

The Brontë Plot: Three Deleted Scenes

Deleted Scene: Lucy Visits Top Withens with Helen rather than James

In The Bronte Plot, Lucy and James visit the Bronte parsonage together and later Lucy walks to Top Withens alone. In this earlier version, Helen and Lucy visited together the parsonage together and the Top Withens moment is folded in that same scene. I found I liked sharing Lucy's vulnerability with James rather than Helen and I liked splitting the two scenes to give Lucy more room to grow. But here's the original scene...

Lucy searched for something to say. "Would you like a little breakfast before we head into the village?"

Helen stepped toward the desk. "This nice young woman sent an egg and toast to my room." She turned to Bette. "That was so considerate of you. Thank you."

"My pleasure." Bette then jumped from her seat and pulled open the heavy wood front door. "It's cold and windy. Are you sure you don't want me to fetch Dillon for you?"

"Send him along later. I could use the slow walk."

Helen held Lucy's arm as they stepped out into the watery sunshine just as it disappeared behind a cloud. The change was startling and foreboding.

Helen hunched her small shoulders hunched forward against the wind. "No wonder your girls didn't write anything happy."

"My girls?"

"The Bronte sisters."

They turned right and walked up a slight hill towards the parsonage.

“I think a lot of what they wrote was happy and, if not traditionally so, it was very powerful. They described emotions and the human experience, at least for women, like no one else.”

“You don’t find them overly dramatic, like an opera gone array?” Helen said.

“*Wuthering Heights*, maybe.

“*Villette*?”

Lucy stopped walking. “Forget it. You can’t have *Villette*. *Agnes Grey*, maybe. And don’t even think about claiming that for *Jane Eyre*.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. Call me sentimental, but I like *Jane Eyre*. It now reminds me of James.” Helen tilted her head toward the parsonage and Lucy followed.

“He’d make a wonderful St. John.”

Helen laughed. “Oh... That’s terrible. He’s not that bad.”

“There’s nothing bad about St. John. He—”

“Rigid, puritanical and cold.”

“He loves his sisters. Jane too in his own way.”

“But he’s not for you, I think.” Helen’s voice tipped up in question.

“I don’t know about that. I always appreciated the stability of St. John. And if one did set his heart afire, and he let them in, who knows? Maybe he’d have his own prequel. A St. John’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*?”

“It might be a boring read.” Helen reached for Lucy’s arm as they stepped to the front door.

The Bronte parsonage and museum –an unassuming brick home with a brass placard near the door stating that the Bronte’s lived within from 1820 to 1861 – was before them. An older woman hurried forward and welcomed them, offering a tour of the house.

“We’d rather just wander, if we may.” Helen spoke before Lucy could. She then turned to Lucy. “I don’t think I’ll join you for the library talk later. Can you tour on your own this afternoon?”

“Of course.”

They crossed the narrow front hall into the dining room, straight back, and Lucy stopped. She could feel the vibration in the floor, smell the melting wax, sense the warm

stuffiness of the room as the three sisters paced the dining room table again and again, reading aloud, brainstorming, editing and creating their stories. Stories that bound them as sisters, changed fiction forever and continued to impact lives – Lucy’s life – daily.

It was the same table, that after Emily and Anne’s deaths, Charlotte paced alone. The thought pricked her heart. It felt too familiar as if she too had outlived love, before ever truly experiencing it, and paced alone. She always paced alone.

Lucy started talking, not caring if Helen was listening or not. There were simply things to say. “I started reading their books when I was in middle school. My dad always read to me. It was our thing, each and every night, and I continued. I honestly thought if I kept reading he’d come back. He’d sense those moments were going on without him. He’d feel them, miss them, and come home. *Jane Eyre*, ‘my *Jane Eyre*’ as you called it, arrived on my birthday a few weeks after he left. It made sense to me – the shifting of emotions, power, stability. *Wuthering Heights* arrived for my fourteenth and it’s almost brutal in some ways. And after a year of him gone, that made sense too. Heathcliff is more demon than man, I think, and he had to go. He had to go so that the next generation could someday flourish. I may be reading too much into them, but that’s how my dad thought, through character, through story.” Lucy reached over the red velvet rope and touched a finger to the table. She quickly withdrew it. “And they were so romantic and almost overwhelming. They made the plain and obscure beautiful and worthy of undying love.”

