



The Dark Widow

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Dramatization of Anne Brontë's "*The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*"

by Christian Lanciai (2013, translated 2018)

Dramatis personae:

Rose Markham
Gilbert Markham
their mother
Reverend Millward, vicar
Eliza Millward, his daughter
Lawrence
Helen Graham
Jane Wilson
Arthur Huntingdon
Annabella Wilmot
Uncle Wilmot
Grimsby
Hattersley
Lord Lowborough
Rachel
Walter Hargrave
Millicent Hargrave, his wife
Arthur Huntingdon junior
A doctor

The action is in England in the 1820s.

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Act I scene 1.

Rose Welcome home, dear brother! How does it feel to have become a patron?

Markham Honestly, it feels like coming home. It will be nice to get settled at last.

Rose Everyone speaks about you and has great expectations of your most welcome addition to our small community.

Markham Are there many new members here that I don't know?

Rose I actually invited a few, so that you could feel really at home from the start. I don't know if you know Mr Lawrence, who should be your closest colleague.

Markham The owner of the old manor of Wildfell Hall?

Rose He doesn't live there any more. He settled for a more convenient residence closer to his lands and with better facilities.

Markham Still I got the impression of someone staying at Wildfell Hall, although it looked rather neglected.

Rose So there is. He has let it. His lodger is a young widow with a small son seven years old. She is at least doing something about the garden.

Markham Is it anyone we know?

Rose Her name is Helen Graham. No one knows anything about her, wherefore everyone speculates in her story. She is always dressed in black and appears very reserved. She doesn't even go to church.

Markham What does the vicar feel about that?

Rose I presume he will remind her of it by some courtesy visit. Then we shall probably see more of her.

Markham Will he insist on her going to church although she might not want to?

Rose I hardly think so, but the church is the best social place. Only there everyone can meet everyone. Anyone who risks not going to church will risk becoming a permanent outsider.

Markham But that is perhaps what she wants. *(a doorbell)*

Rose That must be Eliza Millward. She just comes here to gossip, since she knows everything about everyone. I warn you. She is keen on marriage. *(goes to open the door)*

Mother More tea, Gilbert?

Markham I had better brace myself for all possible visits of celebrities from the neighbourhood. But you can relax, mother. I am not in the least interested in marriage.

Mother You should never be eager about such things. Let it come in peace and quiet with maturity. If it comes, it will come naturally.

(enter Rose with the vicar and Eliza, his daughter)

Eliza (immediately rushing on Markham) How nice to see you again, Gilbert! It's several years ago! Imagine that you have returned!

Markham I had no choice. Our father wanted me to take over the estate.

Millward I am glad that you have assumed the responsibility. You will grow with the task.

Markham I am sure I will.

Mother Some tea, reverend?

Millward Yes, please.

Eliza (to Rose) Imagine, that Jane Wilson tried to make Mrs Graham's acquaintance without getting a word out of her!

Rose Is she declining?

Eliza Not at all, just closed up like a clam. She must be carrying some deep secret sorrow. Father promised to go there and speak with her.

Millward She already lived here for quite some time, and such a young and beautiful widow should be taken care of, so that she one day might get over her grief. I intended to discreetly tempt her to come to church, so that she might at least see us. So far no one here has hardly seen her at all.

Rose Except Mr Lawrence.

Millward For good reasons. *(the doorbell)*

Rose That must be him. *(goes for the door)*

Markham The last time I saw him he was as unbearable as I, but that was long ago.

Millward He has also grown with his task as a patron.

(enter Rose with Lawrence)

Rose Gilbert, meet your colleague.

Markham *(rising to greet Lawrence)* I almost can't recognize you.

Lawrence That's mutual. So you have at last come back home. Congratulations.

Markham It's for the family, and they have immediately put me on trial by inviting the whole village just to expose me.

Lawrence It's not as risky as it seems. All gossip is innocent, since no one means any harm by just talking. The only dangerous intrigues are those that end up in marriage.

Markham I agree. So you are still a bachelor?

Lawrence A confirmed one, and there is no one that even appeals to me.

Eliza That's why so many try.

Lawrence You are not pestering me.

Markham But what is this about your lodger? Everyone speaks about her although no one knows anything about her or maybe for that very reason.

Lawrence She came for a refuge from her past, and I could offer one. Thanks to that, our old family residence will not fall into unrecognizable decay.

Eliza All are so curious about her. What do you know about her?

Lawrence Nothing.

Eliza If you didn't know anything about her you took a risk, or was it charity?

Millward If she asked for a safe place to find refuge in, no one has any right to importune. I shall pay her a Christian visit of courtesy in an effort to get her to church. If I succeed I believe we could get her into our community.

Rose Good luck, vicar.

Mother Our vicar is always successful.

(They have tea. Lawrence is the first to give thanks and leave.)

Scene 2. Helen's study.

Lawrence Are you sure you are all right here?

Helen I couldn't have it better.

Lawrence But it is worn down and almost ramshackle, there is a draught everywhere, and this is actually the only room that can keep warm.

Helen That's why I arranged my study here.

Lawrence It pleases me that you can sell some paintings.

Helen I wish I could be self-sufficient on my art.

Lawrence One day, perhaps...

Helen (*has thrown a glance out the window*) Here he comes again, that nosy young man!

Lawrence Shall I drive him away?

Helen It's not necessary. He is accompanied by his sister. But you had better leave.

Lawrence I will disappear at once. (*leaves*)

Helen Does my case have to raise such an epidemic curiosity everywhere? I thought I could live in peace here, but even in the smallest village in the county, everyone has to turn his attention on the only outsider.

(*a knock. She opens.*)

Markham Sorry to be importuning again, Mrs Graham.

Rose My brother's walks always seem to pull him in this direction.

Helen It doesn't matter. I almost never have any visits anyway, but you must excuse the mess.

Markham (*looking around amazed*) I didn't know you were a painter.

Helen This is the only room that keeps warm. You will have to do with it. I can impossibly receive guests in any other room because of the draught.

Markham I am impressed.

Rose We missed you at our party on Saturday. You were the only one missing.

Helen I know. I apologize for my discourtesy, but I don't like parties.

Markham Why not?

Helen They are so artificial. All conceal themselves behind rubbish. Only superficiality is permitted. And you see through them all and are depressed by their hypocrisy.

Markham So you are too deep for ordinary people.

Helen Not at all. I just don't want to partake in any conceit.

Rose No one has any secrets in our village. Everyone knows everything about everyone.

Helen So I am the only one to have one, and the more reason then to keep away, since I don't want to exhibit myself.

Markham That must make everyone even more curious about you. Won't you tell your story?

Helen Never in my life. Pardon me. I must give my maid instructions for the day. (*hurries out*)

Rose You shouldn't press her.

Markham She must have some very interesting secrets indeed.

Rose Be patient. They should come out eventually.

Markham But how she paints! Who could believe it? An artist in our midst! And she knows her art. (*studies the paintings*)

Rose I thought it was just a hobby of hers, but I heard that she is even selling them.

Markham No wonder. These landscapes are well up to Constable standards. And here are some portraits as well. Have you seen the boy? (*finds a child portrait*)

Rose Yes. It is very much like him.

Markham (*finds one painting after the other with increasing interest*) And here is probably a family portrait. (*finds a picture of the boy with another man*)

Helen (*happens to enter coincidentally*) Put that one away!

Markham Sorry, but could it possibly be your former husband?

Helen That is no business of yours! (*snatches it from him and puts it away, hiding its front*)

Rose (*to Markham*) We had better leave. (*to Helen*) Please excuse us, but my brother is so impulsive. He meant no harm.

Markham On the contrary. I admire your art. Can you live on it?

Helen Not yet, but I hope to in time. Thanks for the visit. My son is coming home shortly, and I need to take care of him.

Rose As befits a good mother. Come, Gilbert. Please pardon our intrusion once more.

Helen It doesn't matter. I am used to it. Welcome back some other time.

Markham Thank you, we will be glad to. (*sincerely*) I sincerely apologize if I touched on any matter of delicacy.

Helen Thank you, Gilbert. You merely stumbled. That's human. Goodbye. (*Rose and Markham politely take their leave.*)

Markham (*outside*) She called me Gilbert!

Helen (*smiling*) What a card! I just hope he doesn't become even more intrusive. (*sits down by her easel*)

Scene 3. A tea party.

Eliza As usual everyone is here except the mysterious Miss.

Jane Wilson Why do you call her Miss?

Eliza Honestly speaking, I don't think she ever was married.

Jane But she is wearing the tokens of a widow.

Eliza Is she? I think that's only to protect herself against curiosity and intrusion.

Jane What do you really think?

Eliza I heard strange rumours about her. Her so called husband appears to still be alive and living under a totally different name. It seems as if she has run away from him.

Jane I dare say!

Millward Don't sit there gossiping about what you don't have the slightest knowledge, girls.

Jane We are only speculating.

Eliza Here is Gilbert at last. What news, Gilbert? Have you seen her again?

Markham Several times. I haven't gained her confidence but well enough her son's. She seems to have brought him up by singular methods. Among other things she has impressed a total aversion against wine in him.

Millward Against wine? That can't be very healthy.

Markham Exactly my opinion as well.

Eliza But why on earth?

Markham You might well ask. She only gives him wine when he is sick as medicine, and she puts salt in it to make it even more disgusting.

Millward Wine is the best medicine there is, and usually the patient grows so fond of it, if the illness lasts long enough, that it could lead to addiction. This is especially common with elderly gentlemen when their medicine has advanced from wine to whisky. Then they never stop drinking whisky when needed. Usually you put some sugar in the medicine to make it more easily go down with children. This is the first time I hear of the contrary.

Rose Perhaps she has her reasons.

Eliza Here is Lawrence now. Lawrence, as usual we are discussing your mysterious lodger.

Lawrence What about her?

Eliza That's what we wonder, and the less we know, the more there are rumours.

Lawrence What kind of rumours?

Eliza Tell us about the picture, Gilbert.

Markham When I was there with my sister we saw her study. I was very impressed. I found a picture of her son with, as I assume, her late husband. When I saw it she was terribly upset and put the picture out of sight.

Eliza What did the man look like?

Millward Eliza!

Markham A good-looking healthy young man with something roguish about his character and an enigmatic smile that could mean anything.

Eliza Like what?

Markham Knavery, practical jokes, secret calculation, ridicule, disdainful scorn or something like superiority.

Eliza Was it her husband, Lawrence?

