

THUNDER

A Play of the Brontes

by

RICHARD CRANE

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

THUNDER

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The Cast

The characters are divided among six actors:

- Charlotte** plays Miss Scatcherd, Nelly Dean,
Jane Eyre, Mrs. Markham
- Emily** plays 3rd Villager, Elizabeth Brontë,
Miss Temple, Catherine Earnshaw,
Aunt Reed, Lady Ingram,
Rose Markham
- Anne** plays 2nd Villager, Maria Brontë,
Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Fairfax,
Blanche Ingram, Helen Graham
- Branwell** plays 1st Villager, Mr. Brocklehurst,
Mr. Briggs, Arthur Huntingdon
- Papa** plays 4th Villager, William Wordsworth,
Professor Heger, Heathcliff,
Gilbert Markham, Rev. Wood
- Nicholls** plays Rev. Redhead, Aunt Branwell,
William Weightman, Solitude,
Edmund Robinson, Mr. Lockwood,
Edgar Linton, Edward Rochester,
Fergus Markham

The Parsonage, Haworth 1860

Introduction

Background

In the spring of 1820, Patrick Brontë moved into the Parsonage at Haworth with his wife and six small children. He was a tall, forbidding parent, a vehement preacher and a man of passionate moods and silences. The house stood high, apart from the village, overlooking moors on one side, graves on the other. Mrs Gaskell recalls the wind 'piping and wailing and sobbing round the square, unsheltered house in a very strange, unearthly way'. Deaths were common and lingering in the household. Mrs Brontë died in 1821 and two of her daughters four years later.

Against this background, the four Brontës wrote - letters, diaries, histories, poems, translations, articles and novels. From these, and from the letters and observations of their friends and commentators, I have composed *Thunder*, not as a biography, but as a drama which must brood and explode with the same ecstasies and terrors that inspired the Brontës.

Characters

The play is set in the cold reality of the Parsonage and in the wild imaginings of the children. Fact and fiction are interwoven. The school at Cowan Bridge becomes Lowood, the death of Huntingdon becomes the death of Branwell, and Rochester's final appearance and marriage to Jane fades into the wedding of Charlotte and Nicholls. The children act out the characters and the stories, with Papa and Nicholls playing themselves or extensions of themselves from the children's point of view. Thus Branwell, not the actor, plays Brocklehurst; Charlotte, Jane Eyre; Papa, Wordsworth etc. It is important that the distribution of parts remains as indicated.

Setting and Effects

A large pulpit should dominate the stage like a petrified oak, broad steps, like boulders or gnarled roots, in front of it. The cyclorama should be clear for the projection of sky-scape, fire, thunderstorm and blizzard. Two areas to left and right of stage should be dressed to represent corners of rooms in the Parsonage: one accommodating an upright piano and stool; the other, a small round table with heavy cloth, and two dining chairs, one with arms, one without. Dry ice is required. The thunderclaps must be gargantuan. The whole design - lighting, sound and set

should be stark and austere, to exaggerate the physical smallness of the children and the challenge and bleak enormity of the real and imaginary worlds they inhabited.

Music

The music is a mixture of traditional - 'Ilkley Moor', 'Widdecombe Fair', 'My song is love unknown' (*Hymns Ancient and Modern* No. 102), 'Boney was a Warrior' - and my own composition. Emily is the pianist for the traditional pieces. The original music is unaccompanied.

Cast of First Production

Thunder was first presented on 28 April 1973 at the King's Hall, Ilkley, as part of the Ilkley Literature Festival, by the University of Bradford Drama Group. It then moved to the Bradford Library Theatre, and from there to the YWCA Theatre, Edinburgh, for the Edinburgh Festival 1973, where it won a Scotsman Fringe First Award. The cast was as follows:

Charlotte	Elaine Smith / Susan Myerscough
Emily	Fiona Taylor
Anne	Gillian Barraclough
Branwell	Blob Wyvill
Papa	Lester Hall
Nicholls	Alan Bridger

Directed by the Author

THUNDER

by Richard Crane

ACT I

*Howling gale. Torrential storm. Thunderclap. Heavy driving rain.
Rain subsides as sallow light comes up on NICHOLLS standing by the piano, and
PAPA seated in the armchair.
NICHOLLS is murmuring texts from the burial service in a rapid monotone. PAPA
is eighty-three and blind.*

Nicholls:.... I am the resurrection and the life saith the Lord, he that believeth on me though he were dead yet shall he live and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.... *(continues while PAPA is speaking).*

Papa: I have achieved nothing. I have outlived my life. What am I but a lonely blind old man of four score years and three....

Nicholls:.... I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth and though after my skin worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God....

Papa: I was born in Emdale, County Down. I taught myself to read. I was a blacksmith, a linen-weaver, a draper, a schoolteacher. I entered St. John's College, Cambridge. I changed the spelling of my name: Brontë, which is Greek for thunder....

Nicholls:.... Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery, he cometh up and is cut down like a flower, he fleeth as it were a shadow and never continueth in one stay....

Papa:.... I was ordained, held curacies in Wethersfield and Wellington, and the livings of Hartshead, Thornton and Haworth. I married. I begat six children - but all that is gone. I have out-lived my life. I am left with nothing but fading memories....

(NICHOLLS kneels).

I remember one day, Charlotte came into my study. She said she had written a book and wanted me to read it. I said it would strain my eyes. 'But Papa, it is not in manuscript - it is printed!' 'Printed?' I said. 'But my dear, you've never thought of the expense it will be. It will surely be a loss, for how can you get a book sold? Such extravagance!' She asked me if she could read me some reviews, then she left me with the book and went to prepare the tea. When I came into the dining-room some time later, I saw that my daughters

were waiting for me with excitement and some apprehension. I said grace and we sat down and I turned to Emily and Anne. 'Girls', I said, 'do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?'
(The light fades on PAPA and NICHOLLS and comes up, dim and still, on CHARLOTTE, EMILY and ANNE, standing on the steps in front of the pulpit, grouped as they are in the portrait by Branwell. Everything is still.)

Emily: *(sings)* ***Cold in the earth
and deep snow piled above thee;
far, far removed,
cold in the dreary grave -
Have I forgot
my only love to love thee,
severed at last,
by time's all-wearing wave?***

Emily Jane Brontë, born 1818, died 1848, of consumption.

Anne: *(sings)* ***Now, when alone,
do my thoughts no longer hover
over the mountains,
on Angora's shore,
resting their wings
where heath and fern leaves cover
that noble heart
for ever evermore?***

Anne Brontë, born 1820, died 1849, of consumption.

Charlotte: *(sings)* ***Cold in the earth
and fifteen wild Decembers,
from those brown hills
have melted into spring;
faithful indeed
is the spirit that remembers
after such years
of change and suffering.***

Charlotte Bell Nicholls, born 1816, died 1855 of pleurisy and phthisis.

(Suddenly - BRANWELL appears at the pulpit. He moves down the steps, past the girls, as he speaks).

Branwell: Backward I look upon my life!
To see one waste of storm and strife!
One wrack of sorrows, hopes and pain
vanishing to rise again!
That life has moved through evening where
continual shadows veiled my sphere!
From youth's horizon upward rolled
to life's meridian - dark and cold!
All dark without! All fire within!
Can Hell have mightier hold on Sin!

Patrick Branwell Brontë, born 1817, died 1848 of bronchitis, neuritis, gingivitis, marasmus, phthisis, consumption, epilepsy and a general decline.

(He bows. The girls applaud briefly. CHARLOTTE comes down and sits in the armchair. The others disperse).

Charlotte: Permit me, gentle reader, to transport you back in time, to the spring of the year 1820, to a large, but undistinguished manufacturing village, in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Picture, if you will, a convoy of seven carts, six containing the household and personal effects of the eight persons ensconced, squashed and jostling, in the seventh. The road is cobbled and steep, the air is sharp, the old stone houses rise high, solid and unwelcoming, and a meagre handful of the 4,668 inhabitants of this laconic place, are watching the procession with mild and dry-witted indifference.

(Four VILLAGERS emerge, peering through the gloom, cold and blowing on their nails).

Villager 1: Ee, yon's new encumbrance from Bratford!

Villager 2: Eck it's cowld -

Villager 3: Wrap up in thi shawl!

Who's yon?

Villager 1: New encumbrance from Bratford -

Villager 4: Nay! En't from Bratford at all.

Yon's from County Down -

Villager 3: That's in Ireland.

Villager 1: A foreigner!

Villager 2: By gum, it's bleak!
Villager 3: Shurrup lass -
Villager 1: Wait till next Sunday!
Villager 4: We'll teach him to turn t'other cheek!
Villager 1: Remember that Reverend Redhead?
Villager 2: Ee look Mum, me 'ands 'ave gone blue!
Villager 1: Last parson -
Villager 4: but one -
Villager 1: Aye, we showed 'im!
Villager 3: Eeyup lads, what did ye do?
Villager 4: Warn't ye there - ?
Villager 2: Nay, our Mum were coortin'.
Villager 1: A-coortin'?
Villager 4: At 'er age?
Villager 2: It's true!
Villager 3: Quit wittering kid or I'll thrash thee!
I were sick. Eeyup what did ye do?
Villager 1: Well as ye know, Reverend Redhead -
Villager 4: - were appointed perpetual like -
Villager 1: - to this parish by Vicar of Bratford -
Villager 4: - cum Cleckheaton -
Villager 1: cum Heckmondwyke.
Villager 4: Twas on 'is first Sunday we showed 'im -
Villager 1: - we warn't to be treated like dogs!
Villager 4: T'whole congregation quit service -
Villager 1: - wi' clatterin' and clumpin' o' clogs!
Villager 4: And next Sunday -
Villager 2: Our Mum were coortin'.
Villager 3: I were sick, so whissht 'fore I bonk 'ee!
Villager 4: In middle o' service old Abram -
Villager 1: He rode into t'church on a donkey!
Villagers 2 & 3: A donkey?
Villagers 1 & 4: A donkey!
Villager 3: Give over!
Villager 1: And next Sunday -
Villager 3: What were in store?

(REDHEAD appears in the Pulpit).

Villager 4: Old Redhead were readin' t'lesson -
Villager 1: - and he said -
Redhead: O blest are the poor -
Villager 4: Go back to Bratford ye papist! (*goes*)
Redhead: O blessed are they that mourn -
Villager 1: No more perpetual incumbents!
Redhead: O blest are the meek and forlorn,
for they shall inherit -
Villagers 2 & 3: Go to t'devil!
Redhead: O blest are the meek -
Villager 1: Go to Rome!
Villager 3: Foreigner!
Villager 2: Land-owning papist!
Villagers 1, 2 & 3: GO PERISH! QUIT HAWORTH! GO HOME!
(*They drive him from the pulpit. The gloom fades. Light comes up on CHARLOTTE*).

Charlotte: Such, dear reader, was the temperament of the villagers in the year 1820, when my father was appointed incumbent of Haworth. Even as small children, we were aware of the under-current of bitterness that ran through the town, and were much relieved when our first Sunday passed to our father's advantage.

(*PAPA is robed, in the pulpit. The VILLAGERS and CHARLOTTE kneel*).

Papa: Brethren, in the Primitive Church, there was a godly discipline, that at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin, were put to open penance, and punished in this world that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend. Instead whereof, until the said discipline be restored - which is much to be wished - it is thought good, that at this time, should be read the general sentences of God's cursing against impenitent sinners, and that ye should answer to every sentence: Amen!

(*Silence*).

(*Suddenly*) Cursed is he that maketh any carved or molten image to worship it!

All: Amen!

Papa: Cursed is he that curseth his father or mother!

All: Amen!

Papa: Cursed is he that lieth with his neighbour's wife!

All: Amen!

Papa: Cursed are the unmerciful, fornicators and adulterers, covetous persons, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards and extortioners!!

All: AMEN!!

(Peal of thunder. PAPA acknowledges it).

Papa: You will now sing Psalm number 119, verses 1 to 176, and to the greater glory of the Lord, and magnification of his holy name, you will sing it twice! And whiles you are singing it, I shall repair to the public bar of the Black Bull - *(He produces a whip and cracks it).* - and drive out the drunkard! The toss-pot! The slattern! The blasphemer! And flog them from their Sodom! Their Babylon! Whimpering and blistered into Eternal Life! For Strait is the gate! And Narrow is the Way! - that leadeth unto life! And few there be that find it!!

(Blackout. Thunder. Pouring rain.

Light comes up on the FOUR CHILDREN in the living-room of the Parsonage.

MARIA is seated at the table, reading, ELIZABETH on the floor, CHARLOTTE and BRANWELL in the armchair, jostling each other. It is damp, cold and quiet).

Maria: Sit still Charlotte. Papa instructed us to sit still and be quiet.

Charlotte: Yes Maria.

Maria: Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: Yes Maria?

Maria: You may read if you like.

Elizabeth: Thank you Maria. *(reads).*

Maria: But if Emily and Anne wake, you must attend to their needs, for Papa left them in your charge

Elizabeth: Yes Maria.

