

Production:

GENTLEMAN JACK

by Ross McGregor

Directed by Stevie Hughes

For more info, please [email the director: stevie@triocreative.com](mailto:stevie@triocreative.com)

Bromley Little Theatre

Charity performance: **6 July 2023**

Public performances:

Fri 7- Sat 15 July 2023 (not Sun 9 July)

Auditions: **Sun Nov 13 2022 at 4pm**

CHARACTERS

John Lister 30s.

Modern, forward-thinking philanthropist, serious and thoughtful.

Arthur Burrell 30s-50s

John's colleague. A passionate and boisterous intellectual. An effective counter-balance for John's idealism.

Anne Lister 30s 40s.

An unstoppable virago of a woman with a voracious sexual appetite that she indulges freely.

Anne 20s.

Anne Lister Lite? A more playful prototype of the later, full-on turbo-charged model.

Christopher Rawson(40s -60+)

A ruthless industrialist who knows and uses all the tricks of his trade to achieve his goals. Wily and scruple-free, he represents the judgmentalism and bigotry of Victorian Yorkshire. He goes head to head with Anne Lister.

Ann Walker Late 20s.

Friend and sexual partner of the older Anne Lister. A little delicate and inexperienced, but is measured and possessed of a quick wit.

Isabella 'Tib' Norcliffe 20s. Coquettish playmate of the Lister menage a trois. There is a scene where she appears drunk.

Mariana Lawton/Belcombe

20s Self-possessed member of the Lister sorority. Frequently declared by Anne Lister to be the love of her life but Mariana chooses the safe option of marriage (to a man).

There is plenty of kissing between Anne and the girls in this show, as well as much tactility and (simulated) frottage, albeit dressed decorously in Victorian underwear. An intimacy consultant will advise on close contact protocol.

AUDITION PIECES

John & Arthur:

pp1-3

Anne & Ann:

pp22-25

Young Anne, Isabella & Mariana

pp11-15

Anne, Ann & Rawson

pp9-11 / pp16-19

Yorkshire accents required throughout please.

I: ARTHUR & JOHN

1880, SHIBDEN HALL, YORKSHIRE.

[JOHN LISTER (33) sits at his desk, holding one of many diaries in front of him. He squints, turns the book at an angle, holds it further away, then nearer, sucks on a pencil, scribbles something down, looks, crosses it out and scowls. His study is warm, shadowy with light coming from a fire. The space is comfortable, dark wood and elegant angles. There is the distant sound of the doorbell. He jumps up, adjusts his jacket, checks his hair in the looking glass, brushes his trousers down and scurries off. A moment passes. JOHN LISTER returns with ARTHUR BURRELL, his friend from the Antiquarian Society. ARTHUR is quite passionate, boisterous, where JOHN seems more considered and interior.]

ARTHUR: So this is it, is it? The famous Shibden Hall. Bloody hell, Jack, your old man fell on his feet with this one, didn't he? It's a ruddy palace.

JOHN: A façade of antique grandeur covers several decades of neglect, I'm afraid. Still, we are doing what we can to restore the property.

ARTHUR: I have to say, Jack, you need to have a word with your men about the drive.

JOHN: It is slightly overgrown.

ARTHUR: Slightly? It's like a bloody jungle back there. I felt like Doctor Livingstone by the time I rung your bell. Still, it fired the heart up somewhat, which is all the better I suppose for embarking on an antiquarian pursuit, for it sharpens the mind. Now, where is she? Where is she?

JOHN: [going to his desk, and handing over a volume of the diary.] Here. Well, it's a part of her. A very small part. I'm afraid there's rather a lot. I've found over twenty volumes, and what must be thousands of letters.

ARTHUR: And they're all like this? They all use the coded script?

JOHN: No, that's the thing – she only slips into code at certain points. Sometimes only on someone's name, other times mid-sentence.

ARTHUR: So she had something she wished to hide.

JOHN: Yes. And I need your help to find out what. I'm hoping to run next month, as you know, and if I win – I'd be the first Labour candidate in the district. This woman was a landowner, part of the elite, and a dyed-in-the-wool conservative. She was involved in politics, she says as much in the bits that aren't encoded, and I'm hoping – well to be honest, I'm hoping for something of a scandal. Something to take the whigs down a peg or two. Political intrigue, corruption, possibly even fraud, who knows – all I do know is that if she was careful to write her diaries in code, there must be something that she didn't want anyone else to know.

ARTHUR: And this was – who is this woman again? Who is she to you?

JOHN: Her name was Anne Lister. 15th in the seat here at Shibden. Distant relation, the other side of the tree, so to speak. She owned the property before my father. Died back in '40. No heir, so everything went to my father's side of the family. He brought us over from the Isle of Wight and made us all Yorkshire men.

ARTHUR And what makes you so interested in her?

JOHN: She has something of a reputation around these parts. People still talk about her. She only ever wore black, because she decided at a young age to free herself "from the tyranny of fashion." But more than that, she was a mine owner, ran a hotel – even opened a casino towards the end of her life. Never married. Did it all by herself. Do you know, she was the first woman to climb Vignemalle?

ARTHUR: Alps?

JOHN: Pyrenees. She cuts an impressive figure, and I must admit, I find myself curious about her. I know hardly anything other than what I've pieced together. She travelled widely, and from the parts I've read, wrote a great deal about Halifax and her time there. I had the notion that I might publish something.

ARTHUR: I see.

JOHN: Well, nothing substantial – just a couple of extracts in the Halifax Guardian or something – "Social and Political Life from Fifty Years Ago..." And she's a clever woman. Very droll, at times, with a good sense of herself, readers will like that. Unfortunately as it stands, I can't read half of it.

ARTHUR: Hmm. Ah yes. So – let us see – we're looking at a selection of Greek letters, numerical insertions of course, and some kind of other symbols... perhaps invented. Where did you find these?

JOHN: Just going through some old papers. There's whole rooms of this stuff. Bloody shambles.

ARTHUR: One assumes there might have been other ancestors you could have chosen that would have given you an easier time deciphering.

JOHN: Possibly, Arthur. But where would the fun be in that?

ARTHUR: Quite so, quite so. Well, I can tell you what two of the letters are from just a cursory examination, but if you want any more than that, I'm going to need some dinner and a bottle of the good wine.

JOHN: Already? Which ones? How on earth did you manage to -

ARTHUR: There's nothing particularly spectacular in the method, just took a perfunctory appraisal of these pages here, calculated which symbols were appearing with the highest frequency, and assigned them to the most commonly used letters in the alphabet. We can therefore assume that whenever your Miss Lister used this curled numerical three or this squashed double sigma, she actually meant either the letter "h" or "e".

JOHN: Which is which?

ARTHUR: Difficult to say without further study. [he smiles.] And the aforementioned dinner.

JOHN: “E” and “H” ... “E” and “H”. Yes, hold on – all right – here. [takes up another paper from the pile.] I found this yesterday. Just five words. The first four are written plainly, the last is in code.

ARTHUR: A riddle! Perhaps a key. The game is on. Proceed.

JOHN: How would you finish this sentence, Arthur? “In God is my...” In God is my what?

ARTHUR: How many symbols?

JOHN: Four.

ARTHUR: [smiles.] Is the first symbol the double sigma? And the fourth the number three?

JOHN: Yes. How did you –

ARTHUR: The word is “hope”, Jack. In God is my hope. Has to be.

JOHN: Oh my lord, you have it.

ARTHUR: And now we also know her code for the letters “O” and “P”. Four letters. You know, I believe we may be able to break Miss Lister’s code tonight after all, Jack.

JOHN: You think it’s possible to get all the rest from just four letters?

ARTHUR: Well, Miss Lister herself has already given you “hope”, Jack.

II: ANNE & ANN

1832, HALIFAX. FORTY-EIGHT YEARS EARLIER. [ANNE LISTER (41) enters. She is led in by ANN WALKER (29). WALKER is furtive, her eyes never stay still, and her speech has a thoughtful careful, considered poise to it. LISTER is front-footed, quick, and wears only black. She appraises the room, trying to hide how in awe of it she is.]

ANN: Welcome to Crow Nest, Miss Lister. Won’t you please sit?

ANNE: It has been most remiss of me to be your neighbour so long, and this be my first visit. Your home is utterly breath-taking.

ANN: Large houses run the risk of becoming mausoleums when they shelter only a single soul within them.

ANNE: My aunt and I were saddened to hear of the passing of your brother, Miss Walker. Our hearts went out to you all.

ANN: There is no “all” to receive them. There is only me. My parents died years ago.

