

CHAPTER XX

I HAD forgotten to draw my curtain, which I usually did, and also to let down my window-blind. The consequence was, that when the moon, which was full and bright (for the night was fine), came in her course to that space in the sky opposite my casement, and looked in at me through the unveiled panes, her glorious gaze roused me.

Awaking in the dead of night, I opened my eyes on her disk- silver-white and crystal clear. It was beautiful, but too solemn: I half rose, and stretched my arm to draw the curtain.

Good God! What a cry!

The night- its silence- its rest, was rent in twain by a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall.

My pulse stopped: my heart stood still; my stretched arm was paralysed. The cry died, and was not renewed. Indeed, whatever being uttered that fearful shriek could not soon repeat it: not the widest-winged condor on the Andes could, twice in succession, send out such a yell from the cloud shrouding his eyrie. The thing delivering such utterance must rest ere it could repeat the effort.

It came out of the third storey; for it passed overhead. And overhead- yes, in the room just above my chamber-ceiling- I now heard a struggle: a deadly one it seemed from the noise; and a half-smothered voice shouted-

'Help! help! help!' three times rapidly.

'Will no one come?' it cried; and then, while the staggering and stamping went on wildly, I distinguished through plank and plaster:-

'Rochester! Rochester! for God's sake, come!'

A chamber-door opened: some one ran, or rushed, along the gallery. Another step stamped on the flooring above and something fell; and there was silence.

I had put on some clothes, though horror shook all my limbs; I issued from my apartment. The sleepers were all aroused: ejaculations, terrified murmurs sounded in every room; door after door unclosed; one looked out and another looked out; the gallery filled. Gentlemen and ladies alike had quitted their beds; and 'Oh! what is it?'- 'Who is hurt?'- 'What has happened?'- 'Fetch a light!'- 'Is it fire?'- 'Are there robbers?'- 'Where shall we run?' was demanded confusedly on all hands. But for the moon-light they would have been in complete darkness. They ran to and fro; they crowded together: some sobbed, some stumbled: the confusion was inextricable.

'Where the devil is Rochester?' cried Colonel Dent. 'I cannot find him in his bed.'

'Here! here!' was shouted in return. 'Be composed, all of you:

I'm coming.'

And the door at the end of the gallery opened, and Mr. Rochester advanced with a candle: he had just descended from the upper storey.

One of the ladies ran to him directly; she seized his arm: it was Miss Ingram.

'What awful event has taken place?' said she. 'Speak! let us know the worst at once!'

'But don't pull me down or strangle me,' he replied: for the Misses Eshton were clinging about him now; and the two dowagers, in vast white wrappers, were bearing down on him like ships in full sail.

'All's right!- all's right!' he cried. 'It's a mere rehearsal of Much Ado about Nothing. Ladies, keep off, or I shall wax dangerous.'

And dangerous he looked: his black eyes darted sparks. Calming himself by an effort, he added-

'A servant has had the nightmare; that is all. She's an excitable, nervous person: she construed her dream into an apparition, or something of that sort, no doubt; and has taken a fit with fright. Now, then, I must see you all back into your rooms; for, till the house is settled, she cannot be looked after. Gentlemen, have the goodness to set the ladies the example. Miss Ingram, I am sure you will not fail in evincing superiority to idle terrors. Amy and Louisa, return to your nests like a pair of doves, as you are. Mesdames' (to the dowagers), 'you will take cold to a dead certainty, if you stay in this chill gallery any longer.'

And so, by dint of alternate coaxing and commanding, he contrived to get them all once more enclosed in their separate dormitories. I did not wait to be ordered back to mine, but retreated unnoticed, as unnoticed I had left it.

Not, however, to go to bed: on the contrary, I began and dressed myself carefully. The sounds I had heard after the scream, and the words that had been uttered, had probably been heard only by me; for they had proceeded from the room above mine: but they assured me that it was not a servant's dream which had thus struck horror through the house; and that the explanation Mr. Rochester had given was merely an invention framed to pacify his guests. I dressed, then, to be ready for emergencies. When dressed, I sat a long time by the window looking out over the silent grounds and silvered fields and waiting for I knew not what. It seemed to me that some event must follow the strange cry, struggle, and call.

No: stillness returned: each murmur and movement ceased gradually, and in about an hour Thornfield Hall was again as hushed as a desert. It seemed that sleep and night had resumed their

empire.

Meantime the moon declined: she was about to set. Not liking to sit in the cold and darkness, I thought I would lie down on my bed, dressed as I was. I left the window, and moved with little noise across the carpet; as I stooped to take off my shoes, a cautious hand tapped low at the door.

'Am I wanted?' I asked.

'Are you up?' asked the voice I expected to hear, viz, my master's.

'Yes, sir.'

'And dressed?'

'Yes.'

'Come out, then, quietly.'

I obeyed. Mr. Rochester stood in the gallery holding a light.

'I want you,' he said: 'come this way: take your time, and make no noise.'

My slippers were thin: I could walk the matted floor as softly as a cat. He glided up the gallery and up the stairs, and stopped in the dark, low corridor of the fateful third storey: I had followed and stood at his side.

'Have you a sponge in your room?' he asked in a whisper.

'Yes, sir.'

'Have you any salts- volatile salts?'

'Yes.'

'Go back and fetch both.'

I returned, sought the sponge on the washstand, the salts in my drawer, and once more retraced my steps. He still waited; he held a key in his hand: approaching one of the small, black doors, he put it in the lock; he paused, and addressed me again.

'You don't turn sick at the sight of blood?'

'I think I shall not: I have never been tried yet.'

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I felt a thrill while I answered him; but no coldness, and no faintness.

'Just give me your hand,' he said: 'it will not do to risk a fainting fit.'

I put my fingers into his. 'Warm and steady,' was his remark: he turned the key and opened the door.

I saw a room I remembered to have seen before, the day Mrs. Fairfax showed me over the house: it was hung with tapestry; but the tapestry was now looped up in one part, and there was a door apparent, which had then been concealed. This door was open; a light shone out of the room within: I heard thence a snarling, snatching sound, almost like a dog quarrelling. Mr. Rochester, putting down his candle, said to me, 'Wait a minute,' and he went forward to the inner apartment.

