

THE THREE SISTERS BRONTË

by Arlene Hutton

Draft: 5 December, 2017

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Thanks to: Ashmount, The Barrow Group, Beacon Artists, Linda Maggiacomo Bennett, Blue Mountain Center, Karyl Lynn Burns, British Library, Brontë Parsonage Museum and Library, the Brontë Society, Dana Brooke, Karen Carpenter, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, College of Charleston, Jennifer Costello, Meg Davis, Peter Ellenstein, Katharine Farmer, Sharon Gracie, Cara Beth Heath, Katie Henry, William Inge Center, Anne Kauffman, The Lark Development Center, Mark Lutwak, MacDowell Colony, Ellen McLaughlin, Morgan Library, New Dramatists, New York Public Library, Orange Tree Theatre, PURE Theatre, Rubicon Theatre, Stephanie Sandberg, Joe Spano, Tennessee Williams Fellowship at Sewanee, and Yaddo.



CHRONOLOGY

- 1777 Patrick Brontë is born in Ireland.
 1812 Patrick marries Maria Branwell.
 1816 Charlotte Brontë is born.
 1817 Branwell Brontë is born.
 1818 Emily Jane Brontë is born.
 1820 Anne Brontë is born. The family moves to Haworth.
 1821 Maria Brontë dies; her sister Elizabeth moves in to take care of the children.
 1839 Charlotte and Anne are employed as governesses.
 1840 Anne goes to work at Thorp Green as a governess.
 1842 Charlotte and Emily go to Brussels to study, returning for their Aunt's funeral.
 1843 Charlotte goes back to Brussels. Branwell becomes tutor at Thorp Green.
 1844 Charlotte returns from Brussels with plans to open a school.
 1845 Anne resigns from Thorp Green. Arthur Bell Nicholls becomes curate.
 Branwell loses his position as tutor at Thorp Green.
 1846 Patrick has successful cataract surgery in Manchester, spending a month there.
 In Manchester, during Patrick's recovery, Charlotte begins writing *Jane Eyre*.
 The three Brontë sisters publish their poetry.
 1847 *Jane Eyre* is published. *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey* are published.
 1848 Branwell dies in September. Emily dies in December.
 1849 Anne dies.
 1854 Charlotte marries Arthur Bell Nicholls.
 1855 Charlotte dies.
 Rev. Brontë invites Mrs. Gaskell to write Charlotte's biography.
 1857 Publication of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* by Elizabeth Gaskell.
 It is translated into more than thirty languages over the next fifty years.
 1861 Patrick Brontë dies.
 1895 Anton Chekhov orders a copy of Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.
 1896 Chekhov returns or donates *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* to his local library.
 1900 First reading of the play *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov.

"In 1895, among the books Chekhov ordered and eventually dispatched to the Taganrog Public library was a biography [translated] by an Olga Peterson of the Brontë sisters. The coincidences between the life of the Brontë sisters and the Prozorov sisters in the play are so striking that it is unlikely that Chekhov was not affected by his reading of Peterson's biography."

Understanding Chekhov
 Donald Rayfield

"English elements construct *Three Sisters*. A biography of the Brontës which Chekhov had read in 1895 is one--."

The Cambridge Companion to Chekhov
 Vera Gottlieb & Paul Allain, ed.

"In 1896 Anton had sent to Taganrog library a biography of the Brontë sisters: three talented, unhappy girls, stranded in Yorkshire; a despotic father; a mother they do not recall; a brother, once their idol, now a drunken ne'er-do-well. Chekhov's Prozorova sisters have much in common with the Brontës."

Anton Chekhov
 Donald Rayfield

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CHARACTERS:

CHARLOTTE BRONTE, a former governess. 28 years old at the start of the play.

EMILY BRONTE, her sister, a mystic. Quiet, lone. 26 years old.

ANNE BRONTE, their sister, the cheerful baby of the family. 24 years old.

BRANWELL BRONTE, their brother, a mad drunkard. 27 years old.

PATRICK BRONTE, their father, 60s, a Yorkshire parson.

ARTHUR BELL NICHOLLS, Patrick Bronte's curate, in love with Charlotte.

WILLIAM WEIGHTMAN, a curate, 20s, who flirts with Anne.

SMITH, another curate.

THE VICAR OF BRADFORD, 50-70s, an old friend of Patrick's.

CROSBY, a visitor. Can double with SMITH

TIME:

Act I, Scene i	January, 1844.
Act I, Scene ii	A year and a half later. July, 1845
Act II, Scene i	Two years later. July, 1847
Act II, Scene ii	A year and a half later. December, 1848

PLACE:

The Brontë parsonage in Haworth, Yorkshire.

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ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

January, 1844. The Parlour, Hallway and Study of the Brontë Parsonage in Haworth, Yorkshire.

There are two main playing areas -- the Parlour and the Study -- and a connecting Hallway. Perhaps the stage is a large turntable that turns imperceptibly slowly (like a revolving restaurant) throughout the action, completing less than a half turn or so during the entire play. At the beginning of the play Patrick's Study, with a table, some chairs, a desk and bookcases, possibly a fireplace, is seen downstage left. Upstage right is the Parlour; on a small dining table in the middle are three portable writing desks. There are three chairs around the table and, furthest upstage, a small sofa. There may be a fireplace and bookcases. Dividing the stage diagonally is the Hallway, leading downstage to the unseen front door. Entrances and exits through the downstage "front door" travel from and to stage left, always passing by the Study "windows." Upstage are stairs [or not] leading to a second floor. Beside the stairs is an opening leading to the kitchen and from there, presumably, to a back door. By the end of the play the stage has revolved so that the Parlour is downstage right and the Study has retreated to up left.

In very, very dim light we can almost make out three figures in the Parlour: the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily and Anne. They are sitting at the table, writing by candlelight. A clock ticks. One at a time each woman rises.

Spots of light come up in the Parlour, individually, on Charlotte, dressed in a plain brown dress, Anne, in light-coloured wool and Emily, wearing a rather old-fashioned dark, nearly black, dress. The spots of light grow and merge until the stage is lit. All three sisters are now pacing around the room. Charlotte has a manuscript in her hand. She stops to look out the window, as Emily and Anne continue to pace.

EMILY: *(Suddenly.)* High Water!

ANNE: *(Joining in.)* High Water!

As soon as Emily has announced the game, Anne quickly finds a chair and Emily grabs the sofa. Both sit with their legs straight out, as if to keep them off the floor. Charlotte takes an extra beat and tries to sit on the sofa next to Emily.

EMILY: Very high water!

ANNE: Flood!

There is swirl of skirts. Anne tucks her legs underneath her. Emily swings her legs around, claiming the entire sofa. All are laughing, as Charlotte struggles to find a place to sit.

CHARLOTTE: No!

EMILY: Too late.

ANNE: Your skirts are wet! Forfeit.

CHARLOTTE: No!

Charlotte joins Emily on the sofa. Anne races over and all three try to squeeze together on the small piece of furniture. They are laughing.

ANNE: We're finally home together!

Suddenly Charlotte stands, growing unexpectedly serious.

ANNE: Keep reading!

CHARLOTTE: "An old maid's life is void and vapid -- her heart strained and empty, seeking to fill the void and ease the aching."

EMILY: You've used "void" twice in the same sentence.

CHARLOTTE: Have I?

ANNE: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: *(Reading again, quickly to herself.)* "An old maid's life is void and vapid -- her heart strained and empty, seeking to fill the void" -- oh, yes, I have.

ANNE: "Void." Abyss?

Anne tries to get Charlotte's attention.

ANNE: *(Cont'd.)* Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE: "Void." *(To Emily.)* It's poetic.

ANNE: It is.

CHARLOTTE: Void, vapid, void. It's alliterative.

EMILY: It's redundant.

ANNE: "Emptiness"?

CHARLOTTE: (*Reading again, quickly to herself.*) "An old maid's life is void and vapid -- her heart strained and empty, seeking to fill the void."

EMILY: Leave it for now.

ANNE: You can change it when you make a fair copy.

CHARLOTTE: This is the fair copy.

ANNE: Oh.

CHARLOTTE: I'll have to write it out again.

Emily goes back to her writing. Anne looks at Charlotte's manuscript. Charlotte walks to the window. The clock chimes.

CHARLOTTE: (*Cont'd.*) Over a year ago Aunt Elizabeth died. I remember a clock chiming when I got the news....

ANNE: Right before my birthday.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. It was cold. And snowing.

ANNE: Don't think about it.

EMILY: Heavy rain and snow. (*Emily starts to hum.*)

CHARLOTTE: I don't know how we got through it, how I got through this last year, I thought I would never survive, but I did, and this morning I woke up with the sun shining and we're all home together again and -- don't hum, Emily.

Emily stops humming.

ANNE: Charlotte, read some more!

Charlotte picks up her manuscript pages.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, I'm home again. I'm so happy to be home. (*Reading.*) "I should probably fail, and die weary and disappointed, despised and of no account, like other single women."

EMILY: Why would she think that?

CHARLOTTE: She's a lacemaker.

EMILY: She should make the observation later.

CHARLOTTE: Later?

EMILY: One expresses such thoughts in retrospection.

ANNE: That's better.

CHARLOTTE: After her marriage. *(Charlotte studies her manuscript.)*

EMILY: Yes.

ANNE: Are they going to marry? Please. I was hoping they'd marry in the end.

CHARLOTTE: Let me note this correction while I'm thinking of it.

ANNE: *(To Emily.)* Emily, weren't you hoping they would marry?

The sisters stop their pacing. Charlotte sits at the table. Emily lounges on the sofa.

CHARLOTTE: Your turn, Emily.

EMILY: Me?

ANNE: Oh, yes.

EMILY: *(Suddenly.)* High Water!

ANNE: *(Joining in.)* High Water!

CHARLOTTE: *(Hearing the front door open.)* Shhhhhhhh.

The three sisters hold their hands over their mouths, trying to quiet down. Patrick, Smith and Weightman enter from the front door and go straight into Patrick's Study.

NOTE: During the following dialogue, and others times later in the play, the men are in one room and the women in another, as indicated by the text position.

In the Study:

PATRICK: Gentlemen, are you prepared to speak at the Sunday school opening tomorrow?

WEIGHTMAN: I have my notes ready.

SMITH: No notes for me. *(To Patrick.)* I'll follow your fine example and extemporize.

PATRICK: Not recommended, Mr. Smith.

SMITH: Why is that?

PATRICK: It takes years of practice. Even my son Branwell uses notes for his speeches at the Temperance Society. Please make your notes now, Mr. Smith. We have to prepare as much for our duties in life as we do for the hereafter.

In Patrick's Study, Smith sits and writes. Weightman looks at a newspaper. Patrick thumbs through a book, pretending to read.

In the Parlour, the sisters, still trying not to giggle too loudly, get off the sofa. Anne opens her writing desk and takes out some papers. Charlotte looks around the room.

CHARLOTTE: I'd forgotten "high water." I'm so happy to be home. Emily, what have you been writing?

ANNE: My turn to read!

CHARLOTTE: Emily?

Anne looks through her papers. Charlotte stares out the window.

PATRICK: Where's Branwell?

SMITH: I dined with him last evening. At Ponden Hall.

WEIGHTMAN: *(To Patrick, holding out a paper.)* Reverend Brontë, would you kindly peruse this homily for me?

PATRICK: No need. I'll hear it tomorrow.

The men go back to their reading and writing, Patrick still pretending to read.

EMILY: Go ahead, Anne.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "How delightful it would be to be a governess!"

EMILY: She wants to be a governess?

ANNE: In the beginning she does.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Anne.)* Anne, do you enjoy being a governess?

EMILY: Can't you two write about anything but governesses?

PATRICK: Branwell is supposed to join us for tea.

WEIGHTMAN: He'll be here.

EMILY: *(To Anne.)* Read it again.

PATRICK: He's late.

SMITH: Maybe he's lost on the moors. I think he's in love.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "To go out into the world--"

PATRICK: He's too young to be in love.

EMILY: *(Interrupting.)* Read it from the beginning.

ANNE: "How delightful it would be to be a governess! To go out into the world, to enter upon a new life." *(She stops as she realizes that Charlotte isn't listening.)*

PATRICK: Mr. Weightman, will you write a letter to the Leeds Mercury for me? I'd put pen to paper myself, but I think better when I speak aloud.

WEIGHTMAN: Certainly.

ANNE: Charlotte.

As if it were a frequent occurrence, Weightman gets pen and ink and prepares to take dictation. Charlotte continues to look out the window.

CHARLOTTE: Over a year ago. Poor Aunt Elizabeth.

ANNE: Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: How did we get through it? I was in Brussels when I got the news.

WEIGHTMAN: *(Indicating he is ready.)* "To the editor, Leeds Mercury."

PATRICK: *(Dictating.)* Sirs. I have been at Haworth for more than twenty years...

EMILY: *(To Anne.)* Read some more.

WEIGHTMAN: Continue.

PATRICK: ...and during that time I have performed the funeral services for over ninety children...

WEIGHTMAN: ...children...

PATRICK: ...over ninety children who were burnt to death in consequence of their clothes having taken fire.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "to act for myself; to exercise my unused faculties;" to try my unknown powers;"

EMILY: "to try my unknown powers." I like that.

CHARLOTTE: Brussels. Day after day, caring nothing, fearing nothing, liking nothing, hating nothing.

EMILY: *(To Charlotte)* It's Anne's turn. *(To Anne.)* Go on.

WEIGHTMAN: *(Simultaneously with Emily.)* Go on.

PATRICK: *(Dictating.)* "In every case the poor sufferers had been clothed in either cotton or linen, which are particularly flammable."

WEIGHTMAN: *(Writing)* "Flammable."

PATRICK: *(Dictating.)* "If women and children were to have their garments of silk or wool... there would be little or no danger of their losing their lives by accidental ignition."

WEIGHTMAN: Very good.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "to earn my own maintenance, and something to comfort and help my father, mother, and sister, to show Papa what his little Agnes could do."

PATRICK: *(Dictating.)* "Your most obedient servant, etc."

CHARLOTTE: I can't think.

EMILY: Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: I can't believe I'm here at home with my sisters again. Emily, didn't you find it cold in Brussels last year? Miserable.

ANNE: You're home now. Don't think about Brussels.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Anne.)* When do you and Branwell go back to Thorp Green?

ANNE: Early next week. Four more days.

CHARLOTTE: So soon.

EMILY: *(To Anne.)* Anne, keep reading.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "and to convince them that I was not quite the helpless, thoughtless being they supposed."

CHARLOTTE: My little Anne a... [governess] And Branwell, a tutor. How strange. You're a better governess than I was, so good with children, but Branwell...

ANNE: *(To Emily.)* She's not listening.

The sound of a bird outside. In the next room the men look up.

CHARLOTTE: *(Sighing.)* Oh.

ANNE: Charlotte, please. Don't be moody.

CHARLOTTE: Traveling has made me ill.

EMILY: You're home with us now.

ANNE: Are you really home to stay?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. *(A beat. Then suddenly:)* High Water!

EMILY: High water!

ANNE: High water!

All three women sit with their feet up. Anne is last this time.

CHARLOTTE: I don't feel well.

EMILY: You should take a walk.

ANNE: But it's almost like spring today! Don't be gloomy. It's my birthday. It's a beautiful day.

EMILY: A walk would do you good.

CHARLOTTE: After tea.

ANNE: It'll be dark by then.

There is silence in the Parlour. Emily and Anne go back to their reading and writing. Charlotte begins to pace around the room again. Emily, brooding over her book, begins to softly hum.

PATRICK: Mr. Weightman, will you make a fair copy of the letter for me to send?

SMITH: Weightman, he trusts you! He's not even going to read it.

PATRICK: No need.

Weightman re-copies the letter, while Smith looks at a book off the shelf. Patrick shuffles through newspaper pages, hiding his difficulty in reading.

CHARLOTTE: You're humming again, Emily. *(No response from Emily.)* You're humming again.

