

Why'd You Bring That?

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Why'd You Bring That?

by [FlyingPigPoet](#)

Beech, Thomas Beech

When he appeared at the kitchen door, all shiny
And handsome, I nearly dropped the flour-covered
Wooden spoon. And then he said that he would be
Miss Lister's new groom, and yes, he's too young
For me, of course, but it warmed my loins,
And when was the last time that happened?

So I showed him into the dining room and then
Hung back in the hallway to watch the sisters
React to him. Surely, I thought, even Miss Lister
Will be charmed by such a dapper fellow. But
No. I think she found her toast more charming
As she listed a tour of Europe that sounded

Downright exhausting. Maybe in my younger
Years, I'd have looked at it as simply one more
Rousing adventure, especially with a man
Like that to distract me from all the ladies
She would undoubtedly attract. And speaking
Of attraction, I notice that Miss Marian

Has lost track of her toast, gazing fondly
At the young man's slightly bulging pants
So that Miss Lister must rap with the knife
To get her to pass the butter. Her elder
Never bothers to look him in the eye
As she speaks, much less his manly crotch.

The Itinerary

Having always been a bit of a home body,
I always stop listening when Anne starts
Listing cities she wants to go charging through
Like Atilla. It's bad enough taking the Highflier
From here to Market Weighton, all rattling

About. But this Thomas Beach, there's a body
I wouldn't mind having about. He starts
Today and I'm to take him to Halifax, through
The shops for his clothes, shoes, hat. We'll fly
Into the bank too, while I rattle on...

He's in His Sunday Best

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Just as I was telling my dolly all about my plans
To be a pig farmer or a librarian or maybe just
A land steward like Pa, there was a sharp knock
On the front door and what do you know,
It's that Thomas Sowden all in his Sunday best,

So I go up to tell Pa and I surprise him with
My banging on his door and make him smudge
But he doesn't mind really, and eventually
I remember to show Thomas up and he wants
To talk to Pa about something "delicate," he says,

And I say, "We're very discrete. What's
On your mind?" but then Pa kicks me out,
Saying I should help in kitchen, but I do tend
To drop things, so I know I don't have to go,
And instead, I tell my dolly about how Thomas

Probably wants to marry our Suzanna,
But my dolly just can't seem to keep quiet,
So my sisters hear us talking and then race
Upstairs to listen at Pa's door, but at least
This time they can't say I was carrying tales.

Chapter End Notes

God, I love this kid. Incipient butch, circa 1834.

The Deeds to Shibden

Marian

The moment Christopher Rawson said it at the bank,
I had a sinking feeling it just might be true.
With Anne, anything is possible, and the worse it is,
The more likely, I'd say. So when he came
Straight at me and started saying all those things--
How she'd given him the deeds to Shibden
As security against a 2000-pound note of credit,
I suddenly had visions of her swanning off
To Paris, Rome and Moscow, while the whole house
Was sold from under us. And then he made
A lewd comment about Mr. Abbott, who apparently
Is now engaged to Miss Greenwood. He said
He'd offer to marry me, but only to get at our coal.
Mr. and Mrs. Saltmarsh saw the whole thing,
And all his staff, and the townspeople sniggering
At me. Excruciating! I'm never going back.

Anne

I know Marian doesn't always think the best of me,
But I should have hoped she would know I'd never
Do that. It pains me that she would not believe
I hadn't until I pulled the deed out of the closet,
And she read it for herself. I almost forgave her
Her doubts, though, when I realized she was
In tears. He should never have spoken to her,
To my sister, like that. Well, I'll deal with him.

He's Still Stealing Your Coal

When she called Holt and me to Shibden
And told us the latest of that great sinner,
Christopher, it went straight to my heart.
I'm fond of Miss Marian, the little I see of her,
And I find I feel fiercely protective of her sister,

Even though she is a bit of an Amazon. Surely,
We two can help them sort this out. "He's still
Stealing your coal," said Holt, "Yes, that's what
This is about. He's fishing for information,
Frightened you might still have the money

To sink your own pit." She spoke of the third
Party's investment she no longer had, showed
Her agitation about risking income and estate,
Kept opening and closing her pocket watch.
She's never nervous. "We'll look again," I say.

Not Quite off the Mark

Feeling so very official in my new blue and gold
Livery, I held the door for Miss Lister as she climbed
Inside (Joseph Booth having told me that she don't
Like to be handed in), then I hopped up on the back.

The back's not so bad once you get used to it,
Though I will say the road to York wasn't exactly
The best of the roads I've suffered through. Still,
Autumn in Yorkshire is as beautiful as folk say,

And it never rained, so that's a mercy. But,
When we finally arrived at Dr. Belcombe's,
I was barely halfway down before she was out
Of the carriage and giving orders about

The postilion bating the horses and getting them
Back by 4:00 for our return to Leeds. She speaks
Fast, walks fast. I'm going to have to practice
Getting down faster, to get the door before her.

