The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANNE BRONTË

The youngest of five children born to Patrick and Maria Brontë, Anne and her siblings grew up in the Haworth Parsonage where their father worked as a curate. When her mother died suddenly, Maria's sister, Elizabeth, moved into the parsonage to help take care of the children. Anne was Elizabeth's favorite and the two shared a room. A devout woman, Elizabeth helped shape Anne's religious education, while her sister Emily fueled her creative ambitions. As a teen, Anne attended Roe Head School where her oldest sister, Charlotte, was a teacher. In her second year at the school, Anne grew gravely ill and was sent home to recover. A year later, she became a governess at Blake Hall, which served as the inspiration and model for Wellwood House in her first novel, *Agnes Grey*. The children under her care were unruly and even cruel, and Anne was traumatized by the experience and dismissed from her position after less than a year. Her second stint as governess for the Robinson family at Thorp Green Hall was more successful. She grew to love the family and even secured a position tutoring the Robinson's son for her brother, Branwell. Anne resigned her post when it was discovered that Branwell and Mrs. Robinson were having an affair. Anne moved back home to the parsonage where Charlotte and Emily were likewise unemployed. The three sisters decided to work together to produce a book of verse. *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* was a failure, but *Agnes Grey*, Anne's biographical novel chronicling her years as a governess, sold well, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, with its unflinching look at alcoholism and unhappiness in marriage, caused a sensation when it was published in June 1848. Soon afterward, though, Branwell died of tuberculosis, and, three months later, Emily died as well. Anne was heartbroken and soon became ill herself. Six months after Emily was buried, Anne died in Scarborough at the age of 29.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Prior to 1870, married women had no rights other than those bestowed on them by their husbands. All money, property, and children belonged to men. If a woman were to leave her marriage, her husband was within his rights to bring her home against her will. If she fled with her children, she could be charged with kidnapping. Even if she had the temerity to find employment, the money she earned would automatically be her husband's, and if she refused to surrender her earnings, she was considered a thief.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As brilliant and relatively isolated young women living in a sleepy country village, the Brontë sisters influenced each other's styles and subject matter in undeniable ways, to the point that "Brontë" has become synonymous with a certain kind of tale redolent of windswept moors and verging on Gothic love stories. For a comprehensive journey through the Brontë canon, read Anne Brontë's *Agnes Gray*; Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, and *The Professor*; and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Turn to Samuel Richardson's epistolary morality tales, *Pamela: Or Virtue Rewarded* and *Clarissa or the History of a Young Lady*, and Thomas Hardy's tragic *Tess of the D'urbervilles* for more stories of pious and undervalued heroines. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* offers another glimpse of British village life, and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* are slightly sunnier takes on love deferred. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is often considered one of the first feminist novels in English literature. *Middlemarch* and *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot likewise detail the struggles strong women face in trying live independent lives.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*
- **When Written:** Spring 1847
- **Where Written:** Haworth Parsonage, West Yorkshire, England
- **When Published:** June 1848
- **Literary Period:** Victorian Realism
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** 1820s, rural England
- **Climax:** Helen plucks a rose from a bush outside her window and hands it to Gilbert, with great ceremony. Gilbert nearly wastes the moment, taking the rose from Helen with very little show of emotion, and so she snatches it away and throws it outside, telling him that the rose represented her heart and he has, in effect, thrown it away. Gilbert, realizing that he could lose Helen if he doesn't seize the moment, fetches the rose and proposes marriage. Helen accepts, and their years of frustrated and thwarted passion end in complete happiness.
- **Antagonist:** Arthur Huntingdon
- **Point of View:** First person from the points-of-view of Gilbert Markham and Helen Graham

EXTRA CREDIT

Their Brother's Keeper. Most scholars believe *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* to be biographical in nature and that the character of Arthur Huntingdon is at least in part based on Anne's

brother Branwell, who suffered from alcohol and opiate addiction and whose death of tuberculosis at the age of 31 was precipitated by his dissolute habits. His erratic behavior was a constant embarrassment to his sisters, who were often charged with taking care of him and at times tried to cover up the worst of his behavior, which included setting fire to his bed.

Charlotte as Censor. Charlotte Brontë went on to become the most famous of the Brontë sisters, perhaps because she was also the longest lived. When *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* appeared in print, Charlotte was one of its harshest critics, saying that Anne was not suited to write about the brutal realities of alcohol abuse and infidelity, but should instead stick to calmer subjects. A year after Anne's death, the publishers of the book approached Charlotte to authorize a reprint. She refused to do so, claiming that she wanted to keep the book out of circulation in order to protect her sister's memory from the attacks of readers and critics who, like her, were turned off by its depressing subject matter—but some believe she acted out of jealousy.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall begins with a gentleman farmer, Gilbert Markham, promising his brother-in-law, Jack Halford, a letter detailing Gilbert's youthful exploits. The letter comprises the first half of the novel.

Gilbert writes of his years living on Linden-Car Farm with his mother, Mrs. Markham, his sister, Rose, and younger brother, Fergus. One day in autumn, Rose tells the family about a new arrival in the village, a young mother in mourning named Helen Graham, who has moved into the gloomy Victorian mansion of Wildfell Hall with her five-year-old son and an elderly female servant. Everything about Helen Graham is intriguing to the villagers of Linden-Car. When Gilbert sees her in church the following Sunday, he thinks her beautiful but stern, not nearly as attractive as Eliza Millward, with whom he has an on-going but not necessarily serious flirtation.

Mrs. Markham hosts a party soon afterward, and the major players in Gilbert's story are all in attendance—Rose and Fergus Markham; the Wilson family, including the materialistic Jane; Eliza Millward, her sister, Mary, and father, the Reverend Michael Millward; and Frederick Lawrence, a wealthy young man and Helen's landlord at Wildfell Hall. Helen is not there, and talk eventually turns to her unusual stance on the consumption of alcohol. She is vehemently against drink of all kinds. The Reverend Millward argues that she should trust in God and consume wine and beer in moderate amounts. The assembled company agrees, and only Frederick Lawrence defends her.

Helen and Gilbert meet for the first time at tea at Linden-Car Farm and spar over how best to raise a child. Helen admits she shelters her little Arthur from the harsh realities of the world, but she says she does so to preserve the boy's character. Gilbert suggests that she should instead expose him to the ways of the world in small amounts, the way a gardener would gradually introduce a fragile **tree** to the elements. Later, Helen invites Gilbert and Rose to visit her at Wildfell Hall, where Gilbert discovers that Helen is an accomplished **painter**. While Helen is out of the room, Gilbert comes across a portrait of a very handsome young man. When Helen returns, she is angry with Gilbert for looking through her work without asking permission, and he feels rebuked. Returning home late for tea, Gilbert then earns another scolding, this one from his mother. Mrs. Markham gives her opinion that a woman's role is to serve the men in her household—a man's role is to serve himself.

Despite their relationship's rocky start, Gilbert and Helen slowly form a friendship, built mostly on their mutual appreciation of literature and the beauties of the natural world. On an excursion to the seaside, his regard for Helen only grows stronger. Later, on the walk home with Eliza (Helen is in a carriage), Eliza seems to understand that Gilbert has transferred his affections and is quietly depressed.

Later, at another Linden-Car Farm party, Eliza joins Jane Wilson in spreading a rumor that Helen might not be a widow after all, but the mistress of Frederick Lawrence—who might also be little Arthur's father. Gilbert is furious and finally sees Eliza for what she is—a petty and malicious woman intent on smearing Helen's good name.

Gilbert is one of two inhabitants of Linden-Car who thinks highly of Helen. The other is Frederick Lawrence, and, against his will, Gilbert grows suspicious of Helen's relationship with her landlord. One night, after Gilbert and Helen have a passionate discussion about the future of their friendship, Gilbert sees Helen and Lawrence walking arm-in-arm in the Wildfell garden together. Gilbert despairs, and assumes that all the rumors are true. A few days later, Gilbert runs into Frederick and, in a jealous rage, strikes him repeatedly with his whip, leaving him bleeding and stunned in the middle of the road.

Frederick survives the attack but grows ill with fever. Helen, meanwhile, has made several attempts to reach out to Gilbert. He rebuffs them all until, fed up with the gossip surrounding Helen and eager to know the truth for himself, he heads to Wildfell Hall to confront her. Helen is happy to see him and oddly relieved to hear that his displeasure with her is founded on his perception that she and Frederick are lovers. She hands him her diary, begging him to read it and vowing that it will make everything clear.

Gilbert takes the diary home and devours it immediately. He informs Jack that the letter will now consist of Helen's diary entries, which he transposes for Jack's benefit. The novel is then in Helen's hands, and her entries begin at Staningley, the

estate of her aunt and uncle, Mrs. Maxwell and Mr. Maxwell. It is June of 1821, and Helen is eighteen years old and recovering from her first London season. She recounts a conversation she had with Mrs. Maxwell about marriage (before going to London). Mrs. Maxwell warned Helen about the dangers of attaching herself to the wrong man, and advised her to let her head rather than her heart guide her when it came time to choose a husband. Helen laughed her aunt off, saying she would never consider marriage to an unworthy man.

Helen is not without her fair share of suitors in London. Older men,in particular seem to attach themselves to her, namely the dull Mr. Boarham and Mr. Wilmot. Boarham even proposes to her, and Helen rejects him, much the consternation of Mrs. Maxwell. In the meantime, she has made the acquaintance of a lively and handsome young man, Mr. Arthur Huntingdon, who is everything the older suitors are not, namely fun and vibrant and handsome.

Soon Mr. Huntingdon is paying regular calls on Helen and the Maxwells, and, later, Mr. Maxwell invites him to Staningley for a shooting party. Helen cannot wait to see him again. Among the group of visitors who assemble at Staningley for the shooting party are Annabella Wilmot, Mr. Wilmot's flirtatious niece, and Milicent Hargrave, Annabella's much meeker cousin. Helen takes an instant liking to Milicent, but she is no fan of Annabella, especially because it seems that Mr. Huntingdon is quite taken with her. Annabella, however, seems intent upon securing the love of Lord Lowborough, a downcast young man with an aristocratic title but little wealth.

Helen quickly falls in love with Mr. Huntingdon, a fact he soon discerns when he comes across a sketch of himself among Helen's paintings. Helen is mortified, and, the next night, when Mr. Huntingdon ignores her in favor of Annabelle, Helen flees the room weeping, only to have Mr. Huntingdon follow her and demand that she admit her feelings. Eventually she does, and he asks her to marry him. Helen does not agree right away. He must appeal to her uncle, and she needs to speak to her aunt.

Mrs. Maxwell is deeply disturbed by the news of Helen's engagement and does not hesitate to tell her so. Helen is alarmed to find out that Milicent disapproves of the match as well. Even Annabella Wilmot, now engaged to Lord Lowborough, says she thinks the engagement a mistake. Helen and Arthur ignore all the advice of their friends and marry at Christmas time.

Helen's next diary entry concerns their honeymoon, which, she admits, was not all she had hoped it would be. Arthur refused to take her out much in society, saying her appearance by his side would cause his former lovers no end of jealousy. Helen worries that perhaps she made a mistake in marrying Arthur, but when they settle at Arthur's estate, Grassdale Manor, she is again at peace with her choice. For a short time, they are happy together, but Arthur eventually grows bored with country life and begins to torment Helen with stories of his many mistresses. Helen resents this and worries constantly about his drinking habits. They quarrel, and Arthur threatens to leave her for London. She persuades him to take her with him. The trip, like their honeymoon, only serves to underscore the many ways they are not suited for each other. Arthur wants only to throw parties and drink with his friends. Helen grows exhausted and eager for the quiet of Grassdale. She returns home without Arthur, who, claiming he has business he needs to sort out in town, remains behind, assuring her it will only be for a short time.

Months pass and, despite his many promises to come home soon, Arthur is still in London. He writes many affectionate letters to Helen, but she grows increasingly unhappy with each day that goes by. While Helen awaits Arthur's return, she receives word of Milicent's engagement to Ralph Hattersley. The news takes Helen by surprise, and she worries about her friend's prospects for happiness.

Arthur finally comes home, feverish and weak from months of debauchery. Helen nurses him back to health, but wishes he would take better care of himself. Soon, he is ready for company and they invite a group of friends to Grassdale. The group includes Lord and Lady Lowborough, Mr. Grimsby, and Milicent and Ralph Hattersley. The visit is unpleasant for Helen, who at one point catches Arthur kissing Lady Annabella's hand tenderly. She and Arthur argue about the moment's significance, and Helen realizes that her husband's views on fidelity and devotion do not match hers.

A year goes by and Helen is now a mother. She gave birth to little Arthur at Christmastime, and she now finds the bulk of her joy comes from tending her young son. She is alarmed, though, by the fact that Arthur seems unable to bond with the boy. Arthur soon leaves her again for London, where he remains for four months. In his absence, Helen learns to take comfort in the company of her son and the time she spends with Rachel, her servant and friend, and Esther Hargrave, Milicent's younger sister. Helen often finds herself in the company of Walter Hargrave as well. It's clear from the beginning that Walter is smitted with Helen and is furious with Arthur for neglecting her. Still, Helen cannot bring herself to like Walter, especially when he hints at the possibility of Arthur's infidelity.

Two years pass in much the same way. Arthur comes home from London, late, sick, and in ill humor with everyone, and Helen, no longer timid, upbraids him for his drinking and bad behavior. Both husband and wife grow to dislike each other, and during yet another fall shooting party, Helen overhears Arthur and Annabella talking openly about their love for each other. Helen is nearly paralyzed by the confirmation of the affair, but places her faith in God. Maybe, with time and patience, she can repair her marriage. When she confronts Arthur about the affair, however, he casually brushes off her heartbreak.

Soon the two are living as strangers. Helen survives another of

Arthur's London jaunts and is even forced to read Annabella's love letters to her husband. All affection and regard is wearing away, and everything is made worse by the fact that Arthur is having a poisonous effect on their son, influencing little Arthur to drink wine, curse, and condemn his mother. Desperate to remove little Arthur from the toxic environment created by his father, Helen begins to make plans for her escape.

Much to Walter Hargrave's displeasure, those plans do not include him. Over the years, he has made several attempts to win Helen's favor, even going so far as to propose they become lovers. Helen spurns him again and again, and turns instead to her brother Frederick. She writes to him and asks if she might take a few rooms in their old family home—Wildfell Hall—should her situation with Arthur grow unbearable.

It doesn't take long for that time to arrive. Arthur employs a young governess, Miss Myers, to take over little Arthur's education. Helen had hoped to teach the boy herself, in hopes of countering his father's bad influence. Further, Miss Myers is deeply unqualified. When Rachel informs Helen that Arthur and Miss Myers are sleeping together, Helen decides finally to leave her husband. She and Rachel flee Grassdale with little Arthur, heading for the village of Linden-Car and Wildfell Hall. Helen, posing as a widow to avoid scrutiny, cannot suppress the joy she feels upon setting off on her own.

Helen's last few entries concern the work she and Frederick do to Wildfell Hall to make it habitable, and her often tense run-ins with villagers like Mrs. Markham and the Reverend Millward. Gilbert is convinced that her final entry, in which she writes of meeting the beau of the parish, is about him, but he doesn't know if he'll ever find out.

The novel is again told from Gilbert's point of view. The diary has both comforted and disturbed him. He is glad to know that Helen is guiltless, but now he understands that she is not a widow. She is still married, and therefore not free. He rushes over the Wildfell Hall to reconcile with her, and he and Helen have an intensely emotional conversation about their future. Gilbert wants them to still be intimate, good friends at least, but Helen says that is not possible. They must remain apart, hoping to meet someday in Heaven.

Gilbert reluctantly agrees to leave her alone and goes to visit Frederick Lawrence. Helen's brother is not happy to see him, but soon forgives him. The two men become close friends, bound by their mutual love of Helen. It is through Frederick that Gilbert finds out that she has gone back to Grassdale Manor to tend to Arthur, who is deathly ill. It seems his most recent stint in town has completely disabled him, and Helen, ever the faithful wife, returns to serve as his nurse.

Gilbert learns of Helen's life at Grassdale through letters she sends to Frederick. In those letters, she writes of Arthur's at first gradual and then rapid decline. Her only hope for her husband is that he will make his peace with God before he dies, but Arthur is too weak and unresolved to repent. He dies in agony and Helen faints with exhaustion.

It seems to Gilbert that his and Helen's path is finally clear. Now that she is free of Arthur, they can finally marry. But obstacles keep presenting themselves. Gilbert is hurt that Helen's letters never mention him, and he fails to send a message to her through Frederick out of pride. It's only when Eliza Millward informs him that Helen is to be married to Walter Hargrave that Gilbert gets up the nerve to go in search of her. What he finds when he gets to the village church is a different marriage altogether, that of Frederick Lawrence to Esther Hargrave. Gilbert continues his journey, stopping by Grassdale Manor, but Helen isn't there. She's at Staningley with her aunt. The driver who takes him to Staningley informs Gilbert that Helen is now an heiress. Mr. Maxwell died and left her his entire fortune. Gilbert gets out of the carriage before it reaches Staningley, now convinced that Helen will never marry him. She is rich and will now want nothing to do with a lowly Linden-Car farmer.

While Gilbert slumps, depressed, against a tree, another carriage rolls up, carrying Helen, Mrs. Maxwell, and little Arthur. Helen asks Gilbert to come with them to Staningley, and Gilbert agrees unhappily. When Helen and Gilbert are finally alone, Helen asks him why he is acting so downcast. Have his feelings for her changed? He tells her that his feelings are the same; it's the circumstances that have changed. Helen reaches out a window and plucks a rose, attempting to hand it to Gilbert. Confused by the gesture, Gilbert backs away, and Helen, greatly upset, throws the rose out the window, telling him that it was her heart he just tossed aside. Gilbert comes to his senses, runs out, grabs the rose, and proposes to Helen. She accepts.

Gilbert and Helen go on to marry, have children of their own, and live happily on the estate at Staningley, where Jack Halford and Rose are soon expected for a long visit with their children.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Helen Graham – A serious and pious young woman in her mid-twenties, Helen is posing as a widow with a young son when she firsts meets Gilbert Markham. In reality, she moves to Wildfell Hall to escape her abusive husband, Arthur Huntingdon. Helen's unusual situation and stiff manner quickly attract the attention and judgment of the sleepy village, just as her beauty and talents ensnare Gilbert's heart. Helen is a devout Christian who suffers greatly at the hand of her husband, a drunken hedonist (a person who lives only for pleasure) who mocks her faith. She is also a devoted mother to little Arthur and an unapologetic defender of a woman's right to determine the course of her own life—within the bounds of

Christian doctrine. A gifted **painter**, Helen supports herself and little Arthur with landscapes she sells to a London dealer. For much of the novel she is tied by law and duty to Arthur Huntingdon, but upon his death, she gladly accepts Gilbert Markham's proposal and becomes his wife.

Gilbert Markham – A gentleman farmer who followed his father into the profession, Gilbert Markham had, at one time, more worldly ambitions. The first half of the novel consists of Markham's letters to his brother-in-law, Jack Halford, in which he details his young life on his father's farm with his mother, his sister Rose, and younger brother Fergus. The real subject of the letters is his love for Helen Graham, whom he soon learns to value above the flirtatious but empty Eliza Millward. Gilbert is quick to anger and suspicion, and these flaws cause both him and Helen unnecessary suffering when he erroneously presumes Frederick Lawrence is her lover, and later when he worries that the inheritance she receives from her uncle makes her unlikely to accept his proposal. Like the other inhabitants of the village of Linden-Car, Gilbert begins the book leery of Helen, but he soon grows to think of her as the perfect woman and he defies the wishes of his family to make her his wife.

Arthur Huntingdon – A handsome and dissolute young man with tastes only for pleasure and drinking, Helen's first husband proves an ill-suited mate for her as a serious and religious woman. Charming and affectionate in the first days of their marriage, he soon becomes cruel and neglectful, leaving Helen alone at Grassdale Manor for months at a time in order to meet up with his friends in London. Helen hopes to reform him, but he proves himself beyond help when he begins a torrid affair with Annabella Lowborough. Eventually Arthur grows tired of her too, and, bloated from drink and his intelligence dulled by years of constant partying, he contracts a fever. Nursed by the faithful Helen, Arthur dies in agony and without the benefit of belief in a higher power.

Frederick Lawrence – The owner of Wildfell Hall. In the first half of the novel, told from Gilbert Markham's perspective, it would seem that Frederick Lawrence is the secret lover of Helen Graham—but in reality, he is her brother. He is also the romantic target of Jane Wilson, who hopes to marry him for his money and station. When Frederick finally becomes aware of Jane's true materialistic character, he abandons her for the much worthier Esther Hargrave.

Mrs. Maxwell (Peggy) – Helen's aunt, a wise, deeply religious, and always well-intentioned woman. She does her best to talk Helen out of marrying Arthur Hungtingdon, but gives up when her husband gives his permission. Later, after Arthur Huntingdon dies, it's Mrs. Maxwell who Gilbert works hard to please. Helen does not want to marry again without her aunt's approval, and, much to the couple's great joy, Mrs. Maxwell and Gilbert eventually become very good friends.

Mr. Maxwell – Helen's uncle, Mr. Maxwell finds Helen's love affairs more amusing than his wife does. While he wishes Helen would accept a more financially stable suitor like Mr. Boarham or Mr. Wilmot, he gives Arthur Huntingdon permission to marry Helen, promising her a small amount of money as a wedding gift. When he dies toward the end of the novel, he leaves her his entire fortune.

Annabella Wilmot / Lady Lowborough – The beautiful and lively niece of Mr. Wilmot, Annabella marries Lord Lowborough solely for his title and the prestige it gives her. She actually despises her husband, and that truth comes to light years later when, invited to Grassdale Manor for a shooting party, she begins an adulterous affair with Arthur Huntingdon. Spoiled, spiteful, and unkind, she taunts Helen with evidence of Arthur's love for her. After her divorce from Lord Lowborough, she takes up a life of empty pleasure in town.

Lord Lowborough – A serious and often depressed young man who must work hard not to give in to his demons, Lord Lowborough makes a disastrous match to Annabella Wilmot. Genuinely in love with her and in denial of her true character, he finally divorces Annabella when he discovers her affair with Arthur Huntingdon. Eventually, he marries again, this time happily.

Mrs. Markham – Gilbert Markham's mother, a woman who is both imperious and indulgent with her children. She thinks no woman can be good enough for Gilbert, and warns him against forming any serious attachment to both Eliza Millward and Helen Graham. It is Mrs. Markham's opinion that, if one is to live in a peaceful household, the woman should live to please the man and the man to please himself. She is, in Gilbert's words, "the soul of order and punctuality."

Eliza Millward – Flighty, shallow, and seductive, Eliza Millward is Gilbert Markham's first love interest. She is also the daughter of the Reverend Michael Millward, and sister to Mary. Eliza grows bitterly jealous of Gilbert's regard for Helen Graham and happily spreads malicious rumors about her rival. In time, she marries a minor tradesman and makes his life a torment.

Mary Millward – The older daughter of the Reverend Michael Millward and sister of Eliza Millward, Mary tended her mother in her final years. Stouter and less graceful than Eliza, it is initially Gilbert's perception that Mary is beloved by her father, old people, and children, and unvalued by everyone else. Gilbert discovers his error when, at the close of the novel, she marries Richard Wilson, with whom she had been secretly engaged for some time.

Jane Wilson – Mrs. Wilson's daughter and friend to Rose Markham, Jane is, in Gilbert's eyes, coldly ambitious. She is also a local beauty and, as the recipient of a boarding-school education, is much more elegant than many of her compatriots. Having rejected most of her suitors, she hopes very much to marry Frederick Lawrence, but ends her days a spinster.

Milicent Hargrave – A friend of Helen's, Milicent is kind,

submissive, and good. Against her own better judgment, she marries Ralph Hattersley. Milicent shares Helen's love of **painting**. She also shares her misfortune in marrying a man devoted to drink and debauchery, but, unlike Arthur Huntingdon, Ralph sees the error of his ways and becomes a devoted husband and father.

Esther Hargrave – Milicent and Walter Hargrave's younger sister, a woman who is innocent and sweet, but also strong and independent. She refuses to give in to her mother, who would like her to marry the first suitor who asks her, and even threatens to venture out on her own and work for a living. In time, she marries Frederick Lawrence.

Ralph Hattersley – An uncouth man, this son of a banker marries Milicent Hargrave because he claims he could not stand a wife who would check his desire to please himself at all times. At first one of Arthur Huntingdon's most immoral and irresponsible friends, he later reforms, determined to be worthy of Milicent and a good father to their two children.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Arthur Huntingdon, Jr. / "Little Arthur" – The five-year-old son of Helen Graham and Arthur Huntingdon, little Arthur grew wild and out of control under his father's influence. When Helen removes him from Grassdale Manor, however, he becomes a sweet and serious youth.

Rachel – Having worked as Helen's nurse when she was young, Rachel becomes Helen's loyal companion when she decides to leave Arthur for Wildfell Hall.

Jack Halford – Gilbert's brother-in-law, married to Rose, he is the man to whom Gilbert's letters about Helen Graham are addressed. Like Gilbert, he cherishes stories of his impetuous youth, but the reader is never given access to those memories.

Rose Markham – Gilbert Markham's sister and Jack Halford's wife, she is a pretty woman with a plump figure and a kind manner.

Fergus Markham – Gilbert Markham's younger brother, who dreams of going to sea or joining the army, but his mother won't let him. Immature and spoiled at the beginning of the novel, he eventually meets a solid woman, inherits the family farm, and grows into a responsible and upstanding member of Linden-Car.

The Reverend Michael Millward – The father of Eliza and Mary Millward, he is the opinionated and strict minister of the Linden-Car parish. A robust, elderly gentleman, the reverend thinks anyone who disagrees with him or dares not to live as he thinks best is a fool.

Mrs. Wilson – Mrs. Wilson, the widow of a successful farmer, is a neighbor of the Markham family and mother to Jane, Richard, and Robert Wilson. Gilbert describes her as a "narrow-minded, tattling old gossip."

Robert Wilson – A rough farmer, he is son to Mrs. Wilson and brother to Jane and Richard Wilson.

Richard Wilson – The studious member of the Wilson clan, he works hard to secure admittance to college in order to enter the church. Brother to Jane and Richard Wilson and son to Mrs. Wilson, he marries Mary Millward and eventually becomes a much-beloved curate.

Mr. Grimsby – The least likable of Arthur Huntingdon's drunken friends.

Walter Hargrave – The most moderate of Arthur's friends, Walter Hargrave seems at first blush to be a moral man, and he is beloved by his sisters and mother, but he is at heart conniving and dishonest. Helen sees through his ruse and refuses his romantic overtures.

Mrs. Hargrave – Hard-hearted and concerned primarily with status, she marries Milicent off to Mr. Ralph Hattersley knowing that her daughter does not love him. She is also furious when her youngest child, Esther, defies her vows to marry for love rather than convenience and a stable financial situation.

Helen Hattersley – Milicent's daughter and Arthur Huntingdon Jr.'s eventual wife.

Ralph Hattersley (Jr.) – Milicent's son.

Benson – A male servant employed at Grassdale Manor, he helps Helen and Rachel orchestrate their escape.

Mr. Oldfield – Suitor of Esther Hargrave during her first season in London, Esther deems him ugly and old.

Mr. Boarham – Suitor to Helen prior to her marriage to Arthur, he is 18 to Helen's 18 the year she "comes out." He applies for her hand in marriage in a very clumsy and condescending manner. Privately, Helen refers to him as "Bore 'em."

Mr. Wilmot – Yet another of Helen's older suitors; he is uncle to Annabella.

Miss Myers – The governess engaged by Arthur Huntingdon to teach little Arthur, Miss Myers is actually Arthur's mistress. It's his affair with her that gives Helen the motivation she needs to leave her husband.

Helen's father – Unnamed in the text, he dies during the worst years of Helen's marriage to Arthur.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

GENDER, SEXISM, AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

The first half of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* consists of Gilbert Markham's letters to his brother-in-law, Jack Halford, in which he chronicles his daily life in the country village of Linden-Car, while the second half is largely made up of Helen Graham's diary. The bulk of Helen's entries concern her tumultuous marriage to the libertine Arthur Huntingdon. The effect of this split narrative is that the lessons contained in Helen's diary entries often serve as refutations of the conventional wisdom espoused by the villagers whom Gilbert profiles in his letters. Those villagers, including Gilbert's mother, Mrs. Markham, and the parish minister, Michael Millward, champion a system that privileges male fulfillment over a woman's right to happiness. The example of Helen's disastrous union with Arthur Huntingdon and Milicent Hargrave's with Ralph Hattersley makes Brontë's point clear, however: a system of laws and cultural norms that first teaches women that they have very little value outside the home, and then requires that they rely on men not only for necessities like food and shelter but also for personal happiness and romantic fulfillment often ends in a form of enslavement. Women are little more than property in this scenario and men their masters.

Gilbert Markham's mother has very rigid ideas about a woman's role in the home, believing that the woman's job is to please the man, while the man's job is to please himself. Gilbert finds her philosophy simplistic and biased in favor of the male sex, but he only raises minor objections and, in general, Mrs. Markham's opinions on marriage are shown to reflect the opinions of the inhabitants of Linden-Car.

As a proper and loving Christian wife, Helen works diligently in the first months and years of her marriage to please her husband, but she gradually discovers that there is no pleasing him. She follows to the letter the prescription put forth by Mrs. Markham for a happy marriage, but her efforts only end in misery. Moreover, the societal rules that prioritize a man's right to happiness over a woman's only serve to prolong Helen's misery, and she remains with Arthur for years after their love has died, hoping that her kindness and generosity will change him for the better. What happens instead is Arthur sinks further and further into alcoholism, while also beginning a torrid affair with Lady Lowborough. By spending most of his days drinking, carousing, and flirting and making love with his friend's wife, Arthur exemplifies Mrs. Markham's idea that husbands should please themselves.

Helen is not the only woman in the novel victimized by this imbalanced system. Her good friend Milicent Hargrave likewise marries into trouble when she accepts Ralph Hattersley's proposal. Hattersley is a good friend of Arthur's and wants Milicent for a wife mainly because she is too timid to restrain his wild conduct. While Hattersley is off carousing with Arthur and his fellow hedonists, Milicent suffers greatly. Later, Hattersley reforms his behavior, making Milicent a happy woman, but not before many of her youthful years are wasted in anxiety and grief.

Walter Hargrave, brother to Milicent and Esther, is held up as an example of manly perfection by both his mother and sisters, and it's true that he isn't as poorly behaved as Arthur and Hattersley, but that is a low bar indeed. Helen sees through his smooth façade to the selfish and conniving man underneath, but she is one of the only ones, because Hargrave seems like a good man in comparison to his companions.

Women, by contrast, are not evaluated on such a generous curve. This double standard is clear in the chapters told from Gilbert's point of view, where Helen comes under suspicion simply for living on her own. Mrs. Markham, Reverend Millward, and even Gilbert himself lecture Helen on the dangers of doting too much on little Arthur (her son) and of going to extreme lengths to protect him from the ways of the world. Mrs. Markham even suggests that if Helen continues to shelter little Arthur from reality, she will make "a mere Nancy" of him. Gilbert agrees, comparing Helen's mothering to the care one might give **a tree**. If you keep the tree inside a greenhouse for too long, when it comes time to expose it to the elements, it will die. If, however, the gardener is careful to expose the tree to short stints of difficult conditions, it will thrive. When Helen asks Gilbert if his analogy applies to the female sex—that is, whether girls should also be exposed to the rough ways of the world—he answers in the negative. Inherent in both of these arguments is the idea that the male sex is somehow superior to the female, that men are made of stronger stuff than women. It's obvious to Mrs. Markham and her sympathetic audience that if little Arthur were to be in any way effeminate, that would be undesirable in the extreme, and that it is Helen's job to make a man of him.

Helen's diary entries expose the flaw in Mrs. Markham's and Gilbert's thinking. Little Arthur gets his fair share of exposure to drinking, cursing, and being disrespectful to women, thanks to his father and his friends, and that exposure doesn't make him into a stronger or better man. Rather, it makes him unmanageable and moody, and Helen has to work hard to break him of these bad habits. Throughout the book, it often falls to women to prop up or serve as good influences on the men and boys in their lives. Arthur Huntingdon, Ralph Hattersley, and even Lord Lowborough are so weak in both moral fiber and willpower that they verge at times on the pathetic. Brontë's narrative shows that men could actually benefit from being more like women in the areas of moderation, patience, and kindness.

Throughout the book, wives are expected to be paragons of virtue and understanding, and to suppress their needs entirely in the service of their husbands. Men, on the other hand, are permitted to behave badly, abuse their wives, and neglect their

children. Members of so-called "respectable society" rarely censor men for such crimes, saving their vitriol and judgement for women who dare to defy the establishment in any way. Brontë shows that Helen's decision to leave her husband is the right one, despite the disincentives. Moreover, Brontë suggests that Helen is able to take this difficult step because she has deep reserves of strength to draw on. That depth is, to a certain extent, courtesy of the difficult years she has spent as the wife of Arthur Huntingdon. She is in effect living proof that Gilbert's theory of conditioning a tree, while correct, can also be cruel. The fact that the villagers fail to recognize that depth while at the same time judging her harshly reveals the shallowness of their understanding and the punitive hypocrisy that women like Helen, Milicent, and Esther are subjected to.

CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MORALITY

Helen Graham is a devout Christian, and strives to live her life according to Biblical principles. Her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon tests both her faith and her resolve to be good in the face of evil. Even as Arthur mocks her piety, and her own unhappiness suggests to her that the institution of marriage might at times prove a prison, she remains true to the Christian tenets of charity and forgiveness, and in the end she is rewarded for her sacrifices. Overall this delivers a relatively straightforward "moral" to Brontë's story: her claim that holding to one's Christian faith and virtues even in the face of difficulties and unfairness will ultimately lead to happiness—if not in this life, then at least in the next.

Christianity buoys Helen and gives her strength in her most desperate moments. For instance, when she discovers that Arthur and Annabella are indeed lovers, she finds consolation in contemplating the heavens. As her marriage to Arthur grows increasingly unbearable, Helen takes comfort in the fact that she is acting like a Christian should and providing her son with a positive role model of how to live in the world. Her belief in God and scripture likewise gives her the fortitude to leave Arthur and begin a new life, and it also supports her while she returns to nurse Arthur on his death bed. Arthur Huntingdon does not have this refuge. He begins their marriage wishing Helen weren't so pious, and ends it begging her to save him with the power of her belief. His death is particularly tragic because he built his life around the pursuit of worldly pleasures, and dies filled with regret that he gave no thought to the salvation of his soul.

Helen's steadfast Christian virtue saves her from forming what would have been a disastrous, not to mention adulterous, attachment to Walter Hargrave. Desperately in love with her, Walter attempts to convince Helen to begin a sexual relationship with him when it becomes clear that Arthur and Annabella are themselves engaged in an affair, but Helen refuses him, partially on the grounds that it would be morally wrong to be unfaithful to her husband. Walter does not understand her logic. Given that Arthur is being unfaithful to Helen, it is Walter's opinion that she would be fully justified in surrendering to her own passions. Helen refuses Walter, and is vindicated later when he, having married an older woman for money, shows his true colors as an abusive and selfish husband.

Helen's strict morals also pave the way for her to find true love with Gilbert Markham. Like Walter, Gilbert had hoped that he and Helen might indulge their feelings for each other while Helen is married, but Helen informs Gilbert that as long as Arthur lives she is a married woman, and therefore the two of them can only hope to meet later in Heaven as soulmates. When Arthur dies, however, Helen and Gilbert are finally free to marry, and they can do so in good conscience, free from any guilt or blame that would have resulted had they permitted themselves to form a romantic attachment while Helen was still committed to Arthur.

Religion plays a sometimes-contradictory role in Helen's pursuit of happiness and fulfillment. On one hand, Christianity provides Helen with the strength she needs to persevere during the difficult years of her marriage to Arthur. On the other hand, her Christianity traps her in that marriage by prohibiting divorce. Later, Christian doctrine gives villagers like the Reverend Michael Millward and Mrs. Markham license to judge Helen unfairly. Brontë does not at any point directly criticize the institution of marriage, but the time Helen spends as the victim of Arthur's cruelty is nevertheless portrayed as a wasted span of years. Although she has a son whom she loves, most of her time as a married woman is spent suffering and hoping Arthur will change. Moreover, had it not been for Christianity's rigid rules concerning marriage and fidelity, she might have divorced her husband when he first began mistreating her. Divorce is not an option for Helen because of her faith (and society which is arranged around that faith), and so she is a prisoner of her decision. Helen's Christianity also leads her to spends several months nursing Arthur, an effort that ends only in more time lost trying to save a man who doesn't want to be saved.

Yet Brontë makes a clear distinction between Helen's virtuous faith and the hypocritical doctrines practiced and preached by the Reverend Michael Millward. Millward's word is law in his parish, and this means that church-goers such as Mrs. Markham do not think to question even his most ill-conceived opinions. Millward is arrogant and at times willfully ignorant, and he therefore represents the worst of organized religion. It is Millward's misguided condemnation of Helen's lifestyle that leads many in the village to judge Helen before they get to know her. That spirit of judgment in turn leads his daughter Eliza and her friend Jane Wilson to spread false rumors about Helen and the father of her child, causing both Helen and Gilbert unneeded torment.

Religion, for the most part, serves as a positive force in Helen's life. It gives her the strength to withstand Arthur's abuse and

the resolve she needs to leave him and live independently at Wildfell Hall. It also clears the way to true love with Gilbert. At the same time, Christianity is shown to make unreasonable demands of Helen, trapping her in a dead-end marriage and stripping her of the freedom to escape the consequences of bad choices. Furthermore, corrupt church officials and their flawed interpretations of scripture are shown to lead not only to warped understandings of the message of Christianity, but to systemic intolerance and a kind of petty tyranny that flies in the face of Christ's teachings.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Helen makes a tragic choice when she marries Arthur Huntingdon—a decision based on infatuation rather than logic. But Helen is not the only character who throws herself away on an unworthy partner; time and time again in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, young people commit themselves to impractical and ultimately destructive relationships that rob them of years of peace and tranquility. Older and wiser people like Helen's aunt, Mrs. Maxwell, understand the potential for an infatuation to determine the course of a person's life, which is why she tries in vain to talk Helen out of marrying Arthur, and why Mrs. Markham attempts to dissuade Gilbert from forming any serious plans to marry Eliza Millward. In depicting a number of unfortunate alliances, Brontë points to the dangers of romance, and more specifically the dangers of deciding to bind oneself to another person for life (especially considering her society's restrictions on divorce and notions of women as property) based on romantic attraction alone. Were young people to marry for more rational reasons, their unions and adult lives would be much happier. The book, then, serves as a warning to the naïve and inexperienced. Choose unwisely in the matter of love, Brontë suggests, and you could be doomed to a lifetime of loneliness and regret.

Helen is attracted to Arthur for the very qualities that eventually end up alienating her from him. She finds him charming, lively, and carefree. Over time, though, she discovers that he's actually an immoral alcoholic with no patience for productive employment. He wants only to be drinking and carousing with his friends, and, when such fun is not to be had, he mopes around the house, lazy and directionless. Mrs. Maxwell had warned Helen that such a fate could be hers if she let her heart rather than her head guide her choice of a mate. "First study; then approve; then love," Mrs. Maxwell advised. "Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse—These are nothing—and worse than nothing—snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction."

Helen learns the wisdom of her aunt's words the hard way. Helen's love for Arthur soon turns to hate, and hate eventually gives way to indifference. Helen and Arthur have nothing of substance in common. They shared only an initial attraction, and that is not enough to make them suitable life partners. Arthur, in turn, grows to despise Helen. He resents her goodness and is bored by her piety and devotion to little Arthur. Brontë does not seem to be suggesting that such a sad state is inevitable—but rather, that this outcome is the result of selecting one's life partner based on shallow considerations like looks, riches, status, and charm.

Lord Lowborough marries Annabella Wilmot without the benefit of understanding the young woman's true character. He proposes to her because he is bewitched by her beauty and charm, and she accepts the proposal because she wants his title. It isn't long before her unkindness and her ongoing flirtation with Arthur Huntingdon make Lord Lowborough's life a misery. In many ways, their marriage parallels Helen and Arthur's. Lowborough, doing his best to live a good life after years of alcohol and opium abuse, marries a beautiful woman completely unsuited to his character. When he finds out about his wife's adulterous relationship with Arthur, he considers ending his life.

But given that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is in some regards a cautionary tale, the just characters are suitably rewarded in love, while the unjust are punished. Lord Lowborough is a good man at heart and, like the rest of the novel's morally upstanding characters, he eventually experiences the redemptive side of romantic love. Freed from Lady Lowborough, who moves to town to pursue a life of pleasure, Lord Lowborough finds happiness with a plain but worthy woman. Millicent Hargrave, too, eventually receives her reward. Her husband, Ralph Hattersley, decides to leave behind the irresponsible and irreverent companions of his youth and devote himself to Millicent and their children. The couple is thereafter happy and prosperous. Esther Hargrave resists her mother's pressure to marry Mr. Oldfield and is rewarded with the love of Frederick Lawrence. Mary Millward becomes the beloved wife of the studious Richard Wilson.

Helen, of course—being the protagonist and most angelic of all the novel's characters—is fittingly given the most desirable fate. Not only does Arthur conveniently die just as Gilbert's love for her reaches its zenith, but Helen inherits her uncle's sizeable fortune and ends up partnered with a loving husband who gives her a second chance both at conjugal love and the joys of motherhood.

Likewise, the novel's unsympathetic characters—Arthur, Eliza Millward, Jane Wilson, Lady Lowborough, Mr. Grimsby, and Walter Hargrave—eventually get their come-uppance. Eliza marries a tradesman and grows increasingly petty and malicious, Jane Wilson ends up as a spinster, Lady Lowborough is abandoned by her lover, Grimbsy dies in a drunken brawl, and Hargrave is hated by his wife, his tenants, and his workers alike.

By rewarding the good and punishing the wicked, Brontë's treatment of romantic love is perhaps overly simplistic.

Everyone's fate is sealed neatly, the story wrapped up in a tidy bow, and Gilbert and Helen are left to live happily ever after with their children on their vast estate. Brontë does suggest, however, that a certain amount of moral fortitude is required to achieve such earthly bliss. It is rare that women like Helen Graham and Milicent Hargrave get a second chance at happiness. Instead of banking on such unlikely outcomes, a young person should make a smart choice from the beginning.

WORK AND IDLENESS

Helen gives credit to God for helping her survive the soul-crushing ordeal that is her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, but she is able to leave Grassdale Manor and her abusive husband behind thanks to the **paintings** she sells to a London art dealer. Later, at Wildfell Hall, she supports herself and little Arthur with the proceeds from her art, and hard work helps soothe her frayed nerves. As an upper-class woman able to support herself financially, Helen is very much an exception to the rule, as most women at the time were financially dependent on their husbands or fathers. The expectation for women of her class was that they were to marry and raise children—their work consisted mainly of meal planning and the management of servants. However, the novel shows that when one's home is not a sanctuary but a house of horrors—as Grassdale Manor is to Helen—hard work can provide a much-needed escape from the painful reality of one's conditions.

When Helen is still very much in love with Arthur, she uses her talents to sketch his portrait and to finish a painting of two lovesick turtle doves. She isn't a serious painter yet, nor does she need to be to support herself. But when her marriage unravels, she needs a career to fall back on and a future she can look forward to, not just for herself, but for her child. As she matures, so does her work. She turns away from childish portraits and sentimental scenes, focusing instead on landscapes. She is literally painting a home for herself, crafting a new world where she and little Arthur can finally live in peace.

Men often try to get in the way of Helen's efforts to paint this blissful place. It's no coincidence that men are forever interrupting her when she is hard at work: she must flee social obligations and scenes of varying degrees of merriment and drunkenness in order to paint, and potential suitors, including Walter Hargrave and Gilbert Markham, often walk in on her and disturb her concentration. In this way the men, even the well-intentioned Gilbert, represent the system of laws and social norms that aimed at keeping women subordinate. The most extreme example of this is, of course, when Arthur, having read a portion of Helen's diary, throws her paintings and supplies into the fire. He hopes to break both her spirit and her physical means of escaping him (the work she was intending to sell), and keep her dependent on him forever. Helen doesn't give up, though, and eventually she does work her way to freedom.

Other characters also benefit from hard work. Whenever Gilbert Markham finds himself agonizing over his hopeless love for Helen, he turns to his farm for consolation, and the work is usually sufficiently challenging to distract him at least for a time from heartbreak. And at the end of the novel, Gilbert signs the farm over to his hapless brother, Fergus, and this newfound employment helps Fergus grow into a responsible and contributing member of society.

Idleness is therefore shown to be the enemy of a peaceful mind. Arthur and his friends illustrate this point well, doing very little with their time beyond drinking and partying it away. Sometimes they spend their hours in sport, hunting at their own or someone else's country estate. Usually, however, they waste it in gambling and drunkenness, and none of these activities promotes happiness and stability. Arthur dies with nothing to show for himself but regret, sin, and debt. Ralph Hattersley, by contrast, becomes a successful horse breeder. His success is only possible when he leaves behind an empty existence of purposeless partying for the rewards of work and family.

Once again Brontë's neat endings for her characters, rewarding the hardworking and punishing the lazy, show the relatively straightforward lesson she imparts to her readers about the benefits of work—yet this lesson is somewhat complicated by a social system dictating that members of the upper classes spend their lives in leisure. For Helen, her work is visual art, giving her the chance to create a new and bright future for herself out of paint, canvas, and a mature vision of the world around her. Regardless of vocation, Brontë suggests, humans are happiest and at their most fulfilled when they are striving to produce a work of lasting value.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

TREES AND FLOWERS

Throughout the novel, Anne Brontë uses tree- and flower-based imagery to underscore men's tendency to underestimate women. For instance, Gilbert likens Helen's mothering of little Arthur to the care a gardener might lavish on a sapling, arguing that it is necessary to expose the young to small portions of the world's cruelty in order to prepare them for an uncertain future. He admits, however, that he would never advocate for exposing a girl to such realities. The book's female characters are often described as fragile flowers. Arthur compares Helen to a dewy rose, modest and mysterious, and Annabella Wilmot to a flashy peony, all ostentation and empty show. Fergus Markham tells Helen that,

as a newcomer to Linden-Car, she is a flower blooming among an uninteresting patch of domesticated plants. In the climatic scene of the novel, when Helen finally declares her love for Gilbert with a Christmas rose, Gilbert nearly loses Helen by bumbling the moment out of sheer conceit. Male characters might equate women with delicate blooms, but the women almost always prove themselves stronger than their male counterparts. The latter half of the novel, told from Helen's perspective, reveals the accidental wisdom of Gilbert's sapling theory. Having suffered years of abuse from the libidinous Arthur Huntingdon, Helen is a strong and independent woman, confident enough in her talents and fortitude to try to make a life for herself and her son without any help from a man.

PAINTING

Helen's work as a painter serves as both a figurative and literal escape for her, and her work likewise represents her evolution from naïve young girl to mature woman. Forced to keep company with Arthur's drunken friends, she often flees them in order to paint, and when she finally gathers the courage necessary to leave Arthur, she supports herself and her son with the proceeds she makes from selling her paintings. One can also trace Helen's personal and emotional journey through her art. As an infatuated 18-year-old, Helen sketches Arthur Huntingdon's handsome portrait. She also dedicates much of her time to a depiction of two lovesick turtledoves. Later, at Wildfell Hall, she turns to landscapes, and it is in her studies of the natural world that she reveals not only her growing mastery as a painter but her inner self. One of the paintings Gilbert most admires is a scene of **bare trees** that themselves symbolize Helen's suffering and loneliness. She knows pain and thwarted desire firsthand, and is therefore able to paint the trees with precision and feeling.

THE WEATHER

As a farmer, Gilbert is deeply tied to the land. His living depends on it. And, as a painter, Helen is always taking care to keenly observes nature's rhythm. It makes sense, then, that Brontë would make liberal use of the weather to hint at Helen and Gilbert's moods, as well as their immediate prospects for happiness and contentment. During the fateful visit to the seaside, the beauty of the May day practically blesses their love with its glory. In contrast, the days following the pivotal moment when Gilbert sees Helen and Frederick walking in the garden and mistakes their filial affection for romantic love are gloomy and wet, as the drizzle and fog match Gilbert's stormy state of mind. And when Gilbert rides into the country to stop Helen from marrying Walter Hargrave, the day is snowy and cold, an outward manifestation of his dread. Sometimes, though, the weather contrasts with a character's mood and mocks the character's reverence for it. For example, alone at Grassdale and desperately missing her husband, Helen experiences the beauties of spring in her new home as an assault upon her sensibilities. Deeply connected to the natural world, both Gilbert and Helen experience the weather as an extension of themselves, a reflection of who they are in different moments in time.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Wordsworth Classics edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* published in 2001.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"No matter, my dear," said I; "it is what every respectable female ought to know; and besides, though you are alone now, you will not be always so; you have been married and probably—I might say almost certainly—will be again." "You are mistaken there, ma'am," said she, almost haughtily; "I am certain I never shall." "But I told her, I knew better."

Related Characters: Helen Graham, Mrs. Markham (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Markham is paying a call on Helen Graham and the two women begin conversing about matrimony. A widow herself, Mrs. Markham is a great proponent of the married state, and her prediction does, indeed, come true. Helen Graham does marry again, but it's Mrs. Markham's arrogant certainty that is noteworthy here, as well as her assertion that there are things all respectable women should know how to do, i.e. cook, clean, and look after their husbands. Helen is averse to following such narrow dictates, and she likewise objects to the idea that she needs to marry in order to be accepted by society. Mrs. Markham might mean well, but it's attitudes like hers that strip women of the agency they need to lead their own lives.

"I would rather admire you from this distance, fair lady, than be the partner of your home."

Related Characters: Gilbert Markham (speaker), Eliza Millward, Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Gilbert is at church, seeing Helen Graham for the first time. He is struck most by the stern set to her face and makes a snap judgment that she must be an unpleasant companion. The implications of his words are that women are to be admired more for their looks than for their inner natures, especially if those looks suggest that a woman might not be as pliable and impressionable as men would like her to be. At this point in the text, Gilbert very much prefers Eliza Millward, whom he considers not only attractive but more conventionally feminine, to the more formidable and complex Helen.

Chapter 3 Quotes

I have not yet said that a boy should be ought to rush into the snares of life—or even willfully to seek temptation for the sake of exercising his virtue by overcoming it; I only say that it is better to arm and strengthen your hero, than to disarm and enfeeble the foe; and if you were to rear an oak sapling in a hothouse, tending it carefully night and day, and shielding it from every breath of wind, you could not expect it to become a hardy tree, like that which has grown up on the mountainside, exposed to all the action of the elements, and not even sheltered from the shock of the tempest.

Related Characters: Gilbert Markham (speaker), Arthur Huntingdon, Jr. / "Little Arthur", Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

In his first conversation with Helen, Gilbert makes the argument that she is doting too much on her son, Arthur, and risking the chance that the boy will grow up weak and unmanly. Gilbert uses the analogy of the tree to prove his point, asserting that it is necessary to introduce a young boy to small dangers frequently so as not to spoil him for the real world. It is interesting that Gilbert likens boys to trees. Girls and women are often compared to buds and blooms, which, of course, would perish if exposed to a tempest. The idea is that boys are made of hardier stuff than girls, and that, should Arthur grow into an effeminate young man, it is all Helen's fault. Also, that it is inherently undesirable for a boy to have any feminine qualities whatsoever is assumed in Gilbert's whole point.

Well then, it must be that you think they are both weakened and prone to err, and the slightest error, the merest shadow of pollution will ruin the one, while the character of the other will be strengthened and embellished—his education properly finished by a little practical acquaintance with forbidden things. Such experience, to him (to use a trite simile), will be like the storm to the oak which, though it may scatter the leaves, and snap the smaller branches, serves but to rivet the roots, and to harden and condense the fibres of the tree. You would have us encourage our sons to prove all things by their own experience,

while our daughters must not even profit by the experience of others.

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Gilbert Markham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In that same conversation as the previous quote, Helen points out Gilbert's essential hypocrisy. He would not have girls or young women exposed to small amounts of danger and depravity in order to make them stronger, only boys, and that means he thinks the female sex is by nature weaker than the male. Helen is also suggesting that Gilbert's theory is flawed because the exposure he advocates for could just as well kill the tree or corrupt it beyond recognition as make it more fit for life. Society, though, continues to prescribe experience for men and a sort of saint-like innocence for women. The result is that women are kept in the dark about the sins of the world and they are often unprepared when forced to encounter them.

Chapter 6 Quotes

Then you must fall each into your proper place. You'll do your business, and she, if she's worthy of you, will do hers; but it's your business to please yourself, and hers to please you.

Related Characters: Mrs. Markham (speaker), Gilbert Markham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Markham is giving Gilbert advice on the ingredients that go into a successful marriage. In her opinion, the happy home is one in which the wife prioritizes the husband above everything, sublimating her needs and wants to his will. The husband's only job is, likewise, to put himself at the center of everything. Mrs. Markham is not alone in ascribing to such a system. She is joined in her opinions by other prominent inhabitants of the village of Linden-Car, including the Reverend Michael Millward. What she and the reverend do not seem to notice is that, in this scenario, no one is seeing to the wife's desires, not even the wife herself. As Helen's marriage to Arthur Huntingdon proves, the result of this is often misery and abuse.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ You're not fit to associate with ladies and gentlemen, like us, that have nothing to do but to run snooking about to our neighbours' houses, peeping into their private corners; and scenting out their secrets, and picking holes in their coats, when we don't find them ready made to our hands—you don't understand such refined sources of enjoyment.

Related Characters: Fergus Markham (speaker), Eliza Millward, Rose Markham, Helen Graham, Gilbert Markham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Gilbert's younger and notoriously irresponsible brother, Fergus, is taking Eliza Millward and Rose to see Helen Graham. Their visit is not really one of friendship; they hope only to satisfy their idle curiosity. While walking to Wildfell Hall, they meet Gilbert, and Fergus tries to convince him not to accompany them because his serious turn of mind will ruin the fun. The fun, of course, lies in snooping on Helen and, should she prove too private to offer them much in the way of gossip, fabricating stories to entertain themselves. Indeed, that is eventually what happens. Helen becomes the target of gossip-mongers and the rumors they spread about her threaten to derail her relationship with Gilbert and her entire reputation as a respectable young woman. The real truth, then, is not that Gilbert is not fit to associate with Fergus and his companions, but that Fergus and people like him do not have interesting lives of their own, and so must live vicariously through others.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ You see what it is for women to affect to be different to other people.

Related Characters: Mrs. Markham (speaker), Frederick Lawrence, Rose Markham, Gilbert Markham, Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

Rumors are afoot that Helen Graham is not a widow as everyone in Linden-Car had been led to believe, but is, in fact, embroiled in an adulterous affair with Frederick Lawrence, who is not just her landlord at Wildfell Hall but is also the father of little Arthur. Gilbert does not believe the tales, but Rose and Mrs. Markham have been caught up in the gossip, partially because Helen is unlike other women of their acquaintance. In fact, Mrs. Markham blames Helen's atypical lifestyle for fueling the scandal. Women are to marry and serve their husbands, she believes; otherwise, they leave themselves open to the worst of public opinion. Frederick Lawrence, interestingly enough, does not reap the sort of scorn Helen does as a result of the rumor. It is only Helen's character that is assassinated.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ "I can crush that bold spirit," thought I. But while I secretly exulted in my power, I felt disposed to dally with my victim like a cat.

Related Characters: Gilbert Markham (speaker), Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Gilbert is very much in love with Helen Graham, but, having seen her walking in the garden with her head on Frederick Lawrence's shoulder, he now believes the rumors about them and is crushed by what he takes to be their deception. Helen has summoned Gilbert to Wildfell Hall to hear her

explanation of why the two of them can never be more than friends, and Gilbert, rather than treating her kindly, is all jealous vindictiveness. Gilbert's comparing himself to a cat and Helen to a mouse is significant. As one of the only villagers in Linden-Car who insisted on thinking the best of Helen, he stopped seeing her as fully human the moment he surmised that her affections belonged to another man. She is little more than a mouse now, and he plans to toy with her emotions in a merciless way. Her only sin, though, is not loving him.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Because, I imagine there must be only a very, very few men in the world, that I should like to marry; and of those few, it is ten to one I may never be acquainted with one; or if I should, it is twenty to one, he may not happen to be single, or to take a fancy to me.

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Mrs. Maxwell (Peggy)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

The novel has switched from Gilbert to Helen's hands. In her conversation with Gilbert about why they had to remain friends and nothing more, she handed him her diary by way of an explanation. The diary begins when Helen is just 18, and she writes here of talking to her aunt, Mrs. Maxwell, about marriage on the eve of her first London season. The above quotation illustrates not only Helen's naivete but the difficulty Helen and women like her face when it comes to selecting a life partner. They are expected to engage themselves to a man early in life and are considered on the shelf if they do not do so by a certain age, but the challenge is in meeting the right man under the right circumstances. Helen discovers just how difficult navigating such terrain can be when the old and dull Mr. Boarham proposes to her and will not take "no" for an answer.

It is not indeed, to be supposed that you would wish to marry anyone, till you were asked: a girl's affections should never be won unsought. But when they are sought—when the citadel of the heart is fairly besieged, it is apt to surrender sooner than the owner is aware of, and often against her better judgement, and in opposition to all her preconceived ideas of what she could have loved, unless she be extremely careful and discreet.

Related Characters: Mrs. Maxwell (Peggy) (speaker), Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Maxwell's advice puts Helen in an impossible position. She cannot even entertain thoughts of marrying a man until she is confident that he desires her as well. The only way to make sure she makes a wise decision in regard to matrimony, Mrs. Maxwell suggests, is for Helen to take great care to maintain a safe distance between herself and future mates. That way, she won't be tempted to give her heart away to the most persistent bidder. A young woman does not have the freedom or right to make her own choice in the area of love. She has to wait for a man to choose her, and even then she has to hold herself apart so that she has the necessarily emotional distance to select the right suitor.

First study; then approve; then love. Let your eyes be blind to all external attractions, your ears deaf to all the fascinations of flattery and light discourse—These are nothing—and worse than nothing—snares and wiles of the tempter, to lure the thoughtless to their own destruction. Principle is the first thing, after all; and next to that good sense, respectability, and moderate wealth. If you should marry the handsomest and most accomplished and superficially agreeable man in the world, you little know the misery that would overwhelm you, if, after all, you should find him to be a worthless reprobate, or even an impracticable fool.

Related Characters: Mrs. Maxwell (Peggy) (speaker), Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Maxwell might be holding her niece to unrealistic and overly exacting standards, but she is a wise woman whose warnings almost take on the ring of prophecy, given the miserable marriage that Helen eventually makes to Arthur Huntingdon. Helen has yet to meet Arthur, though, and assures her aunt she would never marry someone for something as superficial as looks or mere agreeableness. She promises in this conversation to marry only for love and esteem, which she likewise vows never to bestow on an unworthy man. The irony is almost too great, as Arthur proves himself everything Mrs. Maxwell warns against.

❝ I have consulted her; and I know her wishes coincide with yours; but in such important matters, I take the liberty of judging for myself; and no persuasion can alter my inclinations, or induce me to believe that such a step would be conducive to my happiness, or yours—and I wonder that a man of your experience and discretion should think of choosing such a wife.

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Mrs. Maxwell (Peggy), Mr. Boarham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Boarham has proposed to Helen and Helen vehemently rejects him, despite Mrs. Maxwell's wish that she accept. In this scene, Helen shows herself a strong and independent woman, well-acquainted with her own mind and heart, but Mr. Boarham does not trust Helen to judge such a weighty matter for herself. Helen then wonders why he would select her for a partner. He seems to think her too immature to decide with whom she would like to spend the rest of her life. What, Helen asks, does he see in her? It is obviously her beauty and her youth that he is attracted to. It's hypocritical, then, that Mrs. Maxwell would approve the match, when she was just warning Helen about the dangers of throwing herself away on a man simply on account of his looks.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ I have such confidence in him, aunt, notwithstanding all you say, that I would willingly risk my happiness for the chance of securing his. I will leave better men to those who only consider their own advantage. If he has done amiss, I shall consider my life well spent in saving him from the consequences of his early errors, and striving to recall him to the path of virtue—God grant me success!

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Arthur Huntingdon, Mrs. Maxwell (Peggy)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Helen has agreed to marry the dashing Arthur Huntingdon, much to Mrs. Maxwell's displeasure. He is exactly the kind of man Mrs. Maxwell hoped Helen would steer clear of, but Helen tries to comfort her aunt by arguing that she will reform him. Helen's willingness to trade her happiness for Arthur's harkens back to Mrs. Markham's marriage advice. A woman's main responsibility, according to Gilbert's mother, is to make her husband happy. Helen is very much committed not only to fulfilling that role, but to helping Arthur regain firm footing in the Christian church. Her earlier promises to her aunt about not being swayed by good looks and empty charm are now out the window. She is ready to engage herself to a man whose only virtues seem to be a handsome face and an endless appetite for fun and pleasure.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ There is no help for him now; he is past praying for. Besides, she may keep up the deception to the end of the chapter; and then he will be just as happy in the illusion as if it were reality.

Related Characters: Arthur Huntingdon (speaker), Helen Graham, Annabella Wilmot / Lady Lowborough , Lord Lowborough

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

Arthur has been acquainting Helen with some of Lord

Lowborough's personal history, which includes struggles with alcohol and opium addiction. At the present moment, though, Lowborough is a happy man because he thinks he has captured the heart of the beautiful Annabella Wilmot. Arthur knows the truth, however. Annabella cares nothing for Lowborough; she is only allowing him to pursue her because she wants his title.

Helen is horrified by the entire situation and worries that Lowborough will soon find himself dissatisfied with his marriage. Arthur, on the other hand, has no sympathy for his "friend" and thinks it all a good laugh. Helen and Arthur obviously differ greatly on how seriously they take the marriage state, and Lowborough's story likewise acts to underscore the countless young people who enter the institution under some form of delusion.

❝ I cannot get him to write or speak in real, solid earnest. I don't much mind it now; but if it be always so, what shall I do with the serious part of myself?

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Arthur Huntingdon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 157

Explanation and Analysis

Helen has begun to notice that she and Arthur are ill-suited for each other in many regards. As a pious Christian, she finds Arthur's lack of reverence disturbing, and she is turned off by his tendency to turn everything (including love, marriage, and duty to one's friends) into a joke. At this point in their marriage, Arthur's facetious attitude is only a minor annoyance, but the fact that Helen is worried about losing a whole side of her own personality hints at the power Arthur has over her as her husband. Again, this gets to a woman's role in marriage. A man can be entirely himself, even if that self is sardonic to a fault, whereas a woman has to mold herself into a new being, pleasing in every way to her mate.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ She is a daughter of earth; you are an angel of heaven; only be not too austere in your divinity, and remember that I am a poor, fallible mortal.

Related Characters: Arthur Huntingdon (speaker), Annabella Wilmot / Lady Lowborough , Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Arthur is trying to comfort Helen after she has seen him take Annabella Lowborough's hand in his and kiss it. Helen is deeply upset by the scene, but, as usual, Arthur laughs it off. He also explains to Helen that she and Annabella are inherently different creatures. Helen is an angel, very much above the petty cares and sensual delights of the sinning world, whereas Annabella is earthbound and prey to man's baser appetites. Arthur's argument, clearly a patently ridiculous one, is that Helen should not be affected by any affection he shows Annabella, a sinner, since it is automatically of an inferior nature to the love he has for Helen, a saint. His short speech puts women into two very familiar categories: that of the Madonna and the whore. And as becomes increasingly clear, Arthur prefers the worldly, sensual woman to the "angel" who would ruin his fun.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ How little real sympathy there exists between us; how many of my thoughts and feelings are gloomily cloistered within my own mind; how much of my higher and better self is indeed unmarried—doomed either to harden and sour in the sunless shade of solitude, or to quite degenerate and fall away for lack of nutriment in this unwholesome soil!

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Arthur Huntingdon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Helen's marriage to Arthur has grown increasingly strained. He has returned to Grassdale Manor after an extended period of drinking and carousing with his friends in London, and Helen, always left alone during such times, is beginning to wonder if her best self will survive these difficult years, or if her personality will be warped beyond recognition by exposure to Arthur's drunkenness and willfully sinful

nature. Helen's worries reflect the danger inherent in a system that advocates for women surrendering their own wants and desires upon entering the marriage state. Women can easily lose themselves in such unequal partnerships. Helen's word choice here is significant, as in many ways it echoes Gilbert's child-as-sapling theory of parenting, i.e. the idea that Helen should gradually introduce her son to the worst parts of the real world in order to build up his inner reserves. Helen is the sapling in this scenario, and fears that such exposure is not strengthening her but rather weakening her to the point that she might fade away to nothing.

"But it is now January: spring is approaching; and, I repeat, I dread the consequences of its arrival. That sweet season, I once so joyously welcomed as the time of hope and gladness, awakens, now, far other anticipations by its return.

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Arthur Huntingdon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

As a painter, Helen is keenly attuned to the rhythms of nature, and, prior to marrying Arthur, she took a great deal pleasure in the changing of the seasons, particularly the arrival of spring. But spring now means Arthur's annual trip to London, where he quite literally nearly kills himself with drink and debauchery. It also means months of loneliness for Helen. The anxiety she feels at the approach of spring mirrors the other changes she is undergoing as Arthur's wife. With the passing of each year, she loses more and more of herself. Spring, a time of renewal and fertility, no longer has any appeal to Helen, who, though she is still a young woman, no longer looks forward to her future but, instead, has learned to dread it.

Chapter 32 Quotes

"A man must have something to grumble about; and if he can't complain that his wife harries him to death with her perversity and ill-humour, he must complain that she wears him out with her kindness and gentleness."

"But why complain at all, unless, because you are tired and dissatisfied?"

"To excuse my own failings, to be sure. Do you think I'll bear all the burden of my sins on my own shoulders, as long as there's another ready to help me, with none of her own to carry?"

Related Characters: Ralph Hattersley (speaker), Milicent Hargrave

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

It is late summer at Grassdale Manor, and Milicent and Ralph Hattersley are discussing their marriage. Mr. Hattersley, who married Milicent for her timid nature, is now complaining that she is too submissive. Hattersley admits, of course, that if a woman is too assertive, her husband will grumble about that, and if, like Milicent, she is sweet and retiring, he will find fault with that as well. In other words, wives cannot win. He also admits that he is complaining in order take the blame off his own back. Since Milicent is so pure of heart, she can afford to shoulder some of the blame for Hattersley's bad behavior, he feels. Again, women are put in an impossible situation. Their husbands will always find fault with them, regardless of how they act, and wives therefore have very little control over their own destiny or even day-to-day happiness.

