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Emily Brontë, Teenage Necromancer

A play in two acts

By Don Zolidis

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Full-length Comedy/Drama
8w, 4m plus ensemble

1835. Northern England. The moors. A terrifying phantom has appeared at the Roe Head School for Girls, terrorizing its students and driving the school near to extinction. It's up to star pupil Emily Brontë, and her sisters Anne and Charlotte, to discern the true nature of the haunting, using their unique talents—which happen to include necromancy. A gothic, hilarious ride through English literature that needs magic, ghosts, and fog, featuring an undead goose, a lovesick ghost, and a talking meat pudding.

Cast of Characters

EMILY BRONTË, 17
ANNE BRONTË, 15,
CHARLOTTE BRONTË, 19, a teacher at the school
MARIA BRANWELL, their mother, later a ghost

HEADMISTRESS MARGARET WOOLTON, 50s
SEAMUS, a groundskeeper, any age

The Older Girls:
GEORGINA PIERCE, 17
ELIZABETH BRIGHTON, 15
BRITTANY COOK, 16
DONNA O'CONNELL, 17

The Younger Children:
ELTON
MARISOL
THOMAS
MARGOT
DRIP
BOUNCER

CLIFF, early teens, a vagabond child, a ghost
GEORGE WADSWORTH, 20, a suitor to Charlotte, possessed of a very small fortune

MEAT PUDDING/ MR. JACOBY, a spirit trapped in a meat pudding
THE PHANTOM OF ROE HEAD, a ghost
JOHN PIERCE, a ghost
Other GHOSTS

For a smaller cast: You may cut all of the roles of the younger children and have Charlotte exclaiming off-stage when she is speaking with them.

For a larger cast: You may add additional younger children –

Doublecasting: The Younger Children may also play the roles of the various ghosts.

The Setting: The Roe Head school for girls and its environs. An old, slightly crumbling mansion on the edge of the moors, a place prone to fog, marshes, and supernatural occurrences. The locations necessary will include the great hall and dining area, Anne and Emily's private room, and the nearby cemetery.

Transitions: There are a large number of scenes in the play, so the faster the transitions can be accomplished, the better. A minimal suggestion of place will do for just about every location – a single wall or even piece of furniture can represent a place.

On Taking Liberties with Reality: I have bent reality in a number of places in this play, not just in the creation of ghosts and magical powers. For instance, Anne and Emily were never at Roe Head together – Emily went home and then Anne replaced her (Charlotte was a teacher there, though.) What changes I have made in the historical record I have done to make a more fun, more rich theatrical experience. I hope you agree.

Alternate Title: If the word Necromancer might cause issues in your community, you are welcome to change the play title to "Emily Bronte, Teenage Ghost Hunter"

Act One

Fog.
A woman shrouded in a dark cloak. This is MARIA BRANWELL.
EMILY, a teenager, addresses the audience.

EMILY

My mother married my father in 1812, when she was twenty-nine years old. Before that point, there is little known of her history. Why did she wait so long to marry? The simple explanation is that she was a shy bookish young woman who found the company of men taxing and disorienting. That is, until her heart was claimed by a learned and serious rector named Patrick Brontë, with whom she fell in immediate love and proceeded to birth six babies in nine years. Which, as one might imagine, left her exhausted and disillusioned with both motherhood and marriage.

The true explanation, however, is not simple.

My mother was no wallflower. Her long disappearances, supposedly engaged in religious study, were merely a cover for her true vocation.

Maria sheds her cloak, beneath it she wears dashing, swashbuckling gear, complete with a death's head belt buckle and a sash of knives.

Maria Branwell was an adventuress. A pirate, a rogue, a searcher of mystic relics, and some say, a necromancer of considerable skill with power over life and death itself.

CHARLOTTE, another young woman, dressed a little more respectably, enters from another side of the stage.

CHARLOTTE

Emily likes to embellish. She is a consummate fabricator. At best our mother was a necromancer of minor skill.

EMILY

She could communicate with the spirit world. She battled ghouls and poltergeists.

Maria confronts a GHOSTLY SPECTER

With her magic and fortitude, she kept her family safe – until –

The Specter strikes Maria in the stomach.

A devilish curse slew her before her fortieth birthday.

Maria dies.

CHARLOTTE

That was no curse, it was a common disease of the stomach –

EMILY

Without her protection, her two eldest daughters succumbed to the diabolical embrace of death, one after the other.

CHARLOTTE

The doctors said it was tuberculosis.

EMILY

The rest of us, bereft of mother and sisters, believed the official account. That it was merely the accumulation of evil luck which stole the light from our lives. These miseries were commonplace, these diseases could afflict anyone, it was hardly special to have three loved ones die in the space of a year. We were as common as dirt.

CHARLOTTE

Do not overstrain their sympathies, Emily. Our father was a rector and our Aunt provided us an education that was more than adequate.

EMILY

And yet, our true education lay in the relics our mother had collected from the four corners of the world on her adventures. We discovered them on Charlotte's eighteenth birthday – a legacy left by our mother.

CHARLOTTE

Which, I confess, I did not believe at first.

EMILY

That year, we had been banished from our life at home and sentenced to imprisonment at the Roe Head Boarding School –

CHARLOTTE

Sentenced?! It's a lovely school –

EMILY

Charlotte was employed as a jailer –

CHARLOTTE

Teacher –

EMILY

And I labored at my studies in pain and humiliation – until the phantom came.

CHARLOTTE

Well, yes, the phantom.

EMILY

At which point our true legacy became clear.

Lights change.

STUDENTS rush in and out – Emily exits. Charlotte remains.

Someone is playing piano – poorly. Practicing. Going over the same patch of music again and again, without much improvement.

Scene changes to the Great Hall of the Roe Head school, which, to be honest, is not that great.

A gaggle of students rush past – Charlotte tries to instruct them.

CHARLOTTE

Walk please! You are not wild beasts! We must attempt to maintain decorum!

They slow down slightly.

HEADMISTRESS MARGARET WOOLTON enters, along with ELIZABETH BRIGHTON, an older student.

MARGARET

You have abused that piano enough for one evening, Miss Brighton.

ELIZABETH

Yes, Headmistress.

MARGARET

Life is short. Let us all have some relief from your music.

ELIZABETH

I know the notes in my head, but they don't seem to translate to my fingers.

MARGARET

That is the particular challenge of the piano, is it not?

ELIZABETH

I do love it.

MARGARET

The piano?

ELIZABETH

Yes, Ma'am.

M ARGARET

I wish the piano loved you back.

ELIZABETH

I shall continue to practice. Perfect practice makes practice perfect.

MARGARET

There is wisdom in a strategic retreat from the piano, you know.

ELIZABETH

I will remember that.

MARGARET

Do. Run along now.

ELIZABETH

Yes, Headmistress.

Elizabeth scampers off.

MARGARET *(calling off)*

When I say run I do not mean run! I mean walk with purpose!

CHARLOTTE *(entering)*

They are quite coltish this morning.

MARGARET

It's the fall air. It energizes them to a most improper amount. Which reminds me: I wish to speak with you about your sister.

CHARLOTTE

Which one?

MARGARET

You have two sisters, Miss Brontë, one of whom is sweet, obedient and delightful, and the other of whom is…

CHARLOTTE

Emily.

MARGARET

Emily. Yes. She has taken to rambling again.

CHARLOTTE

She does that.

MARGARET

It is not seemly for a young woman to wander about the countryside like a vagabond.

CHARLOTTE

I know, Headmistress.

MARGARET

She pets stray dogs.

CHARLOTTE

She enjoys dogs.

MARGARET

I do not enjoy her enjoying dogs.

CHARLOTTE

Of course.

MARGARET

But the real issue is her ongoing feud with Miss Pierce.

CHARLOTTE

I do not believe that is Emily's fault, Headmistress. Georgina provokes her. She says the most awful things.

MARGARET

Being a woman is learning to endure both provocation and awful things, Miss Brontë. That is how we get children.

CHARLOTTE

I hope never to discover that.

MARGARET

Which brings me to the third thing I wished to speak with you about: your own performance.

CHARLOTTE

I am doing my best.

MARGARET

That is what someone says when they are failing, Miss Brontë.

CHARLOTTE

The children are unruly.

MARGARET

Rule them, or they will rule you. I do not wish to see you chasing after them again, holding your skirts in your hands like a damsel from an inappropriate play.

CHARLOTTE

Right.

MARGARET

It has also come to my attention that you have named the children.

CHARLOTTE

I can explain –

MARGARET

One of whom you have dubbed, "Drip."

CHARLOTTE

Right. Well –

MARGARET

And another, "Bouncer"?

CHARLOTTE

He is quite bouncy. And Drip –

MARGARET

His name is Bentley –

CHARLOTTE

It's simply that his nose –

MARGARET

Yes we are quite aware of the poor boy's issues. His father sends us money for his education, to bring Bentley up as a proper gentleman, and you have named him… Drip.

CHARLOTTE

His nose –

MARGARET

I know what is occurring with the boy's nose. I have seen him. You will not refer to him as Drip. You will not refer to Steven as Bouncer.

CHARLOTTE

Certainly, Headmistress. Drip does like his name, however.

