

CHAPTER XIV

FOR several subsequent days I saw little of Mr. Rochester. In the mornings he seemed much engaged with business, and, in the afternoon, gentlemen from Millcote or the neighbourhood called, and sometimes stayed to dine with him. When his sprain was well enough to admit of horse exercise, he rode out a good deal; probably to return these visits, as he generally did not come back till late at night.

During this interval, even Adele was seldom sent for to his presence, and all my acquaintance with him was confined to an occasional rencontre in the hall, on the stairs, or in the gallery, when he would sometimes pass me haughtily and coldly, just acknowledging my presence by a distant nod or a cool glance, and sometimes bow and smile with gentlemanlike affability. His changes of mood did not offend me, because I saw that I had nothing to do with their alternation; the ebb and flow depended on causes quite disconnected with me.

One day he had had company to dinner, and had sent for my portfolio; in order, doubtless, to exhibit its contents: the gentlemen went away early, to attend a public meeting at Millcote, as Mrs. Fairfax informed me; but the night being wet and inclement, Mr. Rochester did not accompany them. Soon after they were gone he rang the bell: a message came that I and Adele were to go downstairs. I brushed Adele's hair and made her neat, and having ascertained that I was myself in my usual Quaker trim, where there was nothing to retouch- all being too close and plain, braided locks included, to admit of disarrangement- we descended, Adele wondering whether the petit coffre was at length come; for, owing to some mistake, its arrival had hitherto been delayed. She was gratified: there it stood, a little carton, on the table when we entered the dining-room. She appeared to know it by instinct.

'Ma boite! ma boite!' exclaimed she, running towards it.

'Yes, there is your "boite" at last: take it into a corner, you genuine daughter of Paris, and amuse yourself with disembowelling it,' said the deep and rather sarcastic voice of Mr. Rochester, proceeding from the depths of an immense easy-chair at the fireside.

'And mind,' he continued, 'don't bother me with any details of the anatomical process, or any notice of the condition of the entrails: let your operation be conducted in silence: tiens-toi tranquille, enfant; comprends-tu?'

Adele seemed scarcely to need the warning; she had already retired to a sofa with her treasure, and was busy untying the cord which secured the lid. Having removed this impediment, and lifted certain silvery envelopes of tissue paper, she merely exclaimed- 'Oh ciel! Que c'est beau!' and then remained absorbed in ecstatic contemplation.

'Is Miss Eyre there?' now demanded the master, half rising from his seat to look round to the door, near which I still stood.

'Ah! well, come forward; be seated here.' He drew a chair near his own. 'I am not fond of the prattle

of children,' he continued;

'for, old bachelor as I am, I have no pleasant associations connected with their lisp. It would be intolerable to me to pass a whole evening tete-a-tete with a brat. Don't draw that chair farther off, Miss Eyre; sit down exactly where I placed it- if you please, that is. Confound these civilities! I continually forget them. Nor do I particularly affect simple-minded old ladies. By the bye, I must have mine in mind; it won't do to neglect her; she is a Fairfax, or wed to one; and blood is said to be thicker than water.'

He rang, and despatched an invitation to Mrs. Fairfax, who soon arrived, knitting-basket in hand.

'Good evening, madam; I sent to you for a charitable purpose. I have forbidden Adele to talk to me about her presents, and she is bursting with repletion; have the goodness to serve her as auditress and interlocutrice; it will be one of the most benevolent acts you ever performed.'

Adele, indeed, no sooner saw Mrs. Fairfax, than she summoned her to her sofa, and there quickly filled her lap with the porcelain, the ivory, the waxen contents of her 'boite'; pouring out, meantime, explanations and raptures in such broken English as she was mistress of.

'Now I have performed the part of a good host,' pursued Mr. Rochester, 'put my guests into the way of amusing each other, I ought to be at liberty to attend to my own pleasure. Miss Eyre, draw your chair still a little farther forward: you are yet too far back; I cannot see you without disturbing my position in this comfortable chair, which I have no mind to do.'

I did as I was bid, though I would much rather have remained somewhat in the shade; but Mr. Rochester had such a direct way of giving orders, it seemed a matter of course to obey him promptly.

We were, as I have said, in the dining-room: the lustre, which had been lit for dinner, filled the room with a festal breadth of light; the large fire was all red and clear; the purple curtains hung rich and ample before the lofty window and loftier arch; everything was still, save the subdued chat of Adele (she dared not speak loud), and, filling up each pause, the beating of winter rain against the panes.

Mr. Rochester, as he sat in his damask-covered chair, looked different to what I had seen him look before; not quite so stern- much less gloomy. There was a smile on his lips, and his eyes sparkled, whether with wine or not, I am not sure; but I think it very probable.

He was, in short, in his after dinner mood; more expanded and genial, and also more self-indulgent than the frigid and rigid temper of the morning; still he looked preciously grim, cushioning his massive head against the swelling back of his chair, and receiving the light of the fire on his granite-hewn features, and in his great, dark eyes; for he had great, dark eyes, and very fine eyes, too- not without a certain change in their depths sometimes, which, if it was not softness, reminded you, at least, of that feeling.

He had been looking two minutes at the fire, and I had been looking the same length of time at him, when, turning suddenly, he caught my gaze fastened on his physiognomy.

'You examine me, Miss Eyre,' said he: 'do you think me handsome?'

I should, if I had deliberated, have replied to this question by something conventionally vague and polite; but the answer somehow slipped from my tongue before I was aware- 'No, sir.'

'Ah! By my word! there is something singular about you,' said he: 'you have the air of a little nonnette; quaint, quiet, grave, and simple, as you sit with your hands before you, and your eyes generally bent on the carpet (except, by the bye, when they are directed piercingly to my face; as just now, for instance); and when one asks you a question, or makes a remark to which you are obliged to reply, you rap out a round rejoinder, which, if not blunt, is at least brusque. What do you mean by it?'

'Sir, I was too plain; I beg your pardon. I ought to have replied that it was not easy to give an impromptu answer to a question about appearances; that tastes mostly differ; and that beauty is of little consequence, or something of that sort.'