Emily stops humming.

CHARLOTTE: Anne, read some more.

ANNE: You haven't been listening.

EMILY: Are you writing about yourself?

ANNE: I'm writing a story.

EMILY: I didn't think you really wanted to be a governess.

ANNE: The character thinks she wants to be a governess, but it turns out to be different than what she imagines it will be.

CHARLOTTE: It's never what we think it will be, is it?

PATRICK: *(To Smith.)* I've buried over ninety children who burned to death by fire.

SMITH: Such tragedy wouldn't occur if women would stay indoors where they belong. Women read too many books these days. They get ideas.

Anne sighs and starts to tear up.

CHARLOTTE: *(Noticing Anne.)* What's the matter?

ANNE: You're right. Teaching is different than I thought it would be.

CHARLOTTE: But you're there with Branwell. Governess and tutor. What could be better?

ANNE: I never see Branwell at Thorp Green.

EMILY: Never?

CHARLOTTE: What do you mean?

ANNE: Branwell...Branwell tutors the boys. Mrs. Robinson keeps me very busy with the girls.

EMILY: The family works you too hard.

ANNE: What else is there?

CHARLOTTE: We could open our own school.

SMITH: It's a waste of time teaching local girls to read.

PATRICK: Are you saying girls should be illiterate?

SMITH: I'm saying they should stay home to help their mothers.

WEIGHTMAN: Reverend Brontë has educated his daughters.

CHARLOTTE: A school here in Haworth. Isn't that what we planned?

PATRICK: *(To Smith.)* I sent Charlotte and Emily abroad. To a finishing school.

SMITH: They can be governesses. What else is there?

CHARLOTTE: What else is there to do?

EMILY: You still want to open our own school?

ANNE: *(Changing the subject.)* Your turn, Emily. You read something.

EMILY: Later, perhaps.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Please read, Emily. Then I'll truly know that I'm home again. Please read. Something you wrote while I was gone. Goodness knows you don't write letters.

ANNE: She's busy.

CHARLOTTE: Busy? Walking on the moors?

ANNE: Helping Tabby with the house.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Emily.)* Haven't you written anything since you left Brussels?

ANNE: Emily's always making notes, even in the kitchen.

CHARLOTTE: Read those then. Read anything.

ANNE: Yes.

Emily looks for her manuscript. Her papers are in a mess.

SMITH: Your daughters can teach young ladies the importance of a sharp sewing needle.

WEIGHTMAN: Really, Mr. Smith. Shouldn't everyone be taught to read and think?

Charlotte begins to pace the room. Anne follows. Emily reads.

EMILY: *(Reading.)* "The Gondalians are at present in a threatening state, but there is no open rupture yet. Northangerland is in Monceys Isle and Zamorna is at Eversham."

Emily stops reading. Charlotte stops pacing.

CHARLOTTE: Nothing more?

EMILY: Northangerland and his army will sail soon. He plans to attack Zamorna, but doesn't know that Zamorna has joined forces with Lord Percy. Lady Percy is at the palace. She worries about Lord Percy and fears for her own life. Lord Percy has left her alone to see if she can be trusted. Zamorna has challenged Lord Percy to a duel.

CHARLOTTE: Emily, that's childish.

ANNE: Are you writing new Gondal stories with Branwell?

CHARLOTTE: I hope not.

EMILY: You asked me to read anything. You didn't request poetry.

CHARLOTTE: Have you been writing poetry?

Emily doesn't answer.

ANNE: Emily's continuing our Gondal saga.

CHARLOTTE: I no longer care for Gondal stories, for Glasstown characters, for anything I used to love.

ANNE: Emily will always write our Gondal stories.

CHARLOTTE: Not I. I've put away my childish things. You and Emily and Branwell can have Lord and Lady Percy and Mr. Northangerland all to yourselves. I'm finished writing Gondal stories.

ANNE: Never write our stories again? Never play Gondal again? Never?

EMILY: Perhaps you should've stayed in Brussels.

ANNE: Emily! Don't you want Charlotte to be home again?

CHARLOTTE: We'll establish our own school and teach together.

ANNE: Yes! I won't have to return to Thorp Green.

CHARLOTTE: It will take time to find a property and establish a school.

EMILY: I never said I'd teach.

CHARLOTTE: Do you have a better idea? (*The women are silent.*)

SMITH: When a woman has a family to rear and a household to run, her hands are full. Her vocation is evident.

WEIGHTMAN: Her vocation then is her duty to her family?

SMITH: A woman's vocation is to work much and complain little.

PATRICK: Gentlemen! Your debate has turned into argument. Here's the newspapers. Take a look at them and tell me what you find interesting.

WEIGHTMAN: (*Throwing down the paper.*) How can women better themselves without education?

SMITH: They can't. Their fate is as predetermined/

PATRICK: /You Calvinists!/
/during life as it is after death. (*To Patrick.*) Shall you

SMITH: and I debate predetermination, Reverend Brontë?

PATRICK: Perhaps my curate here will take you on again.

WEIGHTMAN: I'm tired of listening to him. Some evenings he goes on for hours. I can't take him seriously.

Emily and Charlotte have been ignoring each other.

ANNE: Please don't be quarrelsome. It's my birthday.

CHARLOTTE: Your birthday. Where's Branwell? You're so young, Anne. And you're so free, on your holiday. So young. I feel as if...as if I have done nothing in my life. I have to do something. I have to work --

ANNE: I work.

The other men have been ignoring Smith.

SMITH: These are serious questions. If women become educated, what do we do with them?

CHARLOTTE: We can work here. A school. Our own school/

ANNE: /Yes./

Charlotte looks around the room.

CHARLOTTE: /We could, with some small alterations--

ANNE: Here?

CHARLOTTE: We could open one sooner if it were here.

ANNE: At the parsonage?

CHARLOTTE: There's room for a small school.

EMILY: I told you. No school for me.

CHARLOTTE: Why else did we go to study in Brussels in the first place? Why else did I go back to teach there?

EMILY: I don't know. Why did you?

ANNE: To learn languages. So you can be the best teachers.

EMILY: No more teaching for me.

ANNE: It would be different in our own school.

EMILY: I'll never teach school again.

ANNE: What else can we do?

SMITH: *(Referring to the newspaper.)* To our "condition of women" question. *(To Patrick.)* The present market for female labor is quite overstocked --

WEIGHTMAN: So professions now filled only by men should be open to women also.

SMITH: Is there any room for female lawyers, female doctors, female engravers?

WEIGHTMAN: What vocations are open to women?

SMITH: Precisely. There are no vocations open for women. *(Smith thumbs through a Bible.)*

EMILY: I won't teach at a school.

CHARLOTTE: Fine then. You be the cook and the housekeeper if you like, but at our own school. Can't you see it?

EMILY: I see us sitting in our own sitting-room.

ANNE: In our very own school for young ladies.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

EMILY: I'll live here with Branwell and take care of Papa.

ANNE: But when Branwell is a successful artist, he won't live here either.

SMITH: *(Reading.)* Ephesians Five, twenty-two, twenty-three. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife."

Emily hums.

CHARLOTTE: You're humming, Emily.

PATRICK: No comment, Mr. Weightman?

WEIGHTMAN: I'm tired of listening to him.

Charlotte looks out the window, as if to see their future.

CHARLOTTE: It's a beautiful day for your birthday, Anne.

ANNE: I wrote my birthday diary paper this morning. See? (*Anne pulls a paper from her box and reads from it.*) "I wonder what we'll be like five years from now and where we'll be if all goes on well in the year 1849. I shall be twenty-nine. And Emily in her thirty-first year. And Branwell in his thirty-second year. And Charlotte -- "

CHARLOTTE: Thirty-three.

ANNE: (*Still reading.*) "I hope we shall all be well at that time."

CHARLOTTE: You're so lovely today, Anne. I had forgotten how beautiful you are. And Emily. So beautiful.

ANNE: And Branwell.

EMILY: Where's Branwell?

PATRICK: Where is Branwell?

CHARLOTTE: Branwell. Branwell could be handsome, but he's grown so thin. Makes his nose look longer. Don't tell him I said so.

ANNE: No, Emily, don't you think --

CHARLOTTE: Brussels took so much out of me.

EMILY: That's over now.

SMITH: You're tired of listening to me?

WEIGHTMAN: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Yes. Yes. It's over. And I don't mind that I'm doomed to be an old maid. I've always known it. That I'd be an old maid.

ANNE: No, you won't.

Weightman has exited the Study, crossed the Hallway and is entering the Parlour.

WEIGHTMAN: (*To Charlotte.*) Miss Brontë. (*To Emily.*) Miss Brontë/

CHARLOTTE: /Mr. Weightman/

WEIGHTMAN: (*To Anne.*) /Miss Brontë/

Anne nods. There is an awkward pause. Emily exits to the kitchen.

WEIGHTMAN: The new curate will be joining us today.

CHARLOTTE: Papa has a new curate?

WEIGHTMAN: Arthur Nicholls.

ANNE: He's visiting.

WEIGHTMAN: He'll be replacing me...when I move on to a larger...you're not rid of...I'll be here a little longer. Mr. Nicholls will be curate next year.

CHARLOTTE: Oh.

WEIGHTMAN: He's Irish. He talks a lot.

There is another awkward pause between the sisters and Weightman. Smith and Patrick are in the Hallway, making their way to the Parlour.

SMITH: *(Trying to make up to Patrick; he's nicer when he doesn't have Weightman as an audience.)* I finished your book, Reverend Brontë. It's fine work. When will you write another?

PATRICK: I haven't written a new book in years.

Patrick crosses to the Parlour, followed by Smith.

ANNE: Papa!

PATRICK: Anne, my little love.

ANNE: I feel so blessed today. So happy.

PATRICK: My sweet girl. . . .

ANNE: I'm so happy. When I woke up this morning, everything seemed clear to me. I lay there thinking. A woman ought to use her mind to its fullest. To make one's own way...To work... It would be better to be an ox, better to be a humble horse, to do real work, than to be a woman like, like Mrs. Robinson at Thorp Green. She wakes at noon, has morning tea in her bed, then spends two hours dressing herself and worries about nothing but the colour of her ribbons... Oh, how awful that is! Just as one craves a drink of water I have a craving for intellectual pursuits.

WEIGHTMAN: *(Teasing her.)* So you're saying a woman should use her mind? Should study? I study, I visit the poor, I lie in bed till eight. Like a woman.

ANNE: Then we shall call you Miss Celia Amelia!

CHARLOTTE: Miss Celia Amelia?

WEIGHTMAN: I've never done physical labour. Maybe that's why I became a man of the church. So I would never have to really work.

SMITH: And I'm certainly not going to work, neither physically nor mentally.

PATRICK: *(Laughing.)* Nor I, then.

WEIGHTMAN: You? You won't let your curate deliver a sermon until after a year's apprenticeship! You work and study harder than anyone I know.

PATRICK: I never read or write anymore. Someone is always needing something.

Emily enters.

EMILY: Papa? Tabby's asking for you.

PATRICK: *(To Weightman.)* See what I mean? *(To the women.)* I'll be right back.

Patrick exits.

WEIGHTMAN: Your father has a surprise for you.

ANNE: Oh, dear.

CHARLOTTE: Sometimes Papa can be rather silly.

Emily moves toward the door. Charlotte follows.

CHARLOTTE: *(Quietly, to Emily)* Emily, what's wrong?

EMILY: This house is very small for so many people.

Emily, humming, starts to leave.

ANNE: Where are you going?

EMILY: I'm taking Keeper out for a walk.

ANNE: This late?

WEIGHTMAN: You'll miss tea.

EMILY: *(Privately, to Anne, kissing her.)* Save me some spice-cake.

ANNE: *(Privately, to Emily)* I'm only home for a short holiday and you spend all your time outdoors with the dogs.

EMILY: I think best when I walk.

SMITH: *(Overhearing.)* Oh, dear. Another woman who thinks. Men who think philosophize, but with women, it's simply twiddle-twaddle!

EMILY: What do you mean by that?

SMITH: Just that women shouldn't think too much.

Smith crosses the room. The women whisper in their corner.

CHARLOTTE: *(Quietly, to Emily.)* Don't engage him.

EMILY: I don't like him. He's odd.

ANNE: I didn't invite him.

EMILY: That's a good thing.

ANNE: *(To Emily.)* Please stay. It's my birthday.

Patrick enters, carefully carrying a silver tea set.

PATRICK: For your birthday, Anne.

CHARLOTTE: What's this?

EMILY: It's Mama's tea set.

ANNE: Papa?

WEIGHTMAN: *(Laughing.)* I warned you!

ANNE: *(To Patrick.)* This should be Charlotte's.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Anne.)* I have Aunt Elizabeth's teapot.

ANNE: Papa --

PATRICK: I loved your dear mother.

ANNE: But why give me Mama's tea set?

PATRICK: Why not? It's mine to give. Put the tea set in my study.

Charlotte carries the tea set into the Study. Everyone stares at Patrick.

PATRICK: I try to do the best I can.

The Vicar of Bradford enters, Weightman behind him.

THE VICAR: Gentleman, I have let myself in.

PATRICK: Who is it?

THE VICAR: Don't you recognize an old friend?

WEIGHTMAN: Ah, the new Vicar of Bradford.

THE VICAR: You must be Mr. William Weightman, the curate.

WEIGHTMAN: Reverend.

THE VICAR: My pleasure.

PATRICK: What a surprise. And an honour. Give me your hand. Congratulations on your new appointment at Bradford.

THE VICAR: Reverend Brontë, it's been too many years.

PATRICK: And you know my former curate, Mr. Peter Augustus Smith.

THE VICAR: Of course.

SMITH: Pleased.

PATRICK: A great, great honour and pleasure.

THE VICAR: Mr. Brontë. The honour and pleasure are mine.

PATRICK: The children will be delighted! The vicar joining us for the opening of the new Sunday School.

THE VICAR: Uh, yes. A fine thing indeed.

PATRICK: It's kind of you to come. You remember -- *(He gestures.)*

THE VICAR: Of course. Your daughters.

PATRICK: Emily and Anne.

THE VICAR: *(To Emily and Anne.)* Look how you've grown up. I've been away for a long time, haven't I?

Anne and Emily don't say anything. Emily looks especially awkward.

THE VICAR: *(Cont'd.)* I remember three tiny little girls. And the baby boy, of course. I've never forgotten the four little Brontës. And look at you now.

PATRICK: My daughter Charlotte has just returned from teaching abroad.

THE VICAR: Indeed.

PATRICK: Charlotte! (*Calling into the kitchen.*) Charlotte, come here!

WEIGHTMAN: You've come from Bradford?

THE VICAR: From London. I'm stopping on my way to Bradford.

SMITH: Haworth is not on the way from London to Bradford. It's not on the way to anywhere.

THE VICAR: I wanted to visit before, but there's no railway service.

WEIGHTMAN: I've always wondered why the station is so far away.

SMITH: I know why it is. (*They all look at him.*) Because if the station were near it would not be so far, and if it is far, it's because it's not near.

There is an awkward silence.

WEIGHTMAN: He's fond of his jokes.

Another silence.

THE VICAR: (*To Emily*) Your face, now, I remember.

EMILY: I don't remember you.

Charlotte enters the Parlour as Emily exits into the kitchen.

CHARLOTTE: I'm here, Papa.

PATRICK: Charlotte, an old friend has traveled from London. He's the Vicar of Bradford.

THE VICAR: Miss Brontë.

CHARLOTTE: Reverend.

PATRICK: My daughter has recently come home from Brussels. She's going to open a school for young ladies here.

SMITH: (*To Weightman.*) Everyone in the world will soon be educated.

THE VICAR: (*To Charlotte.*) I remember your mother.

PATRICK: A fine woman.

CHARLOTTE: Mother's buried here.

ANNE: *(Pointing out the window.)* In the church.

THE VICAR: I remember her.