If She Should Happen to Write to You

It's hard to believe that I've known Anne
For so many years now. I met her when she
And Marianna were teens, awkward, defiant,
And in love, though I shouldn't even think it.
Then Anne had that phase where she swaggered--
There's no other word--and wore more masculine
Clothes, the ones Marianna so hated. And now,
At forty, she is settled in some ways, although,
Alas, not in others. Inheriting suited her, as travel
Always does, a way of taming that bold spirit.
This afternoon, she comes first to thank me,
For my help with Miss Walker, a fine young woman

Who is, like Anne, weak and strong in different ways.
"I was happy to help," I say, and I hope she knows,
Disregarding Marianna, I consider her to be family.
She tells me she recommended Miss Walker write
To me if she needs, that they'd promised not
To write each other, but that if Miss Walker did
Write to me, would I let her know, wherever
In the world she might be, in case she could help.
She gives me her itinerary, with dates and addresses.
I say, "There was a letter two weeks ago,
From her sister. Ann was worried it would be
Too cold in Inverness. I advised good nutrition

And giving the place a fair trial. But there was
No mention of seeking medical advice in Edinburgh."
Anne becomes agitated, using sharper gestures, words,
Looks of disgust as she describes the mother speaking
Quite openly about the family trying to get Ann
For the kin, to pay off debts. I calm her, saying,
"I only met her briefly, but she seems to have more
Backbone than people credit her with. So when do
You travel? Mariana will be delighted." She says,
She thought if they ever got together, finally,
The world might make sense. "Hasn't too much
Water passed under the bridge for that?"

The Family Table

Passing the potatoes, commandeering the carrots,
Gliding the gravy across the table, we casually

Put the magistrate on trial for behavior unbecoming.
Father says Rawson is often drunk in the morning,

Even while sitting on the bench, and Marian recalls
His odd ebullience when he was insulting and upsetting

Her. Aunt Ann questions what that makes us,
Halifax, if such one is at the head of our most revered

Institutions. I resolve to invite him to Shibden. Why?
To hear him apologize, first of all. And then... Well,

I can't have him stealing my coal ("our coal").
They think that he will refuse to come, but I know

A few tricks they don't know, and nor does he.
Certainly, if he can play dirtily, then so can I.

Help Yourself!

I know I always complain about how Anne manages,
Always, to become the topic of conversation no matter
What it had been, and I know I complain about her always
Upstaging me, as she always has. I know this. I do. And yet...

On a day like today, when I sit in the front row for this
Performance, and watch her change the scenery around,
Sifting the little table to next to the love seat, moving
The Madeira onto it, with a little "Hmm" of content...

Then I think, let the show begin. And it does. Christopher
Is like her in his speed and how he uses it to belittle
Whatever "little" affair he thinks he is walking into.
I think you can't belittle a sleeping giant like Anne,

(Although I would never on Earth tell her so). I watch
As he bullies his way past Joseph and immediately
Complains about her "trick" of telling lies to his mother,
And she counters with the thug trying to beat the living

Daylights out of her (I knew she didn't fall off a wall!).
"Didn't work, by the way. He ran off clutching the old
Family jewels--" (I wince at both phrase and gesture)
"--I think he was crying in the end. Perhaps next time,

Employ three or four?" She steps up in his face, smiles.
"Would you like a glass of Madeira?" "Perhaps," he says,
"A small one." (And I don't understand the shift, but
I think it's intentional on her part). He sits down.

She pours for him and her, asks me, but I decline.
And then the moment I never thought I'd live to see:
Anne stepping up for me. "You alarmed her, upset her.
I'm fair game. You can try my mettle any time you like,

But do not humiliate my sister." "Oh, she's a great
Thick-head. I was teasing!" "She was embarrassed.
She was angry. I was intrigued as to why it was said."
"As was I by what you told my mother, who thinks

Anything coming out of your mouth is Gospel."
"She likes me, always has done. Everything I told her
Was true." She took his empty glass and refilled it,
Repeating the complaint about his humiliating me

In front of all those people, the thug, and him driving
The gig in the accident where the boy lost a leg. And then,
You offer to marry Marian, for my coal. Do you recall?"
"Vaguely," he says, which is ridiculous as she points out.

She talks at length, as he drinks off the second glass,
About why he wants to know her worth and how he is
Still stealing her coal (our coal), and how she didn't want
To accuse him outright-- "Own it, and let us do a fair deal."

She adds that Hinscliffe's men heard his men down
In her upper bed. "Oh, men in your bed. Now there is
A novelty." She clinks his glass. "Help yourself." He does.
I begin to see where this is going, smile slightly.

She says, "You vaguely remember what happened.
Were you drunk? We think you were. Then, and when
Your gig ran the carriage off the road and when you paid
Mark Robinson to beat me up--Mm. I found out who he is.

Being drunk doesn't excuse these things, but it explains
Them. But when you systematically day after day steal
My coal, that is not drunk. That is a decision." And that
Was when she got him to show her his hand. Ha!

How to Surprise Your Lawyer

I am surprised to see her like this, tired, fidgety,
Talking of running off to the Continent when there is
Work to do here, in Halifax, on the estate. She says,
"I need to get away for a while," though she has only
Been back for a year. "Part of me just wants to run off
And forget about it." I shake my head. "That's not

Like you." "You'd be surprised. There are other things
To do in the world... The only alternative I can think of,"
She says, tapping her thumb on my desk--a bad sign--
"Is, could you... get me a loan? I'd need 1500 pounds
At least." "And security for that much?" She paused.
"The deeds... to Shibden..." Surprise after surprise.