Maria: I am in charge of Mamma, and I shall attend to her needs when her needs need attending to.

Charlotte: May I read please Maria?

Maria: No. It is bad for your eyes.

Branwell: *(to CHARLOTTE).* What's wrong with Mamma?

Charlotte: I'm not sure.

Maria: Quiet Charlotte! Or you will wake Mamma, and I shall have to attend to her needs.

Branwell: *(to CHARLOTTE).* Is she having another baby?

Charlotte: I don't think so.

Branwell: Why not?

Charlotte: Because she's not fat yet. *(They laugh).*

Maria: Charlotte, why are you laughing?

Charlotte: I'm not....

Elizabeth: She was....

Maria: Quiet! Mamma doesn't like it when people laugh.

Branwell: Why not?

Maria: Because she is not blessed with a sanguine disposition.

Branwell: I am curious as to the matter with her. Charlotte said she didn't know. So I said, 'Is she having another baby?' And Charlotte said, 'No, because she's not fat yet!' (*laughs*).

Maria: She has an internal cancer.

Branwell: Why?

Elizabeth: It is God's will.

Branwell: Who says so?

Elizabeth: Papa.

Branwell: How does he know?

Maria: Be quiet Branwell, or Boney will get you!

Elizabeth: When will Mamma die, Maria?

Maria: I don't know. I think she has two or three months. I very much doubt if she will be with us for Christmas.

(The lights dim. CHARLOTTE is lit).

Charlotte: The Parsonage where we lived, was an oblong stone house, two storeys high, with four rooms on each floor, facing down the hill on which the village stood. It was always dark and quiet, except for the wind that moaned over the bleak and lonely moors.

Maria: We must watch and pray and be as quiet as mice!

Charlotte: There were window seats all through the house. I remember sitting, gazing out over the gravestones for three hours at a stretch, wondering what thoughts the dead were thinking, and what I would think when I joined them.

Elizabeth: I see around me tombstones grey,
stretching their shadows far away;
beneath the turf my foot-steps tread
lie low and lone, the silent dead.

Branwell: Poor Mamma! How she must be suffering!

Elizabeth: I shall pray tonight for inclement weather and thunderstorms; and I shall listen to the wind, howling through the heath, and buffeting the rocks, like the soul of a restless giant!

Maria: Weary I am,
O give me strength,

And leave me not to faint!
Say thou wilt comfort
me at length,
and pity my complaint!

Charlotte: We went to bed at seven, rose at four. Papa always seemed to be in his study, his silent presence forbidding us to talk in more than whispers.

(PAPA is kneeling by the piano).

Papa: Remember not Lord our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefathers.
Spare us good Lord, spare thy people whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever!

Children: Spare Us Good Lord!

(Pause. PAPA rises).

Charlotte: Mamma died on September 15th 1821 in the 39th year of her age.

Papa: She died calmly and with a holy, yet humble confidence that Christ was her Saviour, and Heaven her Eternal Home.

Branwell: She was in agony for several weeks before she died. She could not bear to have us in the room, for fear we should be upset by her pitiable condition. Her dying words were: Oh God my poor children!

Elizabeth: We were expecting her death, so it did not come as a shock.

Charlotte: Aunt Branwell, our mother's sister from Penzance in Cornwall, came to live with us and to look after the household affairs.

(The whole stage is lit. AUNT BRANWELL has appeared upstage on the steps).

Aunt: Elizabeth, the piano! Maria and Charlotte, to my left! Patrick Branwell to my right!

(The CHILDREN go to their places. ELIZABETH plays. AUNT leads the CHILDREN in a dance, and conducts their singing).

(sings) **Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce,
lend me your grey mare!**

Children: **All along down along
out along lee!**

Aunt: **For I want for to go
To Widdicombe Fair -**

Children: (*in turn*) - *with Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer,
Peter Gurney, Peter Davey, Dan'l Whiddon -
HARRY HAWK!*

All: *And Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all
And Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all!*

Aunt: *Now Tom Pearce's old mare
her took sick and died -*

Children: (*cheerful*) *All along down along
out along lee!*

Aunt: *And Tom he sat down
on a stone and he cried -*

Children: (*together - very fast*) *With Bill Brewer, Jan
Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davey, Dan'l
Whiddon, - HARRY HAWK!*

All: *And Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all!
And Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all!*

Children: (*encircling AUNT*) *When the wind whistles low
on the moor of a night!*

Aunt: (*'terrified'*) *All along down along
out along lee -*

Children: *Tom Pearce's grey mare
doth appear GHASTLY WHITE!*

Maria: *With Maria -*

Elizabeth: *Elizabeth -*

Charlotte: *and Charlotte -*

Branwell: *and Branwell -*

Elizabeth: *and Emily -*

Maria: *and Anne -*

Charlotte: *and Keeper -*

Branwell: *and Flossy -*

Aunt: *AND Papa!*

All: *And Old Auntie Branwell and all!
And Old Auntie Branwell and all!*

(*AUNT goes to sit at the Table. The CHILDREN gather round, cross-legged on the
floor.*)

Aunt: *Now children lend an ear or two,
For I've a tale to tell to you
concerning one Euphemia Pratt.
Back in! Chin up! Don't slouch like that!*

No child's conduct was more abstemious,
temper milder than Euphemia's,
a perfect child and full of grace
who always walked at walking pace,
seldom seen and never heard
to speak a rash or nasty word.
Until one day - Oh don't do that! (*to BRANWELL*)
a fatal day for Family Pratt,
when Great Aunt Maud and Uncle Hugh
had come to stay a week or two.
They were expected to arrive
at roughly twenty-five to five,
and this they did with punctuality,
knowing something of the locality.
Mamma said: Auntie, how do you do?
How nice you look, and you too Hugh!
Upon which Uncle Hugh sat down,
and with a low lugubrious frown,
began to tell a tale of wealth,
of testaments and failing health.
Mamma, Papa, and Nursey too
attended as if stuck with glue
to every phrase and every word,
for they were certain it referred
to Great Aunt Maud whose health was poor,
whose will was made and they were sure
they would inherit land and riches,
stocks and shares and all that which is
due to nephew and to niece
upon a maiden aunt's decease.
Euphemia meanwhile, was sitting
silently, as was befitting,
absent-minded, still and pale,
while her uncle told his tale.
He talked of houses, gardens, botany,
talked with studied, stern monotony,
talked till nearly ten past eight
of duties, deeds, estates probate.
And then it was - Oh children hearken! -
as the skies began to darken -

Please attend, I've told you twice,
and don't do that it isn't nice! (*to BRANWELL*)
'Twas roughly quarter past or less,
While Uncle talked with ceaselessness,
that suddenly, and with no warning -
Euphemia started - yawning!
She yawned but once, and yawned again,
and yawned and yawned nine times or ten!
She yawned so far, and yawned so wide,
her gums and tonsils gaped inside!
Mamma was speechless with dismay,
and Nursey fainted clean away!
Papa was fraught, and Great Aunt Maud
said: Gracious me! The child is BORED!
(*rises*) Then crashing through the window came
the Great Yawn-Widener, eyes aflame,
and hair on end and mouth so grim -
Oh children cringe! The sight of him!
For he's the one who comes in rage
to children of a certain age,
who dare to gape, yawn or grimace
at home or in a public place.
He seized Euphemia by the teeth,
one hand above, one hand beneath,
and caught her yawn and then began -
(as all the best Yawn-Wideners can) -
to widen, stretch, enlarge her yawn -
her lips were split, her jaw was torn,
her throat was broke, and with a shout -
he turned Euphemia inside out!
This done, he smiled, and bowed his head,
and left, and not a word he said.
Mamma said: Dearie me! Oh dear!
That THIS should happen! THIS! In HERE!
Papa perceived Mamma's distress
and called the maid to clear the mess.
But Uncle Hugh surveyed the scene
and said: This incident has been
a grim reminder to us all
of all the things that can befall

those who, without a word of warning,
interrupt a speech with yawning.
Don't you agree Aunt Maud?, he said -
But Great Aunt Maud, alas, was dead.

BLACKOUT

(Light up on the CHILDREN standing in line before PAPA. They step forward as he addresses them).

Papa: Maria.

Maria: Papa.

Papa: What is the best way to spend time?

Maria: By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity.

Papa: How old are you?

Maria: Eleven. *(She goes to the other end of the line).*

Papa: Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: Papa.

Papa: What is the best kind of education for a woman?

Elizabeth: That which will make her rule her house well.

Papa: How old are you?

Elizabeth: Nine. *(She goes to the other end of the line).*

Papa: Charlotte.

Charlotte: Papa.

Papa: What is the best book in the world?

Charlotte: The Bible.

Papa: And the next best?

Charlotte: The Book of Nature.

Papa: How old are you?

Charlotte: Eight. *(She goes to the armchair).*

Papa: Branwell.

Branwell: Papa.

Papa: What is the best way to tell the difference between the minds of men and women?

Branwell: By considering the difference between them as to their bodies.

Papa: How old are you?

Branwell: Seven. *(He goes and stands by the piano).*

Papa: Emily.

Emily: Papa.

Papa: What is the best course of action to take with Branwell when he is naughty?

Emily: Reason with him, and when he will not listen to reason, whip him.

Papa: How old are you?
Emily: Six. (*She goes to the piano*).
Papa: Anne.
Anne: Papa.
Papa: What is it you want most in the world?
Anne: Age and experience.
Papa: How old are you?
Anne: Four and a half.

BLACKOUT

(*Light on CHARLOTTE*).

Charlotte: About this time, my father discovered a newly formed charitable institution, which undertook to educate the daughters of distressed clergymen, for the not unreasonable fee of £14 per annum. The founder was an earnest, wealthy land-owner of good intentions, devoutly religious in the Evangelical belief. I shall call him Mr. Brocklehurst, and the school I shall call Lowood. Maria and Elizabeth were installed at the school in July 1824. Emily and I were to follow a few months later.

Branwell: Few would credit the hideous and unmentionable atrocities perpetrated at Lowood, without let or hindrance, morning, noon and night, upon the wretched bodies and souls of the forlorn Church of England maidens beneath its vengeful sway!

Elizabeth: The food was not good, and the air was insalubrious.

Maria: But my sisters and I endured our trials with stoicism.

Lowood Institution.

(*MR. BROCKLEHURST is in the Pulpit. He wears a gown. MISS TEMPLE is at the piano. MISS SCATCHERD stands beside her.. They wear shawls. MARIA is standing on the table, frail and cold.*).

Scatcherd/Temple: (*sing*)

*My song is love unknown,
My Saviour's love to me,
love to the loveless shown,
that they might lovely be.*

Brocklehurst: Teachers and children of Lowood Institution for distressed Church of England waifs and strays - this is a sad, a melancholy occasion. You all see this girl!

Scatcherd: A disagreeable, slatternly girl if ever there was one!

Brocklehurst: You see she is yet young; you observe she possesses the ordinary form of childhood. God has graciously given her the shape he has given to all of us. No single deformity points her out as a marked character. Who would have thought that the Evil One had already found a servant and an agent in her! Yet such I grieve to say is the case!

Scatcherd: Slovenly, unrepentant little savage!

Brocklehurst: For it becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway! Not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien! You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; avoid her company; exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse! Teachers, you must watch her; keep your eyes on her movements; weigh well her words; scrutinize her actions; punish her body, to save her soul - if indeed such salvation be possible - for my tongue falters while I tell it! - but this girl, this child, the native of a Christian land, worse than many a little heathen who says its prayers to Brahma, and kneels before Juggernaut -

Scatcherd: Hohoho!

Brocklehurst: This girl is a liar!!!

Scatcherd: How shocking! How appalling! How disgraceful!

Brocklehurst: Let her stand for three hours on that stool, and let no-one speak to her for the remainder of the day.

Scatcherd &

Temple: (*sing*) *O who am I, that for my sake,
My Lord should take frail flesh and die?*

(*MARIA coughs. TEMPLE and SCATCHERD approach her*).

Temple: The child is ill.

Scatcherd: Ill, Miss Temple?

Temple: She is feverish.

Scatcherd: She is ill-mannered, ill-tempered, and ill-iterate!

Temple: She has a disagreeable cough.

Scatcherd: And a disagreeable nature!

Temple: These extended bouts of punishment are doing her no good.

Scatcherd: She is careless, untidy, dirty, dilatory, and she tells lies.

Temple: What lies has she told?

Scatcherd: What lies Miss Temple? Why her LIFE is a lie! Her insolence, her brazen slatternliness!

Temple: She is not well. She must see a doctor.

Scatcherd: She must see the error of her ways.

Temple: She has a cough and a fever, and lacks the strength to stand up to these prolonged hardships.

(They go. Cold light on MARIA)

Maria: *(sings)* ***O God if this indeed be all
that Life can show to me,
if on my aching brow may fall
no freshening dew from Thee,
if life must be so full of care,
then call me soon to Thee,
or give me strength enough to bear
my load of misery.***

BLACKOUT

(Light on CHARLOTTE in the armchair).