Lawrence I don't know. I haven't seen the picture.

Eliza But you if anyone should know something about her.

Lawrence Why?

Eliza Because she is your lodger. You don't lease your house to someone without investigating who she is, do you?

Lawrence She had enough credible references.

Eliza So you know something.

Lawrence I know her uncle.
Eliza At least something.
Lawrence Are you interested in her, Gilbert?
Markham Why so? Are you jealous?
Lawrence (short laugh) Not at all. But I didn't think she was your type.
Markham No one is my type. We are like each other on that point.
Lawrence So far. Who knows when one of us will fall. I don't think I will be the first one.
Markham Neither will I. Shall we bet?
Lawrence Agreed!
Markham The first one to fall will invite the other to his wedding.
Lawrence If it's me you will be my best man as well.
Markham Agreed! And vice versa!
Millward You seem to have departed from the subject. Perhaps weddings are more important than black widows.
Jane We don't even know if she is a widow.
Rose What else would she be?
Eliza We only know that she appears as a widow.
Millward Then we have no right to assume that she isn't.
Lawrence All I know for certain about her is that she moved here to be left in peace.
Jane In peace of what?
Rose The curiosity of neighbours.
Eliza That's why she makes us so curious.
Jane And she is terribly intriguing to speculate about.
Millward Let's leave her in peace now and pass to merrier subjects. Is it you that baked the cake, Jane?
Markham It's our mother who contributed the scones.
Millward The best scones of our neighbourhood, our very speciality.
Rose Help yourselves! The recipe will remain secret.
Lawrence The attraction of secrets only lasts as long as they remain secret.
Millward Bang on, Lawrence!

(They have tea.)

Act II scene 1. Some rocks by the sea.

Helen (the first to appear on top) Thanks for bringing me here, Gilbert. I always desired to reach this place since all my motives at home are long since used up.
Markham (coming after) It was a privilege to show you the way.
Helen Why?
Markham I admire your art. Now I have succeeded in contributing to its development by opening doors to you for new motives.

Helen I am actually no real artist. I started painting for serious as a kind of therapy to escape the humdrum daily routines.

Markham May I ask you something?

Helen That depends on what it is.

Markham No danger. I just wonder why you chose such a large and bleak house, when you only use a few small rooms, while the greater part of the rookery is left to remain empty and desert as haunted mansion.

Helen I am fond of large spaces. I can use the many empty rooms for storage when needed. When it is raining, little Arthur can run around there playing, when he can't go out. And I like the position. It's both close to the village and is properly detached from it.

Markham You like seclusion. Don't you like company at all?

Helen To a limited extent. I wish to avoid the wrong kind of people, and in larger company they are unfortunately unavoidable. Your coterie in the village is quite enough, but I wouldn't like to be in the vicinity when they are all together.

Markham Why?

Helen I already answered that.

Markham Who has harmed you to the extent that you can't bear with people?

Helen Check yourself, Mr Markham. You are now going too far.

Markham I beg your pardon, but the only life there is, is with people. Lonesomeness is no life.

Helen I am never alone. I have my son, and I have nature. They are my universe where I can thrive. One or two may visit me in this universe sometimes, but no one may inflict on it.

Markham That's the last thing I wish to do. Do you remember our latest conversation?

Helen About literature?

Markham You expressed a wish to some day be able to read Walter Scott's "Marmion". I happen to have it with me.

Helen What do you mean?

Markham I beg the honour of honouring you by it as a humble present.

Helen You don't mean to say that you acquired it for my sake?

Markham Yes, I did.

Helen I can impossibly accept it.

Markham Why? You haven't read it, and you wished to have it.

Helen I can only receive it if I may pay for it.

Markham Then it's no present any longer but just a delivery. I was hoping that you would graciously accept my friendly gesture.

Helen I cannot owe you any debt of gratitude.

Markham You don't have to.

Helen And you have no further intentions by your gift?

Markham I assure you.

Helen You worry me.

Markham That's not my intention.
Helen I accept it, but no further gifts, please.
Markham The grace of your friendship is all that I ask for.
Helen You have done so much for my son. He has accepted you with all his confidence. I am more grateful for that than for your present.
Markham We enjoy ourselves together.
Helen That's what he needs. (*turns away*) He never had a real father.
Markham (*controls himself*) I can never become more to him than just a friend, but that is maybe enough.
Helen It is more than enough. Come, it's time to turn back. We mustn't add more fuel to the village gossip. (*He helps her on her feet. For a moment he holds her in his arms but immediately releases her.*)
Markham I invited Lawrence to come with us, but he declined. Why?
Helen Ask him.
Markham Does he hold anything against you?
Helen No. He only wishes to keep a distance.
Markham A wise landlord.
Helen That's why I can go on living here – so far.
Markham We will all protect you.
Helen Thank you, but it isn't necessary. My son is the only protector I need. (*They start slowly to turn back.*)

Scene 2. Yet another tea party.

Eliza I feel sorry for Gilbert.
Jane Why?
Eliza He allows himself to be blindly fooled.
Jane What do you mean?
Eliza (*lower*) More and more the truth about that so called widow is starting to appear. Haven't you noticed that her son is like Mr Lawrence?
Jane (*observing Lawrence, who is in the company*) What are you saying?
Eliza Why does Mrs Graham keep so secretive? There can only be one reason. She has something to hide. She is not only escaping from her past but also from herself and her sins.
Rose I hear you, dear friends. No matter how carefully I study our widow's son and Mr Lawrence, I can't see any resemblance except between him and his mother. On the contrary, there are other traits that don't belong to any of them.
Jane Your speculations are blind, Eliza, because you desire Gilbert yourself and therefore have grown jealous of his contact with the black widow.
Eliza Here he is now. Forget what I said.
Jane Never, until we know the truth.

Millward How come, Mr Lawrence, that you and your lodger never appear at our parties? When she joins our excursions and surprise us by really appearing at our parties you are absent, and when you are here she never comes. I hope there is no problem between the two of you?

Lawrence On the contrary. I respect her as much as she respects me.

Jane Eliza claims that her son shows some likeness to you. I don't agree with her.

Lawrence (laughing dryly) That's the most stupid thing I ever heard.

Markham Honestly speaking, Lawrence, there is something between you. What have you to hide? Are you ashamed of your contact with her since you don't want it to show?

Lawrence There is nothing to suspect, Gilbert, I assure you. Others are concerned and worried about your courtship of her. I can also assure you that there is nothing for you there.

Markham We are just friends. I admire her art.

Lawrence And you give her presents.

Markham Only one. She made me promise not to give her any more.

Lawrence There you are.

Markham What is your hold on her?

Lawrence You are on the wrong track. If you are jealous, there is no reason for it. I am only her landlord.

Markham But why did she come to you when there are hundreds of better and cheaper derelict places than yours?

Lawrence Her aunt recommended me.

Markham Was it so simple?

Lawrence Leave her in peace, Gilbert, for her and for your own sake.

Markham So she is in some sort of peril. Then I can never leave her in peace from my protection.

Lawrence We all want to protect her.

Markham But against what invisible danger? Only you can know something about it.

Lawrence It's enough that she knows about it. No one else wants to know about it.

Markham You only make her more mysterious.

Lawrence We all have our own problems. Let her mind her own, and mind your own.

Markham My only problem is she.

Lawrence Forget it.

Rose He means, that his only problem is love.

Lawrence The more reason to forget all about it.

Markham Impossible. *(rises and leaves)*

Lawrence (to Rose) Is it that bad?

Rose It only gets worse. He can't get her out of his mind.

Lawrence (seriously) Then it is serious.

Rose And it doesn't pass.

Lawrence I see. I must let her know.

Rose And if it is mutual? Could it amount to something?

Lawrence Impossible.

Jane (*who has been eavesdropping*) So her husband is still alive.

Lawrence (*regarding her almost in shock*) Do you want to chase her out of here?

Eliza On the contrary. We only want to help her, if possible.

Rose Whatever she has been through, we all sympathize with her for the sake of her dark sorrow, and we all want to protect her.

Lawrence Thanks, Rose and Eliza. I also don't think anyone here wishes her any harm, thank goodness. But I must keep her informed about what you are saying about her.

Jane (*meaningly*) It is your duty as her landlord.

Lawrence (*objectively and seriously*) So it is.

Rose I think tea is served.

Millward Take your seats, ladies and gentlemen! Those absent will have to blame themselves.

Jane (*meaningly*) The fewer the absentees, the more they are noticed.

Rose Stop speculating now, Jane. You are only dragging us all out into deep water, getting even too deep.

Eliza Abysmal depths have always been irresistibly attractive, and the deepest depth is in the ocean. Mrs Graham sometimes brings Gilbert along to it.

Rose Quiet, Eliza. She paints the sea, not the depth.

Eliza But she if anyone goes into depth.

Rose And that's no business of ours. Come now.

(*They join the table.*)

Scene 3. Wildfell Hall.

There is a knock. Helen opens. It's Markham.

Helen Oh, there you are again.

Markham (*indicates the canvases*) I see that you are making progress.

Helen I try to. Come in.

Markham You must excuse my constantly more importuning courtship, but I must be allowed to speak with you.

Helen Has anything happened?

Markham Once more your absence was more than palpably felt at our latest gathering, while Lawrence was present.

Helen And?

Markham I suffer from what I hear about you.

Helen I don't.

Markham Have you grown so accustomed to it?

Helen I know that they don't know what they are talking about.

Markham It's so obvious that it's all lies. They speculate in the wildest fantasies that apparently only I immediately sense to be lies.

Helen Don't bother about them. You shouldn't.

Markham But they harm you!

Helen I can't be more harmed than I am already.

Markham When shall we at last know your secret, which could end all gossip speculations once and for all and make all lies vanish?

Helen Not yet.

Markham When?

Helen When the time is ripe.

Markham How can you be so careless about your own honour?

Helen I don't have any.

Markham Could there be any truth then in what they say?

Helen If you knew the truth about me, Gilbert, you wouldn't come here. That's why you might as well leave and never come back.

Markham I can't allow myself to be turned down. I am too much fond of you for that.

Helen And my son has taken a great liking to you. I am grateful for your friendship and that you care for us, but I beg you to let it remain that way.

Markham I can take anything. No truth could be so terrible that my faith in you would not merely be strengthened thereby.

Helen You are noble.

Markham You are not, if you turn me out.

Helen I must turn you out, for your own sake. The way the spread of rumours about me has developed like an epidemic around here, I will soon not be able to go on living here.