Forwarding Addresses

With all her trunks and bags and things being piled
Out in the courtyard and Joseph and Thomas sweating up
Their livery carrying down yet more, the household
Is all aflutter. I wish she wouldn't travel so much. Yes,
It was good to get off to Wales that time, and yes, Paris,
For the most part was good, although the riots were,
To be quite honest, alarming. But now she is going off,
Again, without me--with just a lady's maid I know she has
Doubts of, and an almost untried footman. How can this

Be a good idea? She sits with me in the dining room
Telling me of her stops and addresses, in Leamington,
London until the 17th, Paris a week later. "And then,
From Paris, who knows? But you'll always know
Where I am, wherever I go. I'll come back at a moment's
Notice if there is anxiety about health." I say I know,
And I do, but that doesn't mean I like it much. That is
Also when she asks me to write to Ann Walker Sr.
From time to time, pass the news on to her. I will.

Mirror

My history with mirrors is a mixed one. When young,
I hated them, not knowing how to recognize myself
In the girl who looked back at me. I longed to see
Her with her wife, arms around each other. With each
Woman I entangled myself with, I imagined leaning
Back against her, perhaps looking out a window.

The years passed, and as I had more of my own
Money, and more of my own say in my own clothes,
I found a happy medium between clothing that would
Allow me to do the things I love to do--walk, ride, shoot,
Climb walls if I have to--and be with the people I prefer
To spend time with, educated ladies of good conversation,

Who inevitably expect a certain bowing to conventions,
Compromise. It took me years and a good dressmaker,
But I found my place. But today, readying to travel,
I throw on my greatcoat and find myself confronting
Myself. After all the women come and gone, I wonder
Just who this woman is, so bold, and still so alone...

Nobility of Character

She's off again, and it's a relief to both of us, if not
To Aunt Anne. Still there is one more thing. I tell
Her she mustn't be cross if I do have call her back
On account of our aunt's health. "I wouldn't do it
Lightly, you know that, but she is... old." She nods,

Then tells me about Thomas Sowden's trouble
With Suzannah Washington's mother not being for
The match, thinking Thomas and his family are
Beneath her. "Washington's for it, of course.
He can see how bright Thomas is, that he will do

Well for himself. And it's better for us if our tenants
Are settled, so... Perhaps you could take Father,
Pay a house call on the Washingtons. Tell them
That just occasionally, someone is born with
A nobility of character that belies their lowly birth,

And that's how we feel about Thomas." I do not
Show my shock at this uncharacteristic show
Of--dare I call it egalitarianism? No, she'd not like
That. So all I say is, "Certainly." She hugs me,
Roughly, as always. "Take care of yourself." "And you."

Nobody Else Knows

She always thinks she knows so much, and so much
Better than anyone else, as if she were the expert,
Just because she's read all those books on geology
And the like. So when she comes to say farewell,
And just happens to mention that the pit is being
Sunk, starting now, and won't say where the money
Came from, and Holt and Washington in charge, and
Only they and their men know about it, and if those
Blasted Rawsons don't find out, all the better, well...

I can only hope she actually does really know
What she's doing. She says the money is "tight,
But it's manageable, and if all goes to plan, we could
Be getting the coal within a year." "Shouldn't you
Be here to manage it?" I ask, frustrated. She says,
"That's the perfect cover. How can I be up to something
If I'm not even here?" "I've told you before," I say,
"It's an unpleasant business, coal." She says nothing,
Just kisses me, nods, and goes out to her carriage.

Cordingly, Having Been Indiscreet

Cordingly always thinks of such things, a basket
For the servants, bread and cheese, tongue and apples,
And a few bottles of beer. Surely Eugenie has learned
Enough English to understand that, though she still
Seems determined to flirt with the new groom,
The handsome Thomas Beach. But he's not having it.

I marvel, murmuring to Cordingly, "It doesn't matter
What she tries. He's just not having any, is he?
How odd. All the other men seem smitten with her."
Cordingly smirks. "Well," she says, "I may have been
Indiscreet, telling him a cautionary tale about her
Indiscretion with his predecessor." Lesson learned.

A Thermometer and a Kiss

When I give thought to the necessities for a journey,
I first think of the obvious: new drawers; a new trunk
That will fit on the carriage, lined; slippers for dancing;
New boots for much walking; my travel suit; my pelise
For more formal occasions; money drawn from the bank;
My journal and slate; stationery, ink and my writing desk.

But, of course, there are also the last-minute things.
As I take leave of my father and am about to pass through
To the courtyard, my eyes land on the thermometer
And I pull it off its hook tuck it under my arm. One wants
To know what the weather is, when traveling, so as
To plan one's clothes, decide to go out or stay in.

And as I hurry out to the courtyard, I see them lined up
To see me off: the servants, my aunt, my sister. Of course
Only my aunt seems disturbed by my leaving. Marian
Probably is relieved. The servants, I imagine, only think
Of one less mouth to feed, one less set of clothes
To launder, orders to obey... But Aunt Anne is in tears,

Her handkerchief damp in her hand, her eyes red.
I feel a powerful tenderness toward her, this woman
Who has been more of a mother to me than my own
Ever was. I stride forward and kiss her hand. She sees
My meaning, my gratitude, I hope. Then, all needful
Things packed or handled, I get in and we go. Release.

Fond of Children?

The last few days I've given new thought to that idea
I had, that I liked children. The longer I stay here,
The more their shrieks and moans, the banging of drums,
The whining--there's a lot more of that than laughter,

It would seem. It's a miracle my sister doesn't lose
Her mind. It goes on and on, sunrise to sundown,
And that's before you tally in how she has to order
The servants and watch out for the captain's temper.

