to her breast. She doubles over, her body, convulsing. Suddenly she stands erect. She thrusts the notebooks at the sky and screams triumphantly...

CHARLOTTE

Yes! Yes! Yes!

There is a flash of lightening and a loud clap of thunder. The lights fade as the thunder continues and dies away even as the house lights are rising.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

Branwell's laughter is heard. The lights rise on him. He's sitting on a barstool, holding forth.

BRANWELL

The whole world is changing, Talli. The invention of the steam engine is a wonder beyond all recognition. Soon no one will travel by road. We will move through time like skylarks on the air. If you want to go to London, it's an overnight trip. Do you know what that means, girl? Yorkshire is but a sleep away.

The lights cross fade on him and rise on Charlotte in the paronage doorway.

As Charlotte speaks the lights rise on Patrick and Branwell. Branwell is on the slab stone in the graveyard. Patrick is bent over him. Branwell whispers something to

Patrick, puts his arms around him, then sinks back into the bed.

CHARLOTTE

My brother is dead. He died on Sunday morning, the 24th of September, 1848. He was 31 years old. How could I have known it would happen? He seemed impervious to self-destruction. When did I cease to love him, and I *did* cease to love him. It was a separation drawn out by time in tiny increments too small to perceive but left the heart alone, away, dull and forgotten, so that the face of the once loved seemed dim and unfamiliar like an unremarkable intruder, so did Branwell slip from my love's sight. I write to you, Mary, for this is my last night and must tell you all, tomorrow I will be as I was, no more. I surely hated those who loved him best, Papa, and Anne and Emily, especially Emily, for I knew he could, of all of them, draw her down into that black hole with him. And he did, Mary, he did. Emily died less than 3 months after him.

Emily enters the graveyard. The grave slides open. Branwell rises and Emily takes his hand and leads him to the grave. She stays above him as he descends into it. Patrick remains seated on the slab stone. This happens as Anne delivers her prayer from a window above.

ANNE

Forgive me if I did not have limbs strong enough to pull him from the undertow, from the beguiling face of Death's darker angel. And if I failed to protect him or worse, drew him into the ray of deeper sin, forgive me now. I thought he had his hand in mine. I do not know who had his other.

The lights crossfade from Anne to Patrick sitting on the slabstone.

PATRICK

He was my son, my only son. The boy was my shadow. He followed me to the parlor, he escorted me to the vestry, he walked with me across the moors. I could have been a soldier. I told you that, didn't I? I told him that. We talked about it often. I had the brains and the capacity to plan battles. Look. (*He stands and pulls some papers from his coat.*) These are some of my designs. Bombs. Brigade advancement. I've shown them to you, haven't I?

The grave closes over Branwell. Charlotte crosses to Patrick and sits on the slab stone.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, papa.

PATRICK

Yes, yes, of course. (*Distracted, he lets the papers fall.*) You see, if I had become a soldier I might have risen high in my profession. Life would have been very different. I never would have come here. My wife would have had a different life. I could have moved her away from this place. but as it was...the Almighty chose differently, and He knows best. So I have stayed here in this house. (*He goes down on his knees and prays over the bed.*) Oh, Charlotte, why him? My son, my son, my brilliant, unhappy son! If only I could have died in his place. Branwell was

PATRICK (CONT.)

promising, don't you think? He could have been a great painter, a poet. He could have done what I only dreamed of doing. A writer, yes a writer. I wanted to be a writer. He could have been them all. Couldn't he, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, papa.

PATRICK

(Still on his knees, to Charlotte)

But he was too nervous for school. He was too nervous, you see, for school, and so I had to take care of him, to watch him, even when he slept, so nothing, nothing could harm him.

He lays his head on Charlotte's lap. She strokes his hair and begins telling him a story as if he were a child.

CHARLOTTE

Once upon a time there were four children who lived in a far off land in a house surrounded by a graveyard. Behind their house were ancient hills long striped of trees where the wind blew unbridled. (*Patrick rises and crosses into the parsonage.*) Their father was a parson to a village of tired and ragged people who worked the factories night and day so the children only had each other. They didn't always get along. They did their best, Mary, they did their best. From

that house, surrounded and permeated by death,
there issued seven novels and some of them, I
swear, some of them will be immortal.

*THERE IS LAUGHTER IN THE PARLOR. THE LIGHTS CROSSFADE FROM
CHARLOTTE TO EMILY AND ANNE. THEY ARE FROLICKING AROUND THE PARLOR
TABLE. CHARLOTTE CLIMBS THE STAIRS.*

ANNE

(TO EMILY)

You read yours first.

Emily runs to the stairs.

EMILY

(MEANING CHARLOTTE)

No, I want her to read first *(Calling)*
Charlotte? Come down here. We'll not stop calling
you until you come down.

CHARLOTTE

Stop shouting, you'll wake Papa.

EMILY

Then come down!

CHARLOTTE

(RESISTING)

I don't want to, not now.

ANNE

Come on, Papa's asleep, Branwell's passed out,
the work of the day is done and now this is our
time.

EMILY

We want to hear your ideas about your novel. Come
down here this instant!

Charlotte crosses to the tops of the stairs.

ANNE

There she is.

EMILY

Finally.

*Charlotte descends the stairs. Anne takes her hand and
leads her to the parlor. Emily crosses and sits on a chair
at the parlor table looking playfully severe.*

ANNE

Here she comes, Emily.

EMILY

Good. I'm going to sit here and listen *(beat)* and
learn.

Anne and Emily sit down look at her expectantly.

CHARLOTTE

(LOOKING AT HER SISTERS)

You're really serious, aren't you?

EMILY

(GIVING HER A GHOSTLY LOOK)

Deadly serious.

ANNE

(BREAKING UP)

That's very good, Emily.

CHARLOTTE

Not so loud. *(She pauses and pulls her thoughts together)* I was going to call it "The Master," but I've decided to call it "The Professor."

EMILY

Yes, a wise choice. I wonder who it's about?

CHARLOTTE

I want it to be a real account, not a romance, but something true. I'm making a stand against all that foolish writing we once devoured, like Scott's romances.

EMILY

What is in this story that would make it interesting?

CHARLOTTE

I am determined to take Nature and Truth as my sole guides and to follow their very footprints. I am seeking to produce something which should be soft, grave and true.

EMILY

Again, I ask, dear sister, what is there about this story that would make me want to read it?

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps you wouldn't want to read it.

EMILY

Charlotte, read some of it and I'll tell you.

Charlotte opens her writing desk and reaches for some pages. Her hand is trembling.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know where to start.

EMILY

Describe one of your heroes.

CHARLOTTE

There are no heroes.

EMILY

(DRYLY)

Of course. Well, one of your "characters" then.

Charlotte self-consciously shuffles through some of her papers. She stops, hesitates, crosses D.S. and begins reading.

CHARLOTTE

"Pellet was a man of about forty years of age, of middle size, and rather emaciated figure; his face was pale, his cheeks were sunk, and his eyes hollow; his features were pleasing and regular, they had a French turn...

Heger's voice is heard D.S. in the darkness.

HEGER

Vous êtes entrée dans le sujet: marchez au but!

CHARLOTTE LOOKS UP. THE LIGHTS CROSSFADE FROM EMILY AND ANNE TO PROFESSOR HEGER, D.S., A SLIM MAN OF FORTY WITH BLACK HAIR, OLIVE COMPLEXION AND BLUE EYES. HE IS DRESSED IN BLACK. HE IS SMOKING A CIGAR AND MOVING ABOUT THE ROOM LIKE A PANTHER PACING IN A CAGE. HEGER FAIRLY RUSHES AT CHARLOTTE. SHE BECOMES TERROR STRICKEN AND ON THE VERGE OF TEARS. HE WHIPS OUT HIS KERCHIEF AND SHOVES IT AT HER. SHE TAKES IT AND IMMEDIATELY BEGINS SOBBING. HEGER STICKS HIS FACE IN HERS.

HEGER (CONT.)

Why must you have these wet outbursts? Do you think they will help you with your writing? They will not.

HEGER TURNS FROM CHARLOTTE WITH FELINE SPEED. HE BEGINS PACING WAVING HIS CIGAR AT HER.

HEGER (CONT.)

Stop crying!

CHARLOTTE BLINKS SHARPLY, SNIFFLES AND RUBS THE KERCHIEF OVER HER EYES. HEGER RUSHES AT HER AND LEANS CLOSE TO HER FACE. CHARLOTTE LOOKS INTO HEGER'S FACE, HER EYES MOIST AND ADORING. HE BRINGS HIS FACE CLOSE TO HEARS.

HEGER (CONT.)

Ma petite Anglaise, you must stay with your subject.

HEGER LOOKS OVER CHARLOTTE'S SHOULDER AT SOMEONE IN THE DOORWAY. CHARLOTTE TURNS SLOWLY TO SEE WHO IT IS. MADAME HEGER, (WEARING MESH BLACK MASK TO COVER HER FEATURES), APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY. HEGER SMILES SHEEPISHLY AT HER. HE SNATCHES THE HANDKERCHIEF FROM CHARLOTTE AND CROSSES TO HIS WIFE. THE LIGHTS FADE ON HIM AND RISE ON EMILY AND ANNE.

CHARLOTTE

"...and a melancholy, almost suffering expression of countenance; his physiognomy was "fine et spirituelle."

Emily begins laughing. Charlotte stops reading.

EMILY

This is quite incredible, this Pelet is a curious combination of you and the little dark professor, Heger. Why, Charlotte, it's you, it's you in trousers, how droll,

ANNE

(COMING TO CHARLOTTE'S DEFENSE)

What does it matter, Emily? I think the writing is good.

EMILY

Yes, passably so. I like much better the flavor of your Angrian personality, "Talli." I think she is much braver than this "Currer Bell".

CHARLOTTE

(WITH SUPPRESSED RAGE)

We shall see when the time comes, won't we?

EMILY

What do you mean by that?

CHARLOTTE

(SMILING SLIGHTLY)

Which of our books will be published.

EMILY

(LAUGHS)

I dare's say that probably none of them will be published.

CHARLOTTE

(TURNING TO ANNE WITH A COLD EYE)

How about you, Anne?

ANNE STARTS.

ANNE

Me? Oh, yes. Are you sure you want to hear it?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, it's your turn.

ANNE RISES.

ANNE

I started a journal of my experiences with the Ingham and Robinson families. I call it "Agnes Grey." I fear, Emily, that perhaps you will have the same opinion about my endeavors as you have with Charlotte's.

EMILY

Read. Read.

Anne opens her manuscript. She is nervous about reading.

ANNE

"In stature Mr. Weston was a little above the middle size; the outline of his face would be pronounced too square for beauty; his dark brown hair was not carefully curled but simply brushed aside over a broad white forehead; the eyebrows, I suppose, were too projecting, but from under those dark brows there gleamed an eye of singular power that bespoke a man of strong sense, firm faith, and ardent piety."

THERE IS THE SOUND OF RAIN. THE LIGHTS RISE ON WILLIE WEIGHTMAN, STANDING D.S. WITH AN OPEN UMBRELLA, HE SPEAKS TO ANNE AS IF SHE WERE BY HIS SIDE.

ANNE (CONT.)

We met in a rain shower.

WEIGHTMAN

...An umbrella will do you no harm at any rate.

ANNE CROSSES D.S. TO WEIGHTMAN.

ANNE

"I could not deny the truth of his assertion, and so went with him to the carriage; he even offered his hand on getting in: an unnecessary piece of civility, but I accepted that too, for fear of giving offense.

WEIGHTMAN SMILES AT ANNE ADORINGLY.

ANNE (CONT.)

One glance he gave, one little smile at parting - it was but for a moment; but therein I read, or

thought I read, a meaning that kindled in my heart a brighter flame of hope than had ever yet arisen."

He turns and exits off stage. Charlotte laughs as the lights crossfade to Charlotte and Emily in the parlor.

CHARLOTTE

So your Mr. Weston is a plainer version of the handsome Willie Weightman. I fear, Anne, that your portrait of him is more charitable than the one I would paint.

EMILY

Who cares if it's about Weightman. My only criticism is that beneath this mask of candor you are trying to drive out your lover's "ungodly" traits. Perhaps beneath his flim and flutter, our Willie Weightman had an animal heart...*(She smiles mysteriously at Anne.)* like yours.

ANNE MEETS HER SMILE WITH A SMILE OF HER OWN, THEN TURNS AWAY. CHARLOTTE IS BEMUSED BY HER SISTER'S EXCHANGE. SHE CHARGES INTO THE INCIPIENT SILENCE.

CHARLOTTE

(Charitably)

Annie, Annie, I'm quite pleasantly surprised, it's very well written. Forget Willie Weightman, he's gone, gone.

ANNE

(Still looking away)

Is he?

SHE TAKES HER SEAT AND LOOKS AT HER HANDS. SUDDENLY EMILY PIPES UP. SHE STANDS.

EMILY

It's my turn. *(She opens her manuscript.)* My hero is Heathcliff, a Yorkshireman, but of gypsy blood brought here as a child. The woman he loves has been buried for seven years. *(She recites the text from memory.)* "I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep, by that sleeper, with my heart stopped, and my cheek frozen against hers. The next day upon waking and conscious two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us, I said to myself -- I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills me; and if she be motionless, it is sleep.' I got a spade from the toolhouse, and began to delve with all my might -- it scraped

the coffin; I fell to work with my hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws, I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from someone above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down. 'If I can only get this off,' I muttered, 'I wish they may shovel in the earth over us both!' and I wrenched more desperately still. There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by -- but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there..."

CHARLOTTE

(GAZING AT HER AGHAST)

Do you mean to say that he was digging up her corpse and was about to lie with her?

EMILY

Something like that.

Anne begins laughing. Emily smiles at her in proud delight.