MARGARET

Boys prefer many things which are bad for them. If a boy were given the choice, he would pick his nose with a snake. Our job, as educators, is to prevent boys from doing what they want to do.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Ma'am.

MARGARET

I say this to you because I am near retirement and I am looking for a successor.

CHARLOTTE

Oh.

MARGARET

And I believe I have found her.

CHARLOTTE

Surely you don't mean me!

MARGARET

You show remarkable promise, your nicknames notwithstanding. The day may soon arrive when you shall be named Headmistress.

CHARLOTTE

I don't know what to say.

MARGARET

Do not gawk. Headmistresses never gawk.

CHARLOTTE

I… thank you?

MARGARET

Of course, to be truly worthy of the job, you must be suitably married.

CHARLOTTE

Therein lies the difficulty.

MARGARET

Not at all. I have taken the liberty of writing to your father and I believe we have discovered a young man who may be adequate for the task.

CHARLOTTE

Adequate?

MARGARET

I will not oversell him. His family is not prosperous and his face, though pleasing, is not exceptional. He makes up for that with a character which is… fine.

CHARLOTTE

He sounds like what I've always dreamed of.

MARGARET

Skipping Forward

Anne, where is your sister? I thought she was going to show us the way.

DONNA

Show us the way where?

ANNE

She said she would be here.

GEORGINA

She wasn't in your room when you left?

ANNE

She rambles.

ELIZABETH

Is this Emily's idea? If this is Emily's idea I don't want to do it. I'm most certain she is truly wicked.

BRITTANY

I thought I was wicked.

ELIZABETH

More than you.

GEORGINA

We needn't wait for her. She'd probably force us to listen to some hideous ghost story or miserable tale of her wretched childhood. Not you Anne, you are lovely and don't trouble us with your history. I always think it best to keep silent about past misfortune.

BRITTANY

Like your family misfortune?

GEORGINA

My family misfortune is no business of yours, Brittany. I'm sorry, Anne, I'm sure it is horribly difficult to lose a mother and your sisters. But everyone has problems.

ANNE

I didn't say anything about it.

DONNA

It's best if you can't remember your mother.

ELIZABETH

Your mother isn't even dead!

DONNA

But she could be one day, and then how sad will I be? I sometimes think it preferable to have her dead before I could remember, then I shan't be sad about it in the future.

Emily, wearing a hooded cloak and carrying a lantern sneaks in.

EMILY *(like a ghost)*

Boooo….

The girls startle.

ELIZABETH

You scared me half to death!

DONNA

I knew it was you!

EMILY

Are we all here then?

GEORGINA

Yes, we were waiting on you.

EMILY

Then wait no further, here I am.

GEORGINA

I wasn't sure you'd appear, after you stormed out of dinner.

EMILY

I swear, if we are forced to endure "meat pudding" one more time, I shall toss myself off the nearest cliff.

GEORGINA

You're used to the concoctions of your own personal chef then? With your family fortune?

ELIZABETH

I hear we are to have goose on the sabbath. That shall be better.

EMILY

I am dubious.

DONNA

Headmistress said if you were so saucy, you should work in the kitchen. That was funny. She is funny sometimes.

BRITTANY

Are we going to discuss the menu or are we going to experiment with this?

GEORGINA

Be my guest.

Brittany takes a swig of whatever is in the bottle.
All the girls watch, expectant.
It's horrible.

BRITTANY

It is wretched.

ELIZABETH *(reaching for it)*

Ooh!

Brittany hands it over.

DONNA

What is it?

BRITTANY

I am not sure it is meant to be drunk at all, to be honest.

Elizabeth coughs and sputters after drinking some.

DONNA

Are we even certain that it's spirits?

BRITTANY

It might be cooking oil.

EMILY

All right then, follow me.

ANNE

Emily, must we tempt disaster?

EMILY

There is nothing to worry about, dear sister.

ANNE

Charlotte would not approve.

EMILY

It's a good thing I don't see her anywhere.

The other girls follow them, trading attempts to drink from the bottle. More giggling and joking.

Fog, if possible, drifts in. (Otherwise the lights dim further.)

They reach a different part of the grounds, near a graveyard.

ELIZABETH

I hate graveyards.

DONNA

What are we doing here?

GEORGINA

Shhh! You'll wake the dead!

Laughs from some of the other girls.

Emily assumes a perch somewhere.

EMILY

Are you ready to hear the tale?

GEORGINA

I told you there was a macabre story at the heart of this!

BRITTANY

I hope it's truly horrifying.

EMILY

Oh it is. You see, Roe Head School was not always a school for young, respectable, young ladies with impeccable moral character.

Laughs from the girls.

It was once the home of a cruel and wicked man. His eyes were black as night –

DONNA *(whispering)*

How does she know this?

ELIZABETH

Shhh!

EMILY

And once he had a great fortune, which he squandered through gambling and drink –

BRITTANY

He sounds perfect!

EMILY

His entire family disowned him, and he stayed alone at Roe Head, miserable and alone, every day he woke and endeavored to end his life, but he didn't have the courage. Some say that he sealed himself and what little was left of his fortune inside a wall, *alive*.

DONNA

Is he still alive?

GEORGINA

He was shut in a wall, dear. Fifty years ago.

DONNA

Oh.

EMILY

But if you look carefully at the space reserved for his grave, you will see –

They lean in –

ROARING, SEAMUS leaps out of the darkness, carrying a stick. He's the groundskeeper, and he's not happy his wine has been pilfered.

SEAMUS

WHAT ARE YE DOIN' OUT HERE YE WAYARD GIRLS!?

The girls SHRIEK and scatter and flee in all directions.

Seamus chases after them.

YE STEAL MY WINE?! IS THAT WHAT YE BEEN DOIN?! I'LL NOT BE TRIFLED WITH! I'LL GIT ALL O' YE AND SEND YE TO THE HEADMISTRESS!

They've all fled the scene.

Seamus is alone now.

Emily Brontë! This is yer doin, ain't it? I'll have ye this time! Wicked, inconstant girl! She-devil of the moors!

He stalks off, cursing.

I'll set the evil eye on ye, that's what I'll do!

He's gone.

Georgina, Anne, and Elizabeth emerge from a hiding spot near the graves.

ANNE

You think he's gone?

ELIZABETH

He's headed off that way.

ANNE

I nearly died of fright.

ELIZABETH

Georgina, are you all right?

GEORGINA

I am fine.

ANNE

Where did everyone else go?

ELIZABETH

He's going to tell the Headmistress.

GEORGINA

And tell her what? That he was on the moors at midnight searching for his spirits? No, I think not. I think…

The lights begin to change.

Do you feel that?

ELIZABETH

Feel what?

GEORGINA

There's a chill.

ANNE

Oh I am frightened.

GEORGINA

You don't think…?

The lights change eerily.
If there is fog, it intensifies.
Rising from behind the graves is the PHANTOM.
It speaks with an otherworldly, echoing voice.

PHANTOM

Trespassers! Interlopers! I claim my ancient rights! I walk in life after death! I see you with my dead eye! I bring you calamity and woe!

The girls shriek in fear.

GEORGINA

It's a phantom!

PHANTOM

Fall under my gaze two days hence and I shall stop up your blood! Your heart will wither in your chest, your teeth will rot from your jaws! Mine! This is mine! All that I see I shall claim!

The Phantom seems to lunge towards them as
Lights out suddenly.

Birds chirping.

Lights up during the daytime.

Anne and Emily's room. It's small and sparsely decorated. Anne, Emily, and Charlotte are fretting.

EMILY

We must do something.

CHARLOTTE

We cannot even be certain of what it was.

ANNE

I saw it, Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE

And it was in the dead of night and you had been consuming liquor!

ANNE

The other girls did, I didn't!

CHARLOTTE

Am I supposed to believe that?

ANNE

I'm not trying to convince you!

CHARLOTTE

You never should have been there in the first place! Neither of you should. I have had quite enough of your roaming about the countryside like a vagabond, refusing your dinner, belittling the school –

EMILY

I am constrained by this place –

CHARLOTTE

You are constrained solely by your lack of grace and refinement! How does it look to have the both of you engaged in this debacle whilst I am employed here? Do you wish me to lose my position? Shall we all return to father in disgrace?

ANNE

There was a phantom. I saw it.

EMILY

And we have the means to deal with it.

CHARLOTTE

What means? Whatever are you on about?

EMILY

Mother's relics. We need to –

CHARLOTTE

You are not seriously suggesting that we engage in dark magic to ascertain –

EMILY

It's not dark magic! You should know that.

CHARLOTTE

I forbid it.

EMILY

You are not our mother, you cannot forbid anything.

CHARLOTTE

I am the eldest, I am the one who must shoulder the responsibility –

ANNE

So we are to do nothing whilst the phantom terrorizes the children at the school?

CHARLOTTE

I see no one who is terrorized except a few girls who should have been fast asleep. Perhaps the phantom appeared because you were mischievous and saucy!

EMILY

You have never welcomed me here! I am a burden to you!

CHARLOTTE

Oh grab a hold of yourself, Emily! Not everything centers on your ego and peculiarities! Some of us are perfectly capable of attending school like virtuous young women!

