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## [The Tenant of Wildfell Hall](#)

[Anne Bronte](#)

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### Chapter 21

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October 1st. - All is settled now. My father has given his consent, and the time is fixed for Christmas, by a sort of compromise between the respective advocates for hurry and delay. Millicent Hargrave is to be one bridesmaid and Annabella Wilmot the other - not that I am particularly fond of the latter, but she is an intimate of the family, and I have not another friend.

When I told Millicent of my engagement, she rather provoked me by her manner of talking it. After staring a moment in mute surprise, she said, - 'Well, Helen, I suppose I ought to congratulate you - and I am glad to see you so happy; but I did not think you would take him; and I can't help feeling surprised that you should like him so much.'

'Why so?'

'Because you are so superior to him in every way, and there's something so bold and reckless about him - so, I don't know how - but I always feel a wish to get out of his way when I see him approach.'

'You are timid, Millicent; but that's no fault of his.'

'And then his look,' continued she. 'People say he's handsome, and of course he is; but I don't like that kind of beauty, and I wonder that you should.'

'Why so, pray?'

'Well, you know, I think there's nothing noble or lofty in his appearance.'

'In fact, you wonder that I can like any one so unlike the stilted heroes of romance. Well, give me my flesh and blood lover, and I'll leave all the Sir Herberts and Valentines to you - if you can find them.'

'I don't want them,' said she. 'I'll be satisfied with flesh and blood too - only the spirit must shine through and predominate. But don't you think Mr. Huntingdon's face is too red?'

'No!' cried I, indignantly. 'It is not red at all. There is just a pleasant glow, a healthy freshness in his complexion - the warm, pinky tint of the whole harmonising with the deeper colour of the cheeks, exactly as it ought to do. I hate a man to be red and white, like a painted doll, or all sickly white, or smoky black, or cadaverous yellow.'

'Well, tastes differ - but I like pale or dark,' replied she. 'But, to tell you the truth, Helen, I had been deluding myself with the hope that you would one day be my sister. I expected Walter would be introduced to you next season; and I thought you would like him, and was certain he would like you; and I flattered myself I should thus have the felicity of seeing the two persons I like best in the world - except mamma - united in one. He mayn't be exactly what you would call handsome, but he's far more distinguished-looking, and nicer and better than Mr. Huntingdon; - and I'm sure you would say so, if you knew him.'

'Impossible, Millicent! You think so, because you're his sister; and, on that account, I'll forgive you; but nobody else should so disparage Arthur Huntingdon to me with impunity.'

Miss Wilmot expressed her feelings on the subject almost as openly.

'And so, Helen,' said she, coming up to me with a smile of no amiable import, 'you are to be Mrs. Huntingdon, I suppose?'

'Yes,' replied I. 'Don't you envy me?'

'Oh, dear, no!' she exclaimed. 'I shall probably be Lady Lowborough some day, and then you know, dear, I shall be in a capacity to inquire, "Don't you envy me?"'

'Henceforth I shall envy no one,' returned I.

'Indeed! Are you so happy then?' said she, thoughtfully; and something very like a cloud of disappointment shadowed her face. 'And does he love you - I mean, does he idolise you as much as you do him?' she added, fixing her eyes upon me with ill-disguised anxiety for the reply.

'I don't want to be idolised,' I answered; 'but I am well assured that he loves me more than anybody else in the world - as I do him.'

'Exactly,' said she, with a nod. 'I wish - ' she paused.

'What do you wish?' asked I, annoyed at the vindictive expression of her countenance.

'I wish,' returned, she, with a short laugh, 'that all the attractive points and desirable qualifications of the two gentlemen were united in one - that Lord Lowborough had Huntingdon's handsome face and good temper, and all his wit, and mirth and charm, or else that Huntingdon had Lowborough's pedigree, and title, and delightful old family seat, and I had him; and you might have the other and welcome.'

'Thank you, dear Annabella: I am better satisfied with things as they are, for my own part; and for you, I wish you were as well content with your intended as I am with mine,' said I; and it was true enough; for, though vexed at first at her unamiable spirit, her frankness touched me, and the contrast between our situations was such, that I could well afford to pity her and wish her well.