Markham So you wish to escape? Then let me at least defend you!

Helen Could you really without second thoughts stand up for someone against whom everyone nourishes suspicions and disrespect, and make her interests equal to yours? Consider it well. This is serious.

Markham Without doubt, as it would be my honour. And if this is the only impediment between us, *(falls on his knees and spreads his arms with his hat in his hand)* there would be no impediment for you to become my own.

Helen (shocked) Get up! You know as little as the gossips spreading rumours what you are talking about!

Markham (rising) What else could possibly more stand between us? I see no shadows. The past is the past and can never catch you up, if you prepare yourself with me to enter the future. With all respect for your crushingly deep mourning, I can't help or hide the fact that I love you irrevocably and incurably with all my heart.

Helen It's my fault. I have let you go on while I should have checked your courtship from the beginning.

Markham Have you then no feelings for me at all?

Helen I can't answer that.

Markham So there is a response to my feelings.

Helen Leave me now, Gilbert, please. This has gone way too far.

Markham And can never go back.

Helen You are too honest and young and inexperienced. You are entering a bog and can't look ahead. I must beg you to go back. Leave me, Gilbert, for both our sakes.

Markham Only if you promise it will only be temporary.

Helen I promise.

Markham Then I will obey you. (*bows politely and kisses her hand for the first time. She withdraws it almost in terror, as if hit.*)

I am sorry. (*leaves*)

Helen This is terrible. What shall I do? I can't just deny him or what's happened between us. But I hear someone coming up the path. It must be Frederick. (*She rushes to the other door and opens to him.*) Frederick!

Lawrence (entering) Has anything happened?

Helen I am afraid so. What wasn't supposed to happen has happened.

Lawrence What?

Helen I can't live here any longer, Frederick. I must leave.

Lawrence Are you so disturbed by the local gossip?

Helen I thought they would pass, but they only grow worse. And I don't want to have you involved.

Lawrence I am involved already. I should have been more careful.

Helen It has gone too far for us to be able to do anything about it any more. The only solution is that I move.

Lawrence But where will you go? You were protected here. You can never find a more ideal refuge. No one can reach you here.

Helen Except people's minds and speculations, and I had better leave before anything happens.

Lawrence What could happen?

Helen You could get into trouble.

Lawrence I am not afraid of anything, but that's the last thing I fear. (*embraces her, comforting her*) If you are not safe here, you are not safe anywhere. If you move I must move with you. I can't accept that you face some unknown destiny out there. Here I can stand guard for you and protect you, and there are some in the village who are even more eager to do the same. It's only their uncertainty that makes them curious unto rudeness.

Helen And we can't dispel that uncertainty as long as the threat remains.

Lawrence Yes, it's a vicious circle that we must endure. Try to be patient.

Helen But not too long.

Lawrence I'll see what I can do. Come. Let's take a walk.

(*They leave together. He holds her, and she tenderly leans her head on his shoulder.*)

Markham (has stayed all the while and heard everything, sees them now together) So you are still a seducer and deceiver, my dear neighbour and colleague! What do you hold her as? Your sex slave? Your deceit violates all limits. No, this is too much! (*leaves in despair.*)

Scene 4.

Eliza Gilbert hasn't been quite himself lately.

Jane No, he has grown considerably gloomy and almost completely stopped visiting that woman.

Eliza He is lucky to have his work and be able to commit himself to the harvest instead.

Jane Perhaps we are unfair with her. We really know nothing about her.

Eliza Or perhaps he learned the truth about her and has grown to despise her.

Jane I don't think so. There is something else. (*enter Rose*)

Eliza How is your brother, Rose?

Rose Was that supposed to be ironic?

Jane Not at all. We are just concerned about him.

Rose He is working all the time.

Eliza Lucky for him to have his work. Or else he would have gone sour and dried out.

Rose What do you mean?

Jane No one has seen him happy for ages.

Eliza It started after that accident happened to Mr Lawrence.

Jane Is he still confined in bed?

Eliza He keeps constantly indoors and doesn't accept visitors but appears to be sitting up.

Jane What luck that he didn't break any legs!

Rose What are you talking about?

Jane Mr Lawrence had a riding accident. The horse threw him off...

Rose Impossible!

Jane ... and he badly hurt his head. There was blood everywhere but fortunately no legs broken, only a slight concussion but a severe shock. A farmer found him half unconscious and dangerously chilled and took care of him. He has been in a fever since then but fortunately without pneumonia. But it was a near thing. The odd thing is that the horse was still there tied beside him.

Rose Mr Lawrence is too good a rider to be thrown off his horse.

Eliza That's what we all think. We believe someone must have attacked him.

Rose But who and why? And why keep it secret? No one knows anything about it except you, who always know everything.

Eliza He doesn't want to talk about it.

Jane So he is ashamed of his accident.

Eliza If it was an accident.

Jane Here is your brother. Some tea, Gilbert?

Markham (*coming directly from work, worn out*) I am not hungry.

Rose We just talked about Mr Lawrence's accident. Did you know about it, Gilbert?

Markham What accident?

Rose He appears to have been thrown off his horse and found it tied beside him when he woke up.

Markham Then some friendly fellow must have helped him.

Eliza But no further than to the horse. He let the unconscious man remain and get cold.

Rose Not even Mrs Graham knows about this.

Markham He wouldn't like to worry his lodger, I gather. How is he?

Eliza He is gradually recovering and getting better.

Markham That pleases me.

Rose You should pay him a visit.

Markham Never. I leave that to my brother.

Jane Neither do you pay any visits to the dark lady any more.

Markham What concern is that of yours?

Eliza You see. He can't even bear her being mentioned any more. He has had his eyes opened to the fact that she no longer can be mentioned among decent people. You shouldn't have mentioned her, Jane. It's not pleasant for anyone to hear her name.

Markham *(in a rage)* For goodness' sake! *(hits the table with his fist and disappears)*

Rose Now you have gone too far. Get out of here!

Eliza *(getting up with Jane)* You shouldn't have mentioned her, Jane.

Jane As if you didn't trigger the bait!
(They are driven out. Rose closes the door behind them and sighs.)

Scene 5. Wildfell Hall.

Helen What gives me the honour of this visit after so long a silence?

Markham Your son wanted me to visit you.

Helen So you came unwillingly?

Markham Indeed, and actually only for your son's sake, whose innocence outweighs all the guilt in the world.

Helen Still he has passed through the same as I and perhaps been even more harmed by it than I. The future will show. That is why he is so precocious.

Markham I decided to come to give you one last chance.

Helen So this is our last encounter.

Markham Yes. I was surprised to learn at the village that you hadn't been informed of your landlord's accident.

Helen Neither he has been here for quite a long time.

Markham And you have no idea why?

Helen I heard that he was confined to bed in a severe cold.

Markham So he hasn't given you any details?

Helen No. Is there any connection between your mutual long term absence?

Markham Indeed there is. Last time I was here I saw him come for a visit immediately after I had left you. I then remained to perhaps learn something about your relationship by discreetly spying on you. I learned enough. Unfortunately, my lady, I had irrefutable confirmation, that all that has been said about you in the village is true. I hardly need to know anything more about you. My last curiosity concerns only the question how long this has been going on, if he has a hold on you or the contrary, and if you have brought more unsuspecting young men down by deception with more men than him.

Helen Now I understand your total transformation after your devoted declaration of love last time. It's partly my own fault, who didn't take you in my confidence earlier, but I must insist on assuring you, that it was never my intention to bring you into false apprehensions, even if this was the regrettable result of a mountain of misunderstandings, which it must be my painful duty to dispel.

Markham What was my misunderstanding?

Helen Everything. But you actually only made yourself guilty of one of the most common of human weaknesses and mistakes, namely to jump to conclusions.

Markham If I made any mistake, I must beg you to correct me.

Helen Let the word stand for the sake of safety, that this is the last time we meet. (*brings forth a notebook*) This is my diary during my entire marriage. Read it, and judge me afterwards.

Markham You never said a word about your husband.

Helen Because he is still alive. You will find all you need to know about him in these sheets.

Markham My lady, I will respectfully keep your confidence and partake of your confession with an effort at as just a detachment as possible. It pleases me that I haven't found you defenceless after the comprising circumstances in which I last found you. – You are smiling?

Helen Pardon me. It wasn't at you. You will understand.

Markham I sincerely hope so.

Helen You had better leave now. And thanks for giving me a last chance.

Markham Thank your son, my lady. Only his innocence forced me back to you. (*leaves without anything further.*)

Helen Poor man of no experience! He can't guess my son's background. He can't guess at anything.

Act III scene 1. A fashionable ball in London.

Huntingdon I have made a fool of myself again, Annabella.

Annabella That's no news. You always do.

Huntingdon Not when I win.

Annabella When did you win last time?

Huntingdon I don't remember.

Annabella There you are.

Huntingdon I should find myself a rich widow, who could support me for the rest of my life.

Annabella Most of them are too old for you.

Huntingdon Are there no young ones?

Annabella Not widows. Only heiresses.

Huntingdon That will do as well, if only they are not ugly. Do you have anyone in mind?

Annabella Several. But they are particular and kept close by their fathers. Most of them leave the decision to their parents. But I know one who only has an aunt who could stand in your way.

Huntingdon Do I know her?

Annabella She is here tonight. She is hard beset by her aunt's aged sloths of squeamish whimperers. If the aunt gets her way, her niece will be married to such a dullard.

Huntingdon I understand that would be a waste. Do you see her?

Annabella She is sitting over there.

Huntingdon (*sharpening his eyes*) A beauty. I know who she is. My father knew her uncle.

Annabella You redeem humanity if you save her from being trapped by impotence.

Huntingdon I will try my luck. (*approaches Helen, who now becomes visible, radiant and young in glorious white*) May I have the honour?

Helen (*gaily*) With whom have I the honour?

Huntingdon Arthur Huntingdon, at your service. My father was a good friend of your uncle's.

Helen Of course, I recognize the name! I thought I would be a wallflower all evening. (*They go off in a waltz.*)

Wilmot (*to Annabella*) Who has young Arthur Huntingdon caught this time?

Annabella The niece of one of his father's friends.

Wilmot She is beautiful. Is she well off?

Annabella Enough.

Wilmot It's time for Arthur to get out of his rake's progress. At the same time we'll miss him if he gets married.

Annabella He needs an anchor. Or else he will just drift around.

Wilmot Do you think an anchor could hold him?

Annabella That's the question.