CHARLOTTE: I've forgotten what she was like.

THE VICAR: We'll all be forgotten, too, one day, won't we? But I remember her. I used to visit your family when you first moved to Haworth. I was at Keighley then.

PATRICK: We were very young.

THE VICAR: I've lived many lives and traveled to many places.

PATRICK: London, now Bradford.

THE VICAR: Bradford's a gloomy town. Dirty. Close. *(A pause.)* But here. What fine views across the moors!

SMITH: Ah, the moors-- cold, windy.

WEIGHTMAN: It's splendid here.

SMITH: Cold, windy, damp--

WEIGHTMAN: The open fields--

SMITH: Cold, windy, damp and bleak.

WEIGHTMAN: --the long rambles.

THE VICAR: Yes, yes. Bleak, but beautiful.

SMITH: Haworth.

WEIGHTMAN: It's a charming place. Brooks and waterfalls.

SMITH: Streets for sewers. Overflowing privies with no doors on them. Cockroaches everywhere. Worse than the darkest corners of London. Thank god your church is near the top of the hill, closer to the sweet smells of heaven.

PATRICK: *(To the Vicar.)* There is a severe lack of pure water. I've written to the General Board of Health in London. I'm asking them to send an agent, to look into the situation.

THE VICAR: Always the reformer.

WEIGHTMAN: There's much suffering in the village.

SMITH: I saw a mangy three-legged dog just today.

WEIGHTMAN: Mr. Smith.

SMITH: Suffering is simply another word for complaining.

A flute is heard from upstairs. They all look in the direction of the sound.

PATRICK: That's Branwell playing his flute. My son. He's a musician, he's a writer and he's a painter.

THE VICAR: Indeed.

PATRICK: My son is capable of great achievements.

THE VICAR: I look forward to meeting him.

PATRICK: *(Calling from the bottom of the stairs.)* Branwell, come down here and join us. The Vicar of Bradford is here.

SMITH: *(Aside, to Weightman.)* You should've heard Branwell at supper last night. I think he's in love.

WEIGHTMAN: *(Aside, to Smith.)* Who is she?

SMITH: *(Aside, to Weightman.)* He won't say. Probably an exotic gypsy girl with long black hair.

ANNE: *(Who has overheard them.)* Branwell is not in love.

Branwell enters. He is in a good mood. Emily enters from the kitchen. The three sisters run to him.

PATRICK: Branwell, greet my old friend.

BRANWELL: Ah, my dear sisters.

Branwell embraces the sisters, who hang onto him. There is great affection among the four siblings.

PATRICK: Vicar, my fine son, Branwell.

CHARLOTTE: Vicar, our brother.

THE VICAR: How do you do?

EMILY: *(To Branwell.)* What were you playing just now?

BRANWELL: *(To the Vicar.)* Branwell Brontë, sir. *(To Emily.)* A small composition of

my own.

THE VICAR: Honoured.

ANNE: It's a lovely tune.

BRANWELL: *(To Anne.)* A modest beginning. *(To the Vicar.)* You're the new Vicar?

ANNE: *(To Emily.)* Wasn't it a lovely tune?

WEIGHTMAN: The Vicar's come from London. On his way to Bradford.

BRANWELL: London? Well, then, I congratulate you and warn you. My sisters will hang on your every word.

EMILY: Branwell.

THE VICAR: You've been to London?

BRANWELL: A few years ago.

ANNE: Branwell was invited to the Royal Academy.

THE VICAR: You studied at the Academy?

BRANWELL: London didn't suit me.

ANNE: See what a pretty picture Branwell's given me today! *(Showing it.)* He drew it himself. He's an artist.

THE VICAR: *(Looking at the picture but not knowing what to say.)* Yes. That's quite nice, isn't it?

ANNE: And that drawing above the piano, that's his, too!

Branwell dismisses it with a wave.

BRANWELL: An early effort.

CHARLOTTE: *(To the Vicar.)* Our brother is a scholar and a poet. He's been writing for years.

BRANWELL: I write a little.

CHARLOTTE: Poetry. Stories--

BRANWELL: *(Cutting her off.)* A bit of everything.

PATRICK: Branwell has a talent for language.

THE VICAR: Passed down from his father.

ANNE: You heard him play the flute, and you should see his portraits. Branwell can do almost anything. He shouldn't be a tutor.

BRANWELL: A temporary situation.

PATRICK: He's a published author. His letters have appeared in Blackwood's magazine.

SMITH: He can write two different letters to two different people at the same time, one with each hand!

THE VICAR: Indeed.

SMITH: Two letters at once.

WEIGHTMAN: He can. I've seen him.

SMITH: One in Greek and one in Latin.

THE VICAR: You're joking.

SMITH: It's true.

WEIGHTMAN: I've seen it, too.

BRANWELL: A parlour trick.

Branwell kisses Anne and starts to exit.

EMILY: Branwell, don't go!

ANNE: That's what he always does -- he's always going somewhere.

Emily takes Branwell by the arm, leading him back, Anne hanging on, too.

EMILY: *(To Branwell.)* I'll stay if you stay.

BRANWELL: Leave me alone.

EMILY: Stay here while I get the tea ready.

(Emily exits.) During the following conversations she is going back and forth between the back of the hallway, leading to the kitchen, and Patrick's Study.

ANNE: If you're good you can have some spice-cake!

BRANWELL: You're embarrassing me in front of --

ANNE: The Vicar knew Mother. He's family.

SMITH: We've already told him you're in love.

THE VICAR: Indeed they have.

SMITH: Are you in love with the same woman as last night?

BRANWELL: I do love my dear sisters.

SMITH: Aha! You blush. Who is she? Is she a gypsy?

BRANWELL: Come on, now, that's enough.

ANNE: What have you been doing all day?

PATRICK: *(To the Vicar.)* Branwell is here on holiday. He's tutor to the Robinson family. Edmund and Lydia Robinson. Of Thorp Green. Anne is governess there.

THE VICAR: I don't know them.

ANNE: *(To Branwell.)* Charlotte's come home only last evening. She's barely seen you at all.

BRANWELL: I didn't sleep last night. I read till four o'clock in the morning and then tried to go to bed. But thoughts and more thoughts kept coming into my head and finally the sun streamed through my window.

ANNE: *(To the Vicar.)* Branwell's a genius.

BRANWELL: While I'm here on holiday I want to translate a book from the Latin.

THE VICAR: You read Latin?

BRANWELL: Our father has oppressed -- pardon me, Father -- I should have said "blessed us," with education. Thanks to our dear father we all know French and German, and Charlotte knows Italian, too. Worthless accomplishments here in Haworth.

SMITH: In a village like this knowing three languages is an unnecessary luxury. A burden even. What do you do with them?

PATRICK: Can one have too much knowledge?

SMITH: Women don't need so much knowledge. It is like, like an extra appendage, unnecessary and awkward.

PATRICK: *(To Smith.)* Can there be a village or town so dull and dismal that intelligent and educated people are unnecessary in it?

WEIGHTMAN: A good point.

SMITH: *(To Branwell.)* You're the genius. What do you think?

Branwell spies Nicholls, offstage.

BRANWELL: Here's Mr. Nicholls. I'm sure he'll enjoy your discussion.

Nicholls enters. During the introductions Branwell slips away, unnoticed.

PATRICK: Ah, our visiting curate. Vicar, this is Mr. Nicholls.

THE VICAR: Yes, of course.

NICHOLLS: *(To the Vicar of Bradford.)* Vicar.

THE VICAR: Sir.

PATRICK: Mr. Nicholls! You haven't met my daughter, just returned from Brussels. Charlotte, one of our traveling curates, Mr. Arthur Bell Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: Miss Brontë.

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: My pleasure.

CHARLOTTE: It seems to be raining curates in Haworth.

SMITH: It's a party!

Nicholls crosses to Anne, a book in his hand.

NICHOLLS: Miss Brontë. Allow me to congratulate you on your birthday and with all my heart to wish you good health and everything else that one can desire for a girl of your age. And to offer you as a gift this little book of homilies, written by myself. *(Nicholls hands Anne the book.)* An insignificant little book, written because I had nothing better to do, but still you and your sisters and your brother and your father may find it inspirational.

ANNE: Thank you.

WEIGHTMAN: *(To Nicholls.)* The Vicar is here to inaugurate our new Sunday school building tomorrow.

PATRICK: And you will stay for tea.

THE VICAR: I've intruded on a birthday party.

PATRICK: You must join us.

CHARLOTTE: Please.

NICHOLLS: *(To the Vicar.)* A pleasure to have you here, Reverend. I'm sure it's rare to have such a distinguished visitor in this remote village.

PATRICK: *(To Charlotte.)* Mr. Nicholls is from Ireland.

CHARLOTTE: I hope you'll like Haworth, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: I hope I shall. I think I shall. I hope--

PATRICK: *(To the Vicar, interrupting Nicholls.)* I'm planning to write to the newspapers about the Irish situation. I hope that the Protestants are arming themselves.

WEIGHTMAN: Surely you don't believe in war.

PATRICK: Christ said, "let him who has no sword sell his garments and buy one."

NICHOLLS: If only all the Protestants in Ireland were rightly armed and organized.

SMITH: You can't believe the Romanists could destroy both Churchmen and Dissenters.

Charlotte crosses into the Hallway, followed by Nicholls.

CHARLOTTE: Come to tea, please. There's spice-cake for Anne's birthday!

NICHOLLS: Miss Brontë, did I tell you how happy I am to meet you?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, you did.

Nicholls, the Vicar and Charlotte enter Patrick's Study. Charlotte busies herself with the tea things. Patrick crosses into the Hallway, as Emily comes out of the kitchen.

EMILY: *(To Patrick, quietly.)* Mind you don't drink anything, Papa! Do you hear me? Don't drink anything. The parishioners can smell it. They talk about the odor.

PATRICK: Oh, come, that's the medicine for my eyes. I only drink a little ale.

EMILY: Please don't drink. Don't you dare.

Patrick and Emily enter the Study. Smith sidles up to Weightman.

SMITH: You should direct your attention elsewhere. I'm sure that your little Miss Brontë has no family money.

Before Weightman has a chance to reply, Smith exits into Patrick's Study, leaving Anne and Weightman alone in the Parlour. Charlotte walks into the Hallway and calls up the stairs. The Vicar follows Charlotte into the Hallway.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell, come on!

THE VICAR: Miss Brontë? A moment?

CHARLOTTE: Yes?

THE VICAR: I had hoped to speak with your brother.

CHARLOTTE: With Branwell? Why?

THE VICAR: To ask him...Your father, he is well?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

THE VICAR: It's been many years since I've seen my dear friend. He's aged a great deal.

CHARLOTTE: Papa will outlive all of us.

THE VICAR: I came to Haworth to see if-- *(He stops.)*

CHARLOTTE: Yes?

THE VICAR: There's been talk --

CHARLOTTE: Talk about what?

THE VICAR: I understand you have been out of the country this past year. Perhaps you haven't heard--

CHARLOTTE: My sisters wrote to me often.

THE VICAR: There have been implications.

CHARLOTTE: Gossip?

THE VICAR: The smell of spirits is unmistakable.

A beat.

CHARLOTTE: Many medicines and remedies have an odor, yes.

THE VICAR: You don't understand.

CHARLOTTE: My father and my brother are both members of the local temperance society.

THE VICAR: Your father stumbles when he walks.

CHARLOTTE: My father is not a drunkard. (*A pause.*) There's nothing wrong with my father.

THE VICAR: He's getting on in years.

CHARLOTTE: He's always been very healthy.

A pause.

THE VICAR: As his friend, I ask you to please keep me informed of his health. He means a great deal to me.

CHARLOTTE: I'm glad to hear it.

THE VICAR: If he needs to retire there are things to be taken care of.

CHARLOTTE: He has a perpetual curacy. For life.

THE VICAR: So long as he can perform all the duties.

CHARLOTTE: All the duties? No one can perform all the duties. There are too many baptisms and funerals.

THE VICAR: If there were to be new clergy appointed-- and if the new curate had a family-- the family would need a home. You see, you and your brother and sisters are all grown. There would be nothing I could do to help you.

CHARLOTTE: My sisters and I will be opening our own boarding school soon.

THE VICAR: You're opening a school.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Very soon.

THE VICAR: Well, then, you've eased my mind. There's no need to worry, is there?

CHARLOTTE: None. And it's only a matter of time until Branwell makes his mark on the world. (*She sees Branwell on the stairs.*) There he is. Did you still want to speak with him?

THE VICAR: I don't think it's necessary.

CHARLOTTE: No, I don't think it is. *(Calling to Branwell.)* Branwell, come on!

Charlotte leads the Vicar back into Patrick's Study. Branwell comes quickly down the stairs and follows them in. Anne starts to leave the Parlour. Weightman comes up to her.

WEIGHTMAN: Miss Brontë.

ANNE: Mr. Weightman?

WEIGHTMAN: May I apologise? *(Anne looks at him.)* My colleague, Smith. He's annoying. I think he's shy and uncomfortable in company.

ANNE: Oh.

WEIGHTMAN: When there's only the two of us he's very intelligent and friendly.

ANNE: Yes.

Anne starts to exit.

WEIGHTMAN: Don't go yet.

Anne turns to him. There is silence. Anne starts to leave again.

WEIGHTMAN: I want to wish you happy birthday.

ANNE: Thank you.

WEIGHTMAN: You're twenty-four.

ANNE: Yes.

WEIGHTMAN: I'm not yet thirty. We both have years ahead of us./ In two years

ANNE: /Mr. Weightman/

WEIGHTMAN: /I will have my own church. I have passions, Miss Brontë, a passion to help others/

ANNE: /Yes/

WEIGHTMAN: /and a passion, rather, affection for you, Miss Brontë...

ANNE: Mr. Weightman.

A pause.

WEIGHTMAN: What are you thinking?

Anne doesn't speak.

WEIGHTMAN: *(Cont'd.)* You must know...that...that I...that I...that I think...you're beautiful.

A pause. Anne looks at him.

WEIGHTMAN: *(Cont'd.)* Yes, Miss Brontë?

ANNE: Are you joining us for tea?

WEIGHTMAN: Yes, if I may sit next to you.

ANNE: I have to help with the tea.

WEIGHTMAN: Not on your birthday.

ANNE: Yes, I must.

WEIGHTMAN: May I wish you happy birthday?

ANNE: You already did.

WEIGHTMAN: May your birthday be as beautiful as you are.

ANNE: Mr. Weightman.

WEIGHTMAN: And may your life be beautiful. May your life be very beautiful. Always.

ANNE: Life isn't always beautiful.

WEIGHTMAN: I hope with all my heart that yours will be. My dear Miss Brontë, may I call on you?

ANNE: I...I...I am...I am a governess.

WEIGHTMAN: I know.

ANNE: I have to return to my position. At Thorp Green. Next week.

WEIGHTMAN: Please listen to me --

PATRICK: *(From the next room.)* Anne!

ANNE: We should join them.

Anne and Weightman look at each other. Neither moves.

ANNE: *(Cont'd.)* You may write to me.

PATRICK: *(From the next room.)* Anne!

Anne starts to leave. Weightman stands in front of her.

WEIGHTMAN: One more word....may I call you "Anne"?

PATRICK: *(From the next room)* Anne!

Flustered, Anne goes into Patrick's Study, followed by Weightman. Branwell, coming from upstairs, is close behind them.

SMITH: And here is our birthday celebrant, Miss Brontë. Oh, and Mr. Weightman. What a handsome couple you would make. Oh, I've made you blush.

PATRICK: *(As he busies himself with the spice cake.)* Anne is still a child. She's much younger than Charlotte.

ANNE: Not so young.

SMITH: *(Looking pointedly at Nicholls.)* The elder Miss Brontë may have a suitor sooner than she thinks.

CHARLOTTE: Not likely.

SMITH: And we already know about Branwell. Spring is very early this year.

BRANWELL: Sir!