“Victorian literature isn’t a period I’ve collected or enjoyed until James gave that book. All the Bronte books, their writing styles, made me uncomfortable.”

Lucy threw Helen a glance.

“Telling. I know.” She smiled.

“But you felt something. That’s what makes them great.” Lucy felt herself pleading.

“True. Agitation and annoyance are strong emotions.”

They walked out of the room and headed up the stairs, their shoes clicking on the bare wood. Helen stopped three times, as if to read the placards on the wall describing some aspect of the Bronte’s family life, but Lucy knew she was catching her breath.

At the landing, Lucy waited. “I read their father, Patrick, would stop here each evening to wind this clock and use the moment to yell back to them a reminder to not stay up too late. It was his ritual, but it was also theirs – that late night creative time.”

“You sound as if you understand such a time?”

“I’ve never slept well and felt a certain camaraderie with them. I don’t create great works though, I often turn on music and either play on my computer or work on my drapery project.” She continued up the stairs. “Sid gives me the fabric remnants many of his clients don’t want and I’m piecing my favorites together for my living room’s bay window.”

“That sounds like a ‘great work’ to me.”

“More of a small, incongruent something. Maybe something liked your mixed picture frames but without the priceless art.”

“Then that’s powerful, because I’ve loved those frames as much as the art with them.”

They continued to the second floor where they found the bedrooms, small and stark, opening off the hallway. A few more stairs led them to Charlotte’s with her desk and the windows looking out into the town.

“Charlotte moved in here after her brother died. Her father gave it to her and stayed in the back bedroom. She carried the family by then financially and I think he was paying her respect.” Lucy closed her eyes to absorb every aspect of the room.

“That doesn’t surprise me, but the room does. It feels so contained for all the passion I associate with her.”

“Don’t judge a book by the cover or an author by her room?”

“Or a woman by her demeanor.” Helen smiled softly and shook her head. “I need to head downstairs. You take your time.”

Lucy watched her walk away, her steps shorter and with great care. She held firmly to the side rail as she took each step down. Lucy then turned back into the front bedroom and her mind drifted to Charlotte and her stories... to *Jane Eyre*, full of change, passion and promise... to *Shirley*, emotionally distant with more of an eye to social change rather than the heart, and to *Villette*, with its pervading sense of isolation and its

search for finding one's place. Standing in her house, in her world, Lucy felt like she was trespassing upon a soul rather than a career.

For how could someone write of such characters, such change, such loss, unless they'd felt it, endured it and suffered through it? Her first heroine, Jane Eyre, unfolded and transformed throughout her tale. She was hard at the beginning – as hard and unbending as Mr. Brocklehurst, in her own way. Helen Burns softened her. Edward softened her. Then Diana and Mary. Every person pushed and pulled in her heart, molding her as people do in reality. *Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world.* She said that... But nor do they journey alone.

Mom. Dad. Sara. Sid. James...

As Lucy stepped down the stairs, going carefully over each shallow step herself and turning her feet sideways so as not to slide over the edge, her mind drifted to another character. Edward Fairfax Rochester. He was the character that drew her back to Thornfield again and again. He offered hope – hope to an unrepentant grifter and hope to his way-ward daughter. For at the end, that's to whom Charlotte bestowed the glorious ending – the promise that the unrepentant sinner can be saved, that he can fall on his knees in a new understanding and find mercy and grace.

She recalled Edward's line, when Jane returned to him. It had always struck her that with love in his arms; he turned away even for a second.

“I thank my Maker, that, in the midst of judgment, he has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto.”

She let the words drift through her and as she reached the bottom step, she decided to bypass the gift shop as it led to trifles and trinkets and the exit. She needed more time. Edward was presenting her with something new. A thread she didn't want to let slip through her fingers. She wandered to the opposite door to the garden. There she found Helen, staring at a statue of the three sisters and a sign stating that the garden was as it looked during their lifetime. Over one hundred years and something could stay the same. Endure.