ANNE

I think mother would want us to try something.

CHARLOTTE

I think you do not remember our mother. That is all.

She spots a small bowl of meat pudding on a dresser.

And what is this? Is this what you do with your dinner? Collect it in your room like a scrounger?

EMILY

I was hoping to entice some stray dogs to eat it. But they are quite sensible and refused.

CHARLOTTE

And so now you are saucy with me.

EMILY

If Mrs. Ronald cooked edible food, I would eat it. As is, I am using this meat pudding for its true purpose, which is to fling at invaders from France should they appear!

CHARLOTTE

Enough. This conversation is over. No more talk about phantoms. You stay in your rooms after dark. You stop wandering the countryside. And no more stray dogs! Surely that is what you saw in the middle of the night!

ANNE

Dogs don't speak!

Charlotte exits in a huff.

So that's that.

EMILY

That is most certainly not that. I have an idea.

ANNE

Is it likely to get us killed?

EMILY

Oh definitely not.
Probably not.
I have no idea, honestly.

Lights change. Emily and Anne set up candles in their room while Charlotte is elsewhere, wrangling students.

**If you need to perform this play with a smaller cast, all of the children's lines here may be cut and the actress playing Charlotte may speak her lines as if she is talking to others.*

CHARLOTTE

Come on then, in you go! Time for bed!

ELTON

Thomas struck me!

THOMAS

I did not! Elton lies!

ELTON

Thomas is a liar!

CHARLOTTE
Is anyone bleeding? No? Then shake hands and make up.

ELTON
I wouldn't shake hands with him if he were the last boy on earth!

DRIP *(referring to himself)*
Something is wrong.

CHARLOTTE
Drip, that wouldn't happen if you didn't probe your nose so frequently with your finger.

DRIP
It's wet.

CHARLOTTE
Yes I know it's wet, Drip, your nose is meant to be wet.

MARGOT
Why must we learn Latin? Latin is dead!

CHARLOTTE
Latin is the language of culture, it is –

MARGOT
Dead culture.

MARISOL
All the Latins are dead.

CHARLOTTE
I don't believe it's true that all the Latins are dead, Marisol. Regardless it is not polite to be so smug about it.
Bouncer bounces by.
Bouncer! You have feet. Keep them on the ground.

BOUNCER
If I keep both feet on the ground, I can't move. So there. Teacher is stupid.

CHARLOTTE
You are not a frog. Stop hopping. I will put lead in your shoes if I must.

ELTON
He hit me again!

THOMAS

No I didn't!

CHARLOTTE

Come on then! Move on, move on! Off to bed with you!

Charlotte ushers them all off-stage as the lights rise on Anne and Emily's room again. It's near midnight.
There are candles lit.

ANNE

Is it time?

EMILY

Nearly.

ANNE

I feel awful that we haven't included Charlotte.

EMILY

She had the opportunity to join us and declined.

ANNE

Perhaps some day we shall speak to mother this way?

EMILY

I hope to.

Emily finishes setting up.

ANNE

You hate it here, don't you?

EMILY

And you don't.

ANNE

I like the lessons. Sometimes. And the other girls.

EMILY

I feel like my soul has been placed in a vise. They crank and hope to squeeze me into some acceptable shape – abrade my rough edges, shear off any outgrowths of imagination or fancy, till I am flat and dull like the others. In my heart, I am enormous, like a great cloud lit by the sunset. Every day here they try to crush me – Miss Woolton, the other girls, even Charlotte. Why can't I think the way I want to? Why can't I go where my spirit takes me?

ANNE

Skipping Forward

WHUMP.
Something larger happens.
If you can manage it, a book might fall from a bookshelf or leap into the air.

EMILY

Someone is here! I can feel a presence!
Everything happens at once.
The lights flare very brightly and then simmer back to normal.
All the wind and noise cease.

EMILY

Are you with us?
A loud gurgling noise assaults them. Anne recoils in terror.

VOICE

Grrgahghghghwhs…

ANNE

Ah!
Anne leaps onto the bed.

EMILY

We are not alone.

ANNE

Oh I don't like this at all!

EMILY

Spirit, have you joined us?

VOICE

Grgargggrggfgullllll…

ANNE

It's coming from over there!
Emily tries to triangulate the source of the voice.

EMILY

Can you hear us?
A throaty, gurgling voice replies loudly.

VOICE

Yessss….

ANNE

Oh dear. Again, sorry to bother you!

VOICE

It's very dark.

The voice clears its throat.

ANNE

It's coming from the meat pudding!

Emily scurries over to look.

*The MEAT PUDDING on top of the dresser is beginning to move.**

**The Meat Pudding should be played by a puppeteer inside the dresser, manipulating its surface – much of this doesn't need to be terribly visible to the audience, but if the audience caught a glimpse of the surface of the pudding burbling and shifting, that would be awesome.*

MEAT PUDDING

Hellllooooo.

ANNE

Did you put the phantom in the meat pudding?

EMILY

You were the one who suggested it take a pleasing shape! And I must say, this is *not* pleasing at all!

ANNE

You surely don't think this my fault!

EMILY

Spirit, what has disturbed you?

MEAT PUDDING

Wasn't disturbed afore, but I did saw a rabbit with three ears once. Highly disturbing. When I was alive. Now I'm dead.

ANNE

Who were you in life?

MEAT PUDDING

Name's Jacoby. I was a farmer. Grew crops. The soil's quite poor so it was a difficult life – I remember a lot of weeds.

EMILY

Oh dear. We may have contacted the wrong spirit.

ANNE

Are you familiar with any angry spirit who might be haunting us?

MEAT PUDDING

Mostly peas. I loved raising peas. A good pea is more valuable than gold. Why I had a recipe for pea soup that would -

EMILY

Excuse me, Jacoby, is there anyone else there?

MEAT PUDDING

Where?

EMILY

Who might be crossing over from the other side. An angry spirit. A phantom?

MEAT PUDDING

I'll check. Once I can move. But I don't seem to have feet.

EMILY

Not here. *There.*

MEAT PUDDING

My father's name was Early. Cause he came early. Ironically, he was often late. People would say, `Oh there's Early, late again.'

EMILY

Right.

ANNE

Can we send him back?

EMILY

Thank you for time, Mr. Jacoby. We seem to have contacted you in error.

MEAT PUDDING

I understand. Don't want to talk to me. I'm not what you would call interesting. Just go home, Jacoby. No one wants to hear your stories about the weather. I once got hit with a hailstone so large it knocked an eye out of my head.

ANNE

How did…?

MEAT PUDDING

I popped it back in afterwards. An eye is just an orb. You can pop them in or out just as you like.

ANNE

I don't think that's true.

EMILY

Thank you for your visit, Jacoby. We no longer require you. Please go home.

MEAT PUDDING

Of course. How do I do that?

EMILY

One moment.

Emily and Anne huddle away from the pudding.

Do you have any thoughts?

ANNE

How should I know anything?! This was your idea!

EMILY

I – thought it would be more self-explanatory, to be honest.

ANNE

Just… get rid of him.

EMILY

I could… bury him?

ANNE

You mean throw him in the rubbish?

EMILY

Or – I could feed him to a dog. I lied earlier, the dogs do love the meat pudding. They would be most pleased.

ANNE

And what happens if he doesn't die?

EMILY

He's already dead –

ANNE

But what if he continues to exist? *Inside* the dog?

EMILY

Oh.

ANNE

And what if then he moves *outside* the dog?

EMILY

Oh.

ANNE

You would have talking poo.

MEAT PUDDING

I'm still here you know. I can hear you. Even though I don't have ears.

EMILY

Right.

Emily finds a lid and puts it on the pudding.

Problem solved.

ANNE

Now what?

EMILY

I have another idea.

Lights change.

ELIZABETH

And then I started weeping, right there at the piano.

DONNA

Your poor thing.

ELIZABETH

The notes seemed to transform themselves into shrieking ghosts and my fingers froze – Headmistress thought I was crying over my failure to produce music. `You mustn't weep over the piano, dear, it can't do any good.'

DONNA

I've often wept over the piano.

ELIZABETH

It wasn't the piano that caused my crying! It was the memory of –

DONNA

Oh yes.

ELIZABETH

I can't sleep. I see it whenever I close my eyes.

DONNA

Perhaps the best way to sleep is to think of your lessons. Whenever I'm learning Maths I get the most restful sleep.

ELIZABETH

Donna, I can't go on like this. What if I fall ill? What if they send me home?

DONNA

They shan't! And you won't fall ill. You are the most robust girl I know. And I mean that in the best possible way. They could attach a plow to you.

Elizabeth gives her a look

They won't! Because you're beautiful.

ELIZABETH

I don't know what to do.

DONNA

It will be all right. No more visiting graveyards.

ELIZABETH

No.

DONNA

May I embrace you?

ELIZABETH

Of course.

Donna hugs Elizabeth and holds on to her.

DONNA

When I was little I once saw a ghost. Afterwards everyone told me it was an owl and I was imagining things. But I think of owls – they don't know they're scary, they're just owls going about their business. I suppose to mice they're terrifying. You can't even hear an owl when they fly, did you know that? Their wings are silent. So a mouse might simply be wandering about in a field, doing mouse things, and out of nowhere an owl will pierce them with its talons and then bite their head off. So I suppose they have good reason to be scared of owls.

