

CHAPTER XVII

A WEEK passed, and no news arrived of Mr. Rochester: ten days, and still he did not come. Mrs. Fairfax said she should not be surprised if he were to go straight from the Leas to London, and thence to the Continent, and not show his face again at Thornfield for a year to come; he had not unfrequently quitted it in a manner quite as abrupt and unexpected. When I heard this, I was beginning to feel a strange chill and failing at the heart. I was actually permitting myself to experience a sickening sense of disappointment; but rallying my wits, and recollecting my principles, I at once called my sensations to order; and it was wonderful how I got over the temporary blunder- how I cleared up the mistake of supposing Mr. Rochester's movements a matter in which I had any cause to take a vital interest. Not that I humbled myself by a slavish notion of inferiority: on the contrary, I just said-

'You have nothing to do with the master of Thornfield, further than to receive the salary he gives you for teaching his protegee, and to be grateful for such respectful and kind treatment as, if you do your duty, you have a right to expect at his hands. Be sure that is the only tie he seriously acknowledges between you and him; so don't make him the object of your fine feelings, your raptures, agonies, and so forth. He is not of your order: keep to your caste, and be too self-respecting to lavish the love of the whole heart, soul, and strength, where such a gift is not wanted and would be despised.'

I went on with my day's business tranquilly; but ever and anon vague suggestions kept wandering across my brain of reasons why I should quit Thornfield; and I kept involuntarily framing advertisements and pondering conjectures about new situations: these thoughts I did not think it necessary to check; they might germinate and bear fruit if they could.

Mr. Rochester had been absent upwards of a fortnight, when the post brought Mrs. Fairfax a letter.

'It is from the master,' said she, as she looked at the direction. 'Now I suppose we shall know whether we are to expect his return or not.'

And while she broke the seal and perused the document, I went on taking my coffee (we were at breakfast): it was hot, and I attributed to that circumstance a fiery glow which suddenly rose to my face. Why my hand shook, and why I involuntarily spilt half the contents of my cup into my saucer, I did not choose to consider.

'Well, I sometimes think we are too quiet; but we run a chance of being busy enough now: for a little while at least,' said Mrs.

Fairfax, still holding the note before her spectacles.

Ere I permitted myself to request an explanation, I tied the string of Adele's pinafore, which happened to be loose: having helped her also to another bun and refilled her mug with milk, I said nonchalantly-

'Mr. Rochester is not likely to return soon, I suppose?'

'Indeed he is- in three days, he says: that will be next Thursday; and not alone either. I don't know how many of the fine people at the Leas are coming with him: he sends directions for all the best bedrooms to be prepared; and the library and drawing-rooms are to be cleaned out; and I am to get more kitchen hands from the George Inn, at Millcote, and from wherever else I can; and the ladies will bring their maids and the gentlemen their valets: so we shall have a full house of it.' And Mrs. Fairfax swallowed her breakfast and hastened away to commence operations.

The three days were, as she had foretold, busy enough. I had thought all the rooms at Thornfield beautifully clean and well arranged; but it appears I was mistaken. Three women were got to help; and such scrubbing, such brushing, such washing of paint and beating of carpets, such taking down and putting up of pictures, such polishing of mirrors and lustres, such lighting of fires in bedrooms, such airing of sheets and feather-beds on hearths, I never beheld, either before or since. Adele ran quite wild in the midst of it: the preparations for company and the prospect of their arrival, seemed to throw her into ecstasies. She would have Sophie to look over all her 'toilettes,' as she called frocks; to furbish up any that were 'passees,' and to air and arrange the new. For herself, she did nothing but caper about in the front chambers, jump on and off the bedsteads, and lie on the mattresses and piled-up bolsters and pillows before the enormous fires roaring in the chimneys. From school duties she was exonerated: Mrs. Fairfax had pressed me into her service, and I was all day in the storeroom, helping (or hindering) her and the cook; learning to make custards and cheese-cakes and French pastry, to truss game and garnish dessert-dishes.

The party were expected to arrive on Thursday afternoon, in time for dinner at six. During the intervening period I had no time to nurse chimeras; and I believe I was as active and gay as anybody- Adele excepted. Still, now and then, I received a damping check to my cheerfulness; and was, in spite of myself, thrown back on the region of doubts and portents, and dark conjectures. This was when I chanced to see the third-storey staircase door (which of late had always been kept locked) open slowly, and give passage to the form of Grace Poole, in prim cap, white apron, and handkerchief; when I watched her glide along the gallery, her quiet tread muffled in a list slipper; when I saw her look into the bustling, topsy-turvy bedrooms,- just say a word, perhaps, to the charwoman about the proper way to polish a grate, or clean a marble mantelpiece, or take stains from papered walls, and then pass on. She would thus descend to the kitchen once a day, eat her dinner, smoke a moderate pipe on the hearth, and go back, carrying her pot of porter with her, for her private solace, in her own gloomy, upper haunt. Only one hour in the twenty-four did she pass with her fellow-servants below; all the rest of her time was spent in some low-ceiled, oaken chamber of the second storey: there she sat and sewed- and probably laughed drearily to herself,- as companionless as a prisoner in his dungeon.

The strangest thing of all was, that not a soul in the house, except me, noticed her habits, or seemed to marvel at them: no one discussed her position or employment; no one pitied her solitude or isolation. I once, indeed, overheard part of a dialogue between Leah and one of the charwomen, of which Grace formed the subject. Leah had been saying something I had not caught, and the charwoman remarked-

'She gets good wages, I guess?'

'Yes,' said Leah; 'I wish I had as good; not that mine are to complain of,- there's no stinginess at Thornfield; but they're not one fifth of the sum Mrs. Poole receives. And she is laying by: she goes every quarter to the bank at Millcote. I should not wonder but she has saved enough to keep her independent if she liked to leave; but I suppose she's got used to the place; and then she's not forty yet, and strong and able for anything. It is too soon for her to give up business.'

'She is a good hand, I daresay,' said the charwoman.

'Ah!- she understands what she has to do,- nobody better,' rejoined Leah significantly; 'and it is not every one could fill her shoes- not for all the money she gets.'

'That it is not!' was the reply. 'I wonder whether the master-'

The charwoman was going on; but here Leah turned and perceived me, and she instantly gave her companion a nudge.

'Doesn't she know?' I heard the woman whisper.

Leah shook her head, and the conversation was of course dropped.

All I had gathered from it amounted to this,- that there was a mystery at Thornfield; and that from participation in that mystery I was purposely excluded.

Thursday came: all work had been completed the previous evening; carpets were laid down, bed-hangings festooned, radiant white counterpanes spread, toilet tables arranged, furniture rubbed, flowers piled in vases: both chambers and saloons looked as fresh and bright as hands could make them. The hall, too, was scoured; and the great carved clock, as well as the steps and banisters of the staircase, were polished to the brightness of glass; in the dining-room, the sideboard flashed resplendent with plate; in the drawing-room and boudoir, vases of exotics bloomed on all sides.

Afternoon arrived: Mrs. Fairfax assumed her best black satin gown, her gloves, and her gold watch; for it was her part to receive the company,- to conduct the ladies to their rooms, etc. Adele, too, would be dressed: though I thought she had little chance of being introduced to the party that day at least. However, to please her, I allowed Sophie to apparel her in one of her short, full muslin frocks.

For myself, I had no need to make any change; I should not be called upon to quit my sanctum of the schoolroom; for a sanctum it was now become to me,- 'a very pleasant refuge in time of trouble.'

It had been a mild, serene spring day- one of those days which, towards the end of March or the beginning of April, rise shining over the earth as heralds of summer. It was drawing to an end now;

but the evening was even warm, and I sat at work in the schoolroom with the window open.

'It gets late,' said Mrs. Fairfax, entering in rustling state. 'I am glad I ordered dinner an hour after the time Mr. Rochester mentioned; for it is past six now. I have sent John down to the gates to see if there is anything on the road: one can see a long way from thence in the direction of Millcote.' She went to the window.

'Here he is!' said she. 'Well, John' (leaning out), 'any news?'

'They're coming, ma'am,' was the answer. 'They'll be here in ten minutes.'

Adele flew to the window. I followed, taking care to stand on one side, so that, screened by the curtain, I could see without being seen.

The ten minutes John had given seemed very long, but at last wheels were heard; four equestrians galloped up the drive, and after them came two open carriages. Fluttering veils and waving plumes filled the vehicles; two of the cavaliers were young, dashing-looking gentlemen; the third was Mr. Rochester, on his black horse, Mesrour, Pilot bounding before him; at his side rode a lady, and he and she were the first of the party. Her purple riding-habit almost swept the ground, her veil streamed long on the breeze; mingling with its transparent folds, and gleaming through them, shone rich raven ringlets.

'Miss Ingram!' exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax, and away she hurried to her post below.

The cavalcade, following the sweep of the drive, quickly turned the angle of the house, and I lost sight of it. Adele now petitioned to go down; but I took her on my knee, and gave her to understand that she must not on any account think of venturing in sight of the ladies, either now or at any other time, unless expressly sent for: that Mr. Rochester would be very angry, etc. 'Some natural tears she shed' on being told this; but as I began to look very grave, she consented at last to wipe them.

A joyous stir was now audible in the hall: gentlemen's deep tones and ladies' silvery accents blent harmoniously together, and distinguishable above all, though not loud, was the sonorous voice of the master of Thornfield Hall, welcoming his fair and gallant guests under its roof. Then light steps ascended the stairs; and there was a tripping through the gallery, and soft cheerful laughs, and opening and closing doors, and, for a time, a hush.

'Elles changent de toilettes,' said Adele; who, listening attentively, had followed every movement; and she sighed.

'Chez maman,' said she, 'quand il y avait du monde, je le suivais partout, au salon et a leurs chambres; souvent je regardais les femmes de chambre coiffer et habiller les dames, et c'etait si amusant: comme cela on apprend.'

'Don't you feel hungry, Adele?'

'Mais oui, mademoiselle: voila cinq ou six heures que nous n'avons pas mange.'

'Well now, while the ladies are in their rooms, I will venture down and get you something to eat.'