SMITH: The next celebration here won't be a birthday, it will be a wedding!

BRANWELL: Sir, this grows tiresome.

NICHOLLS: Perhaps we're all hungry.

SMITH: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. An odd number for tea!

WEIGHTMAN: Surely you don't attach importance to such superstitions?

SMITH: If there are an odd number at tea, it means that someone present is in love. It's not you, Mr. Weightman, by any chance? Or Mr. Nicholls? Or you, Mr. Brontë?
(Laughing.)

BRANWELL: Mr. Smith.

PATRICK: Branwell's life is devoted to literature and art.

SMITH: Ding, dong, ding, dong. I hear wedding bells!

BRANWELL: Aren't you tired of it yet?

Branwell runs from Patrick's Study and crosses the hall into the Parlor.

BRANWELL: *(To himself.)* They're only joking, they don't understand--

Branwell takes a folded paper from his pocket, a drawing of a woman. He speaks directly to the image.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* My dear, my sweet Mrs. Robinson. Lydia. My Lydia. I could draw your likeness forever. God! I feel so happy, so happy! My soul is filled with love and joy and--and ecstasy. Soon. Soon now.

Branwell is enraptured.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* I love you, I love you-- My god, Lydia. Lydia. No one ever loved you more, can ever love you greater, than I.

Branwell is on his knees.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* I am so blessed. Let us bring glory to the name of Him who has so wonderfully brought us together! I love you, as I have never loved anyone. . . My dear, my sweet, my-- My Lydia, be my wife!

*Branwell kisses his drawing.
End of scene.*

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

A year and a half later. July, 1845. Almost 9 o'clock in the evening. Emily is alone in the Parlour, writing, her papers messily spread across the desk. Branwell enters the Hallway on his way upstairs. Emily runs to meet him.

EMILY: Branwell!

BRANWELL: Evening.

EMILY: Something's wrong.

BRANWELL: No.

EMILY: You look ill.

BRANWELL: It's nothing, nothing.

EMILY: I'll get you some supper.

BRANWELL: Just give me a candle.

EMILY: Won't you take some supper?

BRANWELL: I need to get something from my room.

EMILY: You're trembling. You should go to bed.

BRANWELL: No.

EMILY: Tell me what's the matter.

BRANWELL: It's nothing.

EMILY: Has something happened?

BRANWELL: I've been walking too fast, that's all. Good night.

Branwell starts up the stairs.

EMILY: *(Calling after Branwell.)* Walking too fast? Where have you been?

BRANWELL: For heaven's sake, let me alone, and get to bed yourself!

EMILY: What is it? Why are you so distressed?

BRANWELL: Nothing, I'm telling you - It's nothing.

Branwell starts to go upstairs.

EMILY: I thought you wanted a candle.

BRANWELL: I was wrong. It's light enough. *(He calls towards the kitchen.)* Tabby! Did a letter come for me?

EMILY: Last night at twelve o'clock I passed through the hallway, and there was a candle left burning.

BRANWELL: *(Ignoring her comment.)* Where is everyone?

EMILY: Charlotte and Anne are at the evening service. Reverend Nicholls is preaching.

BRANWELL: Is Papa here?

EMILY: He's at the service, too. *(She sighs.)* Papa needs to take care of himself. I worry about him.

BRANWELL: The old man will still be alive when the rest of us are dead and buried.

EMILY: You should go to bed.

BRANWELL: Do you have a few coins lying around?

EMILY: Let me get you some supper. You're so thin. You're not sleeping. Would you like some tea? *(Branwell doesn't answer.)* Don't go out again. Stay here with me. *(Branwell doesn't move.)* You don't have to talk. You don't have to say a word. Just sit and keep me company.

A pause. Branwell sits, slumped. There is a long pause. Then he suddenly sits up straight, soldier-like, his voice changing as he begins to play-act.

BRANWELL: Northangerland is awaiting word from Lady Percy.

EMILY: *(Following his lead, she begins play-acting.)* There's a great storm. The messenger can't get through.

BRANWELL: Northangerland will go mad if he doesn't hear from her.

EMILY: What's he waiting to hear?

BRANWELL: That she loves him. No. No. No. He knows she loves him.

EMILY: Lady Percy.

BRANWELL: Yes.

EMILY: Loves Northangerland.

BRANWELL: With all her heart.

EMILY: And Lord Percy is off to the wars. He knows none of this.

BRANWELL: No. He's home keeping an eye on Lady Percy.

EMILY: She needs keeping an eye on.

BRANWELL: Lord Percy thinks so.

EMILY: And Northangerland is soon to return.

BRANWELL: Lord Percy demands that Northangerland stay away.

EMILY: And Lady Percy is left behind.

BRANWELL: Yes. She sits and waits. No. He waits. Northangerland. He waits for a letter. Or a note. Or even a word. Northangerland is miserable. Lord Percy writes a letter to Northangerland telling him his services are no longer needed.

A beat. Branwell looks at Emily.

EMILY: You've been dismissed from Thorp Green.

BRANWELL: Robinson says he'll shoot me if I return.

EMILY: You're not here on holiday. You've been let go for good.

BRANWELL: Robinson's stupid sons can't be taught anything, anyway.

EMILY: Oh, Branwell.

BRANWELL: *(Sighing.)* Thorp Green. What pleasures. And troubles. She's seventeen years my senior .

EMILY: Mrs. Robinson. Lydia Robinson.

BRANWELL: Surely you have a few coins for me.

EMILY: There's nothing.

BRANWELL: You're so unkind to your brother. She shows me kindness. She's unselfish. Such sweet concern. My, God, Lydia, Lydia. *(A pause.)* I admire her. I never looked for an...an attachment. She's the one who...She doesn't care a farthing for her husband. He's detestable.

EMILY: I'll bring you a cup of tea.

BRANWELL: He threatened to shoot me! Me! I'm the favourite of the entire household. What can I do? She is damnably too fond of me. She asked Anne if I loved her.

EMILY: She spoke of you to Anne?

BRANWELL: She couldn't help herself. So in love with me. God, Lydia!

Anne enters.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.) (To Anne, pointing to Emily.)* Tell her. Tell her about Lydia.

EMILY: Branwell, go to bed.

BRANWELL: When I damn well choose!

EMILY: Branwell!

ANNE: Tabby says there's someone at the door.

BRANWELL: Who? Who is it?

EMILY: Did Tabby say who it is?

BRANWELL: Is it a woman?

ANNE: A man.

EMILY: A gentleman?

BRANWELL: From Thorp Green?

ANNE: What?

BRANWELL: Is it someone from Thorp Green? The coachman? Or Crosby?

ANNE: I didn't see his face.

BRANWELL: It must be Crosby.

EMILY: Don't go out. You're ill.

BRANWELL: Yes, that's right. I'm sick. I'm heartsick. Excuse me.

Branwell heads for the kitchen.

EMILY: (To Anne.) Tell Tabby to show the man into the parlour.

BRANWELL: No.

Anne looks from one to the other, wanting to obey Emily.

BRANWELL: (Cont'd.) Tell Tabby I'll see him in the hallway. He won't be staying.

Emily doesn't move. Anne exits into the kitchen.

EMILY: Who is it?

BRANWELL: A messenger.

EMILY: Are you mad?

BRANWELL: A messenger from my angel. Go away.

EMILY: Branwell.

Branwell pushes Emily towards the Parlour immediately before Crosby enters the Hallway. He and Branwell speak in hushed tones. Emily stands just inside the Parlour, in the shadows.

BRANWELL: Good evening, sir.

Crosby reaches into a pocket and takes out an envelope.

CROSBY: I have for you

BRANWELL: What took her so long? It's late.

CROSBY: What?

BRANWELL: (Louder.) I say, you have come late in the evening, sir.

Branwell reaches for the envelope.

BRANWELL: (Cont'd.) ~~It's after dark.~~ It's nearly nine o'clock.

Crosby holds onto the envelope.

CROSBY: So it is. I went looking round the pubs first.

BRANWELL: The devil you did.

CROSBY: They were closed.

BRANWELL: It's Sunday, sir.

Branwell reaches for the envelope.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* Give me the letter. Quickly, man.

CROSBY: You must agree...

BRANWELL: Anything.

Crosby hands Branwell the envelope.

CROSBY: You must agree to have no further correspondence with Mrs. --

BRANWELL: Don't you dare speak her name.

CROSBY: There is to be no further correspondence.

BRANWELL: A formality, sir.

Branwell pulls some banknotes from the envelope.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* What, no letter?

CROSBY: No further correspondence.

BRANWELL: The devil --

CROSBY: I was told to tell you --

Branwell stares at the money.

BRANWELL: Bank notes? What is this?

CROSBY: It'll be paid on a regular basis. I'm instructed to tell you -
-

BRANWELL: Not here. Come. Come explain this, sir. I'll treat you to a pint.

CROSBY: The pub is closed.

BRANWELL: We'll find something. A thirsty man can always find something to drink. Even in Haworth.

Branwell leads Crosby out though the kitchen.

EMILY: Branwell!

Emily throws a book across the room and exits up the stairs. Charlotte enters, taking off her shawl. The Vicar of Bradford follows her.

CHARLOTTE: Tabby! Is tea ready?

Charlotte bustles around the room, lighting candles, arranging chairs.

THE VICAR: A moment, Miss Brontë--

CHARLOTTE: Yes? *(A pause as she stops and looks at the Vicar.)* Yes?

THE VICAR: Your father can no longer read his sermons.

CHARLOTTE: My father has never read a sermon in his life. He speaks from memory.

THE VICAR: He can't read the scripture.

CHARLOTTE: He doesn't have to read the scriptures. He can recite them.

THE VICAR: He's given the preaching over to his curate.

CHARLOTTE: For the evening services, as is common.

A pause.

THE VICAR: Miss Brontë, your father is nearly blind.

A pause.

CHARLOTTE: Are you a doctor as well as a man of the cloth?

THE VICAR: Miss Brontë.

CHARLOTTE: You should speak to my father if you're so concerned about him.

THE VICAR: It's because I'm concerned about him that I'm speaking to you. He's my very dear old friend.

A pause.

THE VICAR: *(Cont'd.)* The school you intend to open.

CHARLOTTE: Yes?

THE VICAR: You have pupils enrolled?

CHARLOTTE: Not yet.

THE VICAR: For next year, perhaps?

CHARLOTTE: Haworth is--

THE VICAR: Poor.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

THE VICAR: Miss Bronte, may I ask how you and your sisters would manage? Should something happen to your father?

CHARLOTTE: My father will outlive us all. *(A pause.)* We have an appointment with a new doctor. In Manchester.

THE VICAR: *(Cautiously.)* I fear that nothing-- *(After a hesitation.)* Thank you, Miss Brontë. I'll pray for him.

Anne enters the Hallway from the kitchen, as Nicholls, Weightman and Smith come in through the front door. While they are talking, Anne lights lamps and candles in the Parlour and Study. Emily comes back downstairs and heads toward the kitchen.

NICHOLLS: *(To Charlotte.)* Did you like my sermon, Miss Brontë?

CHARLOTTE: Well, one doesn't actually speak of "liking" a sermon, does one? *(A pause.)* One is inspired, perhaps. Andone has to....let it settle, perhaps, in one's mind before concluding its value.

WEIGHTMAN: An interesting topic, surely. "The Importance of Habit in the Common Man." Interesting.

NICHOLLS: Did you think?

WEIGHTMAN: Habit means a great deal to everyone. Right, Miss Brontë?

ANNE: After Aunt Elizabeth died, it was a long time before we could get used to getting the house in order ourselves.

WEIGHTMAN: And you instill good habits in your young charges.

ANNE: I've left my position at Thorp Green.

WEIGHTMAN: Oh. *(A beat.)* You have another position?

ANNE: No. *(And that's as much as they can say to each other in public.)*

Charlotte picks up Emily's book and puts it on the table, straightening Emily's papers as she talks.

CHARLOTTE: Emily has to be reminded to tidy up her papers and books.

NICHOLLS: Would it be possible to have some tea? I've had no dinner today, and had nothing to eat since the morning. My throat is very dry.

THE VICAR: I'm not surprised. That was a lengthy sermon.

Anne tries not to laugh. Weightman gives her a smile.

NICHOLLS: Was it too long?

Anne can't look at Weightman for fear of laughing. Deadpan, he replies to Nicholls for her benefit.

WEIGHTMAN: You had a lot to say on the subject.

NICHOLLS: I did. I could have continued longer, but my throat was so dry I thought it best to conclude.

SMITH: A good decision. There was a lot of coughing already among your congregants.

CHARLOTTE: *(Glancing at the clock.)* Tabby will be bringing tea soon.

THE VICAR: Well, done, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: I'm not sure everyone appreciated my modest homily as much as our little group here.

WEIGHTMAN: There are many ill-mannered, badly brought-up people among the parishioners. Don't mind them, Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: Please pay no attention to me.

A sudden noise. Anne, startled, jumps, causing Nicholls to jump as well.

NICHOLLS: What?

ANNE: What was that?

WEIGHTMAN: The fireplace.

There is another noise. Nicholls is startled again.

NICHOLLS: What?

WEIGHTMAN: Outside, I believe.

Weightman, Smith, the Vicar and Nicholls cross to the Hallway to investigate.

ANNE: Perhaps it's Branwell.

CHARLOTTE: Stumbling home again.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* Is it true that Branwell lost ten shillings?

CHARLOTTE: Much more than that. Two weeks ago he lost money, in April he lost money. He keeps losing more and more.

ANNE: Does Papa know?

CHARLOTTE: Papa gives the money to Branwell.

The men reenter the Parlour. Weightman is subtly guiding Patrick, who makes great attempts to conceal his blindness. Patrick stumbles a little as he finds a chair. He adjusts his neck scarf, and sits.

THE VICAR: Here he is.

ANNE: Papa.

PATRICK: My sweet girl.

Silence.

PATRICK: *(Cont'd.)* So quiet, Mr. Nicholls? Surely you're not talked out.

NICHOLLS: I don't know. I'm longing for tea. I'd give half my life for a cup of tea. I've had nothing to eat since the morning.

CHARLOTTE: Any minute now.

A pause.

NICHOLLS: I confess that I'm relieved to have the service behind me. Did you find the subject interesting?

A pause, then quickly, overlapping.

ANNE: Oh, yes.

CHARLOTTE: How could it not be?

THE VICAR: Out of the ordinary.

PATRICK: *(Quietly, to Nicholls.)* Sunday evening services are usually a little shorter. Your flock has to get home to supper.

NICHOLLS: I'll remember that. They need their supper, too.

A pause.

NICHOLLS: *(Cont'd.)* Should I publish the sermon?

PATRICK: That hadn't occurred to me.

NICHOLLS: Vicar? *(No answer.)* Vicar?

THE VICAR: I'm dwelling on your conclusion.

NICHOLLS: You are?

A pause.

NICHOLLS: *(Cont'd.)* My conclusion.

THE VICAR: Yes.

A pause.

NICHOLLS: I think not only about eternity, but the life on earth after we are long gone. Suffering will continue and men will still be afraid of death.

PATRICK: *(Patting Nicholls on the arm.)* You've given your sermon for tonight.

NICHOLLS: The purpose of our existence--

PATRICK: *(Interrupting.)* The purpose of our existence is to prepare ourselves for the hereafter.

THE VICAR: Well, of course. Without faith life is empty.

Emily enters from the kitchen.

EMILY: I thought I heard Branwell.

ANNE: Did you leave the door ajar?

EMILY: I didn't open it.

THE VICAR: What a wind.

ANNE: Yes. It's quite chilly for summer.

Weightman and Smith enter from the back door, holding up Branwell, who is slightly drunk.

BRANWELL: It's a party.

Emily exits, silently slipping back into the kitchen.

PATRICK: Is that Branwell?

BRANWELL: We must celebrate! I have decided...tonight I have made the decision... to....

WEIGHTMAN: Your clothes are wet.