Charlotte: Maria died in the spring of 1825, and Elizabeth in the early summer. In the autumn, Emily and I were taken away from the school, to continue our education at home, with Branwell and Anne, under the wise direction of Aunt and Papa.

(She has been joined by EMILY and ANNE who sit on the floor, and BRANWELL who leans on the armchair).

Anne: I wish Aunt would come down. I would so love to hear further tales of the ladies and gentlemen of Penzance.

Branwell: She is in her room. Tales of Penzance upset her. She pines for her early life. I think she also pines for Papa! I think she is helplessly enamoured! But she cannot marry him, because he was married to her sister. What a wretched creature she is! It would little surprise me if she entered a decline.

Charlotte: Papa has been away three days.

Anne: Perhaps he has been delayed by the weather.

Branwell: Perhaps he has fallen among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half-dead! *(sits)*. I hope he brings the present I asked for.

Anne: What did you ask for Branwell?

Branwell: An army of soldiers, shimmering in scarlet and gold, left right, left right

left right!

Charlotte: A difficult request.

Branwell: What did you ask for Charlotte?

Charlotte: A new pair of spectacles, to correct my squint.

Anne: A practical request, and sure to be granted.

Branwell: What about you Anne? What did you ask for?

Anne: I asked for nothing but a smile and a kind word on his return.

Branwell: What about Emily? (*EMILY gets up and goes and sits on the piano stool*). Oh, it appears the Major is not speaking to us today. I expect she asked for a large pair of boots, so she can go trampling across the moors. Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp....

(Cold light on EMILY. The light on the CHILDREN fades. During her speech we dimly see PAPA enter in cloak and hat. He sinks into his chair. He has a bundle under his cloak).

Emily: Just about eleven o'clock, the doorlatch was raised quietly, and in stepped Mr. Earnshaw. He threw himself into a chair, laughing and groaning, and bid them all stand off. 'I would not have such another walk for three kingdoms!', he said opening his great-coat which he held bundled up in his arms. It seemed to contain something dark and mysterious, something which moved. We crawled round, and over Miss Cathy's head, I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child, big enough both to walk and talk. Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors, and indeed flew up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gypsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for. The master tried to explain the matter, but he was already half-dead with fatigue. Well the conclusion was that my mistress grumbled herself calm, and Mr. Earnshaw told me to wash the child, and give it clean things, and let it sleep with the children. This was Heathcliff's first introduction to the family at Wuthering Heights.

(Full Lights).

Branwell: What have you brought for me Papa? (*PAPA gives him a large box*).

Papa: Share them with your sisters. Entertain yourselves in silence. The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you and remain with you, amen.

Children: (*quickly*) Amen.

(PAPA goes. The GIRLS gather round BRANWELL).

Anne: What is it Branwell?

Charlotte: Open it.

Emily: Open it slowly that we may dwell on the mystery.

Charlotte: *(taking the box).* Let me open it Branwell. In your excitement, you may bruise or shatter the contents.

Anne: *(taking it from her).* No Branwell should open it.
(BRANWELL opens it).

All: Soldiers!

(EMILY starts to pick out 'Boney was a warrior' with one finger on the piano).

Branwell: This shall be yours Charlotte. *(Gives her a Duke of Wellington doll).*

Charlotte: Oh look! The prettiest, the tallest, the most perfect soldier in every part!

Anne: What bearing! What shall you call him Charlotte?

Branwell: I should call him Nosey because of his aquiline features.

Charlotte: He shall be named Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington!

Branwell: This shall be yours Anne. *(Gives her a Boy Soldier doll).*

Anne: What a lonely looking figure!

Charlotte: What shall you call him?

Anne: He looks so sad.

Branwell: He is waiting recognition for his extraordinary military prowess.

Charlotte: He is open, honest and good....

Branwell:and of a bravery in battle, sometimes approaching to madness!

Anne: Until I think of a name, I shall call him Waiting Boy.

Branwell: Emily, this shall be yours. *(Gives her a black, masked soldier).*

Emily: *(stops playing - solemnly).* His name is Gravey.

Anne: Gravey?

Charlotte: What an unsingular name!

Branwell: Perhaps he's a grave-digger.

Charlotte: You could as soon call him Porridge, or Gruel, or Yorkshire Pudding!

Anne: And what shall yours be Branwell?

(BRANWELL seizes a Napoleon doll and leaps to the steps in front of the pulpit).

Branwell: BONEY!!!

(Crash of thunder. The stage bursts into flame [Special effect]. Howling gale. ANNE and EMILY sing 'Boney was a warrior' while CHARLOTTE and BRANWELL declaim their verse, using the dolls as puppets. Gale subsides).

Cannons roar!
and trumpets blast!
and battles rend
my heart!
I will survive!

***Boney was
a warrior
way yea
yah
Boney was***

	I live! I thrive Napoleon Bonaparte!	<i>a warrior John France- wah.</i>
Charlotte:	Wellington met Bonaparte and said: Tell me would you agree to settle in Af- rica instead? And Napoleon said:	<i>Boney fought the Rooshians way yea yah Boney fought the Rooshians John France-</i>
Branwell: Both:	Mais oui! They hoisted sail with trusty swains, to Africa they came	<i>wah. Boney beat the Prooshians way yea yah</i>
Branwell:	They beached the hulks mid vasty plains	<i>Boney beat the Prooshians</i>
Charlotte:	and gave the land a new name!	<i>John France- wah.</i>
Both:	ANGRIA!	
Charlotte	Now Arthur Wellesley called the Iron Duke	<i>Boney went to Mossy-cow</i>
Branwell:	and Napoleon called Bonaparte,	<i>way yea yah</i>
Both:	vied for control of th'Angrian economy, exchequer, change and mart.	<i>Boney went to Mossy cow John France- wah.</i>

	When all of a sudden came down like a wolf on the fold the marau- ding hordes!	<i>Boney he came back again way yea yah.</i>
Charlotte:	And Wellington	<i>Boney</i>
Branwell:	and Bonaparte	<i>he</i>
Both:	girded their loins and did battle with bayonets and swords	<i>came back again John France- wah.</i>
	They fought like fury! Fought as if possessed! With wave upon wave of the foe	<i>Boney went to Elly-bow way yea yah.</i>
Charlotte:	Till at dusk They looked and saw they had slain -	<i>Boney went to Elly-bow</i>
Branwell:	- about seven hundred thousand or so!	<i>John France- wah.</i>
Charlotte:	By Jove!	<i>Boney</i>
Branwell:	Sacré bleu!	<i>went</i>
Charlotte:	Said each in his tongue.	<i>to Waterloo</i>

Both:	'Tis clear we are fearful in fray! What a pity we vied for th' Angrian economy and wrangled so angrily today!	<i>way yea yah</i> <i>Boney went</i> <i>to Waterloo</i> <i>John France- wah.</i>
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(The singing and the wind stop. EMILY creeps up on them, with her Gravey puppet).

Emily: Then secretly,
without a sound,
a stowaway,
who wasn't found,
crept up behind
and with one bound -
pinned Wellington's shoulders
to the ground!

Charlotte: What's this?

Branwell: He cried.

Charlotte: What evil ploy?
What brings this end
to peace and joy?
Who seeks the Duke
thus to destroy?

Anne: *(in the pulpit)* I do sir,
said the Waiting Boy!

(The fire goes out. They go to the table, singing sadly. CHARLOTTE sits in the armchair, EMILY and ANNE on the floor, and BRANWELL at the table).

All: *(sing).* *Boney broke his heart and died*
Way yea yah,
Boney broke his heart and died,
John France-wah....

(Light on CHARLOTTE).

Charlotte: As the days went by, the legend of Angria grew - the political intrigues, rebellions, settlements, marriages, frustrations, passions and wars. Gravey was imprisoned and rescued by Bonaparte's paramour who was in league with Waiting Boy. Wellington discovered the plot, and was sadly vexed, and, after a long estrangement, was reconciled with Bonaparte, who sealed his allegiance by changing his name to Alexander Percy. Gravey and Waiting Boy were banished to the remote and storm-tossed isle of Gondal, where, with bitter remorse, they plotted to return....

(Lights up on the CHILDREN. EMILY, ANNE and CHARLOTTE [very short-sighted] are writing and doing sketches in tiny books. BRANWELL has a large book and two pens. He writes alternate lines with different hands).

Branwell: I see a corpse
upon the waters lie,
with eyes turned, swelled,
and sightless to the sky,
and arms upstretched
to move as wave on wave
upbears it
in its boundless, billowy grave....

Anne: Her hair was raven-black, and disposed in long, glossy ringlets, a style of coiffure rather unusual in those days....

Emily: In dungeon crypts
idly did I stray,
reckless of the lives
wasting there away!
Draw ponderous bars!
Open warder stern!
He dare not say me nay;
the hinges harshly turn....

Charlotte: The Iron Duke shuddered. 'I am dying!' he croaked. 'I would see my son'. 'I am here Father,' sobbed Zamorna. 'How it rends my heart to know that I am the cause of this disaster!'

Tabby: *(off)* Please Miss Anne, I'm ready in t'kitchen for thee to pillopotatties.

Anne: drooping lids and long black lashes, semi-colon; *(She gets up with her doll)* O Genius Brannii, the Genius Annii craves leave to pilloputate.

Branwell: Crave not Genius. Leave granted.

(BRANWELL and ANNE bow their dolls formally, and ANNE goes out)

Oh God! She murmured forth again,
while yet her shattered senses knew - (*KEEPER barks offstage*).
what darkness shrouded her from view!
Oh take from me this sickening pain!....

Emily: Aye darkly lodged enough! returned my sullen guide. Full stop. (*She gets up with her doll*). O Genius Brannii, the Genius Emmii craves leave to tramp with Keeper o'er the blasted heath.

Branwell: Crave not Genius. Leave granted. (*They bow their dolls, and EMILY goes out*).

Emily: (*off*). Quiet! (*KEEPER whimpers*).

Branwell: Down, down, they lowered her,
sad and slow,
into her narrow
house below....

Village Children: (*off*). Please we've come for extra Sunday School class with Miss Charlotte.

Charlotte:the caresses of Lady Zenobia Ellrington. 'Begone!' he cried, 'and let me grieve alone!' Exclamation mark. Unquote. (*She gets up with her doll*). O Genius Brannii, the Genius Tellii craves leave to sundayschoolicate!

Branwell: (*briefly*) C.N.G.L.G.

(*They bow their dolls quickly, and CHARLOTTE goes*).

(*Passionate*) For wild my sob when hollow rung
the first cold clod above her flung!
When glitter was to turn to rust!
Ashes to ashes! Dust to dust....

(*He continues writing. PAPA and WILLIAM WEIGHTMAN, an eager Curate, have entered*).

Papa: I trust the situation is to your satisfaction as my new assistant curate Mr. Weightman?

Weightman: Oh indeed sir!

Papa: You will find us a dour breed I fear.

Weightman: Oh no sir! The bluntness of your congregation, inasmuch as being a far cry from the dainty duplicity of my native Ambleside, I find refreshing as a ducking in yonder waterfall and strangely agreeable!

Papa: This is my son Branwell.

Weightman: Hullo Branwell! I hope we shall be friends.

Branwell: I hope we shall be damned first!

Weightman: Very straight and guttural to be sure! (*He coughs into his handkerchief as ANNE, CHARLOTTE and EMILY enter, severely*).

Anne: Who is this man Papa?

Charlotte: We are ill prepared for visitors.

Emily: If he is not without the gate in two cracks of a whip, Keeper and Flossy will descend on him like ravenous, three-headed hounds of hell!

Weightman: Well spoken ma'am!

Papa: He is the Reverend William Weightman -

Anne: (*thrilled*) The new assistant curate?

Charlotte: (*dour*). Do you like porridge?

Emily: He will.

Weightman: (*desperately chummy*). A hale and sinewy company indeed! Stark and inclement as the shrieking gale, that buffets the harebells and tosses the boulders from crevice to crevice like paltry tennis-balls!

Charlotte: (*front*). Do not misconstrue, dear reader, the tenor of our feeling toward Mr. Weightman. We loved him dearly - nay Anne was not a little enamoured - and it pleased us to nick-name the curate and bait and harass him with caricature portraits of our unexceptional selves. Papa countenanced all this with an unseen wink and a secret smile.

(*PAPA has gone. EMILY is at the piano*).

Branwell: (*curious*). Wheear hast tha been Celia Amelia?

Weightman: (*sings*). *On Ilkla Moor baht'at!*

Children: *Wheear hast tha been since I saw thee?*

Wheear hast tha been since I saw thee?

All: *On Ilkla Moor baht'at*

On Ilkla Moor baht'at

On Ilkla Moor baht'at!

(*ANNE takes WEIGHTMAN on one side*).

Anne: We retire at eight and rise at four Celia Amelia.

