

## CHAPTER XI

A NEW chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play; and when I draw up the curtain this time, reader, you must fancy you see a room in the George Inn at Millcote, with such large figured papering on the walls as inn rooms have; such a carpet, such furniture, such ornaments on the mantel-piece, such prints, including a portrait of George the Third, and another of the Prince of Wales, and a representation of the death of Wolfe. All this is visible to you by the light of an oil lamp hanging from the ceiling, and by that of an excellent fire, near which I sit in my cloak and bonnet; my muff and umbrella lie on the table, and I am warming away the numbness and chill contracted by sixteen hours' exposure to the rawness of an October day: I left Lowton at four o'clock A.M., and the Millcote town clock is now just striking eight.

Reader, though I look comfortably accommodated, I am not very tranquil in my mind. I thought when the coach stopped here there would be some one to meet me; I looked anxiously round as I descended the wooden steps the 'boots' placed for my convenience, expecting to hear my name pronounced, and to see some description of carriage waiting to convey me to Thornfield. Nothing of the sort was visible;

and when I asked a waiter if any one had been to inquire after a Miss Eyre, I was answered in the negative: so I had no resource but to request to be shown into a private room: and here I am waiting, while all sorts of doubts and fears are troubling my thoughts.

It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world, cut adrift from every connection, uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted.

The charm of adventure sweetens that sensation, the glow of pride warms it; but then the throb of fear disturbs it; and fear with me became predominant when half an hour elapsed and still I was alone.

I bethought myself to ring the bell.

'Is there a place in this neighbourhood called Thornfield?' I asked of the waiter who answered the summons.

'Thornfield? I don't know, ma'am; I'll inquire at the bar.' He vanished, but reappeared instantly-

'Is your name Eyre, Miss?'

'Yes.'

'Person here waiting for you.'

I jumped up, took my muff and umbrella, and hastened into the inn-passage: a man was standing by the open door, and in the lamp-lit street I dimly saw a one-horse conveyance.

'This will be your luggage, I suppose?' said the man rather abruptly when he saw me, pointing to my trunk in the passage.

'Yes.' He hoisted it on to the vehicle, which was a sort of car, and then I got in; before he shut me up, I asked him how far it was to Thornfield.

'A matter of six miles.'

'How long shall we be before we get there?'

'Happen an hour and a half.'

He fastened the car door, climbed to his own seat outside, and we set off. Our progress was leisurely, and gave me ample time to reflect; I was content to be at length so near the end of my journey; and as I leaned back in the comfortable though not elegant conveyance, I meditated much at my ease.

'I suppose,' thought I, 'judging from the plainness of the servant and carriage, Mrs. Fairfax is not a very dashing person: so much the better; I never lived amongst fine people but once, and I was very miserable with them. I wonder if she lives alone except this little girl; if so, and if she is in any degree amiable, I shall surely be able to get on with her; I will do my best; it is a pity that doing one's best does not always answer. At Lowood, indeed, I took that resolution, kept it, and succeeded in pleasing; but with Mrs. Reed, I remember my best was always spurned with scorn. I pray God Mrs. Fairfax may not turn out a second Mrs. Reed; but if she does, I am not bound to stay with her! let the worst come to the worst, I can advertise again. How far are we on our road now, I wonder?'

I let down the window and looked out; Millcote was behind us; judging by the number of its lights, it seemed a place of considerable magnitude, much larger than Lowton. We were now, as far as I could see, on a sort of common; but there were houses scattered all over the district; I felt we were in a different region to Lowood, more populous, less picturesque; more stirring, less romantic.

The roads were heavy, the night misty; my conductor let his horse walk all the way, and the hour and a half extended, I verily believe, to two hours; at last he turned in his seat and said-

'You're noan so far fro' Thornfield now.'

Again I looked out: we were passing a church; I saw its low broad tower against the sky, and its bell was tolling a quarter; I saw a narrow galaxy of lights too, on a hillside, marking a village or hamlet. About ten minutes after, the driver got down and opened a pair of gates: we passed through, and they clashed to behind us. We now slowly ascended a drive, and came upon the long front of a

house: candlelight gleamed from one curtained bow-window; all the rest were dark. The car stopped at the front door; it was opened by a maid-servant; I alighted and went in.

'Will you walk this way, ma'am?' said the girl; and I followed her across a square hall with high doors all round: she ushered me into a room whose double illumination of fire and candle at first dazzled me, contrasting as it did with the darkness to which my eyes had been for two hours inured; when I could see, however, a cosy and agreeable picture presented itself to my view.

A snug small room; a round table by a cheerful fire; an arm-chair high-backed and old-fashioned, wherein sat the neatest imaginable little elderly lady, in widow's cap, black silk gown, and snowy muslin apron; exactly like what I had fancied Mrs. Fairfax, only less stately and milder looking. She was occupied in knitting; a large cat sat demurely at her feet; nothing in short was wanting to complete the beau-ideal of domestic comfort. A more reassuring introduction for a new governess could scarcely be conceived; there was no grandeur to overwhelm, no stateliness to embarrass; and then, as I entered, the old lady got up and promptly and kindly came forward to meet me.

'How do you do, my dear? I am afraid you have had a tedious ride;

John drives so slowly; you must be cold, come to the fire.'

'Mrs. Fairfax, I suppose?' said I.

'Yes, you are right: do sit down.'

She conducted me to her own chair, and then began to remove my shawl and untie my bonnet-strings; I begged she would not give herself so much trouble.

'Oh, it is no trouble; I daresay your own hands are almost numbed with cold. Leah, make a little hot negus and cut a sandwich or two: here are the keys of the storeroom.'

And she produced from her pocket a most housewifely bunch of keys, and delivered them to the servant.

'Now, then, draw nearer to the fire,' she continued. 'You've

brought your luggage with you, haven't you, my dear?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'I'll see it carried into your room,' she said, and bustled out.

'She treats me like a visitor,' thought I. 'I little expected such a reception; I anticipated only coldness and stiffness: this is not like what I have heard of the treatment of governesses; but I must not exult too soon.'

She returned; with her own hands cleared her knitting apparatus and a book or two from the table, to make room for the tray which Leah now brought, and then herself handed me the refreshments. I felt rather confused at being the object of more attention than I had ever before received, and, that too, shown by my employer and superior; but as she did not herself seem to consider she was doing anything out of her place, I thought it better to take her civilities quietly.

'Shall I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Fairfax to-night?' I asked, when I had partaken of what she offered me.

'What did you say, my dear? I am a little deaf,' returned the good lady, approaching her ear to my mouth.

I repeated the question more distinctly.

'Miss Fairfax? Oh, you mean Miss Varens! Varens is the name of your future pupil.'

'Indeed! Then she is not your daughter?'

'No,- I have no family.'

I should have followed up my first inquiry, by asking in what way Miss Varens was connected with her; but I recollected it was not polite to ask too many questions: besides, I was sure to hear in time.

'I am so glad,' she continued, as she sat down opposite to me, and took the cat on her knee; 'I am so glad you are come; it will be quite pleasant living here now with a companion. To be sure it is pleasant at any time; for Thornfield is a fine old hall, rather neglected of late years perhaps, but still it is a respectable place; yet you know in winter-time one feels dreary quite alone in the best quarters. I say alone- Leah is a nice girl to be sure, and John and his wife are very decent people; but then you see they are only servants, and one can't converse with them on terms of equality: one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority.'