ELIZABETH

Is this digression supposed to make me feel better?

DONNA

There are many real things in the world one ought to be afraid of. We shouldn't add more. And if the ghost appears again I shall fight it to protect you.

ELIZABETH

You? Fight it?!

DONNA

Oh yes. I will yell and throw things. We are not mice.

Georgina enters –

GEORGINA

This is a fine sight.

DONNA

Be gentle, Georgina. Elizabeth is suffering from her encounter with the phantom.

GEORGINA

I was there as well, you don't see me blubbering like an infant.

DONNA

Your family has no money, you are used to seeing horrible things.

Georgina gives her a look

I'm sorry! That wasn't kind.

GEORGINA

Your mouth gets ahead of your mind sometimes, Donna.

DONNA

It does.

ELIZABETH

How can you stand it, though? The sight of that thing?

GEORGINA

It was terrifying, wasn't it?

ELIZABETH

I fear I shall catch my death.

DONNA

Shh! You are very robust.

GEORGINA

Have you told the Headmistress?

ELIZABETH

About the phantom?!

GEORGINA
It was on school grounds, she should know about it.

ELIZABETH
I would never!

GEORGINA
What if it comes back? What if it isn't limited to the cemetery, what if it takes to invading our rooms at night?

ELIZABETH
Oh! I hadn't thought of that!

GEORGINA
The school should close. We should all go home.

ELIZABETH
I hope not. I am thoroughly unwanted at home. Three brothers and a father who hasn't the slightest idea what to do with me except order me about and expect me to clean the house and cook dinner. I am more servant than child there. I couldn't bear to go back.

DONNA
You won't need to. We shall face this phantom like soldiers.

GEORGINA
We shall do no such thing. If you won't tell the Headmistress, then I shall. Someone needs to do something.

Lights change.

Elsewhere, GEORGE enters. He's a nervous young man, dressed as best as he can, and holding a small collection of flowers. He's nearly hyperventilating, pacing back and forth.

Charlotte enters, dressed more for a date.

CHARLOTTE
Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Wadsworth.

GEORGE
Please, call me George. I hope we shall be very intimate with each other.
As in fast friends.
As in friendly.
Not in the other sense. Yet.
And may I refer to you as Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

I suppose.

GEORGE

Excellent. I must say the portrait I received of you did not do justice to your immense beauty.

CHARLOTTE

You received a portrait of me?

GEORGE

Your brother sent it. A sketch really. But quite well-done. He is most talented.

CHARLOTTE

My brother sent you a sketch of me?

GEORGE

It was quite small. And you are quite large. I mean – dash it all, that isn't what I meant to say. You are much bigger than how he portrayed you. Which is good. Which is wonderful. I would not want to marry a leprechaun.

CHARLOTTE

Are you suggesting that you initially believed that my brother's miniature portrait of me was meant to be life-sized?

GEORGE

I don't know what I am suggesting, to be honest. I am merely flabbergasted by your beauty.

CHARLOTTE

Flabbergasted.

GEORGE

Right. Shall I recite a poem I have composed about your beauty?

CHARLOTTE

I'd rather you didn't.

GEORGE

It shall remain a surprise then. At any moment this evening, I may pull it out.

CHARLOTTE

Oh dear.

GEORGE

So tell me about yourself.

CHARLOTTE

My mother is dead.

GEORGE

I'm sorry to hear that.

CHARLOTTE

As is my eldest sister.

GEORGE

Quite sad.

CHARLOTTE

As is another sister.

GEORGE

Yes. Well. Perhaps we should talk about something else then.

CHARLOTTE

What is your family like?

GEORGE

Mostly dead as well. I do have one sister whom I care for very much, even though she can be quite disagreeable.

CHARLOTTE

Ah it seems we have something in common!

GEORGE

And you are hoping to become headmistress some day?

CHARLOTTE

Whatever gave you that impression?

GEORGE

That is the scuttlebutt.

CHARLOTTE

Whose butt is scuttling that?

GEORGE

It's in the air. So you do not mean to be headmistress?

CHARLOTTE

I am nineteen years old, Mr. Wadsworth, I have not yet resigned myself to a life in education. I fear that if the small children are any example, they will drive me mad and I will be locked up in an attic.

GEORGE

That sounds dreadful.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, small children are dreadful.

GEORGE

No the attic part.

CHARLOTTE

I suppose that as well. Although one assumes the children wouldn't be there, so.

GEORGE

Well I am a progressive man and believe that a woman may enter any occupation she chooses, whether that is education or owning a small bakery. If you were – if we were to –

CHARLOTTE

To what?

GEORGE

To – become engaged – I would not forbid you from becoming headmistress. Even though many men would.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Wadsworth, we have just met seven minutes ago. Are you proposing marriage?

GEORGE

Are you familiar with Romeo and Juliet?

CHARLOTTE

They both die.

GEORGE

Right. Well yes that is not a grand example.

CHARLOTTE

Romeo and Juliet is a fine example. When one chooses a mate too hastily, one is doomed to murdering relatives, drinking poison, and stabbing.

GEORGE

I must confess I have not read Romeo and Juliet.

CHARLOTTE

I gave you an accurate summary.

Emily enters.

EMILY

Is this him?

GEORGE

Oh! Hello! I am George Wadsworth, pleased to make your acquaintance.

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing here?

EMILY

And I am Emily Brontë, Charlotte's sister and confidante.

CHARLOTTE

Emily, you are not needed.

EMILY

Would that that were true, dear sister. However, I have recently made progress on the thing we were working on, and I require something that belonged to our late mother.

GEORGE

Oh – um –

CHARLOTTE

I cannot imagine anything of mother's that you would require at the moment.

EMILY

That is because you lack imagination. I'll just be a moment. Then you may continue with your…

GEORGE *(simultaneous)*

Date.

CHARLOTTE *(simultaneous)*

Meeting.

EMILY

Yes. Don't mind me. I am not here.

Emily begins looking for something.

GEORGE

Yes, well, I thought we might go for a carriage ride in the country.

Skipping Forward

ANNE

Did you retrieve them?

EMILY

It was hardly a challenge. Charlotte's suitor was there.

ANNE

Was he handsome?

EMILY

I did not have time to consider such things.

ANNE

Perhaps he looked like a Greek God.

EMILY

If he did, it was one of the crusty ones – Poseidon or some such.

ANNE

I should have gone. I should have liked to have spied him. Do you think it's love?

EMILY

Absolutely not.

ANNE

It could be love, though. Imagine it: Charlotte is swept off her feet by a mysterious suitor; perhaps he has fought in a war, or been a pirate in his youth.

EMILY

He is still in his youth. If he were a pirate previously, it would have been in his infancy. I don't think Charlotte is likely to be drawn to any infant buccaneers.

ANNE

But our stories are beginning. Haven't we always dreamed of that? That *something* would finally happen? Adventure? Romance? Mystery?

EMILY

I will leave the romance to Charlotte – at the moment I am more interested in the mystery.

She takes out the object she pilfered – it's a pair of reading glasses on a chain.

ANNE

Do you think they'll work?

EMILY

I don't know.

ANNE

Charlotte said –

EMILY

I don't care what Charlotte said. She had her chance.

ANNE

I do hope they don't drive you mad. You know what they say.

EMILY

Some people think me already mad.

ANNE

They are wrong. You are merely sensitive.

EMILY

That's nearly the same thing. Here goes.

Emily puts on the glasses.
The lights change, become surreal.
Perhaps a spotlight on Emily. We are now seeing things through her perspective.

ANNE

Can you see anything unusual?

Mr. JACOBY is standing nearby, a ghost. He looks like a farmer, ghostly white and pale, perhaps glowing with a strange light.

EMILY

Oh!

ANNE

What is it?

MR. JACOBY

`Ello!

EMILY

I forgot you were still here.

MR. JACOBY

Nice day, in'it? I think! Can't really tell as I'm shut up in a bowl of some kind. Now where was I? Oh yes, my peas. My pride and joy. I find a good pea is sweet on the breath and has a nice snap to it.

EMILY

Mr. Jacoby –

ANNE

It's Mr. Jacoby?! You should apologize for dooming him to eternal torment.

EMILY

I am handling this, Anne.

MR. JACOBY

I told my first wife I preferred the peas over her – that is how I got my second wife.

EMILY

Yes, wonderful –

A loud RAP on the door startles them.

Ah!

ANNE

Oh no!

Brittany enters angrily.

BRITTANY

Headmistress says we are all waiting for you and it's exceedingly rude to remain in your rooms like clerics. We are all hungry and you are abysmal.

She sees Emily

Why are you wearing glasses?

ANNE

She can't see.

BRITTANY

You're blind?

EMILY

No I –

BRITTANY

I wouldn't care if you were blind as long as you came to dinner. We are not allowed to proceed until everyone is seated and the goose is getting cold. I am *not* eating cold goose.

She leaves.

JACOBY

Course it was all farms back in those days. I worked for the Pierces, who owned most of this here land.

Emily takes her glasses off.