Weightman: At four? I should liken rising at four to a pig's tail!

Emily: In Hell's name why a pig's tail Celia Amelia?

Weightman: Because it's.... twirly!

(*The CHILDREN cackle. WEIGHTMAN coughs into his handkerchief*).

Children: (*sing*). *Tha's bahn to catch thi deeath o' cowl'd*

Weightman: Deeach o' cowl'd?

Children: *On Ilkla Moor baht'at!*
 Tha's bahn to catch thi deeath o' cowld
 Tha's bahn to catch thi deeath o'cowld

All: *On Ilkla Moor baht'at*
 On Ilkla Moor baht'at
 On Ilkla Moor baht'at!

Charlotte: I hope you do not feel sorry for us Celia Amelia?

Weightman: Certainly not madam! But I grieve for the letter 'L'.

Branwell: Deuce roast me! Why the letter 'L'?

Weightman: Because - he is three times in 'ill-health' but never in - 'good spirits'.

(The CHILDREN shriek and cackle like hags. WEIGHTMAN coughs into his handkerchief and sinks into a chair).

Children: Then we shall ha' to bury thee!

Weightman: Bury thee.... *(collapses)*.

Children: On Ilkla Moor baht'at!

 Then we shall ha' to bury thee

 Then we shall ha' to....

(They notice that the curate is inanimate).

Anne: *(careful)*. Come on Celia Amelia. Join in the fun.

Branwell: He is pretending.

Emily: He's dead.

Charlotte: In a moment he will leap up and laugh at our silly concern for him. Let us carry on singing, and he will join in, and he will be so cross that we took no notice of him.

(They sing tentatively, and unaccompanied).

Children: *Then t'worms'll come and ate thee up*
 On Ilkla Moor baht'at
 Then t'worms'll come and ate thee up -

(WEIGHTMAN leaps up and joins in a wild 'ring o' roses' dance with the CHILDREN).

All: *ON ILKLA MOOR BAHT'AT!*
 ON ILKLA MOOR BAHT'AT!
 ON ILKLA MOOR BAHT'AT!

ON ILKLA MOOR BAHT'AT!
ON ILKLA MOOR BAHT'AT!
ON ILKLA MOOR BAHT'AT!

(WEIGHTMAN has a terminal fit of coughing and dies).

BLACKOUT

(Light on CHARLOTTE in the armchair and ANNE and EMILY by the piano).

Charlotte: With the death of Mr. Weightman, a sudden and terrible gloom filled the Parsonage. We had lost our only contact with the outside world, and must needs now turn in on each other again for company.

(ANNE begins to sing, unaccompanied, as CHARLOTTE speaks).

Anne: *Oh I am very weary,
though tears no longer flow....*

Charlotte: There was no more laughter, no more joking....

Anne: *My eyes are tired of weeping,
my heart is sick of woe....*

Charlotte: Our lives were twice as drab and dreary as they were before....

Anne: *My life is very lonely,
my days pass heavily....*

Charlotte: Because we now knew what qualities we lacked....

Anne: *I'm weary of repining;
wilt thou not come to me?*

(Light on BRANWELL posed with easel, canvas, pallet and brush, in front of the pulpit).

Branwell: 1835. I am eighteen years old. The prime of my life. With energy and high hopes, exhorted by my father, aunt and sisters. I apply myself to my true vocation, and submit my rude talents to be fashioned by Mr. William Robinson of Leeds. Painting in oils is my be-all and end-all, my humble gesture to posterity.

(He paints for a while, then loses interest and goes. The girls speak as he paints).

Charlotte: We girls have all been to school again.

Emily: The name of the school is Roe Head.

Anne: The headmistress is Miss Wooler.

Charlotte: I have contracted strong and lasting friendships with Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor. In all my experience of schools for young ladies, none

surpasses Roe Head in warmth of heart, and an air of cheerful application to duty.

Emily: It is better than Lowood.

Anne: I do not care for it either.

Charlotte: The air at Roe Head is sufficiently agreeable that I have acquiesced to Miss Wooler's plea that I remain at the school as a junior teacher. I do not much like teaching, but the presence of Emily and Anne as pupils, renders the situation not unbearable, and what other occupation is there for a young lady of uninspiring features and a humourless disposition, who has an ageing father and a motherless brother to support?

(Enter BRANWELL with a flute and music stand).

Anne: We all love Branwell and we feel he will do very well.

Branwell: 1836. I am nineteen years old. The prime of my life. With energy and high hopes, exhorted by my father, aunt and sisters. I apply myself to my TRUE vocation. Flute-playing is my be-all, and end-all, my humble gesture to posterity.

(He plays a scale - badly - and bows. The girls applaud without enthusiasm. BRANWELL exits with his music things. A Bell tolls).

Charlotte: It is seven o'clock at night; the young ladies are all at their lessons; the schoolroom is quiet, the fire is low; a stormy day is at this moment passing off in a murmuring and bleak night. I now assume my own thoughts and try to summon around me the dim shadows, not of coming events, but of incidents long departed, of feelings, of pleasures, whose exquisite relish I sometimes feel it will never be my lot again to taste....

Emily: I am the only being whose doom
no tongue would ask, no eye would mourn:
I've never caused a thought of gloom.
a smile of joy since I was born.

Anne: I have gone backward in the work,
the labour has not sped:
drowsy and dark my spirit lies,
heavy and dull as lead.

Charlotte: The thought came over me: Am I to spend the best part of my life in this wretched bondage, forcibly suppressing my rage at the idleness, the apathy, and the hyperbolic and most asinine stupidity if these fat-headed oafs, and of compulsion, assuming an air of kindness, patience and assiduity?....

Emily: There have been times, I cannot hide,
there have been times when this was drear,
when my sad soul forgot its pride
and longed for one to love me here.

Anne: There have been times when I have mourned
in anguish o'er the past,
and raised my suppliant hands on high
while tears fell thick and fast.

Charlotte: I started up and walked to the window, and flung up the sash. A sweet August morning was smiling without. The dew was not yet dried off the field, the early shadows were stretching cool and dim from the haystacks. An uncertain sound of inexpressible sweetness came on a dying gale from the south. It was the bells of Huddersfield parish church. I shut the window and went back to my seat....

Emily: 'Twas grief enough to think mankind
all hollow, servile, insincere,
but worse to trust to my own mind,
and find the same corruption there.

Anne: I cannot weep, but I can pray,
then let me not despair:
Lord Jesus save me, lest I die,
and hear a wretch's prayer!

Charlotte: Then came over me, rushing impetuously, all the mighty phantasm that this had conjured up from nothing. I felt as if I could have written gloriously. If I had had time to indulge it, I felt that the vague suggestion of that moment would have settled down into some narrative better than anything I ever produced before! But just then, a dolt came up with a lesson.

(Light on BRANWELL in the pulpit, with two pens poised, and a large book).

Branwell: 1836. I am nineteen years old. The prime of my life. With energy and high hopes, exhorted by my father, aunt and sisters, I apply myself to my TRUE vocation. The composition of sonnets, iambic pentameters, and elegiac couplets on an epic theme, is my be-all and end-all, my humble gesture to posterity. *(He writes with both hands).*

Charlotte: My brother is blessed with uncommon talents that sprout in all directions and earn no money. To finance the artistic and literary leanings of this brother, and confident that my investment will not prove worthless, I have relinquished my post with Miss Wooler at Roe Head, and have accepted the lucrative situation of private governess to the children of Mrs. Sidgewick at Stonegappe.

Branwell: (*reciting*). 'The Agony of Harriet on her Cruel Desertion by the Earl of Northumberland' by P.B. Brontë.

O Percy! Percy! Where art thou?
I've sacrificed my God for thee!
And yet thou wilt not come to me!

Emily: I have left Roe Head and have become governess at a school near Halifax. The situation ill suits me, and I sicken for home, but Branwell's future must be considered, and we sisters must feed the flame.

Branwell: Methought I saw a sudden beam
of passing brightness through the room
like lightning vanish! Percy come!
Leave me not in the dark - 'tis cold!
And some thing stands beside my bed -
O loose me from its icy hold
that presses on me! Raise my head -
I cannot breathe!

Anne: We must all have faith in the prodigy our brother. I have left Roe Head School and have wasted little time in obtaining the situation of governess to the family of Mrs. Ingham at Mirfield.

Branwell: (*from a letter he has been writing*). To the Editor, Blackwood's Magazine. Sir, Read what I write and humbly do I beg you to include it in your next issue, Blackwood's has always formed my chief delight. The remembrance of you and your magazine are so fixed on my mind that the idea of striving to aid ANOTHER periodical is horribly repulsive! So, for God's sake, till you see whether or not I can serve you, do not so coldly refuse mine aid. By the hand of death, you have lost an able writer in James Hogg, God grant you may gain one in - Patrick Branwell Brontë.

Anne: Have you read any of Branwell's poems Charlotte?

Charlotte: I have read those he has chosen to show me.

Anne: How were they? Were they quite passable?

Charlotte: Some of them were reckless and arrogant and quite devoid of real feeling.

Anne: He will improve, if we continue to exhort him.

Charlotte: He must improve. He owes it to us. We are working in very distasteful situations, in order to promote his possibilities of success. Next to Papa he is the man in the family. It is his duty to imbue us with pride in his achievement.

Emily: He will never improve. On the contrary, he will get worse. (*The SISTERS go*).

Branwell: (*another letter*). To Mr. William Wordsworth, January 19th 1837. Sir, I would earnestly entreat you to read and pass judgment upon what I have sent you, because, from the day of my birth, to this twentieth year of my life, I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank; because it was a real craving of nature. I wrote on the same principle as I spoke - out of impulse and feelings of the mind....

(*As he reads he goes out, and the SISTERS re-enter with an arbour of daffodils. Birdsong. Springtime afternoon. The arbour parts revealing the LAKELAND BARD in kimono and laurels, on a chaise with quill and sheaf of bond*)

Wordsworth: (*composing*).

I wandered lonely as a star....

No....

I wandered slowly through the mead....

Used that....

I wandered lonely as the breeze....

Breeze?....

Trees bees knees please tease....

(*Enter SOLITUDE his man, with a letter on a salver*).

Solitude: Sir.

Wordsworth: Solitude.

Solitude: A letter sir. I do not recognise the hand.

Wordsworth: (*taking the letter*). Yet another mewling puking whining wheedling self-effacing sycophantic screed of appreciation. I had one the other day from a lad named Eightison.

Solitude: Eightison sir?

Wordsworth: Or was it Nine-ison? Tennyson! That's right, Tennyson. He enclosed some verses. (*He tears up the letter without reading it and hands it back*). Childish babble. Rubbish. Weeds. Rambling weeds. (*SOLITUDE goes*).

I wandered slowly on my knees....

I wandered moaning through the trees....

I wandered slowly moaning loud....

I want a word that rhymes with 'crowd'
I wandered ghostly in my shroud....
I wandered lonely as a - Cloud!

(He is now inspired. SOLITUDE re-enters with pencil and pad, follows the BARD, getting it all down).

that floats on high o'er vales and hills
when all at once I saw a crowd -
a host of golden daffodils!
Beside the lake, beneath the trees -
fluttering and dancing in the breeze!

Solitude: *(writing).*fluttering and dancing in the breeze....

Wordsworth: Continuous as the stars that shine
and twinkle in the milky way -
they stretched in never-ending line
along the margin of the bay!
Ten thousand saw I at a glance!
Tossing their heads in spritely dance!

Solitude:tossing their heads in spritely dance....

Wordsworth: *(returns to couch).*

For oft, when on my couch I lie,
in vacant or in pensive mood,
they flash upon that inward eye
which is the bliss of
Solitude?

Solitude: *(smiles affably).*

Wordsworth: And then.... my heart.... with pleasure fills....

Solitude: *(Suggestion).* And dances with the daffodils?

Wordsworth: *(continuing).*

I think I'll dedicate this ode
to the advancement of the boy
from whose appeal my paeon flowed
and bade the bulbs burst out with joy!
Yes bless the boy whose letter came!
Oh Solitude! What was his name?

Solitude: You destroyed the letter sir.

Wordsworth: Oh.

Solitude: Should I recover it sir?

Wordsworth: *(shakes head).*

By our own spirits are we deified!
we poets in our youth begin in gladness,

and thereof come in the end
despondency and madness.

Solitude: (*getting it down*).despondency and madness....

(*Birdsong fades. Lights fade to black.*)

Lights up on BRANWELL slumped on the steps, CHARLOTTE sitting in the armchair, ANNE sitting at the table, and EMILY on the piano stool).

Charlotte: Branwell has received no reply from Mr. Wordsworth.

Anne: We must not give up hope. Branwell's abilities will be appreciated in time, will they not Emily?