And issuing from my asylum with precaution, I sought a backstairs which conducted directly to the kitchen. All in that region was fire and commotion; the soup and fish were in the last stage of projection, and the cook hung over her crucibles in a frame of mind and body threatening spontaneous combustion. In the servants' hall two coachmen and three gentlemen's gentlemen stood or sat round the fire; the abigails, I suppose, were upstairs with their mistresses; the new servants, that had been hired from Millcote, were bustling about everywhere. Threading this chaos, I at last reached the larder; there I took possession of a cold chicken, a roll of bread, some tarts, a plate or two and a knife and fork: with this booty I made a hasty retreat. I had regained the gallery, and was just shutting the back-door behind me, when an accelerated hum warned me that the ladies were about to issue from their chambers. I could not proceed to the schoolroom without passing some of their doors, and running the risk of being surprised with my cargo of victualage; so I stood still at this end, which, being windowless, was dark: quite dark now, for the sun was set and twilight gathering.

Presently the chambers gave up their fair tenants one after another: each came out gaily and airily, with dress that gleamed lustrous through the dusk. For a moment they stood grouped together at the other extremity of the gallery, conversing in a key of sweet subdued vivacity: they then descended the staircase almost as noiselessly as a bright mist rolls down a hill. Their collective appearance had left on me an impression of high-born elegance, such as I had never before received.

I found Adele peeping through the schoolroom door, which she held ajar. 'What beautiful ladies!' cried she in English. 'Oh, I wish I might go to them! Do you think Mr. Rochester will send for us by and by, after dinner?'

'No, indeed, I don't; Mr. Rochester has something else to think about. Never mind the ladies to-night; perhaps you will see them to-morrow: here is your dinner.'

She was really hungry, so the chicken and tarts served to divert her attention for a time. It was well I secured this forage, or both she, I, and Sophie, to whom I conveyed a share of our repast, would have run a chance of getting no dinner at all: every one downstairs was too much engaged to think of us. The dessert was not carried out till after nine, and at ten footmen were still running to and fro with trays and coffee-cups. I allowed Adele to sit up much later than usual; for she declared she could not possibly go to sleep while the doors kept opening and shutting below, and people bustling about.

Besides, she added, a message might possibly come from Mr. Rochester when she was undressed; 'et alors quel dommage!'

I told her stories as long as she would listen to them; and then for a change I took her out into the

gallery. The hall lamp was now lit, and it amused her to look over the balustrade and watch the servants passing backwards and forwards. When the evening was far advanced, a sound of music issued from the drawing-room, whither the piano had been removed; Adele and I sat down on the top step of the stairs to listen. Presently a voice blent with the rich tones of the instrument; it was a lady who sang, and very sweet her notes were. The solo over, a duet followed, and then a glee: a joyous conversational murmur filled up the intervals. I listened long: suddenly I discovered that my ear was wholly intent on analysing the mingled sounds, and trying to discriminate amidst the confusion of accents those of Mr. Rochester; and when it caught them, which it soon did, it found a further task in framing the tones, rendered by distance inarticulate, into words.

The clock struck eleven. I looked at Adele, whose head leant against my shoulder; her eyes were waxing heavy, so I took her up in my arms and carried her off to bed. It was near one before the gentlemen and ladies sought their chambers.

The next day was as fine as its predecessor: it was devoted by the party to an excursion to some site in the neighbourhood. They set out early in the forenoon, some on horseback, the rest in carriages; I witnessed both the departure and the return. Miss Ingram, as before, was the only lady equestrian; and, as before, Mr. Rochester galloped at her side; the two rode a little apart from the rest. I pointed out this circumstance to Mrs. Fairfax, who was standing at the window with me-

'You said it was not likely they should think of being married,'

said I, 'but you see Mr. Rochester evidently prefers her to any of the other ladies.'

'Yes, I daresay: no doubt he admires her.'

'And she him,' I added; 'look how she leans her head towards him as if she were conversing confidentially; I wish I could see her face; I have never had a glimpse of it yet.'

'You will see her this evening,' answered Mrs. Fairfax. 'I happened to remark to Mr. Rochester how much Adele wished to be introduced to the ladies, and he said: "Oh! let her come into the drawing-room after dinner; and request Miss Eyre to accompany her."'

'Yes; he said that from mere politeness: I need not go, I am sure,' I answered.

'Well, I observed to him that as you were unused to company, I did not think you would like appearing before so gay a party- all strangers; and he replied, in his quick way- "Nonsense! If she objects, tell her it is my particular wish; and if she resists, say I shall come and fetch her in case of contumacy."'

'I will not give him that trouble,' I answered. 'I will go, if no better may be; but I don't like it. Shall you be there, Mrs. Fairfax?'

'No; I pleaded off, and he admitted my plea. I'll tell you how to manage so as to avoid the

embarrassment of making a formal entrance, which is the most disagreeable part of the business. You must go into the drawing-room while it is empty, before the ladies leave the dinner-table; choose your seat in any quiet nook you like; you need not stay long after the gentlemen come in, unless you please: just let Mr. Rochester see you are there and then slip away- nobody will notice you.'

'Will these people remain long, do you think?'

'Perhaps two or three weeks, certainly not more. After the Easter recess, Sir George Lynn, who was lately elected member for Millcote, will have to go up to town and take his seat; I daresay Mr. Rochester will accompany him: it surprises me that he has already made so protracted a stay at Thornfield.'

It was with some trepidation that I perceived the hour approach when I was to repair with my charge to the drawing-room. Adele had been in a state of ecstasy all day, after hearing she was to be presented to the ladies in the evening; and it was not till Sophie commenced the operation of dressing her that she sobered down. Then the importance of the process quickly steadied her, and by the time she had her curls arranged in well-smoothed, drooping clusters, her pink satin frock put on, her long sash tied, and her lace mittens adjusted, she looked as grave as any judge. No need to warn her not to disarrange her attire: when she was dressed, she sat demurely down in her little chair, taking care previously to lift up the satin skirt for fear she should crease it, and assured me she would not stir thence till I was ready. This I quickly was: my best dress (the silver-grey one, purchased for Miss Temple's wedding, and never worn since) was soon put on; my hair was soon smoothed; my sole ornament, the pearl brooch, soon assumed. We descended.

Fortunately there was another entrance to the drawing-room than that through the saloon where they were all seated at dinner. We found the apartment vacant; a large fire burning silently on the marble hearth, and wax candles shining in bright solitude, amid the exquisite flowers with which the tables were adorned. The crimson curtain hung before the arch: slight as was the separation this drapery formed from the party in the adjoining saloon, they spoke in so low a key that nothing of their conversation could be distinguished beyond a soothing murmur.

Adele, who appeared to be still under the influence of a most solemnising impression, sat down, without a word, on the footstool I pointed out to her. I retired to a window-seat, and taking a book from a table near, endeavoured to read. Adele brought her stool to my feet; ere long she touched my knee.

'What is it, Adele?'

'Est-ce que je ne puis pas prendre une seule de ces fleurs magnifiques, mademoiselle? Seulement pour completer ma toilette.'

'You think too much of your "toilette," Adele: but you may have a flower.' And I took a rose from a vase and fastened it in her sash.

She sighed a sigh of ineffable satisfaction, as if her cup of happiness were now full. I turned my face away to conceal a smile I could not suppress: there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne's earnest and innate devotion to matters of dress.

A soft sound of rising now became audible; the curtain was swept back from the arch; through it appeared the dining-room, with its lit lustre pouring down light on the silver and glass of a magnificent dessert-service covering a long table; a band of ladies stood in the opening; they entered, and the curtain fell behind them.

There were but eight; yet, somehow, as they flocked in, they gave the impression of a much larger number. Some of them were very tall; many were dressed in white; and all had a sweeping amplitude of array that seemed to magnify their persons as a mist magnifies the moon. I rose and curtsied to them: one or two bent their heads in return, the others only stared at me.

They dispersed about the room, reminding me, by the lightness and buoyancy of their movements, of a flock of white plummy birds. Some of them threw themselves in half-reclining positions on the sofas and ottomans: some bent over the tables and examined the flowers and books: the rest gathered in a group round the fire: all talked in a low but clear tone which seemed habitual to them. I knew their names afterwards, and may as well mention them now.

First, there was Mrs. Eshton and two of her daughters. She had evidently been a handsome woman, and was well preserved still. Of her daughters, the eldest, Amy, was rather little: naive, and child-like in face and manner, and piquant in form; her white muslin dress and blue sash became her well. The second, Louisa, was taller and more elegant in figure; with a very pretty face, of that order the French term *minois chiffone*: both sisters were fair as lilies.

Lady Lynn was a large and stout personage of about forty, very erect, very haughty-looking, richly dressed in a satin robe of changeful sheen: her dark hair shone glossily under the shade of an azure plume, and within the circlet of a band of gems.

Mrs. Colonel Dent was less showy; but, I thought, more lady-like.

She had a slight figure, a pale, gentle face, and fair hair. Her black satin dress, her scarf of rich foreign lace, and her pearl ornaments, pleased me better than the rainbow radiance of the titled dame.

But the three most distinguished- partly, perhaps, because the tallest figures of the band- were the Dowager Lady Ingram and her daughters, Blanche and Mary. They were all three of the loftiest stature of women. The Dowager might be between forty and fifty: her shape was still fine; her hair (by candlelight at least) still black; her teeth, too, were still apparently perfect. Most people would have termed her a splendid woman of her age: and so she was, no doubt, physically speaking; but then there was an expression of almost insupportable haughtiness in her bearing and countenance. She had Roman features and a double chin, disappearing into a throat like a pillar: these features

appeared to me not only inflated and darkened, but even furrowed with pride; and the chin was sustained by the same principle, in a position of almost preternatural erectness. She had, likewise, a fierce and a hard eye: it reminded me of Mrs. Reed's; she mouthed her words in speaking; her voice was deep, its inflections very pompous, very dogmatical, - very intolerable, in short. A crimson velvet robe, and a shawl turban of some gold-wrought Indian fabric, invested her (I suppose she thought) with a truly imperial dignity.

