

BY CHARLOTTE BRONTË

Illustrated by Well Booker

Introduction by May Lamberton Becker

The World Publishing Company

Cleveland and New York



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General Editor: May Lamberton Becker

Introduction

HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE WRITTEN

by May Lamberton Becker

YOU ENTER Haworth in Yorkshire by a street that goes straight up a steep hill; on its top stands an old stone church and a parsonage built of stone; at its back, a little way down the slope, a tiny alehouse is tucked into a corner. There seem to be gravestones everywhere you look, clustered so thickly you wonder how so many people could ever live in a place so small, till you find that this is the only churchyard for miles around. It would have been a gloomy sight for the children in the parsonage nursery whose windows overlook the headstones—but they took them for granted as children do, and had too much to do inside to dwell on graves. They drew pictures—people come now to see some of them on the walls. They listened to fantastic old tales told them by Tabby, the servant, and they made their own stories, even writing them down at great length—which is more than most children do-and in so fine a hand that visitors who examine the little manuscript books they made must do so through a magnifying glass. They were the children of a clergyman named Patrick Brontë, whose name had been originally Prunty (he had twisted it by main force into Brontë, the Greek word for thunder) who had brought a furious thundering sort of genius with him into the family, and left it, in one form or another, among them all.

Mrs. Brontë died when Maria, the eldest child, was only seven, and her sister Miss Branwell came to keep house, but the real mothering was done by devoted little Maria. Mr. Brontë thought they would be better off at a school, and as there was one at Cowan Bridge, meant especially for daughters of poor clergymen, he sent them all there except Anne, the baby, and of course Branwell, the only son. I need not tell you about that school; you will find it as Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, and will not wonder that both Maria Brontë and the second daughter Elizabeth died there

just as Helen Burns did; Charlotte and her little sister Emily were brought home just in time. The girls knew they would all be governesses, for somebody must add to the family income, but for their brother they had higher hopes. He could do anything, they thought-and indeed he started out that way. But the alehouse was too near the parsonage, and Branwell had a strain of weakness his stronger sisters had not foreseen; he became their greatest trouble. Charlotte went to a much better school for a while, even abroad to study languages, and did become a governess; so did Anne and Emily, but none of them could keep it up. Charlotte disliked children—as a child she knew only those of her own family; Anne's health was too delicate, and Emily-to whom even three months of school away from home had been like putting an eagle into a bird-cage—could hardly be expected to stand her first and only job, which kept her on duty sixteen hours a day.

So when the supper dishes were cleared away and everyone else asleep, the girls would pace up and down the old kitchen in the firelight, making plans to earn money enough to be free. A book was the first venture: Charlotte and Anne wrote verses, and Emily's poems, which she tried to keep secret, will last as long as our language: a selection from the three was printed in a little volume, Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell—notice that they kept their own initials. This was published in 1846: it cost them fifty pounds and sold two copies that year, but the girls had tasted print. Each set to work on a novel. Charlotte used some of her Belgian experiences in The Professor, Anne drew on her life as governess in The Tenant of Wildfell Hall, and Emily, out of her own wild heart and tragic genius, produced a masterpiece, Wuthering Heights. No publisher wanted Charlotte's book: undismayed, she set off on Jane Eyre, which came out in 1847. After that she was famous—and still anonymous.

People thought the author was a man: no lady would write such a story! Then they said Currer, Ellis and Acton must be the same person, and rather than take her sisters' glory, Charlotte had to set them straight—and then some said anyone who would write such a story was no lady. It seems strange to us now that anyone should have found in it anything but a stern sense of right. When you reach its climax, and Jane, her world in ruins around

her, sits numb and cold, locked into her room while Rochester pleads with her through the door, pay attention to what she says to herself and see what her anchor was in that storm.

Then came the dreadful year. Poor broken Branwell was buried in September, 1848. Three months later Emily, who had stood by him through everything, met death magnificently. Within the year the same tuberculosis was too much for Anne's weak lungs. Charlotte was alone with her half-blind father. She had success, but there was no one with whom to talk it over in the firelight. When in 1854 she married her father's assistant, the Rev. Arthur Nicholls, it seemed as if the old parsonage would see new happiness. But the brief and glowing hour of the Brontës was over: Charlotte died within the year.