ANNE: I myself have lost three brothers, and my mother. It is a terrible thing to suffer the death of a family member -

ANN: Worse still to do so whilst inheriting their responsibilities. [Pause.] My brother died intestate. Everything has gone to me. The land, our properties, all of it. And so it hangs there over me. Like some great bloody albatross. Forgive me. I did not mean to curse.

ANNE: I can forgive the profanity, but never the Coleridge. Detestable man. He could write a good hill though. You must be wary of fortune hunters, Miss Walker, for they will seek to seduce you.

ANN: Would that you had given my sister the same advice. She fell prey to one some years ago. A captain with the army - Elisabeth could never refuse a man in uniform. She most likely deemed it unpatriotic to not fall into bed with him. In no time at all she made a rather large purchase of the sweetness of his words, only to then experience the bitter debt of his actions.

ANNE: And how is she now?

ANN: Pregnant and penniless. He made her sign over all her deeds and rights to him. Our father would be heartbroken if he were still here to see it. He always wished our lands to remain exactly that.

ANNE: Surely your aunt and cousin will not rest until you're safely married to a man of means.

ANN: Oh, yes. It is all their letters speak of. From the fervour of their syntax, one would be led to believe that there is a veritable legion of red-faced young men, all clamouring for me to drop a riding glove to be rescued out of the gravel.

ANNE: Perish the thought. Waste of a good glove if nothing else.

ANN: Shall I send for some cake?

ANNE: What more could a lady want? 9

ANN: My family would suggest a husband.

ANNE: I make it my personal preference to never listen to suggestions. But I did not come here with mere condolences. I come in want of a favour. I wished to ask you about the coal mine on your property.

ANN: I am completely ignorant of the workings of it. What is it that interests you about it, Miss Lister?

ANNE: Well, to be frank, I wish to own one of my own, in time. I thought that if I was permitted to study yours, I could get a better sense of what to expect.

ANN: Are there not books on such matters?

ANNE: I'm versed in the theory of it. But I want to get my hands on the dirty, great, black practice of the thing. We're in Yorkshire, Miss Walker, coal has worked its way down into our blood. And as owners of two of the largest estates in the district, we should know our own business, don't you think?

ANN: Even though we are women?

ANNE: Especially because we are women. So much is changing in the world. We are no longer permitted to be simple farmers. The bright lights of industry have come to Halifax, and if the world wants to be powered by steam, then they must have coal with which to do it. If you and I remain ignorant, there will be those that take advantage. What, should we leave the great and vital matters of life to men? They will only bring it to wrack and ruin.

ANN: Surely not.

ANNE: What woman was it that ever started a war, Miss Walker? And yet history is riddled with them.

ANN: Helen of Troy started quite a considerable one, as I recall.

ANNE: Yes. By being stolen like property. By a man. From another man. In a story. Written by yet a further man. If you would not mind, I should like to talk to the team that manage your mine.

ANN: [smiling.] The men, you mean? So they do, in this case in fact, possess something that you yourself do not?

ANNE: Oh, of course men have their uses, much like hammers, or shovels, or other such implements. They can be worked to great effect, you just need a strong arm, and a tolerance for the occasional bruised fingernail. Now, will you allow me to speak with these fine, coal-covered tools of yours?

ANN: By all means. I shall send the foreman to you. Once I find out which one that exactly is.

ANNE: [standing.] I shall not take up any more of your time, but I am grateful to you. Regardless, it will be some time before I am able to make a purchase of the relevant machinery, if at all, so perhaps all this fact foraging will prove nothing more than academic.

ANN: You surely cannot lack the capital? You are a Lister. 10

ANNE: For the moment, sadly yes I do. Alas, you have no need to hear me lament my troubles, so I will leave you to your afternoon. Thank you for your time.

ANN: How much money do you require?

ANNE: For the pit? I believe it is in the region of twelve hundred pounds.

ANN: I shall write you a cheque.

ANNE: I could not possibly ask you to do that. It is a small fortune.

ANN: Miss Lister. You seem to be somewhat confused. I have, as I mentioned, an inordinately large amount of money that I have no idea what to do with. And you have a proposition but temporarily lack the means with which to fund it. Where, in this dichotomy of excess and want, is there to be found confusion? I will simply give you the money and the matter will be solved.

ANNE: I would offer you a large return on your investment.

ANN: Would you do me the kindness of calling it the Walker Pit?

ANNE: In your honour, of course. It will be a hundred yards deep and the handsomest pit in the county.

ANN: I had never countenanced a coal pit could be handsome.

ANNE: How could it not be? It's named after you. [A pause. Something has happened. Phosphorus.]

ANN: Thank you, Miss Lister.

ANNE: As I am the one holding the cheque for an astronomical amount of money, and you the pen – I believe it is me who should be thanking you. And you must call me Anne, for we are partners.

ANN: I look forward to working with you. You really mean to do it? Go into the mining industry? It is a man's world.

ANNE: What business isn't? But yes, I mean to try.

ANN: You will make enemies.

ANNE: Of whom? The other mine owners? I have no friends in that quarter. I know what men like that call me. I know there are stories. You yourself must have heard some.

ANN: I know better than to believe any of them.

ANNE: You should. They're all true. I am what they say I am.

ANN: You – you mean – you like –

ANNE: Ladies, yes.

ANN: Not just as your friends?

ANNE: One would hope they could be both.

ANN: And only ladies? Never gentlemen?

ANNE: No. Only ladies. And only pretty ones at that.

ANN: How – when did you –

ANNE: When did I know what I was?

ANN: Yes.

ANNE: [smiling.] I always knew. Tell me, Miss Walker, do you like Byron?

III: YOUNG ANNE & ISABELLA

[ANNE LISTER (20) is sitting in bed with ISABELLA "TIB" NORCLIFFE (26). Both are in their bedclothes, reading separate books by candlelight. ISABELLA is translating hers, clearly having trouble.]

ISABELLA: [pointing at her book.] I give up. What does this mean?

ANNE: Which? Oh. Easy. Eunuch.

ISABELLA: What's that?

ANNE: Well, you are aware, I suppose, of the existence of a gentleman's nethers?

ISABELLA: [sniggers.] I have been told, yes.

ANNE: Well, they take a gentleman, get hold of his nethers, and chop them off.

ISABELLA: No!

ANNE: I swear.

ISABELLA: Why would a gentleman want to lose his nethers?

ANNE: I doubt he has much say in the matter.

ISABELLA: [delighted.] That's terrible. [Pause.] What about this one? Herm – hermap –

ANNE: Hermaphrodite. That's a person with too many nethers. Much to the envy of all the eunuchs.

ISABELLA: Too many? They have more than one spindle?

ANNE: Most like. Perhaps even a few quims thrown in for good measure.

ISABELLA: They have both? Both kinds?

ANNE: All kinds. Whole legions of nethers, stuffed down their drawers.

ISABELLA: I never knew poetry could be so – illuminating.

ANNE: That’s why you have to read it in the ancient tongue. The Greeks were nothing more than a clutch of filthy vagabonds when you get down to it. But of course all the best parts get censored when it’s translated into English. But they didn’t touch the original texts, because they assumed no bugger would be bothered enough to read them. Aren’t you glad I showed you how?

ISABELLA: It’s like a clandestine code. And only we two know how to read it. It’s just for us.

ANNE: Where is the joy to be had in life if one has no one to share its secrets with?

ISABELLA: What’s that mean?
[struggling with it.] Clitoris.

ANNE: Ah. Well, that particular term I think I would have to demonstrate. [slides her hand inside ISABELLA’s petticoats.]

ISABELLA: Wait – do you mean -

ANNE: You enjoyed reading about Sappho, didn’t you?

ISABELLA: Yes, so much.

ANNE: Her amorous passions extended to the persons of her own sex. All we are doing is following in the footsteps of the great and godly. [moving her hand up.] “But fondle thee I must and will, Thou art best loved by me, For tho’ my heart thou wound’st still / No friend have I but thee.”

ISABELLA: [distracted.] That’s nice. Who wrote that?

ANNE: I did. For you.

ISABELLA: Say it again. I don’t think I quite heard all the words. No, wait, we can’t. [innocently.] Can we?

ANNE: [stopping with frustration.] You know how I feel about you, don’t you? You can’t possibly be deceived in that. Oh Tib, don’t look at me like that. It’s just candour, for goodness sake, you can’t hate me for it.

ISABELLA: I don’t hate you.

ANNE: Well, you must do, otherwise you wouldn’t be telling me to stop.

ISABELLA: [wanting to appease.] I recently returned from France.

ANNE: [sullenly.] Congratulations.

ISABELLA: The ladies and gentlemen there kiss each other so queerly. I’ve seen them do it. Perhaps I can show you how it went?

ANNE: Only so that I may be better prepared for when I visit there.