'You ought to have replied no such thing. Beauty of little consequence, indeed! And so, under pretence of softening the previous outrage, of stroking and soothing me into placidity, you stick a sly penknife under my ear! Go on: what fault do you find with me, pray? I suppose I have all my limbs and all my features like any other man?'

'Mr. Rochester, allow me to disown my first answer: I intended no pointed repartee: it was only a blunder.'

'Just so: I think so: and you shall be answerable for it. Criticise me: does my forehead not please you?'

He lifted up the sable waves of hair which lay horizontally over his brow, and showed a solid enough mass of intellectual organs, but an abrupt deficiency where the suave sign of benevolence should have risen.

'Now, ma'am, am I a fool?'

'Far from it, sir. You would, perhaps, think me rude if I inquired in return whether you are a philanthropist?'

'There again! Another stick of the penknife, when she pretended to pat my head: and that is because I said I did not like the society of children and old women (low be it spoken!). No, young lady, I am not a general philanthropist; but I bear a conscience'; and he pointed to the prominences which are said to indicate that faculty, and which, fortunately for him, were sufficiently conspicuous; giving,

indeed, a marked breadth to the upper part of his head: 'and, besides, I once had a kind of rude tenderness of heart. When I was as old as you, I was a feeling fellow enough; partial to the unfledged, unfostered, and unlucky; but Fortune has knocked me about since: she has even kneaded me with her knuckles, and now I flatter myself I am hard and tough as an India-rubber ball; pervious, though, through a chink or two still, and with one sentient point in the middle of the lump. Yes: does that leave hope for me?'

'Hope of what, sir?'

'Of my final re-transformation from India-rubber back to flesh?'

'Decidedly he has had too much wine,' I thought; and I did not know what answer to make to his queer question: how could I tell whether he was capable of being re-transformed?

'You looked very much puzzled, Miss Eyre; and though you are not pretty any more than I am handsome, yet a puzzled air becomes you; besides, it is convenient, for it keeps those searching eyes of yours away from my physiognomy, and busies them with the worsted flowers of the rug; so puzzle on. Young lady, I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative tonight.'

With this announcement he rose from his chair, and stood, leaning his arm on the marble mantelpiece: in that attitude his shape was seen plainly as well as his face; his unusual breadth of chest, disproportionate almost to his length of limb. I am sure most people would have thought him an ugly man; yet there was so much unconscious pride in his port; so much ease in his demeanour; such a look of complete indifference to his own external appearance; so haughty a reliance on the power of other qualities, intrinsic or adventitious, to atone for the lack of mere personal attractiveness, that, in looking at him, one inevitably shared the indifference, and, even in a blind, imperfect sense, put faith in the confidence.

'I am disposed to be gregarious and communicative tonight,' he repeated, 'and that is why I sent for you: the fire and the chandelier were not sufficient company for me; nor would Pilot have been, for none of these can talk. Adele is a degree better, but still far below the mark; Mrs. Fairfax ditto; you, I am persuaded, can suit me if you will: you puzzled me the first evening I invited you down here.'

I have almost forgotten you since: other ideas have driven yours from my head; but to-night I am resolved to be at ease; to dismiss what importunes, and recall what pleases. It would please me now to draw you out- to learn more of you- therefore speak.'

Instead of speaking, I smiled; and not a very complacent or submissive smile either.

'Speak,' he urged.

'What about, sir?'

'Whatever you like. I leave both the choice of subject and the manner of treating it entirely to

yourself.'

Accordingly I sat and said nothing: 'If he expects me to talk for the mere sake of talking and showing off, he will find he has addressed himself to the wrong person,' I thought.

'You are dumb, Miss Eyre.'

I was dumb still. He bent his head a little towards me, and with a single hasty glance seemed to dive into my eyes.

'Stubborn?' he said, 'and annoyed. Ah! it is consistent. I put my request in an absurd, almost insolent form. Miss Eyre, I beg your pardon. The fact is, once for all, I don't wish to treat you like an inferior: that is' (correcting himself), 'I claim only such superiority as must result from twenty years' difference in age and a century's advance in experience. This is legitimate, et j'y tiens, as Adele would say; and it is by virtue of this superiority, and this alone, that I desire you to have the goodness to talk to me a little now, and divert my thoughts, which are galled with dwelling on one point- cankering as a rusty nail.'

He had deigned an explanation, almost an apology, and I did not feel insensible to his condescension, and would not seem so.

'I am willing to amuse you, if I can, sir- quite willing; but I cannot introduce a topic, because how do I know what will interest you? Ask me questions, and I will do my best to answer them.'

'Then, in the first place, do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes, on the grounds I stated, namely, that I am old enough to be your father, and that I have battled through a varied experience with many men of many nations, and roamed over half the globe, while you have lived quietly with one set of people in one house?'

'Do as you please, sir.'

'That is no answer; or rather it is a very irritating, because a very evasive one. Reply clearly.'

'I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience.'

'Humph! Promptly spoken. But I won't allow that, seeing that it would never suit my case, as I have made an indifferent, not to say a bad, use of both advantages. Leaving superiority out of the question, then, you must still agree to receive my orders now and then, without being piqued or hurt by the tone of command. Will you?'

I smiled: I thought to myself Mr. Rochester is peculiar- he seems to forget that he pays me L30 per annum for receiving his orders.

'The smile is very well,' said he, catching instantly the passing expression; 'but speak too.'

'I was thinking, sir, that very few masters would trouble themselves to inquire whether or not their paid subordinates were piqued and hurt by their orders.'

'Paid subordinates! What! you are my paid subordinate, are you?'

Oh yes, I had forgotten the salary! Well then, on that mercenary ground, will you agree to let me hector a little?'

'No, sir, not on that ground; but, on the ground that you did forget it, and that you care whether or not a dependant is comfortable in his dependency, I agree heartily.'

'And will you consent to dispense with a great many conventional forms and phrases, without thinking that the omission arises from insolence?'

'I am sure, sir, I should never mistake informality for insolence: one I rather like, the other nothing free-born would submit to, even for a salary.'