A shout of laughter greeted his entrance; noisy at first, and terminating in Grace Poole's own goblin ha! ha! She then was there. He made some sort of arrangement without speaking, though I heard a low voice address him: he came out and closed the door behind him.

'Here, Jane!' he said; and I walked round to the other side of a large bed, which with its drawn curtains concealed a considerable portion of the chamber. An easy-chair was near the bed-head: a man sat in it, dressed with the exception of his coat; he was still; his head leant back; his eyes were closed. Mr. Rochester held the candle over him; I recognised in his pale and seemingly lifeless face- the stranger, Mason: I saw too that his linen on one side and one arm, was almost soaked in blood.

'Hold the candle,' said Mr. Rochester, and I took it: he fetched a basin of water from the washstand: 'Hold that,' said he. I obeyed.

He took the sponge, dipped it in, and moistened the corpse-like face; he asked for my smelling-bottle, and applied it to the nostrils.

Mr. Mason shortly unclosed his eyes; he groaned. Mr. Rochester opened the shirt of the wounded man, whose arm and shoulder were bandaged: he sponged away blood, trickling fast down.

'Is there immediate danger?' murmured Mr. Mason.

'Pooh! No- a mere scratch. Don't be so overcome, man: bear up! I'll fetch a surgeon for you now, myself: you'll be able to be removed by morning, I hope. Jane,' he continued.

'Sir?'

'I shall have to leave you in this room with this gentleman, for an hour, or perhaps two hours: you will sponge the blood as I do when it returns: if he feels faint, you will put the glass of water on that stand to his lips, and your salts to his nose. You will not speak to him on any pretext- and- Richard, it will be at the peril of your life if you speak to her: open your lips- agitate yourself- and I'll not answer for the consequences.'

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Again the poor man groaned; he looked as if he dared not move; fear, either of death or of something else, appeared almost to paralyse him. Mr. Rochester put the now bloody sponge into my hand, and I proceeded to use it as he had done. He watched me a second, then saying, 'Remember!- No conversation,' he left the room. I experienced a strange feeling as the key grated in the lock, and the sound of his retreating step ceased to be heard.

Here then I was in the third storey, fastened into one of its mystic cells; night around me; a pale and bloody spectacle under my eyes and hands; a murderess hardly separated from me by a single door: yes- that was appalling- the rest I could bear; but I shuddered at the thought of Grace Poole bursting out upon me.

I must keep to my post, however. I must watch this ghastly countenance- these blue, still lips forbidden to unclosethese eyes now shut, now opening, now wandering through the room, now fixing on me, and ever glazed with the dulness of horror. I must dip my hand again and again in the basin of blood and water, and wipe away the trickling gore. I must see the light of the unsnuffed candle wane on my employment; the shadows darken on the wrought, antique tapestry round me, and grow black under the hangings of the vast old bed, and quiver strangely over the doors of a great cabinet opposite- whose front, divided into twelve panels, bore, in grim design, the heads of the twelve apostles, each enclosed in its separate panel as in a frame; while above them at the top rose an ebon crucifix and a dying Christ.

According as the shifting obscurity and flickering gleam hovered here or glanced there, it was now the bearded physician, Luke, that bent his brow; now St. John's long hair that waved; and anon the devilish face of Judas, that grew out of the panel, and seemed gathering life and threatening a revelation of the arch-traitor- of Satan himself- in his subordinate's form.

Amidst all this, I had to listen as well as watch: to listen for the movements of the wild beast or the fiend in yonder side den. But since Mr. Rochester's visit it seemed spellbound: all the night I heard but three sounds at three long intervals,- a step creak, a momentary renewal of the snarling, canine noise, and a deep human groan.

Then my own thoughts worried me. What crime was this, that lived incarnate in this sequestered mansion, and could neither be expelled nor subdued by the owner?- what mystery, that broke out now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night? What creature was it, that, masked in an ordinary woman's face and shape, uttered the voice, now of a mocking demon, and anon of a carrion-seeking bird of prey?

And this man I bent over- this commonplace, quiet stranger- how had he become involved in the web of horror? and why had the Fury flown at him? What made him seek this quarter of the house at an untimely season, when he should have been asleep in bed? I had heard Mr. Rochester assign him an apartment below- what brought him here? And why, now, was he so tame under the violence or treachery done him? Why did he so quietly submit to the concealment Mr. Rochester enforced?

Why did Mr. Rochester enforce this concealment? His guest had been outraged, his own life on a former occasion had been hideously plotted against; and both attempts he smothered in secrecy and sank in oblivion! Lastly, I saw Mr. Mason was submissive to Mr. Rochester; that the impetuous will of the latter held complete sway over the inertness of the former: the few words which had passed between them assured me of this. It was evident that in their former intercourse, the passive disposition of the one had been habitually influenced by the active energy of the other: whence then had arisen Mr. Rochester's dismay when he heard of Mr. Mason's arrival? Why had the mere name of this unresisting individual- whom his word now sufficed to control like a child- fallen on him, a few hours since, as a thunderbolt might fall on an oak?

Oh! I could not forget his look and his paleness when he whispered: 'Jane, I have got a blow- I have got a blow, Jane.' I could not forget how the arm had trembled which he rested on my shoulder: and it was no light matter which could thus bow the resolute spirit and thrill the vigorous frame of Fairfax Rochester.

'When will he come? When will he come?' I cried inwardly, as the night lingered and lingered- as my bleeding patient drooped, moaned, sickened: and neither day nor aid arrived. I had, again and again, held the water to Mason's white lips; again and again offered him the stimulating salts: my efforts seemed ineffectual: either bodily or mental suffering, or loss of blood, or all three combined, were fast prostrating his strength. He moaned so, and looked so weak, wild, and lost, I feared he was dying; and I might not even speak to him.

The candle, wasted at last, went out; as it expired, I perceived streaks of grey light edging the window curtains: dawn was then approaching. Presently I heard Pilot bark far below, out of his distant kennel in the courtyard: hope revived. Nor was it unwarranted: in five minutes more the grating key, the yielding lock, warned me my watch was relieved. It could not have lasted more than two hours: many a week has seemed shorter.