Chapter 37 Quotes

"There is another life both for you and for me," said I. "If it be the will of God that we should sow in tears, now, it is only that we may reap in joy, hereafter."

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Walter Hargrave

Related Themes:

Page Number: 263

Explanation and Analysis

As a devout Christian and deeply discontented wife, Helen puts her faith in the afterlife as her one chance at true

happiness. Walter Hargrave had suggested to her that they give themselves permission to begin a love affair in the wake of Arthur and Annabella's adulterous relationship coming to light, but Helen refuses on moral grounds. Helen's philosophy reflects not only her youthful religious education but her current reality. She tells Walter that those who are fated to suffer on earth will be rewarded later in heaven. As the wife of Arthur Huntingdon, Helen suffers innumerable humiliations and slights, and she takes great comfort in the idea that such suffering is not in vain. The worldly Walter is of course dissatisfied with her rejection—he wants his "joy" now.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ Two years hence you will be as calm as I am now—and far, far happier, I trust, for you are a man, and free to act as you please.

Related Characters: Helen Graham (speaker), Lord Lowborough

Related Themes:

Page Number: 268

Explanation and Analysis

Lord Lowborough has discovered that his wife Annabella and Arthur Huntingdon have been embroiled in an extra-marital affair. Angry and mortified, he confronts Helen about the fact that she has known about the affair for some time and never told him. Helen is filled with pity for Lord Lowborough, but, at the same time points out to him that, over time, he will grow numb as she has, and, as a man, he has more license than she does to rebuild his life. As the wife of a philanderer, Helen is trapped. Lord Lowborough, on the other hand, is within the law to divorce Annabella and marry again. Helen is a prisoner of a system that privileges the rights of men over women at every turn.

Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ "I do not insult you," cried he: "I worship you. You are my angel—my divinity! I lay my powers at your feet—and you must and shall accept them!" he exclaimed impetuously, starting to his feet—"I will be your consoler and defender! And if your conscience upbraid you for it, say I overcame you and you could not choose but yield!"

Related Characters: Walter Hargrave (speaker), Helen Graham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 279

Explanation and Analysis

Walter Hargrave makes one last attempt to persuade Helen to be his lover. Helen is furious with him for going against her wishes and insulting her with yet another immoral and distasteful proposal, but Walter defends himself by saying he could never insult her. He insists that the fact that he worships her renders him blameless in the matter, and then, like Arthur, he likens Helen to an angel and a god. Helen considers such talk both blasphemous and disingenuous. She is not a divinity; nor is she an angel. She is a human being who wants her wishes to be respected, but, because she is a woman, she knows those wishes will, more than likely, be ignored. Later, when Grimsby walks in on the scene, he finds Walter embracing Helen and promises to paint Helen's behavior as darkly as he can when describing it to Arthur. Helen, faultless, is made out to be the villain because of Walter's unwanted attentions.

Chapter 45 Quotes

❝ "It gives me little consolation to think I shall next behold you as a disembodied spirit, or an altered being, with a frame perfect and glorious, but not like this! —and a heart, perhaps, entirely estranged from me."

"No, Gilbert, there is perfect love in Heaven!"

"So perfect, I suppose, that it soars above distinctions, and you will have no closer sympathy with me than with any one of the ten thousand angels and the innumerable multitude of happy spirits round us."

Related Characters: Helen Graham, Gilbert Markham (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

Gilbert has finished Helen's diary and, armed now with the knowledge of all that she has suffered at Arthur's hands, confesses his love and asks Helen for her feelings in return. As she told Walter Hargrave when he begged her to engage in a love affair with him, Helen replies that, while they cannot indulge their feelings on earth, they can at least take comfort in the idea that they will meet someday in Heaven,

where love is perfect and beautiful. Gilbert finds no comfort in such a concept. He wants imperfect love with her in the here and now. Helen has experienced her fair share of the mixed pleasure that comes of earthly love, though. She watched helplessly as her husband grew indifferent to her and fell in love with someone else, and she had to fend off the advances of Walter Hargrave, who deviously masqueraded as a kind and loyal friend to her and little Arthur in the hopes that Helen would consent to a sexual relationship with him. Gilbert is, by comparison, naïve. His is an impossible desire, and it is only Arthur Huntingdon's death that can release Helen from her bondage.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

TO J. HALFORD, ESQ.

Gilbert Markham, as of yet unnamed, is writing a letter to his brother-in-law, Jack Halford, in which he promises to atone for having offended Halford the last time they met. At that meeting, Jack treated Gilbert to stories about his youth. Gilbert, not in a sharing mood, did not reciprocate. Now this friendship of long-standing is strained, and Gilbert hopes to soothe any hurt feelings with this letter about an important time in his life. Gilbert warns Jack this will be a long tale and a thorough one, and he is using not just his memory but his journal from that time to paint a full picture.

Gilbert's first letter to Jack sets up the novel's epistolary structure—Gilbert has a specific audience in mind, though the general reader is also privy to this correspondence. It also prepares the reader for a story that, at least to Gilbert, proved life-changing. The fact that readers aren't treated to tales of Jack's youthful indiscretions suggests that Jack will be only a minor character, and that does turn out to be the case. He mostly just acts as a stand-in for the reader.

CHAPTER 1. A DISCOVERY

Gilbert begins his story in fall 1827, when, against his own wishes and the advice of his mother, he follows in his father's footsteps and works as a gentleman farmer, tending to his father's land on Linden-Car farm. Gilbert, walking home through his fields, tells himself that, by farming the land, he is a useful member of society and benefiting not only himself and his future children but humanity at large. The day is **gloomy** and cold but, once in his parlour, he manages a roaring fire and that cheers him up some. He reminds Jack that in the time frame of the story he is telling, he is only 24 years old and therefore not as in control of his emotions as he is now, writing this account.

Gilbert's occupation as a farmer ties him tightly to nature and its rhythms. The weather often mimics his mood and vice versa, and on this particular day he is contemplating his dissatisfaction with his life. He'd hoped to distinguish himself in a more prestigious and intellectually engaging line of work.

Before he can settle in before the fire, Gilbert takes care to remove his muddy clothes and boots. His mother (Mrs. Markham) is particular about such things. On the stair he meets his sister, Rose, and brother, Fergus. The three of them then join their mother for tea and the children tell her what they've been doing with their days. Gilbert was busy with farm duties. Fergus wasted his time baiting badgers. Rose paid a call to the Wilsons, a neighboring family, where she not only ran into Eliza Millward, a lively young woman she thinks would be a good match for Gilbert, but also heard a juicy piece of gossip: that a very reserved single woman in her mid-twenties named Mrs. Graham is renting Wildfell Hall and living there, in its few habitable rooms, with an elderly female servant.

Each member of the Markham family has a role to play. Gilbert is the moody but responsible eldest son; Fergus the fun-loving and irresponsible second son; Rose the kind and pliable sister; and Mrs. Markham the austere and often controlling matriarch. At tea, they form the picture of domestic happiness, but their insatiable interest in their neighbors' affairs hints at the tedium of life in a small, sleepy village.

According to Rose, both her friend Jane and Jane's mother, Mrs. Wilson, have visited the woman, but have had very little luck in getting her to open up to them about who she is and why she has moved to Wildfell Hall. They discerned from her dress that she was a widow, but could learn nothing more than that. The plan, then, is for Eliza, known for her powers of persuasion, to accompany her father on a call to Wildfell Hall in hopes of gleaning more information. Eliza's father intends to offer the young stranger pastoral advice; Eliza hopes to discover the intimate details of the woman's life. Rose suggests that she and Mrs. Markham call on her as well, and Mrs. Markham agrees, pitying the woman and her lonely state.

As a young woman living on her own, Helen Graham is atypical to say the least. She excites a great deal of curiosity partially because she is defying convention, but also by virtue of her sex. The reverend assumes she is in need of pastoral advice because she is a woman and a mother—he would almost certainly not make the same assumption if she had been a man living in similar circumstances.

Fergus jokes that he can't wait to hear about what Mrs. Graham puts in her tea and what sort of caps and aprons she prefers. Rose and Mrs. Markham visit the young woman, and report back to Gilbert—apparently Mrs. Graham is largely ignorant when it comes to domestic matters. Mrs. Graham's ignorance surprises Mrs. Markham, who thinks all respectable ladies ought to have a working knowledge of cooking and other household tasks. It's fine while Mrs. Graham is alone for her to know little about cooking, but she'll have to change her ways when she marries again. Mrs. Graham surprises Mrs. Markham a second time by declaring that she is determined to remain single the rest of her life. Mrs. Markham laughs at the young woman's earnestness, declaring she knows better and that Mrs. Graham is bound to marry again someday.

Fergus's joke makes women the punchline. He is mocking not only Helen Graham, but the other women in the village who are curious about her, and women in general—whose interests, Fergus suggests, are mundane and brainless. Mrs. Markham's preconceived notions concerning what a married woman must know fall right in line with Fergus's joke. Helen's ignorance of cooking and other domestic duties adds to her outlier status, as does her expressed desire to remain single for the rest of her days.

Rose describes Mrs. Graham as a perfect beauty, contrasting the young woman's looks with the imperfect, albeit ample, charms of Eliza Millward. After Mrs. Markham leaves the room, she continues to regale Gilbert with details of Mrs. Graham's person and home. He ignores most of what she has to say, but looks forward to seeing the woman in church the next day. When he does, he finds her features, while attractive, not terribly noteworthy. She is thin, and there is a tightness to her mouth that convinces him she is best admired from afar than loved up close.

In this society women of marriageable age are valued for their abilities as cooks and household managers, but their beauty often proves their most important attribute when it comes to attracting members of the opposite sex. Helen is clearly beautiful, but Gilbert finds her looks unwelcoming, hence threatening.

Mrs. Graham gives him a scornful look that Gilbert vows to make her regret someday. Then, deeming such thoughts unworthy of a man supposedly at worship, Gilbert looks around the church and sees that everyone in the congregation is engaged in the same activity as he: namely in sizing up Mrs. Graham. Even Eliza Millward is sneaking glances at the young newcomer.

Gilbert's desire to make Helen regret something as harmless as a scornful glance hints at his desire to control her and even punish her for daring to commit the crime of not liking him instantly.

Gilbert writes a long description of Eliza Millward for Jack Halford's benefit. The reverend's daughter, is, according to Gilbert, more charming than pretty, but her eyes are particularly bewitching, even wicked in their appeal, and he is very much taken with her, despite the fact that his mother deeply disapproves. Mrs. Markham doesn't consider any woman good enough for her eldest son. Gilbert likens Eliza to a kitten whose moods vary from flirtatious to shy.

Gilbert continues his trend of judging a woman's worth based on her beauty. It's significant that, when describing Eliza for Jack, he almost exclusively dwells on her physicality. This hints at both Eliza's shallow nature and Gilbert's immaturity.

In the interest of giving Jack an overview of the village of Linden-Car's main inhabitants, Gilbert continues sketching the characters of the churchgoers around him. Mary, Eliza's sister, is beloved by her father, children, animals, and old people (Gilbert writes), but is neglected by nearly everyone else. The Reverend Michael Millward is an imposing elderly man convinced that his word is the final one. As children, Gilbert and Fergus used to have to recite their catechism for the reverend, and the memories of those times, combined with the older man's strict attitude in matters of discipline and social conduct, cemented Gilbert's awe of him.

Gilbert presumes that Mary Millward, a plain and stout girl, is only loved by the least discerning members of the village. This is in direct contrast to her charming, prettier sister (and is also an assumption later proved wrong). His description of the reverend is likewise telling. The Reverend Millward is in a position of unexamined authority in the village. Perhaps, though, given his unreasonably strict standards, that authority should be questioned.

Mrs. Markham respects the Reverend Millward a great deal, but when Gilbert and Fergus were young, did at times grow exasperated with his tendency to hold even young boys to exacting standards. The reverend is a robust, healthy man who adheres to an eclectic diet specific to his own appetites and needs. Should someone in the parish attempt the same diet and not achieve beneficial results, the reverend is quick to blame the dieter for not sticking to the correct program.

The reverend is obviously an egotistical, hypocritical man. He enjoys his place of power and takes advantage of his parishioners' trust by advocating for his arbitrary lifestyle as the only healthy one. His hypocrisy suggests that parishioners need to be more skeptical of both male and so-called moral authority.

Gilbert then mentions Mrs. Wilson and her children Jane, Robert, and Richard. Mrs. Wilson, Gilbert says, is an empty-headed gossip. Jane, while beautiful and well educated, is an egotistical fortune-hunter who considers herself far above the working men who have sought her hand. Robert is an unrefined farmer, and Richard is a serious young student hoping to enter college. Finally, Gilbert writes of Frederick Lawrence, a young and wealthy squire and the owner of Wildfell Hall who now lives in a neighboring parish. Jane Wilson clearly hopes to marry Frederick Lawrence someday. He is the only local man rich and sophisticated enough for her tastes.

The fact that Gilbert is unmoved by Jane Wilson's much-admired beauty suggests that his powers of discernment are not always influenced by a woman's looks. He scorns mercenary motives and has the ability to see beyond a pretty façade to what lies beneath. Mr. Lawrence, the owner of Wildfell Hall, becomes a crucial character later in the book.

Gilbert closes his first letter to Jack Halford saying that, should he find this initial installment not worth his while, Gilbert will happily cease and desist. His story is a treasure he'd gladly keep to himself.

Should the reader have forgotten that this was an epistolary novel (that is, that what we're reading is a series of letters), this serves as a useful reminder.

CHAPTER 2. AN INTERVIEW

Since Jack has expressed to Gilbert that he wants to hear more, Gilbert continues his story on yet another day in October of 1827, when, out hunting game, he finds only hawks and blackbirds. He leaves the comfort of his own property for the steep and desolate hill that leads to Wildfell Hall. The hill is the wildest in all the neighborhood, and is too cold and windswept to allow for much vegetation beyond **stunted trees**. The meadows aren't fit for farming, so cattle and sheep are pastured there.

Like the other villagers, Gilbert is curious about the unconventional inhabitant of Wildfell Hall. Helen is literally on a different level than the rest of Linden-Car. The hill serves as a barrier between her and her neighbors, and the stunted trees hint at her stunted life. Gilbert begins the day hunting game—but he will soon be hunting Helen.

Gilbert ascends the hill and takes in the ghostly majesty of Wildfell Hall, an Elizabethan era mansion of dark gray stone that has been worn away by time. The fences and gardens are in total disrepair and the **shrubbery** is of particularly odd appearance. The privet hedge and surrounding topiaries (a beheaded swan, a lion that used to guard the door) are otherworldly and ghoulish, reminding Gilbert of the stories his childhood nurse used to tell him about the spirits of dead tenants that haunted Wildfell Hall.

The gothic nature of Wildfell and its surroundings serve to exoticize Helen and reinforce Gilbert's first impressions of her as stiff, unfriendly, and different from other women. It is an unusual person who would choose to live in such a desolate and seemingly haunted spot. It's Helen, though, who turns out to be haunted.

Having killed two hawks and a crow, Gilbert gets as close as he dares to the house, where he meets a young boy. The boy is roughly five years old and is so enchanted by the antics of Gilbert's dog that he gets snagged on a **cherry tree** reaching for him and nearly falls off the garden wall. Gilbert catches him before can hurt himself. Helen Graham rushes out into the garden and, in an angry panic, snatches the boy away from Gilbert. The boy is Helen's son, Arthur (Jr.). When she learns that Gilbert has saved her son from harm, she calms down, and she and Gilbert have a short, bordering-on-friendly conversation until she remembers the look they exchanged at church. She grows suddenly haughty and cold, and Gilbert leaves, angry and dissatisfied and eager for the company of Eliza Millward.

Despite the fact that he saves her son from harm, Gilbert's first meeting with Helen is not a positive one, and it in fact hints at the obstacles the couple will face as their relationship grows and deepens. The wall likewise suggests the barriers that exist between Helen and Gilbert and real intimacy. Gilbert's desire for Eliza Millward's company is quite obviously a reaction to Helen's unkind treatment. This is one of the first indications that Gilbert does not take his romance with Eliza very seriously, but mostly uses her attentions to comfort and affirm himself.

At the Millward home, Gilbert finds Eliza at work on a piece of embroidery, and her sister Mary mending stockings. Eliza is in a good mood and she and Gilbert flirt with each other while Mary works in the corner. The subject of their flirtation is, at one point, Gilbert's dislike of cats, which he attributes to jealousy: men do not appreciate the affection women bestow on their cats. Eliza then proceeds to shower her cat with kisses and caresses. Gilbert rises to leave—Mrs. Markham will be expecting him for tea—and Eliza treats him to a soft smile and bewitching glance. He goes home, full of love for her.

Unlike Helen, Eliza and Mary embrace traditional female roles. Sewing is almost certainly one of the many domestic skills Mrs. Markham believes all eligible women should have, and Eliza is nothing if not eligible. She is also, according to Gilbert, cat-like in her manner, adding a layer of subtext to their conversation about cats and female affection. Gilbert thinks he loves Eliza—Eliza, meanwhile, loves herself.

CHAPTER 3. A CONTROVERSY

Helen Graham pays a call on the Markhams, bringing Arthur (Jr.) along with her. She explains to Mrs. Markham that she has to keep him with her at all times. Her servant isn't up to being in charge of a moody child, and they are each other's most cherished companions. Since Arthur is not able to walk great distances, she hasn't yet returned the Wilsons' or Millwards' visits. Mrs. Markham warns Helen against being a doting parent, saying it will open her up to ridicule. Helen responds sharply and in a way that shocks the Markhams. Gilbert thinks that his first impression about her temper was the right one. She is beautiful but unpleasant.

Mrs. Markham feels confident enough in her own skills as a mother to tell Helen how to parent Arthur. Even just in what we see from Gilbert's perspective, Helen, as a single mother and presumed widow, receives a great deal of unwelcome advice. When she fails to take such advice and in fact bristles at the interference, Gilbert judges her harshly. Her temper is clearly not compliant, and in this culture women are supposed to be compliant at all times.

Gilbert, occupied with a farmer's magazine, had been observing Helen from a distance. Then Arthur (Jr.) approaches him, attracted again to Gilbert's dog, Sancho. Arthur ends up on Gilbert's knee, perusing along with him the farmer's magazine, but Helen grows alarmed and calls her son back to her side. Mrs. Markham then invites Helen to a house party, but Helen says she never goes to such things. Helen and Arthur partake of cake but refuse the offer of wine. Just the smell of wine makes Arthur sick, Helen says, and she herself has worked hard to make sure he hates it. The Markhams find Helen's words funny, but she is in earnest, and Gilbert scolds her, saying that if she wants her son to be virtuous, she must teach him to conquer challenges on his own, rather than making sure he is never challenged in the first place.

Helen's attitudes toward drinking shock the villagers of Linden-Car, who find her not only odd and unfeminine but narrow-minded and overprotective. Though he is a single man whose experience with children is limited, Gilbert feels as justified as his mother in dishing out parenting advice to Helen, a woman he hardly knows. The hierarchy here is clear: men's opinions are valuable and worth listening to, and women are in need of counseling.

Helen disagrees with Gilbert's assessment of the situation. There are, she contends, so many temptations and rough paths in life that her decision to smooth the way for her son in some areas could not possibly deprive him of life's challenges. Mrs. Markham enters the conversation, expressing her fear that Helen's approach to mothering will make a girl of little Arthur, "a mere Miss Nancy of him." She volunteers to enlist the Reverend Millward, who, Mrs. Markham says, will counsel Helen on how best to school the child on avoidance of evil. Helen grows impatient, asking if Gilbert is suggesting she throw Arthur into situations where he is bound to be tempted, but Gilbert defends his position, arguing that you can't expect an **oak sapling** to flourish in the outdoors if it has been first given an easy start in a hot house.

Inherent in Mrs. Markham's concern about little Arthur becoming a "mere Nancy" is the idea that boys are superior to girls. Likening little Arthur to a sapling, Gilbert argues that Helen should expose her boy to sin and corruption in small doses so as to prepare him for the real world. Ironically, Helen knows all about sin and corruption, but Gilbert assumes he is wiser and more experienced in the ways of the world simply because he is a man.

Helen then asks Gilbert if he would apply the same principal to the female sex. He says he would not. Helen proceeds to argue that such a stance is thus unforgivably hypocritical, using Gilbert's **oak** metaphor against him. Gilbert's stance suggests that girls and women are so inherently wicked that they cannot withstand any amount of temptation without giving into it and having their delicate, **flower**-like natures ruined. If Gilbert insists that boys need to be exposed to reality rather than protected from it but that girls must be sheltered at all costs, then he is saying that males are made of stronger stuff than females.

According to Gilbert and Mrs. Markham, boys should be raised in a way that encourages them to develop physical and emotional fortitude, and girls should be raised with their fragile natures in mind. Such a method guarantees that one sex will always have dominion over the other.

Helen says that her solution would be to acquaint girls with some knowledge of what might lie before them so as to arm them ahead of time. If, however, she were to think that her son would someday become "a man of the world" through glancing acquaintance with evil, she would rather he die tomorrow.

Helen is advocating for a more equal approach to child-rearing than that championed by Gilbert and Mrs. Markham, but her thoughts on men of the world are somewhat extreme and she, too, reveals a measure of hypocrisy here.

Helen then tells Gilbert that she would welcome a visit from him and Rose soon. She could tolerate his counsel more than that of the Reverend Millward, she says, because she would be less shy in admitting she had no intention of following Gilbert's advice than she would the advice of a religious man. Gilbert is offended by her speech specifically and by Helen's treatment of him in general. He feels that she is determined to think the worst of him. Gilbert admits that it's possible, thanks to the indulgence of his mother and sister, that he has learned to have too high opinion of himself. Still, he believes Helen has been unfair to him from the first.

Helen knows that no matter who visits her (Gilbert, the Reverend Millward), she can look forward to that visitor telling her how she can best live her own life. At least with Gilbert, she doesn't have to put on a show of reverence. Gilbert, who is sensitive and easily hurt, doesn't appreciate Helen's wry wit. His sensitivity is perhaps due to too much pampering at home (and his society's elevation of men in general).

CHAPTER 4. THE PARTY

Everyone that Gilbert introduced Jack to in his first letter—Eliza, Mary, and the Reverend Milward; Jane, Richard, Robert, and Mrs. Wilson; and Mr. Lawrence—have come to the Markhams to join Gilbert, Fergus, Rose, and Mrs. Markham for the house party. Helen does not come, and Gilbert surmises that her absence actually benefits the partygoers. Everyone is in excellent spirits and behaves according to type. Eliza is flirtatious, Mary retiring, the reverend opinionated, Jane superior, Richard quiet, Robert uncouth, Mrs. Wilson gossipy, Fergus sarcastic, Rose simple and sweet, and Mrs. Markham so anxious for everyone to have a good time that she bullies them into doing so. Mr. Lawrence seems to have been caught in Jane's web. Otherwise, it's difficult for Gilbert to get a read on him. He is reserved to a fault.

Gilbert's rejoicing at Helen's not being a member of the party suggests that he might be the prejudiced one. He would like to paint her as unfair to him and overly critical, but he seems equally anxious to find fault with her, and in many ways she is treated by the Linden-Car villagers as a kind of "other" at this point. Gilbert and his small circle of family, friends, and acquaintances have a relaxed and easy rhythm they fall into when together. Helen's presence would disturb that.

Conversation eventually turns to the consumption of alcohol. The reverend refuses wine in favor of beer, and that reminds Mrs. Markham of Helen Graham's visit and her strong stance against drinking. Everyone in the party agrees with the reverend that drinking in moderation is the most sensible approach to take to the question of consumption, but Mr. Lawrence defends Helen's side, suggesting that if a person is genetically disposed to intemperance, it might indeed be best that they abstain completely from intoxicants. Mr. Lawrence then takes the opportunity to ask Gilbert what he thinks of Helen Graham, who is Mr. Lawrence's tenant at Wildfell Hall. Gilbert replies that she is interesting to look at but maddening to interact with, because she is narrow-minded and unable to see the truth in any point that might contradict her own worldview.

Helen is obviously not able to defend herself, being absent, and Gilbert and the others are using this opportunity to further position Helen as an outsider, simply because she has taken a firm stance against alcohol. The reverend's opinions in the matter are, like his feelings on diet, completely arbitrary, but the parishioners are more than happy to take his side in the debate if it allows them the chance to oppose Helen. And Gilbert continues to insist it is Helen who is narrow-minded, not seeing that the same charge could just as well be aimed at him.

The party ends with dancing. When Gilbert tries to take Eliza's hand and lead her on to the floor, however, the reverend announces that it's time for them to leave. Gilbert kisses Eliza when her father's back is turned and earns a tearful lecture from his mother, who tells him that if he marries Eliza, he will break her heart. Mrs. Markham thinks Eliza a deceitful minx and not at all on the same level as her son. Gilbert agrees not to make any major decisions without consulting his mother first, but he makes the promise reluctantly and goes to bed very much cast down.

Gilbert made it clear from the beginning of his letter that his mother does not think any woman good enough for him. Still, it is just as obvious that his feelings for Eliza are shallow and motivated mostly by a youthful desire for admiration. Eliza does not challenge his preconceived notions like a certain woman living in a gloomy mansion does.

CHAPTER 5. THE STUDIO

Gilbert and Rose pay their promised visit to Wildfell Hall and find Helen in the middle of **painting** a landscape. Little Arthur informs Gilbert and Rose that Helen sells her paintings through a London dealer. When Gilbert asks Helen why she has misnamed a painting that is obviously of the grounds of Wildfell Hall, she explains that she needs to hide her identity and her whereabouts from certain friends who might try to track her down. Gilbert then tries to steer the conversation into safer territory, and he and Helen talk briefly about a nearby hike that leads to the ocean. As Gilbert goes into the details of how to find her way, Helen cuts him off and says she won't be able to attempt such a journey until the spring. She then leaves the room to meet a visitor, whom Arthur identifies only as her "friend."

The mystery of Helen's past and present deepen with the discovery that she is a talented and dedicated artist—and also that she feels the need to hide her identity. Helen's employment as an artist sets her apart from the other women of the parish, none of whom has a paying profession. Talk of the ocean hike shows that she and Gilbert have something very important in common: a love of nature.

Gilbert glances through the **paintings** stacked along the studio wall, finding one that is clearly of little Arthur as a baby and another of a handsome and vain-looking red-headed man. Gilbert surmises that, if Helen is indeed the artist behind the portrait of the young man, that she completed it several years earlier. While an excellent and, he believes, faithful portrait, it does not display the confidence and ease of her later work. Helen returns from talking with her friend and when Gilbert asks her about the painting's provenance, she rebukes him. Gilbert is again turned off by her cold treatment of him. Soon, though, she apologizes, and he is won over by that small gesture.

Despite his own lack of artistic talent, Gilbert feels himself qualified to pass judgement on Helen's paintings, just as he felt himself justified in judging her parenting. He does not shy away from prying into her past, either. When Helen understandingly reacts with displeasure at the intrusion, Gilbert again reacts defensively. She is being unfair, he decides. When, however, she does the feminine thing and apologizes, he forgives her.

CHAPTER 6. PROGRESSION

Gilbert soon finds that he very much enjoys the company of Helen Graham and her son. He begins to meet them more and more on walks on the moors and on the pasturelands around his property. Helen is warmer to Gilbert than she has been before, but she is still reluctant to let him take little Arthur out of her sight for any long stretch of time. Gilbert is ashamed to admit that he has started to prefer conversing with Helen to flirting with Eliza, and when he arrives home after a particularly bracing discussion with Helen to find Eliza and Rose alone in the parlour, Gilbert's conscience strikes him. He also notices that Eliza's talk is insipid when compared with Helen's. His conduct, he tells himself, is blameless because he has no desire or plans to marry either of the women. He decides that he might as well enjoy his talks with Helen.

Because Gilbert's interest in Eliza Millward is mostly physical and based on his need for affirmation, he soon finds Helen's intelligence more attractive than Eliza's empty-headed coyness. He knows, though, that he is toying with both of them. He might rationalize his behavior by claiming that his lack of serious designs lets him off the hook, but his casual courting of two women at the same time would, it can be assumed, earn him a stern lecture from his mother or the reverend, were he a woman.

On a **clear day** in March, Gilbert finds Helen **painting** on the edge of a brook. He admires her skill with **winter trees** for some time, but she eventually grows self-conscious, and so Gilbert takes little Arthur horseback riding in nearby field. The boy has a wonderful time and Gilbert returns him to Helen, who has grown anxious in their absence. They walk back to Wildfell Hall together. Before leaving her, Gilbert says he worries about Helen being lonely, living in such a gloomy place. She tells him she often experiences loneliness, but that she is grateful for a home, "while it is left" to her.

Gilbert is growing close enough to Helen now to be generous with her. And while he does not yet know why her depiction of the bare trees is so skilled, it hints at Helen's inner strength in the face of suffering. Her words further that impression. A woman who can paint so beautifully a scene of lack and want has obviously experienced those same feelings herself.

Gilbert then runs into Mr. Lawrence, and, without ever saying so directly, the two men admit to each other that they have no serious designs on the women the neighborhood assumes they will marry. Gilbert is disenchanted with Eliza Millward, and Lawrence is obviously indifferent to Jane Wilson. They tease each other briefly about leaving the two women alone and then go their separate ways.

The two men's casual dismissal of the women counting on their love is callous and unfeeling, but, as young men, they have been raised to think that their right to happiness is superior to a young woman's.

Gilbert arrives home too late for tea, but when he says his reheated drink is overdrawn, Rose sets to making a fresh pot for him. As she does so, she complains that Gilbert and Fergus get preferential treatment in the household. Mrs. Markham is forever saving the best pie and cake for Gilbert and making sure that the boys' needs and desires are met, while either ignoring her daughter or putting her to work. While Mrs. Markham argues that this is just how a respectable home should be run, Gilbert disagrees, saying that if Rose weren't there to remind him of how much he is indulged, he might start to take such treatment for granted. Mrs. Markham counters that it is a wife's job to make her husband happy, while it is a husband's job to please himself. Gilbert should take good care to remember that in the future, she says. Gilbert asks Jack if he and Rose subscribe to such a doctrine.

This reveals the essential hypocrisy in Mrs. Markham's argument that Helen is in danger of turning her son into a "mere Nancy" through over-indulgence. Mrs. Markham indulges Gilbert completely, and believes that men are made for such treatment. As a result, Gilbert himself has not had a real acquaintance with any true hardship. Furthermore, Mrs. Markham's doctrine that women should please their husbands while husbands should please themselves assumes that women have no value outside of their powers to make men happy.

CHAPTER 7. THE EXCURSION

On a **beautiful spring day**, while Gilbert is out inspecting his lambs, he runs into Fergus, Rose, and Eliza, who are on their way to Wildfell Hall. Fergus, who's heard much of Helen but has yet to meet her, is hoping to learn more about the mysterious stranger who has recently moved to the parish. Gilbert takes Eliza's arm and tells Fergus he can leave now—Gilbert will watch over the ladies. Fergus replies that the visit was his idea in the first place and he has no intention to forgo the pleasure of snooping about Helen's home. Rose and Eliza contend that there is room in their party for both of them.

Weather often mimics mood in the novel, and acts as a predictor or reflection of Gilbert and Helen's prospects for happiness in any given scene. The beautiful day here then suggests that this could be a productive visit for Gilbert. Fergus's flippant attitude underscores his laziness and the emptiness of his days—as the eldest son, Gilbert must devote much of his time to work, whereas Fergus is free to roam about the countryside.

Gilbert and the rest find Helen and little Arthur together in a relatively cheerful sitting room. Arthur is reading aloud to Helen, and Gilbert admires the pretty picture that mother and son make. Gilbert senses that Helen is not overjoyed to see them, and he retreats to a corner with Arthur and Sancho while Rose, Eliza, and Fergus try to draw Helen out. Fergus in particular peppers Helen with questions, trying hard to get her to talk more about her life before Wildfell Hall, saying that the natives of the parish, who are like **indigenous plants**, are very curious about such an "exotic species" as Helen. Helen will only say that she is an Englishwoman from the middle of the country.

Now that Gilbert is more acquainted with Helen, he finds her beauty more to his taste. The firmness he found off-putting is softened by the presence of her son. Still, she is a mystery to many, and Fergus's suggestion that Helen is an exotic flower among drab houseplants is a reminder of the smallness of village life. It is also another example of how much of Linden-Car sees Helen as foreign "other."

Fergus then pressures Helen on why she would choose to move to such a gloomy, out-of-the-way house as Wildfell Hall. Doesn't she long to see people and be in the thick of village life? Helen says she enjoys her solitude, and while she welcomes friends, she does not need a large acquaintance to make her daily life pleasurable. She flees to the corner to talk to Gilbert, asking him if he might remind her how to find the view of the sea they discussed some days earlier when he and Rose visited her studio. She longs to **paint** it. Overhearing her, Rose suggests they all make the journey together, and while Helen obviously wishes she could go alone, she agrees.

Helen's desire to be left alone will clearly not be respected or valued in a village full of young people with very little to occupy their time. She and Gilbert continue to bond over their mutual love of the natural world. Helen's appreciation of beauty is not idle, though. She wants to paint it and then sell those paintings, so she can afford to support herself and her child. To the others in the room, a visit to the seaside would be nothing more than an excursion for pleasure.