Emily: (*sings*). *Riches I hold in light esteem
and love I laugh to scorn,
and lust of fame was but a dream
that vanished with the morn.*

*And if I pray the only prayer
that moves my lips for me
is - Leave the heart that I now bear
and give me liberty.*

Branwell: (*tired and cynical*). 1840.. I am twenty-three years old. The prime of my life. With weariness and sinking hopes, discouraged by my father, aunt and sisters, I apply myself to my TRUE vocation and submit my rude talents to be fashioned by Mr. Grundy of Luddendenfoot. Being a ticket clerk on the Leeds and Manchester railway, is my be-all and end-all, my humble gesture to posterity.

Charlotte: (*sarcastic*). A distant relative of mine, one Patrick Boanerges, has set off to seek his fortune in the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity, of clerk on the Leeds and Manchester railroad!

Branwell: I can sell tickets; I can write poems; I can paint pictures; I can play the flute; I can drink brandy and live life to the full! How dare you imply that I am a failure!

Charlotte: We are deeply disappointed in you.

Branwell: Oh thrice forlorn
still saw I me!
Long long nights else
in lonely gloom!
With time-bleached locks
and trembling knee,

walk aidless, helpless
to my tomb!
Any more tickets?

(He limps off. EMILY joins CHARLOTTE and ANNE).

Charlotte: I've decided what we must do.

Emily: We must live at home.

Anne: But how will we survive? We must not be a burden to Aunt and Papa.

Charlotte: We will open a school.

Emily: But we detest teaching.

Charlotte: If the school is our own concern, I'm sure it will be agreeable.

Anne: But we are ill-equipped. Our experience is so limited.

Charlotte: Then we must widen it! My plan is this, that two of us should go to the Academy of M. Constantin Heger in Brussels.

Anne: Brussels?

Emily: How immoderate.

Charlotte: We must extend our knowledge of the world, of the methods of teaching, and of the French language. We must strive towards our great goal! We must prepare to support Papa and Aunt Branwell in their declining years, and must not let ourselves degenerate into alcoholic ticket clerks on the Leeds and Manchester railroad. Which of you will come with me?

Anne: Well I...

Charlotte: *(rousing her).* Bless you Emily for volunteering so readily! *(confidentially).* Our sister's health is poor, and may not withstand a protracted season away from home. *(aloud).* Papa and Aunt Branwell are very much in favour. Indeed, Aunt is so taken with the project, that she has recovered from her decline, so far as to advance us a sum for our fees and private expenses, and has agreed to invest a further sum in the school, if she feels we are 'sufficiently transmogrified' by our sojourn, at 'Le Pensionnat Heger'!

(A train passes. ANNE gives CHARLOTTE and EMILY their shawls, kisses them goodbye, and they go over to the piano. BRANWELL enters, dejected, goes to ANNE).

Branwell: I have been dismissed

Anne: Why?

Branwell: I misplaced my vocation. Charlotte was right. However versatile one is, one cannot do accounts with one hand, and write poems and paint pictures

with the other.

Anne: What will you do?

Branwell: I will disintegrate, dissolve and pine away.

Anne: I have a more practical suggestion. As you are aware, since Emily and Charlotte left for Brussels, I have been employed as governess to the daughters of the Reverend Mr. Robinson of Thorp Green. Now Mr. Robinson has a son, fourteen years of age, who will shortly require the services of a resident tutor. His father is not unapproachable, and if the idea of such a situation appeals to you....

(Cross fade to CHARLOTTE and EMILY).

Charlotte: We arrived in Brussels, tired, timid, but very excited. The Pensionnat Heger is a large, historic, somewhat gloomy old house. There are about a hundred pupils, mostly day-boarders. Our professor, M. Constantin Heger, is a forceful, choleric yet kindly man of some intellectual distinction. It came as a surprise to discover that he is only seven years older than I.

(Cross fade to BRANWELL, at the table, and EDMUND ROBINSON slouching in the armchair).

Branwell: Attend Master Edmund Robinson. Je suis, tu es, il est....

Edmund: I don't see the point in learning a dead language.

Branwell: Nous sommes, vous êtes, ils sont....

Edmund: What use is it? Where do they speak it?

Branwell: Je serai, tu seras, Je serai....

Edmund: Who wants to learn Latin? God!

Branwell: This is French.

(Cross fade to CHARLOTTE and EMILY. EMILY, as before, is motionless and inscrutable).

Charlotte: I was twenty-six, a week or two since, and at this ripe time of life, I am a schoolgirl, a complete schoolgirl, and on the whole, very happy in that capacity. It felt very strange at first to submit to authority, instead of exercising it - to obey orders instead of giving them; but I like that state of things. I returned to it, with the same avidity that a cow, that has long been kept on dry hay, returns to fresh grass.

(Cross fade to BRANWELL and MRS. ROBINSON).

Branwell: Mrs. Robinson!

Mrs. Robinson: Mr. Brontë, I would like a report on my son's progress in mathematics, which is his weakest subject.

Branwell: Well, Mrs. Robinson, he is certainly improving.

Mrs. Robinson: How is he improving?

Branwell: Well, at first he seemed shy and reserved.

Mrs. Robinson: Reserved?

Branwell: He clearly had a yearning for the subject, but felt it to be far beyond his grasp.

Mrs. Robinson: Explain.

Branwell: He felt he lacked the experience to take the subject by storm and did not realize that a gradual, even tentative approach would be more pertinent, and more likely to yield satisfaction.

Mrs. Robinson: And did he find the subject responsive to his courtesies?

Branwell: Not at first; but with application and calculated persistence, he soon found he was nourishing an attachment he little expected at the outset, and he dared to hope that his feelings were reciprocal.

Mrs. Robinson: And if they were?

Branwell: Then he would rejoice!

Mrs. Robinson: (*rising*). Be particular Mr. Brontë.

Branwell: (*throwing himself on his knees before her*). He would venerate the beauty, symmetry, eternity of the universal law of number!

Mrs. Robinson: Given two and two?

Branwell: He would make four! And eight! And sixteen! And thirty-two! In delirious geometric progression!

(*EDMUND has come in*).

Edmund: Q.E.D.

(*Cross fade to CHARLOTTE and EMILY*).

Charlotte: M. Heger est très charmant, n'est-ce-pas Emilie?

Emily: Oui.

Charlotte: Mon coeur se frappe si hereusement quand j'entends la voix de cet homme. Écoute! M. Heger chante! Et il chante en Anglais pour moi!

(*Enter PROFESSOR HEGER. He sings softly to himself, and does not see them*).

Heger: (*chants*) *The truest love
that ever heart
felt at its kindled core,
did through each vein*

*in quickened start,
the tide of being pour....*

Charlotte: Formidable!

Heger: *I dreamed it would
be nameless bliss
as I loved, loved to be;
and to this object
did I press
to Mamselle Emily. (Exit).*

Charlotte: *(sadly)*. Eh bien, il ne fait pas beau aujourd'hui je crois.

Emily: Oui.

(Cross fade to BRANWELL and EDMUND).

Edmund: I shall have to speak to my Papa after dinner tonight... *(BRANWELL slips him a coin)*. Although I may postpone our discourse until after breakfast tomorrow... *(Another coin)*. I mean luncheon... *(Another coin)*. Dinner... *(Another coin)*. The following breakfast...

Branwell: I was explaining something to your mother that you would not understand..

Edmund: On the contrary Mr. Brontë, I understood it very well, and my duty to my family, and to my purse, prompts me to make what capital I can out of the situation. *(Exit)*.

Branwell: Heartless villain!

(Enter ANNE).

Anne: Why Branwell! What is the matter?

Branwell: Oh Anne I am ruined!

Anne: Fiddlesticks!

Branwell: It's true!

Anne: Has Master Edmund been a trial to you? I understand from Mrs. Robinson that he was progressing very well, particularly in mathematics, which is his weakest subject.

Branwell: What did she say?

Anne: She said Master Edmund was making great strides and that your presence was uncommonly beneficial to the boy.

Branwell: Indeed it is. What did she say of me?

Anne: She said you were good, and kind, and long-suffering.

Branwell: *(to himself)*. She will deny it! She MUST deny it!

Anne: What is this Branwell?

Edmund: *(entering)*. Hullo Miss Brontë.

Anne: Why Master Edmund! We were just talking about you.

Edmund: I know you were.

Anne: And how are you progressing? Are you doing as well as is reported?

Edmund: I am doing exceedingly well Miss Brontë. I am in fine fettle.

Anne: I am glad to hear it.

Edmund: And I have decided to be magnanimous.

Branwell: Magnanimous?

Edmund: I mean it would be cruel to wait until Tuesday after breakfast. So as I was passing my Papa's study, I noticed he was there, and decided to go in and converse with him; and he has spoken to my Mama, who was most inexpressibly penitent, and he has sent me to entreat you to lose no time in assembling your possessions, and when you have done so, to pay him the honour of a brief visit, to secure formal notice of your dismissal. I have never seen my Papa so exceedingly enraged. Nay I fear for his blood pressure! So I beseech you, make no delay. My Mamma has vouchsafed not to see you or speak with you again, so I suggest, when you leave, you leave by the servants' entrance. I have informed the servants of the cause of your sudden departure, so they will all be present to bid you farewell, with such remarks, asides and tut-tuts as they deem suitable. (*Exit*).

(*Cross fade to CHARLOTTE, EMILY and HEGER*).

(*Awkward pause*).

Heger: (*fast*). Je suis enchanté, Mamselles, que vous avez rendu visite à moi. Je suis si solitaire dans les vacances, quand toutes mes élèves sont disparues.

Charlotte: Très amusant.

(*Pause*).

Heger: Mamselle Emilie est fort silencieuse ce soir.

Charlotte: Ma soeur est réservée m'sieur.

Heger: Réservée? Pour qui?

Charlotte: Pour elle-même. Mais moi, je suis livre.

Heger: You are a book?

Charlotte: Pardon. Je suis libre. Je ne suis pas réservée.

Heger: And your book I read Mamselle. Mais votre soeur - elle est si silencieuse, si mystérieuse - si malheureuse je crois? (*to EMILY*). Est-ce qu'on a dit que tu es la plus belle du monde?

Emily: Non.

(*Pause*).

Heger: Ah! Dis-donc! Je l'ai oublié! Voici une lettre qui est arrivée ce matin. (*gives EMILY a letter*).

Charlotte: Do not open it now Emily. Wait till we get home. Nous sommes les invitées de M. Heger, et ce n'est pas poli.

Heger: Tout va bien chez votre famille Mamselle?

Emily: Aunt Branwell is dying. (*HEGER goes*).

(Light on NICHOLLS in the pulpit. ANNE kneels on the steps. A bell tolls).

Nicholls: The souls of the righteous are in the hands of the Lord.

Anne: Who preserveth them that are true of heart.

Nicholls: Turn then again unto thy rest O my soul.

Anne: For the Lord hath rewardeth thee

Nicholls: Thou Lord hath delivered my soul from death.

Anne: Mine eyes from tears and my feet from falling.

Nicholls: I will walk before the Lord.

Anne: In the land of the living.

(NICHOLLS goes. ANNE greets CHARLOTTE. BRANWELL enters and sits on the floor with his head in EMILY'S lap).

Charlotte: How is Aunt Branwell?

Anne: She died on Monday.

Charlotte: How is Branwell getting on?

Anne: He was dismissed in circumstances you will hear more of in due course.

Charlotte: But you, you are still with the Robinsons?

Anne: No, I have left them also. I couldn't stay after Branwell's dismissal.

Charlotte: And Papa. How is he?

Anne: He is almost blind now.

Charlotte: Who was the clergyman I saw as I came in?

Anne: That was the new assistant curate. A gentle, compassionate man. His name is Mr. Nicholls.

(CHARLOTTE sits in the armchair, ANNE at the table).

Charlotte: Haworth seems such a lonely quiet spot, buried away from the world.

Emily: Branwell I think you are not unlike my mongrel Keeper.

Branwell: Oh Mrs. Robinson! How she loved me! How she doted on me! What torment she must be suffering at our enforced separation!

Emily: He sits whining and sighing, with his ears flopped over his face,

then in no time at all, he is leaping and bounding after rabbits across the moor, and chasing through the deep heather, right up to Top Withens.

Branwell: She will surely perish at the hands of her iniquitous husband!

Charlotte: It is not that I regret coming back. Heaven knows I missed you all terribly and was at times painfully home-sick, but while in Brussels, I cemented a firm and beautiful intellectual liaison with a man of extraordinary finesse and bonhomie.

Anne: I have drawn up the prospectus Charlotte. I think we should embark on our project without delay.

Charlotte: Emily of course, though highly intelligent in some quarters, does not appreciate such qualities. And why should she? She has never showed regard for any human creature; all her love is reserved for animals.

Emily: (*to BRANWELL*). It is such a relief to be back with Papa, and Keeper and Flossy, and Victoria and Adelaide ensconced in the peat-house, and you, and Anne, and Tiger, and Hero singing in his cage.

Anne: I have sent prospectuses to all parents with children of a suitable age within a radius of twenty miles. I really do not see why we should not open the school within three months.