Mr. Rochester entered, and with him the surgeon he had been to fetch.

'Now, Carter, be on the alert,' he said to this last: 'I give you but half an hour for dressing the wound, fastening the bandages, getting the patient downstairs and all.'

'But is he fit to move, sir?'

'No doubt of it; it is nothing serious; he is nervous, his spirits must be kept up. Come, set to work.'

Mr. Rochester drew back the thick curtain, drew up the holland blind, let in all the daylight he could; and I was surprised and cheered to see how far dawn was advanced: what rosy streaks were beginning to brighten the east. Then he approached Mason, whom the surgeon was already handling.

'Now, my good fellow, how are you?' he asked.

'She's done for me, I fear,' was the faint reply.

'Not a whit!- courage! This day fortnight you'll hardly be a pin the worse of it: you've lost a little blood; that's all. Carter, assure him there's no danger.'

'I can do that conscientiously,' said Carter, who had now undone the bandages; 'only I wish I could have got here sooner: he would not have bled so much- but how is this? The flesh on the shoulder is torn as well as cut. This wound was not done with a knife: there have been teeth here!'

'She bit me,' he murmured. 'She worried me like a tigress, when Rochester got the knife from her.'

'You should not have yielded: you should have grappled with her at once,' said Mr. Rochester.

'But under such circumstances, what could one do?' returned Mason. 'Oh, it was frightful!' he added, shuddering. 'And I did not expect it: she looked so quiet at first.'

'I warned you,' was his friend's answer; 'I said- be on your guard when you go near her. Besides, you might have waited till to-morrow, and had me with you: it was mere folly to attempt the interview to-night, and alone.'

'I thought I could have done some good.'

'You thought! you thought! Yes, it makes me impatient to hear you: but, however, you have suffered, and are likely to suffer enough for not taking my advice; so I'll say no more. Carter- hurry!- hurry! The sun will soon rise, and I must have him off.'

'Directly, sir; the shoulder is just bandaged. I must look to this other wound in the arm: she has had her teeth here too, I think.'

'She sucked the blood: she said she'd drain my heart,' said Mason.

I saw Mr. Rochester shudder: a singularly marked expression of disgust, horror, hatred, warped his countenance almost to distortion, but he only said-

'Come, be silent, Richard, and never mind her gibberish: don't repeat it.'

'I wish I could forget it,' was the answer.

'You will when you are out of the country: when you get back to Spanish Town, you may think of her as dead and buried- or rather, you need not think of her at all.'

'Impossible to forget this night!'

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'It is not impossible: have some energy, man. You thought you were as dead as a herring two hours since, and you are all alive and talking now. There!- Carter has done with you or nearly so; I'll make you decent in a trice. Jane' (he turned to me for the first time since his re-entrance), 'take this key: go down into my bedroom, and walk straight forward into my dressing-room: open the top drawer of the wardrobe and take out a clean shirt and neck-handkerchief: bring them here; and be nimble.'

I went; sought the repository he had mentioned, found the articles named, and returned with them.

'Now,' said he, 'go to the other side of the bed while I order his toilet; but don't leave the room: you may be wanted again.'

I retired as directed.

'Was anybody stirring below when you went down, Jane?' inquired Mr. Rochester presently.

'No, sir; all was very still.'

'We shall get you off cannily, Dick: and it will be better, both for your sake, and for that of the poor creature in yonder. I have striven long to avoid exposure, and I should not like it to come at last. Here, Carter, help him on with his waistcoat. Where did you leave your furred cloak? You can't travel a mile without that, I know, in this damned cold climate. In your room? - Jane, run down to Mr. Mason's room, - the one next mine, - and fetch a cloak you will see there.'

Again I ran, and again returned, bearing an immense mantle lined and edged with fur.

'Now, I've another errand for you,' said my untiring master; you must away to my room again. What a mercy you are shod with velvet, Jane! - a clod-hopping messenger would never do at this juncture. You must open the middle drawer of my toilet-table and take out a little phial and a little glass you will find there, - quick!'

I flew thither and back, bringing the desired vessels.

'That's well! Now, doctor, I shall take the liberty of administering a dose myself, on my own responsibility. I got this cordial at Rome, of an Italian charlatan - a fellow you would have kicked, Carter. It is not a thing to be used indiscriminately, but it is good upon occasion: as now, for instance. Jane, a little water.'

He held out the tiny glass, and I half-filled it from the water-bottle on the washstand.

'That will do; - now wet the lip of the phial.'

I did so; he measured twelve drops of a crimson liquid, and presented it to Mason.

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'Drink, Richard: it will give you the heart you lack, for an hour or so.'

'But will it hurt me?- is it inflammatory?'

'Drink! drink! drink!'

Mr. Mason obeyed, because it was evidently useless to resist. He was dressed now: he still looked pale, but he was no longer gory and sullied. Mr. Rochester let him sit three minutes after he had swallowed the liquid; he then took his arm-

'Now I am sure you can get on your feet,' he said- 'try.' The patient rose.

'Carter, take him under the other shoulder. Be of good cheer, Richard; step out- that's it!'

'I do feel better,' remarked Mr. Mason.

'I am sure you do. Now, Jane, trip on before us away to the backstairs; unbolt the side-passage door, and tell the driver of the post-chaise you will see in the yard- or just outside, for I told him not to drive his rattling wheels over the pavement- to be ready; we are coming: and, Jane, if any one is about, come to the foot of the stairs and hem.'

It was by this time half-past five, and the sun was on the point of rising; but I found the kitchen still dark and silent. The side-passage door was fastened; I opened it with as little noise as possible: all the yard was quiet; but the gates stood wide open, and there was a post-chaise, with horses ready harnessed, and driver seated on the box, stationed outside. I approached him, and said the gentlemen were coming; he nodded: then I looked carefully round and listened. The stillness of early morning slumbered everywhere; the curtains were yet drawn over the servants' chamber windows; little birds were just twittering in the blossom-blanchéd orchard trees, whose boughs drooped like white garlands over the wall enclosing one side of the yard; the carriage horses stamped from time to time in their closed stables: all else was still.