CHARLOTTE

Emily, I shudder that such people exist and that you have actually realized them on paper.

Emily crosses to the parlor.

EMILY

Where else should have I realized them? In any case, what is so lost and fallen about them? Should we say the trees are disfigured because they are twisted by the wind or the bracken is evil because it is black?

Emily grins at Anne.

CHARLOTTE

My dear Emily, our neighbors may be possessed of vigorous constitutions but they do not enact such vivid and fearful scenes that they banish sleep by night and disturb mental peace by day.

EMILY

Why Charlotte, whatever do you mean? You won't be able to sleep because of what I've written? --Is there not somewhere in your soul a mad woman scratching at the bars to be free? There is one

in me, she digs at the inside of my skin, screaming to get out. I think perhaps Heathcliff has found some resonance in your own soul as well as in mine.

Emily smiles at Charlotte quizzically. Anne crosses behind Emily. She puts her arms around Emily's waist and gazes at Charlotte, smiling. The lights fade on them.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

One day we got a letter. It was from yet another publisher, Thomas Newby. He was prepared to consider "Agnes Grey" and "Wuthering Heights" for publication providing the authors would bear the cost of £50. "The Professor", he rejected. In my secret heart of hearts, I felt Emily's production

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

would be the one to hold us back. And Anne, simple, sweet Anne, how could anyone chose Anne over me? What was I to do? All the while Papa was going blind with cataracts. If his eyes could not be healed he would lose his incumbency at Haworth and we would lose our home. I took Papa to the sooty city of Manchester for a cataract operation and I began a book in the dark, in the shuttered room where my father lay with leeches on his face, waiting to see if his sight would return.

She crosses into the graveyard. She begins quoting from her book.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

"Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am heartless and soulless? You think wrong! I have as much soul as you--and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal--as we are!" I put the manuscript in a brown paper bag and sent it to Smith, Elder and Company. I called it 'Jane Eyre.'

The lights crossfade from Charlotte to the moors. It is a bright autumn day. Emily runs on to the moors.

EMILY

Charlotte! Annie! It's raining. It's still raining up here. The birds are coming out. I think there'll be a rainbow. Yes, there! Look! There's a crack in the sky.

She stretches out on the ground. Charlotte and Anne enter running and out of breath. Charlotte is carrying a cloak in her arms.

CHARLOTTE

It's raining. Emily, where are you? *(She looks down at the ground and sees Emily lying there)* Get up. You'll get muddy!

EMILY

I shan't get up. Come down here with me.

She reaches up for Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

I won't!

EMILY

You will! *(Charlotte gives a little shout and hops back. She reaches for Anne)* Annie, come down here and kiss me my darling!

ANNE

I shan't!

EMILY

You shall. I command you. I am the Queen of Gondal!

ANNE

You look more like a muddy sow! Here, have something to eat.

She kicks mud on Emily.

EMILY

How dare you!

She gets to her feet and begins chasing Anne who shrieks and runs away.

CHARLOTTE

I'm cold!

EMILY

If you didn't stand around, you wouldn't get cold!

CHARLOTTE

Here, put this on before you catch your death.

She holds the cloak out to Emily, who throws the cloak over her shoulders.

EMILY

Oh, there you are, then. Are you satisfied? (*She runs to a pool of water and looks into it.*)
Tadpoles!

Anne stands next to her, bending over, her hands on her knees; she too examines the pool. Charlotte shrinks back with obvious disgust and primly sits down. Emily kneels on the edge of the rock and plays with the tadpoles in the water. To Anne.

EMILY (CONT.)

Look Anne! Don't you recognize some of them?
(*Anne stands next to Emily and looks into the pool with her.*) They look like Charlotte Brontë's suitors.

ANNE

Why yes, they bear a remarkable resemblance and so many of them.

EMILY

"Oh, I'm plain and little." How many proposals has she had? (*She points at a tadpole*) Henry Nussey, and that Irishman, (*She searches among the tadpoles*) what's his name? (*She finds the right tadpole*) Mr. Pryce. (*She notices another.*) Oh, and this one...I know who he looks like, he looks like Reverend Nicholls. (*To Charlotte*) Perhaps someday he'll ask you to marry him.

CHARLOTTE

Heaven forbid.

EMILY

Don't be so judgmental, Charlotte. He may look like a tadpole today, but who knows, he might turn into a prince!

ANNE

Charlotte, I do think Reverend Nicholls likes you.

EMILY

Don't bother Charlotte. (*She splashes the water with each "mad"*) She might go mad! Mad! Mad!

Emily gets up and goes behind a rock; her head sticks up over it.

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing?

EMILY

What does it look like I'm doing?

CHARLOTTE

Must you include us in your aboriginal eccentricities?

There is a silence. Emily keeps peeing.

CHARLOTTE

(TO EMILY)

Well, aren't you done yet?

EMILY

Charlotte, I've been thinking about this "love" thing and I have concluded that I should be an old maid. Neither God nor man shall have this body. It is mine and when I am done with it I shall commit it to the earth. This is the way I was born and this is the way I shall be. I shall never marry. I'm sure I would kill my husband.

CHARLOTTE

I'm chilly.

Emily comes out from behind the rock.

EMILY

Here.

Emily throws part of her cloak around Charlotte and puts her

ARM AROUND HER. CHARLOTTE LAYS HER HEAD ON EMILY'S SHOULDER AND SNUGGLES NEXT TO HER. ANNE WRAPS HER CLOAK OVER THE THREE WOMEN'S LEGS, THEN SNUGGLES NEXT TO CHARLOTTE LYING HER HEAD ON CHARLOTTE'S SHOULDER.

ANNE

Isn't it nice.

EMILY

It is.

ANNE

(QUIETLY)

I should like to have a child.

CHARLOTTE

(LAUGHING)

A child?

ANNE

(SUDDENLY DEADLY SERIOUS)

Don't laugh.

Charlotte stops laughing.

ANNE (CONT.)

I don't care if we ever find lovers. We shall be writers. *(She takes Charlotte's and Emily's hands.)*

In a matter of weeks we shall be holding our books in our hands. I have already started a new one. In fact, I've almost finished it.

CHARLOTTE

(A LITTLE TAKEN ABACK)

What? You haven't told us about it.

ANNE

I'm not sure you would approve, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Why ever do you say that, Annie?

ANNE

I'm sorry, Charlotte, perhaps I've been presumptuous. It shall all be so perfect. *(She looks at Emily)* Don't you think so,

Emily takes Anne's hand.

EMILY

Yes, my darling, Annie, yes.

ANNE

All the problems that have stood in our way will soon be removed.

A sudden light change occurs -- a perihelion -- three suns APPEAR IN THE SKY.

CHARLOTTE

Look!

She points to the three suns clearly shining overhead in a dark blue sky going into a golden horizon in a semi-circle of light. They stand. Long shadows are cast behind them.

ANNE

A perihelion!

Emily looks up and sees them too, her face becomes radiant. THEY ALL STAND A LITTLE WHILE, SILENTLY GAZING AT THE PHENOMENON.

EMILY

Three suns!

CHARLOTTE

They are us! We are the three suns!

*They all look at each other, then up at the sky. The lights
FADE ON THEM.*

*Nicholls knocks at the parsonage door. Patrick opens the
door. His eyesight has returned.*

PATRICK

Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS

Mr. Brontë.

PATRICK

Come in.

*Nicholls enters. He seems a little more uncomfortable than
usual. Patrick seems to know the source of Nicholls'
discomfort and covers his amusement about it.*

NICHOLLS

I've had...

*Patrick gestures Nicholls to a seat. Nicholl stops speaking
and looks at Patrick questioningly.*

NICHOLLS (CONT.)

...success.

Patrick again gestures for Nicholls to have a seat.

PATRICK

Have a seat.

Nicholls takes a seat.

NICHOLLS

I've had success, sir.

PATRICK

Success?

NICHOLLS

With the women.

PATRICK

The women?

NICHOLLS

With the women of Haworth.

Patrick eyes Nicholls, then...

PATRICK

Congratulations, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS

I taken no pleasure in it, sir.

PATRICK

I'm sure you haven't.

NICHOLLS

What I did was in the name of common decency.

Nicholls casts a furtive glance toward the parlor.

PATRICK

I'm sure, in due time, the community will come to recognize your contribution.

NICHOLLS

They all seem quite upset, sir.

PATRICK

Oh, that will pass, Mr. Nicholls, that will pass. The congregation is always upset about something.

Charlotte crosses to the parlor. She glances through the doorway at Nicholls. Nicholls looks away. Charlotte takes her seat at the parlor table.

NICHOLLS

Your vision seems to have greatly improved.

PATRICK

Yes, yes, Reverend, the operation seems to have been a success. It is a delight, truly. We tend to forget the priceless value of what has been given us until it is taken away.

Nicholls can't keep from glancing Charlotte's way.

NICHOLLS

Yes, sir.

PATRICK

Well, is there any thing else?

NICHOLLS

No, sir.

Patrick rises and leads Nicholls to the door.

PATRICK

Good work, sir. Be always vigilant.

Patrick shakes Nicholls' hand. Nicholls glances at Charlotte, then puts on his hat.

NICHOLLS

Yes, thank you, sir, thank you for your support.

PATRICK

No, no, no, it was all your doing, sir.
Goodnight.

NICHOLLS

Goodnight, sir.

Nicholls can't avoid just one more glance at Charlotte and as he turns to go he practically trips on his way out. Nicholls exits the parsonage. Patrick turns toward Charlotte. Charlotte raises her head and looks at Patrick and they both break out laughing.

CHARLOTTE

What an absolute dolt.

PATRICK

You mustn't underestimate our curate's victory.

CHARLOTTE

Victory, indeed, banning the drying of laundry on the tombstones.

PATRICK

The vanquishing of the washerwomen of Haworth is no mean feat. In fact, I've written a eulogy to our curate's victory.

Patrick pulls a sheet of paper from his coat. He reads it.

PATRICK (CONT.)

The females all routed have fled with their clothes
To stackyards, and backyards, and where no one knows,
And loudly have sworn by the suds which the swim in,
They'll wring off his head, for his warring with
women.
Whilst their husbands combine & roar out in their
fury,
They'll lynch him at once, without trail by Jury.
But saddest of all, the fair maidens declare,
Of marriage or love he must ever despair.

Patrick and Charlotte laugh as the lights fade on Patrick.

It is night in the present. Charlotte continues laughing

CHARLOTTE

Reverend Nicholls, that highly uninteresting,
narrow and unattractive specimen of the coarser
sex; It was his very doltish self that delivered
to me a most droll solution to the thorny problem
of anonymity. As authoresses we would not escape
prejudice. We had to take on a masculine name so
that we might be judged by our work and not by
our sex. Yes, Arthur "Bell" Nicholls, that

stolid, unimaginative Arthur "Bell" would be the last to suspect the parson's daughters of being more than they seemed. So we took his middle name. From hence, we were known as the Brothers "Bell"; Currer, Ellis and Acton.

Charlotte crosses to the table and picks up her book in three volumes and then crosses to the front of the parsonage. She opens one of the volumes, takes a letter out and begins reading it. Thackeray's voice is heard.

THACKERY (OS)

"I wish you had not sent me 'Jane Eyre.' It interested me so much that I have lost (or won if you like) a whole day. Some of the love passages made me cry. I have been exceedingly moved and pleased by this book. It is a woman's writing, but whose? Give my respect and thanks to the author -- Thackeray."

CHARLOTTE

William Thackeray, said that. Book shops sold out of copies so quickly that a second edition was immediately set in preparation. Even Queen Victoria had read it. And yet I told no one, no All this before Newby had published a line of Emily's and Anne's works. Meanwhile, I continued to blacklead the stove, make the beds and scorch the linen.

ANNE (OS)

Emily, we got our books!

The lights fade on Charlotte.

Anne comes running on stage. She is carrying her volumes. She is crying.

ANNE

They're full of errors. It's badly printed and look at the paper. And the binding, it's an awful scarlet. Look how badly they're bound. And there are more errors than before. He's disregarded our proofs.

The lights rise on Emily. sitting on a flat gravestone over the open grave. She is holding her volumes in her hand. She lights a candle, places it on the gravestone. She takes one of the volumes and tears it in half and begins burning pages and letting them drop, flaming, into the open grave.

In the darkness there is a loud pounding at the door. Charlotte appears with a candle. There is more pounding. Charlotte opens the door. Nicholls and Branwell are at the door, Branwell's is draped over Nicholls' shoulder. He is drunk.

NICHOLLS

(EMBARRASSED)

I'm sorry Miss Brontë. I found him wandering about the streets. I didn't want to bother you at so late an hour.

CHARLOTTE

(HIDING HER MORTIFICATION)

Thank you, Reverend.

NICHOLLS

Shall I bring him in?

CHARLOTTE

(BEFUDDLED)

Why yes, yes, of course.

Branwell rips his arm away contemptuously.

BRANWELL

I can do very well on my own, thank you. Get out of the house you! You have no business here! We're perfectly fine in here. *(He shoves Nicholls away from him. Nicholls steps back a bit ruffled.)* Are you going to take a swing at me? You look like it. You going to give me a dose of Christian charity and set me straight the "Irish way?" Is that what you want to do, my shaggy friend? *(He takes a pugilistic stance)* I warn you, I'm schooled in the pugilistic science. Come on, Mr. Nicholls, let's have it out!

Nicholls is almost paralyzed with hot embarrassment Charlotte steps between them.

CHARLOTTE

I can take it from here, Mr. Nicholls. I've very sorry.

NICHOLLS

Are you sure everything is fine?

BRANWELL

"Fine?" "Fine?" Why everything is "fine," Mr. Nicholls. As if you could set it straight if it wasn't "fine."

Patrick comes out of his room with his pistol.

PATRICK

What is going on down there?