'Humbug! Most things free-born will submit to anything for a salary; therefore, keep to yourself, and don't venture on generalities of which you are intensely ignorant. However, I mentally shake hands with you for your answer, despite its inaccuracy; and as much for the manner in which it was said, as for the substance of the speech; the manner was frank and sincere; one does not often see such a manner: no, on the contrary, affectation, or coldness, or stupid, coarse-minded misapprehension of one's meaning are the usual rewards of candour. Not three in three thousand raw school-girl-governesses would have answered me as you have just done. But I don't mean to flatter you: if you are cast in a different mould to the majority, it is no merit of yours: Nature did it. And then, after all, I go too fast in my conclusions: for what I yet know, you may be no better than the rest; you may have intolerable defects to counterbalance your few good points.'

'And so may you,' I thought. My eye met his as the idea crossed my mind: he seemed to read the glance, answering as if its import had been spoken as well as imagined-

'Yes, yes, you are right,' said he; 'I have plenty of faults of my own: I know it, and I don't wish to palliate them, I assure you.'

God wot I need not be too severe about others; I have a past existence, a series of deeds, a colour of life to contemplate within my own breast, which might well call my sneers and censures from my neighbours to myself. I started, or rather (for like other defaulters, I like to lay half the blame on ill fortune and adverse circumstances) was thrust on to a wrong tack at the age of one-and-twenty, and have never recovered the right course since: but I might have been very different; I might have been as good as you- wiser- almost as stainless. I envy you your peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolluted memory. Little girl, a memory without blot or contamination must be an exquisite

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treasure- an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment: is it not?'

'How was your memory when you were eighteen, sir?'

'All right then; limpid, salubrious: no gush of bilge water had turned it to fetid puddle. I was your equal at eighteen- quite your equal. Nature meant me to be, on the whole, a good man, Miss Eyre; one of the better kind, and you see I am not so. You would say you don't see it; at least I flatter myself I read as much in your eye (beware, by the bye, what you express with that organ; I am quick at interpreting its language). Then take my word for it,- I am not a villain: you are not to suppose that- not to attribute to me any such bad eminence; but, owing, I verily believe, rather to circumstances than to my natural bent, I am a trite commonplace sinner, hackneyed in all the poor petty dissipations with which the rich and worthless try to put on life. Do you wonder that I avow this to you? Know, that in the course of your future life you will often find yourself elected the involuntary confidant of your acquaintances' secrets: people will instinctively find out, as I have done, that it is not your forte to tell of yourself, but to listen while others talk of themselves; they will feel, too, that you listen with no malevolent scorn of their indiscretion, but with a kind of innate sympathy; not the less comforting and encouraging because it is very unobtrusive in its manifestations.'

'How do you know?- how can you guess all this, sir?'

'I know it well; therefore I proceed almost as freely as if I were writing my thoughts in a diary. You would say, I should have been superior to circumstances; so I should- so I should; but you see I was not. When fate wronged me, I had not the wisdom to remain cool: I turned desperate; then I degenerated. Now, when any vicious simpleton excites my disgust by his paltry ribaldry, I cannot flatter myself that I am better than he: I am forced to confess that he and I are on a level. I wish I had stood firm- God knows I do!

Dread remorse when you are tempted to err, Miss Eyre; remorse is the poison of life.'

'Repentance is said to be its cure, sir.'

'It is not its cure. Reformation may be its cure; and I could reform- I have strength yet for that- if- but where is the use of thinking of it, hampered, burdened, cursed as I am? Besides, since happiness is irrevocably denied me, I have a right to get pleasure out of life: and I will get it, cost what it may.'

'Then you will degenerate still more, sir.'

'Possibly: yet why should I, if I can get sweet, fresh pleasure? And I may get it as sweet and fresh as the wild honey the bee gathers on the moor.'

'It will sting- it will taste bitter, sir.'

'How do you know?- you never tried it. How very serious- how very solemn you look: and you are

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as ignorant of the matter as this cameo head' (taking one from the mantelpiece). 'You have no right to preach to me, you neophyte, that have not passed the porch of life, and are absolutely unacquainted with its mysteries.'

'I only remind you of your own words, sir: you said error brought remorse, and you pronounced remorse the poison of existence.'

'And who talks of error now? I scarcely think the notion that flittered across my brain was an error. I believe it was an inspiration rather than a temptation: it was very genial, very soothing- I know that. Here it comes again! It is no devil, I assure you; or if it be, it has put on the robes of an angel of light. I think I must admit so fair a guest when it asks entrance to my heart.'

'Distrust it, sir; it is not a true angel.'

'Once more, how do you know? By what instinct do you pretend to distinguish between a fallen seraph of the abyss and a messenger from the eternal throne- between a guide and a seducer?'

'I judged by your countenance, sir, which was troubled when you said the suggestion had returned upon you. I feel sure it will work you more misery if you listen to it.'

'Not at all- it bears the most gracious message in the world: for the rest, you are not my conscience-keeper, so don't make yourself uneasy. Here, come in, bonny wanderer!'

He said this as if he spoke to a vision, viewless to any eye but his own; then, folding his arms, which he had half extended, on his chest, he seemed to enclose in their embrace the invisible being.

'Now,' he continued, again addressing me, 'I have received the pilgrim- a disguised deity, as I verily believe. Already it has done me good: my heart was a sort of charnel; it will now be a shrine.'

'To speak truth, sir, I don't understand you at all: I cannot keep up the conversation, because it has got out of my depth. Only one thing, I know: you said you were not as good as you should like to be, and that you regretted your own imperfection;- one thing I can comprehend: you intimated that to have a sullied memory was a perpetual bane. It seems to me, that if you tried hard, you would in time find it possible to become what you yourself would approve; and that if from this day you began with resolution to correct your thoughts and actions, you would in a few years have laid up a new and stainless store of recollections, to which you might revert with pleasure.'

'Justly thought; rightly said, Miss Eyre; and, at this moment, I am paving hell with energy.'

'Sir?'

'I am laying down good intentions, which I believe durable as flint. Certainly, my associates and pursuits shall be other than they have been.'

'And better?'

'And better- so much better as pure ore is than foul dross. You seem to doubt me; I don't doubt myself: I know what my aim is, what my motives are; and at this moment I pass a law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that both are right.'

