

EXCERPT FROM [EMILY'S GHOST](#)

When tea was done, Charlotte suggested that she and Emily take the new curate on a walk around Haworth.

“But you have only just come from your own walk,” Weightman said. “Are you not tired?”



“No, indeed,” Charlotte replied, “for our walk today was shorter than usual. Emily and I turned back early in anticipation of your arrival.”

Emily raised her eyebrows but said nothing, leaving Weightman to suspect that she had herself been in no great hurry to meet the new man, and the excitement had been all her sister’s. His suspicions were confirmed on the subsequent walk round the village. Charlotte often glanced at him and talked in animated fashion. She seemed pleased by the curious stares the trio received, the two Bronte sisters squirmed about town by a handsome young gentleman. So Weightman – who thought well enough of his own appeal -- fancied. They made the steep descent of the high street down to the river where they studied the distant aspect of the textile mills with their chimneys arrayed like minarets.

On the strenuous return up the high street Charlotte walked slowly and clung to Weightman’s arm for support, now and then catching his eye and offering a smile. She leaned in close when he spoke because

of her myopia – she continued to do without her spectacles to make a better impression. Weightman took note of this, and of her position as the Rev. Bronte’s oldest daughter, and reminded himself to exercise due caution, both for the sake of his own position and of Miss Bronte’s feelings. He suspected that her feelings would be easily hurt. William Weightman, though he admitted to himself that he enjoyed, more than he should, the attentions of the female sex, had no desire to hurt anyone’s feelings.

Emily walked apart. At river’s edge she seemed absorbed by the flow of water and the flight of waterfowl. On the steep ascent, as Charlotte labored, or pretended to, Emily went on ahead and then stopped to wait. She said nothing while Charlotte chattered on. Then she caught Weightman by surprise.



They had reached St. Michael’s once more, and paused to study the tombs of the cemetery that clustered close about the church and extended up the hill past the Parsonage.

“All asleep,” Charlotte said. “To wake some day – what do you think, Mr. Weightman? To Paradise? Or some to Perdition?”

Weightman considered. He could not guess the Miss Brontes' views on the subject of the soul's destination. He thought it best to be honest, for he disliked hiding his deepest convictions and he sensed the question was genuinely asked.

"I believe in divine punishment," Weightman said. "But I don't think that means eternal damnation. Hell is the absence of God and is experienced in this life. God is a loving God. If our faith is of any value at all, it is to tell us that. It is beyond my scope to imagine a loving God condemning his creatures to an eternity of torment. But in the end, I leave it to God, as we are bid to do."

Charlotte clapped her hands. "Well spoken, sir. However you are received in Haworth church, you shall be much appreciated by the Brontes."

He thought the expression on Emily's face could be interpreted as approval.

"And where, sir," Charlotte continued, "does the thirst for a punishing God come from? For it is widely expressed."

"Certainly there are passages in the Bible which speak of divine punishment," Weightman said carefully. "Taken literally and out of context they arouse terror."

"Some people love the terror," Emily said.

Weightman could not be sure if it was what Emily said, or that she finally spoke at all, that he found so arresting. He turned to her and, rather than responding, waited for her to say more.

“People need the terror,” Emily said. “It makes them feel alive and important even as they are so frightened. What could inspire more terror than the torments of Hell? And what greater sense of importance? So much personal attention! It is terror that gives lives meaning and makes it bearable for people to live in this world, drab as it is.”

“Emily is fanciful,” Charlotte said.

Emily looked a clear rebuke at her sister and didn't reply. For Weightman's part, he was so startled the sphinx had spoken that he felt a quick irritation at Charlotte.

“And you?” he asked Emily. “Do you feel that terror?”

Heedless, Charlotte spoke for her sister. “Emily,” she said, “is not afraid of anything. Not on earth or in Heaven or Hell. So she claims. Now Anne, our youngest sister, believes as firmly as we do in universal salvation and yet frets for her own soul. As though God would save everyone but her. When you meet Anne, who is the dearest, sweetest creature imaginable, you shall understand the absurdity of her fears. But Emily – Emily fears nothing. Though sometimes she might.”

Emily had walked on out of earshot, perhaps a good thing, Weightman thought, given Charlotte's last remark. But she stopped at the corner of the cemetery and waited for the others to catch up.

“Do you know, Mr. Weightman,’ she said, “the back garden was once full of graves and even the parsonage itself is built over bones. Have you decided not to lodge in the vicinity?”

“I believe, ‘ Weightman said, “I am to reside with the Widow Ogden at Cook Gate, where the previous assistant lodged.”

Emily looked at him keenly, and then said, “Better for you, then. Your sleep will be much more sound.”

She disappeared around the side of the house to free Keeper, who had been tied up at Charlotte’s insistence to keep him from following them. They must give their undivided attention to Mr. Weightman on their walk, Charlotte had insisted, without the distraction of a dog.

Odd, Weightman thought. Charlotte had been distracting, and distracted. Emily, on the other hand, had never let him go.