BRANWELL

Well, look who's here. Let's have a party. *(He smiles nastily at Charlotte, indicating Nicholls)* I believe Arthur Bell Nicholls has a sweet-tooth and you're just his flavor, Charlotte. *(Nicholls and Charlotte look away from each other. Branwell shouts up at Patrick)* What do you think of that, Papa? I think your curate has cupidinous thoughts about your eldest daughter.

NICHOLLS

That will be enough, Mr. Brontë.

BRANWELL

"Enough," indeed. *(He winks at at him.)* She'd be a handful for the likes of you.

Patrick works his way down the stairs.

PATRICK

Branwell, what are you doing?

BRANWELL

(MOCK TERROR)

Watch out, he's got a pistol! *(To Nicholls)* And he knows how to use it. I would be away, Mr. Nicholls, if I were you, away fast. *(Anne and Emily appear above on the landing. Branwell sees them)* Ah, the family's come to greet me. *(He approaches Patrick with his arms extended. He falls on his knees before the pistol. Patrick is unaware that he's pointing the pistol at Branwell)* Are you going to shoot me, Papa? *(Patrick looks at his pistol)* Well, go ahead, get it over with.

Patrick lowers his pistol and bows his head.

PATRICK

You may go, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS

Yes, sir, goodnight.

BRANWELL

Going so soon? I'm sure we're going to have tea, aren't we? *(Grinning at Charlotte)* We are, aren't we, Charlotte?

Charlotte is speechless. She looks at her hands. Nicholls bows and exits. As soon as Nicholls leaves Branwell becomes suddenly deflated as if his one and only true audience had left him. He slumps and stands teetering drunkenly. Emily and Anne stand on the landing and watch him.

PATRICK

(UTTERING WORDS HE AS SAID SO OFTEN BEFORE)

Come to bed, son.

BRANWELL DOESN'T ANSWER. HE JUST STANDS THERE. CHARLOTTE CROSSES TO PATRICK AND TAKES HIS ARM.

CHARLOTTE

(GENTLY)

Come to bed, Papa.

Patrick submits. He looks old and defeated as she leads him up the stairs. Anne remains on the landing. Charlotte takes Patrick into his room. Suddenly Branwell falls to his knees and begins screaming. He screams over and over again. Then he begins screaming words.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

(SCREAMING)

No one's going to sleep if I can't sleep! No one!
No one!

Branwell continues screaming until Patrick emerges from his bedroom, accompanied by Charlotte. Emily signals to Anne with a glance to help Patrick. Anne and Charlotte take Patrick back to his bedroom while Emily descends the stairs. Branwell falls to his knees and beseeches Emily.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

He's dead, Emmii, Old Man Robinson is dead. Lydia should be mine. She'd come to me, she would. But he wrote it in his Will. He left a proviso that he would leave her penniless if she married me after he died. You see, he reached out from the grave and snatched her from my arms.

EMILY

Is she paying you off?

BRANWELL

What do you mean?

EMILY

You know perfectly well what I mean. How much has she paid you to stay away?

BRANWELL

She's not paying me to stay away.

EMILY

How much?

BRANWELL

£20.

EMILY

£20 here, £10 there, just enough to supply your habit.

Branwell screams at Emily.

BRANWELL

Don't say that! Her sensitive mind is totally wrecked. She wanders around talking to herself. She been talking about entering a nunnery.

Emily grabs Branwell and pull his face close to hers.

EMILY

I want you to stop screaming at Papa. I want you to let us sleep. I don't care if you drink. I don't care if you get work, but I will not have you reeking havoc in the house any longer.

BRANWELL

Just you try and stop me you b----!

Emily puts her hand over his mouth. Branwell screams into her hand. Emily murmurs to him.

EMILY

You're never going to see her again, Branii. I don't condemn you for loving her. I don't even care if you die for the loving of her, but I want you to make less noise.

Branwell slides to the ground, then suddenly he is seized by a fit. Emily pulls his quaking body into the darkness.

The lights rise on Branwell huddled up by the slab stone. It is cold. John Brown enters and crosses to Branwell.

BRANWELL

Thank you for coming, John.

JOHN

It's nothin', son.

Branwell looks over his shoulder at the dark parsonage. John Brown sits next to Branwell.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Do you have something for me, John?

JOHN

Are you sure, Branwell?

BRANWELL

Are you daft, you bloody fool? Dragging me out on a blighted freezing day like this. Give us some cheer, brother.

John pulls a bottle from his coat. Branwell grabs it and takes a long hot drink and hugs the bottle to his breast.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

I'm waiting for death, Johnny, indeed, I long for it, and it's near, my friend. I can feel it. *(He begins shaking)* I'm cold.

John puts his coat around Branwell.

BRANWELL (CONT.)

It's because of Lydia. The bitch has gotten married again, already. *(He takes another long swig.)* Sir Edward Scott. *(He takes another swig, then hands it to John.)* My sisters are acting weirder than usual. *(He laughs)* They're positively supernatural! *(He leans close to John's ear.)* They're doing things up there, John. They're trying to keep it from me, but nothing escapes me; all hunched over the parlor table like a gaggle witches. *(He pulls a sheet of paper from his coat.)* Listen to this. I snuck into

BRANWELL (CONT.)

Emily's room and pulled it from her writing desk. *(He reads.)* "Mr. Heathcliff was there--laid on his back. His eyes met mine so keen and fierce, I started; and then he seemed to smile. I could not think him dead: but his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still. The lattice, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill; no blood trickled from the broken skin, and when I put my fingers to it, I could doubt no more: he was dead and stark." Isn't it priceless? I might have written it myself. Isn't she good? I think I'll bond with the barren bitch and spawn a monster race. *(He is besieged by a coughing fit. He shoves the bottle in his pocket and stuffs the paper back into his coat then suddenly pulls John to him and draws out a carving knife. He puts it against John's throat.)* I didn't think I'd ever see you again, When you said you'd meet me I thought it was a call from Satan. I've long kept

this knife with me to plunge it into his heart for what he's done to me. When I heard your voice, I recognized it was you. *(He puts the knife away, claps John on the back and begins laughing.)* And then I knew for sure it was the Devil. *(He embraces John.)* Oh John, John, you'll never see me again, at least not with my eyes blinking. Good-bye, Johnny, Good-bye.

Branwell releases John and stumbles into the darkness toward the parsonage. John gazes after the vanished Branwell.

JOHN

Good bye, Branwell, good-bye, son.

The lights fade.

The lights rise on Anne and Emily in the parlor. Charlotte is sitting above in her bedroom. Anne and Emily are below in the parlor. Anne is reading to Emily.

ANNE

"He is gone at last. I sat beside him all night, with my hand fast locked in his, watching the changes of his features and listening to his failing breath."

Charlotte suddenly gets up and runs down the stairs in a fury.

CHARLOTTE

Anne, I don't want to hear that infernal book anymore!

ANNE

(STARTLED)

Whatever are you talking about?

CHARLOTTE

The choice of subject is an entire mistake.

EMILY

And how is that?

CHARLOTTE

(TO EMILY)

It is beyond her. There are so many scenes that are revolting, coarse, disgusting. Anni, you're well endowed with quiet virtues. You should write the simple and natural.

Charlotte turns her back on Emily.

ANNE

(QUIETLY)

It is a penance.

CHARLOTTE

A what?

ANNE

A penance for not being able to save my brother.

CHARLOTTE

(Suddenly shouting)

Branwell? I'm so sick of hearing about Branwell! I've lived enough with that hideous incubus! I don't want to read about him in print! My god, you might as well bid the public come gaze through our window!

EMILY

(Smiling slyly at Charlotte)

Perhaps you are somewhat puzzled by Anne's success.

CHARLOTTE

(SCOFFING)

Success?

EMILY

Yes, 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' is selling almost as well as the great 'Jane Eyre.'

CHARLOTTE

Yes, a succès de scandale.

ANNE

Emily, I don't want to "succeed". I want all novels to be written for both men and women to read, and if men should see themselves in a less discriminating light, let them become aware of it.

EMILY

(Laughing)

They are aware of it.

ANNE

Are they, Emily? I'm not sure. Are not "men" as well as "women" subject to the same God? And is not "God" inherent in the very nature of our thoughts?

EMILY

(Laughing)

And so is the "Devil."

Again Anne responds to Emily with rapier conviction.

ANNE

The "Devil" is nothing special, nor does he have any other power than God's. The freedom of choice is as accessible as God's is to "Man" and so is the Devil's. It is Man's choice that I write about, as I am neither God nor Devil.

CHARLOTTE

"Man's into "God's", "God's into "Man's", what are you talking about? You might as well make a construction of the air. Whatever "Man" is, he has shown his "natural" face in this. (*She pulls out a letter from her writing desk.*) I've received a most disturbing letter from Mr. Smith, my publisher. (*She reads a letter*) There is a certain confusion concerning our works. Your publisher, Mr. Newby, it seems, has passed off Anne's book to an American publisher as a new work by "me". (*Emily begins laughing*) He is asking for an explanation. Don't laugh Emily, it is my right to be accepted and rejected by what I do. And I feel it is finally time to face the issue of our identity

EMILY

(*SAVAGELY*)

No!

CHARLOTTE

This is an issue of honor, not only ours but Mr. Smith's.

EMILY

I don't give a damn about your Mr. Smith!

ANNE

Charlotte didn't write my book. Her name should not be on my book.

CHARLOTTE

Just so.

ANNE

What do you think we should do?

CHARLOTTE

I propose that we all go to London and show ourselves.

EMILY

(*TO ANNE*)

You shan't go, Anne. (*Pointing at Charlotte*) She promised us complete anonymity.

ANNE

But 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' is my book.

EMILY

Who cares whose book is whose? This is all nonsense! (*Turning on Charlotte*) It's been nonsense since the very beginning, ever since you tore into my desk and robbed me of my poems.

She turns away from Charlotte and Anne.

ANNE

(*QUIETLY*)

But we must go. I will go. I'm sorry, Emily. I'll pack my things.

Anne exits.

CHARLOTTE

Emily, I wish you could find it in your heart to join us.

EMILY

Don't talk to me about "heart." The truth is that you cannot endure the distrust of your new London friends. You're more worried about what strangers say than your own blood. Branni may die soon and I will not let him die alone. So go, sister, go to London and prance about the town and delight all with the revelation of your identity but keep mine out of it, do you hear, not a word about who I am.

The lights fade on Emily.

Anne appears in the graveyard. She is excited about the trip.

ANNE

Come, Charlotte, let's hurry. We can catch the night train.

Charlotte runs to meet Anne. Anne clasps Charlotte's hands and begins walking Charlotte away.

ANNE (CONT.)

I've never been to London. We shall have a most wonderful time. We shall go first class. Our success as writers have forced us to take these measures. We can share something together, Talli.

Charlotte relishes Anne's excitement. They exit hand-in-hand.

George Smith's Office. London. George Smith is looking at card.

SMITH

Well I'll be damned, look at this! Mr. Williams come here.

Williams enters.

WILLIAMS

Yes, Mr. Smith?

He hands the card to Williams.

WILLIAMS (CONT.)

Currer and Acton Bell? My god. They're outside?

SMITH

So it seems.

WILLIAMS

Well, I'll fetch them.

SMITH

Let me catch my breath. My god, the Bell Brothers. But there are only two of them. I thought there were three.

WILLIAMS

(Looking at the card)

Yes, Ellis seems to be missing. He's probably out shooting buck.

SMITH

(Chuckling)

Or digging a ditch. Well, Mr. Williams, show the gentlemen in.

Williams exits. Smith prepares himself. Williams enters quite in shock.

WILLIAMS

Mr. Smith, meet Mr. Currer Bell, author of "Jane Eyre."

Smith starts. Charlotte and Anne enter, petite and dowdy in prim bonnets.

SMITH

My god!

He shakes her hand. He looks at her disbelief.

CHARLOTTE

My name is Charlotte Brontë and this is my sister, Anne. Acton Bell.

Anne smiles at the men and looks down.

SMITH

You're not pulling my leg, are you. (*Realizing the coarseness of his language.*) Excuse me, but I'm confounded. I thought...

CHARLOTTE

(Unable to meet his eyes)

That we were great country bumpkins? (*She hands him a letter.*) I believe this was addressed to Currer Bell, from you.

Smith looks at the letter.

SMITH

Where did you get this?

CHARLOTTE

It was sent to me, sir.

SMITH

How can this be? Is it really you?

CHARLOTTE

I'm afraid so, sir.

SMITH

I thought that you were men! (*He composes himself and addresses Anne.*) Acton Bell of "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall." Congratulations. You're book is doing quite well. (*He turns his gaze to Charlotte.*)

And you, Mr. Bell, I mean, (*He glances at the card to remind himself of Charlotte's name*) Miss Brontë, I thought you were simply a go-between. Miss Brontë, your book is the sensation of all England. (*He studies the two sisters.*) Two authors in one family, how remarkable.

CHARLOTTE

(Blurting it out)

There are three of us.

Anne starts.

ANNE

Charlotte, you promised Emily you wouldn't tell.

SMITH

Tell what?

CHARLOTTE

It's too late, Anne. My sister, Emily, is Ellis Bell.

WILLIAMS

The author of "Wuthering Heights?" That's impossible, a woman could not write that book.

SMITH

Let alone, a human. It's a monstrosity. (*He catches himself*) I'm sorry, but I found the book quite overwhelming.

CHARLOTTE

Emily is of a singular nature. That is why we have come here. Mr. Newby...

SMITH

Yes, I know about Mr. Newby. He is a man of questionable character. Well, now that we know your names we can clear that all up.

ANNE

Oh, no sir, no one must know our names.

CHARLOTTE

Especially that we are women. We've aroused enough controversy.

SMITH

We will set this right, will we not, Williams?

WILLIAMS

That we will, Mr. Smith.

Smith gazes at Charlotte in amazement.