'They cannot be, sir, if they require a new statute to legalise them.'

'They are, Miss Eyre, though they absolutely require a new statute: unheard-of combinations or circumstances demand unheard-of rules.'

'That sounds a dangerous maxim, sir; because one can see at once that it is liable to abuse.'

'Sententious sage! so it is: but I swear by my household gods not to abuse it.'

'You are human and fallible.'

'I am: so are you- what then?'

'The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely intrusted.'

'What power?'

'That of saying of any strange, unsanctioned line of action,- "Let it be right."'

'"Let it be right"- the very words: you have pronounced them.'

'May it be right then,' I said, as I rose, deeming it useless to continue a discourse which was all darkness to me; and, besides, sensible that the character of my interlocutor was beyond my penetration; at least, beyond its present reach; and feeling the uncertainty, the vague sense of insecurity, which accompanies a conviction of ignorance.

'Where are you going?'

'To put Adele to bed: it is past her bedtime.'

'You are afraid of me, because I talk like a Sphynx.'

'Your language is enigmatical, sir: but though I am bewildered, I am certainly not afraid.'

'You are afraid- your self-love dreads a blunder.'

'In that sense I do feel apprehensive- I have no wish to talk nonsense.'

'If you did, it would be in such a grave, quiet manner, I should mistake it for sense. Do you never laugh, Miss Eyre? Don't trouble yourself to answer- I see you laugh rarely; but you can laugh very merrily: believe me, you are not naturally austere, any more than I am naturally vicious. The Lowood constraint still clings to you somewhat; controlling your features, muffling your voice, and restricting your limbs; and you fear in the presence of a man and a brother- or father, or master, or what you will- to smile too gaily, speak too freely, or move too quickly: but, in time, I think you will learn to be natural with me, as I find it impossible to be conventional with you; and then your looks and movements will have more vivacity and variety than they dare offer now. I see at intervals the glance of a curious sort of bird through the close-set bars of a cage: a vivid, restless, resolute captive is there; were it but free, it would soar cloud-high. You are still bent on going?'

'It has struck nine, sir.'

'Never mind,- wait a minute: Adele is not ready to go to bed yet.'

My position, Miss Eyre, with my back to the fire, and my face to the room, favours observation. While talking to you, I have also occasionally watched Adele (I have my own reasons for thinking her a curious study,- reasons that I may, nay, that I shall, impart to you some day). She pulled out of her box, about ten minutes ago, a little pink silk frock; rapture lit her face as she unfolded it; coquetry runs in her blood, blends with her brains, and seasons the marrow of her bones. "Il faut que je l'essaie!" cried she, "et a l'instant meme!" and she rushed out of the room. She is now with Sophie, undergoing a robing process: in a few minutes she will re-enter; and I know what I shall see,- a miniature of Celine Varens, as she used to appear on the boards at the rising of-. But never mind that. However, my tenderest feelings are about to receive a shock: such is my presentiment; stay now, to see whether it will be realised.'

Ere long, Adele's little foot was heard tripping across the hall.

She entered, transformed as her guardian had predicted. A dress of rose-coloured satin, very short, and as full in the skirt as it could be gathered, replaced the brown frock she had previously worn; a wreath of rosebuds circled her forehead; her feet were dressed in silk stockings and small white satin sandals.

'Est-ce que ma robe va bien?' cried she, bounding forwards; 'et mes souliers? et mes bas? Tenez je crois que je vais danser!'

And spreading out her dress, she chasseed across the room; till, having reached Mr. Rochester, she wheeled lightly round before him on tip-toe, then dropped on one knee at his feet, exclaiming- 'Monsieur, je vous remercie mille fois de votre bonte; then rising, she added, 'C'est comme cela que maman faisait, n'est-ce pas, monsieur?'

'Pre-cise-ly!' was the answer; 'and, "comme cella," she charmed my English gold out of my British breeches' pocket. I have been green, too, Miss Eyre- ay, grass green: not a more vernal tint freshens

you now than once freshened me. My Spring is gone, however, but it has left me that French floweret on my hands, which, in some moods, I would fain be rid of. Not valuing now the root whence it sprang; having found that it was of a sort which nothing but gold dust could manure, I have but half a liking to the blossom, especially when it looks so artificial as just now. I keep it and rear it rather on the Roman Catholic principle of expiating numerous sins, great or small, by one good work. I'll explain all this some day. Good-night.'

第十四章

后来的几天我很少见到罗切斯特先生。早上他似乎忙于事务，下午接待从米尔科特或附近来造访的绅士，有时他们留下来与他共进晚餐。他的伤势好转到可以骑马时，便经常骑马外出，也许是回访，往往到深夜才回来。

在这期间，连阿黛勒也很少给叫到他跟前。我同他的接触，只限于在大厅里、楼梯上，或走廊上偶然相遇。他有时高傲冷漠地从我身边走过，远远地点一下头或冷冷地瞥一眼，承认了我的存在，而有时却很有绅士风度，和蔼可亲地鞠躬和微笑。他情绪的反复并没有使我生气，因为我明白这种变化与我无关，他情绪的起伏完全是由于同我不相干的原因。

一天有客来吃饭，他派人来取我的画夹，无疑是要向人家出示里面的画。绅士们走得很早，费尔法克斯太太告诉我，他们要到米尔科特去参加一个公众大会。但那天晚上有雨，天气恶劣，罗切斯特先生没有去作陪。他们走后不久，他便打铃，传话来让我和阿黛勒下楼去。我梳理了阿黛勒的头发，把她打扮得整整齐齐，我自己穿上了平时的贵格会服装，知道确实已经没有再修饰的余地了——一切都那么贴身而又朴实，包括编了辫子的头发在内，丝毫不见凌乱的痕迹——我们便下楼去了。阿黛勒正疑惑着，不知她的 *petit coffre* 终于到了没有。因为某些差错，它直到现在还迟迟未来。我们走进餐室，只见桌上放着一个小箱子。阿黛勒非常高兴，她似乎凭直觉就知道了。