(*Huntingdon and Helen return to sit down rather out of breath.*)

Huntingdon I hope I didn't make you lose your breath.

Helen It was just fun.

Huntingdon Imagine that we never met before.

Helen I have heard about you, and your reputation is not one of the best.

Huntingdon I know. I am known to indulge myself. But so did your uncle in his youth.

Helen He has forgotten all about it by now.

Huntingdon How old are you?

Helen Not a courteous question. I am not even twenty yet.

Huntingdon Then I am only ten years older. Am I too old for you?

Helen Not in comparison. (*indicates old Boarham*)

Huntingdon You would suit me perfectly. You are young and gay and come from a good family. I like you, and you are not stupid either, like most of your age.

Helen Aren't you a bit too fast?

Huntingdon On the contrary. I try to halt myself at last.

Helen If you are already thirty, why haven't you married yet?

Huntingdon I haven't found the right one.

Helen Have you been searching for her?

Huntingdon Yes, and I found her at once.

Helen Why then didn't you settle for her?

Huntingdon I haven't had time. You are too fast for me.

Helen You are not a little cheeky, but I like your direct honesty.

Huntingdon You are the most respectable young lady I can see here tonight, while I am the contrary. I have led a wild bachelor's life all my life and abandoned myself to reckless indulgencies. I drink and gamble like no one else. Do you still want to keep my acquaintance?

Helen As long as you are honest.

Huntingdon That's my only quality then. So you don't reject me?

Helen Not directly.

Huntingdon What about resuming the dance?

Helen You couldn't have come with a better proposition.

Annabella Now he will never let her go.

Wilmot It all starts well and ends up badly.

Annabella But she might be just the right one for him.

Wilmot If she is he will ruin her.

Annabella I don't think she is ruined that easily.

Wilmot We'll see. I don't believe in happy marriages.

Annabella Any marriage with any of those old suitors she has accumulated would have been unhappier than with him.

Wilmot That's what you think. The advantage of old suitors is that they die soon. Arthur will not die until he has ruined everyone in his way.

Annabella You are inviting the devil, uncle.

Wilmot No, he is already present.

Annabella We'll see. I think there is hope for Helen.

Wilmot But not for Arthur.

(The ball continues, and Helen is happy with Huntingdon.)

Scene 2.

Huntingdon I am glad you didn't turn me down, Helen.

Helen How could I? You would never have accepted a refusal.

Huntingdon Was it difficult to overcome your aunt's and uncle's resistance?

Helen My aunt was difficult. She has always warned me.

Huntingdon I know that I am incorrigible.

Helen Still I think you are capable of loving, which saves you.

Huntingdon Do you think so?

Helen I know it. That was my strongest argument against my aunt, and she finally resigned and let my father decide.

Huntingdon Do you have any contact with your father?

Helen None at all. When mother died she turned us over to my aunt and uncle. My father had no say and couldn't refuse my marriage. Have your friends objected to your abandoning your wild bachelor's life?

Huntingdon Indeed they have! They will never forgive me! Wild protests everywhere! All they can offer is curses and reprimands! There is neither one single wish of good fortune for me nor one single nice word about you. They regard you as my evil genius that forever has enslaved me in the heaviest leaden chains of virtue in hell, which I will never be able to tear myself away from. I have become a hopeless case to them, and all they can do is to sadly shake their heads. No happy days and glorious nights any more, and my horrifying example will inevitably result in others of our brotherhood turning on the same nightmare road, and it's all my fault, who is the first one to break the chain, especially since I was the soul and heart and life of the society, who now shamefully has betrayed their confidence...

Helen You can meet them again whenever you like. I will never stand in their way or yours.

Huntingdon Are you sure?

Helen Honestly speaking, I might as well do without your poor abandoned friends and you, when you are with them.

Huntingdon Then you are the ideal wife. For me, it is 'all for love, or the world is lost'. Let them all go to hell if they insist, where they doubtlessly belong. If you knew how they have abused you, you would love me the more for having dared so much for your sake. That fool Hattersley is the funniest of them, who swears revenge and to throw himself away on the first old maid whose hooks he will come across. Some friends!

Helen Honestly speaking, I don't think they ever were very good for you.

Huntingdon But we did have lots of fun, even if it cost many bitter awakenings the day after with headaches for a lifetime... But now we must celebrate our wedding and have a real ball! Our wedding must be the happiest of them all, with unlimited supplies of champagne! (*lifts her up and whirls around with her*)

Helen Put me down, Arthur! You make me dizzy!

Huntingdon That's my intention! And it's nothing to what's expecting you! (*puts her down and kisses her.*)

Helen Not yet!

Huntingdon Rubbish! (*whirls around with her again and makes her laugh as well.*)

Scene 3. The rogues' nest.

Grimsby This is a terrible disaster, mildly speaking, to say the least.

Wilmot You said it.

Hattersley Now even Lowborough has fallen.

Wilmot I don't believe it. For half a year he has said he would stop gambling and drinking, and still he has come back each time.

Hattersley But now he is going to marry.

Grimsby It's that Huntingdon's fault. Why the devil should he go crushing for that dame? If there is too much of anything in this world, it's petticoat influence.

Hattersley But we need our ladies.

Grimsby For what except the demands of nature? No, it's they that need us, they need to suck our blood and strength out of us, because they don't have any of their own, they need us to make children because they can't make any by themselves, and they need us for our money, which they themselves can but waste and squander.

Wilmot Here is our friend Huntingdon.

Grimsby Arthur, you traitor, how could you willingly sacrifice your freedom for a life sentence in prison?

Huntingdon You don't know her. She is tolerant. She will allow me my friends and pleasures in peace. I can go on as usual. You need not worry. Or else I would never have gone for her.

Wilmot Even your mistresses?

Huntingdon We'll see. If she doesn't satisfy me, I will need emergency exits.

Hattersley She is actually rather beautiful. I envy you, Arthur. You got the best and the most beautiful one.

Grimsby Beauty is the most treacherous of traps, where the devil himself is lurking in the ant lion pit.

Huntingdon You all seem to consider me hopelessly lost.

Grimsby You are.

Wilmot My niece had such hopes for you.

Huntingdon Take it easy, Wilmot. I will not let her go.

Grimsby But look who turns up just at the right moment! We were just going to start the activity. We were only waiting for you.

Lowborough (*comes in*) It's the last time.

Hattersley That's what you always say.

Grimsby Pour him a glass. He will need it, since he is going to marry.

Hattersley Is it true?

Grimsby Regrettably.

Huntingdon Who is the happy or unhappy one?

Lowborough When you discarded Annabella, I had to take care of her.

Huntingdon You don't say!

Lowborough Yes.

Huntingdon Is it true, Wilmot?

Wilmot My niece has accepted, and she is the one who tried to persuade our friend here not to see us any more just for a revenge on you.

Huntingdon She wouldn't let me go that easily, I expect. You will allow me to carry on seeing her, won't you, Sylvester?

Lowborough Who could stop you?

Grimsby Arthur's wife!

Huntingdon Never in my life!

Grimsby Let me refill your glass, my dear lord Lowborough.

Lowborough This is my last time of drinking.

Wilmot So you always say. I had hopes for your wife as well, Arthur, but you anticipated me.

Huntingdon And I am thirty years younger. Don't you think that had some bearing on the case?

Wilmot Never in my life!

Grimsby The older you grow, the more difficult the desire. With ladies it's the opposite. The older they grow, the more repulsive. How could nature be so unfair? That's why old men, the older they grow, constantly need younger women.

Hattersley What about the game?

Grimsby Right'o! Start dealing, Huntingdon!

Lowborough This is the last time I gamble.

Hattersley That's what you always say.

Grimsby Let him have his last time once more.

Wilmot And then another, so that he feels like coming for another.

Lowborough (*empties his glass*) I promise you, this is the last time!

Grimsby (*refills his glass*) We believe you.

Lowborough You must take me seriously.

Wilmot Of course.

Grimsby How is she really in bed, Arthur? Tell us something about it.

Huntingdon Better than most, especially for being so inexperienced.

Grimsby You don't mean to say that she was a virgin?

Huntingdon Do you think I would have taken her otherwise? Why do you think I left Annabella?

Lowborough Don't you dare denigrate my wife!

Huntingdon I didn't.

Lowborough Yes, you did!

Huntingdon Is it mean to say that she is good in bed? Isn't that rather a compliment?

Grimsby Stop it, boys. We don't want any fight here again. We had enough of that before.

Lowborough He insulted my wife! He has had her before me!

Huntingdon You aren't even married yet.

Wilmot Calm down, Lowborough. You will get married.

Lowborough And then my visits here are finished!

Grimsby We believe you.

Huntingdon Fill up his glass, Wilmot. He will need it. He is getting married.

Grimsby Have you put her in the club yet?

Huntingdon I think so. She doesn't feel very well.

Wilmot You had a long and beautiful honeymoon in France and Italy. It would be odd if that didn't give you inspiration.

Huntingdon At least I can be certain that the child is mine, if there will be one. If you have a child, Sylvester, you can never be sure about that, unless you happen to be impotent, as so many lords are. But in that case you will at least know who isn't the father.

Grimsby Stop it now.

Lowborough (*rising*) Do you wish for a duel?

Huntingdon That will definitely be the last time for you, in that case.

(Wilmot and Grimsby confer and fill up Lowborough's glass.)

Grimsby You had better cool down with a drink, my dear lord.

Lowborough It's the last time! (*empties the glass and throws it vehemently at Huntingdon*)

Huntingdon Hallo there! Wrong weapon! Stick to the rules!

Lowborough Do you prefer a cannon?

Huntingdon Then you would miss even more.

Grimsby Calm down, boys. This is no sand box.

Hattersley Shall we play or not?

Lowborough It's no use, for Huntingdon wins anyway, since he only cheats.

Wilmot What about another drink before you leave, my dear friend?

Lowborough Never in my life! (*leaves in a state of fury*)

Grimsby One bachelor less. Who will be the next casualty?

Hattersley I am afraid it will be me.

Huntingdon It's not as bad as it seems, Hattersley. Marriage changes nothing. You will just have another lady round your neck. That is all.

Hattersley But you can't get rid of her.

Huntingdon That depends.

(The gamble and drink and smoke.)

Scene 3. The kitchen in Grassdale.

Rachel If I may say so, Madame, you never should have married him, but it's too late to say it now.

Helen I didn't know whom I married, or thought I knew and to be sure of him, but he has changed. The one I am married to is not the same man as the man I married.