Charlotte: You are right. We must bend ourselves to the task in hand.

Anne: We will have to re-arrange the Parsonage to accommodate the pupils.

Charlotte: We have mastered enough subjects now, to form a reasonable syllabus.

Anne: And we can incur certain expenses without loss, from the legacies left to us by dear Aunt Branwell. She was so interested in the scheme; we owe it to her to succeed.

Charlotte: Emily will help us.

Emily: I do not relish the thought of my home being overrun by hordes of unruly children.

Charlotte: We must fight together over this.

Emily: But for Papa's sake, and because this thing is inevitable, I will look as enthusiastic as I can.

Anne: It is a good fight, and well worth winning.

BLACKOUT

(The Black Bull.

Raucous laughter, drunken shrieks. Clinking of glasses. Piano music. Dim light comes up on the DRINKERS. BRANWELL stands at the pulpit [the Bar]. The noise subsides).

Branwell: Here I stand
in the bar of the Black Bull!

Drinkers: Tell it Mr. Brontë!
Tell your story to the full!

Branwell: It concerns a certain lady;
she was kind as she was sweet.
She was every inch the lady,
and she moved about a treat!

Drinkers: She was every inch the lady
and she moved about a treat!

Branwell: But she was married!

Drinkers: Oh!

Branwell: Her husband was as thin
as he was old as he was mean!
He really was the meanest-
minded miser ever seen!
His name was Edward Rochester!
He locked his wife away,
and hid the key and left her there
to frotter day by day!

Drinker: What was her name Mr. Brontë?

Branwell: Her name was Bertha!

Drinkers: But I was very cunning.
very subtle as you'll see -
Tell it Mr. Brontë!
Tell it episodically!

Branwell: The lady lay in custody;
No champion she had. -
So I resolved to save her
like the brave Sir Galahad!

Drinkers: So he resolved to save her
like the brave Sir Galahad!

Branwell: Then - I had an idea!

Drinkers: Oh!

Branwell: There was a certain woman
did the washing every week,
never known to utter,
breath a single word, or speak;
lend me clothes, I said to her
and let me take your place
and be known to Mr. Rochester
as Mrs. Poole, or Grace!

Drinker: You took the place of Grace Poole?

Branwell: But wait! Alas the vengeful husband
smelt a rat I think!

Drinkers: Tell it Mr. Brontë!
Then I'll buy another drink!

Branwell: For no sooner was I in the turret
where my Bertha lay -
but I heard the key turn in the lock
and heard the husband say:
You asked for this! Now take your just
desert, for here you stay!

I struck a match, and I saw to my horror!

That Bertha wasn't what I thought,
she wasn't young and gay;
Her teeth were gone, her hair was white
her skin was withered away!
She moaned and shrieked and wagged her head -
I dropped the match - Oh Hell!
I burnt the house down, burnt the lot - !
(Pause).
That's all there is to tell.

BLACKOUT

(Lights up. CHARLOTTE is in the armchair, ANNE at the table, EMILY on the piano stool, BRANWELL slumped at her feet).

Charlotte: It has been six weeks.

Anne: Were there any replies today?

Charlotte: No.

Anne: We mustn't give up hope.

Charlotte: Not a single reply.

Anne: It will take us time to become established.

Charlotte: I feel now that even if there were a hundred replies, and a hundred children on our door-step, begging for lessons, I would not be interested and I would turn them away.

Anne: Perhaps we ought to send out more letters

Charlotte: (*getting up*). Letters letters letters! I spend my LIFE writing letters!

Anne: Charlotte -

Charlotte: I am thirty years old. I am plain. I am an embarrassment or a source of cruel amusement to my friends, (*trips over her chair*). and I cannot even SEE! My eyes grow dimmer, as I grow older, and my future shrinks till I have nothing to look forward to, but the endless, barren, boredom of nursing a blind father, and a drunken brother, and shrivelling and wrinkling into a choleric old maid! And the only person who ever led me to hope that I was a little more intelligent, a little more companionable, than the average, gossipy, condescending woman, does not even answer my letters!

Anne: We will abandon the idea of opening a school.

(Lights dim. Light comes up on EMILY).

Emily: (*sings*). *All day I've toiled
but not with pain
in learning's golden mine;
and now at eventide again
the moonbeams softly shine.*

*'Tis sweet to wander here at night,
to watch the winter die,
with heart as summer sunshine light,
and warm as summer sky.*

(The OTHERS are watching. CHARLOTTE goes out and returns with a sheaf of papers. BRANWELL goes to her).

(speaks) O may I never lose the peace
that lulls me gently now,
though time should change my youthful face,
and years should shade my brow.

(Lights up).

Branwell: *(drunk)*. Those are Emily's poems. I have written poems from the soul. Would you like to read them?

Charlotte: I have.

Branwell: What do you think of them? Do you think they are as good as Emily's?

Charlotte: You know what I think of them.

Branwell: *(following her)*. Emily's poems are all about the weather, and bog-trotting, and tramp-tramp-tramping on the moors. Mine are about kings, and battles, and epic love affairs, and the decline and degradation of great people!

Charlotte: My opinion of your poems Branwell, is not far removed from my opinion of their author. But these are uncommonly good, and not at all like the poetry women generally write. They are condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. They have a peculiar music, wild, melancholy and elevating!

Branwell: *(to EMILY)*. Charlotte is reading your poems.

Charlotte: They should be published.

Emily: *(snatching them)*. They are mine! I will not have them fingered and frowned over!

Anne: But don't you find Charlotte's plan exciting Emily?

Emily: I find it impertinent.

Anne: But think how proud we will be, to see our names and our cherished works, printed in a volume, and selling in every bookshop in the country!

Emily: My name will be on nothing!

Charlotte: Oh GOD!

Branwell: Hush Charlotte! You will wake Papa! *(collapses)*.

Charlotte: Is there NOTHING you will agree to! Is there NOTHING I can suggest without your hurling it back at me! It's not for myself I do this! It's for all of us!

Anne: We will call ourselves Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. Agree to this Emily.

(Pause).

Emily: Shall earth no more inspire thee,
thou lonely dreamer now?
Since passion may not fire thee,
shall nature cease to bow?

Thy mind is ever moving
in regions dark to thee;
recall its useless roving,
come back, and dwell with me.

Charlotte: (*goes to the steps - sings*).
*Often rebuked,
yet always back returning,
to those first feelings
that were born with me
and leaving busy chase
of wealth and learning,
for idle dreams of things
that cannot be.*

Anne: (*joins her*) *Today I will not seek
the shadowy region;
its unsustaining vastness
waxes drear;*

Emily: (*joins them*) *And visions rising
legion after legion,
bring the unreal world
too strangely near.*

(*The light concentrates on them as they as they perambulate round the table. There is a light on BRANWELL inanimate on the floor*).

Sisters: *I'll walk
where my nature would be leading;
it vexes me
to choose another guide,
where the grey flocks
in ferny glens are feeding,
where the wild wind blows
on the mountain side.*

*What have these lonely mountains
worth revealing?
More glory and more grief
than I can tell;*

*the earth that wakes
ONE human heart to feeling,
can centre both the worlds
of Heaven and Hell!*

*(Thunderclap. Pouring rain. The light on the SISTERS fades. The light on
BRANWELL fades).*

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(Howling gale. Snowstorm [special effect]. The gale subsides as light comes up on NELLIE DEAN, seated in the armchair, darning, and CATHY sitting at her feet. There is a candelabra on the table. All is still except for the falling snow).

Cathy: (*sings*). *Silent is the house;
all are laid asleep;
one alone looks out
o'er the snow-wraiths deep,
watching every cloud
dreading every breeze,
that whirls the wildering drifts
and bends the groaning trees.*

*Frown my haughty sire,
chide my angry dame,
set your slaves to spy,
threaten me with shame;
but neither sire nor dame,
nor prying serf shall know
what angel nightly tracks
that waste of winter snow.*

(Cross fade to LOCKWOOD who is seated on the stool, by the piano).

Lockwood: This time I remember, I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow. I also heard the fir-bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause. But it annoyed me so much that I resolved to silence it if possible; and I thought I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple. 'I must stop it nevertheless,' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching out an arm to seize the importunate branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me. I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it still, and a most melancholy voice sobbed: 'Let me in! Let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, meanwhile trying to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton', it replied shiveringly. 'I'm come home. I lost my way on the moor'. As it spoke I discerned obscurely, a child's face

looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist onto the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro, till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes.

(Cross fade to NELLY and CATHY).

Cathy: Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?

Nelly: Is it worth keeping?

Cathy: I want to know what I should do. Edgar Linton has asked me to marry him and I have given him an answer. Now, before I tell you whether it was consent or denial, you tell me which it ought to have been.

Nelly: Really Miss Catherine, how can I know?

Cathy: I accepted him. Tell me I was wrong.

Nelly: Do you love him?

Cathy: Yes.

Nelly: Why?

Cathy: Because he is rich and handsome, and pleasant to be with.

Nelly: What else?

Cathy: I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head and everything he touches and every word he says. I love all his looks and all his actions, and him entirely and altogether. And yet in my heart and in my soul, I'm convinced, I'm wrong.

Nelly: That's very strange. I cannot make it out.

Cathy: Do you never dream Nelly?

Nelly: Yes, now and then.

Cathy: I dreamt once that I was in Heaven, and Heaven did not seem to be my home, and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights, where I awoke sobbing for joy! Nelly, I have no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in Heaven, and if Heathcliff were not brought so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now, so he shall never know how I love him; and that not because he's handsome Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am! Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire. My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries. My great thought in life is himself. If all else perished and he remained, I should continue to be; and if all else remained and he were annihilated, the universe would turn into a mighty stranger - I should not seem part of it. My love for Linton, is like the foliage in the woods; time will change it, as winter changes

the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath - a source of little visible delight, but NECESSARY! Nelly, I AM Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind - not as a pleasure, any more than I am a pleasure to myself, but as my own being!

(A great gale. Light fades. HEATHCLIFF in billowing cloak is standing on the steps in the snow. CATHY rushes to him and falls into his arms. The gale continues. They speak over it).

Heathcliff: Cathy! Cathy! Oh my life!

Cathy: Oh Heathcliff! You have broken my heart and thriven on it I think. How strong you are! How many years do you mean to live after I am gone?

Heathcliff: Don't torture me till I'm as mad as yourself!

Cathy: Will you forget me? Will you be happy when I am in the earth?

Heathcliff: You are possessed with a devil to talk in this manner when you are dying!

Cathy: Will you say twenty years hence: That is the grave of Catherine Earnshaw! I loved her long ago, but it is past? I have loved others since. My children are dearer to me than she was - !

Heathcliff: Is it not sufficient for your infernal selfishness, that while you are at peace, I shall writhe in the torments of Hell!

Cathy: I shall not be at peace!

Heathcliff: I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may wring out my kisses and tears - they'll blight you! I have not broken your heart - YOU have broken it! And in breaking it, you have broken mine! So much the worse for me that I am strong! Oh GOD - would you like to live with your soul in the grave!

Cathy: If I have done wrong, I'm dying for it! But know this, I will not lie alone beneath the earth! They may bury me twelve feet deep and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me! I never will!

Heathcliff: CATHY!!

(She dies. The storm subsides. Light on NELLY and LINTON).

Nelly: The service is over. Mr. Linton will be here soon.

Linton: I have been so far forbearing with you sir. Not that I was ignorant of your miserable, degraded character, but I felt you were only partly responsible for that, and Catherine, wishing to keep up your acquaintance, I acquiesced - foolishly. Your presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous. For that cause, and to prevent worse consequences, I shall deny you

hereafter admission into this house, and give notice that I require your instant departure. Three minutes delay, will render it involuntary and ignominious.
(Exit).

Heathcliff: She is dead!

Nelly: (*sings*). *Dreadful is the check,
intense the agony,
the ear begins to hear,
the eye begins to see,
the pulse begins to throb,
the brain to think again,
the soul to feel the flesh,
the flesh to feel the chain.*

(HEATHCLIFF alone in the snow. A distant gale).

Heathcliff: The day she was buried, there came a fall of snow. In the evening, I went to the churchyard. It blew bleak as winter; all around was solitary. Being alone, and conscious two yards of loose earth was the soul barrier between us, I said to myself: 'I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, it is this north wind that chills me; if she be motionless, it is sleep'. I got a spade from the tool-house, and began to delve with all my might. It scraped the coffin. I fell to work with my hands. The wood commenced cracking about the screws. I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from someone above, close at the edge of the grave. 'If I can only get this off!' I muttered, 'I wish they may shovel in the earth over us both!' and I wrenched at it more desperately still. There was another sigh close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by; but as certainly as you perceive the approach of some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there! A sudden sense of relief flowed from my heart through every limb. I relinquished my labour of agony, and turned, consoled at once, unspeakably consoled. Her presence was with me. It remained while I refilled the grave, and led me home.