I'm sure last winter (it was a very severe one, if you recollect, and when it did not snow, it rained and blew), not a creature but the butcher and postman came to the house, from November till February; and I really got quite melancholy with sitting night after night alone; I had Leah in to read to me sometimes; but I don't think the poor girl liked the task much: she felt it confining. In spring and summer one got on better: sunshine and long days make such a difference; and then, just at the commencement of this autumn, little Adela Varens came and her nurse: a child makes a house alive all at once; and now you are here I shall be quite gay.'

My heart really warmed to the worthy lady as I heard her talk; and I drew my chair a little nearer to her, and expressed my sincere wish that she might find my company as agreeable as she anticipated.

'But I'll not keep you sitting up late to-night,' said she; 'it is on the stroke of twelve now, and you

have been travelling all day: you must feel tired. If you have got your feet well warmed, I'll show you your bedroom. I've had the room next to mine prepared for you; it is only a small apartment, but I thought you would like it better than one of the large front chambers: to be sure they have finer furniture, but they are so dreary and solitary, I never sleep in them myself.'

I thanked her for her considerate choice, and as I really felt fatigued with my long journey, expressed my readiness to retire. She took her candle, and I followed her from the room. First she went to see if the hall-door was fastened; having taken the key from the lock, she led the way upstairs. The steps and banisters were of oak; the staircase window was high and latticed; both it and the long gallery into which the bedroom doors opened looked as if they belonged to a church rather than a house. A very chill and vault-like air pervaded the stairs and gallery, suggesting cheerless ideas of space and solitude; and I was glad, when finally ushered into my chamber, to find it of small dimensions, and furnished in ordinary, modern style.

When Mrs. Fairfax had bidden me a kind good-night, and I had fastened my door, gazed leisurely round, and in some measure effaced the eerie impression made by that wide hall, that dark and spacious staircase, and that long, cold gallery, by the livelier aspect of my little room, I remembered that, after a day of bodily fatigue and mental anxiety, I was now at last in safe haven. The impulse of gratitude swelled my heart, and I knelt down at the bedside, and offered up thanks where thanks were due; not forgetting, ere I rose, to implore aid on my further path, and the power of meriting the kindness which seemed so frankly offered me before it was earned. My couch had no thorns in it that night; my solitary room no fears. At once weary and content, I slept soon and soundly: when I awoke it was broad day.

The chamber looked such a bright little place to me as the sun shone in between the gay blue chintz window curtains, showing papered walls and a carpeted floor, so unlike the bare planks and stained plaster of Lowood, that my spirits rose at the view. Externals have a great effect on the young: I thought that a fairer era of life was beginning for me- one that was to have its flowers and pleasures, as well as its thorns and toils. My faculties, roused by the change of scene, the new field offered to hope, seemed all astir. I cannot precisely define what they expected, but it was something pleasant: not perhaps that day or that month, but at an indefinite future period.

I rose; I dressed myself with care: obliged to be plain- for I had no article of attire that was not made with extreme simplicity- I was still by nature solicitous to be neat. It was not my habit to be disregarding of appearance or careless of the impression I made: on the contrary, I ever wished to look as well as I could, and to please as much as my want of beauty would permit. I sometimes regretted that I was not handsomer; I sometimes wished to have rosy cheeks, a straight nose, and small cherry mouth; I desired to be tall, stately, and finely developed in figure; I felt it a misfortune that I was so little, so pale, and had features so irregular and so marked.

And why had I these aspirations and these regrets? It would be difficult to say: I could not then distinctly say it to myself; yet I had a reason, and a logical, natural reason too. However, when I had brushed my hair very smooth, and put on my black frock- which, Quakerlike as it was, at least had the merit of fitting to a nicety- and adjusted my clean white tucker, I thought I should do

respectably enough to appear before Mrs. Fairfax, and that my new pupil would not at least recoil from me with antipathy. Having opened my chamber window, and seen that I left all things straight and neat on the toilet table, I ventured forth.

Traversing the long and matted gallery, I descended the slippery steps of oak; then I gained the hall: I halted there a minute; I looked at some pictures on the walls (one, I remember, represented a grim man in a cuirass, and one a lady with powdered hair and a pearl necklace), at a bronze lamp pendent from the ceiling, at a great clock whose case was of oak curiously carved, and ebon black with time and rubbing. Everything appeared very stately and imposing to me; but then I was so little accustomed to grandeur. The hall-door, which was half of glass, stood open; I stepped over the threshold. It was a fine autumn morning; the early sun shone serenely on embrowned groves and still green fields; advancing on to the lawn, I looked up and surveyed the front of the mansion. It was three storeys high, of proportions not vast, though considerable: a gentleman's manor-house, not a nobleman's seat: battlements round the top gave it a picturesque look.

Its grey front stood out well from the background of a rookery, whose cawing tenants were now on the wing: they flew over the lawn and grounds to alight in a great meadow, from which these were separated by a sunk fence, and where an array of mighty old thorn trees, strong, knotty, and broad as oaks, at once explained the etymology of the mansion's designation. Farther off were hills: not so lofty as those round Lowood, nor so craggy, nor so like barriers of separation from the living world; but yet quiet and lonely hills enough, and seeming to embrace Thornfield with a seclusion I had not expected to find existent so near the stirring locality of Millcote. A little hamlet, whose roofs were blent with trees, straggled up the side of one of these hills; the church of the district stood nearer Thornfield: its old tower-top looked over a knoll between the house and gates.

I was yet enjoying the calm prospect and pleasant fresh air, yet listening with delight to the cawing of the rooks, yet surveying the wide, hoary front of the hall, and thinking what a great place it was for one lonely little dame like Mrs. Fairfax to inhabit, when that lady appeared at the door.

'What! out already?' said she. 'I see you are an early riser.' I went up to her, and was received with an affable kiss and shake of the hand.

'How do you like Thornfield?' she asked. I told her I liked it very much.

'Yes,' she said, 'it is a pretty place; but I fear it will be getting out of order, unless Mr. Rochester should take it into his head to come and reside here permanently; or, at least, visit it rather oftener: great houses and fine grounds require the presence of the proprietor.'

'Mr. Rochester!' I exclaimed. 'Who is he?'

'The owner of Thornfield,' she responded quietly. 'Did you not know he was called Rochester?'

Of course I did not- I had never heard of him before; but the old lady seemed to regard his existence as a universally understood fact, with which everybody must be acquainted by instinct.

'I thought,' I continued, 'Thornfield belonged to you.'

'To me? Bless you, child; what an idea! To me! I am only the housekeeper- the manager. To be sure I am distantly related to the Rochesters by the mother's side, or at least my husband was; he was a clergyman, incumbent of Hay- that little village yonder on the hill- and that church near the gates was his. The present Mr. Rochester's mother was a Fairfax, second cousin to my husband: but I never presume on the connection- in fact, it is nothing to me; I consider myself quite in the light of an ordinary housekeeper: my employer is always civil, and I expect nothing more.'

'And the little girl- my pupil!'

'She is Mr. Rochester's ward; he commissioned me to find a believe. Here she comes, with her "bonne," as she calls her nurse.'

The enigma then was explained: this affable and kind little widow was no great dame; but a dependant like myself. I did not like her the worse for that; on the contrary, I felt better pleased than ever.

The equality between her and me was real; not the mere result of condescension on her part: so much the better- my position was all the freer.