Rachel Is it his drinking or his friends who have altered him?

Helen I don't know, maybe both, maybe neither. I married of love, and the man I married I loved completely and without reservations, and we had a wonderful honeymoon. Then I became pregnant, and everything changed when I had my child. He couldn't bear with the child, he was disgusted by it and didn't want to see it. Then he started leaving on constantly longer journeys. In the beginning he brought me with him to London but sent me home after a few weeks while he stayed for months and came home swollen up and burnt out from countless orgies with his reckless friends, and I never learned any details about this life of ruthless self-indulgence. And the journeys became more frequent, he came home constantly more worn out and sometimes ill, he complained of everything and I had to cure him to make him a man again, so that he could take up his orgiastic journeys to London again. It has become like a vicious circle.

Rachel You should leave him.

Helen How could I? He would never let me do it. He wants me imprisoned here as his nurse and slave and punchball for him to quarrel with and vent his frustration on.

Rachel If you stay it will only get worse.

Helen But where would I go? My father has died, and I can't burden my aunt with my failure.

Rachel What about your brother?

Helen Even less I wish to become a burden to him. He hasn't come out of his sorrow for our father. When we were together at the funeral he wouldn't let me part with him.

Rachel There at least you have a refuge.

Helen But I can't abandon Arthur. He is ill from his promiscuous life, his gall, his drinking, which he imagines he could cure by drinking more, I can't just let my husband down, that would be the greatest dishonour.

Rachel I think you will have to sooner or later.

Helen If that is so I will wait until later and as late as possible.

Rachel I know that kind of libertines. They pull all others with them in their decay. They grow constantly more pathetic with time while at the same time they grow more and more dependent on care and surveillance, while they only bereave you of your life's energy and give nothing back. They develop into suckers and parasites, and the only thing that can break that vicious circle is their own final death.

Helen You mustn't speak like that, Rachel. This is my husband.

Rachel He is like all other men. Stuck in their own destruction they will never rise again but pull as many others as possible with them in their perdition.

Huntingdon (entering suddenly) What's for dinner today?

Helen Are you better, Arthur, my love?

Huntingdon My appetite is returning.

Helen That pleases me. We will have Rachel's turkey stew in your honour.

Huntingdon Is there any wine left, or do we have to get some more?

Helen You know best about that.

Huntingdon (*entering for real, falling on his knees to Helen*) I am sorry if I have been troublesome, Helen. I haven't been quite myself lately, but I feel better now.

Helen Now I recognize you.

Huntingdon How is our son? I haven't seen him at all today.

Helen Would you like to see him? He is asleep at the moment.

Huntingdon Then it can wait. You must never doubt my love, Helen, whatever happens.

Helen I never did. I only doubted my own.

Huntingdon Why?

Helen You know. When you drink you become another person, like as if some reptile took over your being. And your absence on journeys doesn't make it better. Then you come home fat, worn out and unrecognizable and must be put to bed for a long convalescence, being only good for whining and complaining and bitterly unpleasant. I am tired of your worse part, Arthur.

Huntingdon And I am afraid it's only getting worse. I have to go back to London tomorrow.

Helen (*upset*) What are you saying?

Huntingdon Business.

Helen That's what it always is. What kind of business? Game tables, drinking parties or just ordinary new women?

Huntingdon That's not fair.

Helen I am just asking.

Huntingdon I will not answer such a question.

Helen So you keep secrets to me.

Huntingdon Am I not entitled to some privacy?

Helen Not if you deceive me with others.

Huntingdon Your jealousy is painful.

Helen I am not jealous. I just want to get to know you and not lose you.

Huntingdon Haven't you known me enough? Haven't I loved you unto the absolute consummation by a fortunate childbirth?

Helen And for that I am deeply grateful. But you almost never even want our son.

Huntingdon When he gets older he will perhaps start looking like a human being. Now he is just some crawling vermin shitting around everywhere.

Helen (*smiling*) We are the ones cleaning up after him. You don't have to.

Huntingdon Thank heavens.

Helen But don't go to London.

Huntingdon I must.

Helen How long will you be absent?

Huntingdon Two, maybe three weeks.

Helen That means two, maybe three months.

Huntingdon I will try to improve.

Helen Trying is not enough, Arthur. You *must* improve. Or else the situation becomes untenable.

Huntingdon Who the devil did I really marry?

Helen Me and no one else.

Huntingdon But you try to control my life and obstruct me in my demands of freedom. It wasn't like that when we married.

Helen Then you were always together with me.

Huntingdon Your first denouncement of one of my friends put up the first screen between us.

Helen Because that friend separated you from my son and me.

Huntingdon Enough! I leave tomorrow! (*leaves, banging the door behind him*)

Helen (*crying*) It gets worse every time.

Rachel (*comforting her*) I will stay with Madame as long as she stays with her husband, and when Madame finally runs away, I will run away with her.

Helen Thank you, Rachel. But what will become of our son with such a father? How can he grow up in such an environment?

Rachel If he can't we'll have to see to it that he doesn't.

(*Helen cries, Rachel keeping hold of her and comforting her.*)

Scene 5. A party at Grassdale.

Hargrave Where are all our wives?

Lowborough Out for some fresh air, I gather. Honestly I don't care any more what my wife is doing. She will do as she pleases anyway.

Hargrave Isn't your marriage a happy one?

Lowborough As happy as a marriage could be, outwardly. I really adored her and did everything for her, but obviously I must have spoiled her.

Hargrave Where is she now?

Lowborough Out with Grimsby. Here is now your wife. Her at least you can trust.

Millicent It's so beautiful out in the moonlight, Walter. In here it's so stuffy.

Hargrave Thank you, we are well enough as it is and too comfortable to get up.

Lowborough Have you seen my wife?

Millicent She should be out there somewhere.

Lowborough Huntingdon isn't here either.

Millicent I saw him out there with Grimsby.

Hargrave Here at last is our hostess, as beautiful and sparkling as ever and in her beaming glory even outshining the moon.

Helen (*entering in bright evening dress and sparkling*) There are still some of our guests left here. Most of them have been tempted out into the moonlight. Have you seen my husband?

Millicent I saw him last out there with Grimsby. Come now, Walter. Don't sit still and get dull and heavy. You must come out.

Hargrave You absolutely force me. *(They go out together.)*

Helen Your wife appears to be out there too, Mylord.

Lowborough I am afraid so, but she is probably in good company.

Helen With whom?

Lowborough I don't know. There is always someone.

Helen Shall I get her for you?

Lowborough I guess she is in your beautiful garden arbour.

Helen All alone?

Lowborough That's the question.

Helen Then I'll fetch her for you. *You must not be alone with such a beautiful wife.*

Lowborough (aside) And you don't know how lonely you are with such a fleeting husband.

(Helen goes for the arbour, which becomes visible with Huntingdon and Annabella on a garden bench together. Helen halts when she sees them and keeps herself concealed.)

Annabella This can't go on, Arthur. Rachel suspects us.

Huntingdon She suspects everybody. She lives only for Helen.

Annabella That's what *you* should do.

Huntingdon Never. She bores me and only gets more bothersome with the years.

Annabella You have a child together.

Huntingdon That disgusting pest of a boy, who only cries and defecates and disturbs the environment? I can't bear with his crying.

Annabella Would you rather have done without him?

Huntingdon I would rather never have married. I walked into a wall and got stuck there. It has only brought troubles and worries and restrictions.

Annabella Still you live as liberally as you did before.

Huntingdon Without my escapades in London I couldn't bear with life. You should join me sometime.

Annabella I follow my husband. He doesn't care what I do. Thanks to him we can actually be together in London.

Huntingdon But only periodically and under constant threat of discovery.

Annabella I have a better hold on you than your wife has. I knew you long before you knew her, and it was I who gave her to you. Never forget that.

Huntingdon We knew each other too well in those days. We understood each other too well to marry, since we both realized the other one never could be tamed.

Annabella And we have managed to preserve our freedom even as married.

Huntingdon Your lord has at least provided you with a lot of money.

Annabella While your wife haven't given you anything but her disappointment.

Huntingdon I still love her.

Annabella Do you? I think we will have to elope soon. My lord doesn't think it's fun any more.

Huntingdon That time isn't ripe yet.

Annabella We will have to do with our secret nights in London in the meantime.

Grimsby (entering) I think your husband is looking for you, Annabella. It's better if he doesn't see you here.

Annabella Thanks for the warning. I will immediately go to calm him down.

Huntingdon Follow her in, Grimsby, and say that you have been for a moonlight promenade.

Grimsby I will be glad to. (*leaves with Annabella*)

Huntingdon (smoking) All I need now is a proper whisky grog and a nice lay with Annabella in London. But I guess we'll have to wait for a couple of weeks.

Helen (suddenly standing in front of him. He is surprised.) I heard everything.

Huntingdon Have you been spying?

Helen Her husband sent me out here.

Huntingdon (smoking demonstratively, arrogantly) So what?

Helen It's finished, Arthur. I can't respect you any more, since you have no respect of me.

Huntingdon Are we then not married any more? Can you just strike out our marriage?

Helen Will you let me have our child and what remains of my fortune and let me go?

Huntingdon And where would you go?

Helen Anywhere.

Huntingdon Never in my life!

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

Huntingdon Never, and not even without the child I will let you go. Do you think I would allow myself to be shamed in front of the whole country by your squeamishness? I thought you were tolerant.

Helen I am only thinking of the child's future.

Huntingdon The child stays with me.

Helen You don't even want to know your son.

Huntingdon Not as long as he shits down my clothes. Hopefully he will grow out of it. Then I will take care of his upbringing.

Helen With your drinking friends?

Huntingdon Your influence would be more harmful.

Helen So you compel me to go on living here hated and despised. But from now on we are husband and wife only by name.

Huntingdon Splendid.

Helen I am only your child's mother and your wife – nothing more. You don't have to pretend love any more.

Huntingdon It was true as long as it lasted.

Helen Was it? How could you marry me when you had a relationship with Annabella?

Huntingdon She suggested you. I caught on.

Helen Why?

Huntingdon You had money.

Helen So you only needed money?

Huntingdon I had lost my mother's inheritance on gambling.

Helen And that was all your love, your love of my money?

Huntingdon You looked good and were beautiful. I actually tried to love you.

Helen And you succeeded. My son is the proof thereof. For his sake I will forgive you, if you ever show some remorse.

Huntingdon Remorse for what?

Helen For having deceived your family.