SMITH

"Jane Eyre"! Madame, you are the talk of London. You must come to the Opera with me tonight.

Charlotte looks at Anne. They both look down.

CHARLOTTE

I'm afraid...

ANNE

Our dresses...

SMITH

That will not matter at all...for a celebrity it is quite in order. Till this evening then, Miss "Jane Eyre."

Charlotte blushes and looks away. The lights fade on Smith and Williams to Emily.

EMILY

You betrayed me. There are no walls between me and the ghastly world now. You invaded my dreams and pulled me out into the death light of an alien I've written for one reason only, to touch the invisible world. I shall not reach it that way again. You care more about what strangers think than about your own brother. Here, here is my new novel. I'm sure it will scandalize you even more than my last. (*Emily flings the manuscript into the air. The pages flutter about the gravestones.*) I shall not write again.

The lights fade on Emily. Charlotte stands alone in the middle of the night.

CHARLOTTE

He died, Mary.

The lights fade on Charlotte.

There is the sound of an Irish reel. Branwell U.S. in a cape, paper hat and a shillelagh. He dances an Irish jig. The greave slides open. He sings and dances toward it.

BRANWELL

My name Captain Percy
I'm the leader of the band
And everywhere I go
the corpses stand on end
To my enemies I show no mercy
To my lovers I'm not a friend.
Say good-bye to Captain Percy
He's gone around the bend.

Let's teetle a tottle a tittle o'rum
And pittle and prattle and paddle the drum
Let's teetle a tottle a tittle o'rum
And pittle and prattle and paddle the drum

Little Maria appears from the grave, with a white veil on. She kisses him on the mouth and pulls him under. There is the sound of rain. The lights rise on Emily. She is standing above, her cape over her head and partially covering her face. Charlottelooks up at her. She cries out...

CHARLOTTE

Emily! Emily! Emily!

The lights fade on Charlotte, then on Emily. The sound of the rain continues into the darkness.

End Of Act Five

Act Six

A special rises on Patrick aiming his pistol out a window above. He shoots it. The lights crossfade to John Brown.

JOHN BROWN

Six o'clock in the morning, old man Brontë's blown off his pistol like he's done for the past 40 years. The town sets its clock by it. Old man Brontë, had a father back in Ireland, so the story goes. His name was Hugh Brunty. He lived near the edge of a secluded glen among the hills. For miles 'round it had the reputation of being haunted, and few passed that way after dark. *(The sound of the wind is heard.)* Strange and fitful cries were said to be heard in the glen. People barred their doors and covered their heads in bed with their blankets. *(There is the sound of a baby crying in the night.)* One evening, as the sun was setting, there came from the glen the cries of a baby, pitiful and prolonged. Throughout the night they went on and so pathetic and persistent were they, that they drove the people out of their beds. Grandpa Brunty had had enough. He came out of his house with a Bible and a fiddle and headed down toward the glen. The neighbors watched in awe and silence as Hugh marched off and disappeared into the trees. *(The sound of a fiddle playing a lullaby is heard)* They could hear the sound of Hugh's fiddle playing a lullaby. *(The baby's cries suddenly stop.)* The cries of the baby stopped. *(The sound of the fiddle continues.)* A glow arose in the trees, greeny-blue, and everything went still. Then Hugh's fiddle went silent. *(The sound of the*

fiddle stops. There is the sound of a strong wind blowing through the trees.) The trees began to move, tossing their heads like a strangling man but there was no wind. *(The sound of the trees moving in the wind go silent.)* Then the trees too went still. All about there was a heady quiet. Everyone gathered at the edge of the road above the glen as if bidden by some silent sentry call.

JOHN BROWN (CONT.)

Out of that darkness came the shadow of Hugh Brunty. Upon seeing his tall frame silhouetted in that dark place, at last gone still, they cheered old Hugh. His skin was chalk-white, whiter than the bone-light of the moon that shone down on the little party of villagers whose cheers had gone frozen and hushed as the world about them. His eyes shone, and his mouth was drawn into a scowl as if some sour spirit had leapt down his throat. Gone was his Bible and broken was his fiddle, its strings dangling like a gutted cat. As he passed, they made way for him on either side. From that day forth Hugh Brunty was a changed man. It was said that he had quieted the spirit of the glen by letting it jump down his throat and that he had made a bargain with it to preserve his sweet tongue as a teller of tales, for tales he went on to tell, but from then on they were of a different tone, dark, somber, frightening. And one more thing. It was there in the Haunted Glen, from then on called "The Hollow", that he wooed and won the hand of the beautiful Alice McClory. It was said that perhaps she was a part of the bargain. And from them grew a line of storytellers doomed from that day on to be cursed with short lives but sweet tongues. And that was them, the Brontë's.

The lights fade on John Brown.

There is the sound of rain. There is a creaking as if someone were moving overhead. Charlotte lights a candle. She is sitting at the parlor table. Anne is sitting in the shadows. Charlotte's eyes follow the movement of someone above her.

CHARLOTTE

I got a letter from my publisher, Emily. I described the symptoms of your illness to him.

*Emily appears at a window above. Her eye sockets are dark.
Her hair is down.*

EMILY

It's raining.

CHARLOTTE

He suggested homeopathy.

EMILY

It's raining out there on the moors.

CHARLOTTE

I think perhaps you might try his suggestion.
(There is the sound of thunder) Emily, aren't you
listening to me?

*Charlotte crosses to the bottom of the stairs with the
candle.*

EMILY

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

I think perhaps you might try his suggestion.

Emily slowly descends the stairs.

EMILY

Your publisher's intention is kind and good, but
he is under a delusion. Homeopathy is only
another form of quackery.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps you could see Dr. Wheelhouse. He's a very
good local doctor.

EMILY

No.

CHARLOTTE

Then what about a doctor in Keighley or Leeds?

Emily's face appears in Charlotte's candlelight

EMILY

No. No poisoning doctor shall come near me.

Emily slowly works her way to the graveyard.

CHARLOTTE

Why won't you accept help? Are you trusting in nature to cure you? Well, it won't. (*Emily doesn't answer.*) Why don't you go to bed? You've not consented to lie in bed for a single day. You're up at 7 in the morning till 10 at night. It is cruel: you must know how your silence is making us suffer.

EMILY

(*QUIETLY*)

Are you suffering, Charlotte?

Charlotte turns her face away to hide her tears.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

EMILY

You should not suffer on my account.

CHARLOTTE

But I am!

EMILY

(*COOLLY*)

What I do with my person is no concern of yours.

CHARLOTTE

(*IN TEARS*)

You're tearing me apart.

EMILY

(*COOLLY*)

Then leave.

CHARLOTTE

(*SHE STARTS*)

Leave? This is my house.

EMILY

(*AS IF RESPONDING TO A SIMPLE REVELATION*)

Oh.

CHARLOTTE

Where are you going, Emily?

EMILY

To feed the dogs.

Suddenly the wind comes up and blows Emily away. The lights shift to a special on Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

I swear she was dying just to torment me, Mary. And Anne, Anne, is silent complicity, was helping her do it. The next day Emily got up as usual,

and she was dying all the time. The rattle in her throat could be heard behind the door as she dressed herself.

The lights shift to a somber, overcast day. Charlotte crosses to the parlor, sits and begins reading. Anne remains sitting in the rocking chair still in shadow. Emily descends the stairs carrying a box of manuscripts. The grave slides open and fog rises from it. Emily crosses to the grave. Silently Emily begins dropping her manuscripts into the grave. Charlotte looks up from her reading.

CHARLOTTE

What are you burning?

Emily doesn't answer. She continues putting papers into the grave.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

It's not your writing, is it?

Charlotte rises and starts toward Emily. Emily looks entreatingly at Anne. Anne rises from her chair and crosses into the light. She is deathly pale with the same dark circles around her eyes, her lips gray. She stands between Emily and Charlotte and with cold, unwavering eyes, holding Charlotte in her place. Emily hunches over her box, her hands moving more quickly, crumpling the pages and dropping them into the grave.

The lights fade on Emily and Anne as the grave slides shut.

CHARLOTTE

But she didn't burn it all, Mary. I found the rest, hidden in a trunk. In spite of her pride, somewhere was a skulking little ambition tucked away. Perhaps she hoped that long after we all were dead the new parson would find her little treasure under the floorboards. I don't see how

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

she could think that, hadn't she lived with me long enough to know that I'm thorough housekeeper.

The lights rise on the couch in the parlor. Emily is lying down on it, Anne, assisting her. Charlotte turns toward Emily.

EMILY

If you will send for a doctor, I will see him now.

CHARLOTTE

Anne, get Papa!

Anne runs to Patrick's room and knocks.

PATRICK

What is it?

ANNE

Emily.

Patrick's door flies open and Patrick comes out in a rush. Charlotte kneels next to Emily.

CHARLOTTE

Don't go! Please don't go!

Anne looks up at Patrick.

ANNE

Papa. Pray for her.

Patrick turns his face away from Emily.

PATRICK

She doesn't want any of my prayers.

CHARLOTTE

I know what will bring her back! A sprig of heather. It's late in the season but maybe I can find one.

ANNE

Run, Charlotte! Run!

Charlotte runs out onto the moors in search of a lingering spray of heather. On a scrim the hills tower above her. The sky is ashen. The wind howls. She speaks the following sentences without punctuation or pause, running one line into the next as if thinking them aloud.

CHARLOTTE

Was I not the first to be rejected by the publishers without my prompting our books wouldn't have found print at all it was not my fault.

She stops, sensing a presence, turns around, not finding the source, she continues onward. The ghost of Branwell suddenly appears behind her. He is emaciated, his clothes tattered, his face hollow and his teeth are rotten. Charlotte doesn't hear him. He mimics her every word and action but his intonations are full of mockery and irony. He follows her over the moors as she searches for the sprig of heather.

CHARLOTTE AND BRANWELL (CONT.)

How could Branni put the family in jeopardy by falling in love with the mistress of an alien house a married woman with three children and bring shame us...

As they speak the wind howls mingling with their voices. Charlotte drops to her knees. Branwell drops to his knees beside her, exaggerating Charlotte's emotions, mocking them.

CHARLOTTE AND BRANWELL

(TOGETHER)

...the shower of love was always on Branwell and look what he did with it can't you see Emily I've done the best I could under the circumstances it's not my fault they loved my work more than yours it's unfair of you! *(The voices of the wind blow high and strong around her. Charlotte works her way to the top of the hill against the wind's force, Branwell always near her. The sky darkens.)* I feel your anger in the air. Oh please, Emily don't die, don't leave me alone.

The hill gradually becomes a black, empty space. Branwell fades into the darkness. Charlotte is alone.

CHARLOTTE

I can feel death all around me. Sinful terrors plague my mind. Spectral visions. The church tower bears down on my spirit like an awful giant. *(The graveyard, the long crucifixes and shapes of the graves sweep up around her.)* I am afraid to pray. I can see myself in that house alone possessed by a ghastly power grinding at my thoughts...ghostly and spectral, Anne and Emily gone...and Papa, alone with Papa, standing in the window looking out with sparkling eyes.

She appears in semi-silhouette, her eyes and mouth illuminated. She is pulling at her hair, screaming but silent. The wind begins howling more loudly, screaming for her. A flash of lightning cracks across the sky. The lights go black, then rise again on the ash-gray moors. Charlotte bends down and picks a single sprig of heather. Charlotte looks down at the parsonage and sees Emily standing in the doorway of the parsonage, shining and spectral. The grave slides open.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

No, Emily!

Charlotte runs toward the parsonage with the sprig of heather, but it is too late, Emily is already on her way to the open grave. Charlotte stands by the parsonage with the sprig of heather out stretched in her hand. Emily walks toward the crypt and the lights rise from it, glowing and changing colors; moody dark greens, blues and purples. Emily delivers her poem. There is a youth and a delight, a sensuality and wonder playing in her voice.

EMILY

ON A SUNNY BRAE ALONE I LAY
ONE SUMMER AFTERNOON;
IT WAS THE MARRIAGE-TIME OF MAY,
WITH HER YOUNG LOVER, JUNE.

THE TREES DID WAVE THEIR PLUMY CRESTS,
THE GLAD BIRDS CAROLED CLEAR;
AND I, OF ALL THE WEDDING GUESTS,
WAS ONLY SULLEN THERE!

EMILY (CONT.)

AND WHY SHOULD WE BE GLAD AT ALL?
THE LEAF IS HARDLY GREEN,
BEFORE A TOKEN OF ITS FALL
IS ON THE SURFACE SEEN!

NOW, WHETHER IT WERE REALLY SO,
I NEVER COULD BE SURE;
BUT AS IN FIT OF PEEVISH WOE,
I STRETCHED ME ON THE MOOR,

A THOUSAND THOUSAND GLEAMING FIRES
SEEMED KINDLING IN THE AIR;
A THOUSAND THOUSAND SILVERY LYRES
RESOUNDED FAR AND NEAR:

AND, WHILE THE WIDE EARTH ECHOING RUNG
TO THAT STRANGE MINSTRELSY,
THE LITTLE GLITTERING SPIRITS SUNG,
OR SEEMED TO SING, TO ME:

The colors issuing from the crypt begin to warm.

LET GRIEF DISTRACT THE SUFFERER'S BREAST,
AND NIGHT OBSCURE HIS WAY;
THEY HASTEN HIM TO ENDLESS REST,
AND EVERLASTING DAY.

A SHADOW APPEARS IN THE WARM FLUTTERING LIGHT. IT GROWS LARGER AS ITS SOURCE EMERGES FROM THE GRAVE. IT IS BRANWELL. HE IS DRESSED LIKE A DANDY, TOP HAT AND CANE AND SILK CRAVAT, BUT ALL IN WHITE WITH WHITE SHOES.