As I was meditating on this discovery, a little girl, followed by her attendant, came running up the lawn. I looked at my pupil, who did not at first appear to notice me: she was quite a child, perhaps seven or eight years old, slightly built, with a pale, small-featured face, and a redundancy of hair falling in curls to her waist.

'Good morning, Miss Adela,' said Mrs. Fairfax. 'Come and speak to the lady who is to teach you, and to make you a clever woman some day.' She approached.

'C'est la ma gouvernante!' said she, pointing to me, and addressing her nurse; who answered- 'Mais oui, certainement.'

'Are they foreigners?' I inquired, amazed at hearing the French language.

'The nurse is a foreigner, and Adela was born on the Continent; and, I believe, never left it till within six months ago. When she first came here she could speak no English; now she can make shift to talk it a little: I don't understand her, she mixes it so with French; but you will make out her meaning very well, I daresay.'

Fortunately I had had the advantage of being taught French by a French lady; and as I had always made a point of conversing with Madame Pierrot as often as I could, and had besides, during the last seven years, learnt a portion of French by heart daily- applying myself to take pains with my accent, and imitating as closely as possible the pronunciation of my teacher, I had acquired a

certain degree of readiness and correctness in the language, and was not likely to be much at a loss with Mademoiselle Adela. She came and shook hands with me when she heard that I was her governess; and as I led her in to breakfast, I addressed some phrases to her in her own tongue: she replied briefly at first, but after we were seated at the table, and she had examined me some ten minutes with her large hazel eyes, she suddenly commenced chattering fluently.

'Ah!' cried she, in French, 'you speak my language as well as Mr. Rochester does: I can talk to you as I can to him, and so can Sophie. She will be glad: nobody here understands her: Madame Fairfax is all English. Sophie is my nurse; she came with me over the sea in a great ship with a chimney that smoked- how it did smoke!- and I was sick, and so was Sophie, and so was Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester lay down on a sofa in a pretty room called the salon, and Sophie and I had little beds in another place. I nearly fell out of mine; it was like a shelf. And Mademoiselle- what is your name?'

'Eyre- Jane Eyre.'

'Aire? Bah! I cannot say it. Well, our ship stopped in the morning, before it was quite daylight, at a great city- a huge city, with very dark houses and all smoky; not at all like the pretty clean town I came from; and Mr. Rochester carried me in his arms over a plank to the land, and Sophie came after, and we all got into a coach, which took us to a beautiful large house, larger than this and finer, called an hotel. We stayed there nearly a week: I and Sophie used to walk every day in a great green place full of trees, called the Park; and there were many children there besides me, and a pond with beautiful birds in it, that I fed with crumbs.'

'Can you understand her when she runs on so fast?' asked Mrs. Fairfax.

I understood her very well, for I had been accustomed to the fluent tongue of Madame Pierrot.

'I wish,' continued the good lady, 'you would ask her a question or two about her parents: I wonder if she remembers them?'

'Adele,' I inquired, 'with whom did you live when you were in that pretty clean town you spoke of?'

'I lived long ago with mama; but she is gone to the Holy Virgin.

Mama used to teach me to dance and sing, and to say verses. A great many gentlemen and ladies came to see mama, and I used to dance before them, or to sit on their knees and sing to them: I liked it. Shall I let you hear me sing now?'

She had finished her breakfast, so I permitted her to give a specimen of her accomplishments. Descending from her chair, she came and placed herself on my knee; then, folding her little hands demurely before her, shaking back her curls and lifting her eyes to the ceiling, she commenced singing a song from some opera. It was the strain of a forsaken lady, who, after bewailing the perfidy of her lover, calls pride to her aid; desires her attendant to deck her in her brightest jewels and richest robes, and resolves to meet the false one that night at a ball, and prove to him, by the



gaiety of her demeanour, how little his desertion has affected her.

The subject seemed strangely chosen for an infant singer; but I suppose the point of the exhibition lay in hearing the notes of love and jealousy warbled with the lisp of childhood; and in very bad taste that point was: at least I thought so.

Adele sang the canzonette tunefully enough, and with the naivete of her age. This achieved, she jumped from my knee and said, 'Now, Mademoiselle, I will repeat you some poetry.'

Assuming an attitude, she began 'La Ligue des Rats: fable de La Fontaine.' She then declaimed the little piece with an attention to punctuation and emphasis, a flexibility of voice and an appropriateness of gesture, very unusual indeed at her age, and which proved she had been carefully trained.

'Was it your mama who taught you that piece?' I asked.

'Yes, and she just used to say it in this way: "Qu'avez vous donc? lui dit un de ces rats; parlez!" She made me lift my hand- so- to remind me to raise my voice at the question. Now shall I dance for you?'

'No, that will do: but after your mama went to the Holy Virgin, as you say, with whom did you live then?'

'With Madame Frederic and her husband: she took care of me, but she is nothing related to me. I think she is poor, for she had not so fine a house as mama. I was not long there. Mr. Rochester asked me if I would like to go and live with him in England, and I said yes; for I knew Mr. Rochester before I knew Madame Frederic, and he was always kind to me and gave me pretty dresses and toys: but you see he has not kept his word, for he has brought me to England, and now he is gone back again himself, and I never see him.'

After breakfast, Adele and I withdrew to the library, which room, it appears, Mr. Rochester had directed should be used as the schoolroom. Most of the books were locked up behind glass doors; but there was one bookcase left open containing everything that could be needed in the way of elementary works, and several volumes of light literature, poetry, biography, travels, a few romances, etc. I suppose he had considered that these were all the governess would require for her private perusal; and, indeed, they contented me amply for the present; compared with the scanty pickings I had now and then been able to glean at Lowood, they seemed to offer an abundant harvest of entertainment and information. In this room, too, there was a cabinet piano, quite new and of superior tone; also an easel for painting and a pair of globes.

I found my pupil sufficiently docile, though disinclined to apply: she had not been used to regular occupation of any kind. I felt it would be injudicious to confine her too much at first; so, when I had talked to her a great deal, and got her to learn a little, and when the morning had advanced to noon, I allowed her to return to her nurse. I then proposed to occupy myself till dinner-time in drawing

some little sketches for her use.

As I was going upstairs to fetch my portfolio and pencils, Mrs. Fairfax called to me: 'Your morning school-hours are over now, I suppose,' said she. She was in a room the folding doors of which stood open: I went in when she addressed me. It was a large, stately apartment, with purple chairs and curtains, a Turkey carpet, walnut-panelled walls, one vast window rich in stained glass, and a lofty ceiling, nobly moulded. Mrs. Fairfax was dusting some vases of fine purple spar, which stood on a sideboard.

'What a beautiful room!' I exclaimed, as I looked round; for I had never before seen any half so imposing.

'Yes; this is the dining-room. I have just opened the window, to let in a little air and sunshine; for everything gets so damp in apartments that are seldom inhabited; the drawing-room yonder feels like a vault.'

She pointed to a wide arch corresponding to the window, and hung like it with a Tyrian-dyed curtain, now looped up. Mounting to it by two broad steps, and looking through, I thought I caught a glimpse of a fairy place, so bright to my novice-eyes appeared the view beyond. Yet it was merely a very pretty drawing-room, and within it a boudoir, both spread with white carpets, on which seemed laid brilliant garlands of flowers; both ceiled with snowy mouldings of white grapes and vine-leaves, beneath which glowed in rich contrast crimson couches and ottomans; while the ornaments on the pale Parian mantelpiece were of sparkling Bohemian glass, ruby red; and between the windows large mirrors repeated the general blending of snow and fire.