“Ma boîte ! Ma boîte!” 她大嚷着朝它奔过去。

“是的，你的‘boîte’终于到了，把它拿到一个角落去，你这位地道的巴黎女儿，你就去掏你盒子里的东西玩儿吧。”罗切斯特先生用深沉而颇有些讥讽的口吻说，那声音是从火炉旁巨大的安乐椅深处发出来的。“记住，”他继续说，“别用解剖过程的细枝末节问题，或者内脏情况的通报来打搅我，你就静静地去做手术吧——*tiens toi tranquille, enfant; comprends tu?*”

阿黛勒似乎并不需要提醒，她已经带着她的宝贝退到了一张沙发上，这会儿正忙着解开系住盖子的绳子。她清除了这个障碍，揭起银色包装薄纸，光一个劲儿地大嚷着。

“Oh! ciel! Que c'est beau!” 随后便沉浸在兴奋的沉思中。

“爱小姐在吗？”此刻这位主人发问了。他从座位上欠起身子，回过头来看看门口，我仍站

在门旁。

“啊！好吧，到前面来，坐在这儿吧。”他把一张椅子拉到自己椅子的旁边。“我不大喜欢听孩子唧唧呀呀，”他继续说，“因为像我这样的老单身汉，他们的喃喃细语，不会让我引起愉快的联想。同一个娃娃面对面消磨整个晚上，让我实在受不了。别把椅子拉得那么开，爱小姐。就在我摆着的地方坐下来——当然，要是你乐意。让那些礼节见鬼去吧！我老是把它们忘掉。我也不特别喜爱头脑简单的老妇人。话得说回来，我得想着点我的那位，她可是怠慢不得。她是费尔法克斯家族的，或是嫁给了家族中的一位。据说血浓于水。”

他打铃派人去请费尔法克斯太太，很快她就到了，手里提着编织篮。

“晚上好，夫人，我请你来做件好事。我已不允许阿黛勒跟我谈礼品的事，她肚子里有好多话要说，你做做好事听她讲讲，并跟她谈谈，那你就功德无量了。”

说真的，阿黛勒一见到费尔法克斯太太，便把她叫到沙发旁，很快在她的膝头摆满了她‘boite’中的瓷器、象牙和蜡制品，同时用她所能掌握的蹩脚英语，不住地加以解释，告诉她自己有多开心。

“哈，我已扮演了一个好主人的角色，”罗切斯特先生继续说，“使我的客人们各得其所，彼此都有乐趣。我应当有权关心一下自己的乐趣了。爱小姐，把你的椅子再往前拉一点，你坐得太靠后了，我在这把舒舒服服的椅子上，不改变一下位置就看不见你，而我又不想动。”

我照他的吩咐做了，尽管我宁愿仍旧呆在阴影里。但罗切斯特先生却是那么直来直去地下命令，似乎立刻服从他是理所当然的。

我已作了交代，我们在餐室里。为晚餐而点上的枝形吊灯，使整个房间如节日般大放光明，熊熊炉火通红透亮，高大的窗子和更高大的拱门前悬挂着华贵而宽敞的紫色帷幔。除了阿黛勒压着嗓门的交谈（她不敢高声说话），以及谈话停顿间隙响起了敲窗的冷雨，一切都寂静无声。

罗切斯特先生坐在锦缎面椅子上，显得同我以前看到的大不相同，不那么严厉，更不那么阴沉。他嘴上浮着笑容，眼睛闪闪发光，是不是因为喝了酒的缘故，我不敢肯定，不过很可能如此。总之，他正在饭后的兴头上，更加健谈，更加亲切，比之早上冷淡僵硬的脾性，显得更为放纵。不过他看上去依然十分严厉。他那硕大的脑袋靠在椅子隆起的靠背上，炉火的光照在他犹如花岗岩镌刻出来的面容上，照进他又大又黑的眸子里——因为他有着一双乌黑的大眼睛，而且很漂亮，有时在眼睛深处也并非没有某种变化，如果那不是柔情，至少也会使你想起这种感情来。

他凝视着炉火已经有两分钟了，而我用同样的时间在打量着他。突然他回过头来，瞧见我正盯着他的脸看着。

“你在仔细看我，爱小姐，”他说，“你认为我长得漂亮吗？”

要是我仔细考虑的话，我本应当对这个问题作出习惯上含糊、礼貌的回答，但不知怎地我还

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没意识到就已经冲口而出：“不，先生。”

“啊！我敢打赌，你这人有点儿特别，”他说，“你的神态像个小 nonnette，怪僻、文静、严肃、单纯。你坐着的时候把手放在面前，眼睛总是低垂着看地毯（顺便说一句，除了穿心透肺似地扫向我脸庞的时候，譬如像刚才那样），别人问你一个问题，或者发表一番你必须回答的看法时，你会突然直言不讳地回答，不是生硬，就是唐突。你的话是什么意思？”

“先生，怪我太直率了，请你原谅。我本应当说，像容貌这样的问题，不是轻易可以当场回答的；应当说人的审美趣味各有不同；应当说漂亮并不重要，或者诸如此类的话。”

“你本来就不应当这样来回答。漂亮并不重要，确实如此！原来你是假装要缓和一下刚才的无礼态度，抚慰我使我心平气和，而实际上你是在我耳朵下面狡猾地捅了一刀。讲下去，请问你发现我有什么缺点？我想我像别人一样有鼻子有眼睛的。”

“罗切斯特先生，请允许我收回我第一个回答。我并无妙语伤人的意思，只不过是失言而已。”

“就是这么回事，我想是这样。而你要对此负责。你就挑我的毛病吧，我的前额使你不愉快吗？”

他抓起了横贴在额前的波浪似的黑发，露出一大块坚实的智力器官，但是却缺乏那种本该有的仁慈敦厚的迹象。

“好吧，小姐，我是个傻瓜吗？”

“绝对不是这样，先生。要是我反过来问你是不是一个慈善家，你也会认为我粗暴无礼吗？”