The gentlemen now appeared. Mason, supported by Mr. Rochester and the surgeon, seemed to walk with tolerable ease: they assisted him into the chaise; Carter followed.

'Take care of him,' said Mr. Rochester to the latter, 'and keep him at your house till he is quite well: I shall ride over in a day or two to see how he gets on. Richard, how is it with you?'

'The fresh air revives me, Fairfax.'

'Leave the window open on his side, Carter; there is no wind- good-bye, Dick.'

'Fairfax-'

'Well, what is it?'

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'Let her be taken care of; let her be treated as tenderly as may be: let her-' he stopped and burst into tears.

'I do my best; and have done it, and will do it,' was the answer: he shut up the chaise door, and the vehicle drove away.

'Yet would to God there was an end of all this!' added Mr. Rochester, as he closed and barred the heavy yard-gates.

This done, he moved with slow step and abstracted air towards a door in the wall bordering the orchard. I, supposing he had done with me, prepared to return to the house; again, however, I heard him call 'Jane!' He had opened the portal and stood at it, waiting for me.

'Come where there is some freshness, for a few moments,' he said;

'that house is a mere dungeon: don't you feel it so?'

'It seems to me a splendid mansion, sir.'

'The glamour of inexperience is over your eyes,' he answered;

'and you see it through a charmed medium: you cannot discern that the gilding is slime and the silk draperies cobwebs; that the marble is sordid slate, and the polished woods mere refuse chips and scaly bark. Now here' (he pointed to the leafy enclosure we had entered) 'all is real, sweet, and pure.'

He strayed down a walk edged with box, with apple trees, pear trees, and cherry trees on one side, and a border on the other full of all sorts of old-fashioned flowers, stocks, sweet-williams, primroses, pansies, mingled with southernwood, sweet-briar, and various fragrant herbs. They were fresh now as a succession of April showers and gleams, followed by a lovely spring morning, could make them: the sun was just entering the dappled east, and his light illumined the wreathed and dewy orchard trees and shone down the quiet walks under them.

'Jane, will you have a flower?'

He gathered a half-blown rose, the first on the bush, and offered

it to me.

'Thank you, sir.'

'Do you like this sunrise, Jane? That sky with its high and light

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clouds which are sure to melt away as the day waxes warm- this

placid and balmy atmosphere?"

'I do, very much.'

'You have passed a strange night, Jane.'

'Yes, sir.'

'And it has made you look pale- were you afraid when I left you alone with Mason?'

'I was afraid of some one coming out of the inner room.'

'But I had fastened the door- I had the key in my pocket: I should have been a careless shepherd if I had left a lamb- my pet lamb- so near a wolf's den, unguarded: you were safe.'

'Will Grace Poole live here still, sir?'

'Oh yes! don't trouble your head about her- put the thing out of your thoughts.'

'Yet it seems to me your life is hardly secure while she stays.'

'Never fear- I will take care of myself.'

'Is the danger you apprehended last night gone by now, sir?'

'I cannot vouch for that till Mason is out of England: nor even then. To live, for me, Jane, is to stand on a crater-crust which may crack and spue fire any day.'

'But Mr. Mason seems a man easily led. Your influence, sir, is evidently potent with him: he will never set you at defiance or wilfully injure you.'

'Oh no! Mason will not defy me; nor, knowing it, will he hurt me- but, unintentionally, he might in a moment, by one careless word, deprive me, if not of life, yet for ever of happiness.'

'Tell him to be cautious, sir: let him know what you fear, and show him how to avert the danger.'

He laughed sardonically, hastily took my hand, and as hastily threw it from him.

'If I could do that, simpleton, where would the danger be?'

Annihilated in a moment. Ever since I have known Mason, I have only had to say to him "Do that," and the thing has been done. But I cannot give him orders in this case: I cannot say "Beware of

harming me, Richard"; for it is imperative that I should keep him ignorant that harm to me is possible. Now you look puzzled; and I will puzzle you further. You are my little friend, are you not?"

'I like to serve you, sir, and to obey you in all that is right.'

'Precisely: I see you do. I see genuine contentment in your gait and mien, your eye and face, when you are helping me and pleasing me- working for me, and with me, in, as you characteristically say, "all that is right": for if I bid you do what you thought wrong, there would be no light-footed running, no neat-handed alacrity, no lively glance and animated complexion. My friend would then turn to me, quiet and pale, and would say, "No, sir; that is impossible: I cannot do it, because it is wrong"; and would become immutable as a fixed star.

Well, you too have power over me, and may injure me: yet I dare not show you where I am vulnerable, lest, faithful and friendly as you are, you should transfix me at once.'

'If you have no more to fear from Mr. Mason than you have from me, sir, you are very safe.'

'God grant it may be so! Here, Jane, is an arbour; sit down.'

The arbour was an arch in the wall, lined with ivy; it contained a rustic seat. Mr. Rochester took it, leaving room, however, for me: but I stood before him.

'Sit,' he said; 'the bench is long enough for two. You don't hesitate to take a place at my side, do you? Is that wrong, Jane?'

I answered him by assuming it: to refuse would, I felt, have been unwise.

'Now, my little friend, while the sun drinks the dew- while all the flowers in this old garden awake and expand, and the birds fetch their young ones' breakfast out of the Thornfield, and the early bees do their first spell of work- I'll put a case to you, which you must endeavour to suppose your own: but first, look at me, and tell me you are at ease, and not fearing that I err in detaining you, or that you err in staying.'

'No, sir; I am content.'