ISABELLA: They do it like this. [kisses her swiftly on both cheeks.]

ANNE: How thoroughly intriguing. I can’t be entirely sure I have mastered the technique though. Demonstrate again.

ISABELLA: [doing so.] It feels so funny because we don’t do that in England.

ANNE: No.

ISABELLA: Because, we, in England, of course we kiss on the mouth. Like this. [kisses her delicately on the mouth.]

ANNE: You’re clearly well studied.

ISABELLA: This is Paris [kisses ANNE's cheeks], this is London [kisses ANNE's mouth] –

ANNE: And this is Yorkshire. *[She kisses her passionately after a moment ISABELLA pulls away. ANNE collapses in mock frustration.]* Tib, make up your mind. Either let me have a good and proper kiss or don't keep sitting on my bed until four in the morning. Do you know how dreadful it is to be this excited, and then not to be gratified? You leave me with no relish of anything, and truth be told, I'm quite uncomfortable. Right down in my queer.

ISABELLA: I let you kiss me.

ANNE: I mean a real kiss. Down there. Or do you not want me to?

ISABELLA: Yes, but isn't that a sin?

ANNE: Find me the part of the bible that says that a woman cannot lie with another woman. God only gets riled up if the gentlemen do it.

ISABELLA: Oh, Anne, why would you ever be interested in someone like me? I can offer you neither amusement nor instruction –[gestures to the book] I can barely understand a word of this book, I'm a terrible dunce with all learning and languages, I can't sing, I can hardly dance, Mother says I eat too much, I'm not as pretty as some of the other girls you've gone to bed with, and I'm terribly, terribly short. I have come to believe you are my superior in just about everything.

ANNE: Although I've known you only a short time, Tib, I have fallen in love with you. God knows how deeply. You must believe me. My feelings are entirely natural. I'm just how God made me, and I've never seen the point of trying to counteract it, so neither should you. Now, are you going to give me another performance or not?

ISABELLA: [grins.] What would you like tonight? A piece of Hamlet or Othello?

ANNE: The Dane is too watery weak for an evening such as this. I crave the name of action tonight. Give me your best Othello, if you will.

ISABELLA: [Assuming a stance on the bed, taking up the candle. From memory, a consummate performance:] It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.

ANNE: Oooh, la. Yes, this is the good stuff.

ISABELLA: It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood, Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow, And smooth as monumental alabaster. Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men. Put out the light, and then put out the light. When I have plucked thy rose, I cannot give it vital growth again.

ANNE: We shall see about that. Come now. Put out the light. The devil and desire await you.

[ISABELLA blows out the light. They kiss and tumble into bed. ANNE assumes a dominant position, almost masculine and ISABELLA succumbs wilfully. After a moment, ISABELLA detaches herself, grins and blows out the other candle before going back under the covers.]

IV: ANNE & RAWSON

1832 HALIFAX [ANNE LISTER enters to find CHRISTOPHER RAWSON waiting for her. She acknowledges him, more a wince than a smile.]

ANNE: Mister Rawson. I trust I did not keep you long.

RAWSON: [lopsided smile, holding up a whiskey bottle.] Your girl was good enough to show me where you hid this.

ANNE: It is a rule of the house to keep access to the spirits restricted until noon. [checks her pocket watch.] A time I see we are still yet to reach. It is a leftover from when my father was living with us.

RAWSON: Not to be trusted, was he?

ANNE: In a multitude of ways.

RAWSON: Ah well, no harm, no matter. Yet I'll not be judged by you. When you're up before dawn, Miss Lister, you find yourself in need of a little warmth to wet your lips, even if the afternoon be yet a long ways off.

ANNE: You keep full days I take it, Mister Rawson. No doubt, judging from the cacophony we hear coming from your estate.

RAWSON: A man should not apologise for working, Miss Lister.

ANNE: He should if he's incapable of doing it quietly. Is one to assume that you are sinking another mine then, Mister Rawson?

RAWSON: A pair. Simultaneously.

ANNE: It is a wonder that your little estate requires so many.

RAWSON: This region is choked with coal. I'll take as many as I can cram in.

ANNE: A delightful image sure to stay with me the rest of the morning. Are you not concerned about the damage to the land?

RAWSON: I wouldn't expect you to understand, Miss Lister. Mining is like digging up money. It's waiting for us, just under our feet. You just have to be brave enough to go down and get it. It's not like your gardening, it need not be pretty.

ANNE: I was speaking more about excessive and repeated efforts mining the same small area causing an imbalance in the strata, with possible geological concerns, as opposed to merely the aesthetic. Mining need not be pretty, you are correct, but it should be done correctly.

RAWSON: Are you implying that I don't know what I'm doing?

ANNE: I'm implying nothing. I'm merely stating fact.

RAWSON: And you know much about it, do you? Geology?

ANNE: I have been reading up on the matter, yes.

RAWSON: Perhaps this may turn out for the best, then.

ANNE: This?

RAWSON: You're well-presented, Miss Lister, a handsome woman. I see you have strong arms, and fine frame. You must take exercise.

ANNE: I walk.

RAWSON: Good. Excellent. That will be to the benefit. I can't abide the idle.

ANNE: Mister Rawson, I have to admit I find myself at a loss to follow your thoughts.

RAWSON: I have been thinking about your assets.

ANNE: Now -

RAWSON: And how they are not being exploited as much as they could be.

ANNE: I beg your pardon?

RAWSON: From what I can tell, you're sat on a fat seam. Our estates are adjoining. I'd not be needing much from you, I'd be busy enough working the land, and running the men, so I wouldn't interfere with your reading, your uncle tells me you have an interest in - books and the like - and I'd let you continue to tend the gardens, perhaps even lend an eye to my own when you move there in due course. I know we've never really taken the time to talk properly with one another, but I've always admired your uncle -

ANNE: No.

RAWSON: I'm here to ask -

ANNE: I wish you wouldn't.

RAWSON: I've come to ask you to marry me. [A pause.]

ANNE: Whilst I appreciate the very generous offer, and the time you took to make it, I must decline.

RAWSON: Why?

ANNE: I do not love you, Mister Rawson.

RAWSON: And?

ANNE: Well, I hold the belief that possessing even a modicum of romantic affection for a partner is of paramount importance if you choose to wed them. As such, you are not what I am seeking.

RAWSON: I know all too well the kind of company you seek, Miss Lister, and I am offering you a way out of that.

ANNE: Out of it?

RAWSON: Aye. Are you not lonely, up here on your little hill? I'm offering you a way back into society. Into people's good graces and out of their gossip.

ANNE: You would have a wife that did not, could not, love you?

RAWSON: Miss Lister, I don't give a damn if you love me or not. This isn't some child's romance, this is the new world of steam, and black gold. This is a chance for you to build something. A name.

ANNE: I have a name already.

RAWSON: Oh aye. You do. In the taverns. In the streets. They call you Gentleman Jack. Lock up your wives, lads, Anne Lister is on the prowl again. She's a Jack-the-Lass, wearing kegs, what likes the ladies.

ANNE: If I am as you say - why on earth would you want me as your wife? I'd be neither use nor ornament to you.

RAWSON: Regardless, I am offering.

ANNE: And I am declining.

RAWSON: [darkly.] I'm only here because your uncle begged me. I will not ask again, Miss Lister.

ANNE: I should hope not. Having to tell you twice would be frightfully dull. Now, if that was all, I bid you good day.

RAWSON: [sings.]

*Gentleman Jack,
Oh Gentleman Jack
Watch your back,
You're under attack
Their husbands are coming,
You'd better start running
The knives are out
For Gentleman Jack.*

V: YOUNG ANNE, ISABELLA & MARIANA

SALISBURY 1813

[Night. A storm is slowly rolling. ISABELLA "TIB" NORCLIFFE lies down in bed, the covers rolling and shuddering beneath her. She orgasms and from beneath the covers, ANNE LISTER appears.]

ISABELLA: Thank you. That was so wonderful.

ANNE: I wish you wouldn't keep saying that. You shouldn't thank me.

ISABELLA: It is only fitting for the quality of love you provide.

ANNE: I have not suffered a want of practice. I don't think I've ever been refused by anyone.

ISABELLA: Certainly not by me.

ANNE: Perish the thought. [they kiss.]
[Lightning and thunder.]

ISABELLA: Is it to be your turn now? I could –

ANNE: No, that's enough for tonight. It has been a long day.

ISABELLA: It has indeed, but most fascinating. Did you enjoy Stonehenge?

ANNE: I certainly admired the ingenuity, although one does wonder what on earth the point was in dragging all those rocks halfway across the country?

ISABELLA: I don't think Marianna enjoyed it all. Not like us.