'In what order you keep these rooms, Mrs. Fairfax!' said I. 'No dust, no canvas coverings: except that the air feels chilly, one would think they were inhabited daily.'

'Why, Miss Eyre, though Mr. Rochester's visits here are rare, they are always sudden and unexpected; and as I observed that it put him out to find everything swathed up, and to have a bustle of arrangement on his arrival, I thought it best to keep the rooms in readiness.'

'Is Mr. Rochester an exacting, fastidious sort of man?'

'Not particularly so; but he has a gentleman's tastes and habits, and he expects to have things managed in conformity to them.'

'Do you like him? Is he generally liked?'

'Oh, yes; the family have always been respected here. Almost all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind.'

'Well, but, leaving his land out of the question, do you like him? Is he liked for himself?'

'I have no cause to do otherwise than like him; and I believe he is considered a just and liberal landlord by his tenants: but he has never lived much amongst them.'

'But has he no peculiarities? What, in short, is his character?'

'Oh! his character is unimpeachable, I suppose. He is rather peculiar, perhaps: he has travelled a great deal, and seen a great deal of the world, I should think. I daresay he is clever, but I never had much conversation with him.'

'In what way is he peculiar?'

'I don't know - it is not easy to describe - nothing striking, but you feel it when he speaks to you; you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don't thoroughly understand him, in short - at least, I don't: but it is of no consequence, he is a very good master.'

This was all the account I got from Mrs. Fairfax of her employer and mine. There are people who seem to have no notion of sketching a character, or observing and describing salient points, either in persons or things: the good lady evidently belonged to this class; my queries puzzled, but did not draw her out. Mr. Rochester was Mr. Rochester in her eyes; a gentleman, a landed proprietor - nothing more:

she inquired and searched no further, and evidently wondered at my wish to gain a more definite notion of his identity.

When we left the dining-room she proposed to show me over the rest of the house; and I followed her upstairs and downstairs, admiring as I went; for all was well arranged and handsome. The large front chambers I thought especially grand: and some of the third-storey rooms, though dark and low, were interesting from their air of antiquity. The furniture once appropriated to the lower apartments had from time to time been removed here, as fashions changed: and the imperfect light entering by their narrow casement showed bed-steads of a hundred years old; chests in oak or walnut, looking, with their strange carvings of palm branches and cherubs' heads, like types of the Hebrew ark; rows of venerable chairs, high-backed and narrow; stools still more antiquated, on whose cushioned tops were yet apparent traces of half-effaced embroideries, wrought by fingers that for two generations had been coffin-dust. All these relics gave to the third storey of Thornfield Hall the aspect of a home of the past: a shrine of memory. I liked the hush, the gloom, the quaintness of these retreats in the day; but I by no means coveted a night's repose on one of those wide and heavy beds: shut in, some of them, with doors of oak; shaded, others, with wrought old English hangings crusted with thick work, portraying effigies of strange flowers, and stranger birds, and strangest human beings, - all which would have looked strange, indeed, by the pallid gleam of moonlight.

'Do the servants sleep in these rooms?' I asked.

'No; they occupy a range of smaller apartments to the back; no one ever sleeps here: one would almost say that, if there were a ghost at Thornfield Hall, this would be its haunt.'

'So I think: you have no ghost, then?'

'None that I ever heard of,' returned Mrs. Fairfax, smiling.

'Nor any traditions of one? no legends or ghost stories?'

'I believe not. And yet it is said the Rochesters have been rather a violent than a quiet race in their time: perhaps, though, that is the reason they rest tranquilly in their graves now.'

'Yes- "after life's fitful fever they sleep well,"' I muttered.

'Where are you going now, Mrs. Fairfax?' for she was moving away.

'On to the leads; will you come and see the view from thence?' I followed still, up a very narrow staircase to the attics, and thence by a ladder and through a trap-door to the roof of the hall. I was now on a level with the crow colony, and could see into their nests.

Leaning over the battlements and looking far down, I surveyed the grounds laid out like a map: the bright and velvet lawn closely girdling the grey base of the mansion; the field, wide as a park, dotted with its ancient timber; the wood, dun and sere, divided by a path visibly overgrown, greener with moss than the trees were with foliage; the church at the gates, the road, the tranquil hills, all reposing in the autumn day's sun; the horizon bounded by a propitious sky, azure, marbled with pearly white. No feature in the scene was extraordinary, but all was pleasing. When I turned from it and repassed the trap-door, I could scarcely see my way down the ladder; the attic seemed black as a vault compared with that arch of blue air to which I had been looking up, and to that sunlit scene of grove, pasture, and green hill, of which the hall was the centre, and over which I had been gazing with delight.

Mrs. Fairfax stayed behind a moment to fasten the trap-door; I, by dint of groping, found the outlet from the attic, and proceeded to descend the narrow garret staircase. I lingered in the long passage to which this led, separating the front and back rooms of the third storey: narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle.

While I paced softly on, the last sound I expected to hear in so still a region, a laugh, struck my ear. It was a curious laugh; distinct, formal, mirthless. I stopped: the sound ceased, only for an instant; it began again, louder: for at first, though distinct, it was very low. It passed off in a clamorous peal that seemed to wake an echo in every lonely chamber; though it originated but in one, and I could have pointed out the door whence the accents issued.

'Mrs. Fairfax!' I called out: for I now heard her descending the great stairs. 'Did you hear that loud

laugh? Who is it?'

'Some of the servants, very likely,' she answered: 'perhaps Grace Poole.'

'Did you hear it?' I again inquired.

'Yes, plainly: I often hear her: she sews in one of these rooms.

Sometimes Leah is with her; they are frequently noisy together.'

The laugh was repeated in its low, syllabic tone, and terminated in an odd murmur.

'Grace!' exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax.

I really did not expect any Grace to answer, for the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and, but that it was high noon, and that no circumstance of ghostliness accompanied the curious cachinnation; but that neither scene nor season favoured fear, I should have been superstitiously afraid. However, the event showed me I was a fool for entertaining a sense even of surprise.

The door nearest me opened, and a servant came out,- a woman of between thirty and forty; a set, square-made figure, red-haired, and with a hard, plain face: any apparition less romantic or less ghostly could scarcely be conceived.

'Too much noise, Grace,' said Mrs. Fairfax. 'Remember directions!' Grace curtseyed silently and went in.

'She is a person we have to sew and assist Leah in her housemaid's work,' continued the widow; 'not altogether unobjectionable in some points, but she does well enough. By the bye, how have you got on with your new pupil this morning?'

The conversation, thus turned on Adele, continued till we reached the light and cheerful region below. Adele came running to meet us in the hall, exclaiming-

'Mesdames, vous etes servies!' adding, 'J'ai bien faim, moi!'

We found dinner ready, and waiting for us in Mrs. Fairfax's room.