'Well then, Jane, call to aid your fancy:- suppose you were no longer a girl well reared and disciplined, but a wild boy indulged from childhood upwards; imagine yourself in a remote foreign land; conceive that you there commit a capital error, no matter of what nature or from what motives, but one whose consequences must follow you through life and taint all your existence. Mind, I don't say a crime; I am not speaking of shedding of blood or any other guilty act, which might make the perpetrator amenable to the law: my word is error. The results of what you have done become in time to you utterly insupportable; you take measures to obtain relief: unusual measures, but neither unlawful nor culpable. Still you are miserable; for hope has quitted you on the very

confines of life: your sun at noon darkens in an eclipse, which you feel will not leave it till the time of setting. Bitter and base associations have become the sole food of your memory: you wander here and there, seeking rest in exile: happiness in pleasure- I mean in heartless, sensual pleasure- such as dulls intellect and blights feeling. Heart-weary and soul-withered, you come home after years of voluntary banishment: you make a new acquaintance- how or where no matter: you find in this stranger much of the good and bright qualities which you have sought for twenty years, and never before encountered; and they are all fresh, healthy, without soil and without taint. Such society revives, regenerates: you feel better days come back-higher wishes, purer feelings; you desire to recommence your life, and to spend what remains to you of days in a way more worthy of an immortal being. To attain this end, are you justified in overleaping an obstacle of custom-a mere conventional impediment which neither your conscience sanctifies nor your judgment approves?'

He paused for an answer: and what was I to say? Oh, for some good spirit to suggest a judicious and satisfactory response! Vain aspiration! The west wind whispered in the ivy round me; but no gentle Ariel borrowed its breath as a medium of speech: the birds sang in the tree-tops; but their song, however sweet, was inarticulate.

Again Mr. Rochester propounded his query: 'Is the wandering and sinful, but now rest-seeking and repentant, man justified in daring the world's opinion, in order to attach to him for ever this gentle, gracious, genial stranger, thereby securing his own peace of mind and regeneration of life?'

'Sir,' I answered, 'a wanderer's repose or a sinner's reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature. Men and women die; philosophers falter in wisdom, and Christians in goodness: if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to amend and solace to heal.'

'But the instrument- the instrument! God, who does the work, ordains the instrument. I have myself- I tell it you without parable- been a worldly, dissipated, restless man; and I believe I have found the instrument for my cure in-'

He paused: the birds went on carolling, the leaves lightly rustling. I almost wondered they did not check their songs and whispers to catch the suspended revelation; but they would have had to wait many minutes- so long was the silence protracted. At last I looked up at the tardy speaker: he was looking eagerly at me.

'Little friend,' said he, in quite a changed tone- while his face changed too, losing all its softness and gravity, and becoming harsh and sarcastic- 'you have noticed my tender penchant for Miss Ingram: don't you think if I married her she would regenerate me with a vengeance?'

He got up instantly, went quite to the other end of the walk, and when he came back he was humming a tune.

'Jane, Jane,' said he, stopping before me, 'you are quite pale with your vigils: don't you curse me for disturbing your rest?'

'Curse you? No, sir.'

'Shake hands in confirmation of the word. What cold fingers! They were warmer last night when I touched them at the door of the mysterious chamber. Jane, when will you watch with me again?'

'Whenever I can be useful, sir.'

'For instance, the night before I am married! I am sure I shall not be able to sleep. Will you promise to sit up with me to bear me company? To you I can talk of my lovely one: for now you have seen her and know her.'

'Yes, sir.'

'She's a rare one, is she not, Jane?'

'Yes, sir.'

'A strapper- a real strapper, Jane: big, brown, and buxom; with hair just such as the ladies of Carthage must have had. Bless me! there's Dent and Lynn in the stables! Go in by the shrubbery, through that wicket.'

As I went one way, he went another, and I heard him in the yard, saying cheerfully-

'Mason got the start of you all this morning; he was gone before sunrise: I rose at four to see him off.'

第二十章

平常我是拉好帐幔睡觉的，而那回却忘了，也忘了把百叶窗放下来。结果，一轮皎洁的满月（因为那天夜色很好），沿着自己的轨道，来到我窗户对面的天空，透过一无遮拦的窗玻璃窥视着我，用她那清丽的目光把我唤醒。夜深人静，我张开眼睛，看到了月亮澄净的银白色圆脸。它美丽却过于肃穆。我半欠着身子，伸手去拉帐幔。

天哪！多可怕的声音！

夜晚的宁静和安逸，被响彻桑菲尔德府的一声狂野、刺耳的尖叫打破了。

我的脉搏停止了，我的心脏不再跳动，我伸出的胳膊僵住了。叫声消失，没有再起。说实在，无论谁发出这样的喊声，那可怕的尖叫无法立即重复一遍，就是安第斯山上长着巨翅的秃鹰，也难以在白云缭绕的高处，这样连叫两声。那发出叫声的东西得缓过气来才有力气再次喊叫。

这叫声来自三楼，因为正是我头顶上响起来的。在我的头顶——不错，就在我天花板上头的房间里——此刻我听到了一阵挣扎，从响声看似乎是一场你死我活的搏斗，一个几乎透不过气来的声音喊道：

“救命呀！救命呀！救命呀！”连叫了三声。

“怎么没有人来呀？”这声音喊道。随后，是一阵发疯似的踉跄和跺脚，透过木板和灰泥我听得出来！

“罗切斯特！罗切斯特，看在上帝面上，快来呀？”

一扇房门开了。有人跑过，或者说冲过了走廊。另一个人的脚步踩在头顶的地板上，什么东西跌倒了，随之便是一片沉寂。

尽管我吓得四肢发抖，但还是穿上了几件衣服，走出房间。所有熟睡的人都被惊醒了，每个房间都响起了喊叫声和恐惧的喃喃声。门一扇扇打开了，人一个个探出头来。走廊上站满了人。男宾和女客们都从床上爬起来。“呵，怎么回事？”——“谁伤着了，”——“出了什么事呀？”——“掌灯呀！”——“起火了吗？”——“是不是有窃贼？”——“我们得往哪儿逃呀？”四面八方响起了七嘴八舌的询问。要不是那月光，众人眼前会一片漆黑。他们来回乱跑，挤成一堆。有人哭泣，有人跌交，顿时乱作一团。

“见鬼，罗切斯特在哪儿？”登特上校叫道。“他床上没有人。”

“在这儿！在这儿！”一个声音喊着回答。“大家镇静些，我来了。”