“你又来了！又捅了我一刀，一面还假装拍拍我的头。那是因为我曾说我不喜欢同孩子和老人在一起（轻声点儿！）。不，年轻小姐，我不是一个一般意义上的慈善家，不过我有一颗良心。”于是他指了指据说是表示良心的突出的地方。幸亏对他来说，那地方很显眼，使他脑袋的上半部有着引人注目的宽度。“此外，我曾有过一种原始的柔情。在我同你一样年纪的时候，我是一个富有同情心的人，偏爱羽毛未丰、无人养育和不幸的人，但是命运却一直打击我，甚至用指关节揉面似地揉我，现在我庆幸自己像一个印度皮球那样坚韧了，不过通过一两处空隙还能渗透到里面。在这一块东西的中心，还有一个敏感点。是的，那使我还能有希望吗？”

“希望什么，先生？”

“希望我最终从印度皮球再次转变为血肉之躯吗？”

“他肯定是酒喝多了，”我想。我不知道该如何来回答这个奇怪的问题。我怎么知道他是不是可能被转变过来呢？

“你看来大惑不解，爱小姐，而你虽然并不漂亮，就像我并不英俊一样，但那种迷惑的神情却同你十分相称。此外，这样倒也好，可以把你那种搜寻的目光，从我的脸上转移到别处去，

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忙着去看毛毯上的花朵。那你就迷惑下去吧。年轻小姐，今儿晚上我爱凑热闹，也很健谈。”

宣布完毕，他便从椅子上立起来。他伫立着，胳膊倚在大理石壁炉架上。这种姿势使他的体形像面容一样可以看得一清二楚。他的胸部出奇地宽阔，同他四肢的长度不成比例。我敢肯定，大多数人都认为他是个丑陋的男人，但是他举止中却无意识地流露出那么明显的傲慢，在行为方面又那么从容自如，对自己的外表显得那么毫不在乎，又是那么高傲地依赖其他内在或外来的特质的力量，来弥补自身魅力的缺乏。因此，你一瞧着他，就会不由自主地被他的漠然态度所感染，甚至盲目片面地对他的自信表示信服。

“今天晚上我爱凑热闹，也健谈，”他重复了这句话。”这就是我要请你来的原因。炉火和吊灯还不足陪伴我，派洛特也不行，因为它们都不会说话。阿黛勒稍微好一些，但还是远远低于标准。费尔法克斯太太同样如此。而你，我相信是合我意的，要是你愿意。第一天晚上我邀请你下楼到这里来的时候，你就使我迷惑不解。从那时候起，我已几乎把你忘了。脑子里尽想着其他事情，顾不上你。不过今天晚上我决定安闲自在些，忘掉纠缠不休的念头，回忆回忆愉快的事儿。现在我乐于把你的情况掏出来，进一步了解你，所以你就说吧。”

我没有说话，却代之以微笑，既不特别得意，也不顺从。

“说吧，”他催促着。

“说什么呢，先生。”

“爱说什么就说什么，说的内容和方式，全由你自己选择吧。”

结果我还是端坐着，什么也没有说。“要是他希望我为说而说，炫耀一番，那他会发现他找错了人啦，”我想。

“你一声不吭，爱小姐。”

我依然一声不吭。他向我微微低下头来，匆匆地投过来一瞥，似乎要探究我的眼睛。

“固执？”他说，“而且生气了。噢，这是一致的。我提出要求的方式，荒谬而近乎蛮横。爱小姐，请你原谅。实际上，我永远不想把你当作下人看待。那就是（纠正我自己），我有比你强的地方，但那只不过是年龄上大二十岁，经历上相差一个世纪的必然结果。这是合理的，就像阿黛勒会说的那样，*et j'y tiens*。而凭借这种优势，也仅仅如此而已，我想请你跟我谈一会儿，转移一下我的思想苦苦纠缠在一点上，像一根生锈的钉子那样正在腐蚀着。”

他已降格作了解释。近乎道歉。我对他的屈尊俯就并没有无动于衷，也不想显得如此。

“先生，只要我能够，我是乐意为你解闷的，十分乐意。不过我不能随便谈个话题，因为我怎么知道你对什么感兴趣呢？你提问吧，我尽力回答。”

“那么首先一个问题是，你同不同意，基于我所陈述的理由，我有权在某些时候稍微专横、唐突或者严厉些呢？我的理由是，按我的年纪。我可以做你的父亲，而且有着多变的人生阅

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历，同很多国家的很多人打过交道。漂泊了半个地球。而你却是太平平地跟同一类人生活在同一幢房子里。”

“你爱怎样就怎样吧，先生。”

“你并没有回答我的问题。或是说，你回答很气人，因为含糊其词——回答得明确些。”

“先生，我并不认为你有权支使我，仅仅因为你年纪比我大些，或者比我阅历丰富——你所说的优越感取决于你对时间和经历的利用。”

“哼！答得倒快。但我不承认，我认为与我的情况绝不相符，因为对两者的有利条件，我毫无兴趣。更不必说没有充分利用了。那么我们暂且不谈这优越性问题吧，但你必须偶偶尔听候我吩咐，而不因为命令的口吻面生气或伤心，好吗？”

我微微一笑。我暗自思忖道，“罗切斯特先生也真奇怪——他好像忘了，付我三十镑年薪是让我听他吩咐的。”

“笑得好，”他立即抓住了转瞬即逝表情说，“不过还得开口讲话。”

“先生，我在想，很少有主人会费心去问他们雇佣的下属，会不会因为被吩咐而生气和伤心。”

“雇佣的下属！什么，你是我雇佣的下属是不是，哦，是的，我把薪俸的事儿给忘了？好吧，那么出于雇佣观点，你肯让我耍点儿威风吗？”

“不，先生，不是出于那个理由。但出于你忘掉了雇佣观点，却关心你的下属处于从属地位心情是否愉快，我是完全肯的。”

“你会同意我省去很多陈规旧矩，而不认为这出自于蛮横吗？”

“我肯定同意，先生。我决不会把不拘礼节错当蛮横无理。一个是我比较喜欢的，而另一个是任何一位自由人都不会屈从的，即使是为了赚取薪金。”