The lights change.
Mr. Jacoby is gone.
Emily exhales.

ANNE

They work?

EMILY

Apparently. Now let's see what else we can see.

BRITTANY *(off-stage, yelling)*

Don't trouble yourselves, it's ONLY GOOSE!

GEORGINA *(off-stage, yelling)*

YOU NEEDN'T BRAY LIKE A DONKEY, BRITTANY!

Lights change to the great hall.

Only the older girls are in attendance – at present Georgina and Donna are seated while Elizabeth is finishing setting the table.

Anne and Emily enter.

MARGARET *(to Anne and Emily)*

There you are. We were about to dine without you.

BRITTANY

I was hoping they wouldn't come.

MARGARET

Miss O'Donnell, though it sometimes to be desired, it is rude to hope a dinner companion won't arrive.

BRITTANY

She's not a companion, though.

ELIZABETH

Are you feeling well, Emily?

EMILY

Yes, thank you. And you?

GEORGINA

Elizabeth is greatly agitated.

MARGARET

No one is agitated. Everyone is well.

ELIZABETH

Yes, Headmistress.

DONNA

Is Miss Brontë joining us?

MARGARET

She is indisposed this evening.

ANNE

She has a date.

DONNA

Oh!

ANNE

I hear he's stunning. Like a Greek God.

EMILY *(overlapping)*

I said no such thing!

ELIZABETH *(overlapping)*

I should like to see a Greek God!

MARGARET

No one is seeing any Greek Gods except in books.

ELIZABETH

There are drawings that are quite illuminating.

MARGARET

A woman of character does not look at drawings, or imagine any such drawings. And we will not discuss Miss Brontë's date only to say that I'm certain she's comporting herself with dignity and character. As will all of you, should the day come when you will be courted by a man. In the meantime, no one should be thinking about Greek Gods or anything Greek for that matter.

DONNA

Have you ever been to Greece, Headmistress?

MARGARET

Certainly not. It's far too sunny and pleasant there for decent people.

BRITTANY

Where is the dinner?

MARGARET

Patience, Miss O'Connell!

Seamus enters, carrying a platter with a goose upon it –
It still has its head.
The girls make happy, hungry noises.

DONNA

It's exquisite!

SEAMUS

Aye, she's a fat one all right. Slaughtered her meself.

Seamus eyes the girls as he talks.

Caught her stealin' from me and I took me revenge.

MARGARET

The goose stole from you?

SEAMUS

Aye. She was rootin' about in my things. Real naughty-like. And now we're havin' her for dinner.

GEORGINA

Perhaps you should tell us what the goose was trying to steal.

MARGARET

Geese can't steal. They are birds.

SEAMUS

Aye they're birds all right. Naughty birds that ought not to be stealin.

GEORGINA

That will be enough, Seamus.

SEAMUS

You aren't the headmistress here, girl.

MARGARET

That will be enough, Seamus.

SEAMUS

Of course, Ma'am.

Seamus exits

DONNA

He seems disturbed this evening.

GEORGINA

Yes, Donna. I think he might be. Why do you suppose that is?

DONNA

No idea.

Emily is putting on her glasses.

GEORGINA

Elizabeth, do you know?

ELIZABETH

I don't know anything.

GEORGINA

Well –

Everything FREEZES.
Emily has the glasses on.
A spotlight on her. The world is strange.
Light on the goose.

It slowly turns its head towards Emily.
Emily shrieks and leaps backwards.

It speaks.

GOOSE

I was murdered.

EMILY

Murdered?!

GOOSE

Avenge my most fowl and unnatural murder.

EMILY

But I –

GOOSE

My chicks are motherless! Man is my enemy! Avenge me! Raise my children as your own! I DEMAND JUSTICE!

Emily stumbles backwards, removing her glasses and the light changes back to normal.
The goose stops moving.

Everyone is staring at Emily.

MARGARET

Miss Brontë! Such a display is –

EMILY

I have to go!

She runs out.
Margaret is speechless.
A moment.

BRITTANY

I can have her portion, yes?

The lights change. Night.
We are outside again. Near the cemetery from the beginning of the play.

Emily stumbles out – she reaches out and puts the glasses on her face again.
The lights go strange again.

CLIFF, a teenage boy about her age, a bit of a ragamuffin, appears, leaning against the wall. He is a ghost.

EMILY

Oh!

Cliff freaks out

CLIFF

Ah!

EMILY

Aaaah!

CLIFF

Aaaaaaaaahhh!

EMILY

It's all right – my name's Emily –

CLIFF

I don't care what your name is, it's rude to sneak up on one like that.

EMILY

I wasn't sneaking –

CLIFF

You were most definitely sneaking! I was perfectly content to be thoroughly unnoticed, and then you rudely decided to notice me.

EMILY

Who are you?

CLIFF

I am none of your concern! I don't need to answer any of your impertinent questions –

EMILY

Have you been haunting the school?

CLIFF

What school?

EMILY

This school.

CLIFF

This is a school?

EMILY

Yes and there is a phantom haunting it – perhaps that phantom is you.

CLIFF

Do I look like a phantom to you?

EMILY

You do have a rather ghostly pallor about you.

CLIFF

Because I am a ghost! But I am no phantom!

EMILY

I fail to see the difference.

CLIFF

Because you are both rude and stupid.

EMILY

You are the rude one. Perhaps I shall trap you. Do you know Jacoby? I have entombed his spirit in a meat pudding and I could do the same to you!

CLIFF

Jacoby.

EMILY

He's very fond of peas.

CLIFF
Oh yes. I believe he was before my time, so to speak.

EMILY
So you are more recently dead then?

CLIFF
Every word out of your mouth is an insult or a provocation.

EMILY
Because you answer nothing.

CLIFF
I am beyond the need to answer questions from a pretty girl.

EMILY
Pretty?

CLIFF
You spoil it by being both stupid and impertinent.

EMILY
I apologize if I startled you.

CLIFF
Startled me?! I am a –

EMILY
I apologize. I am hoping to discover who or what is haunting us. If it is you, and you are merely pretending not to be the phantom, please inform me what I may do to placate you.

CLIFF
Stand on your head.

EMILY
Stand on my - ?

CLIFF
Stand on your head and I will be placated. My righteous rage shall abate and all will know peace.

EMILY
If I stand on my head?

Skipping Forward

Is that what you believe? Everyone is doomed for some measure of torment? That's a sad perspective for one so young and full of life.

EMILY

Will you help me?

CLIFF

Will you come speak with me again? And perhaps stand on your head?

EMILY

No!

CLIFF

Just speak – then?

We hear Seamus before we can see him.

SEAMUS

You there! I spot ye! I spot ye all right!

CLIFF

You have been spotted, it appears.

EMILY

So it seems.

CLIFF

If you visit me again I will gladly assist you.

EMILY

Very well.

Emily removes her glasses as Seamus enters.
The lights change. Cliff is gone.

SEAMUS

Out and about again like a regular vagabond, aren't ye?

EMILY

I was doing no such thing. I am getting some night air after witnessing a crime this evening.

SEAMUS

What are ye talkin' about?

EMILY

The goose, Mr. Seamus.

SEAMUS

The goose?!

EMILY

Aye, the goose. I must ask you: where are her chicks?

SEAMUS

None o' yer business.

EMILY

You cruelly struck down their mother and orphaned the chicks and now you hope to possess them for your own.

SEAMUS

They're chicks.

EMILY

And they are deserving of love and care. I insist that you deliver them to me at once.

SEAMUS

I'll do no such thing ye wayward girl. I'll give ye to the headmistress and she'll whip ye within an inch of yer awful life.

He grabs a hold on her –

EMILY

Unhand me, sir or I shall be forced to summon all the dark powers at my disposal!

He laughs –

This is your last chance! Ghouls and monsters shall dine on your bones!

CHARLOTTE *(entering)*

Seamus, what are you doing?

Charlotte enters, somewhat discombobulated, with George trailing.

SEAMUS

Ah Miss Brontë I found this wicked, unprincipled girl –

CHARLOTTE

My sister –

SEAMUS

Yes, your… she was up to no good –

CHARLOTTE

Going for a stroll?

SEAMUS

More of a ramble.

CHARLOTTE

And you found it necessary to manhandle her as if she were a pickpocket? My sister has a delicate constitution –

Emily coughs

She is exceedingly sensitive –

EMILY

It's true –

CHARLOTTE

And requires fresh air for the maintenance of her healthful bloom.

EMILY

I cannot bloom without it.

SEAMUS

Of course, Miss.

CHARLOTTE

Do go in and retire for the evening.

EMILY

Oh and I will require those chicks in the morning. For my healthful bloom.

Seamus exits, grumbling under his breath.

GEORGE

Miss Brontë, that was most enchanting.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, well –

GEORGE

I can see your character and authority are quite suited to your future profession.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Wadsworth –

GEORGE

George –

CHARLOTTE

It was a… not unpleasant journey with you this evening –

GEORGE

Excellent –

CHARLOTTE

But I am fatigued and I fear I am much bruised from the constant jostling of your carriage.

GEORGE

Yes the carriage is… turbulent.

CHARLOTTE

So I must wish you good night.