走廊尽头的门开了，罗切斯特先生拿着蜡烛走过来。他刚从楼上下来，一位女士便径直朝他奔去，一把抓住他胳膊。那是英格拉姆小姐。

“出了什么可怕的事了？”她说。“说呵！快让我们知道最坏的情况！”

“可别把我拉倒或者勒死呀，”他回答，因为此刻两位埃希顿小姐紧紧抓住他不放，两位遗孀穿着宽大的白色晨衣，像鼓足了风帆的船，向他直冲过来。

“什么事儿也没有！——什么事儿也没有？”他喊道。“不过是《无事生非》的一场彩排。女士们，让开，不然我要凶相毕露了。”

而他确实目露凶光，乌黑的眼睛直冒火星。他竭力使自己镇定下来，补充道：

“一个仆人做了一场恶梦，就是这么回事。她好激动，神经质，她把梦里见到的当成了鬼魂，或是这一类东西，而且吓得昏了过去。好吧，现在我得关照大家回自己房间里去。因为只有整座房子安静下来了，我们才好照应她。先生们，请你们给女士们做个榜样。英格拉姆小姐，我敢肯定，你会证实自己不会被无端的恐惧所压倒。艾米和路易莎，就像一对真正的鸽子那样回到自己的窝里去。夫人们（向着两位遗孀），要是你们在冷嗖嗖的走廊上再呆下去，那肯定要得感冒。”

他就这样连哄带叫，好不容易让所有的人再次进了各自的房间，关上了门。我没有等他命令我回到自己房间，便像来的时候一样悄悄地走了。

不过我没有上床，反倒小心地穿好了衣服。那声尖叫以后传来的响动和大声喊出来的话，很可能只有我听到，因为是从我头顶的房间传来的。但我很有把握，闹得整所房子惊惶失措的，不是仆人的恶梦。罗切斯特先生的解释不过是一时的编造，用来稳住客人的情绪而已。于是我穿上衣服以防不测。穿戴停当后，我久久地坐在窗边，眺望着静谧的庭园和银色的田野，连自己也不知道在等待着什么。我似乎感到，在奇怪的喊叫、搏斗和呼救之后，必定要发生什么事情。

但没有。一切又复归平静。每个细微的响动都渐渐停止，一小时后整座桑菲尔德府便像沙漠一般沉寂了。暗夜与沉睡似乎又恢复了自己的王国。与此同时，月亮下沉，快要隐去。我不喜欢那么冷丝丝黑咕隆咚地坐着，心想虽然穿好了衣服，倒还是躺在床上的好。我离开了窗子，轻手轻脚地穿过地毯，正想弯腰去脱鞋，一只谨慎的手轻轻地敲响了我的门。

“要我帮忙吗？”我问。

“你没有睡？”我意料中的那个声音问道，那是我主人的嗓音。

“是的，先生。”

“而且穿了衣服？”

“不错。”

“那就出来吧，轻一点。”

我照他说的做了。罗切斯特先生端着灯，站在走廊上。

“我需要你帮忙，”他说，“这边走，慢一点，别出声。”

我穿的是一双很薄的拖鞋，走在铺好席子的地板上，轻得像只猫。他溜过走廊，上了楼梯，在多事的三楼幽暗低矮的走廊上，停住了脚步，我尾随着，站在他旁边。

“你房间里有没有海绵？”他低声耳语道。

“有，先生。”

“有没有盐——易挥发的盐？”

“有的。”

“回去把这两样都拿来。”

我回到房间，从脸盆架上找到了海绵，从抽屉里找到了食盐，并顺原路返回。他依旧等待着，手里拿了把钥匙。他走近其中一扇黑色的小门，把钥匙插进锁孔，却又停下来同我说起话来。

“见到血你不会恶心的吧？”

“我想不会吧，我从来没有经历过。”

我回答时不觉毛骨悚然，不过没有打寒颤，也没有头晕。

“把手伸给我，”他说，“可不能冒让你昏倒的危险。”

我把手指放在他手里。“温暖而沉着”便是他的评价。他转动了一下钥匙，开了门。

我见到了一个似曾见过的房间，记得就在费尔法克斯太太带我浏览整幢房子的那一天。房间里悬着挂毯，但此刻一部份已经卷了起来，露出了一扇门，以前是遮蔽着的。门敞开着，里面的灯光射向门外。我从那里听到了一阵断断续续的咆哮声，同狗叫差不多。罗切斯特先生放下蜡烛，对我说了声“等一下，”便往前向内间走去。他一进去便响起了一阵笑声，先是闹闹嚷嚷，后来以格雷斯·普尔妖怪般的哈哈声而告终。她当时就在那儿。他一声不吭地作了安排，不过我还听到有人低声地同他说了话。他走了出来，随手关了门。

“这儿来，简！”他说，我绕到了一张大床的另外一头，这张帷幔紧锁的床遮去了大半个房间。床头边有把安乐椅，椅子上坐了个人，除了外套什么都穿上了。他一动不动，脑袋往后靠着，双眼紧闭。罗切斯特先生把蜡烛端过他头顶。从苍白没有血色的脸上，我认出了那个陌生人梅森。我还看到，他内衣的一边和一只胳膊几乎都浸透了血。

“拿着蜡烛，”罗切斯特先生说。我取过蜡烛，而他从脸盆架上端来了一盆水。“端着它，”他说。我听从了。他拿了海绵，在脸盆里浸了一下，润了润死尸般的脸。他向我要了嗅盐瓶，把它放在梅森的鼻子底下。不久梅森先生睁开眼睛，呻吟起来。罗切斯特先生解开了伤者的衬衫，那人的胳膊和肩膀都包扎了绷带。他把很快滴下来的血用海绵吸去。

“有生命危险吗？”梅森先生喃喃地说。

“去去！没有——不过划破了一点皮。别那么消沉，伙计。鼓起劲儿来！现在我亲自给你去请医生，希望到了早上就可以把你送走。简——”他继续说。

“什么，先生？”