Weeks pass, and finally a day arrives fine enough to justify an excursion to the coast. **Flowers** are in bloom, and everything is **verdant and lovely**. The party consists of Gilbert, Fergus, and Rose Markham; Mary and Eliza Millward; Richard Wilson; and Arthur (Jr.) and Helen Graham. Gilbert tried to persuade Mr. Lawrence to come, but he declined when he heard Helen would be there. Gilbert thinks his behavior odd, but soon forgets it in the pleasures of the day. He particularly enjoys the walk to the coast, because he has Helen almost to himself. Eliza is riding in the carriage and, happy to not have to entertain her, Gilbert gives himself over to the bracing conversation of Helen, hoping to win her good opinion.

The weather again foretells a pleasant time for Gilbert and Helen. In point of fact, it is so beautiful and marked with signs of fertility and renewal, that it seems to be blessing their union. Gilbert continues his double dealings with Helen and Eliza, but he doesn't let the matter trouble him. Helen's wit and depth are winning him over day by day, and his growing love for her helps him justify his behavior.

Eventually they reach the precipice that affords a view of the ocean, and Gilbert is struck by the wild, untamed beauty of the sea and how it is reflected in the beauty of Helen Graham. He is so taken with her at that moment that he is tempted to do something daring, something dangerous, but Rose interrupts his thoughts by calling everyone to lunch.

Gilbert respects and admires Helen's intelligence, but it is her wild beauty that nearly overcomes him. He gazes on her at this moment as if she were a painting and not a person.

It is a merry meal and Gilbert is again happy, even though this time he finds himself near Eliza Millward and separated from Helen Graham, who later leaves the party to **paint** the sea. Gilbert grows so weary with Eliza's empty flirtatiousness that he goes in search of Helen, who does not hide the fact that she is unhappy to see him. He tries to make himself agreeable to her by remaining at a distance and commenting sparingly on her work. He can't help stealing glances at her, though, and thinks that if he had her skill, he could paint a portrait of her that would be even lovelier than her sketch of the ocean.

When Helen leaves the party to paint the sea, she clearly wants to be alone. She needs solitude to complete her work, but Gilbert's passion for her is such that he cannot seem to let her be. His fleeting thought that if he were an artist, he could paint a portrait of Helen that would rival any of her creations is born of a need to possess her. The more she works and lives independently of him, the less power he has.

Helen ignores Gilbert for the most part and focuses on her **painting**, but she does consult him on a detail, and even goes so far as to take his advice. They walk back to the lunch spot, where Mary is watching over little Arthur with Richard Wilson, who is absorbed in an academic text of some sort. Gilbert wonders at Richard: why is he always so focused on his studies? But Mary, whom Gilbert suspects of being in love with Richard, does not seem to mind.

Helen's willingness to take Gilbert's advice in regard to her seascape reveals that she has thawed considerably toward Gilbert. And Gilbert's thoughts about Richard Wilson's studiousness show that, while Gilbert might work harder than Fergus, he is still more idle than men not fortunate enough to inherit property.

Everyone heads back to the parish, but the journey home is not as pleasurable for Gilbert, because Helen has decided to ride with the others in the carriage and he is now in charge of shepherding Eliza home. He picks up on Eliza's jealousy of Helen, but, instead of being catty or bitter, Eliza is merely quiet and downcast, and Gilbert is consumed with guilt. Once back at Wildfell Hall, he offers to help Helen cart her **painting** supplies to her studio. She refuses his help, but in such a warm way he almost forgives her.

Gilbert must now suffer for the crime of dallying with a young woman's feelings. His sufferings are not extreme, however. He still has the pleasure of seeing Helen at the end of the day. Helen displeases him by asserting her own independence, but, when she tempers her independent spirit with femininity, he is almost appeased.

CHAPTER 8. THE PRESENT

On yet another **fine day** in early summer, Gilbert is hard at work in his fields, working among servants and hired hands to cut the hay. He had hoped to spend all day in such work, but a package arrives from London that he hopes to deliver to Wildfell Hall. He asks Fergus to take his place overseeing the hay-cutting. Fergus does, making a joke of it as he does everything.

Gilbert's work in this scene is genuinely taxing. This is apparent because he is working alongside his servants. When he asks Fergus to take his place, he asks him only to oversee the activity, not take part. Fergus, therefore, remains idle.

The package is *Marmion*, a historical romance by Sir Walter Scott, which Gilbert intends to give to Helen Graham. He's not sure how his gift will be received. He has been working hard to establish firm footing with her as a friend, bringing little Arthur a puppy and a book, and bringing Helen **plants** from his garden, but he has to be careful not to go too far or strike too romantic a note, as that would Helen to grow serious and withdrawn. Gilbert rushes over to her house, bringing with him a collar for Arthur's puppy, and meets Helen in the garden. He asks if he might see the progress she's made of her **painting** of the bay they recently visited with their friends. She happily obliges, and Gilbert finds the painting beautiful and perfect. Everything is going well until he gives her the book.

Helen and Gilbert share not only a love of natural beauty but an appreciation and hunger for literature. Gilbert's bringing her the book and the plants from his garden is his way of trying to plant the seeds of love. His infatuation with Helen is made clear by the fact that, when she shows him her painting of the seaside, he finds nothing to criticize, nothing to lecture her about. He has come to respect fully her work as a painter.

Much to Gilbert's dismay, Helen insists on paying him for it. She will not allow herself to be obligated to him in any way. Gilbert is affronted and angry. When she sees that she has insulted him, she agrees to take the book, but only on the condition that neither is indebted to the other. He insists that he is grateful to her for taking the gift with grace. Leaving her house, Gilbert wants very much to kiss her hand, but he knows such an act would put an end to their friendship forever, so he flees, upset with himself and his own lack of tact, and wishing Helen were easier to understand and less opaque.

Helen's independence is maddening to Gilbert, who does not see his gift of Marmion *as transactional. Given that Linden-Car is insatiably curious about Helen, however, she knows it is best to keep Gilbert at a distance so as not to invite unwanted gossip. Her aloofness only increases Gilbert's ardor, though—he is at turns drawn to and put off by her mysterious manner.*

CHAPTER 9. A SNAKE IN THE GRASS

Gilbert feels obligated to pay a call on the Millwards, partially because he hopes to let Eliza down easy, and also because the Reverend Millward expects him to visit regularly. Gilbert is sad to see that the reverend is out. He has to content himself with Eliza and Mary. Infatuated now with Helen Graham, he has grown to despise Eliza, who seems that day to be in possession of some damaging information about Helen. Eliza refuses to tell Gilbert what she knows. She claims that she doesn't want to risk his anger, but Gilbert can see that she takes some pleasure in tormenting him.

Helen's fears about the village rumor factory are apparently well founded. She is now the subject of gossip and an easy target for Eliza Millward whom, it would seem, Mrs. Markham was right about. She is a petty, jealous woman who used her superficial charms to fool Gilbert into "loving" her. He now knows the truth, but it's too late. His bad behavior has opened the way for Eliza to abuse Helen.

A few days later, the Markhams invite their friends for a small party, and Gilbert finally discovers the secret Eliza was keeping. He also gets a glimpse of Eliza's true nature. She toys with him for a while, asking if he could still possibly be ignorant of the rumors regarding Helen Graham, and when he grows angry, she breaks down in tears and makes a great show of being deeply injured. Jane Wilson, self-satisfied and smug, steps in and informs the company that she has heard that little Arthur is, in fact, Mr. Lawrence's son. Gilbert is horrified by the pettiness of his companions and steadfastly disbelieves the rumor. He does, however, note a few similarities in appearance between Arthur and Mr. Lawrence, but sees just as many differences.

Helen is the target of a smear campaign led by two women scorned—jealousy is motivating both Eliza Millward and Jane Wilson. Eliza resents Gilbert's growing attachment to Helen, and Jane resents Frederick Lawrence's apparent regard for her. Helen, the unconventional, independent woman, is now the village witch, charged with putting a spell on its men and leading them away from their rightful mates. Women are pitted against each other, mostly because the marriage market demands it.

Angry and distracted, Gilbert leaves the party to take a walk outside, where he eventually meets up with Helen, who has also fled the party, mostly to escape what to her feels like an endless evening of insipid small talk. The two of them admire the **beauty of the evening** and discuss for a time the pitfalls of being a **painter**. Helen wishes she could look on such a scene with pure enjoyment rather than considering its artistic potential. Gilbert argues that the trouble she takes is well worth it in the pleasure she gives to those who get to view her paintings.

The visual artist is always working, especially if she depends on her art for a living. Gilbert's encouraging words about Helen's painting work not only to underscore his belief in her talents but his belief in her as a person. Helen's painting represents her professional and personal evolution, and Gilbert is signaling that he supports her both as an artist and as a woman.

While in the garden, Gilbert sees Jane Wilson and Mr. Lawrence having an intense conversation, which Gilbert assumes is about Helen and the rumor circulating about her child's illegitimacy. Gilbert thinks he detects a regard for Helen in Mr. Lawrence's demeanor, and later, when the guests are leaving, Gilbert is rude to the man. Mr. Lawrence is surprised, and tries to warn Gilbert than any affections he feels for Helen are doomed. Gilbert calls him a hypocrite, and ends the evening satisfied with having obviously upset his supposed rival.

If Gilbert is steadfast in his defense of Helen, he proves himself easily led in the matter of Mr. Lawrence's rumored guilt. A system that enforces the marriage imperative sets young women and young men at each other's throats, turning friends into rivals and rivals into enemies.

CHAPTER 10. A CONTRACT AND A QUARREL

The gossip about little Arthur's parentage has spread throughout the neighborhood. Even Mrs. Markham seems to think there might be some truth to the rumors, saying Helen has always tried to be different from other women. Disgusted, Gilbert takes a book from his shelf and walks over to Wildfell Hall, hoping to use the book as a pretext for a meeting with Helen. In the garden with Arthur, he meets Helen, and she welcomes him to walk with her and assess the progress the plants he gave her have made. Among the **roses**, Gilbert dares to hold Helen's hand, and he sees a look in her eye that confirms she returns his affection. But she begs him to treat her as a sister from now on. She can't be more than a friend to him, she says. He demands to know why. She tells him that someday she might explain, but to please to leave her alone for the time being, agreeing, as a concession, to call him "Gilbert."

Many of the villagers of Linden-Car are more apt to think the worst of Helen just because she lives in an unconventional manner. That is her first sin: daring to be unlike other women. Mrs. Markham's statement shows just how prejudiced people are against the newcomer, and how tied to gender such prejudice is. Gilbert's meeting Helen in the garden is likewise important. Roses bring to mind Fergus's thought that Helen is like an exotic plant among boring houseplants. Her exoticism is more a problem at this point than it is an asset.

Leaving, Gilbert runs into Mr. Lawrence, also on his way to Wildfell Hall. Gilbert accosts his former friend, demanding to know why he is visiting Helen. Mr. Lawrence replies that he will tell Gilbert about his dealings with her when he behaves like a gentleman. The Reverend Millward interrupts the quarrel, laughing at the two men and deeming the woman at the center of the drama unworthy. Gilbert is deeply offended and walks away in a huff.

This scene works as a bit of foil to the one earlier in which Gilbert and Mr. Lawrence meet on the road way and laugh at their romantic entanglements. For Gilbert, love is no longer a laughing matter. It is worth fighting for.

CHAPTER 11. THE VICAR AGAIN

Gilbert and Helen are by this time firm friends. Gilbert wishes they could be more, but takes care not to upset Helen by acting as a lover toward her. He is just about to set off for Wildfell Hall one day when Rose stops him and begs him to remain home. Gilbert is surprised that Rose would allow herself to think the worst of Helen, but Rose defends her position. She reminds him of their visit to Helen's studio, when Helen admitted that she signs her **paintings** with false initials and gives them misleading names so that former acquaintances will not be able to trace her. Gilbert dismisses Rose's concerns, but decides to skip the visit because it is getting late.

Like Mrs. Markham, Rose believes the slander against Helen, at least in part. As a young woman with a very traditional upbringing, she finds Helen's oddities troubling and worries about her brother's growing fondness for her. Again, Helen's mysterious background serves as fuel for suspicion, and Rose's concerns are enough to keep Gilbert from seeing Helen, at least for the day.

The Reverend Millward drops by then, having just paid a call on Helen Graham. His purpose in visiting Wildfell Hall was to give the young woman some much-needed (in his opinion) pastoral advice, but Helen did not receive his counsel kindly. In fact, she grew angry. The reverend then turns his judgmental glance on Gilbert, who also becomes furious, and storms out of the house, aiming for Wildfell Hall.

In the previous chapter, the reverend declared Helen unworthy of coming between Gilbert and Frederick Lawrence. Now he is attempting to give her advice. What she needs instead is acceptance, but he is incapable of accepting her on her own terms.

CHAPTER 12. A TETE-A-TETE AND A DISCOVERY

Gilbert finds Helen in a disturbed state of mind, pacing back and forth in a cold room. He tells her he must unburden his heart, and while she begs him not to, Gilbert confesses to her that his feelings for her are far from brotherly. Helen reminds him of the rumors circulating about her, and says that his coming to see her at this time of night will only make the gossip worse. Gilbert understands this and apologizes for his foolhardy behavior, but asks her to tell him the truth about her past, promising not to judge her harshly. Helen agrees to tell him the next day, asking him to meet her on the moors at midday. He agrees to the plan and leaves for home, turning back to see her weeping inconsolably.

As a single mother and the subject of scandalous rumor, Helen must hold herself to a very high standard of Christian behavior and conduct. By coming to visit her and declaring his love, Gilbert is not risking his own reputation but hers. As a respected man of the village, he is relatively immune to scandal, and that is what allows him to behave in such a reckless way.

On the way to his house, Gilbert realizes he can't abide his mother and sister's company. They are bound to say something about Helen and the gossip surrounding her, so he turns back again and goes to the Wildfell Hall garden gate, hoping for a glimpse of his beloved. What he finds instead is her taking the air with Mr. Lawrence. Gilbert overhears Helen saying that she needs to move away—she cannot be happy in this place. Lawrence advises her against it. If she stays, he says, she can be close to him. Gilbert then sees Helen rest her head on Lawrence's shoulder, and Lawrence put his arm about her waist.

Mrs. Markham and Rose have fallen prey to a system that pits woman against woman. Gilbert's love for Helen has reached such a height that he cannot bear to be without her, and his passion clouds his judgement. Seeing her with Mr. Lawrence, he is, like the rest of the village, tempted to think the worst of them.

Angry and broken-hearted, Gilbert throws himself to the ground and weeps like a child. After a while, he gets up and heads home, where Mrs. Markham scolds him for being late for dinner. Gilbert, however, is in no mood to eat or talk with her, and he storms up to his room, where he begins pacing the floor. Mrs. Markham hears him and inquires after his health. He begs her to go away and she does, but not before wishing aloud that his behavior has not been caused by Mrs. Graham. Gilbert spends the night tossing and turning in agonies of despair, and the next morning walks out into the **rain**, thinking that if his family sees him soaked through it will at least excuse his lack of appetite at breakfast.

Gilbert is now convinced that Eliza Millward and Jane Wilson were right about Helen and Mr. Lawrence. The beautiful, starry night gives way to rain, and, again, the weather mimics Gilbert's mood. He has let his emotions get the better of him, and the storm outdoors mirrors the storm inside of him.

CHAPTER 13. A RETURN TO DUTY

Gilbert has been making life at home a torment for his mother and siblings. His wrath has particularly focused on Fergus, who, jokingly singing a love ballad for Gilbert's amusement, gets thrown against the wall for his trouble. Mrs. Markham lectures Gilbert on the need to be more pleasant and, while he is largely unmoved, he decides to devote himself to his work as a farmer in the hopes of taking his mind off his broken heart. To that end, he heads to the Wilson farm to speak to Robert about purchasing a plot of land from him.

Fergus, ever idle, teases Gilbert about his broken heart. Gilbert at least has work to take his mind off Helen and what he assumes to be her affair with Mr. Lawrence. The very land Gilbert resented at the beginning of the book for depriving him of a chance to pursue a different line of work is now his greatest comfort.

Gilbert finds not Robert but Jane Wilson and Eliza Millward. Eliza, still jealous, asks Gilbert if he has seen Helen Graham lately. Jane begs her not to mention that unfortunate person's name in her presence. Gilbert is disgusted by their malice, but is determined to remain calm. Eventually Robert appears, and the two men agree to the sale of the property. Gilbert takes his leave and heads for his own cornfields, only to find little Arthur and Helen Graham walking there. Upon seeing them, he reverses direction. When Arthur calls out to Gilbert to wait, Gilbert only walks faster, determined never to talk to Helen again.

Gilbert was obviously completely deceived regarding Eliza, but he had judged Jane Wilson correctly. The two women are shallow and petty and make Helen the target of their cattiness. As usual, Gilbert's disgust with their behavior does not extend to himself. He now believes the rumors about little Arthur's illegitimacy, but excuses his own suspicion of Helen because it is founded on what he saw with his own eyes. Also, he is a man and therefore assumed to be a better judge of all things.

The chance encounter with Helen leaves Gilbert miserable for the rest of the day. He concludes that his infatuation is of a deeper nature than he first thought, and that it might take some time and trouble to get over it.

Gilbert has allowed himself to fall in love with Helen, even though he was warned against such a course of action by a number of parties, including Helen herself.

CHAPTER 14. AN ASSAULT

Still wanting to forget his disappointment in work, Gilbert sets out for town on a **gloomy morning** after breakfast. On the road, he meets up with Mr. Lawrence, who begins chatting with him about the business and the weather. Gilbert is taken aback by his friendly demeanor. Lawrence is acting as if their unpleasant conversation at the party, during which Gilbert accused him of being a hypocrite, never happened. Lawrence eventually catches on to Gilbert's contempt for him and asks him why he is angry with him. All he did, Lawrence says, was warn him about forming an attachment to Mrs. Graham. In response, Gilbert hits Lawrence over the head with his riding whip.

Gilbert has not gotten over his love for Helen, and the cold, gloomy morning is the perfect accompaniment to his trip to town. The dark day hints at the storm clouding Gilbert's rational abilities. Yet again, he allows his emotions to dictate his actions and he resorts to violence to relieve his feelings. The villagers at this point are adhering closely to gender stereotypes. The women are indulging in backbiting and petty gossip, while the men are fighting in the streets.

Gilbert then rides on, trying not to think of Lawrence, but his conscience gets the better of him and he returns to the scene, finding the man bloody and feeble. Lawrence refuses any help from Gilbert, so Gilbert rides on into town, conducts his business efficiently, and returns home via the same road. He worries some on the ride back about finding Lawrence dead in the street, but is relieved to see only his dented hat and bloody handkerchief.

Gilbert does not blame himself at any point for beating Lawrence and leaving him for dead. He worries about him but believes he deserved the whipping. The disembodied hat and handkerchief hint at the fact that Gilbert is really only half a man at this point, acting with his heart and ignoring his brain.

At home, Rose and Mrs. Markham have heard that Mr. Lawrence was thrown from his horse and brought to his house on the verge of death. They urge Gilbert to visit him, but Gilbert refuses. They're shocked by his lack of feeling for Mr. Lawrence, but Gilbert reminds them that they haven't been on good terms as of late, and he also suggests that the reports of Mr. Lawrence's dire condition are likely greatly exaggerated. The next day, Gilbert sends Fergus to see how Mr. Lawrence is doing, and Fergus reports back that the squire is suffering from a head injury and a bad cold, but that he should make a full recovery. Lawrence tells Fergus that a fall from his horse is to blame for the head injury, and Gilbert concludes then that, in the interest of protecting Helen, Lawrence plans not to incriminate him.

Gilbert lets his love for Helen overwhelm everything else, including his duty to do the right thing and act like a rational and caring person. He considers Mr. Lawrence's very real plight as nothing compared to his own suffering. The usually useless and inept Fergus is now acting like the better man, and that is an indictment indeed. Gilbert is determined to see Helen and Mr. Lawrence's relationship in the bleakest light possible.

CHAPTER 15. AN ENCOUNTER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

One **beautiful day** Gilbert is out in his cornfields, ready to begin reaping, when little Arthur approaches him and tells him that his mother needs to talk to him. Gilbert tries to excuse himself, but then Helen herself appears and coaxes him into a nearby field. She is obviously nervous and anxious, and asks Gilbert why he did not meet her a few days before to hear her explanation of why they had to remain friends and nothing more. Gilbert is sarcastic and cutting with her and she leaves, deeming him unworthy of her confidence and vowing never to tell him.

This time the weather is mocking Gilbert's suffering. It is beautiful; Gilbert is depressed. Work is not proving enough of a distraction from his pain. Little Arthur's appearance provides some solace, though, giving him a chance to confront Helen and take his pain out on her. Helen does not accept his poor treatment of her, however. She is, as Mrs. Markham pointed out, not like other women.

Gilbert is pleased with himself at first for torturing her as a cat would a mouse, but he begins to regret not hearing her explanation, and so walks to Wildfell Hall in the hopes of drawing out her confidence. Helen is angry and hurt and refuses him. She wants to know why he has changed his mind and now believes, like the rest of the village, the worst of her. Gilbert tells her about seeing her in the garden with Mr. Lawrence. Helen grows excited upon hearing his story, and places a large volume in his hands. She says that the book will tell him everything he needs to know. Full of curiosity, Gilbert takes the book home and immediately begins to read.

Now, instead of Eliza Millward being the cat, Gilbert is, and Helen is his helpless victim. That he would take pleasure in tormenting her proves both the intensity of Gilbert's feelings and his immature willingness to be cruel in the face of rejection. Meanwhile, the reader and Gilbert are finally about to get Helen's side of the story, meaning that the novel has an additional narrative layer. It is now not made up only of letters from Gilbert to Jack, but of Helen's diary as transcribed in those letters.

CHAPTER 16. THE WARNINGS OF EXPERIENCE

The novel is now in Helen Graham's hands, and the reader and Jack Halford are, in effect, reading her diary along with Gilbert. It begins with her entry from June 21, 1821, when Helen and her aunt and uncle, Mrs. Maxwell and Mr. Maxwell, have returned to their rural home in Staningley after an eventful visit to London. City life and a certain someone have spoiled country living for Helen. She is restless and bored, and finds consolation only in **painting** and in her own thoughts and memories.

If the first part of the novel is the tale of Gilbert Markham's youth, the second is of Helen's, and she is even younger than Gilbert when her tale begins: 18 to Gilbert's 24. Like him, she takes solace in her work. That doesn't mean, however, that their stories will parallel each other. They diverge as often as they come together.

One such memory is of a conversation she had with her aunt the night before they left the country for London, during which the older woman counseled her on the question of marriage. Mrs. Maxwell asks Helen if she intends to marry and Helen answers in the affirmative, saying, though, she thinks it unlikely she'll ever meet a man that suits her. Her aunt warns her against wishing to marry anyone before he has asked her. She says it's a woman's place to wait for the proposal before she is even permitted to acknowledge her own feelings. That said, Mrs. Waxwell hopes Helen will not throw her heart away on an unworthy suitor. She is beautiful and well-connected, and will therefore have her share of offers. It is very important to wait until the right man comes along.

The "London season" was designed to parade aristocratic young women in front of eligible men in the expectation that most of the women would receive at least one offer of marriage before the parties ended and the wealthy families returned to the countryside. A woman's role in this ritual is to wait to be chosen—she has only the right of refusal, not the option of selecting her partner for herself. That said, Mrs. Maxwell would like Helen to be choose her partner with great care and deliberation. It is an impossible position.

Helen wonders why Mrs. Maxwell is so worried for her, and her aunt says it's because she's so beautiful, and beauty has the power to ensnare the worst kind of man. Her aunt has seen that scenario play out again and again, and she does not want that fate for her niece. She advises Helen that she not let her heart get carried away and instead, when it comes to romantic matters, let her head be her guide. Study, then approve, then love, rather than the other way around, Mrs. Maxwell suggests—make sure the man you love is worthy of you first.

Mrs. Maxwell is a wise woman, and her warnings to Helen are well-intentioned, but Helen is eighteen and strong-willed and has ideas of her own. Also, it's clear from the first half of the novel that romantic love rarely follows a rational trajectory. Passions rather than practical considerations rule the day.

Helen, while at first making light of her aunt's concerns, does her best to allay them, saying she could never marry a man simply for his charm or good looks. She would only accept a man she could esteem and respect. Mrs. Maxwell hopes she is in earnest, and the conversation ends there. Helen admits to herself later, though, that remembering her aunt's advice is easier than following it, and she finds herself wondering if her aunt could have ever been in love.

Helen's promise reads like protesting too much, especially in light of the fact that she acknowledges that actually doing what Mrs. Maxwell prescribes is harder than it sounds. Her suspicion that Mrs. Maxwell was never in love underscores this idea, and hints that Helen herself has already lost her heart.

Helen feels well prepared for her first London season, and begins the series of parties and dances enjoying herself immensely. Soon, though, the novelty wears off and she discovers that the men and women who surround her are shallow, worthless people. She worries that if she spends too much time in their company she might end up like them. She particularly despises Mr. Boarham, an old friend of her uncle's who seems to want to marry her. She would have liked him fine if he'd let her alone, but since he seeks her out at party after party and is pressed on her by Mrs. Maxwell, she can't help but hate him.

This is one of the pitfalls of a system that does not allow a young woman the freedom to choose her partner. If what she has to do instead is wait for a man to choose her, the chances are good her suitor will not be to her liking, as is the case with Mr. Boarham.

One evening at a particularly boring ball while Mr. Boarham is doing his best to monopolize Helen's attention, a young man named Mr. Huntingdon asks her to dance. Lively and fun, he is also the son of one of her uncle's oldest friends. Helen likes him immediately, partially because he is the opposite of Mr. Boarham. Her aunt, however, disapproves. She has heard that the younger Mr. Huntingdon is a wild youth without principles. Helen laughs her off—she can tell by his eyes that he's trustworthy. Anyway, she thinks, she'll probably never see him again. Then, much to her surprise, he calls on her uncle the very next day.

Mr. Huntingdon is as attractive as he is to Helen partially because she is comparing him to Mr. Boarham. If she had the option of selecting a man for herself rather than waiting in crowded ballrooms for a man to single her out, she might not have found Mr. Huntingdon quite as dashing she did.

It's the first of many calls, and Helen's uncle grows annoyed with the young man's persistence. He knows, of course, that Mr. Huntingdon is coming to see Helen. Her uncle teases her about preferring the young Mr. Huntingdon to the old and rich Wilmot and Boarham. Helen does not deny it, and leaves in order to avoid further questioning.

Mr. Maxwell does not take the matter of Helen's marriage as seriously as his wife does. He finds the affairs of the young amusing. As a woman, Mrs. Maxwell knows just what is at stake.

From her window, Helen sees that Mr. Boarham has come to visit. Soon, her aunt reports that he is there to seek her hand in marriage. Helen is offended: how dare he ask her uncle before asking her? Mrs. Maxwell informs her that Mr. Maxwell told Boarham the decision was Helen's. Mrs. Maxwell then asks, if Helen intends to reject Mr. Boarham, to tell her the reasons. Helen says she would prefer to reject him and give her reasons afterward, and Mrs. Maxwell, begging her to compose herself, asks Helen if she can deny that Boarham is a sensible and respectable man, because those qualities should not be underestimated. Helen says that while Boarham might be both those things, she simply cannot marry him. In fact, she hates the idea of it. And she wishes him a wife that could love him as she never can.

Helen, stripped of the right to choose her life partner, desires at the very least the right of refusal, and she feels very strongly that rejecting Mr. Boarham is the best course of action. She is confident that it is the right thing to do for him as well. If he ties himself to her, he will have a wife who doesn't love him, so she hopes that by refusing him, he has a chance to make a more suitable match. Mrs. Maxwell, unmoved by any romantic considerations, wants Helen to marry Boarham for his respectability.

Helen rushes downstairs to refuse Mr. Boarham. Clearly expecting her acceptance, he is shocked and taken aback. He then tries to persuade her to change her mind, telling her that he would not hold her youthful exuberance against her, and that, with a father's indulgence and a lover's tenderness, he would work to do everything in his power to make her happy. Helen explains that she has no intention of ever changing her mind. They are, she argues, ill-suited for each other in every way. Boarham wishes she would consult her aunt. Helen tells him she has consulted her aunt, but that in this matter she has chosen to decide for herself. She wonders why a man of his age (he is nearing 40, while she is 18) would even think of someone like her for a wife.

If Mr. Boarham is indeed sensible and respectable, he is also condescending and deluded. He underestimates Helen's resolve, and, by promising to love her like a father, indicates how their marriage would proceed: the power and authority would all be on his side and she, as his daughter figure, would have to acquiesce. It's obvious what attracted Boarham: Helen's beauty. It's somewhat strange, then, that Mrs. Maxwell would approve the match, considering the warning she gave Helen earlier about engaging herself based on looks alone.

Boarham admits that his love for Helen has given him some sleepless nights, but he was able to reconcile himself to her faults by thinking of how he would guide her conduct in the future, and, when he weighed her virtues against her faults, her virtues won the day. So, since he no longer has any objections to the match, he would love it if she would consent to be his wife. He continues in this vein for some time, and Helen, finally out of patience, tells him to please leave her alone. Eventually he leaves, offended and upset, though Helen can't see how that could possibly be her fault.

Boarham clearly does not value Helen's mind enough to listen attentively to her reasons for refusal. He might think that he loves her (despite her many youthful faults), but he doesn't respect her as an equal and Helen cannot abide such a relationship.

CHAPTER 17. FURTHER WARNINGS

The next day, Helen and Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell attend a party at the Wilmots', making the acquaintance of Wilmot's handsome and outgoing niece, Annabella, and Annabelle's quieter cousin, Milicent Hargrave. Annabelle is a flirt and very popular with the men in attendance. Milicent becomes quickly attached to Helen. Mr. Huntingdon is also there, as is his friend, Mr. Grimsby, whom Helen dislikes instantly on account of his sinister and insincere air. Helen mentions the practice of having men lead women into the dining room. Grimsby is charged with leading her in. She finds the whole thing silly and obsolete, and wonders why party guests aren't allowed a say in such coupling.

The tradition of men leading women into the dining room is comparable to that of the London season. Again, women do not have the power to refuse the service, and must go along with whatever man has been assigned to them. Further, the convention underestimates women's abilities and puts them in a subordinate position. Women are perfectly capable of finding a room and a seat at a table on their own—they don't need men to show them the way.

Helen then ruminates on the possibility that Mr. Huntingdon would not have picked her anyway, as he seems partial to Annabella Wilmot. The two flirt all through dinner and afterwards, when the whole party has adjourned to the drawing room, Annabella does her best to monopolize Mr. Huntingdon's attention. Helen, stuck in a corner looking over Milicent Hargrave's **paintings**, is jealous of Annabella until finally Mr. Huntington approaches her. Bored by Milicent's artwork, Arthur casts it aside and launches into a round of entertaining conversation that Helen finds impossible to recreate in a faithful way. There is something about Mr. Huntingdon's charm that invests everything he says and does with great interest and fun.

Painting is thematically significant throughout the novel, and it is an art form Helen very much values. She also values friendship and kindness. For her to be charmed by Arthur Huntingdon just moments after he dismisses her new friend's work suggests that, by focusing so much on Mr. Huntingdon, Helen is at risk of growing insensitive to the feelings and needs of others and neglecting art for the more short-term pleasures of romance.

Mrs. Maxwell comes over and, by overwhelming Mr. Huntingdon with what Helen considers irrelevant questions, puts an end to the conversation. Helen moves to a different part of the room and is joined by Mr. Wilmot, who, made bold by wine, attempts to woo her in a clumsy and unrefined manner. Helen finds him repulsive but does not want to be rude to her host, and is only saved from further discomfort by Mr. Huntingdon, who begs her to come with him to look at a **painting**.

Like Mr. Boarham, Mr. Wilmot is another unwelcome suitor whom Helen finds much inferior to Arthur Huntingdon. Again, Arthur prospers by comparison with a stodgy, older man. The fact that he suggests they retire to look at a painting shows that Arthur is now at least somewhat familiar with Helen's hobbies and passions.

Helen happily agrees, and finds that Mr. Huntingdon cares very little about the **painting**, a striking Vandyke. He hoped only to get her away from Mr. Wilmot, whose attentions to Helen anger him. Mr. Huntingdon then asks Helen how she feels about him. Reluctant to confess her feelings before understanding his, she turns the question on him, and he is telling her that he adores her just as Mrs. Maxwell arrives again to interrupt them and take Helen aside. Mrs. Maxwell asks Helen if Mr. Huntingdon has proposed, and Helen tells her he has not. Mrs. Maxwell says they will talk further once they're home.

Arthur's interest in art ends the moment he has the fortune to get Helen alone. Once safely out of earshot of Mr. Wilmot and the rest of the party, he reveals his true purpose in drawing Helen away: to drag from her a confession of love. Mrs. Maxwell, though, warned Helen against just such a situation—it is not a lady's place to declare her love. She must wait for a man to declare his, and Arthur obliges.

Having left the party, Mrs. Maxwell visits Helen in her room and reminds her of the conversation they had in which Helen promised she would not even think about marrying a man strictly for his looks and charm. Her aunt asks if Helen believes Mr. Huntingdon to be a good man, and Helen says she thinks he could be a good man if he had a woman like her to guide him. He has often said so himself. Mrs. Maxwell brings up a rumor that Mr. Huntingdon was involved for a time with a married woman, but Helen brushes it off as untrue and stubbornly defends Mr. Huntingdon. Mrs. Maxwell insists that he spends his time poorly, engaging in immoral activities with a group of vide-ridden young men. If all the scandalous rumors are true, Helen says, she vows to save him from himself.