GEORGE

Good night.
He smiles –
If you have time for the poem –

CHARLOTTE

No.

GEORGE

Right. Good night, sweet Charlotte. My heart is full of Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE

I said no poetry!
George exits.
A moment.
I don't want to hear it.

EMILY

Hear what?

CHARLOTTE

Your opinions on Mr. Wadsworth.

EMILY

I have no opinions on Mr. Wadsworth. Anne, on the other hand, has many, many opinions and is eager to let you know them.

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing out here?

EMILY

Waiting for you, obviously.

CHARLOTTE

You were not.

EMILY

And why do you care?

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps some gratitude is in order.

EMILY

For rescuing me from Seamus? As if I couldn't handle that brute?

She starts to leave

CHARLOTTE

You are not invulnerable, Emily.

EMILY

That's right I have a delicate constitution. I certainly shouldn't be hunting the phantom.

CHARLOTTE

You are doing what?!

Charlotte chases Emily off

Lights change.

CHARLOTTE

No one has seen this phantom except for Anne and a few excitable girls. There is no evidence that it exists – The truth of the matter is that it is nothing but a figment of the imagination, a bit of childish nonsense that has gone too far. In the morning it will be over and we will return to normal.

The other girls and Margaret have gathered after dinner.

GEORGINA

I have something I must confess. As does Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH

I have nothing to say.

MARGARET

Well, girl, what is it? Speak up.

GEORGINA

I fear we have disturbed something.

ELIZABETH
Oh don't say it Georgina! We don't know what we saw!

GEORGINA
I know what I saw! And I know that it wasn't alive!

DONNA
You are scaring her.

GEORGINA
I don't care – the truth is…

MARGARET
The truth is what.

GEORGINA
We… saw something. In the cemetery. At night.

ANNE
I believe it was a spirit.

MARGARET
A spirit? What nonsense is this? And what were you doing out at night?

GEORGINA
It was Emily – she forced us to go.

ANNE
No she did not!

GEORGINA
Anne is covering for her because she is her sister –

BRITTANY
Emily is most wicked –

DONNA
That's not true –

BRITTANY
She stole a bottle of wine from Seamus and forced us to drink it! I spat it out because it was most foul but Emily tossed the bottle into the graveyard.

GEORGINA
She *roused* something.

ELIZABETH

You are liars. You are all liars.

GEORGINA

But you saw it, Elizabeth. You saw what happened. Tell the Headmistress.

MARGARET

Well? Did you see this… spirit?

ELIZABETH

There was a phantom. It cursed us.

MARGARET

Have you all gone mad? There is no –

The lights begin to change.
A strange sound begins.
Perhaps fog.

GEORGINA

Shhh!

MARGARET

Don't shush me girl I will batter your hide like a drum.

GEORGINA

I feel cold.

BRITTANY

I do too.

They look around.
The Phantom RISES –

PHANTOM

One day has passed! One more remains! Agony and woe await you! My dead eyes will see your evisceration! I am the phantom! I am nightmare made flesh! Trespass and feel my wrath!

Shrieks as the Phantom SWOOPS
and

Blackout.

End Act one.

Act Two

The next morning.
Birds chirping.
Chaos.
Charlotte is attempting to wrangle the younger students, who are all going in opposite directions.

**Once again, if you need to perform this play with a smaller cast, all of the children's lines may be cut and the actress playing Charlotte may speak her lines as if she is talking to others.*

CHARLOTTE
No need to panic! We are moving in an orderly fashion with a small modicum of haste.
Elton sprints through.

ELTON
Chaos reigns!

CHARLOTTE
Chaos does not reign, Elton. Wherever have you heard that expression?

ELTON
From Teacher.

THOMAS
I shall wear my trousers on my head!
Thomas begins unbuttoning his trousers.

CHARLOTTE
You shall do no such thing! Put your trousers back on, Thomas.

ELTON
I am the Lord of Misrule!

MARGOT
Is it true we're all going to die?

CHARLOTTE
No. It's not true, Margot.

MARISOL
My Uncle says everyone dies.

CHARLOTTE

Well, yes, everyone dies *eventually*.

MARGOT

So we are going to die?

CHARLOTTE

At some point in the future we all will die, but it is – Thomas, a gentleman does not remove his trousers in public.

THOMAS

What if I put my shirt on my legs?

Thomas begins to try this as well.

CHARLOTTE

Putting your shirt on your legs is equally inappropriate.

Bouncer bounces through –

Bouncer! No!

Bouncer stops.

Cease your endless *hopping!*

Bouncer is sad.

BOUNCER

What if the only thing giving my life meaning is bouncing?

Charlotte can't think of anything to say.

CHARLOTTE

I am sorry. You are more than an action my dear. I am… flustered.

DRIP

As am I.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, I know, Drip.

DRIP

Because it's wet.

MARISOL

And because we're going to die.

MARGOT

I heard the older girls say that a wicked spirit was going to eat us – that's why we're going home.

ELTON

We're going home?!

CHARLOTTE

Letters have been written home to your guardians apprising them of… the situation. Gather your things – there shall be a brief interlude in the schooling and we shall resume in short order.

MARGOT

If we're not dead.

CHARLOTTE

If we're not dead.

Charlotte starts shooing them off-stage.

Come on then, quickly now! Let's go, let's go!

The younger students exit as Margaret enters.

MARGARET

Miss Brontë – when one is confronting chaos, one must be a beacon of order.

CHARLOTTE

Of course.

MARGARET

Would you characterize your behavior as a beacon of order?

CHARLOTTE

Surely in a situation such as this some leniency is expected.

MARGARET

It is precisely in difficult situations that order is most needed.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, Headmistress.

MARGARET

Which brings me to the subject of your sister.

CHARLOTTE

Emily.

MARGARET

Yes, Emily. I believe she is the root of the current contagion.

CHARLOTTE

Surely not.

MARGARET
Both Georgina Pierce and Brittany O'Connell have sworn that it was her actions that disturbed the spirit.

CHARLOTTE
Nonsense! How could they be certain of - ?

MARGARET
You must admit that Emily conducts herself in the most unladylike manner – her constant rambling, foul words, odd moods – she led the other girls into the graveyard on a lark –

CHARLOTTE
Emily does not intend –

MARGARET
At dinner the other night she became agitated and reacted as if she had seen a ghost, I do not find it far-fetched that she has brought this calamity upon us.

CHARLOTTE
Emily has a good heart, Headmistress.

MARGARET
And a dark spirit.

CHARLOTTE
No.

MARGARET
I can see it in the girl's eyes.

CHARLOTTE
You are mistaken.

MARGARET
I am never mistaken, Miss Brontë. This school is in a precarious position; if we cannot reopen quickly I fear our creditors will foreclose. Your plan then, of succeeding me, would be in ruins.

CHARLOTTE
It is *your* plan that I succeed you –

MARGARET
Which you have readily agreed to.

CHARLOTTE
Why does everyone believe that I am destined for this position?

MARGARET

What else will you do with your life, Charlotte? I have placed George Wadsworth in your path –

CHARLOTTE

I have no desire to marry George Wadsworth.

MARGARET

Then you are as foolish as your sister. He has little income it is true, but he is likely the best you could hope for in your situation.

CHARLOTTE

What situation?

MARGARET

The worst thing a woman can do is overvalue herself. Esteeming yourself too highly is a guarantee for misery. It's what Emily does and why she will never know the joy of a happy marriage.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps she esteems herself accurately.

Margaret scoffs

MARGARET

I have written to your father. She is to return to Haworth.

CHARLOTTE

You are expelling her?

MARGARET

I am sending her home. Permanently. For the benefit of all.

CHARLOTTE

And if that doesn't quiet the phantom?

MARGARET

Then all of us will join her.

Lights change.

Elizabeth and Donna are packing their meager belongings.

DONNA

You could come with me, you know.

ELIZABETH

Skipping Forward

We are mourning the demise of the school.

ANNE

The school is not dead.

ELIZABETH

It will be. I am not certain I should ever be allowed to return if I go home.

DONNA

Her father is an ogre. The worst ogre. The king of ogres. He's probably mean to other ogres.

Elizabeth smiles a little at that –

ANNE

Are you certain he's sent for you? Perhaps he's too busy tormenting puppies to bother reading his letters.

ELIZABETH

I don't know. I find if I always anticipate the worst, it's less of a shock when it arrives.

ANNE

Perhaps there is hope, then.

DONNA

I think she should come with me. My father is nearly dead. Which makes him kind. Or at least forgetful, which is mostly the same thing.

ELIZABETH

I cannot go with you, Donna.

DONNA

What if we concocted a story and said you had fled into the countryside? Anne could write it out, she's always inventing stories.

ELIZABETH

It would need to be more than written.

DONNA

We could memorize it, like a play. Only I am terrible at remembering things so I should be given a small role.

ANNE

I could write it.

ELIZABETH

What would you write?

ANNE
Do you wish to flee with a handsome young man, or are you striking out for adventure?

ELIZABETH
Can it be both?

ANNE
Certainly. I'm overfond of pirates in my stories, I must tell you. His name was Captain Blood –

ELIZABETH
This is who I fall in love with?