## 第十一章

一部小说中新的一章，有些像一出戏中的新的一场。这回我拉开幕布的时候，读者，你一定

会想象，你看到的是米尔科特乔治旅店中的一个房间。这里同其他旅店的陈设相同，一样的大图案墙纸，一样的地毯，一样的家具，一样的壁炉摆设，一样的图片，其中一幅是乔治三世的肖像，另一幅是威尔士亲王的肖像还有一幅画的是沃尔夫之死。借着悬挂在天花板上的油灯和壁炉的熊熊火光，你可以看得见这一切。我把皮手筒和伞放在桌上，披着斗篷戴着帽子坐在火炉旁，让自己在十月阴冷的天气里暴露了十六个小时、冻得了僵的身子暖和过来。我昨天下午四点离开洛顿，而这时米尔科特镇的时钟正敲响八点。

读者，我虽然看来安顿得舒舒服服，但内心却并不平静，我以为车子一停就会有人来接我。从脚夫为我方便而搭的木板上走下来费尔法克斯小姐吗？”我吃完了她递给我的点心后问。

“你说什么呀，亲爱的，我耳朵有些背。”这位好心的夫人问道，一边把耳朵凑近我的嘴巴。

我把这个问题更清楚地重复了一遍。

“费尔法克斯小姐？噢，你的意思是瓦伦小姐！瓦伦是你要教的学生的名字。”

“真的，那她不是你女儿？”

“不是，我没有家庭。”

我本想接着第一个问题继续往下问，问她瓦伦小姐同她是什么关系，但转念一想，觉得问那么多问题不太礼貌，更何况到时候我肯定会有所闻的。

“我很高兴——”她在我对面坐下，把那只猫放到膝头，继续说：“我很高兴你来了。现在有人作伴，住在这儿是很愉快的。当然，什么时候都很愉快，桑菲尔德是一个很好的老庄园，也许近几年有些冷落，但它还是个体面的地方，不过你知道，在冬天，即使住在最好的房子里你也会觉得孤独凄凉的。我说孤独——莉娅当然是位可爱的姑娘，约翰夫妇是正派人。但你知道他们不过是仆人，总不能同他们平等交谈吧，你得同他们保持适当的距离、免得担心失去威麓揆唷看到了一辆马车。

“我想这就是你的行李了？”这人见了我，指着过道上我的箱子唐突地说。”

“是的，”他把箱子举起来放到了车上，那是一辆马车。随后我坐了进去，不等他关门就问桑菲尔德有多远。

“六英里左右。”

“我们要多久才到得了那里？”

“大概一个半小时。”

他关了车门，爬到车外自己的位置上，我们便上路了。马车款款向前，使我有充裕的时间来思考。我很高兴终于接近了旅程的终点，身子靠在虽不精致却很舒适的马车上，一时浮想联翩。

“我估计，”我想道，“从朴实的仆人和马车来判断，费尔法克斯太太不是一个衣着华丽的女人，这样倒更好，我跟上等人只生活过一回，同他们相处真是受罪。不知道除了那位站娘之外，她是不是一个人过日子。如果是这样，而且她还算得上有点和气，我肯定能同她好好相处，我会尽力而为。可惜竭尽全力并不总能得到好报。其实在罗沃德，我打定了主意，并坚持不懈地去实行，而且也赢得了别人的好感，但与里德太太相处，我记得我的好心总遭到鄙弃。我祈求上帝，但愿费尔法克斯太太不要到头来成了第二个里德太太。可要是她果真如此，我也并不是非与她相处下去不可，就是发生了最坏的情况，我还可以再登广告。不知道我们现在已走了多远了？”

我放下窗子，往外盼望。米尔科特已落在我们身后。从灯光的数量来看，这似乎是一个相当大的城市，比洛顿要大得多。就我所知，我们此刻像是在一块公地上，不过屋宇遍布整个地区。我觉得我们所在的地区与罗沃德不同。人口更为稠密，却并不那么景色如画；更加熙熙攘攘，却不那么浪漫。

道路难行，夜雾沉沉。我的向导让马一路溜达，我确信这一个半小时延长到了两个小时，最后他在车座上转过头来说：

“现在你离桑菲尔德不远了。”

我再次往外眺望。我们正经过一个教堂，我看见低矮、宽阔的塔映着天空，教堂的钟声正敲响一刻；我还看到山边一狭长条耀眼的灯光，标明那是一个乡村，或者没有教堂的庄子。大约十分钟后，马车夫跳了下来，打开两扇大门，我们穿了过去，门在我们身后砰地关上了。这会儿我们慢悠悠地登上了一条小道，来到一幢房子宽阔的正门前。一扇遮着窗帘的圆肚窗，闪烁着烛光，其余一片漆黑。马车停在前门，一个女佣开了门，我下车走进门去。

“请从这边走，小姐，”这姑娘说。我跟着她穿过一个四周全是高大的门的方形大厅，她领我进了一个房间，里面明亮的炉火与烛光，同我已经习惯了两个小时黑暗恰成对比，起初弄得我眼花缭乱。然而等我定下神来，眼前便出现了一个惬意和谐的画面。

这是一个舒适的小房间，温暖的炉火旁摆着一张圆桌，一条老式高背安乐椅上，坐着一位整洁不过的矮小老妇人，头戴寡妇帽，身穿黑色丝绸长袍，还围着雪白的平纹细布围裙，跟我想象中的费尔法克斯太太一模一样，只是不那么威严，却显得更加和蔼罢了。她正忙着编织。一只硕大的猫娴静地蹲在她脚边。作为一幅理想的家庭闲适图，它真是完美无缺了。对一个新到的家庭女教师来说，也很难设想有比这更让人放心的初次见面的情景了。没有那种咄咄逼人的豪华，也没有令人难堪的庄严。我一进门，那老妇人便站了起来，立刻客客气气地上前来迎接我。

“你好，亲爱的！恐怕一路坐车很乏味吧。约翰驾车又那么慢，你一定怪冷的，到火炉边来吧。”

“我想你就是费尔法克斯太太了？”我说。

“是呀，你说得对，请坐吧。”

她把我领到她自己的椅子上坐下，随后动手取下我的披巾，解开我的帽带，我请她不用如此麻烦了。

“啊，一点也不麻烦。你的手恐怕差点儿冻僵了吧。莉娅，调点儿尼格斯酒，切一两片三明治。储藏室的钥匙在这儿。”

她从口袋里掏出一串井然有序的钥匙，把它递给了仆人。

“好啦，靠近火炉些吧，”她继续说，“你已经把行李带来了是吗，亲爱的？”

“是的，夫人。”

“我来叫人搬到你房间去，”她说，急急忙忙走了出去。

“她把我当客人看待了，”我想，“我没有料到会受到这样的接待。我所期望的只是冷漠与生硬。这不像我耳闻的家庭女教师的待遇。但我也决不能高兴得太早。”

她回来了，亲自动手从桌上把她的编织工具和一两本书挪开，为莉娅端来的托盘腾出了地方。接着她亲自把点心递给我。我颇有些受宠若惊，我从来没有受到过这样的关心，况且这种关心来自我的雇主和上司。可是她似乎并不认为自己的行动有什么出格，所以我想还是对她的礼仪采取默认态度好。

“今晚我能见一见费尔法克斯小姐吗？”我吃完了她递给我的点心后问。

“你说什么呀，亲爱的，我耳朵有些背。”这位好心的夫人问道，一边把耳朵凑近我的嘴巴。

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雨)，从十一月到今年二月，除了卖肉的和送信的，没有人到府上来过。一夜一夜地独自坐着，我真感到忧伤。有时我让莉娅进来读些东西给我听听，不过我想这可怜姑娘并不喜欢这差使。她觉得这挺束缚人。春秋两季情况好些，阳光和长长的白天使得一切大不相同。随后，秋季刚刚开始，小阿德拉·瓦伦和她的保姆就来了，一个孩子立刻使一幢房子活了起来，而现在你也来了，我会非常愉快。”