Helen has obviously fallen in love, and in doing so, she has set aside all rationality in favor of romance and fantasies of reforming a sinful man. Her promise to her aunt about marrying a man for his inner worth meant nothing in the face of reality. Arthur Huntingdon has little to recommend him beyond looks, charm, and a penchant for fun. He is the very man Mrs. Maxwell warned her about, but Helen is determined to love him anyway, and prove her worth as a Christian by saving him from a life of ill-spent leisure.

Their conversation comes to an end when Mr. Maxwell calls for his wife. He has been in a bad mood, Helen writes, because his gout has gotten worse. Mrs. Maxwell goes on to use Mr. Maxwell's health as an excuse to quickly flee from London back to the country, but Helen suspects her aunt of ulterior motives—she wants to get Helen away from Mr. Huntingdon. While they prepare to leave town, Helen refuses to mention the young man's name to either her aunt or her uncle, but he is never far from her mind.

Helen is not yet the master of her own fate. As a young woman, she is under the guardianship of Mr. and Mrs. Maxwell, and she is also now at the mercy of Arthur Huntingdon. She has made her choice; she loves him, but she must wait for him to choose her.

CHAPTER 18. THE MINIATURE

Helen begins her entry for the 25th of August, contending that she is working hard at being content in the country, but her thoughts are always with Mr. Huntingdon. She cannot wait for spring, when she will be in town again and, she hopes, in his company again. When that time arrives, she will assess whether her impression of him or her aunt's is the most accurate and act accordingly. She cannot believe that he still loves her, but, if he does, and if he should ask her to marry him, she will do her utmost to reform his character.

Helen has learned at this point to value Arthur Huntingdon's opinion over her own. She worries more about the possibility that he might no longer love her than she does about the chance that he could be unworthy of her love. Powerless and restless, she resigns herself to waiting until spring to see how her life will turn out.

September arrives, and Mr. Maxwell invites a group of gentlemen to the country for a shooting party. Helen is dismayed at first to find out that Mr. Wilmot and Mr. Boarham are among the party, but then her uncle informs her that Mr. Huntingdon and his friend Lord Lowborough, are also coming, and she is ecstatic. Mrs. Maxwell invites Annabella Wilmot and Milicent Hargrave as well. Helen assumes Annabella is on the guest list to divide Mr. Huntingdon's attention from her, and Milicent because she is such a wholesome influence. Helen says she wishes she were like Milicent, or more like her anyway.

Helen is relieved to find she won't have to wait as long as she thought. The shooting party will afford her the opportunity she wants to discern Arthur's feelings for her. By wishing she were more like Milicent, Helen is admitting to what she sees as flaws in her own character. Milicent is kind and giving and unfailingly sweet to everyone. Helen is already growing jealous of Annabella Wilmot and her ability to fascinate Arthur Huntingdon.

Weeks pass and the shooting party arrives. Helen writes from a place of misery. She says her diary is a friend to whom she will pour out her heart, and her heart is very much full of Mr. Huntingdon. On his first night at the Maxwells', Mr. Huntingdon happens upon a **drawing** of Helen's, the back of which contains a likeness of him. Much to Helen's humiliation, he goes on to discover a number of such likenesses, and he pockets one. Then he goes to sit by Annabella Wilmot the rest of the evening. Helen leaves the drawing room, intending to be alone with her thoughts the rest of the night, but when she returns quickly for a candle, Mr. Huntingdon is there. He takes the opportunity to kiss her.

Arthur's disrespectful treatment of Helen's art work suggests a lack of respect for her as a person. He treats her sketches as nothing more than fuel for his own ego. Helen is miserable, though, not because he mocked her work but because the presence of the sketches revealed to him her true feelings and, instead of honoring those feelings, he spends the evening flirting with Annabella Wilmot. Helen is most definitely letting her heart rather than her head steer her at the moment.

Angered and offended, Helen ignores Mr. Huntingdon at breakfast while showering friendliness on everyone else, including Mr. Wilmot and Mr. Boarham. Later, though, as Mr. Huntingdon treats her to a number of kind speeches and smiles, Helen thaws towards him. All of the men but Boarham go out to shoot. Boarham stays behind, waiting for the grass to dry and giving everyone a lecture on the dangers of wet feet.

Helen's passive aggressive behavior might earn her what she desires—more shows of affection from Mr. Huntingdon—but it also suggests a dysfunction at the heart of her love for him. At least she can rest assured that she made the right decision in refusing Mr. Boarham.

Helen takes the morning to work on a new **painting**. The piece is, in her mind, her most presumptuous. It is of a **sunny morning** and a pair of turtledoves, who, so absorbed in each other, do not see the little girl in the grass below, looking rapturously up at them. While she is hard at work, Mr. Huntingdon sneaks in the window. He compares the girl in the painting to a young woman hoping to find constancy in love. Helen is enchanted by his pretty words and what she takes to be his sincerity, but she is angered the next moment when he wrenches her portfolio from her hand and finds another likeness of himself among the contents. Helen grabs the likeness and throws it in the fire. Mr. Huntingdon, disgruntled, leaves to rejoin the hunting party.

Arthur Huntingdon's assessment of the painting is not far off. It seems in many ways to be a physical manifestation of Helen's feelings for him and her desires for a perfect union with her future husband. Huntingdon's teasing ruins the moment and serves (or should serve) as a useful reminder to Helen that he does not value her identity as an artist. Tossing his portrait into the fire is merely a symbolic gesture—she has no real intentions of forgetting him.

After lunch, Helen, Annabella, and Milicent go on a long walk, meeting up with the hunters near the house. All but Mr. Huntingdon dodge the ladies, being covered in mud and blood. Mr. Huntingdon inserts himself between Helen and Annabella and, after a time, asks Helen why she burned his likeness. Helen tells him she burned it because she wanted to, and Mr. Huntingdon replies that he will save his company for those who value it, namely Annabella Wilmot. Helen is now truly miserable, convinced her needless pride has alienated Mr. Huntingdon forever and, worse, thrown him into the unworthy arms of Annabella. Helen thinks that Annabella would only serve to exacerbate his faults, and worries she is playing Mr. Huntingdon and Lord Lowborough off each other for selfish reasons of her own.

Mr. Huntingdon now has complete power over Helen. If he misbehaves or engages in a casual flirtation with Annabella Wilmot, she blames herself. And, should Annabella end up winning Arthur Huntingdon for herself, Helen will blame herself for that, too. Regardless, Arthur wins and Helen loses. It is a cruel game and a natural result of a system that teaches women that they have no real agency from the moment they reach marriageable age.

Meanwhile, both Wilmot and Boarham redouble their efforts to woo Helen, who begins to doubt that Mr. Huntingdon ever had any affection for her. If he loved her, he couldn't possibly watch those two older, awkward gentlemen vie for her with such composure. His indifference and unkindness are not enough to erase her regard, though. She continues to love him and be tormented by his attentions to Annabella.

As a young woman without agency, Helen can only dodge unwelcome offers and watch helplessly as the man she desires most flirts with another woman. It is not in her power to declare her love for Arthur or refuse Wilmot and Boarham in a forceful enough way that they will leave her alone.

CHAPTER 19. AN INCIDENT

Helen goes down to dinner, resolving to be in good spirits, but when Mr. Huntingdon asks Annabella Wilmot to sing for the company, Helen is overcome with jealousy and bitterness. Annabella is a wonderful performer, and Helen nearly forgets her envy in the pleasure of listening to her. Annabella asks Lord Lowborough, probably as jealous as Helen, to pick the next song. He selects a piece that, in its themes of unrequited love and unceasing devotion, reminds Helen of her feelings for Mr. Huntingdon. She starts to cry and, worried that Mr. Huntingdon might notice her tears, flees to the library to cry alone.

Helen is a painter but not a performer. Painting is a solitary art, making it a perfect fit for her as a quiet and contemplative person. In contrast, performing is social, which could be one reason Arthur places more value on Annabella's artistic efforts than he does Helen's. Either way, he mocks Helen's drawings while celebrating Annabella's work as a singer. Helen either does not see or does not want to see this truth.

Helen isn't alone for long. Mr. Huntingdon joins her and asks to know what is the matter. She won't tell him, so he confesses that he loves her. He says that compared to Annabella Wilmot (who is "**an ostentatious peony**"), she, Helen, is like a dewy rosebud. He asks her to marry him, and she says he must first ask her aunt and uncle. Mr. Huntingdon agrees, but begs her to admit that she loves him. Under protest, she does.

Arthur sees women as flowers. If Annabella is a showy blossom, then Helen is a much more modest bloom. His analogy suggests he thinks of women in terms of their beauty and nothing more, and that he, like other male characters in this story, has a tendency to underestimate women's essential strength and complexity.

Mr. Huntingdon kisses Helen, and Mrs. Maxwell walks in at that very moment. The two young people leap apart, shocked and embarrassed, but Mr. Huntingdon quickly recovers his equilibrium and explains to Mrs. Maxwell that he has been proposing to Helen, and that she said he would have to seek the permission of Mr. Maxwell and his wife. Mr. Huntingdon goes on to make various hyperbolic statements about what he would do to ensure Helen's happiness, but Mrs. Maxwell is unmoved by his words. She tells him to rejoin the other guests, and says they will talk about this tomorrow. She says the same to Helen, but in a much more tender tone. Helen retires to her room to write down the events of the evening, hoping the act of recording will calm her down enough for sleep.

Helen has mentioned in other entries that Arthur Huntingdon has a way with words. She finds his charming way of speaking difficult to describe and do justice to—but the older, wiser Mrs. Maxwell is not affected by Arthur's flights of fancy. It seems that all Mrs. Maxwell feared for her niece is now coming to pass, namely that she would accept the proposal of a man with little to recommend him beyond good looks, charm, and a cheerful manner.

CHAPTER 20. PERSISTENCE

Helen wakes the next morning completely happy and goes for a solitary walk. The **weather** mimics her mood. It is fine and dewy, and a robin is singing in the field. Again, she is not alone for long. Mr. Huntingdon joins her and, arm around her waist, rejoices in the fact that she is "his" Helen. Not yet, she warns—He still needs to acquire her aunt and uncle's permission, and her aunt is prejudiced against him. Mr. Huntingdon asks Helen for help in winning over Mrs. Maxwell. If she's worried about his lack of worldly wealth, it's true that he is not as rich as some, and after his father's death, he did become somewhat of a spendthrift, but he would reverse that course if Helen were to become his wife, he says—he would become more responsible and live like a Christian.

As was often the case with Gilbert, Helen finds the weather completely suited to her mood: it is a beautiful day and she is in a state of complete bliss. She had wanted to be alone, but Arthur's intrusion is not unwelcome. He acknowledges that, thanks to his own irresponsible spending habits, he is not as rich as some of Helen's suitors, but he's confident that marriage to her will reform him. His vow aligns neatly with Helen's wish to "save" him and allows her the comfort of thinking it is already half done.

It's not money that worries her aunt, Helen insists; it's her doubts about Mr. Huntingdon's virtues. Mrs. Maxwell wants Helen to marry a good man. Mr. Huntingdon says if it's piety that's required, he'll go to church as often as he can. Helen is put off by his excesses—she wants him to be sincere. He wants her to call him Arthur. They walk on, and Arthur asks about Helen's father, who is still living but who gave Helen up when her mother died many years ago. Helen admits that, unlike Annabella Wilmot, who is a very rich young woman, she is no heiress. Arthurs insists he doesn't care about such things.

As was the case when he promised Mrs. Maxwell to make her niece very happy, Arthur again indulges in a number of verbal excesses, vowing to become a pious and god-fearing man if that is what Helen and her aunt require. Arthur's overly casual inquiry about Helen's financial situation suggests that he might indeed care about money more than he lets on.

Later, Arthur requests a conference with Mr. Maxwell, and Helen and her aunt have a talk about her future. Mrs. Maxwell is still very much against Helen's marrying Mr. Huntingdon, but Helen insists that her aunt has the wrong idea about him. His friends are not all bad—Lord Lowborough, for instance, is not a terrible man. No, her aunt admits, he is a desperate man in need of a fortune because he already spent his, and that is why he courts Annabella. Mrs. Maxwell has tried to warn that young woman as well, but, like Helen, she refuses to see Mrs. Maxwell's point. Helen feels very little for Annabella. If Lord Lowborough is a fortune hunter, she thinks, then they deserve each other.

Helen's lack of pity for Annabella seems primarily motivated by jealousy. In light of that, it is ungenerous and unchristian of her to not to care about the young woman's prospects for happiness in marriage. Then again, it is becoming clear to her that many people do not marry for love. Rather, they enter the state for more material reasons.

What faults Arthur Huntingdon has, Helen says, she will do her best to alleviate. In Helen's estimation, they're mostly due to his miserly father and over-indulgent mother. As his wife, she will be a model of moderation for him, and she will provide him another service: getting him out of the clutches of his worst friends. Mrs. Maxwell is deeply disappointed in Helen's judgment. She says she thought Helen would be wiser than this when it came time to choosing a partner for herself.

According to Arthur, his miserly father kept such careful track of the family finances that he never let Arthur have any fun. His mother, on the other hand, let him do what he liked, especially after his father died. Helen is unwittingly inserting herself into the role of mother to Arthur. Charging herself with remaking his character, she is, in effect, hatching plans to raise him.

She and Helen then trade Bible verses. Mrs. Maxwell's verses support her point that Arthur's sin of thoughtlessness will land him in hell. Helen's support her own argument—that Jesus died on the cross so that all sins would be forgiven.

Both women's verses comport well with Christian teachings, but Mrs. Maxwell's speaks to the sufferings of experience, while Helen's is colored by the optimism of youth.

Their talk ends because it is time for church. Most of the party attends the morning service, but Lord Lowborough and Annabella Wilmot stay behind from afternoon prayers. Arthur Huntingdon accompanies Helen and Mrs. Maxwell both, but his behavior mortifies Helen, who catches him drawing a satirical caricature of the Pastor on the pages of his Bible. After the service, though, he is respectful and reverent.

Arthur clearly does not take Helen's faith seriously. In that way, it is similar to how he treats her artistic endeavors: with light-hearted ridicule. The caricature he draws of the minister mocks both her faith and her art at the same time.

Back at Staningley, Mr. Maxwell calls Helen into the library to discuss Arthur Huntingdon's marriage offer. Mr. Maxwell asks Helen if she is ready to accept Arthur's hand. She says yes without hesitation. Her uncle then asks her if she knows anything about her future husband's finances. Mr. Maxwell understands that Arthur's father's fortune has been squandered somewhat, but that there is some left. Helen replies that she has no interest in that. Whatever is his will be hers, and vice versa. Her uncle says he will appeal to Helen's father for some money for the couple, and he might be able to spare some as well. Helen is very grateful. Mr. Maxwell then asks when they want to have the ceremony—Arthur is anxious for it to happen right away. Helen wants to consult her aunt.

Even when one is determined, as Helen is, to marry for love and love alone, material considerations creep in. The couple must have something to live on. Her uncle is proving himself more serious than he seemed at first—he wants her to be able to marry the man she loves, but understands the need for financial security more than she does. Helen, of course, has no money of her own. As an aristocratic woman, she is expected to marry into a very precarious form of independence.

CHAPTER 21. OPINIONS

The wedding is set for Christmas. Helen soon discovers that others besides Mrs. Maxwell are unhappy about the match, namely Milicent Hargrave, who had hoped to introduce Helen to her brother Walter in the spring. Milicent worries that Arthur is not serious enough for Helen, and she doesn't like his looks either. She thinks his beauty too showy, his face too red. Helen is offended, and says that the next person who abuses Arthur Huntingdon in her presence will get a piece of her mind. Then Annabella Wilmot approaches her, surprised and apparently disappointed that Helen would accept Arthur. She says she wishes that Lord Lowborough and Arthur could be combined. The lord's aristocratic connections, when paired with Arthur's handsome face and wry wit, would make the perfect man. Helen pities Annabella, and says she is completely happy with her choice.

An engagement is supposed to be a happy time, but Helen finds that hers is far from it. Too many friends and acquaintances disapprove of the match. Milicent's comments about Arthur's looks parallel in an interesting way what Arthur said about Helen's brand of beauty versus Annabella's. Like Annabella, Arthur's handsomeness is very much on display. Everything about Helen is, in contrast, subtle and reserved. Helen is being bombarded by hints that she and Arthur are not well-suited for each other, but she agrees with Annabella on one point: the perfect man does not exist.

The disapproving opinions keep pouring in. Over breakfast, Arthur reads a number of letters from his friends, who are upset with him for breaking up their merry band of sinners. Grimsby is particularly put out, as is Milicent's brother, Walter Hargrave, who had fallen in love with Helen via Milicent's accounts and wanted Arthur's betrothed for himself. Helen is affronted by Arthur's seeming sorrow over the letters, but he assures her that his friend's disapproval is nothing to him. He is happy to sacrifice their happiness to secure hers. Helen wonders, once the shooting party ends, what she will do to amuse herself. Being at Staningley without Arthur Huntingdon is a sad prospect.

Arthur's friends obviously disapprove of his marriage because they fear Helen will occupy all his time, thereby cutting down on their fun considerably. Arthur, as usual, is able to talk himself out of an uncomfortable situation, and Helen, who, prior to meeting Arthur, rarely experienced loneliness or boredom, finds now that Arthur is her only interest. Without him, she has no direction.

CHAPTER 22. TRAITS OF FRIENDSHIP

Helen admits to her diary and herself that her joy in being Arthur Huntingdon's fiancé is tempered by the faults of his character that she sees more and more. She had considered thoughtlessness his main character flaw, but now she is worried that his heart is less kind than she thought. She discovers this flaw when out riding with him, Lord Lowborough, and Annabella. With the lord and Annabella at a safe distance ahead of them, Arthur acquaints Helen with some of Lowborough's unfortunate history, which includes losing his fiancé because he'd squandered his fortune gambling. Lowborough, Arthur says, is singularly unfortunate at the tables, whereas Arthur is always lucky.

Up until this point, the reader only knows Lord Lowborough as a sad-looking man with an interest in Annabella Wilmot and her fortune. Now, thanks to Arthur's story, Lowborough's entire history is laid bare, as is Arthur's unusual lack of empathy for even one of his closest "friends."

Arthur insists he doesn't care for gambling. He only goes to watch the action and find amusement in others' gains and losses. Arthur then treats Helen to a story about Lowborough's gambling problems. One night, on the verge of ruin, Lowborough takes a challenge from Grimsby for just one more game. Grimsby wins and Lowborough, completely out of money, goes home with Arthur, who gets him drunk in hopes of taking his mind off his problems. Lowborough grows sentimental and predicts that his fiancée will have nothing to do with him now. No matter, Arthur says—he can always find a woman willing to marry him for his title.

The fact that Arthur takes pleasure in watching his friends squander their money says a great deal about his character. He is entertained by other people's suffering. And his attempts to make Lowborough feel better are just as revealing. He gets him drunk and consoles him with talk of a woman marrying him only for his title. Helen, it would seem, has a lot of "saving" to do.

Arthur continues his tale. Lowborough has replaced gambling with drinking as his favored vice, and Arthur and the rest of the crew encourage him in this because it seems to make him feel better about his indebted state. One night, though, Lowborough vows to drink no more and to be a more responsible and ethical man from then on. Arthur assumes he's joking, but then they don't see Lowborough for a week. Eventually he turns up again, saying he is only joining them to get a break from his own morbid thoughts. In celebration, Arthur pours him a glass of liquor, and Lowborough drains it discreetly. When Arthur pours him a second, however, Lowborough throws it at him. After that, Lowborough abstains completely from drink and gambling.

The bonds between Arthur and his friends have clearly been formed over alcohol. They enjoy gambling, drinking to excess, and little else. Lord Lowborough's attempts at sobriety invite not pity or support but scorn and attempts to corrupt him further. This suggests that his friends do not actually care about his welfare but only his willingness to contribute in some way to their fun.

Lowborough still joins the group often, though, because he doesn't want to be alone, and gradually the young men grow annoyed with him for being so moderate in his habits. Either he joins in the fun, his friends say, or he has to stay away. Arthur takes his side, though, and tells them to be patient—he'll come around. One night, Lowborough comes to the club, obviously suffering from having taken too much laudanum the night before. That is the one vice he still has. He says he cannot see any reason to rejoice in life, and his friends try to cheer him up. Arthur offers him a bottle of brandy, which he refuses at first, but later drains to great applause. Unfortunately, though, the drink sends him into a seizure and he is laid low for a time with a fever.

Arthur's attempts to be a good friend to Lowborough are really anything but. Brandy is the last thing Lowborough needs at that moment, but it's the best idea Arthur has. In the end, it nearly kills him. Arthur is obviously trying to present himself as a kind and thoughtful man for Helen's benefit, but what he's really doing is painting a thorough and discouraging portrait of how he treats the people he claims to care about and how he chooses to spend the bulk of his time.

Arthur tells Helen that, when Lowborough recovers, he counsels him to adhere to a program of moderation. Drink for fun, Arthur suggests, but don't let it rule your life. For a short time, it works, but Lowborough has an addictive personality and is soon on a rollercoaster of abstinence and indulgence that lands him in complete despair. He confides in Arthur that his only salvation is a wife. He needs a companion who, unlike Arthur and the rest of the men at the club, will encourage him to keep to the straight and narrow. He worries, though, that no one will have him on account of his poverty, and, as Arthur points out to Helen, that has indeed been the case. Mothers are turned off by Lowborough's lack of fortune, and their daughters by his downcast looks.

Lowborough hopes to marry a woman who will save him from himself. This goal echoes Helen's expressed wish upon entering her engagement to Arthur. As a serious and practicing Christian, she hopes to help cure him of his worst vices and habits. It can be presumed that, before he launched into this story, she did not know the worst of it. And, since Arthur believes himself to be a model of moderation, Helen's goal could prove all that more difficult to achieve.

Then Lowborough met Annabella, and his prospects brightened. He had hoped but not dared dream he would meet a woman who would take him and whom he could also love and esteem, but Annabella seemed to be both, especially when she joined the party at Staningley and was no longer around her other suitors. Lowborough approaches Arthur one night and tells him that his greatest hopes are at hand: Annabella loves him! Arthur, laughing, lets Helen in on a little secret: Annabella despises Lowborough and is only encouraging his attentions because she wants his title and estate. Helen is horrified. How can Arthur find such a tragedy funny? Especially when it concerns his dear friend?

Helen now has every reason to pity Lowborough and despise Annabella. She also has reason to worry about her own future husband's powers of empathy. He finds the entire affair funny, just as he found Helen's sketches and the local minister's earnestness funny, but it is actually a tragedy. Lowborough genuinely loves Annabella, mostly for her beauty but also as a response to her insincere attentions to him, and the marriage seems doomed from the start.

Arthur contends that he cannot tell Lowborough the truth. It will break his heart, and it would be playing a dirty trick on Annabella to betray her confidence. Perhaps Annabella will act out the lie so well that Lowborough will never know the truth and will be happy in his self-deception. But Arthur says he will do whatever else he can to make his beloved happy. Helen begs Arthur then to never again take pleasure in the suffering of others, and he agrees and lets her go.

Arthur thinks it of absolutely no importance whether Lowborough's marital happiness is due to sincere mutual regard or total deception on his wife's part. His attitude calls into question the sincerity of his own dealings with Helen, and shows the lack of respect he has for the institution of marriage.

Returning to her room, Helen finds Annabella Wilmot there. Helen silently admires the other woman's blooming beauty. Annabella then confides in her that Lowborough has proposed and she has accepted. Does Helen envy her now? No, Helen says, but she wishes her every happiness. Annabella assures her that she is the happiest woman alive, and then leaves. Helen's servant Rachel, who is there to help Helen dress for dinner, tells her mistress that the servants have heard rumors about both Lowborough and Arthur Huntingdon not being the best of men, but Helen silences her.

Annabella's beauty was enough to capture Lord Lowborough's heart. This scenario brings to mind again Mrs. Maxwell's warning about attaching oneself for life to a person based solely on their looks, which, after all, fade. Rachel's talk might be unpleasant for Helen to hear, but Helen knows that Rachel, as a longtime caretaker, friend, and companion, only has her best interests at heart.

The guests leave and Helen feels the absence of Arthur keenly. He writes to her often though, and his letters are like his personality: witty, diverting, and full of affection. Helen wishes that he could express himself differently at times. She wonders when they're married what she'll do with the serious side of herself.

Helen seems gradually to be losing all the sides of herself that do not involve Arthur. Before long, there might not be much of her left.

CHAPTER 23. FIRST WEEKS OF MATRIMONY

After four months of neglect, Helen returns to her diary to record the events of the first months of her marriage to Arthur Huntingdon. She admits that they are not what she could wish exactly. Her honeymoon, for instance, was a disappointment. She had hoped to see much more of Europe than they did. Arthur hurried her through Italy and France, saying he was anxious to get her home and have her all to himself. Also, if they met certain ladies out in Paris and Roman society, there was a chance they would be furious to see him with his new wife. Helen is upset at these developments, but maintains she is primarily disappointed in him rather than angry over his treatment of her.

As a wife, Helen's role is to defer to her husband at all times. He dictates the parameters of their honeymoon and, when it's not to Helen's satisfaction, she pardons him, allowing herself to be disappointed but not angry. This pattern of indulgence allows Arthur to hide Helen away in a possessive manner, even as he is also torturing her with tales of his former lovers.

Settled in their new home at Grassdale Manor, though, Helen forgives him everything. The house is perfect, and Arthur is back to his old self. She thinks for a while that perhaps she is too blessed in life. Then, one day when walking home from church, Arthur accuses her of being too religious, of loving her God more than she loves him. Then he places her hand on his head and it sinks into his curls. Arthur laughingly asks how is he to worship God when that same God gave him a misshapen head? Helen replies that that is no excuse for giving in to sin, and that practice makes perfect—he should employ his talents in sincere worship and he'll find it gets easier with time.

Arthur had promised to become a better Christian for Helen, but it seems at this moment that he would like her to become a less devout Christian for him instead. For Helen, this kind of transaction makes no sense. She can love God and Arthur at the same time. Still convinced she can make Arthur a better man, she advises that he apply himself in the matter of worship, misshapen head or not.

Arthur argues that Christianity demands a man forgo pleasure in the present in hopes of obtaining even greater pleasure at some point in the future. That is not a wise way to live, Arthur contends. He prefers to enjoy the metaphorical banquet that he can see, that is laid before him in the now, rather than count on one he cannot see and isn't sure is ever coming. Helen responds that it's not necessary to forgo any pleasure, only that moderation is what's called for. They part, with Arthur insisting that he has been a well-behaved bridegroom, and Helen wishing his thoughts lined up with his actions on a more consistent basis.

One need only consider Arthur's story about Lord Lowborough's struggles with addiction and gambling to see that forgoing pleasure is not one of Arthur's strengths—he enjoys fun and he likes it in excess if possible. Helen, always the patient instructor, offers another lesson in Christian comportment. After all, Arthur claimed in the story of Lowborough to be a moderate person, so now he just needs to be himself.

CHAPTER 24. FIRST QUARREL

It is March, and Arthur has grown bored with country life. His favorite thing to do on an uneventful rainy day, besides mope, is to treat Helen to stories about his former lovers. At the beginning of their marriage, Helen used to cry over such stories, but seeing that Arthur found her dismay funny and wrote it off as weak, feminine jealousy, she now listens to his anecdotes with cold reserve. She admits that there are times she wonders if she has made a terrible mistake in marrying him, but she quickly shoves such thoughts away and vows that she will have no regrets and will continue to love him as best she can.

Arthur has no occupation in the country beyond amusing himself, and without his friends there to distract him, his primary amusement comes courtesy of tormenting his wife. Her jealousy is all a game to him. Helen, though, takes his abuse seriously. Just because she has stopped crying over his stories of former lovers doesn't mean she isn't affected by them. As his wife, though, her job is to please him and serve him loyally.

Helen and Arthur have their first real fight. It begins with Arthur mentions his affair with Lady F, a married woman much his senior whom Helen has grown to hate. She begs him not to mention her name in front of her, and he tells her she is too hard on Lady F. It's jealousy, he supposes, but her jealousy is unwarranted because he loves Helen a lot more than he loved Lady F or any of his other conquests. Helen tells him that if she'd known about his numerous affairs she would never have married him. Then she storms out of the room. Later, when he comes to her room, she tells him to go away. She doesn't want to see him until morning.

Helen hates Lady F., but still loves Arthur. She is holding the woman in the affair to a higher standard than she is willing to hold her husband, which is evidence not only of her own hypocrisy but the deep-seated and toxic effects of societal norms that value men over women and teach women to hate each other as they vie for male attention.

The next day is not much better. Helen receives a few letters and responds to them. Arthur spends the afternoon roaming pointlessly about the house, and when they meet again that night Helen pretends to read and Arthur abuses his dog. Before parting for the night, Helen thinks she hears Arthur call her a "confounded slut," but she can't be sure.

Neither Arthur nor Helen has anything to do all day. Helen's letter writing is more productive than Arthur's roaming, but they are still two very idle people too much leisure time on their hands.

Breakfast the following morning is uncomfortable. Eventually Arthur stands, declaring that he has an idea of what to do with his day, and Helen listens in the hall while he makes plans with his coachman to travel to London. Later, though, the coachman tells Arthur that one of the horses is sick and that it would be best if he delayed his journey. Helen asks Arthur why he was planning to go to London in the first place. He says because he cannot be happy at home with a wife who doesn't love him. Helen says she does love him, but that she wishes he would repent and be kind to her. He admits that the fight broke his heart. Helen melts instantly, and they agree to go to London together the following week.

Arthur's solution to their first fight is to just run away. He does not confront the problem or acknowledge his role in the discord, but instead does his best to escape it. Helen doesn't seem to catch on to this warning sign and agrees to go with him to London for what she hopes will be a healing trip together.

Helen is satisfied with the outcome of their quarrel. She feels closer to Arthur now, and he stops mentioning his former lovers in front of her. She is optimistic again that they can make a fresh start and be completely happy as man and wife.

As a woman who entered the married state hoping to reform her husband, Helen's optimism is understandable. She has to believe all will be well, because the alternative is too awful to contemplate.

CHAPTER 25. FIRST ABSENCE

London proves exhausting for Helen. Arthur, keen to show her off to his friends, insists that she reject her modest style of dress for something showier, and she is constantly being put in the role of hostess, another social obligation that saps her energy. After a week, Arthur suggests that she go home to Grassdale Manor to recover her spirits, and she readily agrees, assuming he will come with her. He informs her that he intends to stay for another week or two to conduct a few business matters, and when she says she can stay on to keep him company at meal times at least, he refuses. She must go home now and take the country air, he says, both for herself and for the child she is now carrying.

Helen and Arthur's temperaments are polar opposites. She draws energy and fulfillment from quiet contemplation, while he enjoys himself most in the middle of a noisy crowd. Arthur tries to remake his wife in a more fashionable mold, but the results of such an effort are unsuccessful. Both want the other to be something they are not. As for the child Helen is carrying, the timeline for this is muddled in the novel—it will be another year before she actually gives birth.

Helen wonders what sort of business it is to keep him in town for several weeks, and Arthur explains that he needs to sell a piece of property to pay some debts on the estate. The details are fuzzy, but Helen assumes it's just her ignorance hindering her understanding. But later, at home in Grassdale, she begins to suspect that it's not business keeping him in London but his old friends. A month passes and still he does not return, even though he promises in every letter to be home soon.

Helen is still quick to blame herself for anything amiss in her relationship with Arthur. The fact that she expected him home sooner and has no idea about the details of his business in town must be, she supposes, due to her own stupidity.

Arthur's letters continue to come, but they've gotten shorter and they're less satisfying to Helen who, ever hopeful, still devours them, having no one to talk to besides Rachel. Milicent is in London, leaving only Milicent's little sister Esther and their brother Walter, but Esther is too young for a companion and Walter is always away. Helen finally met Milicent's brother when she was in London with Arthur, and while she found him superior to Arthur's other acquaintances, that's not really saying much.

Helen understandably begins to doubt Arthur's sincerity about coming home soon. With each day and week and month that goes by, it seems to her more likely that he is not conducting business at all but rather cavorting with his friends. Meanwhile, she is virtually friendless, having given up everything else for Arthur's sake.

Helen finds herself wishing Arthur would come home to find her good looks destroyed by anxiety and worry. That would serve him right, she thinks. In the meantime, she is consumed with disturbing thoughts about how and with whom he is spending his time.

Helen is as idle as Arthur during this period, leaving her plenty of time to miss him and feel sorry for herself.

It is now the beginning of July, and Helen has a new letter from Arthur in which he makes a number of excuses for his extended absences. She has no idea how busy he is, he writes, and if she sends him another bitter letter like the last he will have to do his best to forget her. He also passes along some gossip about Milicent. His friend Hattersley is determined to marry within the year, but he needs a woman who will let him do whatever he wants. Arthur volunteers to introduce him to Milicent, who, he says, will suit him perfectly. Helen worries about her friend, but trusts that Milicent's superior powers of judgment will not permit her to attach herself to such a man.

Helen does not include the text of her letter to Arthur in her diary entry, but the reader can guess at the contents, given his defensive reaction. Helen is presuming that Milicent will make a better choice than she herself did in becoming engaged to a life partner. In making this assumption, Helen is holding Milicent to an unfairly high standard.

