

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

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

[Anne Bronte](#)

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

### Chapter 24

---

March 25th. - Arthur is getting tired - not of me, I trust, but of the idle, quiet life he leads - and no wonder, for he has so few sources of amusement: he never reads anything but newspapers and sporting magazines; and when he sees me occupied with a book, he won't let me rest till I close it. In fine weather he generally manages to get through the time pretty well, but on rainy days, of which we have had a good many of late, it is quite painful to witness his ennui. I do all I can to amuse him, but it is impossible to get him to feel interested in what I most like to talk about, while, on the other hand, he likes to talk about things that cannot interest me - or even that annoy me - and these please him - the most of all: for his favourite amusement is to sit or loil beside me on the sofa, and tell me stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation, he lays it all to the charge of jealousy, and laughs till the tears run down his cheeks. I used to fly into passions or melt into tears at first, but seeing that his delight increased in proportion to my anger and agitation, I have since endeavoured to suppress my feelings and receive his revelations in the silence of calm contempt; but still he reads the inward struggle in my face, and misconstrues my bitterness of soul for his unworthiness into the pangs of wounded jealousy; and when he has sufficiently diverted himself with that, or fears my displeasure will become too serious for his comfort, he tries to kiss and soothe me into smiles again - never were his caresses so little welcome as then! This is double selfishness displayed to me and to the victims of his former love. There are times when, with a momentary pang - a flash of wild dismay, I ask myself, 'Helen, what have you done?' But I rebuke the inward questioner, and repel the obtrusive thoughts that crowd upon me; for were he ten times as sensual and impenetrable to good and lofty thoughts, I well know I have no right to complain. And I don't and won't complain. I do and will love him still; and I do not and will not regret that I have linked my fate with his.

April 4th. - We have had a downright quarrel. The particulars are as follows: Arthur had told me, at different intervals, the whole story of his intrigue with Lady F-, which I would not believe before. It was some consolation, however, to find that in this instance the lady had been more to blame than he, for he was very young at the time, and she had decidedly made the first advances, if what he said was true. I hated her for it, for it seemed as if she had chiefly contributed to his corruption; and when he was beginning to talk about her the other day, I begged he would not mention her, for I detested the very sound of her name.

'Not because you loved her, Arthur, mind, but because she injured you and deceived her husband, and was altogether a very abominable woman, whom you ought to be ashamed to mention.'

But he defended her by saying that she had a doting old husband, whom it was impossible to love.

'Then why did she marry him?' said I.

'For his money,' was the reply.

'Then that was another crime, and her solemn promise to love and honour him was another, that only increased the enormity of the last.'

'You are too severe upon the poor lady,' laughed he. 'But never mind, Helen, I don't care for her now; and I never loved any of them half as much as I do you, so you needn't fear to be forsaken like them.'

'If you had told me these things before, Arthur, I never should have given you the chance.'

'Wouldn't you, my darling?'

'Most certainly not!'

He laughed incredulously.

'I wish I could convince you of it now!' cried I, starting up from beside him: and for the first time in my life, and I hope the last, I wished I had not married him.

'Helen,' said he, more gravely, 'do you know that if I believed you now I should be very angry? but thank heaven I don't. Though you stand there with your white face and flashing eyes, looking at me like a very tigress, I know the heart within you perhaps a trifle better than you know it yourself.'

Without another word I left the room and locked myself up in my own chamber. In about half an hour he came to the door, and first he tried the handle, then he knocked.

'Won't you let me in, Helen?' said he.

'No: you have displeased me,' I replied, 'and I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning.'

He paused a moment as if dumfounded or uncertain how to answer such a speech, and then turned and walked away. This was only an hour after dinner: I knew he would find it very dull to sit alone all the evening; and this considerably softened my resentment, though it did not make me relent. I was determined to show him that my heart was not his slave, and I could live without him if I chose; and I sat down and wrote a long letter to my aunt, of course telling her nothing of all this. Soon after ten o'clock I heard him come up again, but he passed my door and went straight to his own dressing-room, where he shut himself in for the night.

I was rather anxious to see how he would meet me in the morning, and not a little disappointed to behold him enter the breakfast-room with a careless smile.

'Are you cross still, Helen?' said he, approaching as if to salute me. I coldly turned to the table, and began to pour out the coffee, observing that he was rather late.

He uttered a low whistle and sauntered away to the window, where he stood for some minutes looking out upon the pleasing prospect of sullen grey clouds, streaming rain, soaking lawn, and dripping leafless trees, and muttering execrations on the weather, and then sat down to breakfast. While taking his coffee he muttered it was 'd-d cold.'

'You should not have left it so long,' said I.