Anne always said the lack of children would be a great
Sadness, but now I wonder. I can't imagine she would
Get much reading done if we had a pair of little Annes
Running around, and boys would be even worse.

And yes, she is occasionally pushy or patronizing,
But she is also a rock to lean against, with an even
Temper--she says the journal helps there--rarely
Displaying anger. And I know now it was righteous

The two times she did, when I reacted harshly
Because of Mr. Ainsworth and Miss Parkhill.
She is nothing like the captain. He is vain, stern,
Sulky and self-serving, always putting Elizabeth

In a hard place, criticizing and threatening.
I am going back to my early thoughts of marriage
To a man as being repugnant. I draw Anne here
So I can tell her likeness how my ideas change.

Sister Talk, One

She's quiet yes, is Ann, but nothing like
What we were told to expect. And she does
Not like company, but then she never did,
Much preferred conversation with just one
Or two friends, rather than parties
And the like. I go to her, as she is drawing
Flowers and ask her if she might make
A compromise with her own preferences
To make my life easier--as I've got one
Child nursing, one in the measles, and
Sackville utterly unmanageable...
"It's just that the captain has invited
His mother and cousin to dinner
On Wednesday and hopes you might
Come join us. I know you prefer it
Upstairs here, but Captain Sutherland
Would count it a great kindness, as would
I... And don't think there's anything
Behind it, just a family gathering.
You'll be all right with that, won't you?"

London in Autumn

so my life is like this now, cold grey London, as if
all of summer's warmth had been bled from the city,
if not the world, and I hear carriages rattling down
the street behind the clattering of horse's hooves,
but they all sound like hearses to me today...

and objectively I know, I can see the brightly turning
leaves, the yellows and oranges that offer a reminder
of sun and warmth, one last fiery fling before winter
overtakes us once again, for months and months
and then she hurries into the sitting room, all in black

as ever she has since my wedding, and it's just one more
reminder that death happens, is inevitable, and Charles
might go first, but will he leave me enough to live on?
will he leave me anything but the memory of decades
lived with a man, with an irritating man, because that

is the way the world is: cold, unfeeling and unfair,
especially when one is a woman, and here she is
looking less like a man than formerly, but still--
and Charles takes his leave to be with the family
at this dreadful time, but his late brother's wife

can't stand me, and the dead boy was the only one--
but she is here, and I lean on her as I often have,
lean into her kisses, because she's seen a fair bit
of death too, her mother, her uncle, her hopes when I
married Charles, securing money and unhappiness...

You and Her Were So Close

At least in bed, we are alike, hair down, white linen
Covering us lest the servants walk in, a shared sheet,
A shared blanket, shared candlelight as we grubble,
Shared darkness as we doze, sated, and then, shared
Daylight maneuvering its way around the curtains.

We talked between kisses all night, talked between
Me drifting off, then her, then waking to talk again.
I find the tale she is telling me disturbing. It fills in
Details left out of her letters, gaps that made me
Wonder, worry, not a little jealous, though I tried

To wave it off. I say, "I didn't realize that you and her
Were so close. I suspected something, but..." Her hand
Strokes the linen over my knee, saying, "It was just
Something to do. I was bored. And lonely." She tells me
It's all off now, but she won't meet my eyes. "Freddy,

Are you crying?" "No, it's just--" "Is she very rich?"
"Yes, but it's not that. It was to start, but then..."
And I wonder about that look in her eyes, far-off,
Romantic, idealistic. Once again, she tried for that
Hopeless wish she had, and once again, she failed.

Yes, and Then You Married Charles

It always hits me sharply, every time I am near her
Again, her perfume, and all the memories good and bad
It stirs in my imagination: meeting, falling, discovering
What we liked from each other. Then the proposal, his,
Her marriage, every adulterous connection we've had

Since then. The "three steps" business and Scarborough,
When she said she would wish me different, basically
Saying she would wish me to be not-me. That stung,
And the sting has never completely gone away. So now,
When she seems surprised when I finally tell her more

About my understanding with Ann, how I had asked her
To marry me, move in to Shibden, take the sacrament,
It's odd and ironic for her to say, "But Freddy, you are
Married to me!" "Yes," I snap. "And then you married
Charles all those years ago." She is annoyed, I can tell,

And jealous, saying, "I'd no idea it had got that far
Between you." "Yes, well, it did." And I lie there,
Thinking how her perfume is so strong compared
To l'eau de toilette Ann wears, like the oil portrait
Compared to the watercolor. My tastes have changed.

Do You Think It's Going to Rain?

I recall telling my father that Ann blew hot and cold,
Never realizing that I have been experiencing sudden
Shifts in the weather for almost two decades. I put
Away my journal as M starts talking about the dead
Nephew, glance out the window at the heavy clouds,
Ask, "Do you think it's going to rain?" before I realize

She has been trying to tell me something. "Sorry. Go on."
So he was Charles's heir, the amiable young man who
Would have taken her in on Charles's death. Now, though,
She thinks Charles will leave her destitute, reliant upon
Some unknown relative who will cut her off. My surprise,
I see, makes her think me naive. She says, "I always

Thought I'd be coming to you when Charles died, and now
There you are moving in with Miss Walker." Her tone
Is petty. I remind her how she'd put an end to us ever
After Hastings. She says she didn't, but I was distraught,
Yes, not deaf. And she starts to argue, but is distracted
By my yard-long thermometer. "Why'd you bring that?"

