

Chapter 21-The tenant of wildfell hall

Chapter 21-The Tenant of Wildfell Hall begins with Helen documenting a decisive moment in her life: her engagement to Arthur Huntingdon. On the first of October, she settles on Christmas as their wedding day, a compromise reached despite her growing apprehension. Helen notes the selection of her bridesmaids—Millicent Hargrave, a quiet ally, and Annabella Wilmot, chosen more from social obligation than genuine affection. Though Helen privately dislikes Annabella's arrogance, she accepts the role Annabella plays in her social sphere. Her sense of duty and decorum compels her to maintain appearances, even when her heart protests. Brontë uses this contrast to subtly critique how societal norms often silence personal preference, especially for women in Helen's position. Helen's voice, though hopeful, begins to reveal the tension between her love for Arthur and the unspoken doubts creeping into her reflections.

Helen's conversation with Millicent brings these doubts further into focus. Millicent, gentle yet candid, offers only restrained congratulations, quickly moving into concern. She points out that Arthur's personality appears too unstable, too indulgent, to complement Helen's moral depth. While never overtly disapproving, Millicent suggests that someone like her brother, Walter, might have made a more compatible partner for Helen—an idea that exposes the quiet wishes she harbors. Helen listens respectfully, though she remains firm in her belief that Arthur's love is genuine and that her influence might guide him toward a better path. Still, the conversation unsettles her. She begins to sense that love alone may not be enough to ensure harmony or shared purpose. Brontë reveals how early warnings from well-meaning friends are often ignored in favor of romantic ideals, even by intelligent women like Helen.

In contrast, Annabella's reaction to the engagement carries a tone of veiled competition. Rather than express happiness for Helen, she quickly shifts the attention to herself, boasting about her future marriage to Lord Lowborough and the status she

expects to gain. Her fixation on rank and reputation highlights the transactional view of marriage held by many in their social circle. Annabella sees relationships as strategic moves, not emotional bonds. Helen quietly recoils from this mentality, recognizing a growing gap between her own vision of marriage and what others around her seem to prioritize. Yet she continues to suppress her discomfort, convinced that sincerity and affection will prevail in her own case. The chapter subtly foreshadows that Helen's path will not be as insulated from society's pressures as she hopes.



When Arthur shares the reactions of his friends to the engagement, Helen is struck by their immature and mocking tone. His companions, committed to their shared bachelor lifestyle, express disappointment and disbelief that Arthur would tie himself to any woman, let alone one of Helen's temperament. Their letters frame marriage as a loss of freedom, portraying Helen as a threat to their leisurely indulgences. Arthur finds their mockery amusing and seems almost flattered by their objections. Helen, however, finds their tone distasteful, reading in their words a lack of respect for the sanctity of marriage. The exchange reveals a divide in how Helen and Arthur view commitment—she sees it as a moral and emotional bond, while he sees it as a social shift with little personal transformation. This contrast raises further doubts that Helen is not yet ready to confront aloud.

As the engagement progresses, Helen clings to the hope that love and virtue will guide their future together. Her conviction remains sincere, though shadows begin to stretch across her optimism. Every conversation—whether with Milicent, Annabella, or Arthur's friends—plants a subtle seed of doubt. Helen's inner voice grows more alert, aware of the fragility beneath her decision. Yet she pushes forward, driven by her belief that her love will be enough to sustain them both. Brontë carefully illustrates this phase as one of transition, where youthful assurance begins to collide with real-world complexity. Helen's faith in marriage is tested even before it begins.

Throughout the chapter, Brontë crafts a portrait of a young woman navigating conflicting messages about love, status, and responsibility. Helen's engagement

becomes a symbol of how personal desires must often battle societal expectation. In her, readers see both the resolve to love genuinely and the quiet fear of what lies ahead. Chapter 21 not only marks a turning point in Helen's romantic life but also lays the emotional groundwork for the struggle between her values and the reality of Arthur's character. It is a chapter charged with tension between appearance and authenticity, choice and consequence—an early sign that the love Helen clings to may soon be tested in ways she is not yet prepared to face.