Blanche and Mary were of equal stature, - straight and tall as poplars. Mary was too slim for her height, but Blanche was moulded like a Dian. I regarded her, of course, with special interest.

First, I wished to see whether her appearance accorded with Mrs. Fairfax's description; secondly, whether it at all resembled the fancy miniature I had painted of her; and thirdly - it will out! - whether it were such as I should fancy likely to suit Mr. Rochester's taste.

As far as person went, she answered point for point, both to my picture and Mrs. Fairfax's description. The noble bust, the sloping shoulders, the graceful neck, the dark eyes and black ringlets were all there; - but her face? Her face was like her mother's; a youthful unfurrowed likeness: the same low brow, the same high features, the same pride. It was not, however, so saturnine a pride! she laughed continually; her laugh was satirical, and so was the habitual expression of her arched and haughty lip.

Genius is said to be self-conscious. I cannot tell whether Miss Ingram was a genius, but she was self-conscious - remarkably self-conscious indeed. She entered into a discourse on botany with the gentle Mrs. Dent. It seemed Mrs. Dent had not studied that science: though, as she said, she liked flowers, 'especially wild ones'; Miss Ingram had, and she ran over its vocabulary with an air. I presently perceived she was (what is vernacularly termed) trailing Mrs. Dent; that is, playing on her ignorance: her trail might be clever, but it was decidedly not good-natured. She played: her execution was brilliant; she sang, her voice was fine; she talked French apart to her mama; and she talked it well, with fluency and with a good accent.

Mary had a milder and more open countenance than Blanche; softer features too, and a skin some shades fairer (Miss Ingram was dark as a Spaniard) - but Mary was deficient in life: her face lacked expression, her eye lustre; she had nothing to say, and having once taken her seat, remained fixed like a statue in its niche. The sisters were both attired in spotless white.

And did I now think Miss Ingram such a choice as Mr. Rochester would be likely to make? I could not tell - I did not know his taste in female beauty. If he liked the majestic, she was the very type of majesty: then she was accomplished, sprightly. Most gentlemen would admire her, I thought; and that he did admire her, I already seemed to have obtained proof: to remove the last shade of doubt, it remained but to see them together.

You are not to suppose, reader, that Adele has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet: no; when the ladies entered, she rose, advanced to meet them, made a stately reverence, and said with gravity -

'Bon jour, mesdames.'

And Miss Ingram had looked down at her with a mocking air, and exclaimed, 'Oh, what a little puppet!'

Lady Lynn had remarked, 'It is Mr. Rochester's ward, I suppose- the little French girl he was speaking of.'

Mrs. Dent had kindly taken her hand, and given her a kiss. Amy and Louisa Eshton had cried out simultaneously-

'What a love of a child!'

And then they had called her to a sofa, where she now sat, ensconced between them, chattering alternately in French and broken English; absorbing not only the young ladies' attention, but that of Mrs. Eshton and Lady Lynn, and getting spoilt to her heart's content.

At last coffee is brought in, and the gentlemen are summoned. I sit in the shade- if any shade there be in this brilliantly-lit apartment; the window-curtain half hides me. Again the arch yawns; they come. The collective appearance of the gentlemen, like that of the ladies, is very imposing: they are all costumed in black; most of them are tall, some young. Henry and Frederick Lynn are very dashing sparks indeed; and Colonel Dent is a fine soldierly man. Mr. Eshton, the magistrate of the district, is gentleman-like: his hair is quite white, his eyebrows and whiskers still dark, which gives him something of the appearance of a 'pere noble de theatre.' Lord Ingram, like his sisters, is very tall; like them, also, he is handsome; but he shares Mary's apathetic and listless look: he seems to have more length of limb than vivacity of blood or vigour of brain.

And where is Mr. Rochester?

He comes in last: I am not looking at the arch, yet I see him enter. I try to concentrate my attention on those netting-needles, on the meshes of the purse I am forming- I wish to think only of the work I have in my hands, to see only the silver beads and silk threads that lie in my lap; whereas, I distinctly behold his figure, and I inevitably recall the moment when I last saw it; just after I had rendered him, what he deemed, an essential service, and he, holding my hand, and looking down on my face, surveyed me with eyes that revealed a heart full and eager to overflow; in whose emotions I had a part.

How near had I approached him at that moment! What had occurred since, calculated to change his and my relative positions? Yet now, how distant, how far estranged we were! So far estranged, that I did not expect him to come and speak to me. I did not wonder, when, without looking at me, he took a seat at the other side of the room, and began conversing with some of the ladies.

No sooner did I see that his attention was riveted on them, and that I might gaze without being

observed, than my eyes were drawn involuntarily to his face; I could not keep their lids under control: they would rise, and the irids would fix on him. I looked, and had an acute pleasure in looking,- a precious yet poignant pleasure; pure gold, with a steely point of agony: a pleasure like what the thirst-perishing man might feel who knows the well to which he has crept is poisoned, yet stoops and drinks divine draughts nevertheless.

Most true is it that 'beauty is in the eye of the gazer.' My master's colourless, olive face, square, massive brow, broad and jetty eyebrows, deep eyes, strong features, firm, grim mouth,- all energy, decision, will,- were not beautiful, according to rule; but they were more than beautiful to me; they were full of an interest, an influence that quite mastered me,- that took my feelings from my own power and fettered them in his. I had not intended to love him; the reader knows I had wrought hard to extirpate from my soul the germs of love there detected; and now, at the first renewed view of him, they spontaneously arrived, green and strong! He made me love him without looking at me.

I compared him with his guests. What was the gallant grace of the Lynns, the languid elegance of Lord Ingram,- even the military distinction of Colonel Dent, contrasted with his look of native pith and genuine power? I had no sympathy in their appearance, their expression: yet I could imagine that most observers would call them attractive, handsome, imposing; while they would pronounce Mr. Rochester at once harsh-featured and melancholy-looking. I saw them smile, laugh- it was nothing; the light of the candles had as much soul in it as their smile; the tinkle of the bell as much significance as their laugh. I saw Mr. Rochester smile:- his stern features softened; his eye grew both brilliant and gentle, its ray both searching and sweet. He was talking, at the moment, to Louisa and Amy Eshton. I wondered to see them receive with calm that look which seemed to me so penetrating: I expected their eyes to fall, their colour to rise under it; yet I was glad when I found they were in no sense moved. 'He is not to them what he is to me,' I thought: 'he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine;- I am sure he is- I feel akin to him- I understand the language of his countenance and movements: though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him. Did I say, a few days since, that I had nothing to do with him but to receive my salary at his hands? Did I forbid myself to think of him in any other light than as a paymaster? Blasphemy against nature! Every good, true, vigorous feeling I have gathers impulsively round him. I know I must conceal my sentiments: I must smother hope; I must remember that he cannot care much for me. For when I say that I am of his kind, I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract; I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him. I must, then, repeat continually that we are for ever sundered:- and yet, while I breathe and think, I must love him.'

Coffee is handed. The ladies, since the gentlemen entered, have become lively as larks; conversation waxes brisk and merry. Colonel Dent and Mr. Eshton argue on politics; their wives listen. The two proud dowagers, Lady Lynn and Lady Ingram, confabulate together. Sir George-whom, by the bye, I have forgotten to describe,- a very big, and very fresh-looking country gentleman, stands before their sofa, coffee-cup in hand, and occasionally puts in a word. Mr. Frederick Lynn has taken a seat beside Mary Ingram, and is showing her the engravings of a splendid volume: she looks, smiles now and then, but apparently says little. The tall and phlegmatic Lord Ingram leans with folded arms on the chair-back of the little and lively Amy Eshton; she

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

glances up at him, and chatters like a wren: she likes him better than she does Mr. Rochester. Henry Lynn has taken possession of an ottoman at the feet of Louisa: Adele shares it with him: he is trying to talk French with her, and Louisa laughs at his blunders.

With whom will Blanche Ingram pair? She is standing alone at the table, bending gracefully over an album. She seems waiting to be sought; but she will not wait too long: she herself selects a mate.

Mr. Rochester, having quitted the Eshtons, stands on the hearth as solitary as she stands by the table: she confronts him, taking her station on the opposite side of the mantelpiece.

'Mr. Rochester, I thought you were not fond of children?'

'Nor am I.'

'Then, what induced you to take charge of such a little doll as that?' (pointing to Adele). 'Where did you pick her up?'

'I did not pick her up; she was left on my hands.'

'You should have sent her to school.'

'I could not afford it: schools are so dear.'

'Why, I suppose you have a governess for her: I saw a person with her just now- is she gone? Oh, no! there she is still, behind the window-curtain. You pay her, of course; I should think it quite as expensive,- more so; for you have them both to keep in addition.'

I feared- or should I say, hoped?- the allusion to me would make Mr. Rochester glance my way; and I involuntarily shrank farther into the shade: but he never turned his eyes.

'I have not considered the subject,' said he indifferently, looking straight before him.

'No, you men never do consider economy and common sense. You should hear mama on the chapter of governesses: Mary and I have had, I should think, a dozen at least in our day; half of them detestable and the rest ridiculous, and all incubi- were they not, mama?'

'Did you speak, my own?'

The young lady thus claimed as the dowager's special property, reiterated her question with an explanation.

'My dearest, don't mention governesses; the word makes me nervous. I have suffered a martyrdom from their incompetency and caprice. I thank Heaven I have now done with them!'

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

Mrs. Dent here bent over to the pious lady, and whispered something in her ear; I suppose, from the answer elicited, it was a reminder that one of the anathematised race was present.

'Tant pis!' said her ladyship, 'I hope it may do her good!' Then, in a lower tone, but still loud enough for me to hear, 'I noticed her; I am a judge of physiognomy, and in hers I see all the faults of her class.'

'What are they, madam?' inquired Mr. Rochester aloud.

'I will tell you in your private ear,' replied she, wagging her turban three times with portentous significance.

'But my curiosity will be past its appetite; it craves food now.'

'Ask Blanche; she is nearer you than I.'

'Oh, don't refer him to me, mama! I have just one word to say of the whole tribe; they are a nuisance. Not that I ever suffered much from them; I took care to turn the tables. What tricks Theodore and I used to play on our Miss Wilsons, and Mrs. Greys, and Madame Jouberts! Mary was always too sleepy to join in a plot with spir it.