AND, COULD WE LIFT THE VEIL, AND GIVE
ONE BRIEF GLIMPSE TO THINE EYE,
THOU WOULDST REJOICE FOR THOSE THAT LIVE,
BECAUSE THEY LIVE TO DIE.

Emily kisses Branwell lingeringly on the lips then takes his hand. Branwell steps down in front of her and leads her into the ground. Emily glides into a golden white radiant heavenly light of the crypt. There is a rushing, celestial music as the ground closes up over her and the lights fade to black. Charlotte stands in the graveyard, holding the sprig of heather. Patrick and Anne look out at the graveyard from the house.

As the lights fade the sound of Keeper's mournful baying is heard. The dog's baying continues into the darkness and then fades as the lights fade up on Ellen Nussey and Anne walking arm-in-arm briskly around the dining table. Ellen is prim but very pretty. Anne is pale but strangely animated.

ANNE

Do you remember how we did this at Miss Wooler's school? Emily and Charlotte and I used to walk around the table, arm in arm. I'm sure if Emily were here she would be walking with us.

ELLEN

I'm sure she would, sweet Annie. But I'm sure she is equally happy now, even if you miss her.

ANNE

Oh Ellen, don't worry about my feelings. I feel wonderful, as if I were about to embark on a great journey, across the ocean, to a far away country.

Ellen and Anne sit.

ANNE (CONT.)

My soul has been torn by a strange joy. Is it sinful to feel this way?

ELLEN

As long as it is a joy engendered by God.

ANNE

(Wistfully)

Yes. And how am I to know this?

ELLEN

By the presence of His love.

ANNE

He liked you more than me.

ELLEN

Who, my darling?

ANNE

Willie Weightman. He thought you prettier than I...and you are.

ELLEN

He was a great flirt, Anne.

ANNE

You did not know what was going on in my heart then. Tell me, Ellen, is there truly an Elect of God. Or are we as we appear? Oh surely not! Or do only pretty girls with pretty laughs and pretty boys with pretty eyes have pretty souls?

ELLEN

Oh, my sweet, sweet Anne, your soul shines far more brightly than mine and your beauty escapes description.

ANNE

I am plain, Ellen. You did not know what was going on in my heart then, when he looked at you. It was my consolation that you did not see the fire burning in my soul. And now that my passing is coming soon...

ELLEN

Your "passing", Anne?

ANNE

I know why Charlotte invited you to come here; to help her with me. Am I not right? I know what Dr. Teale is saying to Papa and Charlotte in the other room. He's telling them that I don't have long to live. In a few moments Papa is going to come through that door, take me in his arms and cry "My dear little Anne." And we'll all know that will be the end of me. (*Ellen rises, alarmed*) No, no! Don't fetch them. Come. Sit next to me. I shan't be a problem. (*Ellen sits down next to her again*) I have no horror of death. But I wish God to spare me. Not only for Papa and Charlotte's sake, but because I long to do some good in the world before I leave it. I have many schemes in my head for future practice - humble and limited indeed - but still I should not like them to come to nothing, and myself to have lived to so little purpose. (*Ellen begins to cry softly, Anne looks at her and smiles*) You

look so pretty when you cry. Here, put your head on my shoulder. *(Ellen lies her head on Anne's*

ANNE (CONT.)

shoulder) Do you think perhaps Mr. Weightman, now, after he has passed into the brighter world, might see with spirit-clean eyes the true beauty of my soul? Perhaps in spirit I am as fair as you. *(Anne lies back on the couch, suddenly exhausted. Ellen stands)* If he were to reject my ethereal form, I would fear for my soul.

At that moment The door to Patrick's opens and Patrick enters, his face drained. He crosses to Anne, puts his arms around her and draws her to him, as if to cheer and comfort her.

PATRICK

My dear little Anne!

Anne looks up at him with an open, sweet face, then rests her head on his chest, looking up at Ellen. Ellen stands there, shocked, gazing back at Anne. The wind begins to blow as the lights fade.

The wind continues blowing as the lights rise on Charlotte in the house and Nicholls crossing through the graveyard to the parsonage. Nicholls is bundled up against the cold. He is carrying a package. As Nicholls crosses, Charlotte is opening a bottle of cod-liver oil. She pulls her head back from the bottle in disgust as the stench of the bottle's contents reaches her nose. She begins to pour the cod-liver oil into a tablespoon just as Nicholls knocks lightly at the door. Charlotte is momentarily caught between where to put the bottle and opening the door. Nicholls removes his hat, holding it in one hand and balancing the package in the other. He knocks again, this time, a little louder. Charlotte puts the bottle on a stand and opens the door, still holding the brimming spoon.

NICHOLLS

(PATHETICALLY SHY)

Good morning, Miss Brontë.

CHARLOTTE

(TAKEN ABACK)

Reverend Nicholls.

NICHOLLS

I've just come from the train. I waited for it. The medicine you requested arrived. I picked it up. *(He holds out the package and finally sees*

the spoon. He winces, then smiles pleasantly)
Ah, cod-liver oil, yes, very good. *(He looks at the package he is holding)* Shall I bring it in?

Charlotte takes the package with difficulty, wedging it under her arm while keeping the tablespoon level.

CHARLOTTE

No, I can take it.

NICHOLLS

Yes, Miss Brontë. Is there anything more I can do for you?

Charlotte glances at the door, then at Nicholls.

CHARLOTTE

The door.

NICHOLLS

The door?

CHARLOTTE

Could you close the door?

Nicholls finally understands her meaning, but isn't sure if he should close the door behind him or upon him. He looks at Charlotte's face and realizes that it is the latter he must choose.

NICHOLLS

Oh, yes, Miss Brontë, of course. *(As he closes the door in his own face)* If there's anything more I can do for you...

CHARLOTTE

Thank you, Reverend, I'll let you know.

As the door shuts...

NICHOLLS

Have a pleasant day, Miss Brontë.

The light fades on him. Charlotte crosses to the table, the package still wedged under her arm, picks up the opened bottle of cod-liver oil. Patrick enters.

PATRICK

Who was that?

CHARLOTTE

Reverend Nicholls, he picked up some medicine for Anne from the train.

PATRICK

So early? *(He pulls the scarf around him tighter)*
This east wind, it scrapes the very spirit from
the bones.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Papa. Could you help me with the cap?

PATRICK

The cap?

CHARLOTTE

The cap to this bottle.

She indicates the direction of the cap with head.

PATRICK

Oh yes, the cap.

*Patrick picks up the cap, takes the bottle from Charlotte
and addresses her gravely as he puts the cap on the bottle.*

PATRICK (CONT.)

Pitch plasters, bran tea, hot vinegar, carbonate
of iron, blisters, cod-liver oil. *(He puts the
bottle in Charlotte's hand)* Lord, you're going
to kill our little Anne with the curing of her.

CHARLOTTE

What else, can I do, Papa?

PATRICK

Take her out of this cold, damp clime. Take her
to Scarborough, that's where she wants to go.

CHARLOTTE

She's too ill to move, Papa.

PATRICK

You're like a blind horse in a fire. *(He turns
away from her)* She's going to die, child, there's
nothing you can do to stop it. *(He looks back at
her)* If she wants to go to Scarborough then you
should let her go. Take Ellen Nussey with you.
Oh, go upstairs. You look ridiculous holding all
that "stuff".

*He exits. The lights crossfade from Charlotte to
Charlotte's room. A cloud of steam rises from a hissing
vaporizer. Anne is sitting in the bed. She is feverish and
covered with sweat, her hair hangs in wet ringlets.
Charlotte enters with her package, bottle and brimming
tablespoon.*

CHARLOTTE

I've brought you something that neither of us likes.

Charlotte crosses to the foot of the bed and releases the package.

ANNE

It's not cod-liver oil?

CHARLOTTE

(SHRINKING IN SPITE OF HERSELF)

Oh my!

Anne holds her nose, opens her mouth and swallows the cod-liver oil. She grimaces and gags. Charlotte crosses to the table and pours a glass of water.

ANNE (CONT.)

It does so taste like train oil!

CHARLOTTE

Wash it away with the water.

With difficulty, Anne swallows the water. She looks up, wide-eyed, at Charlotte.

ANNE

I don't think I like this very.

CHARLOTTE

Emily would have become well if she had taken her cod-liver oil.

Anne breaks out laughing. Charlotte is taken aback.

ANNE

Forgive me, Charlotte, but sometimes you say such funny things. *(She laughs again. She grows serious. She gazes at Charlotte sadly.)* I miss her, Charlotte.

Charlotte's face softens.

CHARLOTTE

I miss her too. *(She sits on the edge of the bed and embraces Anne. They hold each other in silence.)* You must get well.

ANNE

And what if I don't?

CHARLOTTE

You shall. Don't you understand, my darling, if Emily had only allowed herself to be treated...

ANNE

(*INTERRUPTING*)

...she might not have become better and her agony would only have been prolonged.

CHARLOTTE

We can't know that because we weren't given a chance to try.

ANNE

And with "me" we do?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

Anne studies Charlotte over the glass of water.

ANNE

Are you sorry it was Emily? Instead of me? Don't answer. I know it's not a fair question. I know you love me.

CHARLOTTE

(*UNABLE TO LOOK AT ANNE*)

If I thought I was the cause...(*She begins crying.*)

ANNE

...of Emily's death? (*Anne watches Charlotte. She lies back on her pillows.*) When I was at the Robinsons, one of my charges, their boy, showed me a nest full of baby birds. They were very small and helpless. Their mouths were open like tiny doors sprung by a wind. Over our heads the parent birds were flying, diving at us bravely, distracted by rage and terror. This boy, this big jowled, blue-eyed thing, pulled the branch down that held the little nest and announced that he was going to torture them to death. Do you know what I did? I did the only thing I could do. Taking the sole means in my power to prevent this, I dashed the nest to the ground and crushed the nestlings instantly with a large stone. (*Charlotte shivers and gazes at Anne.*) I think one ought to dispose of oneself for the sake of compassion for others. I think that's what Emily did. She didn't belong here anymore, Charlotte. It doesn't matter what brought her to that point. It would have happened in any case. It is that way with some people.

Suddenly clutches Anne to her.

CHARLOTTE

But not you, Annie, not you, you have so much to live for.

ANNE

I want to go to the sea, Charlotte, to Scarborough. At the Wood's Lodgings on St. Nicholas Cliff, overlooking the South Bay, where I stayed with the Robinson's when I was their governess. Ellen could come with me. I wouldn't even have to bother you. I've spoken to Papa about it. He's given his permission.

CHARLOTTE

He has? He's never related any of this to me.

ANNE

He hasn't? But he said he would.

She takes Anne's hands.

CHARLOTTE

My dear, I am also of the impulse to take you away to a warmer climate but Doctor Teale insists that you must stay in bed and be kept warm.

ANNE

(Panicked)

It's warm now.

Charlotte laughs.

CHARLOTTE

My dear, it's not warm.

ANNE

It is in Scarborough!

CHARLOTTE

Calm down, Annie.

ANNE

Let me go, Charlotte. Please Charlotte, if not for you, then for me. Let me go!

CHARLOTTE

I can't. I can't.

ANNE

(Suddenly angry)

Do you have to control everything? Even my death?

CHARLOTTE

How can you say that, Annie?

ANNE

You've always thought of me as a child. Well, I'm not! I made a living on my own. I almost escaped this house and I would have if it hadn't been for you and the others.

Charlotte begins crying.

CHARLOTTE

How can you say that?

ANNE

None of you could make it on your own. I could! I did! Oh please don't cry, Charlotte, *(She breaks into tears)* I'm sorry. I'm sorry...

Anne falls back on the bed.

CHARLOTTE

(ALARMED)

Anne! Anne, are you all right?

A loud boyish whistle comes from outside. Anne rises and goes to the window. Charlotte continues bending over the bed as if Anne were still there. The lights crossfade to the outside of the parsonage. It is a spring morning. Emily is standing outside. She is as she was when she was alive.

EMILY

What's all this bawling about? Come out here, right now. It's Spring. It's the merry merry month of May.

Anne is surprised and delighted to find Emily there.

ANNE

Emily!

Anne runs down the stairs. As she does the lights change in the house. They become bright and cheery. The sound of birds fill the air. Anne runs out of doors. Emily is waiting for her.

EMILY

Come on, Annie!

Emily takes Anne's hand and they run out on the moors together. The lights in the parsonage fade to black as Anne and Emily laugh and begin walking up a hill. As they do the sun begins to set. They are silhouetted in the golden light. They sit on top of the hill.

ANNE

I must go back to bed. You know I'm very sick and Charlotte is quite worried.

EMILY

Before I made out plays with you I used to make them out with Charlotte. We called them "bed plays," they were very nice ones, but they were special and secret so I shan't ever be able to relate them to you.

CHARLOTTE

(UNSEEN, CALLING IN THE DISTANCE)

Annie! Annie, come back!

EMILY

When Charlotte went to teach she left me with a story we hadn't finished. I've kept it in my memory all these years. I want us to make it out together, just you and me. *(She looks at Anne wickedly)* ...our way.

CHARLOTTE

(UNSEEN)

Annie, please don't leave me.

EMILY

Don't listen to her, stay here, play with me.

ANNE

I must go. I can't leave her like this.

EMILY

It doesn't matter. Stay with me.

ANNE

I can't, not yet, but soon, Emily, soon. I must go to Scarborough. I think Willie might be waiting for me there. *(Anne gets up and runs a little ways away from Emily. She stops and turns back to Emily)* Emily, I love you.

EMILY

And I love you. *(Anne runs back to Emily and gives her a lingering kiss her on the lips.)* I'll be here, waiting for you.

Anne runs to the parsonage. As she does the lights return to the cloudy present. She dashes up the stairs and onto the bed, throws the covers over her, closes her eyes then opens them, gasping into consciousness. Charlottes grabs Anne and pulls her close to her, weeping.

