

Literature.org:
[Authors](#)
[Contact](#)

[The Tenant of Wildfell Hall](#)

[Anne Bronte](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 11

You must suppose about three weeks passed over. Mrs. Graham and I were now established friends - or brother and sister, as we rather chose to consider ourselves. She called me Gilbert, by my express desire, and I called her Helen, for I had seen that name written in her books. I seldom attempted to see her above twice a week; and still I made our meetings appear the result of accident as often as I could - for I found it necessary to be extremely careful - and, altogether, I behaved with such exceeding propriety that she never had occasion to reprove me once. Yet I could not but perceive that she was at times unhappy and dissatisfied with herself or her position, and truly I myself was not quite contented with the latter: this assumption of brotherly nonchalance was very hard to sustain, and I often felt myself a most confounded hypocrite with it all; I saw too, or rather I felt, that, in spite of herself, 'I was not indifferent to her,' as the novel heroes modestly express it, and while I thankfully enjoyed my present good fortune, I could not fail to wish and hope for something better in future; but, of course, I kept such dreams entirely to myself.

'Where are you going, Gilbert?' said Rose, one evening, shortly after tea, when I had been busy with the farm all day.

'To take a walk,' was the reply.

'Do you always brush your hat so carefully, and do your hair so nicely, and put on such smart new gloves when you take a walk?'

'Not always.'

'You're going to Wildfell Hall, aren't you?'

'What makes you think so?'

'Because you look as if you were - but I wish you wouldn't go so often.'

'Nonsense, child! I don't go once in six weeks - what do you mean?'

'Well, but if I were you, I wouldn't have so much to do with Mrs. Graham.'

'Why, Rose, are you, too, giving in to the prevailing opinion?'

'No,' returned she, hesitatingly - 'but I've heard so much about her lately, both at the Wilsons' and the vicarage; - and besides, mamma says, if she were a proper person she would not be living there by herself - and don't you remember last winter, Gilbert, all that about the false name to the picture; and how she explained it - saying she had friends or acquaintances from whom she wished her present residence to be concealed, and that she was afraid of their tracing her out; - and then, how suddenly she started up and left the room when that person came - whom she took good care not to let us catch a glimpse of, and who Arthur, with such an air of mystery, told us was his mamma's friend?'

'Yes, Rose, I remember it all; and I can forgive your uncharitable conclusions; for, perhaps, if I did not know her myself, I should put all these things together, and believe the same as you do; but thank God, I do know her; and I should be unworthy the name of a man, if I could believe anything that was said against her, unless I heard it from her own lips. - I should as soon believe such things of you, Rose.'

'Oh, Gilbert!'

'Well, do you think I could believe anything of the kind, - whatever the Wilsons and Millwards dared to whisper?'

'I should hope not indeed!'

'And why not? - Because I know you - Well, and I know her just as well.'

'Oh, no! you know nothing of her former life; and last year, at this time, you did not know that such a person existed.'

'No matter. There is such a thing as looking through a person's eyes into the heart, and learning more of the height, and breadth, and depth of another's soul in one hour than it might take you a lifetime to discover, if he or she were not disposed to reveal it, or if you had not the sense to understand it.'

'Then you are going to see her this evening?'

'To be sure I am!'

'But what would mamma say, Gilbert!'

'Mamma needn't know.'

'But she must know some time, if you go on.'

'Go on! - there's no going on in the matter. Mrs. Graham and I are two friends - and will be; and no man breathing shall hinder it, - or has a right to interfere between us.'

'But if you knew how they talk you would be more careful, for her sake as well as for your own. Jane Wilson thinks your visits to the old hall but another proof of her

depravity - '

'Confound Jane Wilson!'

'And Eliza Millward is quite grieved about you.'

'I hope she is.'

'But I wouldn't, if I were you.'

'Wouldn't what? - How do they know that I go there?'

'There's nothing hid from them: they spy out everything.'

'Oh, I never thought of this! - And so they dare to turn my friendship into food for further scandal against her! - That proves the falsehood of their other lies, at all events, if any proof were wanting. - Mind you contradict them, Rose, whenever you can.'

'But they don't speak openly to me about such things: it is only by hints and innuendoes, and by what I hear others say, that I knew what they think.'