听着听着，我对这位可敬的老妇人产生了好感，我把椅子往她身边挪了挪，并表达了我真诚的希望，愿她发现我是一位如她所企盼的融洽伙伴。

“不过今晚我可不想留你太晚，”她说，“现在钟敲十二点了，你奔波了一整天，一定已经很累，要是你的脚已经暖和过来了，我就带你上卧室去，我已让人拾掇好了我隔壁的房间，这不过是个小间，但比起一间宽阔的前房来，我想你会更喜欢的。虽然那些大房间确实有精致的家具，但孤独冷清，连我自己也从来不睡在里面的。”

我感谢她周到的选择，但长途旅行之后，我确实已疲惫不堪，便表示准备歇息。她端着蜡烛，让我跟着她走出房间，先是去看大厅的门上了锁没有。她从锁上取下钥匙，领我上了楼梯。楼梯和扶手都是橡树做的，楼梯上的窗子都是高高的花格窗，这类窗子和直通一间间卧室的长长过道，看上去不像住家，而像教堂。楼梯和过道上弥漫着一种墓穴似的阴森气氛，给人一种空旷和孤寂的凄凉感。因此当我最后被领进自己的房间，发现它面积不大，有着普通现代风格的陈设时，心里便十分高兴了。

费尔法克斯太太客气地跟我道了晚安。我闩上了门，目光从容四顾，不觉感到那宽阔的大厅、漆早宽畅的楼梯和阴冷的长廊所造成的恐怖怪异的印象，已被这小房间的蓬勃生气抹去了几分。这时我忽然想到，经历了身心交瘁的一天之后，此刻我终于到达了一个安全避风港，感激之情油然而生。我跪在床边开始祈祷，表示了理所应当的感恩，在站起来之前，并未忘记祈求在前路上赐予帮助与力量，使我配得上还没有付出努力就坦率地授与我的那份厚意。那天晚上，我的床榻上没有荆棘，我那孤寂的房间里没有恐惧。立刻，倦意与满足俱来，我很快便沉沉睡去，醒来的时候，天色已经大亮了。

阳光从蓝色鲜艳的印花布窗帘缝隙中射进来，照出了糊着墙纸的四壁和铺着地毯的地板，与罗沃德光秃秃的楼板和痕迹斑驳的灰泥全然不同。相形之下，这房间显得小巧而明亮，眼前的情景使我精神为之一振。外在的东西对年轻人往往有很大影响，我于是想到自己生涯中更为光明的时代开始了，这个时代将会有花朵和欢愉，也会有荆棘和艰辛。由于这改变了的环境，这充满希望的新天地，我的各种官能都复活了，变得异常活跃。但它们究竟期望着什么，我一时也说不清楚，反正是某种令人愉快的东西，也许那东西不是降临在这一天，或是这个月，而是在不确定的未来。

我起身了，小心穿戴了一番，无奈只能简朴，——因为我没有一件服饰不是缝制得极其朴实的——但渴求整洁依然是我的天性。习惯上我并不无视外表，不注意自己留下的印象。相反，我一向希望自己的外观尽可能标致些，并希望在我平庸的外貌所允许的情况下，得到别人的好感。有时候，我为自己没有长得漂亮些而感到遗憾，有时巴不得自己有红润的双颊、挺直的鼻梁和樱桃般的小口。我希望自己修长、端庄、身材匀称。我觉得很不幸，长得这么小，这么苍白，五官那么不端正而又那么显眼。为什么我有这些心愿却又有这些遗憾？这很难说清楚、当时我自己虽然说不上来，但我有一个理由，一个合乎逻辑的、自然的理由。然而，

当我把头发梳得溜光，穿上那件黑色的外衣——虽然看上去确实像贵格会教派的人，但至少非常合身——换上了干净洁白的领布时，我想我可以够体面地去见费尔法克斯太太了，我的新学生至少不会因为厌恶而从我面前退缩。我打开了房间的窗户，并注意到已把梳妆台上的东西收拾得整整齐齐，便大着胆子走出门去了。

我走过铺着地席的长廊，走下打滑的橡树楼梯，来到了大厅。我站了一会儿，看着墙上的几幅画（记得其中一幅画的是一个穿看护胸铁甲十分威严的男子，另一幅是一个头发上搽了粉戴着珍珠项链的贵妇），看着从天花板上垂下来的青铜灯；看着一个大钟，钟壳是由雕刻得稀奇古怪的橡木做的，因为年长月久和不断地擦拭，变得乌黑发亮了。对我来说一切都显得那样庄严肃穆、富丽堂皇。那时我不大习惯于这种豪华。一扇镶着玻璃的大厅门敞开着，我越过了门槛。这是一个晴朗的秋天早晨，朝阳宁静地照耀着透出黄褐色的树丛和依然绿油油的田野。我往前来到了草坪上，抬头细看这大厦的正面。这是幢三层楼屋宇，虽然有相当规模，但按比例并不觉得宏大，是一座绅士的住宅，而不是贵族的府第。围绕着顶端的城垛，使整座建筑显得很别致。灰色的正面正好被后面一个白嘴鸦的巢穴映衬着，显得很凸出，它的居住者正在边房呱呱叫个不停，飞越草坪和庭园，落到一块大草地上。一道矮篱把草地和庭园分开。草地上长着一排排巨大的老荆棘树丛，强劲多节，大如橡树，一下子说明屋宇名称字源意义的由来。更远的地方是小山。不像罗沃德四周的山那么高耸，那么峻峭，也不像它们那么是一道与世隔绝的屏障。但这些山十分幽静，拥抱着桑菲尔德，给它带来了一种我不曾料到在闹闹嚷嚷的米尔科特地区会有的清静。一个小村庄零零落落地分布在一座小山的一侧，屋顶与树木融为一体。地区教堂坐落在桑菲尔德附近，它古老的钟楼俯视着房子与大门之间的土墩。

我欣赏着这番宁静的景象和诱人的新鲜空气，愉快地倾听着白嘴鸦的呱呱叫声，细细打量着这所庄园宽阔灰白的正面，心里琢磨着，偌大一个地方，居然只住着像费尔法克斯太太这样一位孤单矮小的贵妇人。就在这时，这位妇人出现在门边了。

“怎么，已经起来了？”她说，“我看你是个喜欢早起的人。”我向她走去，她慈祥地吻了吻我，并同我握了下手。

“你认为桑菲尔德怎么样？”她问。我告诉她很喜欢。

“是呀，”她说，“是个漂亮的地方。但我担心慢慢地会败落，除非罗切斯特先生想着要来，并永久居住在这儿，或者至少常来看看，大住宅和好庭园需要主人经常光顾才是。”

“罗切斯特先生！”我嚷道，“他是谁？”

“桑菲尔德的主人，”她平静地回答，“你不知道他叫罗切斯特吗？”

我当然不知道，我以前从来没有听说过他。但这位老妇人似乎把他的存在，看作尽人皆知的事实，人人都仅凭直感就清楚的。

“我还以为，”我继续说，“桑菲尔德是你的呢。”

