

## CHAPTER ONE

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Scarborough, July, 1842

The sea made the world vast. Anne must have known this before she traveled to the North Yorkshire coast, any coast, for the first time two summers ago, her pencil sketch *Sunrise over the Sea* born three years earlier while she was at Blake Hall.

Emily assumed the drawing was conceived of Gondal imaginings.

Anne kept it in a leather envelope folder along with other artwork and a sketching block. She liked to look at it as a reminder of her early courage and optimism, which posed a young woman on a rocky precipice, her arm lifted and shielding her eyes to a brightening outlook.

The seagulls were real now, as were the ships as light on the waves as wisps of clouds hung from the heavens. Anne was once again in Scarborough with the Robinsons, well-situated on St. Nicholas Cliff in lodgings she appreciated, not because of their elegance and prestige, proximity to the Spa, Gothic saloon, an excellent library and pleasant walkways, but for the magnificent view of the shimmering South Bay. Looking away from the harbor, arcades, and finery, over a stretch of shore little disturbed except by the tides, beyond swelling, spraying waves to where the sea calmed to meet the sky, she could think of only one way she might be happier.

“Doesn’t Miss Brontë look different?”

Anne didn’t mean for anyone to notice, not outside of Haworth and there only by a certain acquaintance if he was wishing as she was. She pretended not to hear Elizabeth’s question or Lydia’s snippy reply.

“Yes. I see how she hopes to improve her looks with a slightly altered hairstyle and dress a mere five years out-of-date.”

Earlier that year it had been difficult for Anne to give up the chance to stay at home. She might have used the excuse of her sisters going to school in Brussels, an ironic turn of events considering Emily's anger when Anne accepted a position forty miles from Haworth. "You won't come back for months. We'll end up hardly knowing each other."

How would a longer distanced, lengthier separation effect their bond? Especially as Emily rarely corresponded.

The previous Christmas, Anne was resolved to permanently leave Thorpe Green and not look for another position while Charlotte and Emily were abroad. Charlotte claimed her youngest sister wasn't up to helping young Martha with household chores and caring for their father like sturdier Emily was, and took credit for Anne's change of plan. Anne was actually swayed by a letter from the Robinsons declaring how much they valued her, imploring her to return to them.

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Lydia, Elizabeth, and Mary were, like Anne and her sisters, close in age. They were obsessed with growing up and outdoing each other, unlike the Brontë girls, who had their scribbles of stories, poems, and letters to the future to keep them childlike, and hopes for a school of their own to encourage collaboration over competition.

Anne watched her pupils with thoughts they would never guess she had, accepting they related to her as a necessary part of growing up advantaged. She wasn't averse to being friends with them, but didn't forget the true purpose of her employment. Although never as intolerably bad as the Ingrams, the Robinson siblings did, at times, test Anne's resolve to educate and care for them like a gardener nurturing and protecting tender plants.

Anne didn't know where Edmund Jr. was that afternoon, not sorry for his absence; there was nothing peaceable or teachable about him. He wasn't always the youngest. When Anne first took

up her post, Georgina Jane, at just over two, wasn't ready for schooling, but now and then Anne would relieve Nanny in the nursery and know a few cheerier hours in the Thorpe Green household.

“Can Mary go for a donkey ride?”

“May Mary,” Elizabeth was corrected. “May I, Miss Brontë?” Mary’s expectant eyes and heart-shaped lips reminded Anne of Georgina’s.

Anne hesitated to decide, thinking how she might be refreshed by a walk along the strand and amused by a donkey that jingled merrily and loved having its neck rubbed. She wished she could go by herself or only with Mary, who, away from the bickering of her sisters, could be quiet, curious, and sympathetic. Anne knew she couldn't take one without the others, but hoped Edmund wouldn't come. She had been worse than embarrassed by him digging his heels into the donkey's flanks, pulling its ears, and kicking sand at the gypsy boy who ordered him off. Edmund's behavior made him little better than the spoiled Ingham boy who removed baby birds from their nests to torture them.

Anne didn't give up on anyone easily, especially children who hardly knew better than their pampered lives and parents' neglect or ineffectiveness afforded them. It was odd she should feel more fortunate than they. Both the Ingrams and Robinsons lacked the cohesion of family, the kind of affection rivalry couldn't overturn, and the companionship of kindred spirits no matter differences in desires and temperaments. She couldn't help but try to convince poor privileged youngsters to be glad of their siblings in a world of sorrows, stumblings, and, especially, strangers. She didn't dare hope they would ever share the intense collaboration of spirit and creativity the Brontë brood did.