But Helen is mistaken. She soon receives a letter from Milicent informing her that she is indeed engaged to Mr. Hattersley. Milicent can't really believe the situation herself. She thought she'd given her potential suitor a kind no, only to be informed by her mother that she as good as accepted him, and that to reverse course now would cause a great deal of offense. So Milicent goes along with the engagement, mostly because she knows it pleases her mother, who had no idea how she was going to marry off her two daughters with no fortune to offer, and who is overjoyed at the thought of her daughter marrying the son of a rich banker. Milicent is not excited about her beau. In fact, she doesn't think she can ever love him. He's the opposite of her ideal, but everyone approves of the match, including Walter.

Like Helen, Milicent does not have the option of earning her own living, and her family views her single status as a burden on them. They must pay for her room and board, but if she marries, those expenses will be her husband's. Selfless and timid, Milicent is reluctant to upset her mother or brother, so she sacrifices her own happiness for theirs. The fact that Mrs. Hargrave and Walter both view the match as advantageous says a great deal about their characters. The blustering Hattersley is obviously completely wrong for Milicent, but they'd rather she be off their hands than satisfied in life.

Milicent begs Helen to write to her and tell her something good about her fiancé. Maybe Mr. Hattersley is a diamond in the rough? Helen is distraught. She can offer no encouragement beyond what Milicent would not want to hear, which is that it's better to disappoint everyone at the outset than live a life of misery and regret.

Helen has learned the hard way the dangers of marrying the wrong person, even if it seems at first to be for the right reasons. Her hard-won knowledge will provide no comfort to her friend, however, so she keeps quiet.

It is now July 13, and Arthur is still in London. Helen mourns the passing of summer without her husband. She lists the **beauties of nature** that surround her daily, the calls of the swallows and sparrows, the noble ash trees bending over the water, wildflowers tossed by the breeze, and laments that Arthur is not there to appreciate them with her. In fact, their beauty cuts her. The prettier the landscape, the more glorious the **weather**, the sadder she becomes, because she is alone and cannot share such beauty with the person she loves most in the world. The nights are the worst. She wonders where he is and who he is with, and is overcome with unhappiness.

Helen is desperately in need of employment, but she is too depressed to know it or to do anything about her unhappiness. This is a rare instance where the weather acts as a contrast to Helen's inner state. This would be the perfect time for Helen to begin painting, but her heart and mind are too much occupied with Arthur and missing him for her to see a way out of her rut.

Ten more days pass and Arthur is finally home with Helen, but he is very much changed. He is feverish and ill, and his looks are not what they were. Helen does not ask him where he's been or why he's returned in the state he has. Instead, she does everything she can to soothe him. She knows he doesn't deserve such treatment, but she vows to spoil him just this once. With him home and, she hopes, repentant, she plans to finally reform his character. Then she will never let him leave her again.

Like Helen, Arthur is gradually losing parts of himself, but he has less to lose. His looks are one of the key assets he offers the world, and they are suffering under his lifestyle of hard-drinking and carousing. Even after months of loneliness and anxiety, Helen still believes she can reform him. She also believes she can keep him by her side.

One night, when Helen is stroking his curls, she finds herself wishing Arthur were worthy of her kindness. The thought makes her cry, and, noticing her tears, he asks her what is wrong. She is loved by him, he says. What else could she possibly want? That he would love himself as much as she loves him, she replies. He goes to sleep in her arms, innocent as a child, and she cries harder, her heart full.

Helen's love for Arthur, like Milicent's vow to be a good wife to Ralph Hattersley, is one of self-sacrifice. She is also morphing into his mother figure. She cradles him like she would a child, and has a mother's hopes that all will be well if she can only keep him home and safe.

After a month's recuperation, Arthur is himself again: restless, irreverent, easily distracted, and just as easily bored. Helen wishes he had something productive to occupy him. If only he would play the role of the gentleman farmer and look after his estate or employ himself in an artistic endeavor of some sort, but he is too idle to apply himself to anything for very long. Helen vows that if she ever becomes a mother, she will make sure to curb the habit of over-indulgence in her child. She blames that evil for the bulk of Arthur's troubles.

Helen's wish for Arthur that he work as a gentleman farmer dovetails interestingly with Gilbert's actual occupation. If Arthur had employment, he would be a happier, more fulfilled man and not have to find so much comfort in drinking. Incidentally, Helen's pregnancy is alluded to after her first trip to London, but this chapter suggests she is not yet pregnant.

They begin to discuss the possibility of a shooting party, but Helen shudders when she thinks of inviting Arthur's friends. Arthur has hinted that he read her letters to his friends in London and is in agony when she thinks how he probably bragged about the kind of abuse he could inflict on her without shaking her attachment to him. Arthur says they could invite Lord Lowborough, but that he won't come without Annabella. Perhaps, he ventures, Helen is afraid of her? Helen doesn't understand him. She asks who else they should invite. Arthur suggests Grimsby, and Helen agrees, even though she hates him. Hattersley, Arthur says, will be too busy with his bride to care about shooting.

This shooting party harkens back to the fateful party at Staningley when Helen engaged herself to Arthur. It throws a melancholy light on that joyful moment in her life, spoiled now by the reality of the man himself. Still, Helen is loyal. It is her only choice, even though Arthur does his best to make her jealous with references to Annabella and broad hints that Helen has reason to despise her again.

That reminds Helen that she has received several letters from Milicent since her marriage. In the letters, Milicent insists that she loves her husband now as a wife should, and Helen surmises that her change of heart is all due to her kind nature. If Milicent stopped to consider that she is actually an unfortunate victim of fate or her mother's greed, she would most likely hate her uncouth husband forever.

Helen cannot imagine that Milicent has actually grown to love her husband, because her relationship with her own husband is so strained. It's possible that Helen is correct about Milicent. Perhaps she, too, has lost whole parts of herself in loyalty to Ralph.

CHAPTER 26. THE GUESTS

Another month goes by, and Helen and Arthur's guests arrive for the shooting party. Helen finds Lord Lowborough changed. He is, for the most part, happier than he was before. He clearly adores his wife, who rewards his adoration mostly with insincere compliments. Annabella also flirts scandalously with Arthur, who flirts back in a way that Helen senses is designed to make her jealous. She refuses to play along, however, and scolds him primarily on behalf of Lord Lowborough. The only time her jealously is truly awakened is when Annabella sings and plays for the company. Helen knows her powers at the piano are woefully inferior to Annabella's.

Arthur is putting Helen in the position of again viewing Annabella as a rival. It's not surprising, perhaps, that he would toy with Lowborough's emotions, given how little he pitied him when he was in the throes of opium addiction and impending poverty, but Helen does her best to get Arthur to consider him. Having lived idly at Grassdale Manor all these months, Helen has no art to show for herself, but Annabella can still perform beautifully.

Helen does have a means of retaliation at her disposal in the form of Walter Hargrave, who is all too happy to show her attention, especially when he thinks Arthur is neglecting her, but Helen finds it all incredibly distasteful and humiliating and strives to ignore his attempts to engage her.

Helen refuses to stoop to Arthur's level by engaging in a flirtation with another man. Her religious and loyal nature forbid her from behaving in an immoral way, even when nearly driven to it by her husband's neglect.

The group is invited to a house party at the Grove, the seat of the Hargraves. Helen takes this occasion to sketch the character of Mrs. Hargrave, whom she thinks hard-hearted and concerned primarily with keeping up appearances. Not poor by any means, she stretches her budget on frivolous things and spends the bulk of her money on Walter who, while not as immoral as his companions, is still, in Helen's estimation, thoughtless and self-involved. The people who suffer the most at the hands of these two status hounds are Milicent and Esther. At 14, Esther is just as kind and innocent as her sister, but is by nature more assertive, and Helen thinks she will give her mother more trouble than Milicent when it comes time to marry her off.

Mrs. Hargrave shares in common with Mrs. Markham a tendency to value her son over her daughters—hence Milicent's disastrous marriage to Ralph Hattersley. An unhappy wife, Helen is naturally interested in the marital fortunes of others. She hopes Esther will have better luck than Milicent and herself in that area, but Helen is now acquainted with the ugly realities and results of the marriage market. It is essentially slavery for women and unlimited power for men.

CHAPTER 27. A MISDEMEANOR

One night in early October, Helen happens to see Arthur press Annabella's hand and tenderly bring it to his lips. Helen leaves the room in a fury and Arthur follows her, insisting that it meant nothing. He'd had too much wine, he says, and she shouldn't make such a fuss over a silly slip. Helen, though, warns him that he is in great danger of making her hate him. Arthur argues that if she hadn't seen the transgression it would have meant nothing, but then Helen turns the tables on him and asks how he would feel if Lord Lowborough treated her to the same flirty gestures as he treated Annabella. Arthur answers that he would happily blow his friend's brains out.

Arthur's hypocrisy in this matter is stunning, or it would be stunning if it weren't so common. He thinks his dalliances with Annabella are nothing to get upset over, but if Lord Lowborough were to kiss Helen's hand in the same manner he would kill him. Women are trapped by such double standards into playing the part of angels in their own homes. They cannot complain or act out themselves; their only option is to endure what would drive most men mad.

Helen continues her argument, telling Arthur that it is no joke to toy with the emotions of people he claims to value. She asks, are the marriage vows so cheap that he would flaunt them so? He counters that she is breaking her vows to him—she promised to honor and obey him, and all she does is abuse and blame him. Helen warns him again that this will end in her hating him, but he claims she can never hate him, not while she loves him. Women's natures, he says, are more constant than men's. Allowances must be made.

It has been clear for some time that Helen and Arthur have very different views of marriage. Helen wants a holy union in which their love grows with time and intimacy. Arthur would like Helen to make as little trouble for him as possible. He lives for pleasure, and her wants and desires are getting in the way of that.

Helen asks if he means that she has lost his affections to Annabella, and Arthur says no, of course not. Helen is an angel, Annabella dust in comparison, but he is a lowly mortal and would like Helen to forgive him for this offense. Helen relents and bursts into tears. After this confrontation, they get along well for a time. Arthur is merely civil to Annabella, and both Helen and Lord Lowborough are gratified by the change.

Arthur's comparing Helen to an angel is more a burden than it is a compliment. It means that she has to be superhuman, and, in this case, it means forgiving Arthur everything and never expressing displeasure. And the post-fight reprieve is, of course, short-lived.

Some time later, Helen finds herself alone in a room with Annabella and is deeply embarrassed by the situation. She doesn't know what to say to the young woman. In fact, she hates being in her presence. Annabella breaks the ice by asking if Arthur is often so merry in company. Helen says she doubts he ever will be so again. Annabella then assumes that Helen won him over with a show of theatrical tears, and Helen, offended, says she never cries for effect. Annabella asserts that *she* doesn't have to, because her husband worships her and would never treat her poorly. Helen suggests that Annabella is taking too much credit for her husband's good behavior, and Annabella admits that they are all fallible creatures. Then she insinuates that Arthur might not be worthy of Helen's love. They end the passive aggressive encounter in mutual dislike.

Annabella reveals herself in this scene to be a heartless villain, and her views on marriage are even more shallow and corrupt than Arthur's. She seems to be proving correct Arthur's theory about Lord Lowborough's chances of happiness in marriage: she deceives her husband and he doesn't know the difference. In fact, he worships her. It is perhaps unfortunate that female characters in this novel so often fall into such simple categories—generally angel or devil—as it deprives them of productive complexity.

CHAPTER 28. PARENTAL FEELINGS

It is Christmas, and Helen has been married for a year. She now has a son to love, and her two hopes are simple ones: she wants God not to take him from her and she wants him to grow up to be a good man. As a devout Christian, she believes that, were little Arthur to die young, he would be rewarded with eternal life in heaven, but still, losing him is painful to contemplate. So is thinking he might grow up to be a sinner in love with the vices of the world. Should that be the case, she hopes God would take him from her and spare her that disillusionment.

Helen's hopes for little Arthur are clearly colored by her unhappiness with his father, and her views on his future are extreme. Readers now understand why she might choose to dote on her son while at Wildfell Hall—she is terrified he will turn out like his father. This is often the effect of the novel's structure: Helen's diary clarifies her behavior in the Gilbert sections.

Helen knows that little Arthur does not yet know her, but she loves him more than she could have imagined, and only wishes that her husband shared her feelings. At the moment, he is mostly indifferent to their son, only hoping little Arthur will grow up to be a fine boy and a worthy heir. Sometimes Arthur is even jealous of the attention Helen gives to the baby. He goes so far as to say he's in danger of hating the boy because Helen dotes on him so. Helen is shocked and says he can't be serious, but he is. He feels invisible now that the baby has arrived.

Arthur is selfish to his core. He is incapable of putting his own wants second, even behind his own son. Like Helen's concerns about little Arthur, his personality traits are on the extreme side, but they are also a direct result of a society that teaches young men that women exist to serve their needs. Helen had been mothering her husband, and now he doesn't want to share her with their child.

Helen tries to get Arthur to hold his son, but he panics and she takes the baby back, kissing little Arthur several times to make up for his father's neglect. Arthur is jealous of the kisses she bestows on the baby, so she gives in and kisses him, too, saying she has half a mind not to kiss him again until he loves the baby as a father should. Arthur says he can't love little Arthur until the boy can show affection for him. It might be selfish, he says, but that's the reality.

This scene mirrors Gilbert's flirtatious talk with Eliza Millward about cats and men's resentment of them because they are so often the beneficiary of female affection. The men in the book are often incapable of sharing the love of women with others, while women are not allowed to be so self-centered.

CHAPTER 29. THE NEIGHBOUR

An entire year has passed since Helen's last entry, and it is Christmas again. Little Arthur is a year old and has succeeded in winning his father's affection. Now Helen worries about Arthur spoiling his son, and she worries that she might be tempted to spoil him, too. Still, the child is her consolation because her marriage has proved a deep disappointment. She loves Arthur and he loves her, but they do not understand one another, and Arthur is an incurable hedonist whose idea of a perfect wife is a companion who sacrifices herself solely for his comfort and enjoyment—she is to be devoted to him alone.

Helen now has two children on her hands, and, in addition to the sadness she feels over her failed marriage, she worries constantly about little Arthur's future character. Arthur's demands make it difficult for her to tend to her child the way she would like, and it is a waste of time to try to satisfy Arthur anyway. He cannot be satisfied, and his appetites are, to her, repulsive, immoral, and without merit.

Helen comes to this realization when Arthur again wants to return to London on "business." Helen suggests she and the baby accompany him, but he argues that town is no place for a baby, and says it would be an unhealthy trip for both of them. Helen is hurt and sees that the truth is he simply does not want her around, spoiling the good times he plans to have with his friends. She asks him to avoid temptation if he can, but Arthur laughs her off. He can take care of himself, he says.

It is gradually dawning on Helen that Arthur does not plan on being a traditional husband or father. He values his time with his friends too much to give any real consideration to Helen and little Arthur. Arthur's claim that he can take care of himself is ironic considering the fact he's spent the last several months being mothered by Helen.

Helen wants to believe him, but during the four months Arthur is gone he rarely writes and, even when he does, his letters are short and unaffectionate. Helen takes comfort in time spent with little Arthur, but still she is miserable without her husband, and is racked with worry over how to teach her son to love and respect his father without following his poor example.

Helen is in the process of transferring her love and hopes from her husband to her son. It is her only choice, given that Arthur seems determined to live apart from her more than half the year.

Helen recognizes that she has brought such suffering on herself, and so she does her best to stay busy and keep from wallowing in despair. In addition to mothering little Arthur and talking with Rachel (who senses her difficulties and goes out of her way to be kind to her mistress), Helen pays charitable visits to the poor who live on the Grassdale estate and enjoys the company of Esther Hargrave. She also sees Walter, who made the odd decision to leave his friends and London and spend the summer with Esther and his mother.

When Arthur was still at home, Helen had wished he would employ himself more productively. Now she learns the value of work herself. The charity work is particularly valuable in reminding her that others are worse off than she is. Rachel again is proving herself a good friend, but Helen is still not quite sure how to feel about Walter, who seems to want to be intimate with her.

Helen soon meets Walter when out on a walk with little Arthur and Rachel. He pays her a pretty compliment and invites her to dinner at the Grove the following night. He then asks if she has heard from Arthur lately, and she admits she has not. Walter angrily denounces Arthur's neglect of her, and says that he finds Arthur's behavior unfathomable. Why, when he has such a wife and child, not to mention such a luxurious estate, does he stay away? Helen says it must be because he prefers the dissipated company of his friends to the sober nature of country and family life, insinuating that Walter should know something about that.

Walter is not endearing himself to Helen by reminding her of her husband's neglect. Helen is becoming, in effect, a prisoner at Grassdale Manor. She has no money of her own and therefore cannot leave, and is just left to wait for her husband to return. She is also forced by Arthur's absence to consider the fact that he prefers the company of a number of drunken men to her. It is a life of luxury but a lonely one.

Walter attempts to defend himself, saying that he has always had moderate habits and he has done his best to talk sense into Arthur, but to no avail. Helen asks him to please stop abusing her husband. It hurts her to hear of his faults from strangers. It is now Walter's turn to be hurt. He was under the impression they were friends. Helen rebuffs him, and he takes his leave, stopping for a moment to hold little Arthur. Rachel is impressed and concludes he is a kind gentleman, but Helen still has her doubts.

Walter's sudden presence in Helen's life suggests parallels between his affection for her and Gilbert's, especially because Helen is often rebuffing Walter's overtures of friendship. Having suffered as Arthur's wife, she is now finding it difficult to trust other men, even when they claim to have pure motives.

Walter very much acts the part of the gentleman the next night at the Hargraves'. He is thoughtful but not overly affectionate toward Helen, and when Mrs. Hargrave starts to complain about Arthur's neglect of his wife, Walter silences her and changes the subject. Still, Helen does not like him. She senses that selfishness is motivating him to seek her friendship and so she is on her guard.

Esther and Milicent are very proud of their brother and consider him superior to his peers, but Helen is not convinced. She thinks his gentleman act is just that: an act.

Helen does not meet Walter alone until one bright, hot day at the end of July. She is delighting little Arthur with a bouquet of **flowers** when Walter approaches them, commenting on Walter's growth and the beauty of the scene Helen and her son make at the side of a brook. He asks if she has heard from Arthur lately, and when she says she has not, he produces a letter from his friend in which he says he will be back in the country next week. Helen scoffs at the idea. He has been promising to return next week for months, but Walter tells her that it was always Arthur's intention to return in July. This revelation hurts Helen, but she is still excited at the thought of seeing her husband. She hopes to impress upon him when he arrives just how much he has wronged her with his absence.

Again, the parallels between Walter Hargrave and Gilbert Markham are striking. Like Gilbert, Walter is in awe of the beauty of the scene when he comes across Helen with her son (and flowers are present as well). But this is where the similarity ends. As a friend of Arthur's, Walter is tainted in Helen's eyes, especially since he seems to be in the know about Arthur's planned-on return date. Her optimism at this point strains belief—she still thinks she can change Arthur by scolding him as a mother would.

CHAPTER 30. DOMESTIC SCENES

Arthur returns from London in even worse shape than he did the year before. He is feverish and impatient with everyone, and Helen bides her time, waiting for the right moment to confront him about his conduct. Finally, after he explodes at a servant for dropping a tray of crockery, Helen begins gently reminding him that his fever and ill humors are, in fact, his fault. He is only sick because he did not take care of himself in town. She tries to cheer him up by bringing little Arthur in, but the baby is teething and his fussiness annoys his father, so she takes him back to the nursery. She is gone for a time, getting little Arthur to sleep, and when she returns, her husband scolds her for caring more for the baby, and for the feelings of a clumsy servant, than she does for him.

Arthur is not made for country life, and he only returns when he is sick and in need of nursing. Helen enables this sort of behavior by accepting him home largely on his own terms. She has no other choice. This time, though, she does not take such care with his feelings. She lets him know she is displeased with him and his habits. Arthur doesn't listen, though, and his annoyance with his son proves he has no capacity to change.

Helen begins to weep, and Arthur grows frustrated with her. What could she possibly have to cry about? Helen tells him that she is crying for him. When he degrades himself, he degrades her. Arthur wants only another glass of wine and to be left alone. He informs Helen that he lived more in the last four months than she has her entire life, and it's a wonder such living didn't kill him. He wishes that she were more like Milicent. Hattersley's wife is perfect, Arthur argues—she lets him do exactly as he pleases and never complains. Helen says Milicent is miserable. Arthur says that's impossible, because if Hattersley is happy, so is she.

This is Mrs. Markham's idea of a perfect marriage. Arthur pleases himself; Helen does what she can to make him happy. For Helen, though, it is a living hell. On top of that, she cannot seem to win. Having once grown tired of Helen's retiring personality, Arthur now wishes she were more like Milicent. Milicent, too, conducts herself as Mrs. Markham would have women behave. The only people happy in this scenario are the husbands.

Helen knows better. In letters, Milicent has complained about her husband's bad behavior and implored Helen to try to use her influence with Arthur to remedy things. Helen gently declines her friend's request, telling Milicent that she overestimates Helen's influence with Arthur, and that the two men feed on each other. It's not enough that one should reform. This exchange angers Arthur, who wishes Helen would be as kind and caring to him as she was last time he came home in a feverish state. But Helen knows such kindness would do no good. He does not repent his treatment of her, only his illness, and now she has a son to look after as well as an ailing and peevish husband.

Helen cannot perform miracles. So far, her efforts at trying to convince Arthur to reform have failed. That means her chances of getting Ralph Hattersley to change his ways are next to nil. These men have no motivation to change anyway—they suffer no consequences as a result of their bad behavior, so there is no reason for them do anything other than what they have been doing all along.

Helen's biggest enemy is Arthur's drinking, so she does whatever she can to curb it. She has help in this matter from Mr. Hargrave, whose own moderate habits serve as a check on his friend. Helen had approached him and asked if he might help her keep Arthur on the straight and narrow, and while she now considers Walter a friend, she worries sometimes about his fondness for her and how Arthur would feel if he knew she and Walter had a secret from him.

Helen's strong stance against drinking as a villager in Linden-Car is now easier to understand. Since she knows that Arthur and his friends feed on each other, she hopes that enlisting Walter's help will lead to positive change.

Helen also worries that she has grown desensitized to vice and bad behavior. What before she would have deemed wrong and sinful she now has daily acquaintance with and is therefore growing rather used to. On one hand, she is glad. She is less judgmental than before, more accepting. On the other hand, she is concerned because she is so close to Arthur, so intimately connected to him and his foibles, and she fears she will be pulled down into the sinful hole he's dug for himself.

Helen is an extension of her husband—she no longer has an identity of her own. How he acts and what he does affects her so deeply it is as if she were committing the acts herself. The same cannot be said of Arthur, however; he is not an extension of Helen. He is allowed and encouraged to be an autonomous human being.

As Arthur grows healthy again, Helen suggests they all go to the seaside as a family, but Arthur refuses. He finds the coast boring, and, besides, he has an invitation from a friend to go shooting in Scotland. Helen is upset about his leaving her again, but he assures her there's nothing to worry about. A shooting excursion in Scotland is bound to be a pretty tame affair.

Arthur only remains at home for as long as it takes him to recover from his sinful sojourns to London. He has no real interest in his family beyond how they can serve him, and Helen is to be left alone again for an extended period of time.

CHAPTER 31. SOCIAL VIRTUES

Spring arrives, and Arthur takes his usual trip to London. The plan was for Helen and little Arthur to accompany him, but first Arthur convinced Helen to visit her ailing father and brother for a bit, since she hadn't seen them since little Arthur's christening. When she returns to Grassdale, Arthur is gone, having left her a note saying he wouldn't be in London long—he had some business to attend to and would be home soon. Helen feels tricked, but she takes consolation in the hope that Arthur really does seem to want to moderate his drinking now, mostly because he's worried about ruining his looks.

Even when taking a trip to see her brother and sick father, Helen is preoccupied with thoughts of Arthur and his misbehavior. She is clinging now to whatever shreds of hope she can find. The young woman who promised her aunt never to marry for something as shallow as good looks is now hoping her husband will quit drinking to save his appearance. It is a far cry from what she'd wanted out of life.

Arthur returns home from his spring London escapades in better health and worse humor than the previous two times. Maybe, Helen surmises, his ill humor is due to her own. She doesn't feel like indulging him anymore. She's tired of tending him and pretending his dissipated habits don't bother her. She is particularly disturbed by his selfish response to the news of Helen's father's death: he hopes she won't go into mourning for too long (he hates black), and he doesn't even want her to attend the funeral because he can't be home in the country alone without growing bored.

As a man concerned primarily with appearance, it comes as no real shock that Arthur would react to the news of Helen's father's death with a wish she not wear black for long—but it's still an extremely callous thing to say. Further, it doesn't matter what color Helen wears at this point in the marriage; she is always in mourning now, grieving the death of love and her chances at happiness in marriage and even motherhood.

Nearly a month passes, and Helen finds herself again in the position of trying to curb the worst of her husband's habits. She lives in the present, letting his moods dictate her behavior, and she's planning a house party for a month hence, hoping Milicent and her new daughter will be good company for her and little Arthur.

This is yet another example of Helen's surrender of self. She's planning a house party she'd rather not host and spending all her time trying to decipher Arthur's many moods. She has no time left for herself.

It's now August, and the guests have been at Grassdale for two weeks. Helen writes of how she cannot make herself like Lady Lowborough (Annabella). She compares interacting with her to crushing a **rose** in one's hand and getting cut on the thorns. At first, Annabella clearly tried flirting with Arthur, but gave up when she got very little encouragement from him. Arthur's main goal during his friends' visit seems to be getting drunk with them. Lord Lowborough is the only male guest who doesn't participate in the drunkenness, and while Helen congratulates him on his moderate habits, Annabella only rewards him with contempt. Helen pities him, and wishes Annabella would treat him better, but Annabella obviously doesn't care.

Helen's likening her attempts at befriending Annabella to crushing a rose is significant. Female characters are compared to flowers throughout the text, and the comparisons typically reference women's beauty or their fragile natures. Here Helen is suggesting that, while on the surface her relationship with Annabella might seem harmless enough, any attempt to get close to the woman or even be pleasant with her is painful. It's a pain, though, that only Helen seems to see.

What follows is for Helen and Milicent a mortifying scene. Arthur, Hattersley, and Grimsby grow increasingly drunk and unruly. They attempt to force Lord Lowborough to drink, but he escapes them. Then Hattersley grabs Milicent and demands to know why she's been crying. When Helen tells him that her tears are a result of her humiliation at his behavior, Hattersley throws Milicent to the ground. Annabella seems amused by the scene, but Helen flees to her room, where she paces in anger and frustration until Hattersley and Grimsby bring Arthur up to her. He is sick and stupid, and she ends her diary saying no more on the subject. But she notes that after that night, Annabella is kinder to Lord Lowborough, perhaps because she sees that Arthur is now indifferent to her.

Helen gets a first-hand glimpse of how Arthur most likely spends his nights away in London: in drunken and idiotic debauchery with his friends, all of whom egg each other on. Hattersley's treatment of Milicent is particularly shameful, but neither she nor Helen has any real power to put a stop to such behavior. Instead, they are forced by circumstance and societal expectations to stand by and tolerate the awful displays of immaturity and decadence because the men are, after all, pleasing themselves as society tells them to.

CHAPTER 32. COMPARISONS: INFORMATION REJECTED

It is now October 5th, and Helen writes that Esther Hargrave is growing into a fine young woman. She often spends time with Helen, although Helen isn't sure why. She supposes Esther's fondness for her is due primarily to the fact that she doesn't have many people to talk to. One day, while taking their children for a walk around the estate, Helen and Milicent talk of Esther's future. Milicent begs Helen to counsel Esther to marry wisely. Milicent would like Helen to advise Esther to marry only if her suitor is the best of men. Helen assures her she'll tell Esther to marry for love. This worries Milicent, who allowed romantic feelings to influence her decision to marry Hattersley. Helen assumes that Milicent is concerned about Esther because of her own unhappy match.

While still very young themselves, Helen and Milicent are now experienced authorities on what it means to live in an unhappy marriage, and the costs such marriages exact. They both want a better outcome for Esther. Helen's hope that Esther will marry for love shows that she has not yet grown completely cynical about the marriage state, though. She married Arthur for love, and that has led mostly to misery, but Helen still clearly believes that marrying for practical reasons, i.e. financial stability, is not a recipe for happiness either.

Milicent assures Helen that she is actually quite content in her marriage, and Helen believes her—but she knows that her friend wishes her husband were a better man. Milicent hopes that he could still become one, as he's only 26. Helen picks up on Milicent's opinion that Arthur is, in many ways, a worse case than Hattersley, and, far from being offended, Helen agrees with her. She does worry, though, that Hattersley could be just as dissipated and useless in a few years. Milicent breaks down in tears over Helen's predicament, and Helen is touched by her compassion.

It is now clear that Helen's friends are aware of the depth of her unhappiness. Of all the London libertines, Arthur is the worst. Even Hattersley, who abuses Milicent physically, has a chance for reform. Arthur, Milicent seems to suggest, is a lost cause.

Eventually they go back to the house, and Hattersley comes to visit with his daughter. She loves her father, but he roughhouses with her too long and she ends up crying. Milicent comforts her daughter and Hattersley declares Lady Lowborough (Annabella) a fine woman, making Milicent jealous. He says not to worry—he loves Milicent, but adores Annabella. He wishes, though, that Milicent were a little less timid. He compares his relationship with her to walking across soft carpet all day. Eventually a man wants a rock to steady him, he says.

Women again are placed in an impossible position. Arthur recently expressed a desire that Helen be more like Milicent; now Hattersley wishes Milicent were more like Annabella or even Helen. These men always want what they don't have, and their wives end up suffering for their fickleness.

Milicent leaves the room to straighten her hair (Hattersley mussed it when he hugged her), and Hattersley continues to grouse in a casual manner about Milicent's meekness. Helen scolds him for treating Milicent unkindly. Hattersley asks if Milicent often complains of him to Helen. Helen says no, but, having observed her friend closely, she can tell that she is often made unhappy by her husband's excesses. He argues that it's her very meekness that is to blame. Why should he act differently when Milicent never complains?

It's convenient for Hattersley to blame Milicent for his own failures. She is the last person who would ever question him, and, as a woman, she has been taught to behave this way. It is her role. The fact that this setup does not lead to happiness for either the woman or the man suggests a new system is needed.

Hattersley insists that he'd be a better man if he had a wife like Helen to check him, but he admits that Arthur Huntingdon often wishes Helen were more like Milicent. He then claims that Arthur is a much worse man than he, and asks Walter Hargrave, who just entered the room, to back him up in his assertion. Hargrave agrees, and after Hattersley leaves, approaches Helen and tells her he has something of import to say.

Hattersley values Helen, even if Arthur doesn't, athough Hattersley's regard is suspect. He wants a mother figure, not a wife. The fact that everyone agrees that Arthur is the worst of them does not bode well for Helen's attempts at reforming him.

Walter says he has been waiting for the perfect opportunity and he thinks this moment is it, but Helen refuses to hear his news. She knows it will be unpleasant and has no wish to know. He agrees to keep his secret, but reluctantly. He had hoped to soften the blow of it, he says. He leaves and, left alone, Helen ponders what the secret could be. She assumes it is something about Arthur, and that Walter hoped to tell her so that he could take advantage of her gratitude for some nefarious purpose of his own.

Walter Hargrave's character is a moving target. In one scene, Helen considers him a true friend, in another, she thinks him devious and selfish. It is difficult to discern if Helen's suspicions are well-founded, since the reader has seen her inconsistent treatment of Gilbert, but it is clear she does not trust Walter to act altruistically.

More time passes, and Helen does not regret her decision to silence Walter. Arthur continues to moderate his habits, and she wonders if she dares hope that he has finally changed his ways.

Helen is becoming a prisoner not only of marriage but of hope.

CHAPTER 33. TWO EVENINGS

On a beautifully clear autumn night, Helen overhears her husband's friends complaining about Arthur's relative sobriety. Grimsby blames all of womankind for ruining the good times they might have, but the other men seem to blame one woman in particular. Helen assumes that they mean her, of course, and she is thrilled to think that Arthur is becoming a better man out of respect for her. She rushes out into the shrubbery where she spied Arthur, seemingly taking in the night's beauty as well. She embraces him impulsively and he returns the embrace at first. When he sees that it's Helen, though, he jumps back and scolds her for being so cavalier with her health. She should get inside right away, he tells her—it's too cold out.

The weather would suggest that Helen is finally getting the good news for which she has been hoping for so long: that Arthur has finally made the decision to reform in order to be worthy of her love. The fact that his friends find his behavior tiresome is of no importance to Helen. She has learned not to care about what they think. His behavior in the shrubbery is a clue most readers will pick up on—he was expecting the embrace of a different woman—but Helen, buoyed by hope and the possibility of dreams fulfilled, does not catch on.

Helen goes in gladly, and that night she finally enjoys herself in the company of their friends. Everyone, it seems, catches her happiness, and it is a joyful gathering. Adding to her happiness is the fact that Arthur again refrains from drinking to excess, and all seems right with the world. Two days later, though, Rachel comes to Helen's room crying. When Helen asks what is the matter, she tells her she doesn't approve of how Arthur has been behaving. She says that if she were Helen, she would not allow Lady Lowborough to stay in the house another minute. The conversation is cut short before Helen can learn anything more. She is deeply disturbed by what Rachel told her, but hopes it is just idle servants' gossip. That night at dinner, she can see no evidence of improper behavior on either Arthur or Annabella's part.

Helen persists in believing that her main enemy in her marriage to Arthur is his drinking. As long as he remains relatively sober, all is well. Rachel's news is ominous, however. So far, Rachel has proven herself a steadfast and loyal friend and not one to be swayed by idle gossip. Her words harken back to Walter Hargrave's desire earlier in the visit to let Helen in on a secret. Helen is refusing to see the truth that is staring her in the face.