"To know what the temperature is, what else? You'd
Better shut up now. You're bringing back some poor
Memories." "I'm just pointing out--" "Yes, I'm odd!
I like to have my thermometer with me on holiday.
It's not illegal!" Hot and cold, always. I only now
Notice her inconsistencies, wonder, have I wasted time?

This Maybe-Sometime-Never Event

I forget, between visits and dalliances, just how
Unreasonable she can be, how out of the common way.
The clothes, the hat, the thermometer. How are we still
Even together after all this time? After all these oddities

And embarrassments? Yet, even as the carriage bounces
Along to Oxford, I see her face soften. "So you do want
To come live with me at Shibden, mm?" "Yes." She takes
My hand, looks soft. "When Charles dies." She throws

My hand back into my lap, growling, "Not now? So, what
Am I supposed to do? Just wait for this maybe-sometimes-
Never event?" She is angry, and I've rarely seen her
Like that, and never for long, but I do know that seventeen

Years is not the five or ten we had presupposed, back then.
Charles has turned out to be hardier than expected, if not
Always as firm as I'd like. She sees the thoughts flicker
Over my face. She knows me too well. She can see it all:

My fear for my future, my jealousy over her moving
Her little Miss Walker in, my surprise that she could
Ever find someone who might replace me in her deep
Affections. Someone other than me she might have, hold.

A Great Kindness

I suppose all families are alike in their push
And pull, each of their separate agendas, their
Needs and wants and inabilities to distinguish
Between those two. My family, hers, the captain's.

I've never seen her family together, not since
That congenial visit after the one where my aunt
And I were tossed on the shores of their hospitality
By the carriage accident. Anne played an equal role

In both, though she was only present the second time.
That is just who she is. In my own family, so parched
From our bereavement, there is our aunt, my sister,
And myself--not much to work with. But Elizabeth

Managed to marry into a bit of a menagerie (or so
I can imagine her describing them). The push
And pull of my sister and her husband, her husband
And his mother, his mother and his cousin...

Then you add the children and the whole thing
Is a bit like jungle monkeys taking tea together.
But the captain is the one we all must bow to.
Elizabeth's quick look tells me so. I never thought

To be a part of such a pantomime, but I know
Survival when I see it, so I acquiesce. No raging
Gorilla will upset the fragile teatime my sister
Has managed to finesse for her own safety.

I Always Know When You're Sulking

Aggrieved, I wait by the fire while she writes in that
Infernal journal, tapping and flipping her pen, sipping
From her teacup. "Are you not speaking to me at all?"

I don't think I have snagged her attention. I continue.
"I always know when you're sulking. All you do is read
And write. You should apologize to me, for what you said,

Earlier." "It's brought back too many memories for that."
"What do you mean?" "Scarborough this time ten years ago."
"Right. Let's talk about Scarborough, my miseries..."

I think of the myriad mortifications I suffered for her
Insistence on masculine attire, gestures, postures,
Her hair and hat and coat. The looks she got, the looks

I got for being seen with her. "Do you know what agonies
I endured being seen with you, the way you used to dress?
Everyone whispering about you behind your back

About how masculine you were. I was snubbed just
For being seen with you. At least now, you do try
To look like a lady. Back then? I heard the post-boy

Say, 'Is that a man?'" "Well, good heavens. I'm surprised
You ever bothered me at all, if that was the case." I flush,
Insist, "I love you. I always have!" She seems unconvinced.

We've Both Made Choices

So many years have flown past, and yet, still
Scarborough haunts me, her words haunt me.
And in all this time, she has never entirely
Taken them back, never said that she loved me
As I was, as I am. Her avowals are always couched,
It's always clear that if she does love me, it is
In spite, rather than because, of what I am:
This oddity who wears stays and petticoats,
Spencers and a top hat. They suit me, I find,

And it took me long enough to come to this dark
Compromise. She thinks I don't know what people
Said or say, but I do. I always have. As Horace wrote,
"It is the false shame of fools to try to conceal
Wounds that have not healed." Perhaps, like our
Shared venereal trouble, some wounds never will
Heal. She claims she loves me more than "your
Miss Walker ever would." I remember the letter.
"We are where we are," I say. "We've both made

Choices, mistakes. Mm? Let's not hate each other.
We've weathered the storm this far... Come!
Live with me at Shibden. I won't go to Paris
Or anywhere!" She pauses. I will remember
That, forever: her pause, her intake of breath.
I sigh. "Think about it. We'll carry on to London.
Think about it." That pause. She lays her head
In my lap, where once upon a time, she did
Other things. My tea, like my heart, grows cool.

You Do Have an Eye

Night is falling, finally. The children are quiet.
Finally. Once more I seek the relative solitude
Of this room and my sketchbook. I flip past ferns
And flowers to my friend, not only sketched,
But also painted, true to life, her sardonic look,
Her dark blue spencer, her (I shouldn't say it)
Ridiculous hair. I can't think of a single lady

I've ever met who could bring off croquettes
Like that, yet when she looks at me, I only
See her eyes. When she grins at me, I only see
Her humor, her clever wit, her willingness
To question conventions in the interest of being
Herself, first and last. I run my fingers over
Her blue sleeves, the way I ran my fingers

Over white linen in York. Only when I hear
The light rap of knuckles on my door do I
Shut the album. The door opens, admits
My elder sister, wrapped in a woolen shawl
Over her nightdress. She says I've been all right
Today, and I think I have carried that off.
She says I've been busy and asks to look

At my album. "Hmm. These are good.
You do have an eye... Thank you... At teatime..."
"I shan't marry him," I say. "No one will make
You do anything you don't want," she says.
"I want to go home!" "No one's there now
To look after you. Miss Lister is traveling...
But I won't let them bully you into anything."