CHARLOTTE

Oh Annie! Annie! You must not die. You must not die. I won't let you!

ANNE

(Delirious)

Charlotte, it's no use. You must let me have my wish. I must go to Scarborough, now.

Charlotte lies Anne down and gazes at her. She strokes Anne's hair.

CHARLOTTE

I don't want to lose you.

ANNE

(SMILING STRANGELY)

Why Charlotte, don't you know?

CHARLOTTE

Know what, my sweet?

ANNE

You'll never lose me, no matter what, you'll never lose me.

Charlotte looks at Anne, pinned momentarily by Anne's gaze. Then, she sighs in resignation.

CHARLOTTE

All right, we'll go. I'll make arrangements with Papa. I'll ask Ellen if she'll come with us.

ANNE

(SMILES AT CHARLOTTE SERENELY)

Good, Charlotte, good. You'll see it's better this way. *(She reaches up and puts her emaciated arms around Charlotte's neck and brings her close to her.)* I love you, Charlotte. I'll never leave you, ever.

The lights fade to black.

In the darkness Patrick's voice can be heard chattering on and laughing as if he were with a good friend. In the background is the ticking of the long case clock.

PATRICK (OS)

I was a red-headed Irishman that's what I was. Now I wasn't a big drinker, a hard worker was what I was with an early fondness for books...

The parsonage door opens. Charlotte stands in the doorway, a tiny upright silhouette with a long shadow. Charlotte steps into the parsonage and closes the door. The lights rise in the interior of the parsonage, washed in stormy, cheerless daylight.

PATRICK (CONT.)(OS)

The eldest son of ten, yes ten children. Though I suppose one shouldn't be surprised at that; in my time it was normal. Only had six myself, my wife died and no one else would have me.

Charlotte listens to Patrick's voice as she surveys the empty downstairs with apprehension and finally she calls...

CHARLOTTE

Papa? (No answer) Papa?

Patrick laughs upstairs behind his closed door. Charlotte takes off her wraps and begins climbing the stairs.

PATRICK (OS)

Hugh Brunty was my father's name. Had a corn kiln, that's how he made his living. But that wasn't all, no, no, was the greatest storyteller in all the county. Now that's saying something, you know, in a land of liars.

Charlotte stops near Patrick's door and listens.

PATRICK (OS)

Got a bit of it myself and so do my children. Though I've lost all of them but for one.

She knocks lightly on the door. Patrick laughs.

PATRICK (OS)

But she's famous, you know...(Charlotte raps again, harder. Patrick stops and calls.) Who's there?

CHARLOTTE

It's me.

PATRICK

Oh, Charlotte, come in, come in. Open the door.

Charlotte opens the door. Patrick is sitting in his chair completely alone.

PATRICK (CONT.)

(ESPECIALLY DELIGHTED TO SEE HER)

Oh, Charlotte it's good to have you back. Come sit down, sit down.

CHARLOTTE

Are you alone?

PATRICK

(LAUGHING)

Of course, of course.

Charlotte sits.

CHARLOTTE

Ellen Nussey sends you her regards.

PATRICK

Oh, good, good. Please return mine when you next write to her. And is it nice?

CHARLOTTE

To what are you referring, papa?

PATRICK

The plot.

CHARLOTTE

The plot?

PATRICK

Anne's plot.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Anne's plot. Yes, it overlooks the sea.

PATRICK

It isn't overcrowded then?

CHARLOTTE

Overcrowded?

PATRICK

The graveyard.

CHARLOTTE

No, no, it is old but it is spacious.

PATRICK

Not like ours, good, good. Ours is far too crowded.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

PATRICK

You see, that is the source of the problem. Water Supply!

CHARLOTTE

Water supply?

PATRICK

That's what I said. Where do we pump our water?

CHARLOTTE

Why in the front, papa.

PATRICK

(IRRITABLY)

Yes in the front. And what is in the "front"?
Starts to answers, then realizes what she is about to say.

CHARLOTTE

The cemetery.

PATRICK

(PLEASED BY HER ANSWER)

Exactly. That is where we get our drinking water. I had that water examined. And do you know what I found?

CHARLOTTE

What did you find, papa?

PATRICK

That there was a peculiar film on its surface. Through the drinking of this water we imbibe materials which, though they do not always produce great severity of disease, speedily induce a morbid condition which renders the body more prone to attacks of illness. Do you understand me?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, papa.

PATRICK

It's from the graves. Our house is not only built in a graveyard, but over one. There are ancient graves beneath our kitchen. What falls from the sky seeps into the graves and is pumped up and filtered through them. By the time it reaches us it is not water anymore. It is an elixir of death. There's where our family has gone! We must not drink this water anymore. We must have it carried down to us...*(He raises his hands)* from above!

CHARLOTTE

And how will we do that, Papa?

PATRICK

Don't worry yourself about it. I will find a way. You should go now. Have some tea to warm you. It is not from the well. And rest, you need rest after such an arduous journey.

CHARLOTTE

(RISING)

Yes. *(She stops by the door.)* Are you well, Papa?

PATRICK

Yes, considering I've imbibed in the water. I've had a cold of course, but it's no worse than usual. Good night, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Good night, papa.

She starts to leave.

PATRICK

Oh Charlotte...I was informed yesterday by Mr. Nicholls that the Mechanics Library in Bradford is considering the installation of one of your books, *Jane Eyre*, I believe it is.

CHARLOTTE

(STANDING BEFORE THE DOOR A LITTLE STUNNED)

Is that so, papa?

PATRICK

Soon all Haworth will know about you.

CHARLOTTE

That is indeed disturbing.

PATRICK

The Classics. It is because I introduced you early to the Classics. And the Brunty blood, Hugh Brunty, your grandfather. I was thinking...do you remember the stories I told you, about your grandfather, Hugh?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, papa.

PATRICK

At breakfast, you and Branwell and Emily and Anne. Your eyes so wide I thought they were going to pop out. Old Hugh, Hugh Brunty, he was a great storyteller, you know. It's been passed on through the family. *(He stops, gazes at her and smiles, although his face is worn with grief)* Ah, but you must be tired. Go. Go, now and rest. I must work on acquiring our new water.

Charlotte rises and crosses to the door.

CHARLOTTE

Good night, papa.

PATRICK

(A BIT ALARMED)

Night? Is it night already?

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

PATRICK

Oh, then so it is, so it is...

CHARLOTTE

(VAGUELY)

Yes.

She starts to leave.

PATRICK

Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, papa?

PATRICK

That "Jane Eyre" ... it is a good book.

CHARLOTTE

(SUDDENLY FLUSTERED)

Why...thank you, papa.

She opens the door.

PATRICK

(UNABLE TO DISGUISE HIS PRIDE IN HER)

Good night, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

(UNABLE TO LOOK BACK AT HIM.)

Good night, papa.

Charlotte exits Patrick's room and closes the door behind her. She pauses outside the door and smiles to herself.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Anne sat at the window so she could look down on the sea. The morning it was calm as glass. Around 11 a.m. she announced that she had felt a change, A doctor was called. She asked him how long he thought she might live--not to fear speaking the truth for she was not afraid to die. He told her that death was close at hand, she thanked him for his truthfulness. She prayed quietly, then called Ellen to her side.

Anne appears under a special.

ANNE

Be a sister in my stead. Give Charlotte as much of your company as you can.

CHARLOTTE

When she became restless as death approached, we carried her to the sofa. When I asked her if she were more at ease, she answered,

ANNE

It is not you who can give me ease, but soon all will be well through the merits of our Redeemer.

CHARLOTTE

Conscious to the last, she died, very calmly and gently, at two o'clock in the afternoon on Monday, May 28th, 1849

The sun appears on the horizon and begins to glow a golden red and the lights crossfade to Anne in the background beyond the window, walking US out toward the sea. There is the sound of seagulls, surf and sea breezes, the sun is setting. Anne stands there a moment, she looks young and free. She runs her fingers through her hair. She turns and looks offstage. Her face brightens. From offstage William Weightman appears in all white curate clothes. Willie smiles at Anne, then strokes her hair. Anne looks back, a joyful smile on her lips. Willie pulls her to him. They kiss passionately, then join hands and walk toward the sea as the lights fade on them.

In the dark there is the sound of Patrick laughing and talking. Charlotte approaches Patrick's door with trepidation.

NICHOLLS (OS)

(Quoting from Charlotte's novel, "Shirley")

"Of late years, an abundant shower of curates has fallen upon the north of England: they lie very thick on the hills."

Patrick laughs. Nicholls continues to quote from Charlotte's novel.

NICHOLLS (CONT.) (OS)

"The curates, summoned to this bounteous repast, entered joyous; but at once, on seeing the ladies..."

Charlotte raps lightly on the door.

NICHOLLS (CONT.) (OS)

...they had not been forewarned, they came to a stand in the doorway. Malone headed the party...

Patrick laughs.

PATRICK

"Malone?" "Malone", indeed. You know who she's writing about.

Charlotte raps on the door a little louded and the laughter and conversation behind the door suddenly stops.

PATRICK

(From behind the door, irritably)
Who is it?

CHARLOTTE

It's Charlotte.

Patrick's laughter is renewed, as if he were laughing at the sound of Charlotte's name.

PATRICK

Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte. Open the door please and let her in.

Patrick's door opens and Nicholls steps out, completely flustered and blushing. He holds her latest novel, "Shirley". Charlotte retreats from the door, noticeably disturbed. She attempts vainly to adjust her clothes and hair but cannot do so under Nicholls' blazing gaze.

CHARLOTTE

Reverend Nicholls!

PATRICK

(From within his room)

Oh Charlotte, *(He can't contain his laughter. Charlotte enters. Nicholls is unable to look at her.)* Come in, Charlotte, come in. *(He laughs)* You new novel, it is hilarious. The Lord must needs bless those who depict the shepherds of his flock with such a keen and satirical eye. Who would have known that my daughter would possess such a sense of humor. Mr. Nicholls has been kind enough to read to me. My eyes are so weak and he has been so kind. "Shirley", what a strange title.

NICHOLLS

I must be leaving.

He turns and puts the book on the table.

PATRICK

Oh, don't go, Mr. Nicholls; it was just getting good.

Nicholls' blushes. He is unable to raise his gaze from his hands which seem suddenly huge and clumsy.

NICHOLLS

I have many things to attend to, I fear, and not much of the day to complete them.

PATRICK

(Sighing good-naturedly)

Well, if you must, you must. But please, you must promise to return and read more of the novel. All of it, I must have you read all of it to me. You will return tomorrow and read more of it won't you?

NICHOLLS

If there is time, Reverend, if there is time.

He bursts from the doorway and runs out in the graveyard. He sits in the shadows, his head in his hands.

PATRICK

(Laughing at the departed curate)

What a strange fellow. You know how I found out about your book? John Brown said his wife was nearly frightened out of her wits by Nicholls' carryings-on. Said she came running to ask what the to-do was and found him roaring with laughter and clapping his hands and stamping about the floor. He said it was because of your novel. She thought he was going daft. But you know, Charlotte, he is a judicious, pious young man. He goes into every house, doing his best. I am unable to run over these hills as I once did. *(Regards Charlotte)* You look tired, child. It cannot be easy for being alone with an old man. Reach into that drawer there. *(He gestures toward a set of drawers. Charlotte looks at him confused)* I noticed that your "Jane Eyre" had no mother. *(She looks into the drawer)* Do you see them? Pick them up.

Charlotte takes a bundle of letters from the drawer.

CHARLOTTE

This, Papa?

PATRICK

Yes. They are yellow with time, written before you were born. They were written to me before we were married.

CHARLOTTE

From my mother?

PATRICK

Yes. Read them.

Charlotte takes a letter from the bundle and begins reading it as the lights fade on Patrick. As Charlotte reads Maria enters S.L. She looks young and in love, gazing at Patrick as Charlotte reads.

CHARLOTTE

My Dear Saucy Pat,
I think if our lives are spared twenty years
hence I shall love you with the same, if not
greater, fervor and delight that I do now.

MARIA

I am certain no one ever loved you with an
affection more pure, constant, tender, and ardent
than that which I feel. Surely this is not saying
too much; it is the truth, and I trust you are
worthy to know it.
Adieu, my dearest. I am your affectionate and
sincere

Maria.

Patrick gazes lovingly at Maria and recites a poem to her.

PATRICK

Sweet is this April morn,...
Maria, let us walk, and breathe, the morning air,
And hear the cuckoo sing,--
And every tuneful bird, that woos the gentle
spring.
Throughout the budding grove,
Softly coos the turtle-dove,

PATRICK (CONT.)

The primrose pale,
Perfumes the gale,
The modest daisy, and the violet blue,
Inviting, spread their charms for you.
How much enhanced is all this bliss to me,
Since it is shared, in mutual joy with thee!

Maria turns and walks off stage. The lights fade on Patrick.

CHARLOTTE

A poem for my mother...from Papa.

She folds the letter, puts it with the rest, clasps the bundle to her bosom. Nicholls can stand it no longer. He crosses to the parsonage door and knocks. Charlotte crosses to the door and opens it.

NICHOLLS

Good evening, Miss Brontë.

Charlotte is stunned.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Nicholls.

Nicholls is shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale.

NICHOLLS

Miss Brontë?

Charlotte gazes at Nicholls.

CHARLOTTE

Are you all right, Mr. Nicholls? It is with me you wish to speak?

NICHOLLS

Yes, ma'am.

Charlotte gestures for him to sit. Nicholls gazes at her but doesn't sit. Charlotte looks up at him, alarmed and takes a seat.

NICHOLLS

(Speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty)

These last months have been very hard on me. My heart has felt as if it would break with every beat. I scarce can breathe at the thought of you. I can barely sleep or eat after I've even had a glimpse of you. I can endure it no longer, Miss Brontë. I love you. And I crave leave for some hope that you might entertain the possibility of being my wife.