PATRICK: Is it raining?

BRANWELL: A decision to....to publish. I shall publish the whole shocking story.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell.

BRANWELL: *(To those trying to help him.)* Let me alone.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell, you have to get out of your wet clothes.

PATRICK: You missed this evening's service.

BRANWELL: *(To Nicholls.)* I missed your sermon, didn't I? Couldn't be there. Business, you know. Business. But we'll celebrate! Eh, Nicholls? To your premiere and my...my...new life. I shall be an author. Let's drink to our creativity!

PATRICK: You must apologise to Mr--

NICHOLLS: No apology is necessary.

BRANWELL: Apology? Did you hear me apologise? Sir, I did not. I merely, merely ...informed....you, sir, of my....absence this evening.

THE VICAR: Perhaps you can read Mr. Nicholls' sermon later.

BRANWELL: Will it be published?

NICHOLLS: Perhaps.

BRANWELL: We will all publish, then.

Branwell coughs.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell. You're ill. Let's put you to bed.

ANNE: Please, Branwell.

SMITH: Sir, you're shivering.

WEIGHTMAN: We'll assist you.

BRANWELL: It's too early for bed.

ANNE: At least have something to eat.

NICHOLLS: Yes.

PATRICK: *(Gesturing to the Vicar and the others.)* Gentleman, shall we retire to my study?

THE VICAR: Of course.

NICHOLLS: *(Not budging.)* Shouldn't he have some tea?

CHARLOTTE: Why don't you join my father in the study?

THE VICAR: Or perhaps you can share Branwell's meal with him, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: What a good idea.

THE VICAR: Let us two old friends dine alone.

Without Patrick noticing, the Vicar takes Patrick's elbow and guides him toward the Study.

PATRICK: Gentlemen.

THE VICAR: Gentlemen.

WEIGHTMAN: Vicar.

Patrick and the Vicar exit into the Study, leaving the rest behind.

BRANWELL: *(To Anne.)* Lydia is as miserable as I, you know. I'm told she eats nothing. I shall fast as well. I shall eat nothing.

ANNE: Branwell!

CHARLOTTE: Branwell, you're embarrassing us.

BRANWELL: The devil I am.

Branwell looks around the room. Everyone is staring at him.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* You're right, dear sister. I'm not a good host. We should drink to our guests. To Mr. Nicholl's opening night! *(Calling to the kitchen.)* Emily! Tabby! Bring us some— Gentlemen, I fear we are not well stocked in this house. Will homemade ale do?

WEIGHTMAN: I prefer tea myself.

BRANWELL: *(Calling to the kitchen.)* Tea! A cup of tea for...what is it you've been calling him? Miss Celia Amelia! A cup of tea for Miss Celia Amelia!

Branwell sprawls on the sofa.

CHARLOTTE: *(Quietly, to Weightman and Nicholls.)* Gentlemen, he is performing for your benefit.

BRANWELL: Do you hear me, Tabby?

CHARLOTTE: Perhaps you should take tea in Papa's study after all.

WEIGHTMAN: Yes, of course.

Weightman, Nicholls, and Smith go into the Hallway, while the women attend to Branwell in the Parlour. Patrick and the Vicar are in Patrick's Study. The dialogue goes back and forth between the three rooms: the Parlour, the Hallway, the Study.

ANNE: Branwell. What have you done to yourself?

CHARLOTTE: He's been drinking, of course.

Smith and Weightman have a moment in the Hallway.

SMITH: They treat him like a girl -- they spoil his spirit and make Miss Nancy of him.

WEIGHTMAN: Better to fortify him against temptation rather than remove him from it.

SMITH: Temperance, sir, is one thing, and abstinence another.

They go silent as Emily passes them with a tray and enters the Parlour.

EMILY: *(To Branwell.)* You need to eat something.

BRANWELL: I'm a dog. You'll be thankful to get rid of me.

EMILY: Poor thing.

BRANWELL: Lydia thinks me a puppy that she can pet and then drown.

ANNE: Branwell!

Smith and Weightman enter the Study.

SMITH: Gentlemen, we've been banished to the study, if you'll have us.

PATRICK: Please come in.

THE VICAR: Yes, of course. Fine work tonight, Mr. Nicholls.

WEIGHTMAN: Interesting point of view.

PATRICK: But surely memorization and contemplation of Bible verse should become a habit. Isn't it one of our foremost duties as clergyman? To inspire our parishioners to think about the gospels?

WEIGHTMAN: Yes.

SMITH: No.

WEIGHTMAN: No?

SMITH: I prefer my parishioners to let me do the thinking.

WEIGHTMAN: To dictate, rather than guide?

SMITH: Does it matter? Our primary duty in this part of the world is officiating at weddings, baptisms—not necessarily in that particular order—and funerals.

NICHOLLS: Weddings, baptisms and funerals, certainly.

WEIGHTMAN: (*To Smith.*) So you think you wield your greatest influence from the pulpit?

SMITH: No one ever sleeps through a wedding.

THE VICAR: Indeed.

NICHOLLS: Ha, ha!

SMITH: A baptism, perhaps. Of course one hopes the little new parishioner is sleeping at the baptism, for the alternative is hard on the ears. And, of course, at a funeral...

NICHOLLS: Does your audience sleep during your sermons?

SMITH: Mine? Never. But possibly my colleagues have experienced the sound of snores or seen the odd head bobbing up and down as it attempts to remain upright.

PATRICK: Mr. Nicholls, take no notice. We have all heard our share of snoring.

THE VICAR: Indeed we have.

NICHOLLS: (*Trying to get back to the subject.*) But interpretation of the gospels--

SMITH: A layman shouldn't attempt to think for himself in matters connected with religion.

WEIGHTMAN: Are you saying they shouldn't be guided and reassured by their own interpretations of Scripture?

THE VICAR: Mr. Smith?

SMITH: There must be reverence and obedience to the clergy.

WEIGHTMAN: You're a taskmaster!

SMITH: As is the Deity.

WEIGHTMAN: I prefer the idea of a benevolent Father.

SMITH: Then you'll find your children lax in their discipline.

NICHOLLS: So long as they continue in their hope of a joyful resurrection at the last day.

WEIGHTMAN: Most can see no further than their next meal.

NICHOLLS: I don't deny that the poor have heavy burdens that must be borne.

WEIGHTMAN: (*To Smith.*) Yet you lay these burdens on their shoulders while you yourself --

SMITH: Sir. Perhaps a debate is in order.

WEIGHTMAN: Surely, sir, that is what is taking place at present.

SMITH: I hardly think this insignificant exchange qualifies as a debate.

WEIGHTMAN: (*To Smith.*) I'm sorry that your flock must look alone to you for verbal consolation when simple literacy would enable them to seek solace directly from the printed page.

THE VICAR: Well said, Mr. Weightman. Speaking of the printed page...

*The Vicar holds up the book he's been trying to read.
The other men fall silent.
In the Parlour Branwell pushes away his plate.*

BRANWELL: This food isn't fit for a dog. We must replace our cook. We need a change.

CHARLOTTE: You're the only thing that needs to change.

BRANWELL: I have an infernal fire in my veins--

CHARLOTTE: Branwell.

BRANWELL: A fire that all the waters of the ocean cannot quench.

CHARLOTTE: There's nothing the matter with you, except what you have willfully brought upon yourself.

BRANWELL: I come home sick and weary, longing for comfort, expecting to find attention and kindness, and you calmly ask what is the matter with me.

CHARLOTTE: If you choose to visit the bottomless pit, we won't go with you.

BRANWELL: Why can't you be as gentle and as good as you used to be?

Wordlessly, Charlotte walks toward the door.

BRANWELL: (*Cont'd.*) Have patience with me, and bear with my crossness a little while. Just a little while, till I get this cursed fever out of my veins.

Charlotte exits into the Hallway.

EMILY: Oh, Branwell, that you would love yourself as much as you are loved by your family.

BRANWELL: Then forgive me, dear sisters, forgive me, and I'll never do it again. There.

ANNE: Darling Branwell. You must ask God for forgiveness.

Charlotte crosses into the Study.

CHARLOTTE: Gentlemen, thank you for your kindness.

WEIGHTMAN: If we can be of no further assistance.

CHARLOTTE: He caught a chill.

PATRICK: Did Branwell eat this evening?

NICHOLLS: Is there supper in the parlour?

CHARLOTTE: Tabby heated some soup.

THE VICAR: *(Gesturing to the outside.)* Shall we, gentlemen?

NICHOLLS: Is there any more --

SMITH: Nicholls, let it go.

THE VICAR: After you, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: Yes, of course.

SMITH: He just needs some strong tea.

NICHOLLS: Tea.

WEIGHTMAN: Come on, Mr. Nicholls.

NICHOLLS: Mr. Weightman, I haven't thanked you for coming all the way from Manchester for my--

SMITH: Your debut?

WEIGHTMAN: Wouldn't have missed it.

SMITH: *(To Nicholls, referring to Weightman.)* He had appointments nearby.

THE VICAR: *(Gesturing to the door.)* Gentlemen.

Anne appears at door of the Parlour as the group enters the Hallway.

WEIGHTMAN: Reverend Brontë. Miss Brontë. Miss Brontë.

ANNE: Mr. Weightman.

NICHOLLS: Miss Brontë. Miss Brontë. Reverend Brontë.

SMITH: Ladies.

CHARLOTTE: Thank you, gentlemen.

THE VICAR: Good-bye to you all.

The men are gone, except for Patrick, who stands in the Study doorway.

CHARLOTTE: Papa, you should be in bed. The doctor said for you to rest.

PATRICK: I need to have a word with Branwell.

CHARLOTTE: It can wait until morning.

PATRICK: You must scold the dog while it still remembers the crime.

CHARLOTTE: Papa. Go to bed.

PATRICK: I'll say goodnight to --

CHARLOTTE: Go to bed, Papa.

Charlotte hands Patrick a candle. He heads up the stairs as she reenters the Parlour. Branwell is slumped in a chair. The three sisters look at each other. No one speaks for a moment.

BRANWELL: The tea is cold.

EMILY: You shouldn't have left it so long. I'll make you some coffee.

CHARLOTTE: Emily, don't pamper him any more. Let's get him to bed.

BRANWELL: *(Suddenly in a rage.)* You will not tell me what to do. You're not my mother. The devil with you! *(He starts to cry.)* Lydia. God.

ANNE: Branwell. You mustn't think of her.

BRANWELL: Who are you to tell me what to think? An old maid. You're an old maid. All of you.

CHARLOTTE: Hush.

BRANWELL: A roomful of old maids. What do any of you know of love?

CHARLOTTE: Stop it.

BRANWELL: Confounded slut!

EMILY: Branwell. You don't know what you're saying.

CHARLOTTE: Emily, let him be.

BRANWELL: I'm a demon! I am a demon! This is hell on earth, this life, this/

ANNE: Branwell!

BRANWELL: /this nothing.....this nothing of a life. For nothing.....

Branwell sweeps Emily's papers off the table. A beat. Emily goes to Branwell and gently strokes him, as she would her dog.

EMILY: Come. Come.

Emily takes a candle and leads Branwell up the stairs, as Anne clears the table.

BRANWELL: *(To Anne, as he exits.)* Tell Tabby that food is not fit for a dog.

Anne gathers the tea things in silence.

BRANWELL: *(From upstairs.)* Give me the candle and leave me alone!

Branwell is gone. Charlotte begins to pick up the scattered papers.

CHARLOTTE: His behavior no longer shocks me.

ANNE: I pray for his soul.

Charlotte reads from a page.

CHARLOTTE: "No coward soul is mine."

ANNE: What?

CHARLOTTE: "No coward soul is mine.
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere.
I see Heaven's glories shine.
And faith shines equal arming me from fear."

ANNE: What is that?

CHARLOTTE: Have you heard it before?

ANNE: No.

CHARLOTTE: Nor I.

ANNE: What is it?

CHARLOTTE: It's Emily's. Emily's handwriting.

Charlotte looks through all the papers and picks up another poem.

CHARLOTTE: (*Reading.*) "I'll come when thou art saddest
Laid alone in the darkened room
When the mad day's mirth has vanished
And the smile of joy is banished
From evening's chilly gloom."

Charlotte reads another poem silently and hands it to Anne and picks up another and another. Charlotte and Anne read in silence. They hear a noise. Both of them put down the papers. Emily enters. No one speaks.

EMILY: Were you talking about Branwell behind his back?

ANNE: No.

CHARLOTTE: Would he know the difference?

EMILY: He needs compassion, not judgment.

CHARLOTTE: Are you judging me?

ANNE: Please don't quarrel.

A pause.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell --

Emily glares at Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: (*Cont'd.*) *Slowly and carefully.*) Branwell is not on holiday. He has lost his position. He won't be able to get another one.

Emily eases her gaze and listens.

CHARLOTTE: (*Cont'd.*) Papa's losing his sight. More and more every day. He's going blind. What if the doctor in Manchester is unable to do anything for him? What then?

EMILY: He has a perpetual curacy.

CHARLOTTE: Providing he can perform his duties.

ANNE: Papa has a curate to assist him.

CHARLOTTE: The Vicar spoke to me.

ANNE: What did he say?

EMILY: What Vicars always say. It will be the will of God.

ANNE: It is.

EMILY: Or the will of the Vicar.

ANNE: The Vicar wouldn't--

CHARLOTTE: He has no choice. If Papa can't perform his duties he'll be relieved of them. And a new rector will take his place.

ANNE: Then Papa could rest.

CHARLOTTE: A new clergyman will have a wife and family. They'll need a home. They'll need a house.

ANNE: Oh.

CHARLOTTE: Where will we go then? What will we do? Do you want to be a governess again?

A pause.

EMILY: Are you a fortuneteller now? You're speculating on a future that may never happen.

ANNE: We could try again. To open our own school.

CHARLOTTE: No pupils applied before. Why would they apply now?

ANNE: Maybe they would this year.

CHARLOTTE: We have to make our own living.

EMILY: So you say.

CHARLOTTE: We may soon find ourselves on our own and we have to prepare for that possibility .

EMILY: We could not worry about things that may never happen.

ANNE: I can't go back to Thorp Greene.

CHARLOTTE: We must be independent.

ANNE: I don't want to be a governess again.

CHARLOTTE: Nor I.

ANNE: What's to become of us?

A pause.

CHARLOTTE: We could sell our writing.

ANNE: Sell our writing?

CHARLOTTE: We could be authors.

Charlotte picks up one of Emily's poems. There is a pause.

EMILY: What are you doing? No. Don't read that! Give me those.

Emily goes over to Charlotte and holds out her hand for the papers.

EMILY: *(Cont'd.)* You've been reading my poems.

CHARLOTTE: They were on the floor. I picked them up.

EMILY: You knew these were private. You deliberately waited until I was out of the room.

CHARLOTTE: If you would tidy up after yourself there'd be nothing for me to find!

EMILY: I did not give you permission to read my --

CHARLOTTE: Leaving them in a mess could be construed as tacit consent.

EMILY: You're not to go through --

CHARLOTTE: They are beautiful.

EMILY: You shouldn't have read them.

CHARLOTTE: The most beautiful poems I've ever read.

EMILY: They're mine.

CHARLOTTE: They should be shared with the world.

EMILY: No.

CHARLOTTE: They should be published. You should send them out.

EMILY: No.

CHARLOTTE: Governess or author, Emily?

Emily turns to go.

CHARLOTTE: (*Cont'd.*) Don't leave this room.

EMILY: I have to feed the dogs.

CHARLOTTE: Answer my question. Governesses or authors?

ANNE: Authors. We will be authors.

EMILY: I hear the cat crying to be let out.

CHARLOTTE: The cat can wait.

EMILY: (*After a pause, to Charlotte.*) What do you propose?

CHARLOTTE: We will publish our poetry.

ANNE: Yes.

EMILY: (*To Anne.*) I did not agree. I was merely asking --

CHARLOTTE: We'll publish our poems. On our own if need be.