He made no answer, and the meal was concluded in silence. It was a relief to both when the letter-bag was brought in. It contained upon examination a newspaper and one or two letters for him, and a couple of letters for me, which he tossed across the table without a remark. One was from my brother, the other from Millicent Hargrave, who is now in London with her mother. His, I think, were business letters, and apparently not much to his mind, for he crushed them into his pocket with some muttered expletives that I should have reproved him for at any other time. The paper he set before him, and pretended to be deeply absorbed in its contents during the remainder of breakfast, and a considerable time after.

The reading and answering of my letters, and the direction of household concerns, afforded me ample employment for the morning: after lunch I got my drawing, and from dinner till bed-time I read. Meanwhile, poor Arthur was sadly at a loss for something to amuse him or to occupy his time. He wanted to appear as busy and as unconcerned as I did. Had the weather at all permitted, he would doubtless have ordered his horse and set off to some distant region, no matter where, immediately after breakfast, and not returned till night: had there been a lady anywhere within reach, of any age between fifteen and forty-five, he would have sought revenge and found employment in getting up, or trying to get up, a desperate flirtation with her; but being, to my private satisfaction, entirely cut off from both these sources of diversion, his sufferings were truly deplorable. When he had done yawning over his paper and scribbling short answers to his shorter letters, he spent the remainder of the morning and the whole of the afternoon in fidgeting about from room to room, watching the clouds, cursing the rain, alternately petting and teasing and abusing his dogs, sometimes lounging on the sofa with a book that he could not force himself to read, and very often fixedly gazing at me when he thought I did not perceive it, with the vain hope of detecting some traces of tears, or some tokens of remorseful anguish in my face. But I managed to preserve an undisturbed though grave serenity throughout the day. I was not really angry: I felt for him all the time, and longed to be reconciled; but I determined he should make the first advances, or at least show some signs of an humble and contrite spirit first; for, if I began, it would only minister to his self-conceit, increase his arrogance, and quite destroy the lesson I wanted to give him.

He made a long stay in the dining-room after dinner, and, I fear, took an unusual quantity of wine, but not enough to loosen his tongue: for when he came in and found me quietly occupied with my book, too busy to lift my head on his entrance, he merely murmured an expression of suppressed disapprobation, and, shutting the door with a bang, went and stretched himself at full length on the sofa, and composed himself to sleep. But his favourite cocker, Dash, that had been lying at my feet, took the liberty of jumping upon him and beginning to lick his face. He struck it off with a smart blow, and the poor dog squeaked and ran cowering back to me. When he woke up, about half an hour after, he called it to him again, but Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail. He called again more sharply, but Dash only clung the closer to me, and licked my hand, as if imploring protection. Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. The poor dog set up a piteous outcry, and ran to the door. I let him out, and then quietly took up the book.

'Give that book to me,' said Arthur, in no very courteous tone. I gave it to him.

'Why did you let the dog out?' he asked; 'you knew I wanted him.'

'By what token?' I replied; 'by your throwing the book at him? but perhaps it was intended for me?'

'No; but I see you've got a taste of it,' said he, looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed.

I returned to my reading, and he endeavoured to occupy himself in the same manner; but in a little while, after several portentous yawns, he pronounced his book to be 'cursed trash,' and threw it on the table. Then followed eight or ten minutes of silence, during the greater part of which, I believe, he was staring at me. At last his patience was tired out.

'What is that book, Helen?' he exclaimed.

I told him.

'Is it interesting?'

'Yes, very.'

I went on reading, or pretending to read, at least - I cannot say there was much communication between my eyes and my brain; for, while the former ran over the pages, the latter was earnestly wondering when Arthur would speak next, and what he would say, and what I should answer. But he did not speak again till I rose to make the tea, and then it was only to say he should not take any. He continued lounging on the sofa, and alternately closing his eyes and looking at his watch and at me, till bed-time, when I rose, and took my candle and retired.

'Helen!' cried he, the moment I had left the room. I turned back, and stood awaiting his commands.

'What do you want, Arthur?' I said at length.

'Nothing,' replied he. 'Go!'

I went, but hearing him mutter something as I was closing the door, I turned again. It sounded very like 'confounded slut,' but I was quite willing it should be something else.

'Were you speaking, Arthur?' I asked.

'No,' was the answer, and I shut the door and departed. I saw nothing more of him till the following morning at breakfast, when he came down a full hour after the usual time.

'You're very late,' was my morning's salutation.

'You needn't have waited for me,' was his; and he walked up to the window again. It was just such weather as yesterday.

'Oh, this confounded rain!' he muttered. But, after studiously regarding it for a minute or two, a bright idea, seemed to strike him, for he suddenly exclaimed, 'But I know what I'll do!' and then returned and took his seat at the table. The letter-bag was already there, waiting to be opened. He unlocked it and examined the contents, but said nothing about them.