The best fun was with Madame Joubert: Miss Wilson was a poor sickly thing, lachrymose and low-spirited, not worth the trouble of vanquishing, in short; and Mrs. Grey was coarse and insensible; no blow took effect on her. But poor Madame Joubert! I see her yet in her raging passions, when we had driven her to extremities- spilt our tea, crumbled our bread and butter, tossed our books up to the ceiling, and played a charivari with the ruler and desk, the fender and fire-irons.

Theodore, do you remember those merry days?'

'Yaas, to be sure I do,' drawled Lord Ingram; 'and the poor old stick used to cry out "Oh you villains childs!"- and then we sermonised her on the presumption of attempting to teach such clever blades as we were, when she was herself so ignorant.'

'We did; and, Tedo, you know, I helped you in prosecuting (or persecuting) your tutor, whey-faced Mr. Vining- the parson in the pip, as we used to call him. He and Miss Wilson took the liberty of falling in love with each other- at least Tedo and I thought so; we surprised sundry tender glances and sighs which we interpreted as tokens of "la belle passion," and I promise you the public soon had the benefit of our discovery; we employed it as a sort of lever to hoist our dead-weights from the house. Dear mama, there, as soon as she got an inkling of the business, found out that it was of an immoral tendency. Did you not, my lady-mother?'

'Certainly, my best. And I was quite right: depend on that: there are a thousand reasons why liaisons between governesses and tutors should never be tolerated a moment in any well-regulated house; firstly-'

'Oh, gracious, mama! Spare us the enumeration! Au reste, we all know them: danger of bad example to innocence of childhood; distractions and consequent neglect of duty on the part of the attached- mutual alliance and reliance; confidence thence resulting- insolence accompanying- mutiny and general blowup. Am I right, Baroness Ingram, of Ingram Park?'

'My lily-flower, you are right now, as always.'

'Then no more need be said: change the subject.'

Amy Eshton, not hearing or not heeding this dictum, joined in with her soft, infantine tone: 'Louisa and I used to quiz our governess too; but she was such a good creature, she would bear anything: nothing put her out. She was never cross with us; was she, Louisa?'

'No, never: we might do what we pleased; ransack her desk and her workbox, and turn her drawers inside out; and she was so good-natured, she would give us anything we asked for.'

'I suppose, now,' said Miss Ingram, curling her lip sarcastically, 'we shall have an abstract of the memoirs of all the governesses extant: in order to avert such a visitation, I again move the introduction of a new topic. Mr. Rochester, do you second my motion?'

'Madam, I support you on this point, as on every other.'

'Then on me be the onus of bringing it forward. Signior Eduardo, are you in voice to-night?'

'Donna Bianca, if you command it, I will be.'

'Then, signior, I lay on you my sovereign behest to furbish up your lungs and other vocal organs, as they will be wanted on my royal service.'

'Who would not be the Rizzio of so divine a Mary?'

'A fig for Rizzio!' cried she, tossing her head with all its curls, as she moved to the piano. 'It is my opinion the fiddler David must have been an insipid sort of fellow; I like black Bothwell better: to my mind a man is nothing without a spice of the devil in him; and history may say what it will of James Hepburn, but I have a notion, he was just the sort of wild, fierce, bandit hero whom I could have consented to gift with my hand.'

'Gentlemen, you hear! Now which of you most resembles Bothwell?' cried Mr. Rochester.

'I should say the preference lies with you,' responded Colonel Dent.

'On my honour, I am much obliged to you,' was the reply.

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

Miss Ingram, who had now seated herself with proud grace at the piano, spreading out her snowy robes in queenly amplitude, commenced a brilliant prelude; talking meantime. She appeared to be on her high horse to-night; both her words and her air seemed intended to excite not only the admiration, but the amazement of her auditors: she was evidently bent on striking them as something very dashing and daring indeed.

'Oh, I am so sick of the young men of the present day!' exclaimed she, rattling away at the instrument. 'Poor, puny things, not fit to stir a step beyond papa's park gates: nor to go even so far without mama's permission and guardianship! Creatures so absorbed in care about their pretty faces, and their white hands, and their small feet; as if a man had anything to do with beauty! As if loveliness were not the special prerogative of woman- her legitimate appanage and heritage! I grant an ugly woman is a blot on the fair face of creation; but as to the gentlemen, let them be solicitous to possess only strength and valour: let their motto be:- Hunt, shoot, and fight: the rest is not worth a fillip. Such should be my device, were I a man.'

'Whenever I marry,' she continued after a pause which none interrupted, 'I am resolved my husband shall not be a rival, but a foil to me. I will suffer no competitor near the throne; I shall exact an undivided homage: his devotions shall not be shared between me and the shape he sees in his mirror. Mr. Rochester, now sing, and I will play for you.'

'I am all obedience,' was the response.

'Here then is a Corsair-song. Know that I doat on Corsairs; and for that reason, sing it con spirito.'

'Commands from Miss Ingram's lips would put spirit into a mug of milk and water.'

'Take care, then: if you don't please me, I will shame you by showing how such things should be done.'

'That is offering a premium on incapacity: I shall now endeavour to fail.'

'Gardez-vous en bien! If you err wilfully, I shall devise a proportionate punishment.'

'Miss Ingram ought to be clement, for she has it in her power to inflict a chastisement beyond mortal endurance.'

'Ha! explain!' commanded the lady.

'Pardon me, madam: no need of explanation; your own fine sense must inform you that one of your frowns would be a sufficient substitute for capital punishment.'

'Sing!' said she, and again touching the piano, she commenced an accompaniment in spirited style.

'Now is my time to slip away,' thought I: but the tones that then severed the air arrested me. Mrs.

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

Fairfax had said Mr. Rochester possessed a fine voice: he did- a mellow, powerful bass, into which he threw his own feeling, his own force: finding a way through the ear to the heart, and there waking sensation strangely. I waited till the last deep and full vibration had expired- till the tide of talk, checked an instant, had resumed its flow; I then quitted my sheltered corner and made my exit by the side-door, which was fortunately near. Thence a narrow passage led into the hall: in crossing it, I perceived my sandal was loose; I stopped to tie it, kneeling down for that purpose on the mat at the foot of the staircase. I heard the dining-room door unclose; a gentleman came out; rising hastily, I stood face to face with him: it was Mr. Rochester.

'How do you do?' he asked.

'I am very well, sir.'

'Why did you not come and speak to me in the room?'

I thought I might have retorted the question on him who put it: but I would not take that freedom. I answered-

'I did not wish to disturb you, as you seemed engaged, sir.'

'What have you been doing during my absence?'

'Nothing particular; teaching Adele as usual.'

'And getting a good deal paler than you were- as I saw at first sight. What is the matter?'

'Nothing at all, sir.'

'Did you take any cold that night you half drowned me?'

'Not the least.'

'Return to the drawing-room: you are deserting too early.'

'I am tired, sir.'

He looked at me for a minute.

'And a little depressed,' he said. 'What about? Tell me.'

'Nothing- nothing, sir. I am not depressed.'

'But I affirm that you are: so much depressed that a few more words would bring tears to your eyes- indeed, they are there now, shining and swimming; and a bead has slipped from the lash and fallen

on to the flag. If I had time, and was not in mortal dread of some prating prig of a servant passing, I would know what all this means. Well, to-night I excuse you; but understand that so long as my visitors stay, I expect you to appear in the drawing-room every evening; it is my wish; don't neglect it. Now go, and send Sophie for Adele.

Good-night, my-' He stopped, bit his lip, and abruptly left me.

第十七章

一个星期过去了，却不见罗切斯特先生的消息，十天过去了，他仍旧没有来。费尔法克斯太太说，要是他直接从里斯去伦敦，并从那儿转道去欧洲大陆，一年内不再在桑菲尔德露面，她也不会感到惊奇，因为他常常出乎意料地说走就走，听她这么一说，我心里冷飕飕沉甸甸的，实际上我在任凭自己陷入一种令人厌恶的失落感，不过我调动了智慧，重建了原则，立刻使自己的感觉恢复了正常，说来也让人惊奇，我终于纠正了一时的过错，清除了认为有理由为罗切斯特先生的行动操心的错误想法。我并没有低声下气，怀着奴性十足的自卑感，相反，我只说：

“你同桑菲尔德的主人无关，无非是拿了他给的工资，去教他的被保护人而已，你感激他体面友好的款待。不过你尽了职，得到这样的款待是理所应当的。这是你与他之间他唯一严肃承认的关系。所以不要把你的柔情、你的狂喜、你的痛苦等等系在他身上。他不属于你的阶层。记住你自己的社会地位吧，要充分自尊，免得把全身心的爱，徒然浪费在不需要甚至瞧不起这份礼物的地方。”

我平静地干着一天的工作。不过脑海中时时隐约闪过我要离开桑菲尔德的理由，我不由自主地设计起广告，预测起新的工作来。这些想法，我没有必要去制止，它们也许会生根发芽，还可能结出果子来。

罗切斯特先生离家已经两周多了，这时候邮差送来了一封给费尔法克斯太太的信。

“是老爷写来的，”她后了看姓名地址说，“现在我想可以知道能不能盼他回来了。”

她在拆开封口仔细看信时，我继续喝我的咖啡（我们在吃早饭）。咖啡很热，我把脸上突然泛起的红晕看作是它的缘故。不过，我的手为什么抖个不停，为什么我情不自禁地把半杯咖啡溢到了碟子上，我就不想去考虑了。

“嗨，有时候我总认为太冷清，现在可有机会够我们忙了，至少得忙一会儿”费尔法克斯太太说，仍然把信纸举着放在眼镜前面。

我没有立即提出要求解释，而是系好了阿黛勒碰巧松开的围涎，哄她又吃了个小面包，把她的杯子再倒满牛奶，随后淡然问道：

“我猜想罗切斯特先生不会马上回来吧？”