“我的？哎哟，我的孩子！多古怪的想法！我的？我不过是个管家——管理人。确实，从母

亲份上说，我是罗切斯特家的远亲，或者至少我丈夫是这样。他是个牧师，是海村的——那边山上的那个小村——靠近大门的那个教堂是他管的。现在这位罗切斯特的母亲是费尔法克斯家的人，她的父亲和我丈夫的父亲是堂兄弟，但我从来没有指望这层关系，其实这与我无关。我把自己看作一个普普通通的管家，我的雇主总是客客气气的，而别的我都不指望了”。

“那么，那位小姑娘呢——我的学生？”

“她是罗切斯特先生的受监护人。他委托我替她找个家庭教师。我想他有意将她在××郡养育大。瞧她来了，同她称作‘bonne’的保姆一起来了。”谜被揭开了，这个和蔼善良的矮小寡妇不是位大贵妇，而是像我一样的寄生者。但我并没有因此而喜欢她，相反，我感到了从未有过的愉快。她与我之间的平等是实实在在的，不是她屈尊就驾的结果。这样倒更好，我的处境就更自由了。

我还在沉思着这个新发现时，一个小女孩由她的侍候者陪着，向草坪这边奔跑过来了。我瞧了一眼我的学生，她开始并没有注意到我。她十足是个孩子，大约七、八岁，个头瘦小，脸色苍白，五官很小，一头累赘的卷发直披到腰上。

“早上好，阿德拉小姐，”费尔法克斯太太说，“过来同这位小姐说说话，她会教你读书，让你有一天成为聪明的女人。”她走近了。

“C'est ma gouvernante？”她指着我对她的保姆说，保姆回答：

“Mais oui Certainement.”

“他们都是外国人吗？”我听到他们讲法语，便吃惊地问道。

“保姆是个外国人，而阿德拉却是生在大陆上的，而且我相信除了六个月前的一次，她从来没有离开过大陆。她初到这儿来的时候，一句英语也不会说，现在倒能转过来讲一点了。她把英语和法语混着讲，我听不懂。我想你会把她的意思搞得很清楚的。”

幸好我得益于曾拜一个法国太太为师，学过法语。那时我下了决心抓紧一切机会同皮埃罗夫人交谈。此外，过去七年来还坚持每天背诵一段法语，在语调上狠下功夫，逼真地模仿我老师的发音，因而我的法语已经相当流利和准确，不至于听不懂阿德拉小姐说的话。她听说我是她的家庭教师，便走过来同我握手。我领她进去吃早饭，又用她自己的语言说了几句，起初她回答得很简短，但等我们在桌旁坐定，她用淡褐色的大眼睛审视了我十来分钟之后，突然叽叽喳喳地说开了。

“啊！”她用法语叫道，“你说我的话同罗切斯特先生说得一样好。我可以同你谈了，像我可以跟他谈一样。索菲娅也可以同你谈了，她会很高兴的，这里没有人懂她的话，而费尔法克斯太太又满口英语。索菲娅是我的保姆，同我一起乘了条大船穿过海洋，船上有个烟囱冒着烟，多浓的烟呀！我病倒了，索菲娅也病倒了，还有罗切斯特先生也病倒了。罗切斯特先生躺在沙发上，在一间叫沙龙的漂亮房间里，索菲娅和我睡在另一个地方的小床上。它像个架子，我差点跌了下来。小姐，你叫什么名字？”

“爱——简·爱。”

“埃尔？啊，我说不上来。是呀，我们的船在早晨停了下来，天还没有大亮，船在一个大城市靠了岸，一个很大的城市，房子都很黑，全都冒着烟。一点也不像我原来地方漂亮干净的城镇。罗切斯特先生抱着我走过一块板，来到陆地上，索菲娅跟在后面，我们坐进了一辆马车，它把我们带到了一座美丽的大房子，比这座还要大，还要好，叫做旅馆。我们在那里呆了差不多一个星期，我和索菲娅每天去逛一个老大的地方，种满了树，碧绿碧绿的，他们管它叫公园。除了我，那里还有很多孩子，还有一个池塘，池塘里有很多漂亮的鸟，我用面包屑喂它们。”

“她讲得那么快，你能听懂吗？”费尔法克斯太太问。

我完全懂她的话，因为过去早已听惯了皮埃罗夫人流利的语言。

“我希望，”这位善良的夫人继续说，“你问她一两个关于她父母的问题，看她还记不记祷啊！”

“他在哪方面跟别人不一样呢？”

“我不知道——不容易说清楚——不很突出，但他同你说话时，你感觉得出来。你总是吃不准他在说笑还是当真，他是高兴，还是恰恰相反。总之，你没法彻底了解他——至少我不行。但这无关紧要，他是一个很好的主人。”

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她摆好姿势，先报了题目：“*La ligue des Rats, fable de La Fontaine*”，随后她朗诵了这首短诗，十分讲究抑扬顿挫，声调婉转，动作得体，在她这个年纪，实在是很不寻常了，说明她受过悉心的训练。

“这首诗是你妈妈教你的么？”我问。

“是的，她总是这么说‘*Qu’avez vous donc? Lui dit un de ces rats;parlez!*’她要我把手举起来，这样，提醒我读问题的时候要提高嗓门儿。现在我来跳舞给你看好吗？”

“不，行啦。你妈妈到圣母玛丽亚那儿去了后，你跟谁一块儿住呢？”

“同弗雷德里克太太和她的丈夫。她照顾我，不过她跟我没有亲戚关系。我想她很穷，因为她不像妈妈那样有好房子。我在那里没呆多久。罗切斯特先生问我，是否愿意同他一起住到英国去。我说好的，因为我认得弗雷德里克太太之前就认得罗切斯特先生了。他总是待我很好，送我漂亮的衣服和玩具，可是你瞧他说话不算数，把我带到了英国，自己倒又回去了，我从来没有见过他。”

吃了早饭，阿黛勒和我进了图书室。罗切斯特先生好像曾吩咐把这用作教室。大部分书籍都锁在玻璃门内，但有一个书架却是敞开的，上面摆着基础教育所需要的各类书籍，和几部轻松的文学作品、诗歌、传记、游记和一些传奇故事等。我猜想这些就是他认为家庭女教师自个儿想看的书。的确，有这些书眼下我已经心满意足。同罗沃德书苑偶尔的少量采摘相比，这里所奉献的却是知识和娱乐的大丰收了。在房子里还有一架小巧的钢琴，成色很新，音调优美。此外，还有一个画架和一对地球仪。

我发觉我的学生相当听话，虽然不大肯用功。对任何正儿八经的事她都不习惯。我觉得一开始就给她过多限制是不明智的。我已给她讲了很多，也使他学了点东西。因此早晨过去，渐近中午时，我便允许她回到保姆那儿去了。随后我打算在午饭前画些小小的素描，供她学习用。

我正上楼去取画夹和铅笔，费尔法克斯太太叫住了我：“我想你上午的课结束了吧，”她说。她正在一个房间里，房间的折门开着。她招呼我时我便走了进去。这是个气派不凡的大房间，紫色的椅子，紫色的窗帘，土耳其地毯，墙上是胡桃木做的镶板，一扇巨大无比的窗，装配了色彩丰富的染色玻璃，天花板很高，浇铸得宏伟壮丽。费尔法克斯太太正给餐具柜上几个紫色晶石花瓶拂去灰尘。