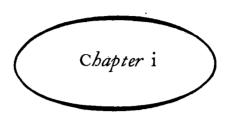
When people make pilgrimages now to Haworth they find that the parsonage has become the Brontë Museum. The nursery is much as it was, the tiny writing of the little books still clear. But visitors do not stay inside very long. Outside are the strange, sweeping moors, the shaggy mountain sheep, the rushing stream that comes down the hillside past a rock that was Emily's seat. Ask anyone in Haworth where that is and they will direct you, speaking of the sisters as if they had never left the country where their hearts were at home.

You may find it hard to believe, as you look at the pictures in this book, that they are the first that Nell Booker has made to illustrate any book. She grew up without much idea of becoming an artist: a student at the University of North Carolina, in her lovely home town of Chapel Hill, it was fun to go out sketching around Coker's Farm with other "summer artists," and get cartoons published in the campus magazine, but that is as far as it went until she had her degree. Then she came to the Art Students' League in New York, studied two years with George Grosz, then in Raphael Soyer's studio and that of Moses Soyer. Meanwhile she helped meet expenses by jobs such as clerking and sending out bills for bookshops and teaching little children how to paint in a great department store, That was fun, she says. This is her first professional job as illustrator, she made herself familiar beforehand with everything in the everyday life of Jane Eyre's day, so she would know how people dressed and what their surroundings

were; she says making these pictures was something like bringing up a family— and dressing it! More than that, I believe she knows what Rochester really looked like—these are the first pictures of him that I would trust—and that Jane herself, though she might have been an ugly little girl, certainly "had something about her" when she grew up, that did as well as beauty!

Jane Eyre

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HERE was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs. Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question.

I was glad of it: I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying, "She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner,—something lighter, franker, more natural as it were—she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy little children."

"What does Bessie say I have done?" I asked.

"Jane, I don't like cavillers or questioners: besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that

manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent."

A small breakfast-room adjoined the drawing-room. I slipped in there. It contained a book-case: I soon possessed myself of a volume, taking care that it should be one stored with pictures. I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged, like a Turk; and, having drawn the red moreen curtain

nearly close, I was shrined in double retirement.

Folds of scarlet drapery shut in my view to the right hand; to the left were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the drear November day. At intervals, while turning over the leaves of my book, I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, a scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweep-

ing away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.

I returned to my book—Bewick's History of British Birds: the letter-press thereof I cared little for, generally speaking; and yet there were certain introductory pages that, child as I was, I could not pass quite as a blank. They were those which treat of the haunts of sea-fowl; of "the solitary rocks and promontories" by them only inhabited; of the coast of Norway, studded with isles from its southern extremity, the Lindeness, or Naze, to the North Cape—

"Where the Northern Ocean, in vast whirls, Boils round the naked, melancholy isles Of farthest Thule; and the Atlantic surge Pours in among the stormy Hebrides."

Nor could I pass unnoticed the suggestion of the bleak shores of Lapland, Siberia, Spitzbergen, Nova Zembla, Iceland, Greenland, with "the vast sweep of the Arctic Zone, and those forlorn regions of dreary space,—that reservoir of frost and snow, where firm fields of ice, the accumulation of centuries of winters, glazed in Alpine heights above heights, surrounded the pole, and concentre the multiplied rigours of extreme cold." Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive. The words in these introductory pages connected themselves with the succeeding vignettes, and gave significance to the rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and



spray; to the broken boat stranded on a desolate coast; to the cold and ghastly moon glancing through bars of cloud at a wreck just sinking.

I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quiet solitary churchyard with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide.

The two ships becalmed on a torpid sea, I believed to be marine

phantoms.

The fiend pinning down the thief's pack behind him, I passed over quickly: it was an object of terror.

So was the black, horned thing seated aloof on a rock, surveying

a distant crowd surrounding a gallows.