'Is there anything for me?' I asked.

'No.'

He opened the newspaper and began to read.

'You'd better take your coffee,' suggested I; 'it will be cold again.'

'You may go,' said he, 'if you've done; I don't want you.'

I rose and withdrew to the next room, wondering if we were to have another such miserable day as yesterday, and wishing intensely for an end of these mutually inflicted torments. Shortly after I heard him ring the bell and give some orders about his wardrobe that sounded as if he meditated a long journey. He then sent for the coachman, and I heard something about the carriage and the horses, and London, and seven o'clock to-morrow morning, that startled and disturbed me not a little.

'I must not let him go to London, whatever comes of it,' said I to myself; 'he will run into all kinds of mischief, and I shall be the cause of it. But the question is, How am I to alter his purpose? Well, I will wait awhile, and see if he mentions it.'

I waited most anxiously, from hour to hour; but not a word was spoken, on that or any other subject, to me. He whistled and talked to his dogs, and wandered from room to room, much the same as on the previous day. At last I began to think I must introduce the subject myself, and was pondering how to bring it about, when John unwittingly came to my relief with the following message from the coachman:

'Please, sir, Richard says one of the horses has got a very bad cold, and he thinks, sir, if you could make it convenient to go the day after to-morrow, instead of to-morrow, he could physic it to-day, so as -'

'Confound his impudence!' interjected the master.

'Please, sir, he says it would be a deal better if you could,' persisted John, 'for he hopes there'll be a change in the weather shortly, and he says it's not likely, when a horse is so bad with a cold, and physicked and all -'

'Devil take the horse!' cried the gentleman. 'Well, tell him I'll think about it,' he added, after a moment's reflection. He cast a searching glance at me, as the servant withdrew, expecting to see some token of deep astonishment and alarm; but, being previously prepared, I preserved an aspect of stoical indifference. His countenance fell as he met my steady gaze, and he turned away in very obvious disappointment, and walked up to the fire-place, where he stood in an attitude of undisguised dejection, leaning against the chimney-piece with his forehead sunk upon his arm.

'Where do you want to go, Arthur?' said I.

'To London,' replied he, gravely.

'What for?' I asked.

'Because I cannot be happy here.'

'Why not?'

'Because my wife doesn't love me.'

'She would love you with all her heart, if you deserved it.'

'What must I do to deserve it?'

This seemed humble and earnest enough; and I was so much affected, between sorrow and joy, that I was obliged to pause a few seconds before I could steady my voice to reply.

'If she gives you her heart,' said I, 'you must take it, thankfully, and use it well, and not pull it in pieces, and laugh in her face, because she cannot snatch it away.'

He now turned round, and stood facing me, with his back to the fire. 'Come, then, Helen, are you going to be a good girl?' said he.

This sounded rather too arrogant, and the smile that accompanied it did not please me. I therefore hesitated to reply. Perhaps my former answer had implied too much: he had heard my voice falter, and might have seen me brush away a tear.

'Are you going to forgive me, Helen?' he resumed, more humbly.

'Are you penitent?' I replied, stepping up to him and smiling in his face.

'Heart-broken!' he answered, with a rueful countenance, yet with a merry smile just lurking within his eyes and about the corners of his mouth; but this could not repulse me, and I flew into his arms. He fervently embraced me, and though I shed a torrent of tears, I think I never was happier in my life than at that moment.

'Then you won't go to London, Arthur?' I said, when the first transport of tears and kisses had subsided.

'No, love, - unless you will go with me.'

'I will, gladly,' I answered, 'if you think the change will amuse you, and if you will put off the journey till next week.'

He readily consented, but said there was no need of much preparation, as he should not be for staying long, for he did not wish me to be Londonized, and to lose my country freshness and originality by too much intercourse with the ladies of the world. I thought this folly; but I did not wish to contradict him now: I merely said that I was of very domestic habits, as he well knew, and had no particular wish to mingle with the world.

So we are to go to London on Monday, the day after to-morrow. It is now four days since the termination of our quarrel, and I am sure it has done us both good: it has made me like Arthur a great deal better, and made him behave a great deal better to me. He has never once attempted to annoy me since, by the most distant allusion to Lady F., or any of those disagreeable reminiscences of his former life. I wish I could blot them from my memory, or else get him to regard such matters in the same light as I do. Well! it is something, however, to have made him see that they are not fit subjects for a conjugal jest. He may see further some time. I will put no limits to my hopes;

and, in spite of my aunt's forebodings and my own unspoken fears, I trust we shall be happy yet.