Charlotte watches him with rapt attention, riveted to him by his honest, undisguised fear and vulnerability.

CHARLOTTE

Have you spoken to papa?

NICHOLLS

I dare not.

Charlotte half leads, half pushes Nicholls from the door.

CHARLOTTE

My...my dear Mr. Nicholls. I am deeply touched but you must leave now, immediately. I will speak to Papa and give you my reply tomorrow.

NICHOLLS

Then you will consider it?

CHARLOTTE

(Practically closing the door on his neck)

Good night, Mr. Nicholls. I will reply tomorrow.

NICHOLLS

(As the door closes in his face.)

Thank you, Miss...

Charlotte closes the door on Nicholls. She then stops and stares at the door, stunned. She raises her hand and touches her cheek. She then whirls around crosses to Patrick's door.

CHARLOTTE

Papa?

Charlotte enters Patrick's room. After a moment of silence Patrick stands and shouts.

PATRICK

He what? Slurring Jesus, I'll break his back!

END OF ACT SIX

Act Seven

The lights rise on Charlotte, above from her bedroom window.. She is looking out at Nicholls in the graveyard.

CHARLOTTE

I was not unaware of Mr. Nicholls' regard: for a long time, I had marked his glances and his feverish restraint. What I was not aware of was the strength of his feeling, to watch him, trembling from head to foot and now to see this new demeanor, after my rejection - for reject him I did, the next morning by way of a note delivered to his doorstep - to see this same man obsessed, tenacious, even careless that the whole of Haworth be witness to his pursuit and deplore him for it, well, I must say, I was surprised.

A special rises on Patrick. She crosses downstairs. Patrick is in the parlor writing. She a teapot on a table and pours herself a cup of tea.

CHARLOTTE

Good afternoon, Papa.

PATRICK

Good afternoon, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Papa?

PATRICK

Yes, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

I was...I was wondering... I've not seen Mr. Nicholls.

PATRICK

And you won't be seeing him.

CHARLOTTE

I see. I was only concerned...

PATRICK

There is nothing to concern you. Mr. Nicholls is safely out of the way.

CHARLOTTE

Out of the way, Papa?

PATRICK

He is gone from our midst.

Patrick turns away as if the matter's been settled. Charlotte starts to leave, then turns to him.

CHARLOTTE

Papa, I don't want to pry, it's only...

PATRICK

(Irritated)

What is it girl?

CHARLOTTE

Well, Mr. Nicholls has been of such use to you...

PATRICK

(Angry)

Mr. Nicholls has exhausted what ever use he was to me.

CHARLOTTE

I see.

PATRICK

Unmanly driveller, Mr. Brown says he's scaring the wits out of his wife with his antics, not taking his meals, weeping all the time like some great baby. It's enough to make you want to kill him.

CHARLOTTE

I see.

PATRICK

No one in the parish ever liked him! Sour as an old hag he was and stiff as a board and not an ounce of humor. And I'll tell you something else, *(He points at his head)* the man's not "right". I hadn't seen that part of him before, but it's come out, the beeast, sure as a dark moon in a

PATRICK (CONT.)

black sky, skulking about like some great Celtic dog, you'd fear he might chase you down with an axe. The best I could do is shoot the animal.

CHARLOTTE

I see. But he still is in town?

PATRICK

Don't you worry yourself about it. He won't be bothering you any more. He's quit position here and taken up a curacy at another parish.

CHARLOTTE

That's good. And where is he going?

PATRICK

The way he's been carrying on you'd think he was going to Africa.

CHARLOTTE

Is he?

PATRICK

Is he what?

CHARLOTTE

Going to Africa?

PATRICK

He's going to Kirk Smeaton, a mile down the road.

CHARLOTTE

Has he gone all ready?

PATRICK

(Shouting)

It's none of your concern!

The lights rise on Nicholls. He is at the end of the graveyard, leaning over the garden gate, head in his hands, in a paroxysm of anguish, convulsed with racking sobs. It is dawn light, the birds are singing, it's a beautiful spring morning. Charlotte rises from her chair and passes from the parlor into the graveyard. As she does, the lights fade in the parsonage. She opens the door and runs out to Nicholls.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Mr. Nicholls. I trust you must know I am not cruelly blind and indifferent to your constancy and your grief. You must take courage and accept your lot.

She gently places her fingers on his arm.

NICHOLLS

Oh Miss Brontë! If you could only find it in your heart to reconsider!

CHARLOTTE

It cannot be. It cannot be. (*Lights fade on Nicholls.*) Oh, Mary, Mary. I cannot understand it. I do not even love this man. Papa's vehement antipathy to the bare thought of anyone thinking of me as a wife, and Mr. Nicholls' distress both give me pain.

Lights fade

The lights fade to night.

CHARLOTTE

One night I took a walk to clear my head. Per chance, I found myself on the path to Smeaten Kirk. The moon was full and bright, the trees, etched in the sky, the stars twinkling between them. I stopped at the church and heard singing and then Mr. Nicholls' voice delivering a sermon. I realized that I shouldn't have come there, that I was indeed, seeking him out. What ever was I thinking?

She turns around and takes off down the path. Behind her she hears the sound of a large person following her. She can hear his footsteps and, at times, his breathing. Silence. She hurries down the lane. The sound follows her. Now she is running. She comes to the end of the lane, stops momentarily and looks behind her while she catches her breath. Silence. Then she hears the hulking creature coming toward her. She gasps and runs off stage. The creature continues up the lane. It stops. Its labored breathing can be heard. It emerges from the bushes. It is Nicholls.

NICHOLLS

Miss Brontë?

The light fade.

Charlotte appears in a long silhouette in the doorway. She's carrying a wrapped portrait.

CHARLOTTE

Papa? (*Silence*) Papa?

CHARLOTTE CLIMBS THE STAIRS WITH HER WRAPPED PORTRAIT. SHE STOPS AT PATRICK'S DOOR AND RAPS LIGHTLY.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Papa? (*Silence*) Papa?

PATRICK

(Quietly from behind his door)

Come in.

*Charlotte hesitates and cautiously opens the door.
Patrick's room is dark.*

CHARLOTTE

Father?

PATRICK

Where have you been? I expected you two weeks ago.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry, papa, I was delayed.

PATRICK

That is obvious.

CHARLOTTE

I apologize if I caused you any concern.

PATRICK

Did you go to the War Museum as I asked?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I did, papa and I saw some most marvelous things. Are you all right?

PATRICK

What do you care?

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean, papa?

PATRICK

What is in the package?

CHARLOTTE

(SELF-CONSCIOUS, UNABLE TO LOOK AT HIM)

A drawing...of me...it's a portrait of me, papa.

PATRICK

Of you! Whatever for?

CHARLOTTE

(LOOKING DOWN AT HER FEET)

I met a certain, Mr. Richmond, while attending a lecture delivered by Thackeray. Richmond is a famous portrait artist. He asked if I would sit for him.

Patrick strikes a match. His face can be seen in its light, grave and tired. He lights a candle.

PATRICK

Let me see it.

CHARLOTTE

Are you sure, Papa?

PATRICK

Yes, yes, of course. Thackeray indeed. You saw Thackeray himself.

CHARLOTTE

(AS SHE IS UNWRAPPING THE PORTRAIT)

Yes. And under the most embarrassing of circumstances, I fear.

PATRICK

Hold it up. Let me see the picture, child. Hold it up into the light, where I can see it.

Charlotte holds the picture up in front of her face displaying it for Patrick, as she continues to speak from behind the portrait.

CHARLOTTE

It was a most interesting lecture. But at the intermission, Mr. Thackeray let it be known that "Jane Eyre" was present. And at the end of the lecture when I was about to leave, I found myself surrounded by the most important lords and ladies in all of England. They gawked down at me like so many crested birds and parted a way for me between them. I was nearly crushed by the sheer weight of their number. *(She pulls the painting down from her face.)* I fear I did not make a favorable impression.

PATRICK

And who accompanied you to Thackeray's lecture?

CHARLOTTE

Why, Mr. Smith.

PATRICK

(SUSPICIOUSLY)

Mr. Smith?

CHARLOTTE

Why yes, papa, Mr. George Smith of Smith, Elder, my publishers.

PATRICK
(COCKING AT EYE)

Your publisher, you say?

CHARLOTTE
Yes, father. Is there anything the matter, papa?

PATRICK
Are you being courted?

CHARLOTTE
Of course not, father. May I ask what has driven you to this line of questioning?

PATRICK
You have been gone close to a month and you said you would be away a fortnight. There is only one conclusion to be drawn.

CHARLOTTE
And what is that, papa?

PATRICK
That you are involved in some kind romantic adventure.

CHARLOTTE
Romantic adventure?

PATRICK
You're gone a month, gallivanting around in London with your publisher, seduced by music and magic.

CHARLOTTE
Why father, how could you even dream of such a possibility? There are so many unmarried women over thirty they're exporting them to the colonies! Even the most prosaic and unattractive of men strut about like a bantam cocks in full plume. And what would there be about me, a plain, diminutive thirty-seven year old, near-sighted, spinster that would draw such favored attention? Unless there is anything more you need of me, I will say goodnight.

She dutifully picks up the wrapping and climbs the stairs with her picture in one hand and the wrapping in the other. She puts the picture in the chair across from her, then looks at the wrapping, not sure what she is going to do with it. She then puts the wrapping in the middle of the table and sits and looks at the wrapping piled between her and her portrait, glaring. She notices a stack of letters on the table. She looks through them. One letter catches

her attention. She squints at the handwriting, then opens the letter. Nicholls appears under a special.

CHARLOTTE

My Dear Miss Brontë,-
Please forgive me for writing this letter but I cannot go on without your council.

CHARLOTTE AND NICHOLLS

I've written with my left hand so that your father might not discover who wrote this to you.

NICHOLLS

I also walked the 20 miles to Bradford and posted it there so that he wouldn't know from whence it came. Please forgive this stealth, but the desperation of my situation has driven me to take such measures. I ask nothing of you but a few words of comfort so that I might be able to accept my lot.

CHARLOTTE AND NICHOLLS

I have loved since I first laid eyes on you.

NICHOLLS

You were not a famous author then, and it is not the famous author that I cherish. "Currer Bell" may fly to heaven for all I care.

CHARLOTTE AND NICHOLLS

It is Charlotte Brontë that I adore.

NICHOLLS

Please help me bear my broken heart by a few words of wisdom.

Your Devoted Servant,

Arthor Bell Nicholls

Charlotte crosses to the window and looks out at the graveyard, Nicholls' letter dangling from her fingers. Nicholls stands below, looking up at her window. Both are unaware of each other. She speaks with an ardency and innocence of a woman on the verge of love.

CHARLOTTE

The trees seem so green this year. The wind so clear. It's as if they were blowing the heavens down to us. The ground is tender as if it hurts when I touch it. And the sky is most cerulean as if it were melting high up there. The dark emanation of moist wood, the smell of wet deer, the lye on the clean stones in the house, I can

smell it all and food, I'm struck with fits of hunger. I can't sleep for waking and when I do, I hear the wind rush through the graveyard. The gravestones glisten with fresh rain. It reminds me of so many days when I played there. The

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

graves are only rocks, Mary, with letters carved into them; words of love and fear; fear that the beloved Dead will come out and climb in our beds. It's Spring, Mary.

Charlotte suddenly turns from the window and descends the stairs and crosses to Patrick's study. She knocks on Patrick's door.

CHARLOTTE

Papa? *(She knocks again)* Papa?

PATRICK

Who is it?

CHARLOTTE

It's Charlotte.

PATRICK

Come in.

Charlotte enters Patrick's room. He is cleaning his gun.

PATRICK

Yes child. What is it?

CHARLOTTE

Papa, I cannot live with it any longer. In all my life, I have always been honest with you.

PATRICK

As you should be.

CHARLOTTE

I would like to improve my acquaintance with Reverend Nicholls.

PATRICK

No! I forbid it!

CHARLOTTE

(Steadily and clearly)

Father, I am not a young girl, not a young woman even. I never was pretty. I now am ugly. At your death I shall have 300 pounds besides the little I have earned for myself. Do you think there are many men who would serve seven years

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

for me? Yes, I have corresponded with Reverend Nicholls and I intend to continue doing so.

PATRICK

You will not. You will not correspond with Reverend Nicholls. I absolutely forbid it!
(*Charlotte runs from his room.*) Come back here!

Charlotte runs from the house. Patrick appears at the parsonage door.

PATRICK

You must not bear children. You will not survive it! I cannot lose you. I will be utterly alone.

He buries his face in his hands. The lights crossfade on the parsonage to Charlotte fleeing over the moors. Everything goes into motion as Charlotte runs. The wind blows, the sky is an arching gray like the inside of a great whale. The clouds sweep up above her and Charlotte runs and runs. Voices burst from the sky and immediately dissolve into a howling wind. Charlotte falls toward the ground and as she falls, Branwell darts out of the darkness, grabs her, whirls her around then lowers her to the earth. Charlotte buries her face in his chest, sobbing. Branwell strokes her hair.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Branni, Branni, I miss you!

BRANWELL

Oh my sweet, sweet sister, cry, my love, cry.

CHARLOTTE

I miss you so. I miss you all. No matter where I go I feel you near me just vanishing around a corner or slipping through a door. I can't stand it. I'm so lonely. (*She looks at Branwell, then kisses him. Branwell returns the kiss, trying to suffocate her with it. Charlotte begins to struggle in Branwell's arms. She pushes Branwell away.*) No!

BRANWELL

Marry him, Tallii, what do you have to lose?

Branwell backs into the darkness .

CHARLOTTE

Branii, Branii don't go.