“说真的，他要回来了——他说三天以后到，也就是下星期四，而且不光是他一个人。我不知道在里斯的贵人们有多少位同他一起来。他吩咐准备好最好的卧室，图书室与客厅都要清扫干净。我还要从米尔科特的乔治旅店和能弄到人的随便什么地方，再叫些厨工来。而且女士们都带女仆，男士们都带随从。这样我们满屋子都是人了。”费尔法克斯太太匆匆咽下早饭，急急忙忙去做准备工作了。

果然被她说中了，这三天确实够忙的。我本以为桑菲尔德的所有房子都纤尘不染，收拾得很好。但看来我错了，他们雇了三个女人来帮忙。擦呀，刷呀，冲洗漆具呀，敲打地毯呀，把画拿下又挂上呀，擦拭镜子和枝形挂灯呀，在卧室生火呀，把床单和羽绒褥垫晾在炉边呀，这种情景无论是从前还是以后，我都没有见过。在一片忙乱之中，阿黛勒发了疯。准备接客，盼着他们到来，似乎使她欣喜若狂。她会让索菲娅把她称之为外衣的所有“toilettes”都查看一下，把那些“passess”都翻新，把新的晾一晾放好。她自己呢，什么也不干，只不过在前房跳来奔去，在床架上窜上窜下，躺到床垫上和叠起的枕垫、枕头上，面对着熊熊炉火在烟窗里哗剥作响。她的功课已全给免掉，因为费尔法克斯太太拉我做了帮手。我整天呆在贮藏室，给她和厨师帮忙（或者说增添麻烦），学做牛奶蛋糊、乳酪饼和法国糕点，捆扎野味，装饰甜点心。

这批客人预计星期四下午到达，赶上六点钟吃晚饭。在等待期间我没有工夫去胡思乱想了。我想我跟其他人一样卖力、一样高兴——阿黛勒除外。不过我时时会感到扫兴，情不自禁地回想起那些疑惑、凶兆和不祥的猜测。那就是当我偶尔看到三楼楼梯的门慢悠悠地打开（近来常常锁着），格雷丝·普尔戴着整洁的帽子，系着围裙，揣着手帕，从那里经过时。我瞧着她溜过走廊，穿着布拖鞋，脚步声减低到很轻很轻。我看见她往闹哄哄乱糟糟的卧房里瞧了一瞧，只不过说一两句话，也许是给打杂女工们交代恰当的清扫方法：如何擦炉栅，如何清理大理石壁炉架，要不如何从糊了墙纸的墙上把缎子取下。说完便又往前走了。她一天下楼到厨房里走一次，来吃饭，在炉边有节制地吸一烟斗烟，随后就返回，带上一罐黑啤酒，在楼上阴暗的巢穴里独自消遣。一天二十四小时中，她只有一小时同楼下别的佣人呆在一起，其余时间是在三层楼上某个橡木卧室低矮的天花板下度过的。她坐在那里做着针线活——也许还兀自凄楚地大笑起来——像监狱里的犯人一样无人作伴。

最奇怪的是，除了我，房子里没有人注意到她的习惯，或者似乎为此感到诧异。没有人谈论过她的地位或工作，没有人可怜她的孤独冷清。说真的我一次偶尔听到了莉娅和一个打杂女工之间关于格雷丝的一段对话，莉娅先是说了什么话，我没听清楚，而打杂女工回答道：

“估计她的薪金很高。”

“是呀，”莉娅说，“但愿我的薪金也这么高。并不是说我的值得抱怨——在桑菲尔德谈不上吝啬，不过我拿的薪金才是普尔太太的五分之一。她还在存钱呢，一季度要去一次米尔科特的银行。我一点不怀疑她要是想走的话，积下的钱能够她自立了。不过我想她在这儿已经呆惯了，更何况她还不到四十岁，身强力壮，干什么还都行，放弃差事是太早些了。”

“我猜想她是个干活的好手，”打杂女工说。

“呵，——她明白自己该干什么——没有人比得过她”莉娅意味深长地回答说，“不是谁都干得了她活的，就是给了同她一样多的钱也干不了。”

“的确干不了！”对方回答。“不知道老爷——”

打杂女工还想往下说，但这时莉娅回过头来，看到了我，便立即用肘子顶了顶她伙伴。

“她知道了吗？”我听见那女人悄悄说。

莉娅摇了摇头，于是谈话嘎然而止。我从这里所能猜测到的就是这么回事：在桑菲尔德有一个秘密，而我被故意排除在这个秘密之外了。

星期四到了，一切准备工作都已在前一个晚上完成。地毯铺开了，床幅挂上了彩条，白得眩目的床罩铺好了，梳妆台已经安排停当，家具都擦拭得干干净净，花瓶里插满了鲜花。卧室和客厅都已尽人工所能，拾掇得焕然一新；大厅也已经擦洗过，巨大的木雕钟，楼梯的台阶和栏杆都已擦得像玻璃一般闪闪发光。在餐室里，餐具柜里的盘子光亮夺目；在客厅和起居室内，一瓶瓶异国鲜花，在四周灿然开放。

到了下午，费尔法克斯太太穿上了她最好的黑缎袍子，戴了手套和金表，因为要由她来接待客人——把女士们领到各自的房间里去等等。阿黛勒也要打扮一番，尽管至少在那天，我想不大会有机会让她见客。但为了使她高兴，我让索菲娅给她穿上了一件宽松的麻纱短上衣。至于我自己，是没有必要换装的，不会把我从作为我私室的读书室里叫出去，这私室现在已经属于我，成了“患难时愉快的避难所。”

这是个温煦宁静的春日，三月末四月初的那种日子，骄阳当空，预示着夏天就要到来。这时已近日暮，但黄昏时更加暖和，我坐在读书室里工作，敞开着窗子。

“时候不早了，”费尔法克斯太太浑身叮当作响，进了房间说，“幸亏我订的饭菜比罗切斯特先生说的时间晚一个小时，现在已经过了六点了。我已派约翰到大门口去，看看路上有没有动静。从那儿往米尔科特的方向望去，可以看得很远。”她朝窗子走去。“他来了！”她说。“嗨，约翰”（探出身子）“有消息吗？”

“他们来了，夫人，”对方回答道。“十分钟后就到。”

阿黛勒朝窗子飞奔过去。我跟在后面，小心地靠一边站立，让窗帘遮掩着，使我可以看得清清楚楚，却不被人看见。约翰所说的那十分钟似乎很长。不过终于听到了车轮声。四位骑手策马驰上了小道，两辆敞开的马车尾随其后。车内面纱飘拂，羽毛起伏。两位年轻骑手，精神抖擞，一付绅士派头；第三位是罗切斯特先生，骑着他的黑马梅斯罗，派洛特跳跃着奔跑在他前面。与他并驾齐驱的是一位女士，这批人中，他们俩一马当先。她那紫色的骑装差不多已扫到了地面，她的面纱长长地在微风中飘动，她那乌黑浓密的卷发，同它透明的折裥连在一起，透过面纱闪动着光芒。

“英格拉姆小姐，”费尔法克斯太太大叫一声，急冲冲下楼去履行她的职务了。

声明：本资料由[听力课堂](http://TingClass.com)网站收集整理，仅供英语爱好者学习使用，资料版权属于原作者。

这队人马顺着车道的弯势很快转过屋角，在我视线中消失了。这时阿黛勒要求下楼。我把她搂在膝头上，让她明白无论是此刻，还是以后什么时候，除非明确要她去，绝不可以随意闯到女士们跟前去，要不罗切斯特先生会生气的等等。听了这番话，“她淌下了自然的眼泪”不过见我神情严肃，她也终于同意把眼泪抹掉了。

这时大厅里人声鼎沸，笑语纷纭。男士们深沉的语调，女士们银铃似的嗓音交融在一起。其中最清晰可辨的是桑菲尔德主人那洪亮而声音不大的嗓门，欢迎男女宾客来到府上。随后，这些人脚步轻盈地上了楼梯，轻快地穿过走廊。于是响起了柔和欢快的笑声和开门关门声。一会儿后，便寂然无声了。

“Elles changent de toilettes,” 阿黛勒说。她细听着，跟踪着每一个动静，并叹息着。“Chez maman,” 她说，“quand il y avait du monde, je le suivais partout au salon et a leurs chambres; souvent je regardais les femmes de chambre coiffer et habiller les dames, et c'était si amusant: comme cela on apprend.”

“你觉得饿了吗，阿黛勒？”

“Mais oui, mademoiselle: voila cinq ou six heures que nous n'avons pas mange.”

“好吧，就穿戴好了。我立即穿上了自己最好的衣服（银灰色的那一件，专为参加坦普尔小姐的婚礼购置的，后来一直没有穿过），把头发梳得平平伏伏，并戴上了我仅有的饰品，那枚珍珠胸针。随后我们下了楼。

幸亏还有另外一扇门通客厅，不必经过他们都坐着吃饭的餐厅。我们看到房间里空无一人，大理石砌成的壁炉中，一堆旺火静静地燃烧着；桌上装饰着精致的花朵，烛光在花朵中间孤寂地闪亮，平添了几分欢快。拱门前悬挂着大红门帘，虽然我们与毗连的餐室中的客人之间，仅一层之隔，但他们话说得那么轻，除份战利品急忙撤退，重新登上走廊，正要随手关上后门时，一阵越来越响的嗡嗡声提醒我，女士们要从房间里走出来了。要上读书室我非得经过几间房门口不可，非得要冒端着一大堆食品被她们撞见的危险。于是我一动不动地站在这一头。这里没有窗子，光线很暗。此刻天色已黑，因为太阳已经下山，暮色越来越浓了。

一会儿工夫，房间里的女房客们一个接一个出来了，个个心情欢快，步履轻盈，身上的衣裳在昏黄的暮色中闪闪发光。她们聚集在走廊的另一头，站了片刻，用压低了了的轻快动听的语调交谈着。随后走下楼梯，几乎没有声响，仿佛一团明亮的雾从山上降落下来。她们的外表总体上给我留下了这样的印象：这些人具有一种我前所未见的名门望族的典雅。

我看见阿黛勒扶着半掩的读书室门，往外偷看着。“多漂亮的小姐！”她用英语叫道。“哎呀我真想上她们那儿去！你认为晚饭后罗切斯特先生会派人来叫我们去吗？”