ANNE: She favours the scientific over the historical. Nothing wrong in that.

ISABELLA: How do you know of her interests?

ANNE: She told me.

ISABELLA: I don't recall a conversation about that.

ANNE: Then I would venture you were not present for it.

ISABELLA: I did not realise you had spoken to Mariana at length without me.

ANNE: And I did not realise I required your permission to do so. [A pause. Thunder.]

ISABELLA: We mustn't fight. I'm sorry. Forgive me. I'm still your Tib, aren't I?

ANNE: Let's go to bed.

ISABELLA: [gleefully] Of course. Will you have me without the gown this time?

ANNE: To your own bed, tonight, Tib. I need some space to move about, I have a pain.

ISABELLA: Where?

ANNE: [holding it gingerly.] In my stomach.

ISABELLA: You should take a little brandy for that.

ANNE: That is your cure for everything.

ISABELLA: It has been proven to possess therapeutic properties. 19

ANNE: You would do well with my mother. She strives to remain tipsy twenty-five days of the month, and is most successful in the endeavour.

ISABELLA: I shall leave you, if you think it best. I'm sorry that you are in pain. Shall I call the doctor? Or read to you until it passes?

ANNE: I'll see you in the morning. I just want to sleep.

ISABELLA: Very well. Good night, my love, and thank you for your kisses. They shall stay with me through the night, and warm my bed in your absence. If there's anything you need, I'm just a door away.

[ISABELLA exits. ANNE stops holding her stomach and sighs. She checks her pocket watch. Paces. Checks again. Pours some water and gargles with it. Checks her watch again. Goes to the door and listens. Hears something and runs back to bed, hops up, and lounges, adjusts her hair, and practices a few versions of her smile. There is a knock on the door and MARIANA BELCOMBE enters. Thunder. Lightning.]

MARIANA: Am I too late?

ANNE: Just in time. She took some convincing to go.

MARIANA: I feel as though I'm intruding.

ANNE: If you were not supposed to be here, I would not have extended the invitation. Please.

MARIANA: What a dull day that was. I don't see how Tib can find a collection of erected rocks so enthralling.

ANNE: I believe it may be possible, if this would be of more interest to you, to visit Warwick Castle on the way back, perhaps stay the night in Kenilworth. There is a fine inn there that I am familiar with.

MARIANA: I have never been to Warwick.

ANNE: Perhaps also you and I could share a room there? Seems terribly opulent to rent three rooms when two would do perfectly. We must consider costs.

MARIANA: Will not Tib mind you sharing a bed with me? She considers you her partner in life, she told me herself only yesterday.

ANNE: The more interesting question is whether you would like to. [Thunder.]

MARIANA: [smiles.] Miss Lister, I feel you are more practised in the art of seduction than you would have it known.

ANNE: Is that what I'm doing?
[ISABELLA enters.]

ISABELLA: [to MARIANA.] I checked your bed, but found it empty.

ANNE: She only came to say good night.

ISABELLA: How thoughtful.

MARIANA: We were just discussing our route back to York.

ISABELLA: Via Warwick, surely.

MARIANA: That was the suggestion.

ISABELLA: You must see the castle. 20

MARIANA: I intend to.

ISABELLA: It is quite convenient to stay in Kenilworth.

MARIANA: A lovely place I have heard.

ISABELLA: There's an inn there we know.

MARIANA: So I have been told.

ISABELLA: Anne and I have stayed there many times.

MARIANA: I shall look forward to it.

ISABELLA: I shall write ahead and ensure there are three rooms awaiting us.

MARIANA: Seems exorbitant to rent three. Why don't we scale down to two? [looks at ANNE.] We must consider costs.

ISABELLA: Of course, Anne and I will be happy to share. And you can have the second chamber.

MARIANA: What do logistics matter when we are all such good friends?

ANNE: Tib, don't look so. We had a fascinating day, did we not?

ISABELLA: Mariana, I'll walk you back to your room.

MARIANA: A guide is unnecessary. I know where it is.

ANNE: Tib – I've just remembered we've not had a Shakespeare from you tonight. Give to us, and then we can all retire.

ISABELLA: I don't feel inclined.

MARIANA: [dryly] Pity. I did so enjoy your Malvolio. You do so suit the cross-gartered cretin.

ISABELLA: Very well. Something has, in fact, just now come to mind.

[eyeing MARIANA throughout.]

*Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-ful
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood.
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come, you murd'ring
ministers.
Come, pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the
dark
To cry "Hold, hold!"*

[Loud thunder, lightning.]

ANNE: Fine fare for an evening as this.

MARIANA: You portray a mad woman so well, I fear you must have had experience of it yourself.

ISABELLA: [eyeing MARIANA.] Oh no, not at all, I take inspiration from those around me. Like any good actress, I am a natural mimic. [to ANNE.] Must I go? I feel terrible leaving you in your time of need.

MARIANA: Need?

ISABELLA: Anne is unwell. She needs looking after. She has a pain.

MARIANA: Then I shall perform a constant vigil over her. All night if need be.

ISABELLA: You? It is hardly your place.

MARIANA: Why not? I am the daughter of a doctor, and my brother is himself a doctor. I think there is scarcely one more suited to look after Anne than I. What would you do for her, other than make her drink brandy and compound the problem?

ISABELLA: [To ANNE.] Would you truly prefer Mariana stay with you?

ANNE: I think that would be most beneficial. In case my condition worsens.

ISABELLA: I see. If you think that best. I wish you both a good night. [exits.]

MARIANA: Where is your pain?

ANNE: It is just below my stomach.

MARIANA: [touching her.] Here?

ANNE: Thereabouts.

MARIANA: [moving lower.] Here?

ANNE: You have it now.

MARIANA: [moving her hand back and forth.] I see. Delicate attention to the area is clearly needed.

ANNE: Whatever you think best.

MARIANA: I did not take you for an avid appreciator of Shakespeare.

ANNE: I like the language. And his command of it is one of the greatest. Despite the fact he gives all his best lines to men.

MARIANA: Ah, but the sonnets. They may be read by anyone.

ANNE: Do you know any?

MARIANA: [moving quicker.] Are you of the mind that it may help your pain?

ANNE: I believe so, in any case, I would relish the attempt. If you can spare the effort.

MARIANA:

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be
taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

[ANNE has an orgasm, holding herself against MARIANA.]

How is your pain now?

ANNE: Disappeared entirely.

MARIANA: I am glad of it. Perhaps all that was required was an attentive physician.

[ANNE kisses MARIANA. Phosphorus. ANNE pulls away, shocked and elated.]

ANNE: Where did you learn to kiss like that?

MARIANA: When drinking an unfamiliar wine, it is better to savour the first taste, rather than question the vintage. Are you tired?

ANNE: I am the very epitome of awake.

MARIANA: Would you like to go again?

ANNE: Very much.

MARIANA: Then go lock the door, and take off your clothes.

ANNE: But –

MARIANA: Yes?

ANNE: We hardly know anything of each other.

MARIANA: Strangeness is not a barrier to love.

ANNE: You would have me love you?

MARIANA: I would ask nothing less of you than what I am willing to give in return. [kisses her.] Now go lock the door, so that we may begin. The greatest of tales start with a single step.

ANNE: I can think of a better beginning. [she pounces.] [MARIANA and ANNE begin to make love as the storm rages over them.]

MARIANA: [as ANNE enters her.] Tell me, Anne, have you ever read the works of Byron? [Thunder, lightning.]

VI: ANNE, ANN & RAWSON

1833, HALIFAX.

[ANNE LISTER and ANN WALKER sit with a newspaper.]

ANNE: You have to view it as a silly joke, a prank to unseat us. To throw us from our endeavour.

ANN: [reading from newspaper.]
“Marriage announcement. Captain Tom Lister of Shibden Hall, to Miss Ann Walker, lately of Lidgate. We beg to congratulate the couple on their happy connection.”

ANNE: It’s nothing.

ANN: It’s the third one this week. First The Leeds Mercury, then the York Chronicle, and now the Halifax Guardian. The whole of West Riding will have seen it by now.

ANNE: It’s because you are staying with me here at Shibden, that’s all. It’s a perfectly tiny detail that the gossips have spun into scandal.

ANN: And I only agreed to stay with you on account of the letters I had begun receiving at home. I no longer felt safe there, Anne.

ANNE: Again, just a joke Mister Rawson and his friends are playing.

ANN: You didn’t read them. They were obscene.

ANNE: All the better that you’re here then.

ANN: That’s not all though, is it? Anne, I have seen the latest reports from the mine.

ANNE: We’ve had a slow start, as to be expected. We’ll make it up next quarter.

ANN: It’s been over a year, Anne. And the pit hasn’t even started to pay for itself, let alone fund the other ventures you’ve begun.