Huntingdon Not for my rogue's life?

Helen That, Arthur, I know you will never regret even if it would kill you. On that point I gave up long ago. (*leaves*)

Huntingdon Damned moralist! (*butts angrily his cigarette, quickly empties a drink and leaves.*)

Act IV scene 1. Grassdale, Huntingdon's friends.

Wilmot Where is that Huntingdon? What is a party without the host?

Hattersley Do you call this a party? We can't even play cards properly.

Grimsby Be grateful for that. Huntingdon would only cheat you out of all your money again.

Hargrave I haven't seen Lord Lowborough here for long. Wasn't he supposed to come here and gamble and drink for the last time?

Grimsby I think he already did his last time. He always returns for another last time when you least expect him to.

Hattersley I think he has grown tired of his wife.

Grimsby She would rather have tired of him. What do you say, Wilmot?

Wilmot Both she and Huntingdon have deceived their better halves. They couldn't keep away from each other.

Hattersley What has Mrs Huntingdon to say about that?

Hargrave She appears to silently bear it and suffer.

Wilmot Here he is at last! Huntingdon, you have fallen behind again! But who is it you have brought with you?

Grimsby Isn't it young master Arthur Huntingdon himself?

Huntingdon (*entering with his son*) I thought it was about time for him to at last become introduced and initiated in the society of great men.

Grimsby Give him something to drink, to get him into shape and out of his shyness.

Huntingdon Drink this, my son. It will do you good.

Arthur What is it?

Grimsby Sugared water. It's called punch.

Arthur (*drinks*) It is good.

Grimsby Have some more.

Hargrave He is only a child.
Huntingdon So what? He must learn sooner or later.
Grimsby Refill his glass. He will soon catch up with us.
Wilmot He is a better drinker than you, Arthur.
Huntingdon I never drink punch, only wine or stronger stuff.
Grimsby Let's see what he would think about whisky. That's pure honey water.
Wilmot Try port instead. It goes down more easily.
Hargrave How is it with your wife, Arthur?
Huntingdon I hardly see her nowadays.
Hattersley Is Annabella better?
Huntingdon She cooperates at least.
Hattersley Not with her husband.
Huntingdon My wife can have him.
Hargrave You don't seem very attached to your wife any more.
Huntingdon Do you want her? You can have her for nothing.
Hargrave Thank you, I have my own wife.
Huntingdon Does nobody want her? I offer her gratis, that bloody slut. She is totally worthless to me.
Grimsby (to the boy) Do you hear what your father calls your mother? Can you repeat it?
Arthur That bloody slut.

(Enter Helen.)

Helen What are you doing? You are not teaching him to drink, are you?
Huntingdon It's never too early, my love. You should have learned it long ago.
Grimsby Dark clouds are gathering. Storm is near.
Arthur They teach me manners, mother.
Helen Their manners are no manners. How can you, gentlemen?
Huntingdon Don't come here ruining the fun. He only had some punch and port. We saved the whisky for later.
Helen You have made him drunk! You make him sick!
Huntingdon When he gets sick he is welcome to your bosom to vomit.
Grimsby They mean no harm, Mrs Huntingdon. They just have some fun with the boy.
Helen The worst evil is the unintentional one that irresponsibly causes irreparable damage. *(advances to take the boy away from them. Huntingdon makes her trip. She falls.)*

All except Hargrave Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! *(laugh their sides off)*

Hargrave (rising) This is going a bit too far. *(takes the boy and carries him to Helen, who gets up)* I apologise, my lady. They make even me ashamed.

Helen Thank you, Hargrave. You at least have still a wife. *(leaves, tenderly hugging little Arthur but can't hide that she is crying)*

Huntingdon That sanctimonious cry baby! Her victim mentality is too pitiable. You just want to kick her.

Hargrave That's what you are doing.

Huntingdon Not yet physically, but that's all that's missing.

Grimsby Why don't you turn her out?

Huntingdon It wouldn't look too good, and she still has some money.

Hargrave Pardon me, gentlemen, but I can't stand with four strong men against a lonely mother with a child. *(breaks up)*

Huntingdon He is soft about her.

Hattersley You shouldn't have made him drunk.

Huntingdon He drank himself and eagerly! He is like his father!

Grimsby It wasn't that bad. He just got a little tipsy.

Huntingdon What a fatal turn of destiny! Now she will see to it that he never touches alcohol again.

Grimsby He will thirst to death. With such a mother he will never become a man.

Huntingdon Well, so far I am still his father. I will get him straight enough!

Wilmot You risk losing both of them.

Huntingdon I already did. I only have their lives still to ruin.

Hattersley You are only ruining your own.

Huntingdon That's my own business. And I will bring whoever I wish with me down the grave. Let's start playing at last and start drinking for real!

Grimsby Bring on the whisky!

Huntingdon The life elixir, that cures all diseases!

Hattersley We could all do with a dram after the irregular interlude.

Huntingdon Exactly! *(fills up their glasses like a good host. They drink and go on drinking and playing and smoking.)*

Scene 2. Helen's study.

Now all in black, she tries to work but cries at the same time.

Helen It doesn't work. My therapy is no good. You can't work when you worry. How shall we get away from here? My husband turns everyone against me, and my son is defenceless.

Huntingdon *(entering without warning)* Have you missed something?

Helen I haven't missed you.

Huntingdon Nothing you mislaid or looked for?

Helen *(uncertain)* No?

Huntingdon *(shows the notebook)* Don't worry. You'll get it back. Very interesting read. Now I know where you stand. You'll never get out of here any more.

Helen Have you taken my diary?

Huntingdon Only borrowed it. Married couples shouldn't have secrets from each other, don't you agree? I just wanted to see what you really thought. At least you haven't started any intriguing yet.

Helen All I ask is to be left in peace.

Huntingdon So that you can abandon yourself to your sickly selfpity and dream yourself away in your own inner worlds by imagining that you could be an artist? That's the way to megalomania and mental disease. Trust me. (*comes forth and breaks her brushes*) You don't need these any more. That's an unsound escape from reality. (*slashes her pictures*) No portrait of me? You paint anything but not me. You are a fake. You will never earn a penny from your paintings. It's useless parasitism. (*has broken almost everything*) All this junk is only good for lighting fires with. And then I must ask you to give over your keys.

Helen What keys?

Huntingdon All keys. Not only of the house but also to your secret cupboards, your writing-case, your bureau and everything in which you could hide anything. We shall no longer have any secrets from each other.

Helen (*turning over her key-ring*) These are all the keys I have. I have never locked anything.

Huntingdon I believe you, for you have never told me a lie. Here is your diary in return. At least it confirms that you have never been false, although you planned to escape with my son to shame me to the world.

Helen You are doing that enough yourself. You don't need my help in it.

Huntingdon But what would it look like if my wife ran away from me? Who do you think would be dishonoured by that, you or me? A wife leaving her husband has nowhere to go, she will be stamped as an unpleasant undesirable fallen woman everywhere, while a deserted husband is more pathetic than a hen-pecked cuckold with horns. Such a humiliation I will never tolerate. I would rather kill you.

Helen Kill me then, and your son along with me, and you will be rid of us without the danger of our escape.

Huntingdon Don't tempt me.

Helen The risk is that you will do it if we remain.

Huntingdon As slowly as possible in that case, so that it can't be noticed.

Helen You are sick.

Huntingdon No, Helen, it's you who are over-sensitive and mad! (*leaves, banging the door behind him after having left the room in ruins. Helen collapses.*)

Helen (*faintly*) I can't take conflicts.

Rachel (*enters*) I heard everything. Collect yourself, Madame. It's time to leave.

Helen But where to?

Rachel I have secretly contacted your brother. He has opened your old house for you, since he moved himself to another residence.

Helen Frederick? Wildfell Hall? Our old home of our childhood?

Rachel Exactly.

Helen What is Arthur doing now?

Rachel The same as he always does when he comes from you. He sits and drinks and swears and is angry with everything and everyone.

Helen Poor man!

Rachel Don't feel sorry for him. That's the last thing he deserves.

Helen We must get away from here.
Rachel I am glad you realize that at last, Madame.
Helen But it must be carefully prepared. Nothing must go wrong. It will be a difficult journey. I must prepare my son.
Rachel Your brother is waiting for you with open arms.
Helen Thank you, Rachel. You are the only friend I have.
(*Rachel helps her up and leads her out, tired and staggering.*)

Scene 3. Lawrence's bedchamber. Enter Markham.

Markham I apologise, my friend, for my sudden intrusion, but I simply must talk with you.
Lawrence (all wrapped up in bed) Have you come to hit me again?
Markham Never in my life!
Lawrence I hoped to never see you again. Haven't you caused enough trouble?
Markham That's why I had to see you. I owe you a sea of apologies.
Lawrence At last. That was about time. I have been like this for two weeks now after you struck me down from the horse without any reason. I could have caught pneumonia and died.
Markham I am infinitely sorry. It was all a misunderstanding.
Lawrence That misunderstanding must have been enormous.
Markham It was, and unforgivable. I thought you were Helen's lover or worse. Now I know you are her brother.
Lawrence How did you know? Did she tell you?
Markham She has given me her diary to read. Now I know everything.
Lawrence (serious, considers) What will you do about it?
Markham Propose for real.
Lawrence That would be the greatest stupidity you could commit. You must know that she is still married.
Markham To an impossible husband who only ruined her life.
Lawrence But he is alive. He would never agree to a divorce.
Markham Then I shall wait him out.
Lawrence (milder) I am afraid, my friend, that is all we can do. Then perhaps it could gladden you that he is seriously ill.
Markham I can never be glad about others' sufferings.
Lawrence Of course. But you don't know all. He also had a riding accident, fell off the horse and had much more damages than I, since he was in full course. He is not dying but completely out of order until further. By his rotten way of living he has scared off all friends and servants, so that no one nurses him except one.
Markham Some relative?
Lawrence Helen has returned to him.
Markham For good?

Lawrence Until further. She brought the son with her so that he would at least recognize him. He appears to have some difficulty recognizing anyone.

Markham The liquor?

Lawrence Not only. Also laudanum in excess.

Markham I am sorry about both.

Lawrence Thanks for coming, Markham. I had almost started to regard you as a brother, when you surprised me by your wild and mad attack in blind jealousy. I am glad that is has been cured by the truth. Now perhaps we could be brothers again.

Markham I would be glad indeed.

Lawrence Now at least I can get well, when I at last know the reason for your fury.