She looks worn, if not haggard. "You are
Frightened of him, aren't you?" I ask.
She sighs. "So much more complicated
When you've got children, but I promise, Ann,
I'll look after you." And she is my big sister.
I must believe her. We hug. Such a little stretch
Of time before her babies, wake, cry, take her.

Your Likeness, in My Arms

Lullaby and good night
As I hold your likeness tight.
With willows bedecked,
What else could you expect?

With lilies o'erspread
As my shoulder feels your head,
Lay us down now and rest.
May our slumber be blessed.

Lullaby and good night,
My gondolier staves my fright.
Shining angels beside,
All your travels abide.

Soft and warm is your bed
After travel's wine and bread.
Clear your mind and rest your head.
Forget your traveler's dread.

Sleepyhead, close your eyes.
Now you've agreeabilized.
You'll protect me from harm
And I'll wake in your arms.

We'll sleep on with no fear.
Our guardians are near.
Let our minds make no fuss.
They watch close over us.

On our sheets, white as cream,
With our head full of dreams
As I hold your likeness tight,
Lullaby and good night.

London, At Speed

Cityspeed, Marianna used to call it, the speed at which
I walk to get not from one village pub to the next but that
Which I use to make things--often travel arrangements--
Happen faster, so I can make connections between coaches
And ships, between one set of high-flown friends and another.

Now I rush, feeling exhilarated, toward the rooms that
Vere and Donald have let, to show off tiny Anne Hobart
To their aristocratic acquaintances in the City. I hurry
Between puddles in the street, take the townhouse's
Steps two at a time and rap the knocker. Inside their

Well-apportioned home, I also take the many stairs
Two at a time in my eagerness to see Vere, congratulate
Her on that achievement *<as she sees it>* that required her
To risk her life and bet on the child for her future security.
<Do I sound jaded, testy? Perhaps. Well, let it be so.>

I manage a huge smile when I see her and the small, bald
Progeny. Her hair braided to the side *<as I always imagined
She did it for bed>*, she holds the swaddled babe, smiling
With that look women often get after surviving a birth:
Breathtaking in this case... I tell her of Donald's note,

And she says she would have rather laid an egg. I laugh,
Until she says, "Here, have a go." My gloves and greatcoat
Still on, I take up the blanketed Verelette tagged with my--
I mean, his grandmother's name. I sit, pull my gloves off
With my teeth and hold and examine the child, who has

Vere's exquisite pearl ears. Vere laughs at my expression,
Asks, "How are you? How long in London?" "A fortnight,
Then to Paris, and after that, who knows? South to Rome,
Or north to Copenhagen and--" "Oh, you must go there!
My half-sister lives in Copenhagen, would be delighted

If you turned up there, couldn't do enough for you.

She's gagging for decent company. Her husband does have
Those handy connections at court. Who are you traveling
With?" And she doesn't ask, when I say, a man and my maid,
But I keep waiting for someone to say, "Do ladies do that?"

Suddenly Remembering Her Speed

It's one thing to remember her speed while walking
From, say Shibden to my carriage, ten miles to meet me along
The way: ridiculous. But in the in-between years
Of our marriage, she has exemplified the speed
Of an ancient Greek marathoner: ready at a moment
To report miles away on a battle lost, on a cause
That she expected to have won, and then, didn't.

This afternoon, I am napping on the hotel sofa
When she comes charging in, hanging on the doorknob
That smashes into the room, waking me suddenly.
She tosses off hat and greatcoat as I ask, "How was she?"
"Very well, and the baby too." I pointed to the cards
And the letter, all from Lady Fill-in-the-Blanks, and
The last, from Lady Stuart, an invitation, which she

Can reply to, as I cannot, having not been introduced.
I suggest shopping and she agrees, needing to buy
A coffee pot for Vere's wedding, but then I realize that
She will need to start dressing now for Lady Stuart's
Dinner, being held an hour away at least. She grabs
Hat, coat, letters all and rushes out to change. I recall
When such an invitation would not have made her budge.

Will I Do?

M

After Anne disappeared to dress and prepare
For this Lady Stuart's ball, I took to my own chamber,
Thinking of what she would wear and how she would
Fail her hostess utterly, trying to be more a man.
She loves that black satin pelise, with the practically
Regimental black hat, and her boots and gaiters.
How I loathe the boots and gaiters, always have.
They, all of it really, the whole painting, are why
People always snicker and ask if she's a man, and,
My least favorite, if her cock stands. It's like she
Never hears, doesn't understand, refuses to change.

E

"Madame," I say in French, "Your Thomas? I don't like him."
"Nonsense," says she, "What's not to like?" "He hates me,
Won't speak to me more than he has to." We're not attaching her
Amusing little croquettes, two above each ear. (I rerolled them
Myself last night after she gave them to me and retired to bed.)
But this afternoon, she wants a different look. This dress
Truly makes her look more like a lady. Her shoulders are fine.
I offer her two pairs of earrings and she chooses. I put those
Earrings in and she says I haven't been trying hard enough.
But I have. She stands and asks, "What do you think?" But then
Madame Lawton hurries in without knocking, and stands mute.