ANNE: It’s our workers, they’re not being allowed to enter the pit. They’re unable to work due to the mob of reprobates blocking their path. Another of Rawson’s games.

ANN: It is not a game, Anne. The workers are frightened. Rawson has intimidated them. He put tar in their drinking well, his men have attacked them in the taverns, broken all their tools and slandered our good names. Last week they burned effigies of us in the town square.

ANNE: It’s just scare tactics.

ANN: And they’re working. People are reluctant to be associated with us, Anne. The Rawsons have been in this town for centuries.

ANNE: As have the Listers.

ANN: Yes, but the Rawsons have always worked the land. What have we done, except look down from our fine windows at the people and charge them rent? You are in debt. A great deal of debt. And I do not see how your mine can ever hope to correct that problem.

ANNE: We need a holiday. 24

ANN: That’s hardly the solution.

ANNE: We should get away, to Paris – you’d love it there. The people kiss you in the queerest way.

ANN: Running away isn’t going to help you.

ANNE: No. Perhaps not. But – might it be possible to ask you for a little more money? Just until the Walker Pit hits its stride. I’m sure this will pass. Rawson’s lot will grow tired of meddling soon enough.

ANN: How much do you want?

ANNE: Another three hundred would suffice, I’m sure.

ANN: Anne – do you not think that this is perhaps a business best left to others?

ANNE: To men, you mean?

ANN: Yes. I know that is not an ideal answer. But we do not live in an ideal world.

ANNE: No, we live in a world of rules, and obstacles and expectations. All of which can be broken and overcome, if we possess the tenacity required to do so. I may not be able to choose to succeed, but I can most certainly choose not to fail. I just need a little more time.
[RAWSON enters.]

RAWSON: Good morning, Miss Lister. I do hope I’m not interrupting.

ANNE: Mister Rawson, you should know better than enter a room without being announced.

RAWSON: Nothing to be gained fussing over airs and graces, Miss Lister. Besides, I don’t need to be announced, we’re all friends here. [nods to ANN with a smirk.] Miss Walker.

ANNE: What do you want?

RAWSON: I’ve come on business.

ANNE: Then be about it quickly.

RAWSON: Very well. You have ten acres of land near Connery. It neighbours my pit. My fourth pit, surely you’ve seen it? I’d like to buy this land from you.

ANNE: Why?

RAWSON: Heard you needed the money. What I do with it is my business.

ANN: What would your price be, Mister Rawson?

RAWSON: A hundred an acre.

ANNE: That is a scandalous outrage.

RAWSON: Well, you’d know more about those than me, wouldn’t you, Miss Lister?

ANN: That is – a rather low price, sir.

RAWSON: Costs are led by the market, Miss Walker. And you’ll struggle to find another man in the district that will give you a better price than what I’m offering.

ANNE: I don’t doubt, Mister Rawson, that you will have made sure of that.

ANN: [to RAWSON.] Would you consider a hundred and forty?

ANNE: I am not selling the land. 25

ANN: Mister Rawson?

RAWSON: I’m afraid not.

ANN: A hundred and twenty?

ANNE: Mister Rawson, I will not be selling the land to you under any circumstances, for any price you care to envisage.

RAWSON: What do you intend on doing with it then? Building a little love nest for the two of you?

ANNE: You must want this land ever so badly, Mister Rawson.

RAWSON: It matters not to me.

ANNE: Oh no, you do want it. You wouldn't be here if you didn't. You've done your best to unseat me, you belittle my name, you make a public mockery of me, you intimidate my business associate, and threaten those that would work for me. So yes, Mister Rawson, I would say, after everything you have done, you must despise me, and it therefore must take a lot for you to come into my home.

RAWSON: It's nothing personal, Miss Lister. I personally admire your nous. I do. Most women wouldn't have the stomach to try and do what you have. You've got something about you, I'll give you that. But business is no place for a woman. It's to be found more in the tavern than the tearoom. It's not nice and fine and polite, it's hard, and it's cold, and it's sharp. You beat the other man down before he has a chance to do the same to you. Mining is a serious business, and we can't afford you picking it up like a child with a new toy, only to drop it in boredom six months down the line. This is about peoples' livelihoods. Real people. Ones that don't live in big houses like you. Folk that need honest work so that they can put food in their children's bellies, and coal in their fires.

ANNE: That is why you want the Connery land. There's coal there. You know because you found it from your side. Probably helped yourself to a bit of it already, haven't you, but now you need to buy the land from me to get the rest of it.

RAWSON: So what if there is? Leave it to someone who knows how to do it properly.

ANNE: Why should I not just mine it myself?

RAWSON: I'd like to see you try. Particularly as seeing what a success you made of it the first time.

ANNE: I will sink a second mine.

RAWSON: With what? You may live in a fancy house, but we both know you haven't got a pot to piss in. The Listers are rich in name only. And Miss Walker surely can't be gullible enough to fall for your flannel a second time. [to ANN.] I'd be careful with this one, Miss Walker, she wants one hand on your chequebook and the other up your petticoats.

ANNE: Good day, Mister Rawson.

RAWSON: When you are done with your pride, come and find me. I'll still buy the land from you. At eighty-five an acre. [leaves.]

ANN: You should have taken his offer.

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ANNE: He's not having that land. I'm going to mine it myself.

ANN: You can't. You lack the capital.

ANNE: Then I will find it. I'll generate other income to finance it.

ANN: How?

ANNE: I'll turn Northgate House into a hotel. Halifax has become a worthy town of note, people are coming from all over to see it, and they will need somewhere to stay when they do. So the Northgate Hotel will provide only the very best.

ANN: You'd convert the property?

ANNE: Yes.

ANN: But do not your father and sister currently live there?

ANNE: They can move to Shibden. It is the family seat, after all. And we have the room.

ANN: But Northgate is their home. You would truly unhouse them to fund your mine?

ANNE: Shibden is hardly a hovel, they will be very comfortable.

ANN: They deserve to be at least consulted.

ANNE: No. My uncle, god rest him, named me the sole heir and beneficiary of the Lister estate. Shibden and Northgate are mine to do with as I wish.

ANN: But what are your father and sister to do?

ANNE: If I were them, I'd start packing.

VII: ANNE & MARIANA

1815, MARKET WEIGHTON

Night. ANNE LISTER and MARIANA lie in bed together. ANNE is stroking MARIANA's hair.]

ANNE: Shibden was built in 1420, and has had many owners. My family have been there for over two centuries.

MARIANA: Your uncle has no children.

ANNE: No. But since he invited me to live with him, away from my father and sister, poor dreadful dull things that they are, I feel I can be comfortably confident that he plans to leave everything to me.

MARIANA: Has he said that?

ANNE: Not in so many words. But it is my hope. I'd be the 15th Lister in residence, and fifteen has always been my favourite number.

MARIANA: You'd need to produce an heir.

ANNE: [turning to her.] I have it in mind to find one instead. You know how I feel about you, don't you? I never wish for the touch of any other.

MARIANA: [kissing her.] My Freddie.

ANNE: You could move to Shibden. I have reasonable means. A degree of opportunity. We could live in comfort, together.

MARIANA: And what would I be to you?

ANNE: My companion.

MARIANA: On your long walks?

ANNE: In my long life.

MARIANA: I love your mind. I honestly do.

ANNE: Then why do we wait?

MARIANA: Mister Lawton came to see my father again yesterday.

ANNE: The old windbag widower that wants to ruin the life of one of your sisters by marrying her? Ah, he's a pig, Mariana, he eats meat with his hands. I can't stand him. He's so vulgar.

MARIANA: And yet, still far above my own family. The Lawton name is wellrespected in York. He has security and wealth.

ANNE: But never cutlery.

MARIANA: Anne. Mister Lawton has come to a decision. He made a formal offer of marriage.

ANNE: Well, at least you can be grateful his visits will cease. Which sister did he pick as his victim, sorry, wife?

MARIANA: Me, Anne. He picked me.

ANNE: [shocked, then laughter.] Ah, I wish I could have seen his face when you declined.

MARIANA: I didn't decline. I accepted. [A pause.] I accepted his proposal. We're engaged. It's going to be announced tomorrow.

ANNE: Why didn't you tell me?

MARIANA: I'm telling you now.

ANNE: He is twice your age.

MARIANA: Nothing will change.

ANNE: Everything will change. Why have you done this? You don't love him, you can't love him.

MARIANA: I'm only a doctor's daughter. I don't have a lot of options in terms of whom I am introduced to. I have no choice in this. I must accept. For my family.

ANNE: Why must you?

MARIANA: Because this is not an ideal world, Anne. One must use what one has.