ANNE: Oh, and Branwell's, too.

CHARLOTTE: No.

ANNE: Branwell has some lovely poems.

CHARLOTTE: We will do this for ourselves alone.

ANNE: His poems have been printed in magazines. He'd be devastated if we were to publish a book without him.

CHARLOTTE: Then we won't tell him.

ANNE: Not tell Branwell? (*A pause.*) Branwell is the writer in the family.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell is incapable of filling any respectable station in life. When money is at his disposal he only uses it for his own injury.

ANNE: But if he had some success with his writing...

CHARLOTTE: We won't tell anyone. Not Branwell, not Papa. Do you hear me? We'll do this ourselves. We will do this ourselves or not at all.

(A pause.)

EMILY: Branwell's a published poet. Is Branwell independent? If a man such as Branwell can't make an independent living as a poet, how do you expect three women to do so? We know nothing –

CHARLOTTE: Branwell!

EMILY: We know nothing of publishing.

CHARLOTTE: We know nothing either of drunkenness, debauchery, deception, procrastination, false dreams, lies and wickedness. Any money Branwell makes will be spent at the pub. Branwell is a failure not as a poet but as a man. He can't even take care of himself.

EMILY: I can take care of myself. I don't have to publish my work.

CHARLOTTE: So.

EMILY: So.

CHARLOTTE: I hear the cat.

EMILY: Yes.

Emily starts to leave the room.

CHARLOTTE: You can take care of yourself.

EMILY: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Can you also take care of the cat? The dogs? The birds?

Emily faces Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* Can you take care of Papa? Can you take care of Branwell?

A very long pause.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* The cat is still crying.

Emily stares at Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* Let the cat out, Emily. And feed your dogs.

ANNE: I'll let Tiger out.

EMILY: I'll let the cat out. I'm going to take a walk.

ANNE: It's so late.

EMILY: There's a full moon.

CHARLOTTE: It's raining.

Emily goes to the window and looks out.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* We need all the poems to make a volume.

ANNE: Yes. All the poems.

Emily turns and stares at Charlotte.

EMILY: Then write some more poems.

CHARLOTTE: But yours are the best.

A pause, as Emily takes this in.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* Emily, I've never read such poetry.

Another pause.

ANNE: Please. Please, Emily.

Another pause.

EMILY: No one shall ever know that I have written.

CHARLOTTE: Then why have you made fair copies of your poetry?

EMILY: For my own self. Not for anyone to know.

CHARLOTTE: No one has to know. We can be anonymous. We don't have to reveal your name. Our names. We will....we will....publish them under false names!

ANNE: False names?

CHARLOTTE: We'll make up names. Like when we were children.

ANNE: Yes! We can make up names, Emily.

CHARLOTTE: No one will know.

Charlotte is making some notes.

ANNE: Our secret.

CHARLOTTE: Yes. With false names no one need know.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* What names? *(To Emily.)* What names?

A pause.

EMILY: *(A challenge.)* Names no one has ever heard of. Names that sound like names but aren't names. So that no one can identify us.

CHARLOTTE: Or identify our sex. We'll be truly anonymous.

EMILY: *(After a beat.)* Publish if you like. I don't care anymore. They've been spoiled.

CHARLOTTE: No, they've been found.

EMILY: I'm going to bed.

Emily starts up the stairs.

ANNE: You forgot your poems!

CHARLOTTE: Hush.

EMILY: It doesn't matter any more!

Emily exits. Charlotte stacks Emily's and Anne's poems together. Charlotte sits and begins to read, to herself.

ANNE: Do you like mine?

CHARLOTTE: I've always liked your poetry. They're all lovely. It'll make a beautiful edition. We'll have it printed in one volume.

ANNE: Like Papa's volume of Wordsworth.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

ANNE: In green binding.

CHARLOTTE: We'll need to cover the cost of paper and printing.

Anne shows Charlotte one of her poems.

ANNE: This is my favourite.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, it's lovely. *(She barely glances at it.)* There's still some money of Aunt Elizabeth's left. I have no idea of the cost, but for a modest printing it shouldn't be...we must make some money from this. After our poetry is printed and reviewed you and I will send out our novels.

Charlotte starts towards the stairs.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* Oh, my head aches. . .I'll write to some publishers tomorrow. We must find a way to make our own living. I'll write tomorrow. To some publishers in London.

ANNE: London!

CHARLOTTE: Yes. We'll be authors and go to London.

Charlotte exits. Anne begins to clean up the poems. She starts to put them in Emily's writing desk, and sees another manuscript there. Curious, she takes it out and begins to read, somewhere in the middle.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in—let me in!...I'm come home: I lost my way on the moor!'" "

Anne shuffles the papers and reads from another page.

ANNE: *(Reading.)* "--My love--...My love for-- Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. -- I AM Heathcliff!"

Anne randomly flips to another page.

"far rather would I be condemned to a perpetual dwelling in the infernal regions than, even for one night, abide beneath the roof of Wuthering Heights again."

Anne looks towards the stairs, where everyone else has gone. She puts the manuscript back in the desk and takes a candle as she goes to the stairs. Lights fade as we see Anne climbing the stairs with her candle.

End of Act One.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Two years later. July, 1847. Charlotte is alone in the Parlour, a letter in her hand. Anne comes running in.

ANNE: Tabby said there's a letter!

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

ANNE: Where?

CHARLOTTE: Here.

ANNE: From London?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

ANNE: From Newby Publishers?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

ANNE: What do they say?

CHARLOTTE: I haven't opened the envelope.

ANNE: Open it. Read the letter.

CHARLOTTE: I'm waiting.

ANNE: Oh, yes! Where's Emily?

CHARLOTTE: Probably out with the dogs.

ANNE: *(Calling toward the kitchen.)* Emily!

CHARLOTTE: Hush. Not so loud.

ANNE: Branwell's not here. No one's around.

Emily enters.

ANNE: *(To Emily.)* Oh! Here you are!

CHARLOTTE: We've received a letter.

ANNE: From London. From Newby Publishers.

EMILY: Another dismissal, like all the rest.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* What does it say?

Branwell enters.

BRANWELL: He's dead! Robinson is dead!

ANNE: Mr. Robinson? Mr. Robinson has died?

BRANWELL: Yes! Lydia will send for me now. I must start to pack. Oh, I'm so happy. So relieved. All my suffering makes this moment the more joyful! My sisters! I will miss you!

Branwell sees the letter in Charlotte's hand.

BRANWELL: What's this? A letter? For me?

CHARLOTTE: No.

ANNE: No.

EMILY: No.

Charlotte puts the letter in her pocket. Emily exits into the kitchen, as if to get tea.

BRANWELL: There shall be a letter soon! Any minute now. A summons. A request. No, a demand. A demand that I come to her as quickly as possible. Not as tutor, but as a--ah, Lydia, my love, my love. *(To Anne.)* Tell them how much she loves me! *(A sudden thought.)* Oh, can I get a horse? *(Calling off.)* Who in this town has a horse I can use? *(To his sisters.)* Can you spare something so I can hire a horse? Lydia will be in a faint if I keep her waiting. Oh, I can't see her soon enough. What a wonderful day! My dear, dear sisters.

ANNE: Branwell.

BRANWELL: My sweet. My sweet, sweet little sister. I'd stay and visit, I would, but I must.....I must.....*(Calling off.)* Tabby! I have to pack. Do I have clean shirts? Tabby! *(To his sisters.)* We should let that old woman go. She's useless. But what do I care? I'll soon have servants of my own. At Thorp Green. Thorp Green! What a life...what a life I'll have! Inspired by our love. I'll write poetry. I'll finish my novel. I'll paint. And you can visit. You can visit me at Thorp Green. You must all visit as often as possible. Oh, blessed day. I'm saved.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell. Stop this.

BRANWELL: You have something against my Lydia. I'm telling you she is wonderful, honorable. *(Calling.)* Tabby!?! Tabby!?! *(To his sisters.)* Tell her to get my clothes ready for travel. I'm going to look for a horse. Lydia will send for me at any moment. I have to be ready. *(Calling.)* Tabitha!

Emily enters.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* Didn't Tabby hear me call?

EMILY: I'm here.

BRANWELL: Why doesn't Tabby come at once?

ANNE: She's making your supper.

EMILY: She's answering the--

BRANWELL: Some things are more important than food! I have no patience with her. She's ruining my -- this can't continue.

EMILY: There's a man at the back door for you.

BRANWELL: What? What? Yes! Lydia summons me! My love! *(To Emily.)* Why didn't Tabby tell me at once? I was going to have her pack my things, but instead she shall pack her things. I won't have her in this house any longer.

Branwell exits. No one speaks until he is gone.

CHARLOTTE: These nights with him have made me ten years older.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* Don't let him send Tabby away.

EMILY: That's nonsense. No one is sending her away.

CHARLOTTE: Of course not.

EMILY: Never.

ANNE: Where could she go? Where? She's eighty. Eighty-one.

CHARLOTTE: He'll be drunk again tonight.

EMILY: He has no money.

ANNE: Is Mr. Robinson really dead? I can't believe it. His poor children.

EMILY: I'll go and help Tabby.

ANNE: Emily!

EMILY: Our poetry book didn't sell and we've had six rejections for the novels. I'm going to go help in the kitchen.

Emily exits towards the kitchen. Anne waits until she is gone.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* Open the letter.

Charlotte pulls the letter from her pocket as Patrick and the Vicar of Bradford enter the Hallway from the front door. Charlotte and Anne stand still.

PATRICK: They don't generally operate on both eyes. But in my case -- well, you couldn't have known this. All last year my sight deteriorated-

THE VICAR: Indeed.

PATRICK: No one knew.

THE VICAR: Both eyes, you say?

PATRICK: It was a risky operation.

THE VICAR: Painful?

PATRICK: Some burning during the procedure, but not intolerable.

THE VICAR: How long did the operation last?

PATRICK: Fifteen minutes.

THE VICAR: Extraordinary.

PATRICK: My lens was extracted in each eye so that the cataracts can never return.

THE VICAR: Miraculous.

PATRICK: I can read again. Here. Let me find you that book.

The men cross into Patrick's Study. Charlotte quickly opens the letter.

ANNE: Newby wants the novels, don't they?

Emily enters as Charlotte scans the letter.

ANNE: *(Cont'd.)* Do they want our novels?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. It seems they do.

ANNE: Three books will make a lot of money! We can pay off Branwell's debts!

CHARLOTTE: Well, no. No.

ANNE: What? Tell us!

CHARLOTTE: They want to publish two of our books. (*Charlotte refers to the paper.*) Three hundred and fifty copies will be printed. At a cost to us of, perhaps, fifty pounds.

ANNE: Our novels are to be published!

CHARLOTTE: They want us to bear the cost of printing ourselves. Perhaps another publisher...

EMILY: You've sent them out six times now and this is the answer.

CHARLOTTE: But money will be returned to us only if there's call for a reprint.

ANNE: Write them a letter of acceptance.

Emily starts to exit.

ANNE: (*Cont'd.*) Emily, don't leave.

EMILY: I'll be home for tea.

CHARLOTTE: This isn't like publishing our poetry. They should be paying for the printing.

ANNE: (*To Charlotte.*) Which books?

Emily stops at the doorway.

CHARLOTTE: What?

ANNE: You said two books. We sent them three.

The sisters fall silent again as Patrick and the Vicar enter the Hallway.

PATRICK: I spent a month on my back, confined to a dark room in Manchester, with bandages over my eyes. Leeches. On my temples.

THE VICAR: Not on the eyelids?

PATRICK: No. On the temples.

THE VICAR: How curious.

PATRICK: The doctors bleed in order to prevent inflammation.

THE VICAR: A speedy recovery. Through divine mercy.

PATRICK: Combined with the skill of the surgeon, and my Charlotte's attention. She was with me the whole time, dear girl. An entire month, with nothing to amuse her except her own scribblings. She never complained, never once, about sitting silent with me in the near darkness. There couldn't have been enough light for her to read by. She pretended that she was writing to keep herself busy. But now we've returned. And no one ever knew how blind I had become.

THE VICAR: We had no idea at all.

PATRICK: I've always preached without notes. But now I'm able to read and write again.

THE VICAR: Praise be to God. That we should live in such times where a doctor's steady hand can restore sight.

PATRICK: I'll walk you to the road. I'm enjoying the outdoors again, as I haven't in years.

Patrick and the Vicar of Bradford exit. Charlotte rereads the letter.

ANNE: Two books.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

EMILY: I didn't want my book read anyway.

CHARLOTTE: They would like to publish "Agnes Grey."

ANNE: Oh, yes!

EMILY: And....

ANNE: And "The Professor." *(She claps with glee.)* Oh, Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE: No. They want "Agnes Grey" and "Wuthering Heights."

ANNE: Oh.

EMILY: Really?

ANNE: Not "The Professor"? Not your book?

A beat.

CHARLOTTE: I don't think Newby is the right publisher. Only three hundred fifty copies. The printing of our poems was five times that.

EMILY: And only two copies were sold. What do we know of publishing? I think you're lucky they want anything at all.

ANNE: Did they say why? Why they aren't taking.....

CHARLOTTE: No. Just that they aren't interested in publishing my book.

EMILY: Then tell them they can't have any of the books.

ANNE: No! You must write them a letter immediately. Before they change their minds.

EMILY: Tell them no.

ANNE: You aren't serious?

CHARLOTTE: They don't want "The Professor."

ANNE: They want to publish two of our books.

CHARLOTTE: Or rather the books of Ellis and Acton Bell.

EMILY: You sent the letter. You sent the books. This is your reply.

ANNE: Surely you aren't going to refuse us because....

CHARLOTTE: You would do this without me?

ANNE: There could be another publisher for "The Professor."

CHARLOTTE: I'm not sending it out again.

ANNE: Then send out your new book. To someone else. But you need to change your heroine. She's unattractive, plain. No one wants to read about that. Your heroine should be pretty. Make her beautiful and then send out the new book.

CHARLOTTE: It goes as it is. *(Beat.)* Yes. I'll send my novel to Smith-Elder. Their rejection was encouraging at least.

ANNE: *(To Emily.)* Our novels are going to be published!

EMILY: Hush. I hear Papa.

The sisters all sit down, reading or writing. Patrick enters the Parlour.

PATRICK: I spied Branwell going into the chemist.

ANNE: He doesn't have any money.

EMILY: He won't buy any laudanum today. He hasn't a penny on him.

CHARLOTTE: I don't care anymore if he takes opium or not. I'm tired of it all. I have no patience with him. How do you bear it? He vexes me. He's sinful. He's evil.

PATRICK: *(Trying to convince himself as much as Charlotte.)* God made him. And God loves him. And if God so loveth us, that He gave His only begotten Son to die for us, we ought also to love one another.

ANNE: Yes, Papa.

PATRICK: So we must pity Branwell's failings and excuse his offences.

CHARLOTTE: Excuse him!

PATRICK: If we love God and wish to serve Him, let us try to be like Him, and forgive.

Branwell enters, drunk.

BRANWELL: The devil take them all ...damn them all. The devil take them.

PATRICK: Branwell.

EMILY: Where did he get the money to drink?

CHARLOTTE: Crosby, of course. Another payment from Thorp Green.

PATRICK: You disappoint me, Branwell.

BRANWELL: You know nothing of disappointment, sir. You, sir, are taken care of every minute of the day. They treat you like a child. What would you know of man's disappointment?

CHARLOTTE: Branwell.

BRANWELL: Perhaps I'm not a man at all but only pretend to have arms and legs and head; perhaps I don't exist at all and only imagine that I walk around, eat and sleep.

PATRICK: You must calm yourself.

BRANWELL: (*Weeping.*) Oh, if only I didn't exist! (*Morosely.*) I don't care! I don't care a scrap! Who the hell knows ...

PATRICK: I can't listen to your ravings.