“多漂亮的房间！”我朝四周看了看，不觉惊叫起来，我从未见过什么房间有它一半那么气派的。

“是呀，这是餐室，我刚开了窗，让它进来一点新鲜空气和阳光，这些房间难得有人住，所以什么都是潮腻腻的，那边的客厅简直像墓穴。”

她指了指跟那窗子相对应的一扇又宽又大的拱门，一样也挂着红紫色的帘子，此刻往上卷着。我跨过两步宽阔的台阶，登上拱门，往里面瞅着。我以为自己看见了一个仙境，那景象使我这个刚踏上世途的人顿时眼目清亮。但它不过是一个漂亮的客厅和里面成套的一间闺房。两间房子都铺着白色的地毯，地毯上仿佛摆着鲜艳夺目的花环。天花板上都浇铸着雪白的葡萄和葡萄叶子。与它恰成对比的是，天花板下闪烁着绯红的睡椅和床榻，灰白色的帕罗斯岛大理石壁炉架上，摆着波希米亚闪光玻璃装饰物，像红宝石一般火红。窗户之间的大镜子，也映照出大体红白相间的色调。

“这些房间收拾得多整齐呀，费尔法克斯太太！”我说。“没有帆布罩子，却能做到纤尘不染，要不是空气冷飕飕的，人家准以为天天住着人呢。”

“唉，爱小姐，尽管罗切斯特先生很少上这儿来，但要来就往往很突然，料也料不到。我发现他最讨厌看到什么都裹得严严实实的，他到了才开始手忙脚乱地张罗，所以我想还是把房

间准备妥当好。”

“罗切斯特先生是那种爱挑剔、难讨好的人吗？”

“不完全是这样。不过他具有上等人的趣味与习惯，希望按他的趣味和习惯办事。”

“你喜欢他吗？大家都喜欢他吗？”

“啊，是的。这个家族在这儿一向受人尊敬。很久很久以前，凡是你能望得见的附近的土地，几乎都属于罗切斯特家的。”

“哦，不过撇开他的土地不谈，你喜欢他吗？别人喜欢他本人吗？”

“我没有理由不喜欢他。我相信他的佃户们都认为他是个公正大方的乡绅，不过他从来没有在他们中间生活得很久。”

“但他没有跟别人不一样的地方吗？他的性格究竟怎样？”

“啊，我想他的性格是无可指责的，也许他有些特别。我想他到过很多地方，见过很多世面。他一定很聪明，不过我没有同他说过很多话。”

“他在哪方面跟别人不一样呢？”

“我不知道——不容易说清楚——不很突出，但他同你说话时，你感觉得出来。你总是吃不准他在说笑还是当真，他是高兴，还是恰恰相反。总之，你没法彻底了解他——至少我不行。但这无关紧要，他是一个很好的主人。”

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“仆人们睡在这些房间里吗？”我问。

“不，他们睡在后面一排小房间里，这里从来没有人睡。你几乎可以说，要是桑菲尔德府闹鬼，这里会是鬼魂游荡的地方。”

“我也有同样想法。那你们这儿没有鬼了？”

“反正我从没听说过，”费尔法克斯太太笑着说。

“鬼的传说也没有？没有传奇或者鬼故事？”

“我相信没有。不过据说，罗切斯特家人在世时性格暴烈，而不是文文静静的，也许那正是他们如今平静地安息在坟墓中的原因吧。”

“是呀，‘经过了一场人生的热病，他们现在睡得好好的，’”我喃喃地说，“你现在上哪儿去呀，费尔法克斯太太？”因为她正要走开。

“上铅皮屋顶去走走，你高兴一起去，从那儿眺望一下景致吗？”我默默地跟随着她上了一道狭窄的楼梯，来到顶楼，在那里爬上一架扶梯，穿过活动天窗，到了桑菲尔德府的房顶。这时我与白嘴鸦的领地已处于同一高度，可以窥见他们的巢穴。我倚在城垛上，往下眺望，只见地面恰似一幅地图般展开，鲜嫩的天鹅绒草坪，紧紧围绕着大厦灰色的宅基；与公园差不多大的田野上，古老的树木星罗棋布；深褐色枯萎的树林，被一条小径明显分割开来，小径长满了青苔，看上去比带叶子的树木还绿；门口的教堂、道路和寂静的小山都安卧在秋阳里；地平线上祥和的天空，蔚蓝中夹杂着大理石般的珠白色。这番景色并无出奇之外，但一切都显得赏心悦目。当我转过身，再次经过活动天窗时，我几乎看不清下扶梯的路了。同我刚才抬头观望的蓝色苍穹相比，同我兴致勃勃地俯瞰过，以桑菲尔德府为核心展开的阳光照耀下的树林、牧场和绿色小山的景致相比，这阁楼便犹如墓穴一般黑了。

费尔法克斯太太比我晚走一会儿，拴上活动天窗。我摸索着找到了顶楼的出口，并爬下狭窄顶楼的扶梯。我在楼梯口长长的过道上踟蹰，这条过道把三楼的前房与后房隔开，又窄、又低、又暗，仅在远远的尽头有一扇小窗，两排黑色的小门全都关着，活像蓝胡子城堡里的一条走廊。

我正轻轻地缓步往前时，万万没有料到在这个静悄悄的地方，竟然听见了一阵笑声。这笑声很古怪，清晰、拘谨，悲哀。我停下步来，这声音也停止了。刹那间以后，笑声重又响起，声音越来越大，不依才起来时虽然清晰却很低沉。这笑声震耳欲聋般地响了一阵以后便停止了，其声音之大足可以在每间孤寂的房子里引起回声。尽管这声音不过来自一个房间，但我完全能指出是从哪扇门传出来的。

“费尔法克斯太太？”我大声叫道，因为这时正听见她走下顶楼的楼梯。“你听见响亮的的笑声了吗？那是谁呀？”

“很可能是些仆人，”她回答说，“也许是格雷斯·普尔。”

“你听到了吗？”我又问。

“听到了，很清楚。我常常听到她，她在这儿的一间房子里做针线活，有时莉娅也在，这两个人在一块总是闹闹嚷嚷的。”

笑声又响起来了，低沉而很有节奏，然后以古怪的嘟哝声告结束。

“格雷丝？”费尔法克斯太太嚷道。

我其实并不盼望哪位格雷丝来回答，因为这笑声同我所听到过的笑声一样悲惨，一样不可思议。要不是正值中午，要不是鬼魂的出现从来不与奇怪的狂笑相伴，要不是当时的情景和季节并不会激发恐怖情绪，我准会相信迷信，害怕起来呢。然而，这件事表明我真傻，居然还为笑声感到吃惊。

最靠近我的一扇门开了，一个仆人走了出来，一个年龄在三十到四十之间的女人，虎背熊腰，一头红发，一张冷酷而长相平庸的脸。实在难以想象还有什么幽灵比她更缺少传奇色彩，更不像鬼魂了。

“太闹了，格雷丝，”费尔法克斯太太说。“记住对你的吩咐！”格雷丝默默地行了个屈膝礼，走了进去。

“她是我们雇来做针线活，帮助莉娅干家务活儿的，”寡妇继续说，“在某些方面她并不是无可非议的，不过她干得挺好。顺便问一下，早上你跟你的学生相处得怎么样？”

于是我们的谈话转到了阿黛勒身上，一直谈到我们来到下面敞亮而欢快的地方。阿黛勒在大厅里迎着我们跑过来，一面还嚷嚷着。