“我得撇下你在这间房子里，同这位先生呆上一小时，也许两小时。要是血又流出来，你就象我那样用海绵把它吸掉。要是他感到头昏，你就把架子上的那杯水端到他嘴边，把盐放在他鼻子底下。无论如何不要同他说话——而——理查德——如果你同她说话，你就会有生命危险，譬如说张开嘴——让自己激动起来——那我就概不负责了。”

这个可怜的男人哼了起来。他看上去好像不敢轻举妄动，怕死，或者害怕别的什么东西，似

乎差不多使他僵硬了。罗切斯特先生这这时已浸染了血的海绵放进我手里，我就照他那样使用起来。

他看了我一会儿，随后说，“记住！——别说话！”便离开了房间。钥匙在锁孔喀喀响起，他远去的脚步声听不到时，我体会到了一种奇怪的感觉。

结果我就在这里三层楼上了，被锁进了一个神秘的小房间。我的周围是暗夜，我的眼皮底下和手下，是白煞煞血淋淋的景象；一个女谋杀犯与我几乎只有一门之隔。是的——那令人胆颤心惊——其余的倒还可以忍受。但是我一想到格雷斯·普尔会向我扑来，便浑身直打哆嗦了。

然而我得坚守岗位。我得看着这鬼一样的面孔——看着这色如死灰、一动不动，不许张开的嘴唇——看着这双时闭时开，时而房间里转来转去，时而盯着我，吓得总是呆滞无光的眼睛。我得把手一次次浸入那盆血水里，擦去淌下的鲜血，我得在忙碌中眼看着没有剪过烛蕊的烛光渐渐暗淡下去，阴影落到了我周围精致古老的挂毯上，在陈旧的大床的帷幔下变得越来越浓重，而且在对面一个大柜的门上奇异地抖动起来——柜子的正面分成十二块嵌板，嵌板上画着十二使徒的头，面目狰狞，每个头单独占一块嵌板，就像在一个框框之中。在这些头颅的上端高悬着一个乌木十字架和殉难的基督。

游移的暗影和闪烁的光芒在四处浮动和跳跃，我一会儿看到了胡子医生路加垂着头；一会儿看到了圣约翰飘动的长发；不久又看到了犹太魔鬼似的面孔，在嵌板上突现出来，似乎渐渐地有了生命，眼看就要以最大的背叛者撒旦的化身出现。

在这种情形下，我既得细听又得静观，细听有没有野兽或者那边窠穴中魔鬼的动静。可是自从罗切斯特先生来过之后，它似乎已被镇住了。整整一夜我只听见过三声响动，三次之间的间隔很长——一次吱吱的脚步声，一次重又响起短暂的狗叫似的声音，一次人的深沉的呻吟声。

此外，我自己也心烦意乱。究竟是一种什么罪行，以人的化身出现，蛰居在这座与世隔绝的大厦里，房主人既无法驱赶也难以制服？究竟是什么不可思议的东西，在夜深人静之时冲将出来，弄得一会儿起火，一会儿流血？究竟是什么畜生，以普通女人的面貌和体态伪装自己，发出的声音一会儿象假冒的魔鬼，一会儿像觅腐尸而食的猛禽？

我俯身面对着的这个人——这个普普通通言语不多的陌生人——他是怎么陷入这个恐怖之网呢？为什么复仇之神要扑向他呢？是什么原因使他在应当卧床安睡的时刻，不适时宜地来这里投宿？我曾听罗切斯特先生在楼下指定了一个房间给他——是什么东西把他带到这儿来的呢？为什么别人对他施暴或者背弃，他此刻却那么俯首贴耳？为什么罗切斯特先生强迫他遮遮掩掩，他竟默默地顺从？这回，罗切斯特先生的一位宾客受到了伤害，上次他自己的性命遭到了恶毒的暗算，而这两件事他竟都秘密掩盖，故意忘却！最后，我看到梅森先生对罗切斯特先生服服贴贴，罗切斯特先生的火暴性子左右着梅森先生半死不活的个性。听了他们之间寥寥几句对话，我便对这个看法很有把握。显然在他们以往的交谈中，一位的消极脾性惯于受另一位的主动精神的影响，既然如此，那么罗切斯特先生一听梅森先生到了，怎么会顿生失望之情呢？为什么仅仅这个不速之客的名字——罗切斯特先生的话足以使他像孩子一样乖乖的——几小时之前，在罗切斯特先生听来，犹如雷电击中了一棵橡树？

呵，当他向我低声耳语：“简，我遭到了打击——我遭到了打击，简，”时，我决不会忘记他的表情和苍白的脸色，我也不会忘记他的胳膊靠在我肩上时，是怎样地颤抖的。使费尔法克斯·罗切斯特坚毅的精神折服，使他强健的体魄哆嗦的，决不是一件小事。

“他什么时候来呢？他什么时候来呢？”我内心呼喊，夜迟迟不去——我这位流着血的病人精神萎顿，又是呻吟，又想呕吐。而白昼和支援都没有来临，我已经一次次把水端到梅森苍白的嘴边，一次次把刺激性的嗅盐递给他。我的努力似乎并没有奏效，肉体的痛苦，抑或精神的痛楚，抑或失血，抑或三者兼而有之，使他的精力衰竭了。他如此呜咽着，看上去那么衰弱、狂乱和绝望，我担心他要死了，而我也许甚至同他连话都没有说过。

蜡烛终于耗尽，熄灭了。灯灭之后，我看到窗帘边缘一缕缕灰色的微光，黎明正渐渐到来。不久我听到派洛特在底下院子里远远的狗窝外吠叫着。希望复活了，而且有了保证。五分钟后，钥匙喀喀一响，锁一开动便预示着我的守护工作解除了。前后没有超过两小时，但似乎比几个星期还长。

罗切斯特先生进来了，同来的还有他去请的外科医生。

“嗨，卡特，千万当心，”他对来说，“我只给你半小时，包扎伤口、捆绑绷带，把病人送到楼下，全都在内。”

“可是他能走动吗，先生？”

“毫无疑问。伤势并不严重，就是神经紧张，得使他打起精神来。来，动手吧。”