BRANWELL: Then don't, sir! Go read your scriptures. Go write your sermons. They fall on deaf ears. To hell with your preaching.

PATRICK: Surely the devil is inside my son.

Patrick exits into his Study.

BRANWELL: Yes, yes. Everything is nasty, disgusting and all twisted in my soul...

ANNE: Branwell, what's happened?

BRANWELL: I went and got drunk, I'm drunk, do you know that?

ANNE: Is Mr. Robinson really dead?

BRANWELL: I hope he rots in hell for all eternity. From the grave-- From the grave Robinson dashes our hopes and dreams. Oh, Lydia, do you suffer as much as I? I know you do. (*To Anne.*) They tell me Lydia is distraught. Sick with grief.

ANNE: Then he is dead.

BRANWELL: For me! She is ill with grief for me!

Branwell suddenly takes out a flask and before anyone can stop him he has finished it off.

BRANWELL: He...his will...he made a will. I'm mentioned in Robinson's will! By name! Lydia will be cut off without a penny if she sees me again. But what is money! She will come. I know she will. She will come to me. Lydia! The devil take her dead husband.

Patrick reenters, carrying a Bible.

PATRICK: Let's put you to bed, sir.

BRANWELL: The devil take you, too.

EMILY: Branwell!

BRANWELL: And you. What do any of you know? What do any of you know of love? You are all as withered as the lone tree in the graveyard. You rot like the bodies in the ground outside.

PATRICK: That's enough. It's time for you to go to bed.

Branwell goes toward the stairs.

BRANWELL: Oh, god. I'm miserable. I'm so miserable. How will I pass the time until she sends for me? The devil with waiting!

Branwell smashes the face of the grandfather clock. Charlotte gasps. Anne utters a little scream.

PATRICK: Branwell!

Stunned silence.

CHARLOTTE: That was Mother's clock.

BRANWELL: I never had a mother.

EMILY: Did you hurt your hand?

PATRICK: Thank God she never lived to see what her son has become.

EMILY: Let me look at your hand.

ANNE: Why did you break Mother's clock?

BRANWELL: Well, Mother has no need for it, does she! And neither do I!

Branwell staggers up the stairs followed by Patrick.

BRANWELL: Leave me alone.

EMILY: Anne, make him some tea.

Emily follows Branwell and Patrick up the stairs. Anne bursts into tears.

ANNE: I can't bear it any more!

Anne exits to the kitchen. Charlotte sits alone, her head in her hands. Nicholls enters. Charlotte looks up at him, sighs.

NICHOLLS: Miss Brontë, what is the matter?

Charlotte doesn't answer.

NICHOLLS: *(Cont'd.)* You should tell me.

CHARLOTTE: It is nothing to you, Mr. Nicholls. Just a headache.

NICHOLLS: Are you sure it's nothing to me? After our walk together yesterday? Aren't you lonely sitting here? Can you swear that you weren't thinking of me just a little?

Charlotte doesn't answer.

NICHOLLS: *(Cont'd.)* Tell me. I want to know, - because, if you were, I have something to say to you, - and if not, I'll go.

CHARLOTTE: Go then. Or say what you will.

NICHOLLS: But which? For I'll only say it if you really were thinking of me. So tell me, Miss Brontë...Charlotte.

Charlotte doesn't speak.

NICHOLLS: *(Cont'd.)* Well, I'll spare your woman's pride, and, construing your silence into "Yes," I'll take it for granted that I was the subject of your thoughts, and the cause of your affliction --

CHARLOTTE: Sir --

NICHOLLS: If you deny it, I won't tell you my secret.

Charlotte doesn't speak.

NICHOLLS: *(Cont'd.)* It is this. I ----I love you to distraction! Now, tell me if that knowledge gives you any pleasure.... Silence again? That means "Yes". Then let me add, that I can't live without you, and if you answer, "No", to this last question, you'll drive me mad - Will you bestow yourself upon me?

CHARLOTTE: *(A beat.)* Mr. Nichols—

NICHOLLS: Arthur. Yesterday you called me Arthur.

CHARLOTTE: I believe my father dislikes you.

NICHOLLS: But you don't, Charlotte. Say you love me, and I'll go.

CHARLOTTE: Right now I wish you would go.

NICHOLLS: I will, this instant, if you'll only say you love me.

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Nicholls!

NICHOLLS: You're an angel and I am a presumptuous dog to dream of possessing such a treasure; but, nevertheless, I would sooner die than relinquish you in favour of the best man that ever went to Heaven - and as for your happiness, I would sacrifice my body and soul --

CHARLOTTE: Body and soul, Mr. Nicholls - sacrifice your soul?

NICHOLLS: Well, I would lay down my life --

CHARLOTTE: You would not be required to lay it down.

NICHOLLS: I would spend it, then - devote my life - and all its powers to -

Patrick is heard offstage.

NICHOLLS: *(In a whisper.)* I love you with all my heart.

Patrick enters. He notices that Nicholls and Charlotte are alone.

PATRICK: Mr. Nicholls!

NICHOLLS: Reverend.

PATRICK: Have you forgotten your late meeting tonight with the sexton?

NICHOLLS: I was just going, sir.

PATRICK: Our Lord is punctual, Mr. Nicholls. The sun rises and sets every day on time.

NICHOLLS: *(As he leaves.)* Miss Brontë.

CHARLOTTE: Mr. Nicholls.

Patrick exits into his Study. Anne passes Nicholls as she enters. Nicholls exits through the kitchen.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* Mr. Nicholls looks stranger than usual.

A pause.

CHARLOTTE: Does he?

ANNE: He's so helpful with Papa and Branwell, I'm beginning to like him. Were you talking with him about Branwell?

CHARLOTTE: No. I wasn't.

ANNE: It's all her fault. Mrs. Robinson.

CHARLOTTE: (*Shaking her head.*) Oh, Branwell.

ANNE: She neglected her children. She was always with Branwell. I hate her. She should have loved her husband. Mr. Robinson was a kind man.

Charlotte is in her own world.

ANNE: (*Cont'd.*) What are we going to do with Branwell?

A pause.

ANNE: (*Cont'd.*) Branwell's spoiled our good news. I don't care about the books now. I don't care about anything.

CHARLOTTE: Anne, do you ever think about marriage?

ANNE: Me?

CHARLOTTE: Or about getting engaged, in the next few years? Do you think about it?

ANNE: Sometimes.

CHARLOTTE: To Mr. Weightman?

ANNE: He writes to me.

CHARLOTTE: Do you love him?

ANNE: I may never meet another man as agreeable as he is.

CHARLOTTE: One could marry the handsomest, the most accomplished, the most agreeable man in the world. And he could turn out to be a fool.

ANNE: But what are all the poor fools to do?

CHARLOTTE: It's not a joke. One could also marry a fool who turns out to be a good man.

ANNE: I have to respect and honour the man I marry as well as love him.

CHARLOTTE: I hope that is so.

ANNE: It is. But what can we offer a man? We have no money.

CHARLOTTE: Oh, my dear sister. What are we to do?

Noises! Emily comes running downstairs.

EMILY: Branwell set his bed on fire!

Lots of commotion. Emily starts for the kitchen. Charlotte and Anne race toward the stairs.

CHARLOTTE: Shall I call for help?

EMILY: No time.

ANNE: Papa?

Charlotte runs up the stairs as Branwell staggers down them, unharmed, but still drunk.

ANNE: *(Cont'd.)* Branwell. What have you done?

BRANWELL: I'm in hell.

Emily comes out of the kitchen with a bucket of sand as Patrick comes out of his Study. Emily runs up the stairs with the bucket. We hear Charlotte and Emily from upstairs. "Smother it." "There." "Watch the bedclothes."

BRANWELL: Ghosts have arrived.

PATRICK: The wicked shall be sent to hell. And those who forget God.

BRANWELL: *(As he starts to go.)* I can't bear my own thoughts.

PATRICK: You are not to leave this house.

ANNE: Where is it all going to end?

BRANWELL: In hell fire. I shall shoot myself.

Charlotte comes down the stairs. Through the following Emily and Charlotte go up and down the stairs, dealing with the aftermath of the fire, i.e. charred bedclothes, etc. Charlotte's lines are thrown out as she goes back and forth.

CHARLOTTE: The fire is smothered. It's out.

PATRICK: Thank God.

BRANWELL: The fire still rages. Inside me.

ANNE: Charlotte, talk to him.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Anne.)* He's given up on life. I've given up on him.

BRANWELL: I'll blow my brains out.

CHARLOTTE: Good.

ANNE: Charlotte!

BRANWELL: What you see in life I don't know. I see only the blackness of darkness.
And fear of judgment.

PATRICK: Let us pray together.

BRANWELL: I'm in hell's torment.

ANNE: I'll pray for you.

BRANWELL: Don't give me prayers, give me a glass.

ANNE: No, Branwell.

BRANWELL: Solomon says "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and to drink,
and to be merry."

PATRICK: And he also says "know thou that, for all these things, God will bring
thee into judgment."

BRANWELL: Judgment? Damn me body and soul. Damn you all! I curse you all! I
curse this house! I curse this house of women!

CHARLOTTE: I hate you.

Anne is sobbing.

BRANWELL: Oh, God, that I might die. There is a fiend within me.

CHARLOTTE: I'm exhausted.

BRANWELL: Death is so terrible. I can't bear it

CHARLOTTE: Let's take you to bed, Branwell.

ANNE: Branwell, go to bed now. Please.

BRANWELL: You don't know, you can't imagine.

PATRICK: Put him in my bed. It'll be safer if I'm with him.

BRANWELL: When I'm buried you'll be as happy as ever, and all the world will go on
as busy and merry as if I had never been.

CHARLOTTE: We will all follow you soon enough.

BRANWELL: Pray for me! Father, pray for me.

PATRICK: I do pray for you - every hour and every minute. But you must pray for yourself.

BRANWELL: I try. I try. There is nothing there. There is no god. There is no god!

PATRICK: My son is lost.

BRANWELL: I can only wish for death.

ANNE: No.

BRANWELL: Death. Help me. Help me, oh, lord.

PATRICK: Do you truly want to be helped?

BRANWELL: What am I to do?

PATRICK: Do this. Say: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

BRANWELL: You are severe.

PATRICK: On your knees.

BRANWELL: Save me.

PATRICK: You must repent.

BRANWELL: Yes.

PATRICK: You must say you're sorry for what you have done.

BRANWELL: Well, well, I am.

CHARLOTTE: You are not! You'll do it again.

BRANWELL: Can there be really life beyond the tomb?

PATRICK: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

BRANWELL: If there is judgment after death, how can I face it? Save me.

ANNE: You must save yourself.

BRANWELL: Nothing will save me, but death. If only I could believe there was nothing after.

PATRICK: There is joy and glory after if you will but try to reach it.

BRANWELL: What, for me?

ANNE: Please try.

BRANWELL: Do you believe that man can spend life as he pleases, then go to Heaven with the best?

PATRICK: We're promised salvation.

BRANWELL: So the vilest sinner may win the reward of the holiest saint, by merely saying, "I repent?"

PATRICK: If you sincerely repent--

BRANWELL: I can't repent; I only fear.

PATRICK: You regret the past only for its consequences to yourself.

BRANWELL: Except that I'm sorry to have wronged my family.

PATRICK: Think of the goodness of God.

BRANWELL: What is God? I can't see him or hear Him.

PATRICK: Fix your mind on Him who was raised to Heaven in His glorified human body, in whom the fullness of the godhead shines.

BRANWELL: I don't understand what you're saying to me!

PATRICK: Say "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

BRANWELL: "God be"...

PATRICK: "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

BRANWELL: "God be"...

PATRICK: "God be merciful to me, a sinner. "

BRANWELL: "God..."

PATRICK: On your knees.

BRANWELL: I can't.

PATRICK: Say it. "God be merciful to me, a sinner. " (*Branwell is crying.*) "God be merciful to me, a sinner. " (*Branwell says nothing.*) "God be merciful to me, a sinner. " (*Still no answer.*) "God be merciful to me, a sinner. " "God be merciful to me, a sinner. "

BRANWELL: I'm damned.

Patrick starts to leave the room.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.)* You give up on me?

PATRICK: You've given up on yourself. Only God can help you now.

BRANWELL: To hell with your God. To hell with you. What did you ever do for me?

ANNE: He taught you--

BRANWELL: What did he teach me? That God is good?

ANNE: Yes.

CHARLOTTE: Anne.

Patrick is leaving. Branwell lunges for his father.

BRANWELL: Your loving god took my mother. The devil has been kinder to me than your god.

PATRICK: And I wish God had never restored my eyesight, that I should be forced to see my son --

BRANWELL: I'm not your son. I'm a child of the devil.

PATRICK: The devil take you then!

Patrick exits, crossing the Hallway into his Study, and sits, head in hands. Branwell thrashes about the room, out of control. He is blubbing and raving. Charlotte and Anne try to subdue him. Emily enters from the staircase and stands off to one side, watching.)

CHARLOTTE: Let's put Branwell to bed.

BRANWELL: Stop giving me orders.

CHARLOTTE: You can't get up the stairs without our help.

BRANWELL: Shut up.

ANNE: Branwell.

BRANWELL: *(To Anne.)* What a waste you are. So pretty. But a virgin.

ANNE: You are horrible.

BRANWELL: I could teach you things.

ANNE: I don't know you anymore.

BRANWELL: Would you like to know me? To really, to truly know me, Anne?

ANNE: No! No, I don't want to -

CHARLOTTE: Anne.

BRANWELL: I saw you looking at the Robinson boy.

ANNE: You're mad.

BRANWELL: Pretty little fellow.

ANNE: You're sinful.

BRANWELL: He would be fourteen now.

CHARLOTTE: Go to bed, Branwell.

Branwell raises a hand as if to strike her, but the action causes him to lose his balance and he falls.

BRANWELL: I curse you.

CHARLOTTE: Go to hell, then.

BRANWELL: There's no other place for me.

Anne has fallen to the sofa, sobbing. Charlotte stands her ground. Emily comes forward to Branwell, who is suddenly lucid.

EMILY: Branwell.

BRANWELL: Lady Percy has betrayed Northangerland.

EMILY: Northangerland is weary and must sleep.

BRANWELL: Stay with me.

EMILY: I'm here.

BRANWELL: No harm can reach me while you're here. But death will come - it is coming now. Fast. Fast. And there is nothing after.

EMILY: There is joy after, great, great joy if you will but believe.

BRANWELL: What joy?

EMILY: Like a sudden rainbow on the moors.

BRANWELL: After a storm.

EMILY: Yes. After the thunder, so frightening. And the cold hard rain. Then it's over. And the sky clears. And the moors are bright and silent. Nature's promise.

BRANWELL: High waters!

EMILY: Spring will come again.

BRANWELL: *(Falling to his knees.)* Father, forgive me. God be merciful to me, a sinner.

Charlotte and Anne look at Branwell. No one speaks for a minute.

BRANWELL: *(Cont'd.) (To Emily.)* I'm ready.

EMILY: Can you get up?

BRANWELL: I'm light as a cloud.

EMILY: Come.

BRANWELL: The sky will be bright?

EMILY: So bright it will nearly blind you.

BRANWELL: I feel sleepy.

EMILY: I'll take you to bed.

BRANWELL: I've burned my bed.

EMILY: You can sleep in my room. Come.

Emily gets Branwell to his feet. Anne moves to help them, but Emily shoos her away with a slight glance and shake of her head. Charlotte has not moved. So intertwined that it is difficult to see who is helping whom, Emily and Branwell exit up the stairs. Anne calls quietly after them.

ANNE: I'll pray for you, Branwell!

CHARLOTTE: There's no help for him now.

ANNE: I'll pray for you!

CHARLOTTE: He is past praying for.

ANNE: How can you say that?

CHARLOTTE: You think he can go on and on like this? For years? No. This will be his last Christmas, if he makes it that long.

Anne breaks down, sobbing.

ANNE: What's to become of us?