BLACK OUT

(The snow fades out. Light up on CHARLOTTE in the armchair).

Charlotte: Emily's novel, 'Wuthering Heights' was accepted for publication, along with Anne's 'Agnes Grey'. Neither was very successful, but their failure

was as nothing to that which attended my own novel 'The Professor'. A score of publishers received it, sniffed at it, and tossed it back, brimming with notes of rejection. (*She lights the candles in the candelabra*). Nothing daunted, I undertook to accompany my father to an oculist in Manchester, for a cataract operation, and, while there, began work on a novel which was to change my whole way of life, and blazen my name across the book-shops of the world.

BLACK OUT

(This next scene is played entirely by candle light. In the gloom a demoniac laugh, low, suppressed and deep. MR. BROCKLEHURST is in the pulpit. AUNT REED stands beside him with a lighted candelabra).

Brocklehurst: Your name little girl?

Jane: Jane Eyre sir.

Brocklehurst: Well, Jane Eyre, and are you a good child?

Aunt Reed: Perhaps the less said on that subject, the better Mr. Brocklehurst.

Brocklehurst: Sorry indeed to hear it. She and I must have some talk. Come here.

Aunt Reed: Approach Mr. Brocklehurst Jane.

Brocklehurst: No sight is so sad as that of a naughty child, especially a naughty little girl. Do you know where the wicked go after death?

Jane: They go to hell.

Brocklehurst: And what is hell? Can you tell me that?

Jane: A pit full of fire.

Brocklehurst: And should you like to fall into that pit and be burning there for ever?

Jane: No sir.

Brocklehurst: And what must you do to avoid it?

Jane: I must keep in good health and not die!

(A demoniac laugh. BROCKLEHURST and AUNT REED go).

(front) A young lady accustomed to tuition, is desirous of meeting with a situation in a private family, where the children are under fourteen. She is qualified to teach the usual branches of a good English education, together with French, Music and Drawing. Address J.E., Post Office, Lowton.

(MRS. FAIRFAX has entered with candles).

Mrs. Fairfax: If J.E. who advertised in the Herald last Thursday, is in a position to give satisfactory references as to character and competency, a situation can be offered her by Mrs. Fairfax, of Thornfield Hall.

Jane: It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth, to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection. Imagine then, my trepidation, that bleak and blustery evening, when I alighted at the threshold of Thornfield Hall.

Fairfax: (*meeting her*). How do you do my dear? I am afraid you've had a tedious ride.

Jane: Mrs. Fairfax I presume?

Fairfax: The same.

(*JANE follows MRS. FAIRFAX up a long (imaginary) flight of stairs*).

Jane: (*front*). She led me upstairs to my chamber. The steps and bannisters were of oak; the staircase window was high and latticed; both it, and the long gallery into which the bedroom doors opened, looked as if they belonged to a church rather than a house. A very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude - !

(*A demoniac laugh*)

What is that laugh?

Fairfax: Do not trouble yourself my dear. It is only Grace Poole.

(*Another laugh, more sinister than the first*).

Jane: Grace Poole?

Fairfax: She is a rough, eccentric creature, but quite harmless. She helps with the laundry and does a little sewing. It is really as a kindness that Mr. Rochester employs her.

Jane: Mr. Rochester?

(*Rumble of thunder. Enter MR. ROCHESTER, choleric and lowering*).

Rochester: Leave us Mrs. Fairfax.

(*MRS. FAIRFAX goes. ROCHESTER sits in the armchair. He and JANE are seated on either side of the stage, lit by candles*).

Jane: (*front*). Mr. Rochester was the owner of Thornfield and guardian to my young pupil Adele. He had a dark face, with stern features, and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eye-brows looked ireful and thwarted.

Rochester: Do you never laugh Miss Eyre? Don't trouble yourself to answer. I see you laugh rarely, but you can laugh very merrily, believe me. You are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious. Therefore I desire you

to have the goodness to talk to me a little, and divert my thoughts.

Jane: I am quite willing to amuse you if I can sir, but I cannot introduce a topic, because I do not know what will interest you.

(front). I felt no fear of him, and but little shyness. On the contrary, his harsh caprice laid me under no obligation, and indeed, a decent quiescence, under the freak of manner, gave me the advantage.

Rochester: You never felt jealousy did you Miss Eyre? Of course not. I need not ask you, because you never felt love. You have both sentiments yet to experience. Your soul sleeps; the shock is yet to be given which shall awaken it.

Jane: *(front)*. He ground his teeth and was silent. Some hated thought seemed to have him in its grip, and to hold him so tightly that he could not proceed.

(Polite society laughter off).

Rochester: *(rising)*. Young lady, I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative tonight.

Jane: *(front)*. The gates of Thornfield were thrown open to admit a gaggle of society house-guests, amongst whom the prevailing opinion was that Mr. Rochester would shortly announce his betrothal to the elegant and beautiful Blanche Ingram, a lady of wealth, rank and radiant accomplishments. In the privacy of my chamber, I arraigned, cross-examined and pronounced judgment on myself: that a greater fool than Jane Eyre had never breathed the breath of life; that a more fantastic idiot had never surfeited herself on sweet lies, and swallowed poison as if it were nectar.

(Enter BLANCHE and LADY INGRAM. They are dimly lit on the steps. They are laughing as they come on).

Blanche: I thought you were not fond of children Edward. Why do you not send your ward to school?

Lady Ingram: Schools are so dear my dear.

Blanche: I saw a person with her just now. Is she gone? Oh no! There she is still behind the window curtain! You should hear Mamma on the chapter of governesses. Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable, and the rest ridiculous, were they not Mamma?

Lady Ingram: My dearest, don't mention governesses! The word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice. I thank heaven I have done with them. *(They go, laughing)*.

Jane: *(rising)*. I wish to seek another situation.

(The sound of heart-beats, which continues through the scene).

Rochester: I sometimes have a queer feeling with regard to you Jane. It is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string in the corresponding quarter of your little frame. And if that boisterous channel, or two hundred miles or so of land come between us, I am afraid that chord of communion will be snapped. Then I've a nervous notion I should take to bleeding inwardly. As for you - you would forget me.

Jane: *(moving in).* That I NEVER would sir! Oh I grieve to leave Thornfield, but leave I must. You have placed a necessity before me.

Rochester: What necessity?

Jane: A noble and beautiful woman - your bride!

Rochester: I have no bride.

Jane: But you will have.

Rochester: *(moving in).* Yes I will, will!

Jane: Then I must go. You have said it yourself.

Rochester: No, you must stay! I swear it, and the oath shall be kept.

Jane: Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automaton? A machine without feelings? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should make it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you! I am not talking to you through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal - as we are!

Rochester: *(moving in).* We are equal Jane, and no bride stands between us. My bride is here because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me? I must have you for my own. Will you be mine? Say yes quickly!

Jane: Mr. Rochester, let me look at your face. Turn to the moonlight.

Rochester: Oh Jane you torture me! With that searching and yet faithful and generous look you torture me!

Jane: How can I do that? If you are true and your offer real, my only feelings to you must be gratitude and devotion - they cannot torture.

Rochester: Gratitude! Jane accept me quickly. Say: Edward I will marry you.

Jane: Are you in earnest? Do you truly love me? Do you sincerely wish me to be your wife?

Rochester: I do, and if an oath is necessary, I swear it!

Jane: Then sir, I will marry you.

(They embrace. Light on MR. WOOD, the curate, robed, in front of the pulpit. JANE and ROCHESTER kneel).

Wood: I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not lawfully be joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it.

(Silence).

Wilt thou take this woman for thy wedded wife - ?

(BRIGGS is standing by the piano).

Briggs: The marriage cannot go on! I declare the existence of an impediment.

Rochester: *(grinding his teeth).* Proceed!

Wood: I cannot proceed without some investigation into what has been asserted.

Briggs: An insuperable impediment to this marriage exists. Mr. Rochester has a wife now living!

(The stage bursts into flames. JANE screams. Hysterical gurgling demoniac laughter! ROCHESTER, WOOD and BRIGGS go, taking the candles).

BLACK OUT

(Light on CHARLOTTE in the armchair).

Charlotte: Such, dear reader, was the tenor of my book 'Jane Eyre'. I will not unfold it further lest I spoil it for the unprivileged few not yet acquainted with the work. Did my heroine flee? Or did she remain with her mysterious paramour? Why did Grace Poole laugh? Or did she not laugh at all, and was it another?....

(Enter GILBERT MARKHAM. He stands by the piano and starts to speak. CHARLOTTE'S voice tails away as his takes over).

...What was the history of Mr. Rochester's first marriage? Who was Richard Mason? What happened to Helen Burns? Who were St. John Rivers, Jane Elliot, and Mr. Briggs?

Gilbert: You must go back with me to the autumn of 1827. My father, as you know, was a sort of gentleman farmer in Ermshire; and I, by his express desire, succeeded him in that same quiet occupation, not very willingly, for ambition urged me to higher aims.

Charlotte: 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall' by Anne Brontë.

Rose Markham: *(entering and sitting at the piano).* You know it was reported a month ago, that someone was to take Wildfell Hall?

Gilbert: Yes?

Mrs. Markham: *(going to her)*. What of it Rose?

Fergus Markham: *(going to them)*. The place is empty.

Rose: Well, what do you think? It has actually been inhabited above a week! And we never knew!.

Mrs. Markham: Impossible.

Fergus: Preposterous!

Gilbert: I cannot believe it!

Rose: It has indeed, and by a single lady!

Mrs. Markham: Good gracious my dear, the place is in ruins!

Rose: She has two or three rooms made habitable, and there she lives, all alone - except for an old woman for a servant.

Fergus: Oh dear, that spoils it. I'd rather hoped she was a witch.

Mrs. Markham: Nonsense Fergus!

Rose: But is it not strange Gilbert?

Gilbert: On my life, it's astounding!

Mrs. Markham: I think it is extremely discourteous that we were never told.

Rose: Her name is Mrs. Graham, and she is in slightish mourning.

(Enter HELEN GRAHAM. ROSE plays a Chopin prelude as she speaks).

Helen: I am Helen Graham. Before my marriage, I was much courted by the impressionable gentlemen of my district, and I earned a reputation for frankness and level-headedness which not a few of my suitors found insurmountable; but not so Mr. Huntingdon.

(Enter ARTHUR HUNTINGDON).

Arthur: Why, Helen! I hope I may monopolize your society?

Helen: I shall be much relieved if you can rescue me from the attentions of Mr. Boarham and Mr. Wilmot.

Arthur: Do I have reason to dread them as rivals?

Helen: You know I detest them both.

Arthur: And me?

Helen: I have no reason to detest you.

Arthur: And Annabella?

Helen: I have nothing to do with her.

Arthur: I have.

Helen: You're excessively impertinent -

Arthur: Not at all. Can you swear you were not thinking of me? Deny it and I

won't tell you my secret. It is this, that Annabella beside you is a flaunting peony beside a sweet rose-bud, gemmed with dew - and I love you to distraction! Now tell if this intelligence gives you pleasure. I want to know, because, if so, I have something else to say, and if not, I'll go.

Helen: Go then. Or say what you have to say -

Arthur: But which? Silence? Then let me add, that I cannot live without you, and if you answer no to this last question, you will drive me mad! Will you bestow yourself on me?

Helen: You must ask my uncle and aunt.

Arthur: They won't refuse me if you don't.

Helen: I'm not so sure of that. My aunt dislikes you.

Arthur: But you don't Helen. Say you'll love me, and I'll go.

Helen: I wish you WOULD go.

Arthur: I will - the instant you say you love me.

Helen: (*softly*). You know I do.

(*He kisses her hand and goes. ROSE plays as HELEN speaks*).

(*front*). With the reluctant consent of my uncle and aunt, we were married. I lived in the hope, that our differences of character, and mode of living would harmonize as the first months went by. It was a stubborn hope, and I clung to it tenaciously. (*Enter ARTHUR*).

Arthur: Helen.

Helen: What is wrong?

Arthur: Will you reform if I tell you?

Helen: If I can, without offending a higher authority.

Arthur: There! You see, you don't love me with all your heart.

Helen: I don't understand you Arthur. At least I hope I don't. Pray tell me what I have done or said amiss?

Arthur: It's nothing you have done or said. It is something that you are. You are too religious. Now I like a woman to be religious, and I think your piety one of your greatest charms, but then, like all other good things, it may be carried too far. To my thinking, a woman's religion ought not to lessen her devotion to her earthly lord. She should have enough to etherialize and purify her heart, but not enough to refine it away and raise her above all human sympathies.

Helen: Am I above all human sympathies?

Arthur: No darling, but you are making more progress toward that saintly condition than I would like. I declare it is enough to make one jealous of one's maker - which is very wrong. So don't excite such wicked passions again, for my soul's sake.

(He goes. ROSE plays).

Helen: *(front).* He was growing restless. He went to London and returned four months later. This became an annual occurrence. He also took to inviting large numbers of his raucous friends to the hall for seasonal sporting. Annabella was regularly of this company.