“不，说实在，我不这样想。罗切斯特先生有别的事情要考虑。今天晚上就别去想那些小姐们了，也许明天你会见到她们的。这是你的晚饭。”

她真的饿坏了，因此鸡和馅饼可以暂时分散一下她的注意力。幸亏我弄到了这份食品，不然

她和我，还有同我们分享这顿晚餐的索菲娅，都很可能根本吃不上晚饭，楼下的人谁都快忙得顾不上我们了。九点以后才送上甜食。到了十点钟，男仆们还端着托盘和咖啡杯子，来回奔波。我允许阿黛勒呆得比往常晚得多才上床，因为她说楼下的门不断地开呀关呀，人来人往，忙忙碌碌，弄得她没法睡觉。此外，她还说也许她解衣时，罗切斯特先生会让人捎来口信，“etalorsqueldommage！”

我给她讲故事，她愿意听多久就讲多久。随后我带她到走廊上解解闷。这时大厅的灯已经点上，阿黛勒觉得从栏杆上往下看，瞧着仆人们来往穿梭，十分有趣。夜深了，客厅里传来音乐之声，一架钢琴已经搬到了那里。阿黛勒和我坐在楼梯的顶端台阶上倾听着。刹那之间响起了一个声音，与钢琴低沉的调子相交融。那是一位小姐在唱，歌喉十分动听。独唱过后，二重唱跟上，随后是三重唱，歌唱间歇响起了一阵嗡嗡的谈话声。我久久地听着，突然发现自己的耳朵聚精会神地分析那混杂的声音，竭力要从混沌交融的音调中，分辨出罗切斯特先生的嗓音。我很快将它捕捉住以后，便进而从由于距离太远而变得模糊不清的音调中，猜想出歌词来。

时钟敲了十一点。我瞧了一眼阿黛勒，她的头已倚在我肩上，眼皮已越来越沉重。我便把她抱在怀里，送她去睡觉。将近一点钟，男女宾客们才各自回房去。

第二天跟第一天一样，是个晴朗的日子，客人们乘机到临近的某个地方去远足。他们上午很早就出发了，有的骑马，有的坐马车。我亲眼看着他们出发，看着他们归来。像以前一样，英格拉姆小姐是唯一一位女骑手。罗切斯特先生同她并驾齐驱。他们两人骑着马同其余的客人拉开了一段距离。费尔法克斯太太正与我一起站在窗前，我向她指出了这一点：

“你说他们不可能想到结婚，”我说，“可是你瞧，比起其他女人来，罗切斯特先生明显更喜欢她。”

“是呀，我猜想他毫无疑问爱慕她。”

“而且她也爱慕他，”我补充说“瞧她的头凑近他，仿佛在说什么知心话呢！但愿能见到她的脸，我还从来没见过一眼呢！”

“今天晚上你会见到她的，”费尔法克斯太太回答说：“我偶然向罗切斯特先生提起，阿黛勒多么希望能见一见小姐们。他说：‘呵，那就让她饭后上客厅里来吧，请爱小姐陪她来。’”

“噢，他不过是出于礼貌才那么说的，我不必去了，肯定的。”我回答。

“瞧，我对他说，你不习惯交往，所以我想你不会喜欢在一批轻松愉快而又都互不相识的宾客前露面，他还是那么急躁地回答说，‘胡说八道！要是她不愿来，就告诉她这是我个人的意愿。如果她拒绝，你就说，她这么倔强，我要亲自来叫了。’”

“我不愿给他添那么多麻烦”，我回答。“要是没有更好的办法了，我就去。不过我并不喜欢你去吗，费尔法克斯太太？”

“不，我请求免了，他同意了。一本正经入场是最不好受的，我来告诉你怎样避免这种尴尬，

你得在女士们离席之前，客厅里还没有人的时候就进去，找个僻静的角落坐下。男宾们进来之后，你不必呆得很久，除非你高兴这么做。你不过是让罗切斯特先生看到你在那里，随后你就溜走——没有人会注意到你。”

“你认为这批客人会呆得很久吗？”

“也许两三个星期，肯定不会再久了。过了复活节假期，乔治·林恩爵士由于新近当上了米尔科特市议员，得去城里就职。我猜想罗切斯特先生会同他一起去。我觉得很奇怪，这回他在桑菲尔德呆了那么长时间。”

眼看我带着照管的孩子进客厅的时刻就要到来，我心里惴惴不安。阿黛勒听说晚上要去见女士们，便整天处于极度兴奋状态，直到索菲娅开始给她打扮，才安静下来。随后更衣的重要过程很快稳定了她的情绪。待到她卷发梳得溜光，一束束垂着，穿上了粉红色的缎子罩衣，系好长长的腰带，戴上了网眼无指手套，她看上去已是像任何一位法官那么严肃了。这时已没有必要提醒她别弄乱自己的服装，她穿戴停当后，便安静地坐在小椅子上，急忙小心地把缎子裙提起来，唯恐弄皱了。还向我保证，她会一动不动坐在那里，直到我准备好为止。我很快就穿戴好了。我立即穿上了自己最好的衣服（银灰色的那件，专为参加坦普尔小姐的婚礼购置的，后来一直没有穿过），把头发梳得平平伏伏，并戴上了我仅有的饰品，那枚珍珠胸针。随后我们下了楼。

幸亏还有另外一扇门通客厅，不必经过他们都坐着吃饭的餐厅。我们看到房间里空无一人，大理石砌成的壁炉中，一堆旺火静静地燃烧着；桌上装饰着精致的花朵，烛光在花朵中间孤寂地闪亮，平添了几分欢快。拱门前悬挂着大红门帘，虽然我们与毗连的餐室中的客人之间，仅一层之隔，但他们话说得那么轻，除了柔和的嗡嗡声，彼此之间的交谈一点都听不清楚。

阿黛勒似乎仍受着严肃气氛的震慑，一声不吭地坐在我指给她的小凳上。我退缩在一个靠窗的位置上，随手从临近的台子上取了本书，竭力读下去。阿黛勒把她的小凳子搬到脚边，不久便碰了碰我膝头。

“怎么啦，阿黛勒？”

“Est ce que je ne puis pas prendre une seule de ces fleurs magnifiques, mademoiselle? Seulement pour completer ma toilette.”

“你对自己的‘toilette’想得太多啦，阿黛勒，不过你可以戴一朵花。”于是我从花瓶里掐下一朵花来，系在她的彩带上，她舒了口气，显出一种不可言喻的满足，仿佛她的幸福之杯此刻已经斟满了。我转过脸去，掩饰自己抑制不住的笑容。在这位巴黎小女子天生对服饰的热烈追求中，既有几分可笑，又有几分可悲。

这时响起了轻轻的起立声，帐幔被撩到了拱门背后，露出了餐室，只见长长的桌上摆满了盛甜点的豪华餐具，烛光倾泻在银制的和玻璃的器皿上。一群女士站在门口。随后她们走了进来，门帘在身后落下。

她们不过八位，可不知怎地，成群结队进来的时候，给人的印象远不止这个数目。有些个

很高，有些一身著白。她们的服装都往外伸展得很阔，仿佛雾气放大了月亮一样，这些服装也把她们的人放大了。我站起来向她们行了屈膝礼，有一两位点头回礼，而其余的不过盯着我看而已。

她们在房间里散开，动作轻盈飘拂，令我想起了一群白色羽毛的鸟。有些人一下子坐下来，斜倚在沙发和卧榻上；有的俯身向着桌子，细细揣摩起花和书来，其余的人则团团围着火炉。大家都用低沉而清晰的调子交谈着，似乎这已成了她们的习惯。后来我知道了她们的大名，现在不妨来提一下。

首先是埃希顿太太和她的两个女儿。她显然曾是位漂亮的女人，而且保养得很好。她的大女儿艾米个头比较小，有些天真，脸部和举止都透出了孩子气，外表也显得很调皮。她那白色的薄纱礼服和蓝色的腰带很合身。二女儿路易莎的个子要高些，身材也更加优美，脸长得很不错，属于法国人所说的“minoischiffonne”那一类，姐妹俩都像百合花那么白净。

林恩夫人四十岁上下，长得又大又胖，腰背笔直，一脸傲气，穿着华丽的闪缎衣服。乌黑的头发在一根天蓝色羽毛和一圈宝石的映衬下闪闪发光。

登特上校太太不象别人那么招摇，不过我认为更具贵妇风度。她身材苗条，面容白皙温和，头发金黄。她的黑色缎子服、华丽的外国花边围巾以及珍珠首饰，远比那位有爵位的贵妇闪光的艳服更赏心悦目。

但三位最令人瞩目的——也许部分是由于她们在这一群人中个子最高——是富孀英格拉姆夫人和她的女儿布兰奇和玛丽。她们是三位个子极高的女人。这位太太年龄可能在四十与五十之间，但身材依然很好，头发依然乌黑（至少在烛光下），牙齿也明显地依然完整无缺。多数人都会把她看成是那个年纪中的美人。以形体而言，她无疑就是这样。不过她的举止和表情显出一种令人难以容忍的傲慢。她生就一副罗马人的脸相。双下巴连着柱子一样的脖子。在我看来，这样的五官不仅因为傲慢而显得膨胀和阴沉，而且还起了皱纹。她的下巴由于同样的原因总是直挺挺的简直不可思议。同时，她的目光凶狠冷酷，使我想起了里德太太的眼睛。她说话装腔作势，嗓音深沉，声调夸张，语气专横——总之，让人难以忍受。一件深红丝绒袍，一顶用印度金丝织物做的披肩式软帽赋予她（我估计她这样想）一种真正的皇家气派。

布兰奇和玛丽都是同样身材——像白杨一样高大挺拔，以高度而论，玛丽显得过份苗条了些，而布兰奇活脱脱像个月亮女神。当然我是怀着特殊的兴趣来注意她的。第一我希望知道，她的外貌是不是同费尔法克斯太太的描绘相符；第二想看看她是不是像我凭想象画成的微型肖像画；第三——这总会暴露——是否像我所设想的那样，会适合罗切斯特先生的口味。