“Is it what you hoped?” Helen turned.

Lucy stood beside her. “It is. I’ve loved the books. They’ve fashioned my life. Their characters were and are so real to me. But now the authors feel more that way too. I touched the table where they ate, my shoes clicked on their same floorboards, Charlotte’s desk looks just like the one I sit at day in day out in Sid’s shop and polish every Thursday. And, as her whole family dropped dead around her, Charlotte had pain, isolation, choices. That’s what she gave to her characters – her full experience. She had something to say and she said with strength, through those stories, but I’ve often gotten so absorbed in the drama, I missed the choices behind them.”

“I’m not following you.”

“It’s easy to get caught up in your circumstances and not see your own way out. I told James the other night that you don’t have options until you know you have options. I don’t know if that’s true. Something inside you always tells you – always presents a choice. Dickens taught me that as a kid, but I... I forgot. You can’t be something new until you get rid of the old.” She looked around the garden and took a deep breath. “Is this what you meant, by more than a buying trip?”

“I don’t know anymore.” Helen’s eyes grew watery. She kept them trained upon the garden’s back hedge, unmoving, unblinking. “But I know that to be true. Unless you have the courage and the conviction to lay down the old, you can’t be new. How can you?”

Deleted Scene: James meets Lucy and Helen in Haworth

1. In *The Bronte Plot*, James meets Helen and Lucy in Haworth. In this version, James is sent to London to bring Helen home prior to their Haworth journey, but she refuses to go. In the final version, I pushed his arrival later and let him stay on scene more. So

we got a little more James. Here Lucy is headed to Haworth with Helen and Dillon, and recalling her “goodbye” to James who is flying from London back to Chicago.

“Perhaps I’ll swoon.” Lucy smiled.

“You’re not the type.” Dillon chuckled.

“How do you know that?”

“If it didn’t happen with me...” He twisted and raised an eyebrow at her.

“So sure of yourself.”

Dillon flashed his eyes back to the mirror. “So what’s really up?”

“Your guess is as good as mine. Maybe nothing more than a could days sightseeing.” She shrugged and settled back into the seat as all semblance of city life blew past.

As the scenery opened from London and then from suburbs to towns then on to pastures and villages, with thatched roofed cottages and lanes, Lucy thought about changes – seasons, friends, work, times and places that leave marks as they slip into your past. The joy of James, the tumult of James, the surprise of Helen, the distraction of Dillon, the work that now burgeoned within her imagination. The passage of each left her feeling as if she now finding steady ground. After all none of that had knocked her down, and like the MacMillian gold cascading down the vase, survival brought hope.

Her mind drifted back to early that morning. James had sought her out in the bar as she checked her emails.

“Figured you’d be here.” He sat down with nothing to distract him. No computer, no phone, no magazine. “Thank you.”

Lucy’s head shot up. “What?”

“I think you’re doing something I couldn’t. I couldn’t be here right now, walk this with her. So thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

James used his pointer finger to scrape at the cuticle on his thumb. She watched him a few seconds.

“Are you nervous?”

His hands stilled and he visually found a spot on the wall behind her. “Yes and no. All will be fine, in the end. There’s always another associate to fill my shoes and the non-profit group seems happy to have me. And if I can avoid Dad until Grams gets home, I’m set.”

“And if you can’t?”

“I will.” James’s looked at her square-on. “Was it all a con?”

“I don’t do cons. Not like you’re thinking.”

“Grams said you had no detachment and that you weren’t actually a very good thief.”

“I supposed you could call it that and the fact that I’m not good at it... That’s something I guess.”

“Do you remember that time at the zoo? You almost told me about your dad then, didn’t you?”

“The coin?” Lucy found her own spot on a far wall. “You caught me off guard when you noticed that. I pick them up for him. Not him directly, but I put them all in a jar and give them to some homeless man each year. It’s stupid; it hardly makes much of a gift at all. But maybe someone’s doing the same for him. He may be doing fine, but I always figure he’s not. After all, don’t all cons end badly?”