(Laughter. Enter ARTHUR).

Arthur: Are you very angry Helen?

Helen: This is no jest Arthur, unless you think it is a jest to lose my affection for ever.

Arthur: So bitter? *(laughs).* Then I must go down on my knees. *(kneels).* Forgive me Helen, dear Helen, forgive me, and I'll never do it again! *(She tries to break away).* No, no by heaven, you shan't escape me so!

Helen: Let me go then.

Arthur: *(getting up).* It is all nonsense Helen. A jest, a mere nothing, not worth a thought. Will you never learn that you have nothing to fear from me?

Helen: I saw you with Annabella.

Arthur: Well what then?

Helen: Only this. Will you let me take our child and what remains of my fortune and go?

Arthur: No.

Helen: Will you let me have the child then, without the money?

Arthur: No, nor you yourself without the child. Do you think I'm to be made the laughing-stock of the county for your fastidious caprices?

(He goes. ROSE plays, as HELEN speaks).

Helen: *(front).* So we stayed together. He engaged a governess for my son, appropriated my keys, and kept me under close watch, as little more than a prisoner in my own home. He took to drinking heavily, and while he was thus diverted, I negotiated secretly with my brother, that I should assume a false name, and escape with my son and Rachel my maid, and set myself up in peace and seclusion as the tenant of Wildfell Hall. The day dawned and we crept stealthily away. What relief, what joy I felt to be freed from tyranny at last!

(Light on the MARKHAMS).

Rose: But what of your husband?

Mrs. Markham: Did he continue in his licentious ways?

Fergus: I'll wager he eloped with the governess!

Gilbert: The whole story is too astounding to be credited.

(ROSE plays).

Helen: *(front).* I maintained a secret contact at the Hall, and not many months had passed but I heard that Huntingdon, in a state of intoxication had fallen from his horse, and was grievously ill. He was at this time deeply in debt, and quite friendless. Duty impelled me to return to him.

(ARTHUR is slumped in the armchair, wrapped in his cloak).

Arthur: Is that you Alice? What did you leave me for?

Helen: It is I Arthur. It is Helen, your wife.

Arthur: My wife? For heaven's sake don't mention my wife. I have no wife.

Helen: It is Helen Huntingdon.

Arthur: Oh leave me whoever you are! I can't bear that white face and those eyes. For God's sake go, and send me someone who doesn't look like that.

Helen: *(front).* His mind was turning and mortification was setting in. I elected to stay with him, and persuade him to repent his foolish ways, before it was too late.

Arthur: Helen, what do you mean to do when I get well? Will you run away again?

Helen: It depends entirely on your own conduct.

Arthur: Oh I'll be very good. Will you not forgive me then?

Helen: I have forgiven you; but I know you cannot love me as you once did, and I should be very sorry if you were to, for I couldn't pretend to return it; so let us drop the subject and never recur to it again.

Arthur: Oh this sweet revenge! And you can enjoy it all with such a quiet conscience, because it's all in the way of duty.

Helen: It is well for you that I am doing my duty.

Arthur: Yes, you're mighty attentive now. I suppose there's nothing you wouldn't do for me now.

Helen: You know I am willing to do anything I can to relieve you.

Arthur: Yes NOW, my immaculate angel! But when once you have secured your reward, and find yourself safe in heaven, and me howling in hell fire, catch you lifting a finger to serve me then! No you'll look complacently on, and not so much as dip the tip of your finger in water to cool my tongue.

Helen: If so, it will be because of the great gulf over which I cannot pass; and if I look complacently on, it will only be from the assurance that your were being purified from your sins, and fitted to enjoy the happiness I felt. But are you determined Arthur, that I shall not meet you in heaven?

Arthur: Ha! What should I do there I should like to know!

Helen: Indeed I cannot tell, and I fear it is too certain that your tastes and feelings must be widely altered before you can have any enjoyment there.

Arthur: Oh it's all a fable!

Helen: Are you sure Arthur? Because if there is any doubt, and if you should find yourself mistaken after all, when it is too late to turn -

Arthur: It would be rather awkward I admit. But don't bother me now. I'm not going to die yet. I can't and won't. (*He grasps her hand*). Stay with me Helen. Save me. I know nothing can harm me. But death is coming - it is coming now! And if only I could believe there was nothing after! (*sobs*).

Helen: Don't try to believe it Arthur! There is joy and glory after, if you will but try to reach it!

Arthur: Not for me!

Helen: Repent.

Arthur: I can't. I only fear.

Helen: Think of the goodness of God, and you cannot but be grieved to have offended him.

Arthur: What is God?

Helen: God is infinite wisdom, and power and goodness and LOVE!

Arthur: I cannot see him, or hear him.

Helen: Then fix your mind on him who condescended to take our nature upon him, who was raised to heaven, even in his glorified human frame, in whom the fulness of the Godhead shines!

Arthur: Pray for me! (*dies*).

BLACKOUT

(*Lights up. CHARLOTTE is in the armchair, ANNE at the table, and EMILY on the piano stool.*)

Charlotte: Branwell died on 24th September 1848. His life had been wasted.

Anne: He had been taking regular quantities of laudanum for several years. He lived in a dream which came to a pitiful conclusion.

Emily: He died the death he wanted, the heroic and desperate death of the Earl of Northangerland.

Charlotte: There are three of us left now. We must live on courageously. We must guard our health and attend to the needs of Papa. And we must continue writing.

Emily: (*coughs*).

Charlotte: My current novel is called 'Shirley'. It is vastly different from 'Jane Eyre'.

Emily: (*coughs*).

Charlotte: It is unpoetic, unmelodramatic and as unromantic as Monday morning.

It is cool and solid. It is cold lentils and vinegar without oil.

Emily: (*coughs*).

Charlotte: It is unleavened bread with bitter herbs and no roast lamb.

Anne: What are you writing Emily?

Emily: 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.

Vain are the thousand creeds
that move men's hearts,
unutterably vain;
worthless as withered weeds
or idlest froth
amid the boundless main.

There is not room for death
nor atom that his might
could render void.
since Thou art Being and Breath
and what Thou art
may never be destroyed.

(*She smiles and dies*).

Anne: Emily and I had a practice of writing birthday notes - a record of what we were doing and how we were situated, to be sealed and not opened for three or four years. This Emily's note of three years ago, written on July 30th 1845.

(*She opens an envelope and reads*).

My birthday - showery, breezy, cool. I am twenty-seven years old today. This morning Anne and I opened the papers we wrote four years since. Since the 1841 paper, the following events have taken place: Charlotte and I have been to Brussels; our school scheme has been abandoned; Branwell has left his situation at Thorp Green and so has Anne. Anne and I went on our first long journey by ourselves, leaving home on 30th June, Monday, sleeping at York, returning to Keighley Tuesday evening, sleeping there and walking home on Wednesday morning. Though the weather was broken, we enjoyed ourselves very much, except during a few hours at Bradford. We are all in

decent health, only that Papa has a complaint in his eyes, and with the exception of Branwell, who I hope will be better and do better hereafter. I am quite contented for myself: not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty, seldom or never troubled with nothing to do and merely desiring that everybody could be as comfortable as myself, and as understanding. Tabby has just been teasing me to 'turn' as formerly to 'pilloputate'. Anne and I should have picked the blackcurrants if it had been fine and sunshiny. I must hurry off now to my turning and ironing. I have plenty of work on hand, and am altogether full of business. With best wishes for the whole house till 1848, and as much longer as may be - I conclude....

(ANNE is weeping. Her sobs turn to coughs).

Charlotte: Anne and I sit alone, and in seclusion, but we do not study. Anne cannot study now. She can scarcely read. A week ago, we sent for a medical man of skill and experience from Leeds to see her. He examined her with the stethoscope. His report I forbear to dwell on. Even skilful physicians are often mistaken in their conjectures. When we lost Emily, I thought we had drained the very dregs of our cup of trial, but now, when I hear Anne cough, as Emily coughed, I tremble lest there should be exquisite bitterness yet to taste. I cannot forget Emily's death-day. It becomes a more fixed, a darker, a more frequently recurring idea in my mind than ever; but it WILL NOT DO to dwell on these things.

Anne: I wish to see the sea Charlotte. Let us go to Scarborough

Charlotte On 25th May, we arrived at Scarborough. On the 26th we drove on the sands for an hour. On Sunday 27th she wished to go to church. We thought it prudent to dissuade her. She walked a little in the afternoon, and we sat on a sheltered and comfortable seat near the beach. The evening closed in.

Anne:
A dreadful darkness closes in
on my bewildered mind;
Oh let me suffer and not sin,
be tortured yet resigned.

Charlotte: The distant ships glittered like burnished gold; the little boats near the beach, heaved on the ebbing tide. Anne was drawn in her easy chair to the window to enjoy the scene with us.

Anne:
I hoped amid the brave and strong
My portioned task might lie,
to toil amid the labouring throng
with purpose pure and high.

Charlotte: The night passed without any apparent accession of illness. She rose at

seven o'clock, and performed most of her toilet herself, by her expressed wish. Nothing occurred to excite alarm till about 11 a.m. She then spoke of feeling a change.

Anne: But Thou hast fixed another part
and Thou hast fixed it well!
I said so with my bleeding heart
when first the anguish fell.

Charlotte: A physician was sent for. She begged him to say how long he thought she might live. He reluctantly admitted that life was ebbing fast. She thanked him for his truthfulness and he departed. Ere long, the restlessness of approaching death appeared and she was borne to the sofa. Seeing I could scarcely restrain my grief, she said: Take courage Charlotte, take courage! Her faith never failed, and her eye never dimmed till about two o'clock....

Anne: Should death be standing at the gate,
thus should I keep my vow,
but hard whate'er my future....

(She dies. CHARLOTTE gets up slowly and goes to the centre. A clock ticks).

Charlotte: I got home a little before eight o'clock. All was clean and bright, waiting for me. Papa and the servant were well, and all received me with an affection which should have consoled. I left Papa and went into the dining-room. I shut the door. I tried to be glad that I was come home; but the house was silent - the rooms were all empty. A sense of desolation and bitterness took possession of me. In the daytime, effort and occupation aid me, but when evening darkens, something within my heart revolts against the burden of my solitude; the sense of loss and want grows almost too much for me. As to the night, could I do without bed, I would never seek it. Waking I think, sleeping I dream of them, and I CANNOT RECALL them as they were in health. Still they appear to me in sickness and suffering. But all this bitterness MUST be tasted. Perhaps the palate will grow used to the draught in time, and find its flavour less acrid. This pain MUST be undergone. Its poignancy, I trust, will be blunted, one day.

(Fade to black. A great wind builds, and a billowing mist. (smoke gun) Out of the wind a voice is heard).

Voice:Jane....Jane....Jane....Jane

(Through the mist, the figure of ROCHESTER emerges, blind and maimed. JANE goes to him).

Jane: Mr. Rochester! Give me your hand sir. Let me guide you.

Rochester: What is this? What sweet madness has seized me?

Jane: My dear master, I am Jane Eyre.

Rochester: Jane?

Jane: I have found you.

Rochester: My living Jane?

Jane: Do you doubt me sir? You touch me: I am not cold like a corpse, nor vacant like the wind.

Rochester: These are her limbs, and these her features!

Jane: I have come back to you.

(She leads him down to the front).

Charlotte: Mr. Nicholls and I were married, on 31st March 1854. We knew a few brief moments of happiness. My fourth novel 'Villette' had been published. I was widely acclaimed. I had made the acquaintance of Harriet Martineau, Thackeray and Mrs. Gaskell...

(Fade to Blackout).

(The sound of rain dripping after a heavy storm. Light comes up on NICHOLLS and PAPA as they were at the beginning of the play).

Nicholls: In the autumn of that year, when Charlotte was expecting our first child, we took a walk on the moors, as was our custom, but we were caught in a rainstorm. Charlotte took a chill. She appeared to have thrown it off, but early in the new year, she developed a high fever. She could neither eat, nor sleep. She suffered for three months, and on the last day of March, she died.

Papa: I held the livings of Hartshead, Thornton and Haworth. I begat six children. But all that is gone. I am left with nothing but fading memories....

(Light comes up on CHARLOTTE, EMILY and ANNE, grouped on the steps, and BRANWELL behind them in the pulpit).

Emily: *(Sings).* ***Cold in the earth
and deep snow piled above thee;
far, far removed,
Cold in the dreary grave;
have I forgot
my only love to love thee?
Severed at last
by time's all-wearing wave.***

Sisters: *Cold in the earth,
and fifteen wild Decembers,
from those brown hills
have melted into spring;
faithful indeed
is the spirit that remembers,
after such years
of change and suffering.*

(Light fades on all except NICHOLLS).

Nicholls: I lingered round them under that benign sky, watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listening to the soft wind, breathing through the grass, and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers, in that quiet earth.

(Fade).

THE END