After dinner, Annabella joins her husband on a moonlit walk, and Walter Hargrave challenges Helen to a game of chess. The game goes on for a long time, sometimes with Helen having the advantage, other times Walter. Both very much want to win. In the end, Walter triumphs and Helen admits he is the better player. He tenderly congratulates her, and she rejects his tenderness. He then inquires after Arthur and Annabella. Hattersley tells him Arthur is out walking with Grimsby and Annabella with her husband. Walter, though, suggests to Helen in a private moment that Arthur is actually with Annabella. Helen rushes outside to see for herself.

The game is a representation of Helen's immediate future. Walter will win; Helen will lose. It also is an opportunity for Helen to better understand Walter's character. His behavior during the match is needlessly competitive and ruthless, and she sees through his smooth façade to the selfish man underneath. Further, he is not pained when giving Helen the news about Arthur and Annabella. In fact, he takes a certain amount of satisfaction in it.

What she finds is Arthur and Annabella deep in passionate conversation. Annabella says she must go—her husband will start to suspect something. She asks Arthur if he could possibly still love Helen, and he assures her that he does care at all for his wife any longer. Helen falls to the ground in a swoon of heartbreak and shock. **Dead leaves** rustle around her. She is in agony until she looks up at the sky. In the stars she sees proof of God, and she knows in that moment that God will never forsake her. He will give her the strength she needs to survive.

This scene mirrors the one in which Gilbert collapses to the ground, having seen Helen and Mr. Lawrence walking arm-in-arm in the Wildfell Hall garden. Helen knows the truth, and that knowledge reveals her marriage to be a lie, as dead as the leaves swirling around her. She believes, however, that her faith will sustain her. Besides little Arthur, it is all she has.

Helen goes back into the house and finds it more difficult to be strong. There are no stars here, only the laughing voices of people she cannot bear to be around. Instead of joining them for tea, she retires to the empty dining room and sees Milicent go out to try to find and comfort her. When she fails to find her, Milicent returns to the dining room, and Helen ponders for a short time how happy she was in that same room only a few nights before. She is glad that Milicent didn't look for her in the dining room. She will bear her pain alone.

God is easier for Helen to find when she is out-of-doors and surrounded by natural beauty. He is harder to access when inside and surrounded by people she despises, some of whom have known about Annabella and Arthur for quite some time. Of course, Milicent is an exception. She alone knows what Helen must be suffering. Always independent, Helen decides not to share her pain with her friend.

Helen knows that she has to confront Arthur, though. Later, when he is walking past her bed chamber, she asks him to come in. She tells him that she knows what he and Annabella have been up to, and asks if she might take her fortune and little Arthur and go. Arthur refuses her. He will not be made the target of petty gossip because she has chosen to be upset about a trifling love affair, he says. Then he leaves. Helen makes a promise to herself that, unless he truly repents, she will no longer be a wife to him. If, however, he sees the error of his ways and learns to value her, she might be able to forgive him in the future.

Even though Arthur is the one clearly in the wrong, Helen must still ask his permission to leave. Arthur has all the power and throws the blame back on her—according to him, it's her fault that she cannot get over a small matter like a sexual dalliance. His argument is not unlike the many times Helen has blamed herself for his bad behavior. By now Helen has lost her ability to see clearly—she only wants to save her marriage, not herself, because she has no real self left.

Rachel comes to help Helen undress and Helen confesses to her old nurse that she knows everything. Rachel pities her, but Helen assures her that she has made her peace with the situation and plans to sleep well. Sleep eludes her, however, and the next morning she is exhausted and full of anxiety about how to meet everyone at breakfast. She finds strength in the thought that she is blameless in the matter. That will be her comfort.

A system that forces women into the role of angel or temptress has molded a very determined angel out of Helen. She takes comfort in her own righteousness, her own goodness, but that means she is still in many waves a slave. To be a blameless, faultless angel is to always serve the needs of others.

CHAPTER 34. CONCEALMENT

Helen gets through breakfast and is cool and collected in all of her dealings with her guests. She's not sure, though, how she will get through the 12 days left in their visit, or how she will abide her future life with Arthur. She freely admits now that she hates him. She wishes only that he could see for himself how depraved he is; then he might be punished enough for the crime of robbing her of her innocence.

Helen's eyes have been opened to the realities of the world. Arthur has, indeed, robbed her of her innocence, and her diary is in this regard a coming of age tale. The eighteen-year-old who dreamed of saving Arthur from himself is gone, and a mature woman has taken her place.

Helen decides to distract herself from her anger and resentment by writing more in her diary about the daily minutia of life with her house guests. Walter Hargrave continues to treat her to kind attentions, and she continues to spurn him. At one point, Helen is alone in a room with Milicent and Annabella, and the latter engages Helen in a superficial conversation. Helen puts a stop to it by writing Annabella a note informing her that she knows everything that is going on between her and her husband. Annabella reads the note and requests a conference with Helen. Annabella then begs Helen not to tell Lord Lowborough or Milicent about the affair. Helen agrees because she doesn't want to upset Annabella's husband or her cousin. Helen then asks Annabella to leave her house as soon as possible.

As is the case in Linden-Car with Eliza Millward and Jane Wilson, woman is pitted against woman, and Lord Lowborough is doubly deceived. Annabella betrays no remorse. She is only concerned about the consequences of getting caught, which would mean the end of her marriage and a loss of prestige. In that way, her reaction mimics Arthur's. He showed no guilt when Helen confronted him, but only worries about petty gossip and how he would be judged by others.

Annabella says she can't possibly leave early without exciting suspicion, and so she is to stay for the remainder of the time allotted for the visit. Helen treats her with civility and nothing more.

Helen has no agency or power. Good manners and the status quo mean she must now put up with housing her husband's mistress. She is a prisoner in her own home.

CHAPTER 35. PROVOCATIONS

Annabella grows bold as time goes on. She is as friendly as she wants to be with Arthur, inquiring often after his health in order to underscore Helen's coldness and indifference, and Arthur responds with gratitude and flirtatiousness. Helen is nearly driven to seek revenge by flirting with Walter Hargrave but stops herself, horrified by the thought that she might be in danger of growing more and more like Arthur and his friends the longer she is with them. She starts to doubt her identity as a Christian, since no true believer could harbor the hateful feelings she has toward Annabella and Arthur. Helen saves the bulk of her hatred for Annabella—she could forgive Arthur someday, she writes, but never Annabella.

Helen, now totally divorced from herself, worries she is gradually becoming Arthur, or at least very like him. The faith that was to sustain her following her discovery of Arthur's affair is being tested daily by her husband's brazen flirtations. Admitting that she reserves most of her hatred for Annabella, Helen is also giving in to a social system that forces women to value men over each other, and even over their own individual identities.

On the last morning of the houseguests' stay at Grassdale, Helen goes down to breakfast to find Annabella up early. Arthur joins them, and he and Annabella begin talk in front of Helen about how sad they are that they will have to part. Annabella asks Helen to forgive her, saying that she simply loves Arthur more than Helen does. Helen is visibly upset, and Arthur laughs at her. Later, Walter Hargrave seems to intimate that he and Helen might have a love affair now that she is free of her husband, but Helen rebukes him. In the afternoon, Annabella informs Helen that she really should thank her—it's because of Annabella that Arthur has moderated his drinking habits. Helen is too furious to speak. Annabella then asks her one favor: she hopes Helen will do what she can to keep Arthur from slipping into his old ways.

Helen has attempted for years, through gentle remonstration and kind, wifely attention, to coax Arthur into being a better man. None of her efforts worked. For her to hear that it is really love for Annabella that has been motivating Arthur's more moderate habits is not only humiliating but yet one more piece of innocence lost. Helen wanted to save Arthur, to reform him by modeling Christian behavior for his benefit. Instead, it's his mistress that succeeds in getting him to change.

Walter Hargrave adds to Helen's discomfort by begging her forgiveness for offending her earlier. He cannot rest until he knows he is back in her good graces. Helen says she will forgive him this one offense if he vows to sin no more. He says he will do everything he can in the future to deserve her good opinion. Helen, rejoining the rest of the company, can only be thankful that they will all be gone the next day.

With the shooting party finally coming to an end, Helen has one more unpleasant meeting, this one with Walter Hargrave, who seems still to be playing some sort of game with her. His strategy now seems to involve winning her over with kindness. Either way, Helen isn't playing.

CHAPTER 36. DUAL SOLITUDE

It is now December 20 and, with their third anniversary drawing near, Helen and Arthur are living together as strangers. Arthur, having maintained his moderate habits for a few weeks, is now drinking to excess again. He abuses Helen bitterly and Helen takes it all very calmly. She knows that a more emotional response would only amuse him or tempt him into using her as a stand-in for Annabella. Helen's feelings for Arthur vacillate between hatred and indifference. She is happiest when he is gone from the house. When he leaves, he usually does so in the company of Walter Hargrave, who is being so careful to act with such polite decorum around Helen that she admits she's starting to almost like him.

Helen's life is stunted by her role as a wife. Everything she does now is either in reaction to Arthur's behavior and needs or in an effort to prevent further discord with him. Even as she loses all affection for him, he still controls her completely. Meanwhile, Walter Hargrave continues to confuse Helen. She is never sure where she stands with him or what his motives are. At the very least, he is a kinder and more moderate man than Arthur, but of course that is a low bar to meet.

Two months pass, and Helen is in the midst of thawing some toward Arthur, thinking that maybe she should start treating him with real kindness instead of cold civility, when he hands her a letter from Annabella and suggests she take a few lessons from his lover in how to be a good and true partner. The letter is effusive and affectionate. Helen is disgusted with it and with her husband. Making matters worse is the fact that little Arthur prefers his father to her, because his father is always indulging his whims. Helen worries that she is losing not only her son's affection but her chance to be a good influence over him. She refuses to despair, though, and vows to trust in God's power to deliver her from such suffering.

That Helen would even consider giving Arthur another chance after his neglectful treatment of her and his casual attitude toward fidelity in marriage is a clear indication that Helen is stuck and has no idea how to extricate herself. She can only hope that Arthur will grow to appreciate her worth as a woman and a mother. Motherhood has proven to be her one consolation, although Arthur seems determined to rob her of that as well by serving as a corrupting influence on their son.

CHAPTER 37. THE NEIGHBOUR AGAIN

Helen continues to worry about Arthur's influence on her son, to the point that she can't even enjoy the boy's good moods without seeing his father's wildness in them. What she wishes is that Arthur would be gone more often, and she gets her wish in the fall when he travels to Lord Lowborough's estate to spend the fall there. It is during Arthur's trip that Walter Hargrave confesses his love to Helen. She rejects him so soundly that he meekly makes off for London, and she doesn't see him again for two months when he returns home to the Grove. Helen pays a call on Esther there, and Esther demands to know what Helen has done to her brother. When Helen refuses to tell her what transpired, Esther asks Walter what has happened to make them at odds with one another.

As a devout Christian, Helen has no wish to avenge herself on Arthur with an affair of her own. Walter's importuning her on the subject reveals just how little he understands her true character. At times, Helen seems almost too angelic, but she is the moral center of the story, and Brontë makes it clear that her judgment is to be trusted in all matters. To enter into an adulterous relationship with Walter Hargrave would strip Helen of her claim to the high ground, which is one of the few comforts she has left.

It's an embarrassing scene for everyone, and Esther tries to defuse it by asking Walter to go pick a **rose** for Helen. He brings back a beautiful moss rose, and he and Helen eventually fall into conversation. He asks her if she is unhappy that Arthur is at Lord Lowborough's, and Helen answers truthfully that she doesn't care. Walter says he does not understand her—her nature is too angelic for him to comprehend, but he can tell that she is as miserable as he is. He suggests that they need not be so unhappy, but Helen cuts him off, reminding him that she has a son to tend to and he a mother, who would be mortified to know of her son's talking in such a way to a married woman.

The significance and symbolic meaning of the rose morphs over the course of the novel. Here it suggests Walter's insincerity. The bloom might be beautiful, but, having been cut from the bush, it will soon wilt. Helen knows now the pitfalls of romantic love. Her wish is to be a good and stable mother to little Arthur so that he will not grow up to be a worthless and sensual man like his father.

Walter apologizes for speaking to her so passionately, and Helen thinks at first that she is finally rid of his unsought advances. Later, though, she sees him riding around the estate, lingering and looking for her. She stops visiting the Grove altogether, and rarely goes walking without Rachel to accompany her. One day, she hears the sound of horse hooves behind her and it is Walter Hargrave. He declares his love again, and insists that there is a way out of misery for them both. He knows she cannot love Arthur. So why should she be faithful to him, especially when she knows he has not been faithful to her?

Helen had thought that when Arthur left Grassdale for Lord Lowborough's estate she would be able to enjoy a period of calm and quiet at home with her son, but Walter Hargrave now disturbs her peace with his pleadings. His advances are becoming as unwelcome of those of Mr. Boarham and Mr. Wilmot, the difference being, of course, that Walter knows he is propositioning a married woman.

Helen is not persuaded by Walter's arguments. She tells him that there is another, more important life beyond this one that they should both aspire to be worthy of, and that she is not about to risk her salvation on the fleeting pleasures of the flesh. Walter will not be silenced, though, and he continues to argue with her, so Helen changes tactics. She asks him if he truly loves her. He says he does, and she can't know how much. Then, Helen says, never bring up this subject again. If he loves her, he will not torture her with such declarations anymore. He agrees, and when they shake hands as friends, Helen sees real agony in his eyes. He vows to leave the country and does, settling for the time being in Paris.

Since Helen's faith is her main comfort in life, it is impossible for her to act against her religious convictions. Having found life on this earth a deep disappointment, Helen is setting her sights on the next one. It is difficult for both the reader and for Helen to discern if Walter's agony is a result of unrequited love or simply thwarted desire. Regardless, it would seem that Helen's appeals to his conscience have finally worked.

CHAPTER 38. THE INJURED MAN

Helen's next diary entry is dated December 20, 1826. It is nearing her fifth wedding anniversary, and she has made a plan for herself. First, though, she chronicles the events of the fall, when another party of ladies and gentlemen arrived at Grassdale for the purpose of amusing Arthur. When the guests arrive, Helen is quick to take Lady Lowborough aside and tell her that if she sees evidence of her and Arthur continuing their scandalous relationship, she will not hesitate to inform Lord Lowborough of his wife's true character. In the end, though, she doesn't have to—Lord Lowborough discovers the affair himself.

Having survived five years of marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, Helen is now reduced to threatening her husband's lover. She is also having the play the role of hostess to people she despises and whose presence in her home gives her no end of misery. The deal she makes with Annabella is a morally suspect one. It trades Lord Lowborough's right to know for her own peace of mind.

Distraught, Lowborough comes upon Helen in the library, and Helen confesses that she has known about Arthur and Annabella's attachment for the last two years. Lord Lowborough is angry that she never told him. He feels betrayed by her, and Helen admits she was in the wrong, but she cannot change the past. Lord Lowborough softens toward her. He realizes that she too has suffered in the knowledge of their spouses' infidelities. Hattersley interrupts them, saying he knows just the thing to make Lowborough feel better: a duel with Arthur. Lowborough refuses, saying he will trust both Arthur's fate and his own to God. Hattersley declares him a coward.

Helen and Lowborough are, on the surface anyway, in similar circumstances. Both have been deceived by their spouses; both have the misfortune to still be in love with their unfaithful partner. But as a man, Lord Lowborough has more options for relieving his feelings. A duel is obviously a ridiculous and futile approach to dealing with the pain of lost love, but it's also perfectly consistent with the behavior Hattersley and the rest have exhibited so far.

Helen, though, presses his hand, and says he is too good for this world. Lowborough is touched but still very grieved. In the hall, Helen finds Arthur laughing at the situation, and Hattersley and Grimsby annoyed that the duel won't be taking place. She continues to the drawing room, where Annabella is trying to mask her anxiety with a great show of cheerfulness. She lies to the company, saying that Lowborough has received bad news from home, and that's why they have to leave in a hurry. Helen, of course, knows the truth, and that night she hears Lowborough pacing in the room next to hers. She also finds a knife in the yard and a razor blade in the fireplace the next day, evidence of his overcoming his desire to end his own life.

Generally incorruptible and good, Lord Lowborough is Helen's male counterpart. His despair, however, is more extreme than hers, partially (the novel suggests) because he does not have her Christian faith to fall back on. Without that comfort, he teeters on the edge of suicide. The knife represents the thin line between life and death and just how close Lowborough got to ending it all.

Lord Lowborough and Annabella leave the next day. Arthur sees them off, joking with his former friend about how perhaps they should trade wives. Lowborough is in a state of barely constrained fury, and Helen's heart breaks for him. She wishes she could soothe him, but knows it is not in her power. Later, she hears from Milicent that he and Annabella are living completely separate lives. She is in town, enjoying herself to the utmost, and he keeps to his castle in the north, raising their two children.

Annabella may be beautiful and a talented singer, but she is not worth dying for. Soon, the Lowboroughs' marriage resembles that of Helen and Arthur: they live as strangers. The difference lies in the fact that they actually live apart. Annabella breaks with convention by abandoning her children, and Lowborough breaks with it as well by fathering them on his own.

After the Lowboroughs' departure, the rest of the ladies take leave of Glassdale as well, and Arthur and his male companions turn the house into one long, continuous party. All is mayhem and dissipation. Helen hides from them in the library as often as she can. When she does come out, she is gratified to see that Walter Hargrave behaves like a perfect gentleman toward her. Perhaps she finally has nothing to fear from him.

Arthur's days are entirely wasted on drink and debauchery, and, because Helen no longer has an identity outside of him, her days are wasted as well. Her literal hiding from Arthur and the others represents a more figurative hiding from the truth: that her marriage, and life as she has known it, is over.

CHAPTER 39. A SCHEME OF ESCAPE

Helen decides she must leave Arthur for the benefit of her son—his influence on the boy is too poisonous. He and his friends are teaching little Arthur to drink, curse, and mock his mother. Walter Hargrave does not participate in such shenanigans, however. In fact, one night when the men are being particularly disrespectful, he picks up little Arthur and takes him out of the room, handing him to Helen and returning to Arthur's company to scold him for his immaturity.

Arthur is attempting to make a man out of his son. Unfortunately, Arthur's definition of what it means to be a man has been warped by his own upbringing and by a society that teaches boys to prioritize leisure and fun over developing good and selfless habits.

With little Arthur's future in mind, Helen begins to form a plan for their independence. Her hope is to begin **painting** again and find a dealer she can sell her work to. She'll ask Rachel to act as the go-between and, once she has enough money saved, she will make her escape. She throws herself back into painting, using the library as her studio. On her third morning back at the easel, Walter Hargrave wanders in and tells her he is leaving Grassdale for Paris. He supposes this bit of news will make her happy. She admits it does not—he is now the only one of Arthur's friends whose company she can stand. Walter then relates to her something that Arthur said to his friends about her. The men were talking about Lady Lowborough's departure. Arthur said he was tired of her. Did he mean, then, to become a good husband again? Arthur responded that he had no wife.

At long last, Helen makes plans to reclaim her life and to do so through work. Painting has always been her refuge; it will now be her salvation, and she hopes it will prove more immediately effective than prayer has up until this point. Arthur's statement that he has no wife is true in ways he cannot imagine. On one hand, Helen has ceased to be herself—Arthur has no wife because Helen has shrunk to a non-entity. On the other hand, if Helen follows through with her plan, he will, in reality, have no wife. Helen will be free and Arthur will be alone.

Walter is furious with Arthur, but Helen is unmoved. She has ceased to care about her husband's opinions. She tells Walter about her plans for escape, and he grows increasingly more passionate and animated. He vows to be her protector, but Helen wants to free herself and little Arthur on her own. She begs Walter to leave her be, but he grabs her and tells her she is going against Heaven's decrees that men and women should be one flesh. Grimsby walks in on the heated argument, and Walter informs Helen that he is sure to return to her husband and slander her good name. He'll paint the scene as darkly as possible, making Helen out to be the criminal.

Helen's friendship with Walter Hargrave is beginning to resemble the rollercoaster that is her marriage to Arthur. Just when she thinks she is safe from Walter's passion, he makes another declaration. His doing so at this moment makes her seem the guilty party, even though she has rebuffed him at every turn, and the fact that she as a faithful wife can come under suspicion from her unfaithful husband shows that women are often held to an impossible standard.

Helen tells Walter he has insulted her as no one has before, and he is shocked. He says he worships her. Then Arthur, Hattersley, and Grimsby burst in. Arthur has a gun. He sarcastically invites Walter to come hunting with them, and then he treats Helen to such an abusive rant she is desperate to defend herself. She asks Walter to swear that they were up to nothing untoward. Reluctantly, he admits it. It's an ugly scene, and Helen can't believe she's lived to be abused by her husband and is stooping to asking someone like Walter Hargrave to defend her own honor.

Arthur feels completely within his rights to abuse Helen even though she has done nothing wrong because, as her husband, he is also her master. In turn, Helen takes his abuse because she is still his prisoner. Adding insult to injury, her defender is the very man who put her in this position in the first place.

That evening only redoubles Helen's determination to leave Grassdale, and she spends the rest of the day hard at work on her **painting**. Later, she acquaints Rachel with her plan, and Rachel vows to accompany Helen and little Arthur on their journey, whenever they should undertake it and wherever Helen decides to go. Helen is grateful to her nurse for her loyalty, especially when, later, little Arthur asks his mother why she is so wicked. Helen doesn't understand. What does he mean?

Helen's applying herself as a painter is a clear indication that she is serious about her scheme to leave Arthur. For the first time in a very long time—since she married Arthur, in fact—she is using her time in a productive manner. She is in effect painting a future for herself and her son.

Little Arthur explains that he often asks after her when he's with his father, and Arthur says, "your mother be damned." When little Arthur asked Rachel what "being damned" meant, she said that it had to with being out of favor with God. Why, little Arthur asks Helen, is she out of favor with God? Helen helps her son to understand the situation as best she can, but cannot wait to get him out from under his father's sinful thumb.

Arthur's corrupting influence puts little Arthur in danger of growing up in a way that is antithetical to Helen's Christian beliefs. Little Arthur's question is ironic, then—if anyone is out of favor with God, it is his father, not his saintly mother.

CHAPTER 40. A MISADVENTURE

One night, while Helen and Arthur are in the drawing room together, he grabs her diary from her and begins to read it. She tries to get it away from him, but he holds on to it, and, having read the last entry, demands the keys to her room and private storage spaces. Helen says she doesn't have them, so he goes in search of Rachel. When he returns, he throws all her **painting** supplies and her canvases into the fire. Helen sits stupefied and aghast. Arthur says it's much to his advantage that women can't keep their secrets to themselves. He has read her diary and knows of her plans to leave him, and he refuses to let her disgrace him in such a way. He will give her a small allowance and she will remain at Grassdale for as long as he wants her to.

Arthur never respected Helen as an individual or an artist. This scene mirrors the early ones in which he mocked her sketches of him. This time, though, instead of just making fun of her work, he is trying to destroy it and, with it, her independence. Helen's reclaiming her identity is her first true act of defiance. She is working not only on her art but on herself as an autonomous being. Arthur, of course, cannot stand for this.

Helen retrieves her diary and goes to bed, now without any hope for the future. She had taken daily consolation in her plan to leave Arthur, but now that is stripped from her as well. She tells Rachel that their plans are now overthrown, and she begins to despair. She even wonders if she is losing her faith in God. But, she takes comfort in a scripture that claims God never willingly gives suffering to His people, and that those who believe in Him will eventually be delivered to Heaven.

Helen's main comfort during this time of trial, besides little Arthur and her friendship with Rachel, is her faith. It strengthens her when, at moments like these, she nearly surrenders to despair. It's worth noting, though, that if it weren't for her religious convictions, she would be free to divorce Arthur.

CHAPTER 41. 'HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL IN THE HUMAN BREAST'

It is now March, and Arthur is on his usual spring trip to London. Helen takes advantage of his absence to break little Arthur of the bad habits he learned from his father. It's easy to break him of cursing—the consumption of wine is more difficult. She starts putting an expectorant in his brandy and wine, just enough to induce nausea. Eventually, he grows to hate the stuff.

Helen's method of breaking little Arthur of his drinking habit is dishonest, but she believes that the ends justify the means.

While Arthur is gone, Helen devises another scheme for her freedom. She writes to her brother to see if he might fix up a few rooms in the house where they grew up, so she can live there with little Arthur. She thinks she can tell from her brother's letters that he knows some of her situation, but he never forces her confidence. She admits she wishes she knew him better, but he is coming to Grassdale soon for a visit and she is excited to become more intimate with him.

Helen mentions her brother only in passing. Helen's turning to him in her time of need suggests he might serve as a foil to Arthur. One thing is for certain: Helen is a strong woman, but she needs help to free herself from her husband. Her finances do not allow her to act on her own.

In April, Helen writes of her brother's visit, which was enjoyable and relaxing but too brief. She loved having Frederick's company and watching him get better acquainted with little Arthur. They talked of her plan for escape, and while Frederick thinks her scheme foolhardy, he understands better now how miserable she is with Mr. Huntingdon and agrees to get his rooms ready in case of emergency.

Helen has an ally in her brother, but his declaring her plan foolhardy is an indication of society's expectations of women. Women are expected to remain in abusive relationships. That is considered safe, whereas escape is "unwise."

It is the end of July, and Esther Hargrave has returned from her first season in London. She comes home unengaged, much to her mother's consternation. Mrs. Hargrave had wanted her to marry Mr. Oldfield, but Esther refused. She thinks him not only old but ugly and tiresome. Helen tells her she was right not to accept him then, but warns her against marrying for love alone. She should also consider the man's other qualities, and if she doesn't find such a man, it is best to remain single. Esther disagrees. She fears becoming an old maid and being dependent on her mother and brother for the rest of her life.

Helen's advice to Esther echoes Mrs. Maxwell's to her: she is warning the younger woman against marrying only for affection. Instead, Helen suggests, Esther should make sure her chosen partner has other qualities to recommend him. Esther's fears of becoming an "old maid" show the entrenched nature of the pressures society puts on young women to marry as a way of achieving financial "independence." But that independence is a lie, and Helen knows this better than anyone.

Esther asks Helen if she's happy. She asked Milicent and Milicent said she was, but Esther suspects she was lying. Helen doesn't answer Esther's question, and Esther tells her she knows she's not as happy as she intends to be in matrimony. Esther wants to marry a man who will only take pleasure in being in her company—he will value it above all other things. Helen tells her she had better be very selective then, or else not marry at all.

Esther's hopes echo the 18-year-old Helen's. She wants a union that so far Helen has yet to witness between a man and a woman: that of equals who respect and love each other as God intended.

CHAPTER 42. A REFORMATION

It's September, and Arthur is still away. Helen is enjoying the company of Milicent and her children, as well as Esther and Mr. Hattersley. Hattersley seems determined to reform, to become a sober and responsible father, and to remove himself permanently from the company of Arthur Huntingdon and the others. Helen is glad but not quite convinced. She engages him in conversation about what he needs to do to truly reform. He swears he's doing well and that Milicent's happiness is proof, but Helen points out that his wife is no longer the plump, blooming creature that he married. She is now thin and careworn. He claims that this is the children's fault, not his.

Helen had wanted to reform Arthur, but that dream officially died when he threw her paintings into the fire. There is still hope for Hattersley, though. His blaming the children for Milicent's loss of bloom suggests that he has a long way to go in terms of coming to terms with the consequences of his bad behavior, but he has already done what Arthur never did (except when he was first courting Helen): express the desire to change.

Helen produces two letters from Milicent and hands them to Hattersley. The first letter covers one of Hattersley's drunken periods with his friends, and the other concerns a time when Hattersley is home and is working hard to be a good husband and attentive father. Helen hopes he'll see the contrast and be moved to truly change his ways. The letters have exactly the effect she was anticipating. Hattersley is overcome by his wife's words. When he's finished reading, he goes to Milicent and picks her up, swearing to be a better man from now on.

Hattersley's change of heart underscores the power of the written word. Milicent's letters clearly have a life-changing effect on him. In contrast, Helen's relationship with Arthur sours partially because his letters from London grow terse. Brontë is subtly pointing out that written communication in the form of letters or a diary has the very real potential to alter the course of a human life.

Milicent gives Helen credit for helping her husband see his errors and repent, but Helen says he was ready to reform before she handed him the letters, and she just hopes his resolve will last. Later, she receives yet another letter from Milicent in which she claims to be completely happy, thanks to her husband's new attitude. Helen knows, of course, that Hattersley has had little to tempt him during this time. It is her greatest wish that Milicent will not be disappointed.

Milicent's happy ending is in direct contrast to Helen's very unhappy present. Still, Helen does not begrudge her friend her happiness. To do so would be unchristian and ungenerous besides. Helen will not allow herself to hope too much, though. She knows from cruel experience where such expectations can lead.

CHAPTER 43. THE BOUNDARY PAST

Arthur returns to Grassdale at the beginning of September and upsets Helen's hard-won peace by engaging a governess to teach little Arthur. Helen objects on the grounds that she is perfectly capable of instructing Arthur, but Arthur says she's turning the boy into a joyless automaton. Miss Myers, he informs Helen, is the perfect choice to look after Arthur. She is pious and more than qualified.

Having given up her painting for the time being, Helen's employment was to come from instructing little Arthur. By bringing Miss Myers in as governess, Arthur has taken that work away from Helen as well.

When Miss Myers arrives, Helen finds her only marginally intelligent. She is very good at the piano and sings beautifully, but other than that, Helen can see little to value in her. She is overly servile with Helen and obsequious with little Arthur. In the evenings, she sings for the obvious entertainment of Mr. Huntingdon and Helen. Helen begins to feel guilty about her dislike of her, but finds out one morning shortly after Miss Myers' arrival that she had every reason to be suspicious of the new governess.

As usual, Helen blames herself when she should really trust her own instincts. She feels remorse at taking an instant dislike to the governess, but learns quickly that she was right. Miss Myers is disingenuous and largely without talent, and Helen is much more qualified to teach Arthur than she is.

Rachel informs Helen that Miss Myers did not sleep in her own bedchamber the night before. Helen immediately begins making plans and preparations for moving to Wildfell Hall. She unhappily tells Rachel she'll have to leave without her—she cannot afford to live as a lady any longer, and she can't imagine why Rachel would want to stay in her service. Rachel steadfastly vows to remain with her and little Arthur as long as she wants her. Helen embraces her, and the two women decide to leave Grassdale as soon as possible together.

Arthur brought Miss Myers to Grassdale not for his son's benefit but for his own. Although not explicitly stated, Helen's decision to leave him finally seems connected to Miss Myers's class. Unlike Annabella, Miss Myers is a working-class woman. Helen was prepared to forgive Arthur's affair with Annabella, but his dalliance with Miss Myers is too insulting to endure.

Helen gives herself the next two days to pack and prepare. During that time, she writes a letter to Esther, Milicent, and her aunt, informing them of her decision. She asks them all to write to her in care of her brother. She does not want Arthur to be able to discover where she's gone. The letter to Mrs. Maxwell is the most difficult to write. She writes in great detail of Arthur's transgressions, so her aunt will understand why she is taking such an extreme step.

The letter to Mrs. Maxwell is the most painful to write because Helen knows her aunt will be greatly pained to know how much Helen has suffered, but it is also because Mrs. Maxwell could have foreseen the outcome of Helen's marriage to Arthur Huntingdon—it is why she warned Helen against it.

Helen also writes to Frederick, asking him to get rooms ready at Wildfell Hall. It is difficult for her to remain calm, but she does her best in order to hide her plans from her husband. At dinner on her final night at Grassdale, she's unable to eat, and when Arthur asks what's wrong with her, she claims to be ill and asks him if she might retire early. He assures her he won't miss her a bit.

It is now clear that Frederick is Mr. Lawrence. What Gilbert took for a lover's tryst in the garden of Wildfell Hall was nothing more than Helen and Frederick showing filial affection.

Helen goes to her bedroom but can't sleep. She calms herself by writing in her diary and decides to call herself Helen Graham from now on. The surname was her mother's maiden name, and she is afraid to go by Mrs. Huntingdon, lest she be discovered.

By renaming herself, Helen is not only working to protect her identity but also to claim a new one. She will be her own person again, and her new name symbolizes that step.

CHAPTER 44. THE RETREAT

Helen, little Arthur, and Rachel leave the next morning. Helen is exhilarated and hopeful, as she is finally leaving the scenes of her misery behind. She plans to pass as a widow, and so is dressed head to toe in black, and since Arthur and Rachel are likewise in plain attire, she hopes they won't attract too much attention. It's dark when they leave Grassdale, but eventually the **weather** grows beautiful, a perfect late October day. It's a long journey, though, and when night falls, they still have seven miles to go. They travel the rest of the way in an uncomfortable cart and arrive at Wildfell Hall exhausted.

Helen is playing the part of a widow in order to make her journey and future life easier and less complicated, but the black she wears likewise represents the death of her marriage and with it a host of youthful hopes and dreams. Young Helen has died, and a mature Helen is arriving to take her place. The weather consequently blesses this monumental move.

An old woman who has been airing the room greets them and makes them a modest meal. Then they fall asleep, and Helen wakes to little Arthur's kisses. By daylight, Wildfell Hall is sparsely furnished and gloomy, but Helen is still in a cheerful frame of mind, and that continues during her first two weeks' stay at Wildfell. Frederick has helped her furnish the rooms and provides her with **painting** supplies. They all get settled in their new home, and the only two dark spots on Helen's happiness are a portrait of Mr. Huntingdon that was included in the packing boxes and her fear of being discovered. She and Frederick have to be careful as well, so as not to inspire petty and scandalous gossip.