“胡扯！为了薪金，大多数自由人对什么都会屈服，因此，只说你自己吧，不要妄谈普遍现象，你对此一无所知。尽管你的回答并不确切，但因为，我在心里同你握手言好，同样还因为你回答的内容和回答的态度。这种态度坦率诚恳、并不常见。不，恰恰相反，矫揉造作或者冷漠无情，或者对你的意思愚蠢而粗俗地加以误解，常常是坦率正直所得到的报答。三千个初出校门的女学生式家庭教师中，像你刚才那么回答我的不到三个，不过我无意恭维你，要说你是从跟大多数人不同的模子里浇制出来的，这不是你的功劳，而是造化的圣绩。再说我的结论毕竟下得过于匆忙。就我所知，你也未必胜过其他人。也许有难以容忍的缺点，抵销你不多的长处。”

“可能你也一样，”我想，这想法掠过脑际时，他的目光与我的相遇了。他似乎已揣度出我眼神的含意，便作了回答，仿佛那含意不仅存在于想象之中，而且已经说出口了。

“对，对，你说得对，”他说，“我自己也有很多过失，我知道。我向你担保，我不想掩饰，上帝知道，我不必对别人太苛刻。我要反省往昔的经历、一连串行为和一种生活方式，因此会招来邻居的讥讽和责备。我开始，或者不如说（因为像其他有过失的人一样，我总爱把一半的罪责推给厄运和逆境）在我二十一岁时我被抛入歧途，而且从此之后，再也没有回到正道上。要不然我也许会大不相同，也许会像你一样好——更聪明些——几乎一样洁白无瑕。我羡慕你平静的心境，清白的良心、纯洁的记忆，小姑娘，没有污点未经感染的记忆必定是一大珍宝，是身心愉快的永不枯竭的源泉，是不是？”

“你十八岁时的记忆怎么样，先生？”

“那时很好，无忧无虑，十分健康。没有滚滚污水把它变成臭水潭。十八岁时我同你不相上下——完全加此。总的说来，大自然有意让我做个好人，爱小姐，较好的一类人中的一个，而你看到了，现在我却变了样，你会说，你并没有看到。至少我自以为从你的眼睛里看到了这层意思（顺便提一句，你要注意那个器官流露出来的感情，我可是很善于察言观色的），那么相信我的话——我不是一个恶棍。你不要那么猜想——不要把这些恶名加给我。不过我确实相信，由于环境而不是天性的缘故，我成了一个普普通通的罪人，表现在种种可怜的小小放荡上，富裕而无用的人都想以这种放荡来点缀人生，我向你坦露自己的心迹，你觉得奇怪吗？你要知道，在你未来的人生道路上，你常常会发现不由自主地被当作知己，去倾听你熟人的隐秘。人们像我那样凭直觉就能感到，你的高明之处不在于谈论你自己，而在于倾听别人谈论他们自己，他们也会感到，你听的时候，并没有因为别人行为不端而露出不怀好意的蔑视，而是怀着一种发自内心的同情。这种同情给人以抚慰和鼓舞、因为它是不动声色地流露出来的。”

“你怎么知道的？——这种种情况，你怎么猜到的呢，先生？”

“我知道得清清楚楚，因此我谈起来无拘无束，几乎就像把我的思想写在日记中一样，你会说，我本应当战胜环境，确实应当这样——确实应当这样。不过你看到了，我没有战胜环境。当命运亏待了我时，我没有明智地保持冷静，我开始绝望，随后坠落了，现在要是一个可恶的傻瓜用卑俗的下流话激起我的厌恶，我并不以为我的表现会比他好些，我不得不承认我与他彼此彼此而已。我真希望当初自己能不为所动——上帝知道我是这么希望的。爱小姐，当你受到诱惑要做错事的时候，你要视悔恨为畏途，悔恨是生活的毒药。”

“据说忏悔是治疗的良药，生先。”

“忏悔治不了它、悔改也许可以疗救。而我能悔改——我有力量这么做——如果——不过既然我已经负荷沉重、步履艰难该受诅咒了，现在想这管什么用呢？既然我已被无可挽回地剥夺了幸福，那我就有权利从生活中获得快乐。我一定要得到它，不管代价有多大。”

“那你会进一步沉沦的，先生。”

“可能如此。不过要是我能获得新鲜甜蜜的欢乐，为什么我必定要沉沦呢？也许我所得到的，同蜜蜂在沼泽地上酿成的野蜂蜜一样甜蜜，一样新鲜。”

“它会螫人的——而且有苦味，先生。”

“你怎么知道？——你从来没有试过。多严肃！——你看上去多一本正经呀，而你对这种事情一无所知，跟这个浮雕头像一模一样（从壁炉上取了一个）！你无权对我说教，你这位新教士，你还没有步入生活之门，对内中的奥秘毫不知情。”

“我不过是提醒你一下你自己的话，先生。你说错误带来悔恨，而你又说悔恨是生活的毒药。”

“现在谁说起错误啦？我并不以为，刚才闪过我脑际的想法是个错误。我相信这是一种灵感，而不是一种诱惑，它非常亲切，非常令人欣慰——这我清楚。瞧，它又现形了。我敢肯定，它不是魔鬼，或者要真是的话，它披着光明天使的外衣。我认为这样一位美丽的宾客要求进入我心扉的时候，我应当允许她进来。”

“别相信它，先生。它不是一个真正的天使。”

“再说一遍，你怎么知道的呢？你凭什么直觉，就装作能区别一位坠入深渊的天使和一个来自永恒王座的使者——区别一位向导和一个勾引者？”

“我是根据你说产生这种联想的时候你脸上不安的表情来判断的。我敢肯定，要是你听信了它，那它一定会给你造成更大的不幸。”

“绝对不会——它带着世上最好的信息，至于别的，你又不是我良心的监护人，因此别感到不安。来吧，进来吧，美丽的流浪者！”

他仿佛在对着一个除了他自己别人什么看不见的幻影说话，随后他把伸出了一半的胳膊，收起来放在胸部，似乎要把看不见的人搂在怀里。

“现在，”他继续说，再次转向了我，“我已经接待了这位流浪者——乔装打扮的神，我完全相信。它已经为我做了好事。我的心原本是一个停骸所，现在会成为一个神龛。”