ANNE
No no no – Captain Blood is attempting to kidnap you, and you are rescued by a second pirate, whose name is John.

ELIZABETH
John the pirate?

ANNE
It's an alias. Because he is actually royalty in disguise –

ELIZABETH
Ohhh.

ANNE
And if your father chased after you, he would find that John the pirate has the readiest blade in the Seven Seas.

DONNA
I like him. We hide you in the cellar when your father arrives and tell him the tale.

ELIZABETH
I appreciate the attempt –

DONNA
No no no it will work.

ELIZABETH
It is a good thing to imagine a world better than our own.

ANNE
I agree. Let us hide you.

DONNA

Or perhaps I shall simply fight him. I was ready to fight the phantom, surely I could defeat a man of flesh and blood.

ELIZABETH

He's not flesh and blood. He's thorns and armor.

DONNA

Then I will pierce that with my ready wit.

Elizabeth laughs

ANNE

Pierce.

DONNA

Hm?

ANNE

You said pierce.

DONNA

Yes it's a verb.

ANNE

It's a name. Georgina Pierce.

DONNA

Right.

ANNE

Where have I heard it before?

She realizes

I must go.

DONNA

But we are not done with the story!

ANNE

I will help you, but first I must speak with my sister.

She runs out –

DONNA

Which one?

Lights change.

The cemetery.
Fog.
Emily and Anne enter, looking about.

ANNE
It feels odd to be in this place when the sun is shining.

EMILY
Would you prefer to return at midnight?

ANNE
No.

EMILY
A ghost may appear in the daylight just as readily as the moonlight.

ANNE
But the phantom has only appeared at night.

EMILY
True. You look over there and I'll look over here.

ANNE
May I have the glasses?

EMILY
No need for the glasses yet.

ANNE
But I should like to have them, to see what may be seen.

EMILY
A great many things may be seen, that to doesn't mean one ought to see them.

ANNE
Now you sound like Charlotte. Oh please impart another life lesson to me, dear sister.

EMILY
I am doing it for your own good –

ANNE
That is clearly Charlotte's voice you're using.

EMILY
Do you wish to hear the cries of every dead creature? A squirrel? A mouse? A pigeon?

ANNE

Sure.

EMILY

No you don't.

ANNE

Fine. You wouldn't even know about this if it weren't for me. I was the one who remembered what Jacoby said.

EMILY

Pierces. Yes.

ANNE

Do you suppose Georgina is related?

EMILY

We shall soon find out.

Emily puts on the glasses.
The lights change.
The world gets stranger.
GHOSTS appear, near the tombstones.

ANNE

Do you see anything?

Emily backs away from the spirits.

EMILY

There are… presences here.

ANNE

Are there many of them?

EMILY

Be quiet, Anne.

Cliff emerges, behind Emily, startling her.

CLIFF

Looking for my tombstone?

EMILY

Cliff!

ANNE *(to Emily)*

Who is Cliff?

EMILY

I wasn't looking for your tombstone –

CLIFF

May I show it to you?

ANNE *(to Emily)*

Who are you speaking to?

EMILY

Be quiet. I am speaking to the spirit of a boy who died in the flower of his youth.

ANNE

His name is Cliff?

EMILY

Yes his name is Cliff.

ANNE

He sounds dangerous. Like one might fall off him.

EMILY

Anne!

ANNE

Is he handsome?

EMILY

He is dead!

ANNE

What is his story?

EMILY

I am hoping to discover that if you would simply shut your curious mouth.

ANNE

Very well, but I shall require updates.

CLIFF

Are you finished?

EMILY

Can you hear my sister?

CLIFF

Dimly. I see her as if drenched in shadow, as I perceive the entirety of the living world.

He finds his tombstone.

Here.

EMILY

You were fifteen. No family name?

CLIFF

I was an orphan. Rescued from the street by the kindness of an older gentleman.

EMILY

Your benefactor. Was his name Pierce?

CLIFF

Edgar Pierce. Yes.

EMILY

And he was a cruel man who wasted a fortune in drink?

CLIFF

You are thinking of his son.

EMILY

Your brother, then?

CLIFF

We were never brothers. Ever. He was a jealous and bitter rival for my father's affections, even though I was as low as dirt in the house – once the old man died, I was regarded as little more than vermin and treated as such.

EMILY

Is that why you are restless?

CLIFF

You are full of questions.

EMILY

You said you would help me.

CLIFF

If you stood on your head.

EMILY

Which I did!

CLIFF

It was a poor attempt. I hope you have a better one in you.

EMILY

Tell me the story and I shall stand on my head.

ANNE *(to Emily)*

Stand on your head?

EMILY

I told you to be silent! Stand there and be quiet – and don't go too near any of the other tombstones, there are spirits at each one.

ANNE

There are?

EMILY

Of course there are, that's why we're here!

ANNE

Oh dear.

Anne approaches a spirit, not seeing it.

EMILY

You're nearly touching one!

ANNE

Ah!

Anne backs up, frightened.

EMILY

Cliff – I believe that the phantom haunting this school must be one of the unhappy Pierces who once owned this home. Perhaps by coincidence, but perhaps not, a girl at this school also bears the name of Pierce. If I may interview the spirit, I may be able to discover why it is angry.

CLIFF

You will get no answers from John Pierce, my enemy and foster brother.

EMILY

Will you show him to me? You said you would help.

CLIFF

He was a jealous and malevolent man. He despised me and despised the love… our sister bore me.

EMILY

Your sister?

CLIFF

I have spoken too much.

EMILY

How did you die?
Why do you roam after death?
Isn't that the way of things? If a person cannot find their purpose in life, they –

CLIFF

I had a purpose! What greater purpose can a person have than to love?

EMILY

Show me John Pierce please.

CLIFF

You are like the others. Full of judgements and cruelty.

EMILY

I have no wish to be cruel to you –

CLIFF

Your presence is cruelty enough.

EMILY

How can that be? I have done nothing but –

CLIFF

You remind me of her.

EMILY

Oh.

A moment between them.

ANNE

What's going on?

EMILY

Shhhhh!

CLIFF

Our love was ferocious. As wide as the sky.

EMILY

And you cannot be with her.

CLIFF

How quickly the living forget the dead.
If I show you John Pierce will you visit me again?

EMILY

Even though my presence pains you?

CLIFF

It is a sweet pain.

EMILY

All right.

Cliff beckons for her to follow – He finds another grave.

CLIFF

Demon! Show yourself!

The spirit of JOHN PIERCE appears – he's terrifying, tall and darkly clothed.

JOHN PIERCE

Who disturbs my rest?

CLIFF

You should have no rest, villain.

EMILY

Cliff, please.

JOHN PIERCE

You wish to torment me further, whelp?

CLIFF

I torment *you?!*

JOHN PIERCE

I curse the day my father brought you into my home, goblin. If only your vagabond mother had strangled you in the ditch in which you were born.

EMILY

Gentlemen, please!

Skipping Forward

The spirits are converging on them.

ANNE

Emily!

Anne grabs the glasses off of Emily's face.
Lights down.

Lights up on Charlotte's room.
She is playing piano. Poorly.
George is listening attentively.
She finishes with a flourish.

GEORGE

Capital! Capital!

CHARLOTTE

I apologize – that was truly awful.

GEORGE

Not at all! You have a… very sprightly way with your fingers. Like little elves. They dance above the keys.

CHARLOTTE

They didn't so much dance, as stumble across the keys. And not elves, but rather ogres.

GEORGE

If your fingers are ogres I would still cherish them.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Wadsworth, I confess that I find your imagery troubling.

GEORGE

I need only a strong editor. And help. So much help.

CHARLOTTE

Yes.

GEORGE

Which is what a good wife would be for.

CHARLOTTE

Editing your imagery?

GEORGE

Among other things. Oh I am giddy today.

CHARLOTTE

I cannot imagine why.

GEORGE

Because I get to be in your delightful presence.

CHARLOTTE

Have you ever courted a woman before?

GEORGE

No, never.

CHARLOTTE

I suppose I knew that answer to that question before I asked it.

GEORGE

Then instruct me in how to woo you properly. You are an educator.

CHARLOTTE

I have a hard enough time educating small children. How much more difficult would it be to educate a full-grown man?

GEORGE

You could try. I am a ready student. I confess I received poor marks in school, but surely… I would do excellently under a teacher such as yourself.

CHARLOTTE

Oh dear.

GEORGE

I have distressed you.

CHARLOTTE

No.

GEORGE

I have… annoyed you?

CHARLOTTE

Quite right.

GEORGE

My heart aches to have given you offense.

CHARLOTTE

All right. First lesson: Lower your temperature.

George is puzzled.

You are trying too hard. It's terrible. I do not need to be praised for every little thing I do. My fingers are quite plain. They do not need to be exalted like angels or elves or fairies or ivory digits or whatever else you've been ceaselessly inventing for the past fifteen minutes.

GEORGE

They are beautiful though.

CHARLOTTE

Stop. They are fingers.

GEORGE

Your face, though is –

CHARLOTTE

No no no – too much.

GEORGE

Your face is… fine? And your personality –

CHARLOTTE

Make conversation, man. I understand that you are drawn to me –

GEORGE

Like a moth to the flame.