Mr. Huntingdon's acquaintances appear to be no better pleased with our approaching union than mine. This morning's post brought him letters from several of his friends, during the perusal of which, at the breakfast-table, he excited the attention of the company by the singular variety of his grimaces. But he crushed them all into his pocket, with a private laugh, and said nothing till the meal was concluded. Then, while the company were hanging over the fire or loitering through the room, previous to settling to their various morning avocations, he came and leant over the back of my chair, with his face in contact with my curls, and commencing with a quiet little kiss, poured forth the following complaints into my ear:-

'Helen, you witch, do you know that you've entailed upon me the curses of all my friends? I wrote to them the other day, to tell them of my happy prospects, and now, instead of a bundle of congratulations, I've got a pocketful of bitter execrations and reproaches. There's not one kind wish for me, or one good word for you, among them all. They say there'll be no more fun now, no more merry days and glorious nights - and all my fault - I am the first to break up the jovial band, and others, in pure despair, will follow my example. I was the very life and prop of the community, they do me the honour to say, and I have shamefully betrayed my trust - '

'You may join them again, if you like,' said I, somewhat piqued at the sorrowful tone of his discourse. 'I should be sorry to stand between any man - or body of men, and so much happiness; and perhaps I can manage to do without you, as well as your poor deserted friends.'

'Bless you, no,' murmured he. 'It's "all for love or the world well lost," with me. Let them go to - where they belong, to speak politely. But if you saw how they abuse me, Helen, you would love me all the more for having ventured so much for your sake.'

He pulled out his crumpled letters. I thought he was going to show them to me, and told him I did not wish to see them.

'I'm not going to show them to you, love,' said he. 'They're hardly fit for a lady's eyes - the most part of them. But look here. This is Grimsby's scrawl - only three lines, the sulky dog! He doesn't say much, to be sure, but his very silence implies more than all the others' words, and the less he says, the more he thinks - and this is Hargrave's missive. He is particularly grieved at me, because, forsooth he had fallen in love with you from his sister's reports, and meant to have married you himself, as soon as he had sown his wild oats.'

'I'm vastly obliged to him,' observed I.

'And so am I,' said he. 'And look at this. This is Hattersley's - every page stuffed full of railing accusations, bitter curses, and lamentable complaints, ending up with swearing that he'll get married himself in revenge: he'll throw himself away on the first old maid that chooses to set her cap at him, - as if I cared what he did with himself.'

'Well,' said I, 'if you do give up your intimacy with these men, I don't think you will have much cause to regret the loss of their society; for it's my belief they never did you much good.'

'Maybe not; but we'd a merry time of it, too, though mingled with sorrow and pain, as Lowborough knows to his cost - Ha, ha!' and while he was laughing at the recollection of Lowborough's troubles, my uncle came and slapped him on the shoulder.

'Come, my lad!' said he. 'Are you too busy making love to my niece to make war with the pheasants? - First of October, remember! Sun shines out - rain ceased - even Boarham's not afraid to venture in his waterproof boots; and Wilmot and I are going to beat you all. I declare, we old 'uns are the keenest sportsmen of the lot!'

'I'll show you what I can do to-day, however,' said my companion. 'I'll murder your birds by wholesale, just for keeping me away from better company than either you or them.'

And so saying he departed; and I saw no more of him till dinner. It seemed a weary time; I wonder what I shall do without him.

It is very true that the three elder gentlemen have proved themselves much keener sportsmen than the two younger ones; for both Lord Lowborough and Arthur Huntingdon have of late almost daily neglected the shooting excursions to accompany us in our various rides and rambles. But these merry times are fast drawing to a close. In less than a fortnight the party break up, much to my sorrow, for every day I enjoy it more and more - now that Messrs. Boarham and Wilmot have ceased to tease me, and my aunt has ceased to lecture me, and I have ceased to be jealous of Annabella - and even to dislike her - and now that Mr. Huntingdon is become my Arthur, and I may enjoy his society without restraint. What shall I do without him, I repeat?