Each picture told a story; mysterious often to my undeveloped understanding and imperfect feelings, yet ever profoundly interesting: as interesting as the tales Bessie sometimes narrated on winter evenings, when she chanced to be in good humour; and when, having brought her ironing-table to the nursery-hearth, she allowed us to sit about it, and while she got up Mrs. Reed's lace frills, and crimped her night-cap borders, fed our eager attention with passages of love and adventure taken from old fairy tales and older ballads; or (as at a later period I discovered) from the pages of Pamela, and Henry, Earl of Moreland.

With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came too

soon. The breakfast-room door opened.

"Boh! Madame Mope!" cried the voice of John Reed; then he

paused: he found the room apparently empty.

"Where the dickens is she?" he continued. "Lizzy! Georgy! (calling to his sisters) Jane is not here: tell mama she is run out into the rain—bad animal!"

"It is well I drew the curtain," thought I; and I wished fervently he might not discover my hiding-place: nor would John Reed have found it out himself; he was not quick either of vision or conception; but Eliza just put her head in at the door, and said at once:—

"She is in the window-seat, to be sure, Jack."

And I came out immediately, for I trembled at the idea of being dragged forth by the said Jack.

"What do you want?" I asked, with awkward diffidence.

"Say, 'what do you want, Master Reed?" was the answer. "I want you to come here;" and seating himself in an armchair, he intimated by a gesture that I was to approach and stand before him.

John Reed was a schoolboy of fourteen years old; four years older than I, for I was but ten; large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin; thick lineaments in a spacious visage, heavy limbs and large extremities. He gorged himself habitually at table, which made him bilious, and gave him a dim and bleared eye and flabby cheeks. He ought now to have been at school; but his mama had taken him home for a month or two, "on account of his delicate health." Mr. Miles, the master, affirmed that he would do very well if he had fewer cakes and sweetmeats sent him from home; but the mother's heart turned from an opinion so harsh, and inclined rather to the more refined idea that John's sallowness was owing to over-application and, perhaps, to pining after home.

John had not much affection for his mother and sisters, and an antipathy to me. He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near/ There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired, because I had no appeal whatever against either his menaces or his inflictions; the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him, and Mrs. Reed was blind and deaf on the subject: she never saw him strike or heard him abuse me, though he did both now and then in her very presence; more frequently, how-

ever, behind her back.

Habitually obedient to John, I came up to his chair: he spent some three minutes in thrusting out his tongue at me as far as he could without damaging the roots: I knew he would soon strike, and while dreading the blow, I mused on the disgusting and ugly appearance of him who would presently deal it. I wonder if he read that notion in my face; for, all at once, without speaking, he struck suddenly and strongly. I tottered, and on regaining my equilibrium retired back a step or two from his chair.

"That is for your impudence in answering mama awhile since,"

said he, "and for your sneaking way of getting behind curtains, and for the look you had in your eyes two minutes since, you rat!"

Accustomed to John Reed's abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult.

"What were you doing behind the curtain?" he asked.

"I was reading."
"Shew the book."

I returned to the window and fetched it thence.

"You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows."

I did so, not at first aware what was his intention; but when I saw him lift and poise the book and stand in act to hurl it, I instinctively started aside with a cry of alarm: not soon enough, however; the volume was flung, it hit me, and I fell, striking my head against the door and cutting it. The cut bled, the pain was sharp; my terror had passed its climax; other feelings succeeded.

"Wicked and cruel boy!" I said. "You are like a murderer—you are like a slave-driver—you are like the Roman emperors!"

I had read Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, and had formed my opinion of Nero, Caligula, etc. Also I had drawn parallels in silence, which I never thought thus to have declared aloud.

"What! what!" he cried. "Did you say that to me? Did you hear her, Eliza and Georgiana? Won't I tell mama? but first"—

He ran headlong at me: I felt him grasp my hair and my shoulder: he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant: a murderer. I felt a drop or two of blood from my head trickle down my neck, and was sensible of somewhat pungent sufferings: these sensations for the time predominated over fear, and I received him in frantic sort. I don't very well know what I did with my hands, but he called me "Rat! rat!" and bellowed out aloud. Aid was near him: Eliza and Georgiana had run for Mrs. Reed, who was gone upstairs; she now came upon the scene, fol-