“I hardly knew you and yet I lo—”

She cut him off. “Again not your fault. I didn’t let you.” She looked back to her computer and, in her periphery, noted him nod, almost as if agreeing that nothing more should be said.

“I should go.” He stood and straightened his pant legs and left.

She watched him walk away. *I loved you too.*

Deleted Scene: Lucy and Helen are long time friends before Lucy ever meets James

3) In *The Bronte Plot's* final version, Lucy and James meet first. He then introduces Lucy to his grandmother, Helen. In a much earlier version, Lucy and Helen are long time friends before James comes on scene. Here is Lucy and James first meeting in that earlier version.

After six hours of quiet, with not a single walk in, Lucy ached for a distraction. None of her friends were free for lunch, so she'd stayed at her desk. She'd called her mom for a chat, but she was hosting an open house. While the gallery's price points kept most casual strollers away, the scented candles, Battersea boxes, fine pens, linen stationary and assorted table smalls usually enticed a daily few — at this point, Lucy would settle for a daily one.

The door chimed and Lucy pulled the pen, cringing as an errant drop of ink fell to the page's corner. But eager to talk to another human, she quickly blotted it and placed the opened *Moby Dick* into her desk drawer to let the ink dry. She stood smoothed both her skirt and her ponytail, drawing it over her shoulder, as she scrambled to the front of the gallery.

"Hello?" A deep voice called as Lucy stepped from the workroom's concrete floor onto the polished wood. She slipped and caught herself.

"Whoa." He called again and hurried forward.

"All good." Lucy blew her long bangs out of her eyes and took in her visitor. A young man, about her own age with dark brown, almost black hair and eyes equally dark. Chocolate brown — 70%. "Must remember not to polish that for a while. Slippery." She followed his gaze to her feet. "Or wear lower heels. One of the two. Maybe both."

"They certainly make you tall." He stood only a few inches from her now, almost eye to eye, and stared a moment. Then, as if recognizing their close proximity, he stepped back. "I need to find a gift. My grandmother mentions this shop all the time and I'm finally taking the hint."

Lucy stepped behind the high chest she used as a workstation in the gallery and opened her laptop. "If you tell me her name, I can find what she's purchased before or some of Sid's notes. They're very detailed and I'm sure we can find *just* the thing."

"Helen Carmichael."

Lucy's head popped up. "I don't need to look her up. Helen was here this morning and you must be James. She talks about you, and your sisters, but you more."

James narrowed his eyes. "You're Lucy?"

"I am." Lucy reached out her hand.

"She's mentioned you, but not... I thought you were her age."

"Yikes! What gave you that impression?"

"She talks about you like you're a friend. I imagined you two lunching and playing bridge together."

Lucy glanced down. James was still holding her hand. "She comes in and we chat. No eating and no bridge. But I did pick out *Kidnapped* for you. She said you liked it?" She leveled her eyes at him. "Really liked it?"

"Is this a test?" James smiled.

The way it tipped up on the left side was so perfectly imperfect that it took all Lucy's will-power not to push the right up to match it. "Perhaps," she replied. "Did you see the four-edge drawing?"

"I wouldn't have, but it was the first thing Grams pointed out. Remarkable how it's just on the edges." He held his index finger and thumb together as if dotting tiny pictures in the air.

"I know." Lucy exclaimed. She had stepped forward again and found herself too close. She retreated, one step, then two. "So Helen needs a gift?"

"A birthday gift."

"You're kidding me. That little sneak."

James raised his eyebrows.

"She was in here this morning talking about birthdays and never once mentioned her own." Lucy shook her head. "I've found that's typical with your grandmother. She operates on an entirely different plane."

"You seem to know her well."

"Does anyone?" Lucy joked then rushed on, fearing her quip could be considered rude. "She hired Sid a few years ago and has been dropping in ever since. There aren't many walk-ins so sometimes we'll sit and chat. Your grandmother really is one of my favorite people." Lucy scanned the shop. "But I'm curious... How old will she be? I've never had the courage to ask, but I've wondered. I want to say early seventies, but the math doesn't add up because I know you're turning thirty soon."

"Good grief that woman talks a lot." At Lucy's satisfied grin, he added, "She'll be eighty-five."