就外貌而言，她各方面都与我的画和费尔法克斯太太的描绘相吻合。高高的胸部、倾斜的肩膀、美丽的颈项、乌黑的眸子和黑油油的卷发，一应俱全——但她的脸呢？——活象她母亲的，只是年青而没有皱纹。一样低低的额角，一样高傲的五官，一样盛气凌人。不过她的傲慢并不那么阴沉。她常常笑声不绝，而且笑里含着嘲弄，这也是她那弯弯的傲气十足的嘴唇所常有的表情。

据说天才总有很强的自我意识。我无法判断英格拉姆小姐是不是位天才，但是她有自我意识

——说实在相当强。她同温文而雅的登特太太谈起了植物。而登特太太似乎没有研究过那门学问，尽管她说喜爱花卉，“尤其是野花”。英格拉姆小姐却是研究过的，而且还神气活现地卖弄植物学字眼，我立刻觉察到她在追猎（用行话来表达）登特太太，也就是说，在戏弄她的无知。她的追猎也许很讥诮，但决非厚道。她弹了钢琴，她的演技很高超；她唱了歌，她的嗓子很优美；她单独同她妈妈讲法语，她讲得很出色，非常流利，语调也正确。

与布兰奇相比，玛丽的面容显得更温顺坦率，五官更为柔和，皮肤也要白皙几分（英格拉姆小姐像西班牙人一样黑）——但玛丽缺乏活力，面部少有表情，眼目不见光泽。她无话可说，一坐下来，便像壁龛里的雕像那样，一动不动。姐妹俩都穿着一尘不染的素装。

那么，我现在是不是认为，英格拉姆小姐有可能成为罗切斯特先生的意中人呢？我说不上来——我不了解他在女性美方面的好恶。要是他喜欢端庄，她正是端庄的典型，而且她多才多艺，充满活力。我想多数有身份的人都会倾慕她，而他确实倾慕她，我似乎已有依据。要消除最后的一丝怀疑，就只要看他们呆在一起时的情景就行了。

读者呵，你别以为阿黛勒始终在我脚边的小凳子上端坐不动，她可不是。女士们一进来，她便站起来，迎了上去，端端正正鞠了一躬，并且一本正经地说：

“Bon jour, mesdames.”

英格拉姆小姐带着嘲弄的神情低头看她，并嚷道：“哈，一个多小的玩偶！”

林恩太太说道，“我猜想她是罗切斯特先生监护的孩子——他常挂在嘴边的法国小姑娘。”

登特太太和蔼地握住她的手，给了她一个吻。艾米和路易莎·埃希顿不约而同地叫道：

“多可爱的孩子！”

随后她们把她叫到一张沙发跟前。此刻她就坐在沙发上，夹在她们中间，用法语和蹩脚的英语交替聊天，不但引起了年轻小姐们的注意，而且也惊动了埃希顿太太和林恩太太。阿黛勒心满意足地受着大伙的宠爱。

最后端上了咖啡，男宾们都被请了进来。要是这个灯火辉煌的房间还有什么幽暗所在的话，那我就坐在暗处，被窗帘半掩着。拱门的帐幔再次撩起，他们进来了。男士们一起登场时的情景，同女宾们一样气派非凡。他们齐煞煞的都着黑色服装，多数身材高大，有的十分年轻。亨利·林恩和弗雷德里克·林恩确实精神抖擞，生气勃勃；登特上校一身英武之气；地方法官埃希顿先生一付绅士派头，头发相当白，眉毛和络腮胡子却依然乌黑，使他有几分像“perenobledetheatre”。英格拉姆勋爵同他的姐妹们一样高挑个子，同她们一样漂亮，但有着玛丽那种冷漠、倦怠的神色。他似乎四肢瘦长有余，血气或脑力不足。

那么，罗切斯特先生在哪儿呢？

他最后一个进来，虽然我没有朝拱门张望，但看到他进来了。我竭力要把注意力集中在钩针上，集中在编织出来的手提包网眼上——真希望自己只想手头的活计，只看见膝上的银珠和

丝线；而我却清清楚楚地看到了他的身影，禁不住忆起了上次见到这身影时的情景，那是在他所说的帮了他大忙以后，——他拉住我的手，低首看着我的脸，细细端详着我，眼神里露出一千言万语急于吐为快的心情，而我也同感。在那一瞬间我同他靠得多近！自那以后，什么事情刻意使他和我的地位起了变化呢？而现在，我们之间的关系变得多么疏远，多么陌生呀！我们已那么隔膜，因此我并不指望他过来同我说话。我也并不感到诧异，他居然连看都不看我一眼就在房间另一头坐下，开始同一些女士们交谈起来。

我一见他心思全在她们身上，而我可以瞪着他而不被觉察，我的目光便不由自主地被吸引到了他的脸上。我无法控制我的眼皮，它们硬要张开，眼珠硬要盯着他。我瞧着，这给了我一种极度的欢乐，——一种宝贵而辛辣的欢乐；是纯金，却又夹杂着痛苦的钢尖。像一个渴得快死的人所体会到的欢乐，明知道自己爬近的泉水已经下了毒，却偏要俯身去喝那圣水。

“情人眼里出美人，”说得千真万确。我主人那没有血色、微榄色的脸、方方的大额角、宽阔乌黑的眉毛、深沉的眼睛、粗线条的五官、显得坚毅而严厉的嘴巴——一切都透出活力、决断和意志——按常理并不漂亮，但对我来说远胜于漂亮。它们充溢着一种情趣和影响力，足以左右我，使我的感情脱离我的控制，而受制于他。我本无意去爱他。读者知道，我努力从自己内心深处剪除露头的爱的萌芽，而此刻，一旦与他重新谋面，那萌芽又自动复活了，变得碧绿粗壮！他连看都不用看我就使我爱上了他。

我拿他和他的客人们作了比较。他的外表焕发着天生的精力和真正的力量，相比之下，林恩兄弟的风流倒倜傥，英格拉姆勋爵的散淡文雅——甚至登特上校的英武出众，又算得了什么呢，我对他们的外貌与表情不以为然。但我能想象得出多数旁观者都会称他们英俊迷人、气度不凡，而毫不犹豫地称罗切斯特先生五官粗糙、神态忧郁。我瞧见他们微笑和大笑——都显得微不足道。烛光中所潜藏的生气并不亚于他们的微笑，铃声中所包含的意义也并不逊于他们的大笑。我看见罗切斯特先生微微一笑——他严厉的五官变得柔和了；他的眼神转为明亮而温存，目光犀利而又甜蜜。这会儿，他同路易莎和艾米·埃希顿交谈着，我不解地看着她们从容接受他那对于我似乎透入心肺的目光。我本以为在这种目光下，她们会垂下眼来，脸上会泛起红晕。但我见她们都无动于衷时，心里倒很高兴。“他之于我并不同于他之于她们，”我想，“他不属于她们那类人。我相信他与我同声相应——我确信如此——我觉得同他意气相投——他的表情和动作中的含义，我都明白。虽然地位和财富把我们截然分开，但我的头脑里和心里，我的血液里和神经中，有着某种使我与他彼此心灵沟通的东西。难道几天前我不是说过，除了从他手里领取薪金，我同他没有关系吗？难道我除了把他看作雇主外，不是不允许自己对他有别的想法吗？这真是亵渎天性！我的每种善良、真实、生气勃勃的情感，都冲动地朝他涌去了。我知道我必须掩饰自己的感情，抑制自己的愿望；牢记住他不会太在乎我。我说我属于他那类人，并不是说我有他那种影响力，那种迷人的魅力，而不过是说我与他有某些共同的志趣与情感罢了。而我必须不断提醒自己，我们之间永远横亘着一条鸿沟——不过只要我一息尚存，我必须爱他。”

咖啡端来了。男宾们一进屋，女士们便象百灵鸟般活跃起来。谈话转为轻松欢快。登特上校和埃希顿先生在政治问题上争论了起来，他们的太太们侧耳静听着。林恩太太和英格拉姆太太两位高傲的寡妇，在促膝谈心。还有乔治爵士，顺便说一句，我忘记描述他了。他是一位个子高大、精神十足的乡绅。这会儿手里端着咖啡杯，站在沙发跟前，偶尔插上几句话。弗雷德里克·林恩先生坐在玛丽·英格拉姆旁边，给她看着一本装帧豪华的书籍里的插画。她看着，不时微笑着，但显然说话不多。高大冷漠的英格拉姆勋爵，抱着双肩，斜倚在小巧活泼

的艾米·埃希顿的椅背上。她抬头看着他，像鸬鹚似的叽叽喳喳。在罗切斯特先生与这位勋爵之间，她更喜欢勋爵。亨利·林恩在路易莎的脚边占了一条脚凳，与阿黛勒合用着。他努力同她说法语，一说错，路易莎就笑他。布兰奇·英格拉姆会跟谁结伴呢？她孤零零地站在桌边，很有风度地俯身看着一本簿册。她似乎在等人来邀请，不过她不愿久等，便自己选了个伴。

罗切斯特先生离开了两位埃希顿小姐后，一如英格拉姆小姐孤单地站在桌旁一样，不然独立在火炉跟前。她在壁炉架的另一边站定，面对着他。

“罗切斯特先生，我想你并不喜欢孩子？”

“我是不喜欢。”

“那你怎么会想到去抚养这样一个小娃娃呢（指了指阿黛勒）？你在哪儿把她捡来的？”

“我并没有去抢，是别人托付给我的。”

“你早该送她进学校了。”

“我付不起，学费那么贵。”

“哈，我想你为她请了个家庭教师，刚才我还看到有个人同她在一起呢——她走了吗？呵，没有！她还在那边窗帘的后面。当然你付她工钱。我想这一样很贵——更贵，因为你得额外养两个人。”

我担心——或者我是否该说，我希望？——因为提到了我，罗切斯特先生会朝我这边张望，所以我不由自主地更往阴影里躲进去，可是他根本没有把目光转移到这边来。

“我没有考虑过这个问题，”他冷冷地说，眼睛直楞楞地望着前面。

“可不——你们男人从来不考虑经济和常识问题，在留家庭教师事儿上，你该听听我妈妈。我想，玛丽和我小时候跟过至少一打家庭教师，一半让人讨厌，其余的十分可笑，而个个都是妖魔——是不是，妈妈？”