Markham I am all lost in remorse.

Lawrence It doesn't matter. Now we have mutual interests worshipping the same saint, whom we are only interested in making life easier for. Your hand, my brother. *(offers his hand, which is immediately accepted)*

Markham Get well soon and quickly.

Lawrence As quickly as I can. Leave me now, but come back soon again.

Markham I promise. *(leaves)*

Lawrence Poor boy! He is all consumed by his love of her. But she could hardly have any better man. It remains to follow up the end of the first husband's tragedy. Perhaps it has already become too much for her. Hem!

Act V scene 1. Grassdale, Arthur's bedchamber.

Arthur in bed in a terrible condition.

Huntingdon Is it you, Alice?

Helen (entering with delicacy) No, it's me, Arthur. It's Helen, your wife.

Huntingdon (starts, terrified) My wife! For God's sake, don't mention her! I don't have any. May the devil take her, and you too! Why did you do it?

Helen What?

Huntingdon You know very well, my tormenting spirit!

Helen You are ill, Arthur. I have come to help you.

Huntingdon Help me to die, or what? Nothing else remains! That's the only thing anyone can help me with any more! Why did you leave me alone, Alice? All the others have deserted me! They couldn't bear it any longer since I only abused them and threw things at them. Well, they have themselves to blame, those bastards! Some friends! You have a breakdown with your horse, and everyone disappears!

Helen I have come back.

Huntingdon Go back to hell, you haunting ghost! Who did you say you were?

Helen Helen Huntingdon.

Huntingdon I must be going mad. I can't separate ghosts from living people. All since she left me she has been persecuting me day and night, wherever I have been. She will haunt me to my death. Leave me, whoever you are, so that at least I may have

my delirium in peace! I can't stand that white face and those piercing eyes. Send anyone to me, just not anyone who looks like that! And drive out that old nurse, who nurses me to death!

Helen In that case no one will be left.

Huntingdon Oh yes, you will be left, Alice, and you are at least better than no one. I actually loved her, but before my eyes she changed into a vampire, but the other way around. She thought she could convert me and save me, but I just couldn't abandon all my lovely vices and horrible friends. Then she turned into my Nemesis and took my boy away from me and escaped. I was never allowed to bring him up into an even better alcoholic than his father, so he missed the chance of his life, and it is her fault.

Helen He is here, if you want to see him.

Huntingdon Never in my life! He is her son!

Helen And yours.

Huntingdon In that case, why did you take him away from me? Why did she give him life, if it was only to bereave me of him? Why was she such a bloody bad cooperative partner?

Helen She couldn't drink like you.

Huntingdon Was that all?

Helen Yes, that was all. When you were sober she was sober like you, and then you were happy together.

Huntingdon Were we really? Imagine, I can't remember.

Helen She remembers and will never forget it.

Huntingdon It's fortunate that anyone remembers in that case. All my memory vanished drowned in alcohol. I am all hollow emptiness within. I have nothing left. Give me something to drink.

Helen Not while you are ill.

Huntingdon That's what that old hag keeps telling me, who nurses me and thinks I will get well.

Helen You *shall* get well.

Huntingdon Not if I may have my way. I wasted my life, and it's just to follow it through to the end of the line. Help me to die, dear Alice, and you will do me a favour.

Helen I am only here to help you back to life.

Huntingdon What life? My life as a rake? My life as a swine? My life as a drinker and swindler? My life as a house tyrant? My life as a drunkard? I have no other life.

Helen You had, and you can have it all back.

Huntingdon Never in my life. Who did you say you were?

Helen Whoever you would like me to be. The only important thing is that I am here to stand you by.

Huntingdon You remind me of someone. Haven't we met before?

Helen Yes, we have met before.

Huntingdon I have so strange fantasies. I can't get rid of them, and they give me no peace, and the strangest and most persistent of them is your face and your voice, as if they came from the other side of the grave. They remind me exactly of hers, but she is dead. I killed her. I violated her soul to death. Still I could swear that she in this very minute is right beside me.

Helen She is.

Huntingdon That feels somewhat soothing, and meanwhile all the other phantoms fade away, while this one only grows stronger. Please go on, until it passes away like all the rest. I can't endure a madness like this. It bereaves me of the last life I have left.

Helen It will never pass away, since it is real.

Huntingdon What is real? The only real thing to me is she, but she was the first to disappear. Only you are left. Don't tell me you are she.

Helen I am, but not the one you think. I have only come to give you all that help and support that no one of the others could give you.

Huntingdon So you are my worst tormentor, the only one left?

Helen And the only one who can take care of you to make you well.

Huntingdon How could you, after all I did for you?

Helen I also wondered that sometimes. Perhaps because I am a woman.

Huntingdon That's enough. What did you do with my son?

Helen He is safe.

Huntingdon Here?

Helen You may see him when you have promised to leave him entirely to my care and protection – in writing and the presence of witnesses. Before that you may not see him.

Huntingdon I want to see him!

Helen Not now.

Huntingdon I promise!

Helen You never kept an empty promise.

Huntingdon Give me the paper then, and I will sign, just to see him before I die.

Helen You will not die, and you will see him after signing.

Huntingdon I want to see him now! I am his dying father!

Helen (*sighs, confers with herself and leaves, returning with the boy*)

Huntingdon Come to daddy, my son. Aren't you happy to see me? No, he is not. He backs out like to a monster. Have I grown so ugly? Am I so ruined? Am I so revolting, that I can only frighten you? Do you know who I am? Do you recognize me?

Arthur Yes.

Huntingdon Who am I?

Arthur Daddy.

Huntingdon Don't tell me you are happy to see me.

Arthur Yes.

Huntingdon I knew it. He despises his own father and doesn't know him.

Arthur No, father. But I learned who you are.

Huntingdon Who am I?

Arthur My father, who never became my father.

Huntingdon This is too painful. Take him away! I never want to see him any more! You have ruined him! He is not my son! I knew it! He has no father! I am dead, for I have forfeited my right to him! (*suddenly bursts out crying desperately*)

Helen (*sends out the boy, who runs out, and embraces her husband to comfort him*) You can cry! Then there is hope for you!

Huntingdon If only I could cry myself to death! If all that I have drunk could flow out of my in tears! Give me oceans of pains to drink, and I will cry them out over my cursed failure of a life!

Helen Everything can still get right.

Huntingdon Never! I went wrong from the start!

Helen No mistakes are greater than that they can be corrected.

Huntingdon Platitudes! Poor comfort! Tell me, Alice, what is really wrong with me? Why am I so sick?

Helen The doctor says that you have internal damages after your fall from the horse. No one can tell how serious or fatal they might be. But I think you can get better.

Huntingdon You are the only one in that case to believe so. I know that I can never get better. I am already burning in hell. Give me something to drink. Anything, but not water.

Helen You can't take any more alcohol. It has given you delirium. The only thing available is the doctor's health potion, lemon tea with ginger.

Huntingdon Pure poison. When all I need to get well is whisky. You keep cheating me and using my vulnerable situation to humiliate me.

Helen All we want is to get you well.

Huntingdon As if that was possible. You command a dying patient to live. Isn't that a rather cruel way of making fun of me?

Helen All life is a cruel joke.

Huntingdon There you said something. I could subscribe to that. Well, give me that sea water poison of the drain, and I will drink it pretending it is medicine spiced with sugar. (*She gives him to drink, and he drinks.*) Are you happy now?

Helen You see. There is hope for you.

Huntingdon So the doctor will be pleased with me tomorrow for having satisfied his vanity by living one more day. Let me sleep now, and I will try not to dream of you.

Helen To sleep is the best thing you can do.

Huntingdon Only he who sleeps does not sin, eh? It was long since I could sleep.

Helen The more you truly deserve a good night's sleep.

Huntingdon Let's call it a day then. Who did you say you were? You are not Alice.

Helen No, Arthur, I am not Alice.

Huntingdon Let's stick to that. I pass out and leave life and the phantoms in peace for the time being. I hope I will never wake up again.

Helen If you only can sleep you will feel better when you awake.

Huntingdon How sensible you are. You don't need to guard me any more. I shall sleep. (*falls asleep and starts snoring. She rises, puts out the lights and leaves.*)

Helen Good night, Arthur. I will never give in until you are well again.

Scene 2.

Hargrave How is he?

Doctor No hope. The body has given up against its proprietor's reckless abuse of it.

Hargrave We thought he was getting better.

Doctor He was, thanks to his good nurse's faithful and active attendance on him. But as soon as he got out of bed and felt better he started drinking again. Then he must finish the bottle and start a new one. You know how it is. You have participated yourself in his gang of rogues.

Hargrave I am the only happily married of them, and the only one with some detachment.

Doctor Wasn't Lord Lowborough happily married with Annabella Wilmot?

Hargrave She only deceived him. He doesn't want to see her any more, and she is now leading a life of reckless self-indulgence in London wasting all her assets.

Doctor And Grimsby and Wilmot have both been overpowered by gout and podagra, the kings of welfare diseases, with pains and torments of no end.

Hargrave Is Helen with him now?

Doctor She tries to feed him hot milk. It doesn't work. He is a hopeless case and will do his best service to the world by simply dying.

Hargrave I think she is coming.

Helen (*entering, crying, trying to conceal it*) Pardon me. It wears me down.

Doctor You should just let him die in peace, Madame. That's all he wants.

Helen Not as long as he lives.

Hargrave How is he?

Helen He is constantly hovering between delirium and sobriety. Sometimes he wanders wildly in hallucinations believing I am anyone but the one I am, scolding me for nursing him to death. He blames me for everything, his condition, his illness, his betrayals and deceits, everything is my fault because I left him.

Hargrave That's all you could do.

Helen I know, and I never regretted it, and neither that I returned. What is your latest diagnosis, doctor?

Doctor His liver appears to be consumed. The liver is a significant organ, as indispensable as the heart, but it works hard in silence without ever resting day and night and never complains and never gives pain. When it finally has had too much, like for example of liquor or other poisons, it simply ceases to work and refuses to cooperate any more. It shrinks and collapses from overwork and stops functioning. That's what happening to Arthur Huntingdon.

Hargrave He has wasted his life on self-destructive indulgencies, as if you could burn a candle in both ends without getting burned in the middle. Whatever chances he had he has missed, and the best one was a wife like you.

Helen And I will remain his wife until he dies. He will need me as long as he lives, since he has no other. *(starts crying again, tries to conceal it by leaving)*

Hargrave Is she returning in to him again?