ANNE: This is prostitution.

MARIANA: Charles is old and rich.

ANNE: "Charles"?

MARIANA: I will be his wife.

ANNE: You were meant to be mine!

MARIANA: Your wife? How on earth... Anne... what did you think was ever going to happen? I can't marry you.

ANNE: You have broken my heart.

MARIANA: You must never doubt I love you.

ANNE: Then cease to say it, and begin to show it.

MARIANA: Charles is not a young man. We can plan for our future. A real future, with independent means. With respectability. I would be a widow. And it may not be such a trial in the meantime. When I am married, I shall have freedom to travel as I please. I will be able to see you, perhaps even more than now. It shall not be long. We'll still see each other. I'll write.

ANNE: [clinging.] And when you are free, we will build a life. I hear that there is coal in this region, mayhap even in Shibden.

MARIANA: Such a filthy dirty thing.

ANNE: But ever so valuable. We shall be miners, you and I.

MARIANA: You are content to wait.

ANNE: Just – do not lie with him as often as he wishes you to.

MARIANA: Whenever the occasion cannot be avoided, I shall think only of you. And you must only think of me, and forsake all others. Including Tib.

ANNE: [kissing her.] As your true husband.

MARIANA: [taking ANNE's hand and guiding it inside her.] My Freddie. [A transition. ANNE LISTER and ANN WALKER enter, climbing, halfway through a hike. ANN is breathless and struggling. ANNE is jubilant, comfortable and serene. After a moment, they disappear. Back in the past, the other. ANNE lies on the bed morose. MARIANA has disappeared. ISABELLA appears, holding a present.]

ISABELLA: Happy birthday, my love. How are you feeling today?

ANNE: Perfectly dreadful.

ISABELLA: Same old trouble?

ANNE: Old?

ISABELLA: She who cannot be spoken of.

ANNE: It's been so long since she and I spoke. Why does she not write, Tib?

ISABELLA: She's honeymooning with Mister Lawton. I doubt she has time for correspondence.

ANNE: Well, I shall cease to be idle. It is my birthday after all, so one must think of new beginnings. I shall devote myself to my studies. What need I of love, when I have literature?

ISABELLA: Don't sit in and stew, Anne – come out – we could go riding.

ANNE: I shall begin with Demosthenes, of course.

ISABELLA: Should you read so much? It can't help.

ANNE: I have decided to publish, and have yet to settle on a subject, therefore I must read widely. I wish for a name in the world.

ISABELLA: You have a name already.

ANNE: Yes. Well. You need not concern yourself, Tib. Within a week, I shall be much improved. Mariana is of no concern to me.

ISABELLA: So you would not be interested in the details of what Mrs Priestley said to me about her yesterday?

ANNE: [considers.] I could be tempted.

ISABELLA: She's happy apparently. She told Mrs Priestley that she was quite taken with Cheshire.

ANNE: Then let her stay there. Happy? With Lawton? But the man uses his waistcoat as a napkin. How can one ever be happy with that?

ISABELLA: You said yourself she's not written.

ANNE: No, but I suppose I did tell her not to. A stoic gesture that is now feeling woefully foolish.

ISABELLA: We're both better off without her. And she's not as pretty as she thinks she is, either.

ANNE: No matter. My mornings will be crammed with Greek and Latin, my afternoons packed with French and algebra. The evenings I will blow my flute and fire my pistol.

ISABELLA: Oh, Anne. I hate to think of you all alone on the moors puffing away on your little whistle, like the pied piper. It sounds so solitary.

ANNE: [sighing, slyly.] Academia is a lonely existence.

ISABELLA: How about a kiss from Tib? It might do you some good. *[She kisses ANNE. After a moment, ANNE reciprocates, and begins to thrust. ISABELLA is elated.]*

ANNE: Tib, let us be clear, this does not mean –

ISABELLA: [eagerly.] I won't hold you to anything.

ANNE: [Pinning her down.] Perhaps Demosthenes can wait another an hour.

VIII: ANNE & ANN

1834 BOOTH

ANNE: Look at that view. I did tell you it would be worth the effort.

ANN: And I will be most pleased to affirm your statement, once my vision has stopped swimming.

ANNE: This really is one of the best views in the county. I often come here to cast off my old thoughts and uncover the new.

ANN: I have two quite sizeable problems concerning my shoes.

ANNE: What are they?

ANN: Well, firstly they feel as though they are on fire. But the first issue may be slightly alleviated by the second, which is that I think I'm going to be sick on them.

ANNE: [rolling her eyes.] Wasn't that steep.

ANN: When you said you wished to go for a stroll, I did not imagine that eighty per cent of it would be vertical.

ANNE: Do you know what they call this place?

ANN: The Everest of the North?

ANNE: It is barely a hill, Ann. No, it's called Mount Tabor.

ANN: How lovely. Feel free to mention it in my epitaph.

ANNE: It's named after a battle in the bible. The Israelites were fighting the Canaanites, and they were hideously outnumbered – defeat was certain – but the prophetess Deborah came to the Israelites and told them that God would deliver them a victory. Not only that, but that the Canaanites' leader, a mighty warrior named Sisera, would meet his defeat at the hands of a woman.

ANN: No wonder you like it here.

ANNE: And sure enough, on the morning of the battle – great rains came down and washed all the Canaanites away.

ANN: A little rain would be nice at this current moment. My throat feels like it's wrapped in parchment.

ANNE: Here – this will take your mind off it. [taking out a pistol.]

ANN: Are you – do you intend to murder me? Because if you are, I will be furious. You could have just done it back at home and saved me the three hour trek.

ANNE: Come here.

ANN: I wished you'd murdered me at the mine. At least going there is downhill.

ANNE: Come here. Hold. Like this. Put your hand around. No, properly around it. Tightly. Use all of your fingers. Now lift.

ANN: This is incredibly heavy.

ANNE: Now point. Away from your body. Keep your arm straight. Knees bent. Not that much. Shoulders, relax your shoulders. More.

ANN: There is nothing remotely relaxing about this. It's like holding an anvil. Why am I doing this?

ANNE: Because it's – something to do.

ANN: Something for men to do. Not for ladies. This is simply ridiculous.

ANNE: I won't tell if you don't. Now, what are you going to shoot?

ANN: Hmm. I think I shall murder that tree over there. It is old and gnarled, and I don't like the way it's looking at me.

ANNE: Very well, proceed. [ANN aims.] Don't close your eyes. And you don't need to keep sticking your tongue out.

ANN: I was assessing which way the wind was blowing. Are we facing east or west?

ANNE: Proceed. [ANN takes aim. It is slightly haphazard.]

ANN: Wait.

ANNE: Oh, good grief.

ANN: What is the wager?

ANNE: The what?

ANN: Well, if I am going to shoot, then I must have a wager to win if I hit my target

ANNE: Very well, if you miss the shot and lose – you must come with me on weekly walks for the next six months.

ANN: My calves now thoroughly detest this tree and all it stands for. And if I hit the bastard and win?

ANNE: Then I will give you your money back. Every shilling. I will sell the mine. And the hotel. All of it.

ANN: What?

ANNE: I will go back to my books. And I will travel, and write, and lead an altogether quieter life. And you can go home, and forget all about me. It will make quite the talking point at many a dinner to come, your year with Gentleman Jack. Now, take aim, take in a breath, release it, and gently squeeze.

ANN: Anne – you mustn't give up.

ANNE: I can't continue. I know what your family are saying about me. About how I'm bleeding you dry.

ANN: Let them talk.

ANNE: I've noticed people laughing at us. In the street. And I won't have that. You're – you've become very special to me. You should go home. [A pause.]

ANN: Since I am the one shooting, it is I who should have the honour of proposing the wager, and I therefore make the following counter proposal. If I miss, we will do as you say and close the Walker pit, I shall move back home, and we will never see each other again. But if I hit my mark, then I will write you another cheque for £3,000, which you will invest into the business, you will listen to some proposals I have, and we will forget this silly conversation entirely.

ANNE: And what are these proposals of yours?

ANN: We will lower our prices.

ANNE: As a money-making gambit, it is not the strongest.

ANN: We will still give a fair price, but it will be lower than Rawson's.

ANNE: He'll just go a penny cheaper.

ANN: Then we will go three. And we'll start selling door to door, it'll be winter soon enough and people will need to feed their fireplaces. With Walker coal, at our new prices, it will be an offer too good to miss.

ANNE: Doesn't solve the canal issue. Rawson has them sewn up.

ANN: We'll stop peddling to the canals, they're a thing of the past – we need to get in with the railroads.

ANNE: Blasted contraptions. Trains will never catch on, Ann, they're slow and filthy.

ANN: And running on coal. Now, have we a wager?