M

I think I have never seen her naked shoulders except in bed,
And never these fifteen or more years. They are exquisite, yes,
But I always thought them mine. How dare she expose
Her exquisite bits to the general public? How is it that,
No matter how I complained or begged, she always dressed
In a masculine style, even with the corset and all
The petticoats? Yet, suddenly, for this Lady Stuart person,
She chose, CHOSE, to wear an off-shoulder gown? How?
Her shoulders are luscious; how can I possibly share them?
She looks at herself in the mirror, sees me staring at her
Reflection, aghast. Strangely hesitant, she asks, "Will I do?
Lady Stuart prefers ladies to wear low-cut gowns at dinner..."
So I looked worried. Envious maybe. She never did that for--

A

It's strange to think of going out in public like this, and I cannot
Read M's gaze. She looks horrified, angry, something I cannot

Name. She stutters when I ask if I will do, and I suppose
That I am flubbing it again, this femininity business, but
Lady Stuart's preferences are well known, and it would be
Social death to flaunt them. So here I am, exposed, chilly.
Still, we're not alive if we're not trying to better ourselves
And there's no guarantee that we'll be comfortable as we do.

We'd Like to Give You Our Blessing

Once again, I find myself in debt to Miss Lister, for surely
She put her sister and father up to visiting the house,
Talking my wife into coming around on the match
Between Suzannah and Thomas Sowden. Nobility
Of character? That's Miss Lister's phrase, you may rely
Upon it. So, wasting no time, I rode to the farm, catching
Thomas just as he was building a proper staircase
With his younger brother. I told him that we would
Like to give him our blessing, and then Suzannah would
Surely like to hear the good news from him direct.
His mother did mention a letter from Sam Sowden's
Brother, Ben, which I did think odd. If a man did do
A drunken runoff, why would he go to his brother?
And would the brother then let the wife know? But
Perhaps it was done so that she need not worry.

If One Can't Distract Oneself in London...

Having returned to our rooms just after midnight,
Eugenie was sleepy-eyed helping me undress,
And climbing into the bed, I could tell that Marianna's
Breathing was not quite so regular as to indicate
Sleep. That's how she breathes after we've fought
When she doesn't want to talk about it. Fine.

I had scribbled on some foolscap in the carriage,
Phrases to remind me of things I would want
To write in my journal in the morning, if I could
Make out my own handwriting. Lying beside
Her in her feigned sleep, I relived the dinner,
A very nice trout and potatoes, and a tart, after,

With port. The conversation was refreshing
After so many months in Halifax, including
News from the Continent. I dreamed of Paris,
The sun setting over the Siene, and Mrs. Barlow's
Voice behind me, suggesting an early night.
I wake refreshed, cannot say the same

For Marianna as we breakfast and I read
The paper. "It's curious," she says. "You haven't
Mentioned your Miss Walker once, though
You were so upset about her in Leamington."
"If one can't distract oneself in London," I say.
Hoping to deflect another quarrel. "What is it,"

She asks, "about these people? What do you think
You'll get from them ultimately?" I put the paper
Down. "These are friendships I cultivated in Paris.
They're interesting people who engage with the world.
Why do you resent it?" Her look is arch. "I wonder
What they get from you. I suppose you amuse them."

"I hope I amuse all my friends." "Do you ever worry
That they just see you as an amusing court jester?
An entertaining freak?" Telling myself silently, as always,
To rise above it, I say calmly, "You're saying that to be
Hurtful, and we can discuss why, because your comments
Say more about your frustration at your lack of place

In the world than they do about me. What you don't seem
To fathom is that the higher in society one gravitates,

The more one's singularities don't matter so much,
The more one is appreciated for being different,
Rather than vilified." She grunts, but does not seem
Convinced, simply saying, "None of them want to sleep

With you, though, do they?" "Really, Marianna, this
Is not attractive. It's parochial and small-minded."
And just as we are about to embark on a full-blown
Quarrel, the maid knocks and announces the arrival
Of Charles, unexpectedly two days early. Marianna says
"Of course. Show him up." And, trying not to think,

Well, you dug your grave, now lie in it, I say, "So.
I take it you don't want to come live with me at Shibden."
She looks shocked. "I didn't for a minute think you were
Being serious. I haven't even seen you for a minute.
You've been so taken with your fair-weather friends--"
I toss my newspaper aside, stand, trying to keep

My temper in check. "I had declined an invitation to go
To the National Gallery with my 'fair-weather' friends
So I could go shopping with you." "For a coffee pot
For your other friend." "But seeing as your husband
Is here, I'll leave you to enjoy his company." I sigh.
"Steph was right. Too much water under the bridge..."

I'll Leave You to It

I never took fools lightly, so I have never done well
Speaking more than ten minutes at a time to Charles,
The charmless buffoon I spoke of to Vere at her own

Wedding. And this time, seeing them together, Charles
And Marianna, I see the queen's gambit she made,
Trading me, her knight, for him, a rich enough rook,

And lost. He moves in straight lines, always. I queer
The board, turning at odd angles. She never understood
Me, my unique place in the world, the advantages

That may avail us when we reinterpret the rules
Of society to our distinct advantage. I hurry away
From breakfast, take a quick seventeen minutes

To update my diary; more must wait until later. Now
I must dress for damp London weather so I may go
To the stables to update the servants on my plans...