CHARLOTTE

Oh dear.

GEORGE

You burn me.

CHARLOTTE

I do not. I am quite unflammable.

GEORGE

I disagree.

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Wadsworth –

GEORGE

George –

CHARLOTTE

Mr. Wadsworth -

GEORGE

Instruct me. I am putty in your hands.

CHARLOTTE

Perhaps you could begin by asking me simple questions.

GEORGE

Will you marry me?

CHARLOTTE

NOT that question!

GEORGE

When do you suppose you will become headmistress?

Charlotte is a bit thrown by this

CHARLOTTE

Um… I do not know that I shall ever become headmistress.

GEORGE

Miss Woolton is quite old and with the difficulties the school is experiencing, you are her natural successor.

CHARLOTTE

The difficulties?

GEORGE

With the… um… the difficulties.

CHARLOTTE

Which difficulties?

GEORGE

Earlier today I saw a carriage picking up some of the younger children. That seems like a poor omen.

CHARLOTTE

Did the Headmistress speak with you?

GEORGE

Yes, and she mentioned…

CHARLOTTE

She mentioned what?

GEORGE

You know, the phantom. Fear not, though I appear fragile, I am brave.

CHARLOTTE

You would fight it?

GEORGE

I will take arms against a sea of troubles.

CHARLOTTE

Shakespeare.

GEORGE

Yes.

CHARLOTTE

Hm. I believe I need to go, Mr. Wadsworth.

GEORGE

But we've only just begun! And I have many sweets for you.
He produces a box of chocolates.
My mother made them. Chocolates.

CHARLOTTE

I am sure they are delightful, but -

GEORGE

Some may not be suitable for consumption.

CHARLOTTE

It is a nice gesture -

GEORGE

Actually, let me remove a few that are unwise to taste.
He takes a few chocolates out.
My mother tries, but she is quite dreadful at this sort of thing.

CHARLOTTE

I do need to be going, Mr. Wadsworth.

GEORGE

But my mother wrote you a note!

CHARLOTTE

How does your mother know of me?

GEORGE

I have described you to her. In very minute detail. She finds my description most enchanting. Here, read it.

Charlotte takes out a note.

CHARLOTTE

`Dearest Charlotte, I feel that I may use your first name since we are destined to be good friends. Your love for George is inspirational. Your work amongst orphans is commendable and I especially wish you success with your plan to produce many babies with George."

GEORGE

I may have embellished.

CHARLOTTE

I never want babies.

GEORGE

Not a problem I hate them.

CHARLOTTE

You hate babies?

GEORGE

They have abominable manners.

CHARLOTTE

They are babies.

GEORGE

I do not believe in excuses.

CHARLOTTE

Thank you for the chocolates, but I must go.

GEORGE

I shall be whatever you wish. Nine babies. Zero babies. Any number any between. A group of wolfhounds instead. Merely agree to be my bride and you shall have whatever you wish. I am not wealthy, but have a modest income, and honestly, in your position, you can do no better.

CHARLOTTE

Good day, Mr. Wadsworth.

GEORGE

Charlotte –
George is blocking the exit.

CHARLOTTE *(with more force)*

Good Day, Mr. Wadsworth.
A moment.

GEORGE

Good day.
He exits.

Lights change.
The great hall.
Georgina and Brittany are getting things ready for dinner.
Brittany is highly annoyed.

BRITTANY

Mrs. Ronald has outdone herself. I glimpsed what she was cooking in the kitchen. I smelled it as well. I can only hope the phantom will kill us all before dinner.

GEORGINA

Brittany, what would I do without your bounteous optimism?

BRITTANY

Drink by yourself.
Brittany produces a bottle.
Look what I found completely unguarded.

GEORGINA

The headmistress is around!

BRITTANY

The headmistress has other concerns. Surely if we are all to die, it would be best to have proper wine in our bellies.

GEORGINA

Is your father coming for you?

BRITTANY

My brother. But it will take him two days as he is the slowest man ever to ride a horse. The horses take advantage of him because of his feeble personality. In the meantime, everyone will leave and I will be left alone with the phantom. Perhaps we shall play cards.

GEORGINA

Two days, really?

Brittany groans.

BRITTANY

Or three. He may get distracted on the way and fall into a ditch with a serving maid. My brother is abominable. Do you have any brothers?

Anne and Emily enter in a rush.

Oh goody our friends.

EMILY *(to Georgina)*

There you are.

GEORGINA

I am not hiding.

EMILY

I believe we may have discovered something.

ANNE

A clue.

GEORGINA

A clue to what?

EMILY

To the identity of the phantom.

BRITTANY

It's the original headmistress. She is angry we are not learning Latin properly. That's my theory, at any rate.

EMILY

What do you know of your grandmother?

GEORGINA

What do you know of *your* grandmother?

EMILY

Your family name is Pierce.

GEORGINA

Please do explain my family to me.

EMILY

This is important, Georgina. The man who once owned this house was named Pierce as well – he had a son and daughter, and a foster child – The son and the foster child are dead and buried in the cemetery. The daughter, however, has no grave.

BRITTANY

Haven't you poked around in the cemetery enough? Are you hoping to rouse more spirits? Do we not have enough at the moment?

ANNE

Must you always be a grouse, Brittany?

BRITTANY

Yes. It is my special gift.

EMILY

Do you know your grandmother?

GEORGINA

She died many years ago.

EMILY

Was her name Pierce?

GEORGINA

Emily, I know that you do not have the gifts of your sister in regards to mental speed, but if my grandmother's family name was Pierce, why would *my* family name be Pierce?

EMILY

It would be if your grandmother was unmarried.

A hostile moment between them.

GEORGINA

I think you'd better go before I thrash you. You're the one with the miserable family.

ANNE

Are you threatening my sister?

EMILY

Anne, I can handle this.

ANNE

Try something. Put fists to your words, girl.

EMILY

Anne?

ANNE
I am not as gentle as Emily! I will dispense with you like a snake shedding its skin!

BRITTANY
Oh now this is interesting.

EMILY
I am trying to help you, Georgina.
Charlotte bursts in.

CHARLOTTE
What is the meaning of this?!

ANNE
She's a lowborn brute, that's what she is.

CHARLOTTE
Anne!

ANNE
It's not me, she was threatening to thrash Emily.

GEORGINA
Emily has made the most appalling insults.

BRITTANY
I heard them.

CHARLOTTE *(noticing Brittany)*
Have you pilfered another bottle of wine?

BRITTANY
No.

CHARLOTTE
I see it!

BRITTANY
You are mistaken.
She slowly puts the bottle of wine behind her back.

CHARLOTTE
I will deal with you shortly. Anne, Emily, with me.

EMILY

But –

CHARLOTTE

Now!

Charlotte hustles them off-stage.
Lights change.
Anne and Emily's room.

EMILY

I was perfectly capable of –

CHARLOTTE *(cutting her off)*

You are not perfectly capable of *anything!* Did you think you were going to get into a fistfight with a classmate?!

ANNE

That was me. Emily is delicate. I am robust.

CHARLOTTE

You are no such thing! This is a school! We are attempting to educate you into womanhood!

EMILY

We are attempting to discover the truth!

CHARLOTTE

What truth?!

EMILY

About the phantom.

ANNE

We have made some discoveries. Emily spoke with the dead.

CHARLOTTE

What?! Which dead?

ANNE

Most of them. Quite a few of them. It's really extraordinary. Mother's glasses have –

EMILY *(trying to get her to be quiet)*

Anne!

CHARLOTTE

You took mother's glasses?

Emily produces the glasses.

EMILY

They belong to all of us.

CHARLOTTE

So that is why you came to my room.

EMILY

I needed them –

CHARLOTTE

I forbade you from investigating this further –

EMILY

You do not have the right to forbid me anything!

CHARLOTTE

I protect you! I speak up for you! I am determined to see you prosper!

EMILY

You delight in telling me what to do! You are only concerned with my behavior when it affects your fortunes!

CHARLOTTE

That is a most outrageous lie! I have always been your friend and advocate! If you only knew how often I defended you against rumor – and you are determined to destroy your name and mine!

EMILY

You care only about being headmistress!

CHARLOTTE

I care nothing for being headmistress! I care for *you*! I care for *us!*

EMILY

Then help us!

CHARLOTTE

And experiment with dark forces beyond our control?! These are the things that may have killed our mother – and our sisters – and –

EMILY

They died of illness!

CHARLOTTE

You were *four*! You know nothing! You cannot remember their faces! I *remember* them! Only me! And I will not see the rest of you die.

EMILY

Everything is under control.

Anne backs up into the dresser, knocking the lid off the meat pudding.

MEAT PUDDING

Hello.

Short pause.

CHARLOTTE

What – is that?

EMILY

That is Mr. Jacoby.

CHARLOTTE

What is Mr. Jacoby?

EMILY

He is a spirit – entombed in a meat pudding.

ANNE

It was an accident.

CHARLOTTE

You have *stolen* someone's immortal spirit and *imprisoned* it inside your dinner?!

EMILY

It sounds awful when you say it that way.

End of Excerpt.
To purchase this play, visit www.concordtheatricals.com