ANNE: You'll not make the shot. You're not even holding it correctly.

ANN: [offering her hand.] Then take the bet, Miss Lister.

ANNE: Fine. [shakes ANN by the hand.] [ANN suddenly kisses her on the mouth.]

ANN: A kiss. For luck. [She smiles, cocks the pistol, and without looking, fires the pistol behind her. An almighty bang. *[ANNE leaps back, covers her ears, straightens, looks at the tree and then scowls.]*

ANNE: You, Miss Walker, are a con artist.

ANN: Did I not mention my brother, god rest his soul, often took me hunting? It's quite simple, really, just point and fire.

ANNE: [considering.] Trains, is it then? Really?

ANN: Welcome to the New World. It's smoky, over-priced and never on time. Come, let's go home. You never said what happened to the fellow in the bible story. The one the prophetess said would be defeated by a woman.

ANNE: Sisera. He fled the battle, and took refuge in a tent, owned by Heber the Kenite. The Kenites weren't involved in the war, so Sisera begged for protection, and Heber and his wife Yael agreed to hide him, even gave him some milk to drink. Then Yael waited until he was asleep and then she drove a tent peg through his skull. And thus the prophecy was fulfilled.

ANN: And what's the moral of the story? Don't wake a woman up in the middle of the night and take all her milk?

ANNE: The prophetess was right. It happened the way she said. I think the point of the story is that when a woman says something is going to happen, you had best believe her.

ANN: [smiles.] As Mister Rawson is about to find out.

IX: YOUNG ANNE, ISABELLA & MARIANA

1819, SHIBDEN.

[ANNE sits writing her diary. ISABELLA enters. She is drunk, and carries a wine bottle and glass. She carries herself well, despite her inebriation, which reveals the mark of a habitual heavy drinker. She comes behind ANNE and kisses her neck, draws her up and onto the bed.]

ISABELLA: Have I told you how fine you looked tonight?

ANNE: Yes. Several times, Tib.

ISABELLA: It was all I could do not to tear your dress off at dinner and have you right there on top of the mutton.

ANNE: Yes, you said. Repeatedly. In front of my aunt and uncle.

ISABELLA: [giggling.] Oops.

ANNE: I have had to tell them that you are unwell, and in something of a delirium. *[ISABELLA works her way down ANNE's body with her mouth, stopping at one point to take another drink.]* Why must you do that?

ISABELLA: What? It's only my second. *[She starts to initiate oral sex. ANNE flinches, recoils, submits, then pulls away.]*

ANNE: Don't. I promised Mariana.

ISABELLA: [rolls back unsteadily. Has another drink.] Promised Mariana? But what has she promised you? To live with you? We both know that will never happen.

ANNE: When Charles dies, she will be my companion at Shibden.

ISABELLA: And how long will that be? Ten years? Twenty years? Are you not tired of waiting for her?

ANNE: She has chosen me.

ISABELLA: She's chosen her husband.

ANNE: You will not speak ill of her. What do you understand of us? Of the love between us? You've never experienced anything like that.

ISABELLA: I have. In my feelings towards you.

ANNE: You're drunk.

ISABELLA: And you're misguided. I can't stand watching Mariana Lawton hold you in such low regard. How many years has it been since she married that man? How many times has she snuck into your bed, only to creep back to him? I love you more than anything. And if you asked, I would be yours. All I want, all I ever, ever wanted was to be with you.

[She kisses ANNE. They tumble back. ANNE is angry, biting, kissing, pushing her down, thrusting her hand inside ISABELLA's skirts, up, entering her, moving quickly, ISABELLA moans, holds her, nodding desperately. Suddenly ANNE stops, their eyes locked. ANNE shakes her head slowly, breaking.] 34

ANNE: But I do not love you. Not in the way you would have me. *[ANNE tries to draw away, but ISABELLA holds her firm, clawing at her, trying to stay connected.]*

ISABELLA: You still do this with her. You touch her. You make love to her. Why not with me?

ANNE: Because it would be adultery. I am Mariana's. Betraying her would be a sin.

ISABELLA: *[throwing her off.]* You make a fine pair. She's a hypocrite, and you are cruel. I have wasted my life waiting for you.

ANNE: Oh Tib, why don't you just have another drink, and be quiet? I will not tolerate you belittling our friendship.

ISABELLA: Friendship? Friendship?! What kind of a friendship is this? What would you have of me? What do you want? I have tried to be a friend to you, Anne, but what quality of friend are you to me? To use me in this way.

ANNE: I think you should go to bed and we will speak of this in the morning.

ISABELLA: No. We will not. For I shall not be here in the morning. I want to go home.

ANNE: *[hurt.]* Very well. As you wish.

ISABELLA: None of this is how I wish.

ANNE: I bid you farewell. *[as ISABELLA leaves.]* We will still write to each other though, won't we?

ISABELLA: *[very still.]* Now my charms are all o'erthrown, And what strength I have's mine own, Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true, I have been here confined by you. Gentle breath of yours my sails Must fill, or else my project fails, Which was to please. Now I want Spirits to enforce, art to enchant, And my ending is despair, Unless I be relieved by prayer. As you from crimes would pardoned be, Let your indulgence set me free.

ANNE: [in tears, nodding.] If that is what you want. Goodbye, then. You are – released. I shall not trouble you further.

ISABELLA: I truly hope that one day you find the person that you are looking for. Someone who loves you the way you deserve to be loved, but whom you respect enough to see it. [leaves.] [ANNE slowly goes back to her diary and resumes writing.]

X: ENSEMBLE

1880, SHIBDEN HALL.

SIXTY-ONE YEARS LATER. [JOHN LISTER sits at the desk, transcribing a passage from the diary. ARTHUR BURRELL sits reading another.]

JOHN: [reading.] “There is a theory that I have always liked. That in all things, at all times, there is a rule of conservation. Nothing is ever truly lost to us. Not a single atom, not a single ounce of energy, nothing can be destroyed, only transformed, from one form into another. Every word that has been spoken in the history of mankind still exists somewhere in the cosmos, in one shape or other. The past is never truly lost, it surrounds us.” What a beautiful sentiment. To think that she lived much of her life in this room, and a part of her, however small, lives on in its walls. Every breath, every word she spoke, is still here – captured, transformed and converted. She’s not just in the diaries, Arthur, she’s all around us. The world may have moved on, but she is not entirely lost to us

ARTHUR: What did we eventually decide was an exclamation point?

JOHN: Double T.

ARTHUR: And an underline?

JOHN: A repetition. Where have you got to?

ARTHUR: I believe I am currently in the throes of another description of an orgasm. It is somewhat lyrical.

JOHN: With Mariana Belcombe?

ARTHUR: No, a widow in France. Maria Barlow.

JOHN: Oh. I don't think I've got to her yet.

ARTHUR: It follows much the same pattern as the others. But it is after two in the morning, John, perhaps we should retire for the night.

JOHN: Yes, of course. I can't believe we've accomplished so much in a single evening.

ARTHUR: [gestures to the book he is holding.] Where do you want these?

JOHN: Just here, please. I'll sort them out in the morning. Thank you for your assistance, it's been invaluable. What a piece of work this is. Her life – in all its eccentricities, failures and foibles, documented and hidden away for a future generation to find. Magnificent. Anne was right, nothing is ever lost.

ARTHUR: I find it unsavoury to say to the least. The sheer number of lovers she had –

JOHN: She wanted to be loved.

ARTHUR: Then she looked in the wrong places. You must burn these, John. Destroy them all.

JOHN: Why?

ARTHUR: How can she seriously consider herself one of "God's creations"? She displays no tears, no desperation for salvation, no shame. She seeks not to hide her difference – she practically flirts with it.

JOHN: Would you have preferred selfhatred? Would it have been more palatable to you for her wear a noose?

ARTHUR: I would have her repent her sins, and save her soul.

JOHN: Why should she hide who she is?

ARTHUR: Why do you? You have lived a certain part of your own life in the shadows, John. And we both know to what I refer. She may not have cared to hide her homosexuality. But you should take a care that publishing hers may in turn reveal yours.

JOHN: How dare you infer such a thing? I am – I am not – that.

ARTHUR: Think of your work. Everything you do for the lower classes, feeding the strikers with your soup kitchens, defending the people's marches, all your charitable efforts – you are making the world a kinder place – for the small, for the common, for those that need it most. You could be the first labour candidate in the district. You will give the people here a voice in government for the first time in their history. You've been so careful, so certain. You've hidden who you are, because of the law, because what people would say, how they would judge you, and you have kept yourself secret, kept yourself safe. Why would you throw that away for a stack of old journals?

JOHN: The life of Anne Lister has no connection with my own.