“你说什么来着，我的宝贝蛋？”

这位被那个遗孀称为特殊财产的小姐，重新说了一遍她的问题，并作了解释。

“我的宝贝，别提那些家庭教师了，这个字眼本身就便我不安。她们反复无常，毫不称职，让我吃尽了苦头。谢天谢地，现在我总算同她们摆脱关系了。”

登特太太向这位虔诚的太太俯下身子，向她耳语了一阵。我从对方作出的回答中推测，那是提醒她，她们所诅咒的那类人中的一位，就在现场。

“Tant pis!”这位太太说，“我希望这对她有好处！”随后她压低了嗓门，不过还是响得让我能听见。“我注意到了她，我善观面相，在她身上我看到了她那类人的通病。”

“表现在哪些方面，夫人？”罗切斯特先生大声问道。

“我会私下告诉你的，”她答道，意味深长地把头巾甩了三次。

“不过我的好奇心会掉胃口：现在它急于要吃东西。”

“问问布兰奇吧，她比我更靠近你。”

“唉呀，可别把他交给我，妈妈！对于她们那号人，我只有一句话要说：她们真讨厌。并不是说我吃过她们很多苦头，我倒是刻意要把局面扭转过来。西奥多和我过去是怎样作弄威尔逊小姐、格雷太太和朱伯特夫人的呀！玛丽常常困得厉害，提不起精神来参与我们的阴谋。戏弄朱伯特夫人最有趣。威尔逊小姐是个病弱的可怜虫，情绪低沉，好伤心落泪。总之，不值得费那番劲去征服她。格雷太太又粗俗又麻木，对什么打击都不在乎。但是可怜的朱伯特夫人就不一样啦！我们把她逼得急了，我见她会大发雷霆——我们把茶泼掉，把面包和奶油弄得稀巴烂，把书扔到天花板上，捣弄着尺、书桌、火炉围栏和用具，闹得震天价响。西奥多，你还记得那些欢乐的日子吗？”

“是——呀，当然记得，”英格拉姆勋爵慢吞吞地说。“这可怜的老木瓜还常常大叫‘哎呀，你们这帮坏孩子？’——随后我们教训了她一顿，其实是她自己那么无知，竟还想来教我们这些聪明的公子小姐。”

“我们确实这么做了，特多，你知道我帮你告发（或者是迫害）你的家庭教师，面无血色的维宁先生，我们管他叫病态教师。他和威尔逊小姐胆大妄为，竟谈情说爱起来——至少特多和我是这么想的。我们当场看到他们温存地眉目传情，哀声叹气，并把这些理解为“labellepassion”的表现，我敢担保，大家很快就会得益于我们的发现，我们要将它作为杠杆，把压在身上的两个沉重包袱，撬出门去。亲爱的妈妈，瞧她一风闻这件事儿，便发觉是种歪风邪气。你不就是这么看的吗，我的母亲大人？”

“当然，我的宝贝。而且我十分正确。毫无疑问，在任何一个管教出色的家庭里，有千万条理由，一刻都不能容忍家庭男女教师之间的私通。第一——”

“哎呀，妈妈，别给我们一一列举啦！Au reste，我们都知道。坏样子会危害儿童的纯真；热恋者相依相伴，神不守舍，会导致失责；而狂妄自恃——傲慢无礼伴之而生——会造成冲突和对抗的总爆发。我说得对吗，英格拉姆花园的英格拉姆男爵夫人？”

“我的百合花，你说得很对，你一向很对。”

“那就不必再说了，换个话题吧。”

艾米·埃希顿不知是没有听见，还是没有注意到这一声明，操着软软的、奶声奶气的调子搭讪了：“路易莎和我，以往也常常戏弄我们的家庭教师，不过她是那么个好人，什么都能忍

耐，随你怎么整他都不会生气。她从来没有对我们发过火，是不是这样，路易莎？”

“不错，从来不发火。我们爱怎么干就可以怎么干。搜她的书桌和针线盒，把她的抽屉翻得底朝天。而她的脾气却那么好，我们要什么她就给什么。”

“现在我猜想，”英格拉姆小姐讥嘲地喂起嘴唇说，“我们要为现存的家庭女教师编一个传记摘要了。为了避免这场灾难，我再次提议换一个新话题，罗切斯特先生，你赞成我的提议吗？”

“小姐，无论是这件事还是别的事情，我都支持你。”

“那得由我把这件事提出来了，Signior Eduardo，”今晚你的嗓子行吗？”

“Donna Bianca，只要你下令，我就唱。”

“那么 Signior，我传旨清一清你的肺和其他发音器官，来为皇上效力。”

“谁不甘愿做如此神圣的玛丽的里丘呢？”

“里丘算得了什么！”她叫道，把满头卷发一甩，朝钢琴走去。“我认为提琴手戴维准是个枯燥乏味的家伙。我更喜欢黑呼呼的波斯威尔，依我之见，一个人没有一丝恶念便一文不值。不管历史怎样对詹姆斯·赫伯恩说长道短，我自认为，他正是那种我愿意下嫁的狂野、凶狠的草寇英雄。”

“先生们，你们听着：你们中谁最像波斯威尔？”罗切斯特先生嚷道。

“应当说你最够格，”登特上校立即呼应。

“我敢发誓，我对你感激之至，”他回答道。

英格拉姆小姐此刻坐在钢琴前面，矜持而仪态万方，雪白的长袍堂皇地铺开。她开始弹起了灿烂的前奏曲，一面还交谈着。今晚她似乎趾高气扬。她的言辞和派头似乎不仅为了博得听从的赞叹，而且要使他们感到惊讶。显然她一心要给人留下深刻的印象，觉得她潇洒而大胆。

“呵我真讨厌今天的年青人！”她叮叮咚咚弹奏起这乐器来，一面嚷嚷道。“这些弱小的可怜虫，不敢越出爸爸的公园门一步，没有妈妈的准许和保护，连那点距离都不敢。这些家伙醉心于漂亮的面孔，白皙的双手和一双小脚，仿佛男人与美有关似的，仿佛可爱不是女性的特权——她合法的属性与遗传物！我同意一个丑陋的女人是造物主白净脸上的一个污点。至于男人们，让他们只关心拥有力量和勇气吧，让他们把打猎、射击和争斗作为座右铭。其余的则一钱不值。要是我是个男人，这应当成为我的座右铭。”

“不论何时结婚，”她停顿了一下，没有人插话，于是又继续说，“我决定，我的丈夫不应当是个劲敌、而是个陪衬，我不允许皇位的近旁有竞争存在；我需要绝对忠心。不允许他既忠于我，又忠于他镜中看到的影子，罗切斯特先生，现在唱吧，我替你伴奏。”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

“我唯命是从，”便是得到的回答。

“这里有一首海盗歌。你知道我喜欢海盗们，因此你要唱得 *con spirito*”。

“英格拉姆小姐的圣旨一下，连牛奶和水也会产生灵性。”

“那么，小心点儿，要是你不能使我满意，我会教你应当怎么做，而让你丢脸。”

“那是对无能的一种奖赏，现在我要努力让自己失败。”

“*Gardez vous en bien!* 要是你故意出错，我要作出相应的惩罚。”

“英格拉姆小姐应当手下留情，因为她能够作出使凡人无法承受的惩罚。”

“哈哈！你解释一下！”小姐命令道。

“请原谅，小姐。不需要解释了。你敏锐的直觉一定会告诉你，你一皱眉头就抵得上死刑。”

“唱吧！”她说，又碰了碰钢琴，开始了她风格活泼的伴奏。

“现在我该溜了，”我思忖道。但是那富有穿透力的声调吸引了我。费尔法克斯太太曾说过，罗切斯特先生的嗓子很好。确实他有一个圆润、洪亮的男低音。唱的时候他倾注了自己的感情，自己的力量。那歌声透过耳朵、灌进了心田，神奇地唤醒了知觉。我等待着，直至深沉雄浑的颤音消失——嗡嗡的谈话声停顿了片刻后再次响起。随后我离开我躲藏的角落，幸亏边门很近，便从那里走了出去。这里有一条狭窄的走廊通向大厅。我穿过时，发觉鞋带松了，便停下来把它系上，跪在楼梯脚下的垫子上。我听见餐室的门开了，一位男士走了出来。我急忙直起身子，正好同那人打了个照面，原来是罗切斯特先生。

“你好吗？”他问。

“我很好，先生。”

“你为什么不进房间来同我谈谈呢？”

我想我本可以反问这个问题，但我不愿那么放肆，只是回答说：

“我不想打搅你，因为你好像正忙着呢，先生。”

“我外出期间你一直在干些什么呢？”

“没有什么特别事儿，照例教阿黛勒。”

“而且比以前苍白了，这我一眼就看出来了，你怎么啦？”

声明：本资料由[听力课堂](http://www.tingclass.com)网站收集整理，仅供英语爱好者学习使用，资料版权属于原作者。

“没事儿，先生。”

“你差点淹死我的那天夜里着了凉吗？”

“绝对没有。”

“回到客厅里去吧，你走得太早了。”

“我累了，先生。”

他瞧了我一会儿。

“而且心情有些不快，”他说。

“为什么事儿？告诉我吧。”

“没有——实在没有，先生。我的心情没有不快。”

“可是我可以肯定你心里不高兴，而且已经到了这个地步，只要再说几句你就要掉泪了——其实此刻你的泪花已在闪动，一颗泪珠已从睫毛上滚下，落在石板地上了。要是我有时间，要不是我怕撞见一本正经爱饶舌的仆人，我准会弄明白内中的缘由。好吧，今晚我就原谅你了。不过你得知道，只要客人们还在这里呆着，我希望你每天晚上都在客厅露面。这是我的愿望，不要置之不理，现在你走吧，叫索菲娅来把阿黛勒带走。晚安，我的——”他刹住了，咬着嘴唇，蓦地离开了我。