Charlotte is stoic.

CHARLOTTE: Newby Publishers will take *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights*. I'm sending *Jane Eyre* to Smith Elder. We three will be writers. We'll publish our books. In London.

The lights fade. End of scene.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

A year and a half later. December, 1848. Nicholls, Smith and the Vicar of Bradford are in the Study, along with Patrick, who is sitting and writing. In the Parlour. Anne is looking out the window. Charlotte sits at the table.

SMITH: Some have no head at all: they can't drink half a bottle without being affected some way; whereas I - well, you see I'm perfectly steady. Now that may strike you as singular, but I can explain it: - you see some brains - I mention no names, but you'll understand to whom I allude - their brains are light to begin with and the fumes of the fermented liquor render them lighter still, and produce an entire light-headedness, or giddiness, resulting in intoxication; whereas my brains being composed of more solid materials will absorb a considerable quantity of this alcoholic vapour without consequence.

THE VICAR: You put six lumps of sugar in your tea just now.

SMITH: Have I? Ah. The evil of thinking too much while engaged in the common concerns of life. Now if I had my wits about me, like an ordinary man, instead of within me like a philosopher, I should not have spoiled this cup of tea.

The men drink their tea in silence. In the Parlour, Charlotte sorts review clippings.

CHARLOTTE: The Economist! The literary critic says he praises my book if it's written by a man, but says it's odious if it's the work of a woman.

ANNE: All these reviews. I don't know where to start.

CHARLOTTE: Listen to this one. "One of the coarsest books ever written."

ANNE: Poor Emily.

CHARLOTTE: Ha! That's your review. They think you are a man.

ANNE: Oh! I'm "coarse"!

CHARLOTTE: And "brutal"! (*Reading.*) "Profane expressions...revolting scenes."

Emily appears in the doorway. She is frail and weak.

ANNE: *(Gleefully.)* Emily! I'm "brutal"!

CHARLOTTE: As long as the books keep selling they can call us whatever they want.

Emily weakly walks to the sofa.

ANNE: Emily! You shouldn't be downstairs – please let me bring you tea in your room next time.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Emily.)* More reviews have arrived.

ANNE: *(To Charlotte.)* Read one of Emily's.

CHARLOTTE: The North American Review. "Ellis Bell is a spendthrift of malice and profanity."

ANNE: "Profanity"! And what was the other, "Heathcliff is the epitome of brutality." I'm brutal, too, Emily. We're "brutal"!

Emily chuckles as she sits on the sofa.

CHARLOTTE: *(Reading.)* "Nightmares and dreams, through which devils dance and wolves howl, make bad novels."

Emily tries weakly to howl like a wolf.

ANNE: Hush! Papa will hear us.

Emily tries again, but starts coughing.

CHARLOTTE: Rest. Put your feet up.

Emily puts her feet up on the sofa.

ANNE: High water!

CHARLOTTE: High water!

EMILY: *(Weakly.)* High water.

They repeat the High Water game from the first scene, get the giggles and end up shushing each other.

CHARLOTTE: *(Shuffling the reviews.)* If these men could see whom they are writing about. We three sisters, fierce seamstresses and naughty gardeners.

ANNE: Branwell would have been so proud.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell.

ANNE: Do you think Branwell guessed? I always thought that someday...

CHARLOTTE: It's time to tell Papa.

ANNE: You're really going to tell Papa that we are authors?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Which reviews do you want me to show him?

Charlotte and Anne sort the review clippings. In the Study, Patrick finishes his letter and hands it to the Vicar.

PATRICK: Perhaps a hand-delivered message will be taken more seriously. My letters go unanswered. There must be an investigation of the water supply here in Haworth.

THE VICAR: I'll do my best to get their attention.

PATRICK: Thank you. I'm sad to say farewell.

THE VICAR: My friend, we've had some good times together.

PATRICK: I'm sorry to see you leave Yorkshire.

THE VICAR: London will seem crowded after Bradford.

SMITH: I hear Canada is very spacious.

NICHOLLS: Canada?

SMITH: Did I not tell you? I have hope of advancement there. The life of a curate here is one of poverty.

THE VICAR: You thought it would be otherwise?

SMITH: When I was ordained it didn't occur to me that there could be such a reduction in position.

NICHOLLS: Poverty. Yes. Christ says--

SMITH: You'll figure it out and leave England yourself one day. There are too many curates here and not enough positions.

PATRICK: *(Looking at Nicholls.)* I'll be losing my assistant temporarily. But if tithes increase next year...I have hope.

Christmas carolers begin to sing "Silent Night" outside the parsonage. Anne runs into the Study.

ANNE: The carolers are outside! Oh! Mr. Smith, I didn't know you were here.

THE VICAR: We've come to say goodbye.

ANNE: Goodbye?

Charlotte enters the Study.

THE VICAR: Mr. Smith is on his way to Canada.

CHARLOTTE: Canada!

SMITH: I'll become what they call a lumberjack!

CHARLOTTE: Where is Mr. Weightman? Isn't he with you?

NICHOLLS: Ah. Mr. Weightman.

ANNE: Is he going to Canada, too?

SMITH: Well, he-- He's in Liverpool. Still in Liverpool. I left him there. Couldn't stand it myself. Every vessel brings more and more Irish, thin and threadbare. They scurry around the dock like rats. No offense, gentlemen. Well, I'm off. No time for tea.

THE VICAR: I'll escort you, Mr. Smith.

Everyone begins to move into the Hallway.

THE VICAR: *(Cont'd.)* Mr. Nicholls?

NICHOLLS: In a moment.

Nicholls stares at Smith who ignores him.

PATRICK: Let's not linger over farewells. Write us. Let us know how you are.

THE VICAR: The Lord be with you.

PATRICK: And also with you.

Patrick goes back to his writing, as the others enter the Hallway. Anne goes to the doorway of the Parlour to look in on Emily. The Vicar pauses.

SMITH: Vicar, the light will be fading soon.

THE VICAR: *(Looking toward the Parlour.)* We must say farewell to your sister.

CHARLOTTE: Emily's resting.

ANNE: She caught a cold at Branwell's funeral.

CHARLOTTE: She's been ill for some months.

THE VICAR: My prayers will be with her. And with you all. Smith?

SMITH: Oh, yes. My prayers as well. We're off.

THE VICAR: Nicholls?

NICHOLLS: Walk on ahead. I'll catch you shortly.

THE VICAR: Farewell.

SMITH: Merry Christmas.

There is a chorus of "Merry Christmas" as Vicar and Smith leave.

CHARLOTTE: *(After a moment of silence.)* Gone.

Anne goes into the Parlour. Nicholls pulls Charlotte aside, in the Hallway.

NICHOLLS: May I have a word?

CHARLOTTE: I'm busy with Emily.

NICHOLLS: Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: Not now, please.

NICHOLLS: I don't know how to tell you--

CHARLOTTE: What is it? *(A pause.)* What?

After another pause Nicholls whispers in Charlotte's ear.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* No! No.

NICHOLLS: I'm afraid it's true.

CHARLOTTE: Surely not.

NICHOLLS: He traveled to Liverpool with Smith. There's disease all around there. It was very sudden.

Anne enters the Hallway and sees Charlotte and Nicholls looking at her.

ANNE: What is it? *(No answer.)* What has happened?

Charlotte puts her arms around Anne.

CHARLOTTE: A terrible day.

ANNE: What is it?

CHARLOTTE: I don't know how to tell you, my dear, sweet-

ANNE: What is it? Tell me quickly, what is it?

CHARLOTTE: My poor sister.

ANNE: For God's sake!

Anne cries.

NICHOLLS: William Weightman took suddenly ill.

ANNE: He's ill?

NICHOLLS: He has passed on.

ANNE: *(Weeping quietly.)* I knew, I knew ...

NICHOLLS: I'm sorry.

ANNE: When his letters stopped coming--

Anne breaks down. Charlotte comforts Anne.

CHARLOTTE: My dear, dear sister.

NICHOLLS: I'm worn out ...*(A pause, then, to no one in particular.)*
Shall I pay the carolers?

CHARLOTTE: Yes, thank you.

Nicholls quietly exits out the back door as Anne and Charlotte enter the Parlour. Anne stands by the window, silent. Charlotte checks on the sleeping Emily. There is silence for a moment.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* Anne.

ANNE: I'd like to be alone.

Charlotte takes this in and checks Emily again. Charlotte picks up a copy of a book and some newspaper clippings. She steels herself and then she crosses the Hallway into Patrick's Study, where Patrick is engrossed in his paperwork. Charlotte stands by Patrick, silent for a moment.

CHARLOTTE: Papa, I've been writing books.

Patrick scarcely looks up.

PATRICK: I can't remember Branwell as he was in health -- I can only remember him as he was in his sickness and suffering. My one comfort is that he was reconciled to his heavenly father at the very end.

In the Parlour, Emily coughs. Patrick and Charlotte hear her.

PATRICK: *(Cont'd.)* My poor Emily. And Anne. I look at Anne now, and wish she were well and strong. But she's not. What's happened to my children?

Patrick goes back to his reading. There is a pause.

CHARLOTTE: Papa, I have written a book.

PATRICK: Have you, my dear?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

PATRICK: Branwell should have written books. He was a fine writer.

CHARLOTTE: Branwell.

PATRICK: Branwell was taken from life in its prime, his promise unfulfilled.

CHARLOTTE: Papa, the anguish of seeing him suffer is over.

PATRICK: And God has sustained me. He has sustained me in a way

that I marvel at, sustained me through agony such as I never could have imagined.

A beat.

CHARLOTTE: Would you like to see my book?

PATRICK: Later, perhaps.

CHARLOTTE: Papa, I want you to show you my book.

PATRICK: A manuscript? You know I can't read that tiny handwriting of yours.

CHARLOTTE: But it's printed.

PATRICK: Printed?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. I've published a book.

PATRICK: You've published a book?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

PATRICK: Branwell's debts were more than we could've imagined.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, I know.

PATRICK: And now you're involved with silly expenses.

CHARLOTTE: I'm beginning to gain some money by it.

PATRICK: You're making money?

CHARLOTTE: Yes. Quite a bit of money.

PATRICK: You've published a book?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

PATRICK: Did Branwell help you write it?

CHARLOTTE: No. He didn't. I wrote it all by myself, Papa. While you were recovering from the operation on your eyes. One of my characters is healed from his blindness, too.

PATRICK: And you found a publisher who pays you?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

PATRICK: Do your sisters know?

CHARLOTTE: We have all three published books.

PATRICK: All three sisters.

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

PATRICK: And Branwell?

CHARLOTTE: No. He never knew.

PATRICK: Branwell wrote some fine articles. And poetry.

CHARLOTTE: Would you like to see my book?

PATRICK: What's it called?

CHARLOTTE: *Jane Eyre*.

PATRICK: *Jane Eyre*?

CHARLOTTE: Yes.

PATRICK: An odd title.

CHARLOTTE: May I show you some of my reviews?

Charlotte sets the copy of her book on the table and hands Patrick the reviews.

PATRICK: Sit down.

Patrick begins to read the reviews. Charlotte sits and watches him. Still on the sofa in the Parlour, Emily wakes with a spasm of coughing.

ANNE: Oh, Emily. Would you like some soup?

EMILY: *(She speaks in gasps.)* No.

ANNE: Some tea?

EMILY: Northangerland. Gondal. Branwell.

ANNE: Let me bring you a cup of tea.

EMILY: No.

ANNE: You must let us send for the doctor.

EMILY: No. No doctor.

Emily has a fit of coughing. Patrick hears her and looks at Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Patrick.)* Today I searched the moors for a lingering bit of heather to bring to Emily. Just one spray, however withered. But she saw the flower with dim and indifferent eyes and let it fall from her hands.

Patrick rises and looks out the Study door towards the Parlour.

PATRICK: She's a brave and noble girl.

CHARLOTTE: Yes, she is.

PATRICK: She's my right hand.

CHARLOTTE: Emily will join Branwell soon, Papa.

PATRICK: I place my faith in God.

There is a pause.

PATRICK: *(Cont'd.)* Branwell could have been a great writer.

Charlotte holds out her book to Patrick. He takes it, opens it to a page near the end, and reads aloud.

PATRICK: *(Cont'd.)* "Reader, I married him. A quiet wedding we had: he and I, the parson and clerk, were alone present. When we got back from church, I went into the kitchen of the manor-house, where Mary was cooking the dinner and John cleaning the knives, and I said - "Mary, I have been married to Mr. Rochester this morning."

Patrick looks at Charlotte. Patrick carries the book to his chair and sits as if settling in for a long and pleasant evening. He opens the book to the first page.

PATRICK: *(Reading aloud.)* "There was no possibility of taking a walk that day." *(He continues reading silently.)*

Charlotte exits the Study and crosses the Hallway into the Parlour. The lights on the Study begin to dim. The carolers sing "Joy to the World."

ANNE: I've not yet had a lover in my life! Not really. I've dreamt of love so much. I've been dreaming of it for years, day and night, but my soul is like a wonderful piano which is locked and the key has been lost.

CHARLOTTE: *(At the window.)* The birds have all flown south. One day they were here and now they're gone and I never even noticed when they left.

EMILY: *(With great effort.)* We're not real, nothing in the world is real, we don't exist, but only seem to exist ...

ANNE: Don't talk.

Emily closes her eyes and takes deep breaths. Charlotte goes over to Anne. They stand with their arms around each other.

CHARLOTTE: I can't think. I'm going mad ... My thoughts are in a tangle.

ANNE: Let's sit together, even if we don't say anything.

Charlotte and Anne sit at the table. The carolers continue to sing.

EMILY: Oh, listen to the carolers!

ANNE: Everyone is leaving us, one has left us forever. We have to begin our life over again.

EMILY: We must live.

Emily has a spasm of coughing.

EMILY: If you will send for a doctor, I will see him now.

CHARLOTTE: Tabby!

Charlotte exits through the hallway to the kitchen. Anne goes to Emily. After a moment Charlotte reenters.

ANNE: Someday we'll understand, won't we? Won't we? Why there is all this suffering? I write and write and write and I don't understand anything at all.

CHARLOTTE: We must work.

ANNE: *(A pause.)* Tomorrow I'll look for a new position. I'll go out alone again and teach and give my life to others. *(A pause.)* Winter is here. There will be snow soon.

Anne sits back down at the table.

CHARLOTTE: On the moors today I saw echoes of the sun, high in the sky, reflections on the icy clouds. Images on either side of the sun. Three suns in the sky. Parhelia.

ANNE: What happens after we're gone?

CHARLOTTE: After we all are gone? After we're gone we'll just be forgotten, that's all. Our faces will be forgotten and our voices will be forgotten, and no one will even remember how many of us there were.

The carolers hum "Joy to the World."

ANNE: How can the music be so happy when life is so miserable?

Anne puts her head down on the table. Charlotte crosses to the window.

CHARLOTTE: The hope of the birth of Our Lord, perhaps? Yes. Yes. In a little while we'll know what we're living for, why we're suffering.

Anne looks up at Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: *(Cont'd.)* The music is so cheerful and I want to live! Our sufferings will pass into joy for those who come after us, happiness and peace will come upon the earth and people will be kind to each other. My sisters, my dear, dear sisters, life is not yet over. Let us work. Let us live! The music is so joyful, so happy, and it seems in a moment more we will understand why we live, why we suffer ...

If we only could know it now -- Oh, my dear sisters. If we could only know!

Charlotte sits back at the table and picks up her pen. Emily is asleep on the sofa. Patrick is in his Study, reading Charlotte's book. The light in the Study continues to dim. The carols continue.

CHARLOTTE: If only we could know, if only we could know!

Charlotte begins to write. Patrick's room is in near darkness. The lights in the Parlour change until each of the three sisters seems to be in her own spotlight. The lights grow brighter and brighter and brighter, three individual suns for a moment. Then the lights blend together into a single bright blinding light. There is a sudden blackout.

The play has ended.