ARTHUR: She was a Lister, like you. She was an unashamed confidante, engaging wantonly in ungodly behavior.

JOHN: The woman just loved who she loved, and more often than not, paid heavily for it. Will there never a time when I am allowed to do the same? I am not so different from you. Love changes not depending on the form it looks upon.

ARTHUR: There resides something within you that the world would consider an illegal act. Against man, against God. You came to these diaries looking for a scandal, and you have found it, just not the one you expected. If people knew the contents of these diaries, and discovered you shared her sentiments, that you were like her - your political career would be over before it even began.

JOHN: I will – consider what you have said. I never knew that you – [ARTHUR kisses JOHN gently.]

ARTHUR: Perhaps we all live our lives wrapped up in a secret code, thinking it safe from prying eyes. Anne had hers, I most certainly have mine, and I would advise you to consider the safety of your own. Sometimes the things we do in the dark are better off left there. For the good of who we are in the light. Good night, John. [leaves.]

[JOHN goes and stands by the fireplace, his face lit by the flames. He holds a diary over the flames. A transition. ANNE LISTER enters with ANN WALKER. JOHN reads, no longer needing the cipher.]

JOHN: [To ANNE.] Nothing is ever truly lost. You're still here, aren't you, 37 Anne? You're with me. Perhaps a part of you, is now a part of me. A conversion of light into matter, of words into flesh, of heat into breath.

ANNE: How are you feeling today?

ANN: Excellent well, thank you. I received gratifying news from my steward. We've secured the contract to supply coal to the railway. They will take all our coal, as much of it as we can produce, so that means there will be no more need to haul it door to door. We shall be wealthy, Anne. Not through our inheritance, but by our own means. It is the most gratifying sensation.

ANNE: I am very lucky to have you, Miss Walker.

ANN: I feel fortunate to be had, Miss Lister. [CHRISTOPHER RAWSON enters. He is changed, smaller, gaunt, distracted.]

ANNE: What do you want, Mister Rawson?

RAWSON: I come with a message, from Miss Walker's family, as they will not deign to cross the threshold of such a house as this. It concerns Miss Walker, and her continued presence here.

ANNE: She is my guest.

RAWSON: [To ANN.] Your family demand that you return to Lightcliffe immediately.

ANN: Thank you for relaying the message, Mister Rawson, but I am very happy where I am.

RAWSON: Your family feel that if this situation is allowed to continue, it may prevent you from securing a husband.

ANNE: Ann, perhaps you should return to your family. You have to think of your good name.

ANN: I have a name already. And it hangs above our pit with pride. I wish to stay here. With you. I do not want a husband. I do not want a husband. [nodding to RAWSON.] Good day, Mister Rawson.

ANNE: I was most sorry to hear about the closure of your mines. Did you not find anyone to sell them to?

RAWSON: No. Not yet.

ANNE: Ah, you see. That's business for you, Mister Rawson. It is a hard, and cold, and sharp. More for the tavern than the tearoom.

RAWSON: It is a momentary set back. The canals – they're not what they were.

ANNE: No, Mister Rawson, they are not. Have you ever been a train? They're most magnificent things. Powered entirely by coal. If you are struggling to stay in business, I would be more than happy to buy your land from you. At say, seventy five an acre? You will not a better offer in all of West Riding. Trust me in this.

RAWSON: Well, you've more nous than me. I'll grant you that. I'm actually impressed. You've snatched up her fortune, and got us all dancing to your tune. It is truly a marvel. 38

ANNE: What is, Mister Rawson?

RAWSON: To be beaten by a woman.

ANNE: Ah, there you are wrong, Mister Rawson, for you have not been defeated by a woman, but by intellect. And as far as I can tell, intellect has no gender. Good day. Do pass on my best wishes to your mother. [MISTER RAWSON leaves.] Are you sure you have no consideration for what is being insinuated about us?

ANN: No, I don't believe I do. What is being insinuated? That you and I do this [kisses her], and this [touches her breast], and this [puts her hand up ANNE's skirts.] I believe I understand the concept, but lack the relevant practice. Perhaps you could assist me?

ANNE: Are you sure? You wish to be mine?

ANN: I already am. You just failed to see it. [ANNE and ANN kiss.] Do you love me?

ANNE: Yes.

ANN: More than any other? [A transition.] [ANNE LISTER sits on the bed. MARIANA enters.]

MARIANA: It would not have hurt you to get dressed. It is almost noon.

ANNE: I would have if you'd allowed me to accompany you this morning.

MARIANA: I was with Lady Stuart and Lady de Rothesay, it would have hardly been appropriate for you to be there. Particularly after what you did to Lady Stuart's niece.

ANNE: I do not know Lady de Rothesay.

MARIANA: She is the daughter of the third Earl of Hardwicke. It was a great honour to be invited.

ANNE: I see.

MARIANA: Will you not get dressed at all?

ANNE: Of course. [she gets up, reaching for her dress.]

MARIANA: The black, again? Must you?

ANNE: You would have me differently?

MARIANA: A little colour would not kill you. Neither would a more feminine figure.

ANNE: I thought you preferred the way I am, compared to other women? I am your Freddie, I have always been, these last nine years – and now it disturbs you? Come here and kiss me. [pulls MARIANA towards her.]

MARIANA: Don't. You're getting a moustache.

ANNE: Just a little soft one.

MARIANA: It makes me feel sick. Get rid of it.

ANNE: Of course, I would do anything for you.

MARIANA: You sound like Tib when you say things like that. 39

ANNE: No more talk then, just a kiss – from Freddie. [she works her way down MARIANA's body.]

MARIANA: [closing her legs.] I am not in the frame of mind for kisses tonight.

ANNE: I am going back to Shibden tomorrow. And I think you should come with me.

MARIANA: Charles is expecting me back by the evening.

ANNE: Then leave him.

MARIANA: We have agreed about this.

ANNE: And now I am disagreeing. Leave him. Leave him tonight. And come home to Shibden with me. I want to share my life with you. I am tired of hiding in a room, of containing our life in a secret, in a code, shared by none, I feel as though you are ashamed of me.

MARIANA: How could I not be when you insist on behaving like a child? What you want is not possible. We cannot marry! You don't get to have something just because you want to. I'm here, with you, at substantial risk and suffering to my person.

ANNE: You won't even let me walk with you in public. You are too scared of the truth but you need not be, there's nothing to fear.

MARIANA: There's everything to fear, should Charles find out. He will disown me, and I would be left with nothing.

ANNE: You will have me.

MARIANA: We must be careful.

ANNE: Why? Why should we? He is not. He has found the company of other women, he lies in the beds of others, why should you not be allowed to do the same? You can leave him. You have a choice. The world is only the way it is because we acquiesce to it. All of us, everyone is God's children. I want to share my life with someone. If that is not to be you, then I must leave you.

MARIANA: You would never. You love me. You will not find this again with another. Do you think Tib can make you happy?

ANNE: No, but I see now, neither can you. I will leave in the morning, and I would request that you do not write to me. I will go away, to Paris perhaps. I have long wanted to. For a year or so. Perhaps there will be someone for me there. Perhaps not. The important thing is that I do not stop looking. Farewell, Mariana. I give you your freedom – I hope that one day you are brave enough to take it.

[A transition.] Back to ANNE LISTER & ANN WALKER.]

ANN: Do you love me? More than any other?

[ANNE LISTER looks past ANN, at MARIANA and nods.] [MARIANA and ANN leave separately. ANNE LISTER in 1823, and ANNE LISTER in 1835 both sit at the table, and begin to write their journal for the day.] [JOHN holds the pages above the fire, smiles and shakes his head. He takes up a water jug from the table and uses it to extinguish the flames. He returns the diaries to the table, undamaged.]

JOHN: One may not always be aware, but the trillions of atomic particles that are us, were once part of a great star in the night sky – until it exploded and scattered us across the universe. And since then we've been assembled and reassembled many times. We've been droplets of water in the ocean, we've been a part of every different type of organism. Connection after connection, ever moving, ever seeking, ever looking. We are never truly alone, because I are built from the parts of a thousand other moments, a million other motions. We have drifted through time, seeking out the bonds that will us whole. But it wasn't until a particular day in a particular year that the conditions of the universe were deemed perfect for every one of our particles to be meticulously assembled to create - us. Each of us. All the energy you've ever given out, every word, every breath, every vibration and particle of heat that ever left your body will continue now forever, warming and touching the lives of those after you. So you see, we are immortal, ever seeking, ever loving, ever looking, and when we are gone, well, we are not really gone at all; we are simply a little disorderly again. If only for a while.

[JOHN continues to read the diaries, as ANNE and ANNE continue to write them. A slow fade to black.]