Wildfell Hall might look like a gloomy and desolate place to most people, but to Helen it is a sanctuary and fresh start. Arthur's waking her with kisses their first morning in their new home is a sign that they will be happy here, as is Frederick's supplying her with new painting supplies to replace the ones Arthur destroyed. Everything, besides Arthur's portrait, is pointing toward a bright future.

The **painting** of Arthur pains Helen, as it reminds her of her folly in falling in love with him in the first place. It is also no longer a faithful portrait of the man himself—in the span of six years, he has been ruined by drink and bad conduct. Helen learns that Arthur has been pressuring Helen's friends and family, particularly Frederick, to tell him where she is. He doesn't want her back—he wants little Arthur—but Helen vows he will never have custody of their child ever again.

The painting and Arthur's efforts to discover Helen's whereabouts serve as reminders that Helen is not completely free. She is still tied to Arthur by marriage, and her circumstances, while promising, are by no means secure.

Helen writes of her kind new neighbors and their relentless curiosity. She worries about their discovering her identity, and is reluctant to leave little Arthur for long for fear that Mr. Huntingdon will snatch him away. Her overprotectiveness has drawn the attention of the local minister, who worries about her spotty church attendance. She vows to leave Arthur with Rachel for a few hours and go to church, even though she knows it will be a difficult day for her.

Told from Helen's perspective now, the villagers' interest in her daily life reads like nosy and officious intrusion. Her "overprotectiveness" is mostly a result of her not wanting Arthur to kidnap their son, and no one could be a more faithful Christian than Helen. The Reverend Millward's lectures are cast in a very different light now.

Helen's last entry is dated November 3rd. She writes a sentence about the "fine gentleman and beau of the parish," but the entry ends incomplete. Gilbert senses she is writing about him, but has no way of knowing for sure.

Either Helen saw Gilbert as the great catch of the parish, or Gilbert wishes she did.

The rest of Helen's journal is torn away. Gilbert assumes this is because she does not want him to read any entries about himself. He admits to Halford, his audience, that he would have liked to have read about the transformation in her feelings for him, but he knows it was best for her to deprive him of that joy. He doesn't deserve it.

Gilbert's assumption that the rest of the diary chronicled in greater detail their burgeoning relationship borders on arrogance, but his humility is likewise clear in his admitting that he doesn't deserve to read any declarations of love from her.

CHAPTER 45. RECONCILIATION

The narrative is back in Gilbert Markham's hands, and he is again addressing his brother-in-law, Jack Halford. He writes to him of staying up late into the night to read Helen's diary and of rising early to finish it. As soon as he can manage it, he decides to make his way to Wildfell Hall to beg Helen's forgiveness. The day is a beautiful one, brisk and golden. He leans out his window to savor the **weather** and the knowledge that Helen is the pure and perfect creature he'd thought her to be.

The weather is yet again blessing a union between Gilbert and Helen, or at the very least it is blessing their friendship. Gilbert's throwing open the window to savor the day represents the light that has been shed on Helen's past life. He now knows she really is the angel he always thought her to be.

At Wildfell Hall, Rachel tries to keep Gilbert from entering. She tells him her mistress is not well, but little Arthur appears and tells him Helen would like to see him. Gilbert gives Helen back her manuscript and asks her to forgive him. She, in turn, asks him to forgive her. Then she begs him to promise never to visit her again. She will leave Wildfell Hall at the first opportunity, she says. Gilbert is dumbstruck and tells her he can make no such promise—he loves her more than ever. But Helen is adamant, especially when he tries to persuade her that Arthur can no longer make any claims to being her husband. Helen is shocked that Gilbert would appeal to her in such a way.

As a wife and a practicing Christian, Helen is still not free to love anyone other than Arthur. She asks Gilbert not to visit her again because she does not want to invite unwelcome gossip or break her vows. The difference, then, between her refusal of Walter Hargrave and her efforts to keep Gilbert at arm's length is one of affection. She cares for Gilbert in ways she never cared for Walter.

Desperate, Gilbert asks if they might now meet as friends, but Helen tells him that is impossible. Doesn't he see that, the more they meet, the dearer they will be to each other? He asks if they might write, but she says no, they will hear of each other through her brother. At the mention of Frederick Lawrence, Gilbert is overcome with shame. Helen still doesn't know of their meeting on the road.

Having read her diary from start to finish, Gilbert is now eager for more communication with Helen, but Helen knows very well the power and danger inherent in the written word. Gilbert finally feels the remorse he should have long ago about beating Frederick Lawrence.

Gilbert vows to wait for her for as long as it takes, knowing, of course, that this means for as long as Arthur lives. Helen tells him that that, too, is impossible. Arthur might live to an old age, and Gilbert should marry while he is still young. She has had a great deal of time to think of their situation, and she is determined that they end their acquaintance now. But, Gilbert asks, might they at the very least write to each other as friends? Helen seizes on this idea. She likes the thought of them corresponding as spiritual soul mates rather than lovers, and offers this proposition: she will go away and, after she is settled six months in another home, Gilbert may write to her through Frederick. The six-month delay is to act as both a cooling-off period and a test. If they are true soulmates, half a year is nothing.

Helen still takes her commitment to Arthur seriously, even if he has learned to completely disregard the sanctity of marriage. She is ready to give Gilbert up out of a selfless love for him and a desire to be true to her religious principles. But, the idea of writing to him as a soulmate is attractive. The angelic Helen is on full display here. She is eager to sacrifice herself and her own happiness for Gilbert's future good, even if it means becoming a stranger to the one friend she made in her new home.

Gilbert asks her again if they really will never meet again, and Helen says at least they can take comfort in the fact that they will meet again in Heaven. To Gilbert in this moment, that is very cold comfort indeed. He has no wish to meet Helen as a disembodied soul when he will be of no more importance to her than a thousand other disembodied souls. Helen argues that they will not think of love then as they do now, and that the more one loves, the happier one is.

Helen's faith is as strong as ever. Although her marriage to Arthur tested it at times, she still believes in the promise of an afterlife and hopes to meet Gilbert there, where they can love each other without guilt or disapproval. But they will also love without individuality, Gilbert argues.

Gilbert is still not persuaded, so Helen makes the argument that as earthly humans they cannot yet know what glory awaits them in heaven. They're like the caterpillar who doesn't understand he is to become a butterfly, or the child who thinks he'll miss his toys when, in fact, as an adult he has innumerable pleasures and consolations to take their place.

Earthly love, according to Helen's argument, is a lowly worm when compared to the beautiful, perfect love people can hope to experience in heaven. It is no wonder she would make such a comparison when her one experience with such love involved Arthur.

Gilbert finally yields, but not before they share one, quick, intense embrace during which Gilbert feels their hearts and souls mingling. Then he leaves, and spends several hours in melancholy misery, crying and worrying about Helen, alone at Wildfell Hall, doing the same. He decides to visit Frederick Lawrence and apologize for his violent behavior. When he gets to Woodford, Frederick's estate, a servant tells him his master is very ill and cannot have visitors, but Gilbert talks his way in and finds Frederick feverish and unwilling to talk to him. Eventually, though, Gilbert apologizes, and Frederick accepts it.

Helen wants to put them through a six-month test, but it's clear to Gilbert that they are soulmates already. Gilbert's visit to Frederick is a form of atonement. He is hoping his friend will forgive him, but he is also working hard to deserve Helen's love, even if that love must for the time being be platonic and nothing more.

Frederick is especially pleased that Gilbert has promised not to see Helen anymore. As her brother, he thinks this resolution best for both of them. He asks Gilbert to mail a letter to Helen for him. He hasn't been able to see her since he's been ill. Gilbert agrees to that and to Frederick's proposal that he come visit him once in a while.

Frederick wants the best for his sister, and he thinks that this does not include her having upsetting meetings with a man passionately in love with her.

CHAPTER 46. FRIENDLY COUNSELS

Gilbert wishes he could enlighten his mother and sister to Helen's true character, but it is not in his power to do so. He worries that if Eliza Millward were to know the truth, she would contact Arthur Huntingdon at once and inform him of Helen's whereabouts. The separation from Helen wears on Gilbert's nerves and mind. He becomes misanthropic and irritable with everyone, wanting only the society of his mother and Frederick Lawrence. The latter he visits as often as he can. He grows to like Helen's brother a great deal, partially because he resembles Helen and his company gives him a chance to talk about her.

The village of Linden-Car is still largely in the dark about Helen's past. Their preconceived notions about her are very much in error, but Gilbert is not in a place to enlighten them. He knows that the jealous and vindictive Eliza Millward will do what she can to make Helen's life harder, and his main comfort at this juncture is his friendship with Frederick Lawrence.

Frederick tells Gilbert that he has been to see Helen and that, while she is not yet cheerful, she is working hard to forget him. She is also making plans to move, and Frederick is assisting her as much he can. Gilbert suspects that Helen does not want to forget him. He cannot forget her, nor does he want to. A little more than a week later, Gilbert meets Frederick returning from a visit to the Wilsons, and he decides to do his friend a good turn by warning him against forming any serious designs on Jane.

Gilbert's desire to keep his friend from making a disastrous marriage to Jane Wilson—who, as a greedy and beautiful fortune hunter, shares much in common with Annabella—shows his growing attachment to Frederick. He now likes the man for himself, not just for his ties to Helen, and wants to save him unnecessary hardship.

Frederick is offended at first, both by Gilbert's presumption and then by the charges Gilbert lays against Jane. Gilbert informs Frederick that Jane hates Helen, and that she and Eliza Millward worked together to spread the nasty rumors about Frederick and Helen being a couple and the parents to little Arthur. Frederick is incredulous at first, but over time, Gilbert sees the young man's attachment lessening. Gilbert concludes that he probably sought other people's opinions of Jane as a way to corroborate Gilbert's assessment of her. Eventually, Gilbert learns that Frederick has given her up, and he is glad for his friend. Jane, however, is very bitter and angry.

Gilbert's attempts to warn Frederick against marrying Jane Wilson mirror Mrs. Maxwell's efforts to keep Helen from marrying Arthur Huntingdon, as well as Helen's advice to Esther Hargrave upon her return from her London season. They also contrast directly with Arthur Huntingdon's decision not to inform Lord Lowborough of Annabella's lack of affection for him. These similar situations are repeated throughout the book, with the ultimate lesson being that Christian marriage is for life, so one should enter it wisely.


CHAPTER 47. STARTLING INTELLIGENCE

Gilbert is home with Rose and Fergus one day when Eliza Millward pays a visit to the Markham house. At first she pays lip service to her concern for Gilbert's health, but then she reveals the true reason for her visit. She has heard that Helen Graham has left the neighborhood, and in a scandalous way. She was never a widow, Eliza said, and now has gone back to her husband. Gilbert doesn't believe her report, and asks her where she heard it. Eliza says she came by the information thanks to a maid working at Frederick Lawrence's estate. Gilbert immediately takes off for Woodford to ask Frederick if there is any truth to Eliza's story.

Eliza assumes that she is imparting the kind of information sure to make Gilbert think less of Helen. She does not know, of course, that Gilbert thinks too highly of Helen to give much credence to an idle report, especially when said report is coming from Eliza Millward, a petty young woman motivated primarily by jealousy and spite. Still, Helen was threatening to leave Wildfell Hall to make her life and Gilbert's easier.

To his shock, the story is true. Helen went back to Grassdale Manor because Arthur Huntingdon is ill. He injured himself falling from his horse and she returned home to nurse him. The governess, Miss Myers, apparently left him some time ago. Frederick has a letter explaining Helen's situation, and Gilbert snatches it from his hand. In the letter, Helen describes Arthur's state. His injuries were not severe, but his drinking worsens his condition considerably and when she arrives he mistakes her for a different woman. He keeps calling her Alice, and refuses to believe Helen is actually there.

Helen declared Lord Lowborough too good for this world, but the description could be applied to her as well. Arthur does not deserve her kindness or her loyalty. That is made clear by the fact that he doesn't even recognize her and calls her by another woman's name. But Helen's religious convictions do not allow to her neglect a man in need, even if it is the man who made her life a living hell for five years.


Arthur eventually grows coherent enough to recognize Helen and register her presence. He assumes she is tending to him out of Christian charity and as a way to get herself a better seat in Heaven. Helen tells him that she is simply there to help, because no one else could care for him as well as she will. He begs to see little Arthur, but she refuses. Until he is willing to sign a document promising that little Arthur is hers to take wherever she pleases, she will not let him see his son.

Helen's main concern at this moment is for her son. She left Arthur primarily to save her son from becoming like him, and that concern has not abated. She also has been living independently for some time now, and so knows that she is capable of taking care of little Arthur on her own.

Arthur reluctantly agrees to her demands and Helen asks Rachel to bring his son to him. Little Arthur is afraid of his father, and Mr. Huntingdon blames Helen for his timid manner, when really his own feverish demeanor is to blame. Later, Arthur abuses Helen for lording her Christian goodness over him. He supposes she is enjoying her position of power, but Helen tells him that nothing could be further from the truth. She is miserable, and she's not sure why she is making such sacrifices for someone as ungrateful as he.

Arthur does not deserve Helen's nursing, but she is so accustomed to playing the role of his mother, not to mention that of the angelic woman, that she finds she has to tend to him and his needs even when he makes it nearly impossible for her to do so.


After Arthur is bled the next day, he grows somewhat calmer, and they talk about whether or not this illness might prove fatal. Helen says it all depends on the extent of his internal injuries. Arthur cannot bear to think of dying, and so he vows that if she nurses him back to health he will agree to any proposal of hers. Helen ends her letter to Frederick saying she will continue to do her duty, even though it brings her no joy and no benefit.

Doctors believed "bleeding" patients, or drawing large quantities of blood from them, was beneficial because it helped balance the body's "humors." In reality, it weakened people considerably and often caused unnecessary fatalities.

When Gilbert finishes reading the letter, Frederick asks him what he makes of it. Gilbert wishes Helen weren't wasting her time nursing someone who isn't worth her effort, but her selflessness only raises her in his estimation. He asks Frederick if he might keep the letter, and Frederick hands it over. Gilbert then wonders if Frederick will ask Helen for her permission to enlighten Gilbert's mother and sister as to Helen's actual circumstances. Frederick promises to do so.

Finally, Gilbert will have the chance to clear Helen's name. The fact that she is tending to her unfaithful and ungrateful husband should only serve to raise Helen in Mrs. Markham and Rose's estimation.

CHAPTER 48. FURTHER INTELLIGENCE

Frederick receives another letter from Helen and visits Gilbert in order to share its contents with him. In the letter, Helen invites Gilbert to tell his family whatever he likes of her, but she wishes he would put her from his mind. She then goes on to describe her continued efforts to nurse Arthur back to health. It is uphill work. He is constantly working against her, and wants to eat and drink as he did before. The worst of the entire situation, though, is his attempt at showing her affection. She recoils at what she sees as insincere gestures, and she cannot return his love. The two of them come to a wry sort of understanding. It's too bad that it has come to this: he has a nurse who feels nothing for him, and out of desperation, he is grateful for whatever crumbs of kindness she throws his way.

Having hoped for years that Arthur would become a better man and return her love in an open and honest manner, Helen must now put up with the unwanted physical advances of her ill and libidinous husband. It is an irony almost too much to bear, especially because his overtures seem insincere to her and motivated primarily by lust. For once, Helen finds herself in a place of power, but it's not the kind of power she wanted.

Helen has the pleasure of seeing Esther during her time at Grassdale, but it's a mixed pleasure. Esther is no longer the joyful young woman Helen remembers. She has been worn down by her mother's constant pestering. Mrs. Hargrave wants so much to see Esther married that she continually accuses her of being a burden to the family, and Esther is convinced that Walter hates her for her obstinacy. Esther says she has gone so far as to threaten her mother with running away and making her own living. Helen feels for her. She wishes a worthy man would come along and save her from her sad fate.

Helen was right when she anticipated that Esther would be more difficult to marry off than Milicent. Esther's forward-thinking mindset is out of step with her family's views, which, like Mrs. Markham's, prioritize a man's happiness over a woman's, and financial security over real independence. Esther's desire for work is a threat not just to her mother's values but the social system in general.

The letter alternately depresses Gilbert and makes him happy. He has less hope for their future, but is consoled by the fact he can now let his mother and Rose in on the fact that Helen is a blameless and upstanding woman. Rose is particularly gratified to hear Helen's story, as is Mary Millward, whom Helen had always valued, in spite of her plainness. Gilbert is happy to discover that Miss Millward is engaged to Richard Wilson, who is now a student at Cambridge. The two were carrying on a secret engagement, waiting for the Reverend Millward to seek a curate. Now that he has selected Richard as his successor, the unassuming Mary and bookish Richard can finally marry and be open with their happiness.

Gilbert is surprised to find out about Mary Millward and Richard Wilson's engagement partially because he'd always found Mary plain and uninteresting. Gilbert's assumption that no one but old people, children, and her own family valued Mary was built on his perception of her unremarkable looks. His understanding of the situation and of Mary was skewed by his tendency to rank women based on their physical attractiveness. This was also what led him into an unwise flirtation with Eliza.

Gilbert flashes forward somewhat in this letter to Halford, updating him on Richard and the former Miss Millward, who are now living in another vicarage where they are both well loved by the parishioners. Meanwhile, Eliza has married a tradesman, who, Gilbert assumes, is too dumb to realize his misfortune, and Jane Wilson, having never received an offer of marriage she thought good enough for her, is living alone in a country village, a small-minded and cold-hearted old maid.

In this novel, the virtuous characters are rewarded and the wicked punished. According to that rule, Mary and Richard are allowed to be happy, but the less worthy Eliza Millward and Jane Wilson must be given their comeuppance: an unremarkable marriage and loneliness respectively.

CHAPTER 49. UNTITLED

The chapter begins with a quotation from the Biblical book of Matthew, about **rain** falling on a house and winds beating it until it comes crashing down with a great roar. Gilbert writes to Halford of his steady friendship with Frederick, which is founded in no small part on Gilbert's need to hear news of Helen. For a long time, Frederick hears nothing from her, but eventually there is a letter, and he hands it to Gilbert immediately. The news is that Arthur has experienced a serious relapse, due to his inability to abstain from drinking. One night, he orders a servant to bring him the strongest wine in the house, and he downs the whole bottle. His worst symptoms recur instantly, and he is soon in very poor condition.

The quotation seems to be referring to Arthur's health. It had been declining for years, thanks to his dissipated habits, and now it is in freefall. The suggestion is that a million tiny drops and a constant rough wind will eventually succeed in bringing down even the strongest of houses, and Arthur was never terribly strong to begin with. Now he seems to be inviting calamity.

Arthur's health is so now poor that Helen has to send little Arthur to be watched over by Esther Hargrave. Helen is needed so often in the sick room that she worries about little Arthur being neglected. His father is still annoyed by Helen's presence by his bedside, and blames her for his relapse. If she weren't so exacting, he claims, he would not have been tempted to drink the wine that is proving his ruin. Helen feels for him, especially because his tastes for food and drink will not serve him well in Heaven. Arthur dismisses her faith as superstition, but then begs her to make him well. He is terrified of death, and his vulnerability touches Helen's heart.

Helen's attempts to nurse Arthur are a torment to him. Despite her best efforts and good intentions, he is always angry with her and mocking her faith. Helen remains patient throughout, and she feels tremendous compassion for Arthur because he does not have a belief in God and heaven to get him through the worst of the suffering. He lives only for present pleasure, and he has those habits to blame for his illness.

Arthur's condition continues to deteriorate. He is not friendless, however. Hattersley comes to see him and is a very attentive friend. Milicent comes with him, and Helen has the pleasure of seeing her and Esther and little Arthur for brief, stolen moments. Arthur insists on having Helen by his side in the sick room at all times. Hattersley attempts to free her for a short stretch, but Arthur won't allow her to leave. He is terrified of death, and Hattersley suggests he send for a clergyman. Arthur refuses that, too.

Arthur has grown dependent on Helen, but he has still not reformed. He doesn't want to hear her talk of God or have a clergyman pray over him. He only wants Helen. Again she is thrust into the role of ministering angel, mostly because Arthur, a life-long sinner, worries about what the afterlife has in store for him.

Arthur worsens, and Helen fears that his death is imminent. Arthur insists that it is the "crisis," or the moment when his illness is peaking, and that once it passes he will be cured. He dozes for a bit and wakes up free of pain. He is ecstatic and thinks he is now well. He grabs Helen's hand and rejoices, but she does not join him in his happiness. He thinks this is because she unkind and cold-hearted, but in fact, she does not rejoice because she knows the truth—he is dying. The end is now very near.

Arthur is as deluded in near-death as he was in life. He cannot see the truth of the matter because it is too awful to think about. He is dying without ever doing any real kindness to another human being. Helen's example of selfless generosity is therefore a daily affront.

Helen stays by Arthur, doing her best to comfort him, but religion provides him with no consolation. If her beliefs prove true, and given the sinful life he has lived up until now, he cannot hope for everlasting life in the kingdom of Heaven. If a sinner like himself were granted permission to enter, it would make a lie of everything. Helen tells him that all he needs to do is repent sincerely, but he cannot or will not do it.

Arthur can admit to his own failings now, but that admission does not help him see any more clearly. This conversation mimics the one Helen had with Mrs. Maxwell about sinners, hell, and Christ's power to forgive. Arthur was the subject then, too.

Gilbert pities Helen and feels almost responsible for her sufferings. He had allowed himself to hope in desperate moments that Arthur might die and free Helen to be with him, and now it seems that that is exactly what is happening. Later Frederick hands him another letter, in which Helen writes of Arthur's death. Agonizing and drawn out, it ended with Helen fainting from exhaustion. She asks Frederick to come quickly. The funeral will take place soon and she would very much like his help.

Like the other characters in the novel, Arthur is punished according to his just desserts. He dies in agony, without the comfort of Christian faith. Having spent his married life abusing his loving wife and his youth drinking and carousing, it is, Brontë suggests, what he deserves.

CHAPTER 50. DOUBTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

Gilbert is overjoyed that Helen is finally free of the burden of nursing a man who made her life a torment, but he does feel for Arthur. He and Frederick talk about the funeral. Frederick has been preparing for his journey while Gilbert read Helen's letter, and he leaves almost immediately. Once he is gone, Gilbert sinks into melancholic reflection. He surmises that Helen no longer loves him. She mentioned him in her letters only once, and given the trauma of what she's been through, he can't imagine that she still feels for him what she once did.

Again, letters loom large in a narrative built around the written word. Gilbert had expected Helen to communicate with him through her brother, but without her encouraging words he loses faith, and whereas Helen places her faith in God, Gilbert places his in Helen and her love for him. Without concrete evidence of her regard, he doubts everything.

When Frederick returns, he says only that Helen was exhausted from her efforts. There is no talk of Helen asking after Gilbert at all, or even of her thinking of him. Gilbert assumes from his cold manner that Frederick would prefer he not marry his sister. Gilbert grows angry but endeavors to hide his feelings. He realizes later that Frederick's reserve was not a result of any dislike or animosity toward Gilbert, but of his thinking he and Helen poorly matched, and of Frederick's probably mistaking Gilbert's attempts at coolness for the real thing. Gilbert vows to be patient and to respect her wish of not writing to her until six months have elapsed. He has ten more weeks to go.

Throughout the novel, Gilbert has allowed his sensitivity and defensiveness to get in the way of his understanding. He comes to the conclusion that Frederick in reality has no animosity toward him only after the fact. In the moment, he allows his anger to get the better of him, much like he did months before when he confused the terms of Frederick and Helen's relationship.

Soon after Arthur's death, Helen experiences another loss. Her beloved uncle Mr. Maxwell dies, and she leaves Grassdale for Staningley so she can be of service to her aunt. Gilbert is in an agony of frustration. While Helen is at Staningley, he cannot write to her—he must wait until she returns home. Frederick joins his family at Staningley and then on a trip to the seaside. When he returns, he is just as reserved as ever, and Gilbert takes offense at his attitude. He admits to Halford that he and Frederick do not get on well—they seem too touchy to be long-lasting friends. They do not see each other for a while after this meeting, and the next time they cross paths, Frederick seeks out Gilbert before traveling again to Staningley.

During all these months of waiting on Helen to return, Gilbert rarely mentions his work as a farmer. Instead, he seems to spend all his time reading Helen's letters, visiting Helen's brother, and wishing Helen would write to him. Without the healthy distraction of work to occupy him, Gilbert grows morbid, self-pitying, and useless.

Gilbert can sense that Frederick is trying to give him an opportunity to send a message to Helen, but Gilbert says nothing out of pride. He lets Frederick leave without taking a message, and, while he regrets his stubbornness, he cannot change it.

It is this state of mind that prevents Gilbert from reaching out to Helen. His hurt pride is also seemingly a direct result of his lack of real employment.

Gilbert takes this moment to acquaint Halford with the fates of Lady Lowborough, Lord Lowborough, Hattersley, and Grimsby. Lady Lowborough, it seems, eloped with a roguish gentleman. They fought and parted, and rumor has it she died a pauper. Lord Lowborough acquired a divorce and married a woman known not for her beauty or charms but her goodness. They were incredibly happy together by all accounts. Hattersley remained true to his resolution to be a good father and husband, and he and Milicent were likewise very content. Grimsby kept to the same crooked path he was on before, and died in a brawl.

Each of these characters gets what he or she deserves based on previous behavior. Lady Lowborough and Grimsby are villains, so they have unhappy ends. Lord Lowborough and Hattersley are good, so they receive happy fates. By rewarding the just and punishing the wicked, Brontë invests her novel with a clear moral—do good to others and you will be rewarded both in this life and the next.

CHAPTER 51. A STRANGE OCCURRENCE

Gilbert is walking home from the vicarage, where, in order to satisfy his mother, he'd been paying a call on the Reverend Millward, when Eliza approaches him and asks if she might accompany him on his walk. She would like to see Rose, as she has some interesting news to impart. Gilbert asks her what she has heard, and she gladly complies. She has heard that Helen Graham is to be married. Gilbert, while not believing her report, asks who the rumored bridegroom is to be. A Walter Hargrave, perhaps? Eliza answers in the affirmative. Gilbert tells her she is wrong—it's impossible—but he makes his mind up that night to go to Grassdale and learn the truth himself. If he needs to, he will save Helen from making such a terrible mistake.

This scene mirrors the one in which Gilbert mistook Frederick's brotherly affection for Helen for a lover's embrace. Having read Helen's confusing and contradictory diary entries about Walter Hargrave, there is a tiny part of him that thinks Eliza Millward could be telling the truth. That he should still doubt Helen at this point says more about his character than hers.

It's a long, snowy journey, but eventually Gilbert makes it to the small country church where a wedding is indeed taking place—not between Helen and Walter, but between Esther and Frederick. Frederick is as shocked to see Gilbert as Gilbert is to see his friend, but both are completely happy, Frederick because of his bride and Gilbert because of the knowledge that Helen is not marrying Walter after all. After Frederick and Esther leave for their honeymoon in Paris, Gilbert wonders why Frederick kept his romance a secret. Perhaps he didn't want to depress Gilbert by talking too much about his own happiness.

The weather during Gilbert's journey represents the storm brewing in his mind. He cannot abide the thought that he could lose his beloved Helen to Walter Hargrave. His thoughts are jumbled; he is filled with dread. Finding Frederick and Esther at the altar adds to the confusion, but it also continues Brontë's theme of good people being rewarded with true love. Esther and Frederick clearly deserve the reward of each other.

CHAPTER 52. FLUCTUATIONS

Gilbert gets in a coach headed for Grassdale Manor. The driver is a talkative man. He used to be a servant at the Grove, and gossips about the Hargrave family as he drives. Walter is finally married. He engaged himself to a rich older woman, and that woman has since regretted her decision to marry him. He was charming at first, but is now cruel and conniving, and it is not a happy match. Gilbert finds it difficult to listen to the man's ramblings, as he is too focused on meeting Helen. She is not at Grassdale Manor, however; she is at Staningley with her aunt.

Walter is yet another character whose fate aligns well with his relative worth. Although Helen's feelings for Walter often fluctuated, her first instincts were correct, as were her impressions of his character during the long-ago chess match. His selfishness and devious nature ultimately trump his good intentions. Esther and Milicent might want to think the best of him, but he is not, in the end, a good man.

Gilbert decides to make the journey there, even though it will take him several days. He writes a letter to his mother, assuring her he is still alive, and begins the trip in a very excited state of mind. As he nears Staningley, however, he hears news that depresses him immensely. Helen, it seems, is to inherit her uncle's estate. She is now a rich, independent woman, free to live as she chooses, and Gilbert assumes she would choose to remain single. Her love for him must be a faint memory by now. He jumps out of the carriage before it can arrive at the house and rests against a **tree**, planning to return home as soon as possible.

Gilbert assumes that, because Helen is now an heiress, she will want nothing to do with him because he is a humble farmer and she a strong, independent woman with ideas of her own. But he does not yet know her mind. The tree he leans against harkens back to their first conversation during which Gilbert lectured Helen on her mothering style. Despite his love for Helen, Gilbert often misreads her and sells her short.

Soon, though, another carriage overtakes him and Gilbert hears little Arthur's voice exclaiming that he sees Mr. Markham. The carriage stops and little Arthur, Mrs. Maxwell, and Helen greet him. Helen wonders what he is doing in this part of the country. Gilbert tells her he is here to see Staningley. Helen invites Gilbert into the carriage and, after some awkward small talk, he accepts. They drive up to the house and Helen again invites Gilbert in. He is stiff with her and standoffish, and Helen is upset. After a time, she tells Arthur to go in search of a book, and Mrs. Maxwell withdraws as well. Gilbert and Helen are left alone.

This longed-for meeting is the perfect opportunity for Gilbert to let Helen know how much he loves and values her, but he again lets his pride get in the way. The roles they played in Linden-Car are now reversed. Gilbert is the awkward and reserved one; Helen the one eager to declare her love. And little Arthur's going in search of a book is a reminder of how Gilbert and Helen first bonded over a shared passion for literature.

Helen asks him what is wrong. Why is he being so distant? Have his feelings for her changed? He replies that they have not, but that the circumstances have changed, namely that she is now a rich woman. It comes out in the course of conversation that they both asked Frederick about the other quite often, but that he did not communicate this fact to either of them. Gilbert makes as if to leave, but Helen detains him. She wishes he would tell her his feelings. He says it is probably best that he not discuss such things, but she doesn't understand. Why would it be wrong to talk of love now, when she is finally free? She opens a window and plucks a rose, handing it to him. It is a **Christmas rose**. Gilbert takes it, but is momentarily confused.

Helen's opening a window at this moment is akin to Gilbert's opening the window upon finishing her diary. She is opening a window on to a future she deeply desires, just as he, too, hoped he was looking at a new, bright day at that moment. The rose represents love fulfilled. It is not a bud, but a blossom in full bloom.

Helen misreads his confusion for rejection and tosses the **rose** back out the window. She is angry and hurt, and tells him that the rose symbolized her heart. How could he treat her so coldly? Gilbert then realizes his folly. He was being too cautious, too guarded. He runs out and grabs the rose, and then asks Helen to offer her hand to him as well as her heart. She accepts immediately.

At long last, these two passionate souls are to be united. The Christmas rose, white and hardy, symbolizes the purity and strength of their love, which is all the more robust for their having waited so long and fought so hard to be together.

The only obstacle to perfect happiness now is Mrs. Maxwell. Helen says her aunt must not yet know of the engagement, as she will think it a rash and foolish step. Helen asks Gilbert to return home and come back to her in the spring for a long visit—then he and Mrs. Maxwell can get to know each other. In a year, they can be married.

Helen's concern about Mrs. Maxwell's reaction is founded partially on her own aunt's long-ago warning about Arthur Huntingdon. Helen wants to honor her aunt's wishes this time. It is both the respectful and intelligent thing to do.

Gilbert balks at such a long separation, but he agrees to it. He will do anything in his power to please Helen and make her happy. Little Arthur returns then, and, jumping forward in the narrative, Gilbert tells Halford that the boy becomes as dear to him as his own son. Arthur goes on to fulfill his mother's wishes for him, and becomes the prosperous and responsible master of Grassdale Manor, and marries Helen Hattersley—Milicent's daughter.

Helen's greatest worry was that little Arthur would someday turn out like his sinful father. This chapter makes it clear that Arthur followed in his mother and stepfather's footsteps instead, growing up to become an intelligent, gentleman farmer and kind and attentive husband.

Back in the present moment, Helen takes Gilbert on a tour of her aunt's **flower** garden. She takes him there to propose that they live at Staningley after they are married. She does not want to leave Mrs. Maxwell alone. Gilbert agrees to that as well. He and Mrs. Maxwell soon become very good friends, and even though it takes several months, Mrs. Markham too becomes reconciled to his son's decision to marry Helen. Gilbert bequeaths the farm to Fergus, whose superior wife influences him for the better, and Gilbert and Helen live in complete happiness with their children. Gilbert closes his letter anticipating a visit from Halford and Rose, who, he's glad to say, will soon be leaving the smoky, busy city of Paris for months of relaxation with him and his wife.

Gilbert's story ends happily. Having sealed their love over a rose, he and Helen stroll through a flower garden, contemplating how their relationship now has room and time to bloom. Later, they are united in perfect love and ensconced at Staningley with their children. Fergus and Rose are likewise lucky in love, as are the book's other upstanding characters.

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