Charlotte runs toward the darkness after Branwell, Branwell has vanished into the darkness. There is the sound of rain

and distant thunder. Charlotte turns and crosses to the pool of water. She kneels above the pool and runs her fingers through the water. Mother Maria, glowing white and dead in her wedding dress comes out of the darkness. A white wedding veil is over her face. She crosses to Charlotte. She removes the wedding veil, dips it in the water and gently begins washing Charlotte's tears away as she speaks.

MOTHER MARIA

My dear daughter you know only the love engendered by the harshness of our Wesleyan decrees and the sympathies felt among siblings. You do not know the touch of a lover's hands. Nor the honeyed sentiments expressed for love's sake alone. You do not know the sweet thread of love's tendrils running through your heart. I wish this for you, no matter how brief it may last. The gentle breath of your name whispered tenderly in your ear... *(Mother Maria backs away into the darkness.)* "Charlotte, Charlotte, Charlotte".

Patrick appears at the parsonage door. He sees his daughter out in the rain by the pool.

CHARLOTTE

A man loves me, father. I know if I marry him I might die. I want to live. How much easier it would be to live alone in this house, singly and safely, feeding on the strange necromantic joys of fancy, to live forever, safely but half-alive. All my life I have written about love but I have never known it. Surely it is madness for one so lonely to throw away such great devotion. I respect him. Perhaps this respect might turn to love.

Patrick comes out of the parsonage. He takes his coat off and puts around her shoulders.

PATRICK

You shouldn't be out in this weather, child, whatever possessed you. Here, come inside. *He helps her into the parsonage. He turns back and looks out.*) I'm sure...I'm sure I saw my wife...my dear Maria...standing on a hill...looking at me...

Patrick leads Charlotte into the parsonage. The lights crossfade to dawn light.

The parsonage door opens and Charlotte appears stealing from the house. She glides between the tombstones, wrapping a shawl about her as she does. Near the edge of the graveyard she stops.

CHARLOTTE
(Calling softly)

Arthur?

A shadowy figure appears near the edge of the graveyard. It is Nicholls.

NICHOLLS
Charlotte.

He takes both her hands in his. For a moment they gaze at each other, then walk upstage toward the rising sun, hand in hand. Nicholl's voice is barely audible as they walk away and the lights fade.

The lights rise on Branwell. He sings down on the couple from Charlotte's window. He sings...

BRANWELL
(Lovingly)

Ah! little child, torn early from thy home
Over a weary waste of waves to roam;
I see thy fair hair streaming in the wind
Wafted from green hills left so far behind;
Like one lamb lost upon a gloomy moor,
Lone flower tossed a hundred leagues from shore.

The lights fade on him.

The lights rise on Charlotte, who is finishing her letter to Mary Taylor.

CHARLOTTE
How does one dispense with love awakened? I cannot simply pack it up and put it away. Being the very impulse of life it doesn't want to die. It wants to take wings and brighten the sky, to fling itself into the world and when it can't, it clouds everything over with a veil of pain, supplanting all with its yearning, stupefies the limbs blinds the eyes with a raging melancholy. If I try to kill love, it reaches back and tries to kill me. So it was with caution that I tried to lull that savage animal to sleep, with various meanderings of the heart and mind, all the while trying to put it down so that it might doze and I move on without its waking. And it hurts and hurts and hurts I must go to my destiny as you

have gone to yours. Today's my wedding day. Today I marry Arthur Bell Nicholls. I am so happy...and so afraid. I fear I dare not send this letter to you. *(She takes the letter she has been writing to Mary and holds it over the candle.)* I will remember you and love you always, dear Mary Taylor, my Tolly.

She drops the flaming letter into the open grave. She looks at the dawning sky.

The lights fade.

There is the sound of the ticking of the parsonage clock. The grave opens, fog rises from it. A long scarlet veil emerges from the grave, draped gracefully from a long twisted branch, held aloft by Branwell. He is covered by a long white veil. Anne and Emily come up out of the grave. They too are covered by long white veils. They move silently through the graveyard to the parsonage.

ANNE

Charlotte, Charlotte...Charlotte, wake up.

Charlotte appears at her window.

CHARLOTTE

Anne?

ANNE

Don't be afraid, Charlotte. Emily and I have had the most brilliant idea.

CHARLOTTE

Emily?

EMILY

Yes, Charlotte, I'm here.

ANNE

Tell her our idea, Emily.

EMILY

We've decided we should collaborate.

CHARLOTTE

Collaborate?

ANNE

I think it is a most wonderful idea.

EMILY

We'll write a novel, all three of us together. Our nom de plume will be Thanatasia.

ANNE

Get up, Charlotte. Come down to the parlor with us. Let's begin now.

CHARLOTTE

Now?

EMILY

Yes, my darling.

CHARLOTTE

Do you really mean it?

EMILY

Come.

Charlotte starts for the stairs when there is a thunderous knocking at the door.

CHARLOTTE

There's someone in the house.

ANNE

Go meet him.

EMILY

Yes, yes, go meet him.

Nicholls comes out of the grave in a white curate suit and a top hat. Mother Maria, Elizabeth and Little Maria follow him. They are covered by long white veils. They form a entourage of veiled ghosts. ajar. She runs to Nicholls.

NICHOLLS

Do you want to be my wife?

CHARLOTTE

(CRYING OUT)

Yes! Yes!

NICHOLLS

What shall you bring into the world, a child of Death?

CHARLOTTE

Yes, if it must be.

Little Maria sings as Mother Maria and Elizabeth remove the scarlet wedding veil from the branch and put it over Charlotte. All the figures are draped but Nicholls.

ANNE

(Singing)

I knew 'twas a bridal, for under a bower
Of roses and the myrtle and the fair lily flower
Stood that stately noble in pluméd pride,
And the sweet, fair lady, his plighted bride.

CHARLOTTE

It will be bright today. The world will be out, all of them, children and fathers and mothers and dottering old grandfathers, all out in the bright, bright sun. I will walk out in the world among them. They will smile at me, little bairns with rosy faces, frolicking among the grave stones and the flowers.

Nicholls and Charlotte join hands again and proceed toward the parsonage. The ghosts, as wedding guests, watch them. There is a glow of candlelight in Charlotte's room. Charlotte appears at her bedroom window. The lights fade to black. From the darkness we hear Nicholls' voice.

NICHOLLS

(Whispering)

Charlotte...Charlotte...Charlotte...

The lights fade.

Lights rise on the bedroom. It is a bright, clear day, birds are singing. Charlotte appears at the window. She looks troubled. Nicholls appears behind her. He is smiling.

NICHOLLS

Did you sleep well, my love?

CHARLOTTE

I was dreaming.

NICHOLLS

Was it a bad dream?

Charlotte nods her head, "Yes".

NICHOLLS (CONT.)

Tell me the dream.

CHARLOTTE

I was on a road. It was unknown to me: rain pelted me; I was carrying a little child: a very small creature, too young and feeble to walk; it shivered in my arms, and wailed piteously in my ear. *(She looks at Nicholls)* I thought, sir, that you were on the road a long way before me; and I strained every nerve to overtake you and made effort on effort to utter your name and entreat you to stop-but my movements were fettered; and my voice died away inarticulate.

NICHOLLS

And this dream weighs on your spirits now,
Charlotte, when I am close to you? *(He looks into
her eyes.)* Do you love me?

*Charlotte looks at Nicholls and ernstly considers his
question.*

CHARLOTTE

I do love you, sir.

NICHOLLS

Those words did not die inarticulate on your
lips. I heard them clear and soft and as sweet as
music. And indeed, I have not walked away from
you. *(He takes her in his arms)* I am here. Forget
your dreams and think only of real happiness. Let
me take care of you.

Charlotte gazes in wonder into his eyes.

CHARLOTTE

I...have never had...any one who would take care
of me.

NICHOLLS

You do now. I will protect you and guard you with
my very life. I will not let you fall into
dispair.

Charlotte is moved. She smiles and touches his face.

CHARLOTTE

Arthur, if ever I did a good deed in my life-if
ever I thought a good thought-if ever I prayed a
sincere and blameless prayer-if ever I wished a
righteous wish,-I am rewarded now.

NICHOLLS

I want you to show me the waterfall...what do you
call it?

CHARLOTTE

The waterfall?

NICHOLLS

The one where you and Emily and Anne played.

CHARLOTTE

The Meeting of the Waters. *(She looks out the
window)* But it looks as if it might rain.

NICHOLLS

A little rain won't hurt us. Come with me, my
dear Mrs. Arthur Bell Nicholls.

Branwell, Emily and Anne appear dressed in the bright capes they wore as children. Branwell has paper hat on. They climb into Charlotte's bedroom. Charlotte takes Nicholls' hand. Branwell, Emily and Anne grab each other's hands, their capes extended like a wall, blocking the view to Nicholls and Charlotte.

The lights rise on Patrick in his study.

PATRICK

Dear Miss Taylor,
Owing to my dear daughter's indisposition, she has desired me to answer your kind letter by return of post. For several days past she has been confined to her bed, where she still lies. I can only hope her health will return again...

Branwell, Emily and Anne release their hands and take various places in Charlotte's room. Charlotte is lying on the bed. Nicholls is standing over her. Emily begins turning cape, creating the east wind.

CHARLOTTE

Why are you crying, Arthur? You're not worried for me, are you? *(She pauses and looks at him, listening to the wind.)* Can you hear that? The east wind, the weird wind, blowing? It's blowing holes in me, making me yearn. It's talking, Arthur! It's talking about lovers. Do you know what it's saying, Arthur? It says the wind blows, blows for fretful lovers bound in mutual mayhem. They crouch in the trees, duck behind the leaves, the clouds, still and steady as summer air, staring at us, ready to spring from nightfall when the flowers grow cold and there is a stirring in eaches' little story...the dead dragging each other by the hair.

NICHOLLS

Charlotte...

CHARLOTTE

Oh God! If only the wind, the weird wind would stop blowing. I feel it in my bones. I will never get dry or warm. It is blowing me away.

NICHOLLS

I'll hold you here. *(He takes her in his arms)* I won't let it take you away.

Each ghost sings with renewed vigor and their childhood regained. Nicholls is unaware of them.

BRANWELL

(Singing)

Ah! swiftly, surely art thou gliding
Over Death's unfathomed sea,
Dark and deep the waves dividing
Thee from earth and earth from thee!

Charlotte come home.

CHARLOTTE

Branii? I'm sorry for judging you so harshly.

BRANWELL

(Laughing)

Don't worry, my love, we're all the same under
the skin.

LITTLE MARIA

Join us! You won't be lonely any more.

CHARLOTTE

I'm not lonely!

ANNE

Fair was the evening and brightly the sun
Was shining on desert and grove,
Sweet were the breezes and balmy the flowers
And cloudless the heavens above.

CHARLOTTE

Annie! Annie! Is that you?

ANNE

Yes, yes, it's me.

CHARLOTTE

I love you more than you know.

ANNE

Don't worry, Charlotte, I know, I know, and I
love you.

Charlotte touches Anne's face. Anne sings.

ANNE (CONT.)

The youth beheld her saddened air
And smiling cheerfully
He said, 'How pleasant is the land
Of sunny Araby!'

Charlotte laughs in delight.

LITTLE MARIA

The sovereign hand that created your frame, and put life into it, has provided you with other resources than your feeble self.

CHARLOTTE

And shall I see you again, Maria, when I die?

MARIA

You will come to the same region of happiness. You must come! Then we'll all be together!

CHARLOTTE

Oh no! You shan't have me, not yet, not yet!

Emily sings to Charlotte.

EMILY

How clear she shines! How quietly
I lie beneath her guardian light
While Heaven and Earth are whispering me,
'To-morrow wake, but dream to-night.'

CHARLOTTE

Emily, I miss you!

EMILY

(Laughing)

Will you stop your infernal bawling and come home?

MOTHER MARIA

Yes, my daughter, come over, come over.

CHARLOTTE

Oh Arthur! I want to stay, I want to stay, but they fill me with such yearning. Is this what I've been yearning for? Oh, surely not! God protect me!

NICHOLLS

Oh God, Oh dear God. Please spare her.

The wind stops blowing. All sounds stop. Charlotte looks up at Nicholls, surprised.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean? I'm not going to die, am I? He will not separate us --we've been so happy.

Branwell, Emily and Anne join hands. Branwell extends his hand to Charlotte. They pull Charlotte away.

CHARLOTTE (CONT.)

Oh I can't stop. God, hold me down, I'm going. I'm sorry Arthur.

Charlotte, Branwell, Emily and Anne come down the stairs from Charlotte's room and cross into Patrick's study. Patrick doesn't see them. As he speaks they pass through his study and into the graveyard.

PATRICK

My Dear Taylor,
I thank you for your kind sympathy. My daughter is indeed, dead, and the solemn truth presses upon her worthy and affectionate husband, and me, with great, and it may be, with unusual weight. The marriage that took place seem'd to hold forth long and bright prospects of happiness, but in the inscrutable providence of god, all our hopes have ended. She died nine months after her marriage. May we resign to the Will of the Most High, but our loss, we trust, is her gain.

Branwell thrusts his arms in the air and brings down the daylight. Anne, Emily and Charlotte cross to the pool of water and sit. The lights suddenly shift. Three suns appear in the sky.

CHARLOTTE

Look!

She points at the three suns clearly shining overhead in a dark blue sky going into a golden horizon in a semi-circle of light. Long shadows are cast behind the three women.)

ANNE

Three suns!

Emily looks up and sees them too, her face becomes radiant. They all stand a little while, silently gazing at the phenomenon.

EMILY

A parhelion!

CHARLOTTE

It is us! We are the three suns! It's a sign!

They all look at each other, then up at the sky. The lights fade on the women leaving the three suns. Patrick and Nicholls are seen in tableau. Nicholls is pouring tea for Patrick. Gradually the three suns begin to fade; the sky grows dark and Patrick and Nicholls fade out -- the three suns have become three stars. The stars fade to black.

THE END