'Well, then, I won't go to-day, as it's getting latish. But oh, deuce take their cursed, envenomed tongues!' I muttered, in the bitterness of my soul.

And just at that moment the vicar entered the room: we had been too much absorbed in our conversation to observe his knock. After his customary cheerful and fatherly greeting of Rose, who was rather a favourite with the old gentleman, he turned somewhat sternly to me:-

'Well, sir!' said he, 'you're quite a stranger. It is - let - me - see,' he continued, slowly, as he deposited his ponderous bulk in the arm-chair that Rose officiously brought towards him; 'it is just - six-weeks - by my reckoning, since you darkened - my - door!' He spoke it with emphasis, and struck his stick on the floor.

'Is it, sir?' said I.

'Ay! It is so!' He added an affirmative nod, and continued to gaze upon me with a kind of irate solemnity, holding his substantial stick between his knees, with his hands clasped upon its head.

'I have been busy,' I said, for an apology was evidently demanded.

'Busy!' repeated he, derisively.

'Yes, you know I've been getting in my hay; and now the harvest is beginning.'

'Humph!'

Just then my mother came in, and created a diversion in my favour by her loquacious and animated welcome of the reverend guest. She regretted deeply that he had not come a little earlier, in time for tea, but offered to have some immediately prepared, if he would do her the favour to partake of it.

'Not any for me, I thank you,' replied he; 'I shall be at home in a few minutes.'

'Oh, but do stay and take a little! it will be ready in five minutes.'

But he rejected the offer with a majestic wave of the hand.

'I'll tell you what I'll take, Mrs. Markham,' said he: 'I'll take a glass of your excellent ale.'

'With pleasure!' cried my mother, proceeding with alacrity to pull the bell and order the favoured beverage.

'I thought,' continued he, 'I'd just look in upon you as I passed, and taste your home-brewed ale. I've been to call on Mrs. Graham.'

'Have you, indeed?'

He nodded gravely, and added with awful emphasis - 'I thought it incumbent upon me to do so.'

'Really!' ejaculated my mother.

'Why so, Mr. Millward?' asked I.

He looked at me with some severity, and turning again to my mother, repeated, - 'I thought it incumbent upon me!' and struck his stick on the floor again. My mother sat opposite, an awe-struck but admiring auditor.

"Mrs. Graham," said I, he continued, shaking his head as he spoke, "these are terrible reports!" "What, sir?" says she, affecting to be ignorant of my meaning. "It is my - duty - as - your pastor," said I, "to tell you both everything that I myself see reprehensible in your conduct, and all I have reason to suspect, and what others tell me concerning you." - So I told her!

'You did, sir?' cried I, starting from my seat and striking my fist on the table. He merely glanced towards me, and continued - addressing his hostess:-

'It was a painful duty, Mrs. Markham - but I told her!'

'And how did she take it?' asked my mother.

'Hardened, I fear - hardened!' he replied, with a despondent shake of the head; 'and, at the same time, there was a strong display of unchastened, misdirected passions. She turned white in the face, and drew her breath through her teeth in a savage sort of way; - but she offered no extenuation or defence; and with a kind of shameless

calmness - shocking indeed to witness in one so young - as good as told me that my remonstrance was unavailing, and my pastoral advice quite thrown away upon her - nay, that my very presence was displeasing while I spoke such things. And I withdrew at length, too plainly seeing that nothing could be done - and sadly grieved to find her case so hopeless. But I am fully determined, Mrs. Markham, that my daughters - shall - not - consort with her. Do you adopt the same resolution with regard to yours! - As for your sons - as for you, young man,' he continued, sternly turning to me -

'As for ME, sir,' I began, but checked by some impediment in my utterance, and finding that my whole frame trembled with fury, I said no more, but took the wiser part of snatching up my hat and bolting from the room, slamming the door behind me, with a bang that shook the house to its foundations, and made my mother scream, and gave a momentary relief to my excited feelings.

The next minute saw me hurrying with rapid strides in the direction of Wildfell Hall - to what intent or purpose I could scarcely tell, but I must be moving somewhere, and no other goal would do - I must see her too, and speak to her - that was certain; but what to say, or how to act, I had no definite idea. Such stormy thoughts - so many different resolutions crowded in upon me, that my mind was little better than a chaos of conflicting passions.