“说实话，先生，我一点也听不懂你的话。你的谈话我跟不上，因为已经越出了我所能理解的深度。我只知道一点，你曾说你并不像自己所希望的那样好，你对自己的缺陷感到遗憾——有一件事我是理解的，那就是你说的，玷污了的记忆是一个永久的祸根。我似乎觉得，只要你全力以赴，到时候你会发现有可能成为自己所向往的人，而要是你现在就下决心开始纠正你的思想和行动，不出几年，你就可以建立一个一尘不染的新记忆仓库，你也许会很乐意地去回味。”

“想得合理，说得也对，爱小姐，而这会儿我是使劲在给地狱铺路。”

“先生？”

“我正在用良好的意图铺路，我相信它像燧石一般耐磨。当然，今后我所交往的人和追求的东西与以往的不同了。”

“比以往更好？”

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“是更好——就像纯粹的矿石比污秽的渣滓要好得多一样。你似乎对我表示怀疑，我倒不怀疑自己。我明白自己的目的是什么，动机是什么。此刻我要通过一项目的和动机都是正通八达的法律，它像玛代人和波斯人的法律那样不可更改。”

“先生，它们需要一个新的法规将它合法化，否则就不能成立。”

“爱小姐，尽管完全需要一个新法规，但它们能成立；没有先例的复杂状况需要没有先例的法则。”

“这听起来是个危险的格言，先生，因为一眼就可以看出来，容易造成滥用。”

“善用格言的圣人！就是这么回事，但我以家神的名义发誓，决不滥用。”

“你是凡人，所以难免出错。”

“我是凡人，你也一样——那又怎么样？”

“凡人难免出错，不应当冒用放心地托付给神明和完人的权力。”

“什么权力？”

“对奇怪而未经准许的行动就说，‘算它对吧。’”

“‘算它对吧’——就是这几个字，你已经说出来了。”

“那就说‘愿它对吧，’我说着站起来，觉得已没有必要再继续这番自己感到糊里糊涂的谈话。此外，我也意识到，对方的性格是无法摸透的，至少目前是这样，我还感到没有把握，有一种朦胧的不安全感，同时还确信自己很无知。”

“你上哪儿去？”

“阿黛勒睡觉，已经过了她上床的时间了。”

“你害怕我，因为我交谈起来像斯芬克斯。”

“你的语言不可捉摸，先生。不过尽管我迷惑不解，但我根本不怕。”

“你是害怕的——你的自爱心理使你害怕出大错。”

“要是那样说，我的确有些担忧——我不想胡说八道。”

“你即使胡说八道，也会是一付板着脸孔，不动声色的神态，我还会误以为说得很在理呢。你从来没有笑过吗，爱小姐？你不必费心来回答了——我知道你难得一笑，可是你可以笑得

很欢。请相信我，你不是生来严肃的，就像我不是生来可恶的。罗沃德的束缚，至今仍在你身上留下某些印迹，控制着你的神态，压抑着你的嗓音，捆绑着你的手脚，所以你害怕在一个男人，一位兄长——或者父亲、或者主人，随你怎么说——面前开怀大笑，害怕说话太随便，害怕动作太迅速，不过到时候，我想你会学着同我自然一些的，就像觉得要我按照陋习来对待你是不可能的，到那时，你的神态和动作会比现在所敢于流露的更富有生气、更多姿多彩。我透过木条坚固的鸟笼，不时观察着一只颇念新奇的鸟，笼子里是一个活跃、不安、不屈不挠的囚徒，一旦获得自由，它一定会高飞云端。你还是执意要走？”

“已经过了九点，先生。”

“没有关系——等一会儿吧，阿黛勒还没有准备好上床呢，爱小姐，我背靠炉火，面对房间，有利于观察，跟你说话的时候，我也不时注意着她（我有自己的理由把她当作奇特的研究对象，这理由我某一天可以，不，我会讲给你听的），大约十分钟之前，她从箱子里取出一件粉红色丝绸小上衣，打开的时候脸上充满了喜悦，媚俗之气流动在她的血液里，融化在她的骨髓里，沉淀在她的骨髓里。‘Il faut que je l'essaie!’她嚷道，‘et a l'instant meme!’于是她冲出了房间。现在她跟索菲娅在一起，正忙着试装呢。不要几分钟，她会再次进来，我知道我会看到什么——塞莉纳·瓦伦的缩影，当年帷幕开启，她出现在舞台上时的模样，不过，不去管它啦。然而，我的最温柔的感情将为之震动，这就是我的预感，呆着别走，看看是不是会兑现。”

不久，我就听见阿黛勒的小脚轻快地走过客厅，她进来了，正如她的保护人所预见的那样，已判若两人。一套玫瑰色缎子衣服代替了原先的棕色上衣，这衣服很短，裙摆大得不能再大。她的额头上戴着一个玫瑰花蕾的花环，脚上穿着丝袜和白缎子小凉鞋。

“Est ce que ma robe va bien?”她跳跳蹦蹦跑到前面叫道“et mes souliers? et mes bas? Tenez je crois que je vais danser!”

她展开裙子，用快滑步舞姿穿过房间，到了罗切斯特先生的跟前，蹑着脚在他面前轻盈地转了一圈，随后一个膝头着地，蹲在他脚边，嚷着：

“Monsieur, je vous remercie mille fois de votre bonte,”随后她立起来补充了一句：“C'est comme cela que maman faisait, n'est ce pas, Monsieur?”

“确——实——像”他答道，“而且‘comme cela’，她把我迷住了，从我英国裤袋里骗走了我英国的钱。我也很稚嫩，爱小姐——唉，青草一般稚嫩，一度使我生气勃勃的青春色彩并不淡于如今的你。不过我的春天已经逝去，但它在我手中留下了一小朵法国小花，在某些心境中，我真想把它摆脱。我并不珍重生出它的根来，还发现它需要用金土来培植，于是我对这朵花三心二意了，特别是像现在这样它看上去多么矫揉造作。我收留它，养育它，多半是按照罗马天主教教义，用做一件好事来赎无数大大小小的罪孽。改天再给你解释这一切，晚安。”