Tide of Shadows, in the Light

It is odd to me, sitting here in the window frame, how She,
Though always all in black, always seemed to shine
Like the sun in a dark place, the way the sunbeams trickle
Through the southern window of the chaumiere. Yet

Here, even when the weather is good, even when the sun
Shines abundantly on the water, even when the day
Sparkles with it, I feel like I'm roaming in darkness, like
That horrid dream about them hanging us. Each day,

I tell myself to rise above it, but it's like I am drowning
In a tide of shadows, and even praying has become
Impossible. It's more than I can do sometimes to breathe.
I move to sit before the mirror, another kind of window,

One that does not show me either my forebears'
Version of Eden or the temporary calm of the North Sea.
All I can see is myself, my hair disheveled, my eyes
Distressed and holding back unshed tears, my lips held tight.

How must I have looked to them, to Her, those nights
At Crow Nest, unable to sleep for fear of dying. I do not fear
That now. I reach for the glass I had asked the servant
For, a little brandy to help me sleep--not that it helped at all...

Mirror, Mirror

I throw on my greatcoat, catch my own eye
In the mirror in my room. Who is that woman,
All too often mistaken for a man, who looks
So sad and severe in all black? I hardly know
Her. I step closer, look more deeply. I feel
That I never do such self-reflection except
In my journal, and usually in code, which
Makes it safe, if that's the right word. But now
I step closer to the looking glass and look
And feel. I am not very skilled at feeling
The darker things. I think of Ann, for some
Reason, but that's not right, I've been thinking
Of her for weeks, wondering, worrying
If she is all right. I am always all right, and yet...

My neck aches from how I had to sleep last night
Rolled away from Marianna as she feigned
Sleep, so unlike how I have slept at Crow Nest,
Even when her religious fervour was at its worst,
I would roll toward her and throw a protective arm
Over her, and she would gradually quiet. I take
Another step toward the mirror, wishing I might
Throw my arms around her, keep her safe.
"Ann," I whisper, as if by some magic, she might
Hear me. What would Georges say? Yet, love--
I must call it what it is--bids us believe in that
Which we cannot understand: the workings
Of the brain, our creator, a woman I had thought
To pursue for her fortune. I make my retreat.

A Sudden Break

In all my years as an invalid, I never truly felt
So invalid as I do today. When my own sister
Says, on one hand, she'd like me to agree with
The captain (and I can't help thinking "agreeabilize")
And, on the other, that she won't let them force me
Into anything I don't want, well, they can't both be
True, can they? I feel torn, as if rather than being
Hung for my crimes, I was being drawn, quartered.

The mirror mocks me by showing me exactly
As I am, a sad little girl with no way out of this
Restrictive life I've been shoved into by my family,
Society, everyone but Her. Even as the tears
Trickle down my cheeks, I do not realize the grip
I had on the brandy glass, but it shatters in my hand.
Surely the glass knew. An odd thought. Followed
By another: I broke the glass. I was able, by my own

Strength, to break the glass. I am not without
Agency here. I can do something... I think about
Wednesday when that hairy Sir Whatshisname
Will be coming, again, to make up to me, again,
Though I told him no the first time-- And then,
Of course, I think of Ainsworth and saying no,
And how pointless that was. And She called
Him a wretch, but I am wretchedness itself.

If I cannot, simply by repeating no, over and over--
As I do in my dreams of the hanging, of my visits
To the Ainsworths, of my foolishly telling Her that
What we did was repugnant, when what I wanted
To say was reviving--force events to stop and, like
A novel in manuscript, torn in two, be rewritten,
Then I must choose, as she might, a more direct
Option. The shard of glass in my palm is sharp...

Change of Plan

Once again moving at cityspeed, I charge through
The streets, determined to be off as quickly
As I can. I turn the corner into the mews, to see
Eugenie having a tantrum and Thomas having
No time to deal with her. She says she made
An effort with him but it's like banging her head
Against a brick wall, and I stop her slapping
Her forehead lest she damage herself. I have no
Time for her either. I turn toward him, where he
Is polishing the carriage, announce, "We have
A change of plans. We're going to Sc--"

I catch my mistake. "We're going to Paris.
If we leave here by 1:00, we can--" "What, today?"
Asks Thomas impertinently. "Yes, today!
We can be in Canterbury by this evening and
In the docks of Dover by 9:00 tomorrow
Morning. So you need to pack, and you need
To order the horses!" I'm charging in the other
Direction before I even finish speaking, so much
To arrange in such a short amount of time.

What Have You Done?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

I woke on Tuesday morning optimistic, if groggy
Because the children were fussing so early. And
When she didn't come down to breakfast by nine,
Well, I knew she'd been sleeping late some days,

So I let her. I know how hard it can be to get used
To sleeping in a new place. I gave the servants
Their tasks, saw to the children, thanked Heaven
The captain had gone out early, and generally

Dealt with household things. But when Cook asked
How many for lunch, I realized how late it was,
Nearly one, and I thought I'd better wake her,
So I hurried upstairs to her room and let myself in.

"Ann, are you hungry--"

She stood up from her mirror,
Gasping and covered in blood, her left hand clasped
About her bloodied right wrist, her sleeping gown

Streaked an angry red. She looked shocked, but not
To see me. "What have you done?" I asked. She stared.

"I don't know..." she said weakly, and even as the image
Began to make a dark, unexpected sense, she collapsed.

Chapter End Notes

And this ends episode 7.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!