Doctor I believe it's the last time.

Hargrave A crook can only grow worse as a crook as long as he is a crook. He is done for.

Doctor Mildly speaking.

Scene 3. Arthur's bedchamber.

Huntingdon Are you back here again, you cursed slut? Have you nothing better to do than to watch me die?

Helen Would you rather die alone?

Huntingdon I am never alone even in my loneliness. You are always with me. I will never get rid of you. Only death can release me from you, and maybe not even death.

Helen Is your power to hurt me all that remains of our marriage?

Huntingdon There never was anything else. That's what marriage is for, so that the parties may have full licence to torment each other to death. You have tortured me to death. You should be satisfied. You have succeeded.

Helen All I wanted was to love you, for I thought love was all you felt for me.

Huntingdon And what is love? Licence, slimy sensuality, wallowing in dirt, self-degradation, masturbation, abuse, whores, venereal diseases, unwanted children to increase the world over-population with, in brief, it's only contributing to man's self-destruction. Life is just a journey of torment down to hell. There it all starts and ends. I have been there all my life. It's my only home. Not even you could offer any alternative.

Helen You are just wandering in your mind and don't know what you are talking about.

Huntingdon On the contrary. Now I see everything clearly. The pains have ceased and are not tormenting me any more. I don't feel anything. It's a miracle. Am I getting well, or am I dying?

Helen (calling) Doctor!

Doctor (enters) What is it? Any change?

Helen He wonders if he is getting well or dying. He feels no pain any more.

Doctor (searching him) It's the end. Gangrene has set in. His interior damages burst open again when he had one bottle too much.

Huntingdon Well, doctor, will I at least have a painless death?

Doctor It seems like it, even if you don't deserve it.

Huntingdon You are at least straight and don't euphemise like that one over there. She is like a vulture just waiting for my death. Look at her black wings, which she prepares to wrap me up in! Then there will only be darkness in all eternity, and hopefully I shall never awake again to see it.

Doctor By continuously abusing and mishandling your body you only succeeded in killing your soul, but it will hurt the more after you are dead.

Huntingdon You do cheer me up, doctor! You are better than my wife, who only suffocates me in her black darkness.

Doctor It's you who smothered her. Why did you ever marry such a good woman if it only was to harm her?

Huntingdon That's why you marry, isn't it, to have someone to be able to legally harass.

Doctor If a man doesn't marry from love to honour his wife and bring up his children, he should be castrated.

Huntingdon You are too late, doctor. I should have been castrated before I got my venereal diseases.

Doctor So you married though you had venereal diseases?

Huntingdon Yes. I could love anyway. Was it wrong?

Doctor (rises indignant) I can't stand this any more. Let him just die, and let the devil take him! (*gets out*)

Helen (embraces Arthur) How are you, my love?

Huntingdon How could you still call me that, after all I did to you?

Helen I am your wife.

Huntingdon Don't remind me. I wish I could have left you in peace and died earlier.

Helen You are only thirty-seven. You could still have had all your life ahead of you.

Huntingdon Instead I will have all hell in all eternity. What a comfort! (*has a seizure, grows pale in terror*)

Helen Arthur! Stay with us!

Huntingdon The devil is hooking me. I miss my delirium. It gave me at least some escape from reality. Now I have nothing left except new torments.

Helen It will pass, dearest.

Huntingdon No, it will not pass. It will never pass. I will die forever, Alice. I am already dead, for I have no soul, as the doctor said. That's my only illness. I thought I could get myself a soul by being drunk all the time, but it only gave me headaches and vomits. Don't worry, Alice. Fortunately I will not last much longer. Life is short and only gets shorter all the time.

Helen I am Helen, your wife, Arthur.

Huntingdon I know. I only wanted to tease you. Have you ever been jealous of me?

Helen When you deceived me with Annabella without shame you ceased to be anything worth being jealous of.

Huntingdon And before that? Did you never suspect how much I deceived you in London with harlots and prostitutes in all kinds of brothels?

Helen Your life in London was your own business. I had nothing to do with it.

Huntingdon You were tolerant. You allowed me to kill myself slowly but irrevocably and didn't cut me off until you had relevant reasons. You were a wise woman and wiser than any man.

Helen I had a son to consider. When you never cared for him, he became the one man I could live for.

Huntingdon You haven't done anything wrong. You did the right thing when you left me. You should have done it earlier. Then I would also have died earlier.

Helen Don't speak of death. Life always gets the better of death.

Huntingdon No, death always gets the better of life. Shall we bet? I shall wait for you in hell. It was you who sent me there.

Helen Arthur! *(breaks out in tears and cries by his bed. When she next raises her head he is dead.)* Arthur! Arthur! *(tries to wake him up)* Doctor!

Doctor (enters, takes his patient's pulse, laconically:) Stone dead. It's over. You can return to life now, Mrs Huntingdon. *(goes out again, leaves Helen to cry her heart out alone by Arthur's side.)*

Scene 4. Wildfell Hall.

Markham (entering the garden with some hesitation) How can I? How can I look her in the eyes? I mishandled her brother and trampled her feelings in ignorance and carelessness to an unforgivable degree of harm, and she would perhaps not want to see me any more. It wouldn't surprise me. But still I can't tear myself away from her. Am I doing right in once more daring to come here? I am not doing anything wrong, if I just sit down here in an effort to enjoy her presence in these flowers, this enchanted garden which she has brought forth like a marvel, elated by the air that she once breathed.

(sits down, closes his eyes and tries to dream)

little Arthur (coming out of the house up to him) Mr Markham! Mother wishes to speak with you. *(pulls his coat)*

Markham (awakens in a daze) What? Who? How? When? *(sees the boy)* Is it you, Arthur? How is your mother?

Arthur Well, but she is in mourning.

Markham I would think so, after all she has been through.

Arthur But she wishes to see you.

Markham Now?

Arthur Yes. *(pulls at him, and Markham has to rise to follow to the entrance. Just before they reach it, Helen opens the door.)*

Helen Markham, my brother has told me that you have proposed to me.

(They embrace spontaneously.)

Markham Is it over now?

Helen No, it's beginning now. But please be careful, Markham. Not until now I am a real widow, and I have to let the sorrow ache out slowly but safely.

Markham I can wait my whole life, if you wish.
Helen While my husband wanted everything at once. Let it be a long and calm engagement. And never forget, Markham, that it was my son who united us.
Markham A child is always right.
Helen Shall we let him decide?
Markham I trust his instinct.
Helen And he has approved of you. Welcome.
(Little Arthur pulls them both inside.)

The End.

9.9.2013, Dharamsala,
translated after five years.

Post Mortem

Anne Brontë (1820-49)

The Brontë world of romantic dreams, complicated intrigues and sufferings have never ceased to fascinate the world's constantly increasing interest in what actually was cultivated in the old desolate and dreary vicarage in Haworth by the wildest Yorkshire moors of north England. Charlotte was the eldest and something of a leader to her sisters as the most dynamic of them. Emily was the most personal and romantic, while Anne, the youngest, was the most reticent and humble but at the same time the most initiated realist by being doubtlessly the most psychological of them and thereby maybe the most interesting. All three were agreed on that their brother Branwell was the most talented of them, who unfortunately never disciplined himself enough for literature. As the only boy in an over-endowed family he was naturally spoilt by his more or less adoring sisters and fell to the temptation of all the vices of the age, gambling, drinking and opium. The sisters beheld with terror how he slowly but irrevocably ruined himself, and could do nothing, except one thing: create a lasting and loving monument over his personality by their unique and in their way unsurpassed novels.

He is almost over-obviously traced in all the three masterworks "Jane Eyre", "Wuthering Heights" and "The Tenant of Wildfell Hall". It's the demonic masculine superiority with dark shadows that colour all the three protagonists in these novels and dominate them. Rochester's dark secret in "Jane Eyre" is never touched upon nor even hinted at until its natural urge and undeniability begins to manifest itself in constantly more mysterious and frightening appearances, until suddenly the whole tragedy of the Rochester case is revealed as a shocking curtain rise to a devastating and terrifying abyss. It's not his fault, he is not self-destructive but only the victim of

family influence, and the entire novel is like an apology, explanation and defence for his by all rights unfathomably bitter personality.

Heathcliff in "Wuthering Heights" is a parallel case, he is an outsider from the beginning who doesn't fit in anywhere and who is therefore treated as such without scruples by constant humiliations, oppression, sadism and injustice to become a hopeless monster of frustration and grief. He is never defended except by Cathy, who loves him and dies, but the author never defends him. She only pictures him in almost merciless objectivity and austere stoic self-control in observation of the undeniably soaring romanticism of this destiny.

Anne Brontë goes even further. Like Emily she makes a man tell the story, a young, impulsive and honestly loving man, who falls in love with the enigmatic widow of Wildfell Hall. Helen Graham is one of the most fascinating and attractive women portraits of Victorian literature. You understand too well that Markham irrevocably falls in love with her for life, which she in spite of her continuous rejection still can't help understanding, why she dares to initiate him in her fate. It appears that her husband still lives but hardly a human life.

She is charmed by him and is more or less induced to marriage against her aunt's better knowledge, and only gradually his darker qualities get the better of his personality and make him hopelessly self-destructive. She does everything for him and sacrifices herself completely to her ideal concept of him in spite of all, until he deceives her. Then her idealism is replaced by sinister realism. Anne's observations and empathy in the gradual disintegration of this alcoholic and self-consumer step by step is something of the most difficult subject of a novel any author could embark upon, but Anne has seen and experienced it all herself with her own eyes. It's a nightmare of reality that she follows until the end, and finally when there is not much left of him and she long since have deserted him with their son, she still chooses to stand up for him and try to get him well while there is still any hope left. But he is and remains incorrigible, and when he by her care has regained his health one last time, he just wastes it on a final catastrophic voluntary relapse.

Her novel is the longest of the three and the seemingly most revolting but at the same time also the deepest, finest, most consistent, interesting and truest account of their beloved brother. When they had written their novels as a testimony of him for good and for worse but the more lovingly, it is as if they had felt they had accomplished their main duty and not found anything more to live for. All were marked by tuberculosis, which also was Branwell's actual cause of death, and both Emily and Anne were consumed by it before they reached 30 only a few years after they had completed their novels and the year after they had been published. Charlotte seemed to manage but committed the mistake of marrying, her father condemned the act and refused to be present at her wedding, as he professed that a marriage would ruin her delicate health, which it did, as she died in childbirth only 39 years old.

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