"She only says good stuff, though. I promise." Lucy briefly surveyed the shop. She took in the Henry Moore prints on the south wall. *Too expensive*. Sid's potpourri of modern works. *Too abstract*. The mixed medium sculptures. *Too industrial*. Various silver pieces, perhaps a pillbox or dish. *Too mundane*. She finally returned her gaze to James and wrinkled her nose. "I'm at a loss."

"What about a book?" His whisper came out low and suggestive with a pinch of adorable uncertainty.

He's flirting? Lucy caught another of the off-kilter smiles and was lost. "I thought of that, but my range is fairly tight and a little pricey."

"They're overpriced?"

"They're valued perfectly." She shot back as she turned the large brass key. "None of these are first editions, but they're beautiful and limited. Some have four-edge paintings on the side, like yours." She opened the *Jane Eyre* and fanned the edges to reveal Jane and Rochester beneath a tree. "Check this out. That's the famous scene when Edward tells Jane that the chord between them will snap when she leaves him for Ireland."

"I like that scene and was very relieved when the tree didn't light up above their heads, but I like when she comes back and finds him at Ferndale better." James lifted one brow in challenge. "What a woman!"

Lucy's lips unfastened. She felt her jaw fall and clamped it up. "I'm sorry I tested you."

"English literature major." James laughed. "You assumed I couldn't read, didn't you?"

“Not couldn’t. Didn’t. And it was my mistake.”

Lucy replaced the book and pulled down *Middlemarch* and *Mary Barton*. “These are a little less and very nice. Your grandmother adores Elizabeth Gaskell.”

“But I know, and I suspect you do too, that she’d like *Jane Eyre* more.”

“Yes, but...”

“I’ll take it.”

Lucy vacillated, remembering what she’d told Helen and how aggressively she’d priced the book. “I don’t think you...”

"You love it, don't you?" James stepped toward her. "You're not going to be very successful as a book seller if you can't part with dear Helen or Jane or Adele or Blanche... Never-mind, Blanche is easy to part with, isn't she?"

"Oh..." Lucy couldn't stop the blush heating her face. She turned away, fully aware it only made her face match her hair. Several former boyfriends had told her that it was not a good look. A comparison to "Animal" from the *Muppets* had even been thrown out — twice. And she didn't want this man to see that — to keep that in his mind as a first impression.

But to have those dark eyes directed straight at her, intense and inviting, was too irresistible, too alluring, and then to add all the characters from *Jane Eyre* to the mix... Too heady all together. Whether he intended to conjure them or not, images of chords stretching from one ribcage to another, never snapping and always holding fast, drifted before her.

Lucy recovered on her walk back to the chest. James followed. She then opened the cover to show him the price, marked lightly in pencil. He afforded it the tiniest glance and returned his gaze to her. He then lifted the same eyebrow he had moments before and reached for his wallet, never breaking eye contact. She was the first to look away.

As she rang-up the sale, she couldn't resist quick peeks as James paced the gallery. She almost laughed as he picked up or touched every item on display. Sid knew his job well. *Always keep tactile objects at hand. You want engagement.* James ran his hand down a warm wooden vase sitting atop a book on architectural design; lobbed a forged-iron apple in his palm like a baseball; and ran his fingers through box of hand-hewn birch pencils. She watched him until he stood stymied in front of a display of scented candles.

“May I give you a gift for your grandmother, from me?” Lucy called out.

“Of course.”

Lucy stepped in front of him, brushing his sleeve with her fingers as she reached past. “We got these in last week and they smell beautiful. Like the real flowers, not sweet or cloying at all. Do you think she’s jasmine or gardenia?”

James shrugged as she lifted one then the other before him. He shook his head. “I can’t tell the difference.”

“Hmm...” Lucy weighed both in her hands as if that was the determining factor. “I’ll go with gardenia.”

She returned to her desk and wrapped both the book and candle in plain brown paper, tying them closed with black grosgrain ribbon. She was so focused, she didn’t hear James approach until she felt him near.

“Would you have dinner with me some time?”

“Yes.”

“Okay then.” He beamed. “Tonight?”