罗切斯特先生拉开厚厚的窗幅，掀起亚麻布窗帘，尽量让月光射进屋来。看到黎明即将来临，我既惊讶又愉快。多漂亮的玫瑰色光束正开始照亮东方的天际！随后，罗切斯特先生走近梅森，这时外科医生已经在给他治疗了。

“喂，我的好家伙，怎么样？”他问道。

“我怕她已送了我的命了，”那是对方微弱的回答。

“那里会呢！——拿出勇气来！再过两周你会什么事儿也没有，只不过出了点血。卡特，让他放心，不会有危险的。”

“我可尽心去做，”卡特说，这会儿他已经打开了绷带。“要是早点赶到这儿该多好。他就不会流那么多血了——这是怎么回事？怎么肩膀上的肉撕掉了，而且还割开了？这不是刀伤，是牙齿咬的。”

“她咬了我，”他咕哝着。“罗切斯特从她手里把刀夺下来以后，她就象一头雌老虎那样撕咬着我。”

“你不该退让，应当立即抓住她。”罗切斯特先生说。

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“可是在那种情况下，你还能怎么样呢？”梅森回答道。“啊，太可怕了！”他颤抖着补充道。“而我没有料到，起初她看上去那么平静。”

“我警告过你，”他的朋友回答，“我说——你走近她时要当心。此外，你完全可以等到明天，让我同你一起去。今天晚上就想去见她，而且单独去，实在是够傻的。”

“我想我可以做些好事。”

“你想！你想！不错，听你这么说真让我感到不耐烦。不过你毕竟还是吃了苦头，不听我劝告你会吃够苦头，所以我以后不说了。卡特，快点！快点！太阳马上要出来了，我得把他弄走。”

“马上好，先生。肩膀已经包扎好了。我得治疗一下胳膊上的另一个伤口。我想她的牙齿在这里咬了一下。”

“她吸了血，她说要把我的心吸干，”梅森说。我看见罗切斯特先生打了个哆嗦，那种极其明显的厌恶、恐惧和痛恨的表情，使他的脸扭曲得变了形。不过他只说：

“来吧，不要作声，理查德，别在乎她的废话。不要唠叨了。”

“但愿我能忘掉它，”对方回答。

“你一出这个国家就会忘掉。等你回到了西班牙城你就算她已经死了，给埋了——或者你压根儿就不必去想她了。”

“怎么也忘不了今天晚上！”

“不会忘不了，老兄，振作起来吧。两小时之前你还说你像条死鱼那样没命了，而你却仍旧活得好好的，现在还在说话。行啦：——卡特已经包扎好啦，或者差不多了。一会儿我就让你打扮得整整齐齐。简（他再次进门后还是第一回同我说话），把这把钥匙拿着，下楼到我的卧室去，一直走进梳妆室，打开衣柜顶端的抽屉，取件干净的衬衫和一条围巾，拿到这里来，动作利索些。”

我去了，找到了他说的衣柜，翻出了他指名要的东西，带着它们回来了。

“行啦，”他说，“我要替他梳装打扮了，你到床那边去，不过别离开房间，也许还需要你。”

我按他的吩咐退避了。

“你下楼的时候别人有动静吗，简？”罗切斯特先生立刻问。

“没有，先生，一点声息也没有。”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

“我们会小心地让你走掉，迪克。这对你自己，对那边的可怜虫都比较好。我一直竭力避免曝光，也不想到头来泄露出去。来，卡特，帮他穿上背心。你的毛皮斗篷放在哪儿了？我知道，在这种见鬼的冷天气里，没有斗篷，连一英里都走不了。在你房间里吗？——简，跑下楼到梅森先生的房间去——在我的隔壁——把你看到的斗篷拿来。”

我又跑下去，跑回来，捧回一件皮夹里皮镶边大斗篷。

“现在我还要差你做另一件事，”我那不知疲倦的主人说。“你得再去我房间一趟。幸亏你穿的是丝绒鞋，简！——在这种时候，粗手笨脚的听差绝对不行。你得打开我梳妆台的中间抽屉，把你看到的一个小瓶子和一个小杯拿来，——快！”

我飞也似地去了又来，揣着他要的瓶子。

“干得好！行啦，医生，我要擅自用药了，我自己负责，这瓶兴奋剂，我是从罗马一位意大利庸医那儿搞来的——这家伙，你准会踹他一脚，卡特，这东西不能包治百病，但有时还灵，譬如说现在。简，拿点水来。”

他递过那小玻璃杯，我从脸盆架上的水瓶里倒了半杯水。

“够了——现在用水把瓶口抹一下。”

我这么做了。他滴了十二滴深红色液体，把它递给梅森。

“喝吧，理查德，它会把你所缺乏的勇气鼓起来，保持一小时左右。”

“可是对身体有害吗？——有没有刺激性？”

“喝呀！喝呀！喝呀！”

梅森先生服从了，显然抗拒也无济于事。这时他已穿戴停当，看上去仍很苍白，但已不再血淋淋，脏兮兮。罗切斯特先生让他在喝了那液体后，又坐了三分钟，随后握住他胳膊：

“现在，你肯定站得起来了，”他说，“试试看。”

病人站了起来。

“卡特，扶住他另一个肩膀。理查德，振作起来，往前跨——对啦！”

“我确实感觉好多了”梅森先生说。

“我相信你是这样。嗨，简，你先走，跑在我们前头，到后楼梯去把边门的门栓拉开，告诉在院子里能看到的驿车车夫——也许车子就在院子外头，因为我告诉他别在人行道上驾车，弄得轮子扎扎响——让他准备好。我们就来了。还有，简，要是附近有人，你就走到楼梯下呼一声。”

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这时已是五点半，太阳就要升起。不过我发觉厨房里依然黑洞洞静悄悄的。边门上了栓，我把它打开，尽量不发出声来。院子里一片沉寂。但院门敞开着，有辆驿车停在外面，马匹都套了马具，车夫坐在车座上。我走上前去，告诉他先生们就要来了。他点了点头。随后我小心四顾，凝神静听。清晨一切都在沉睡，处处一片宁静。仆人房间里的门窗都还遮着窗帘，小鸟在白花满枝的果树上啁啾，树枝像白色的花环那样低垂着，从院子一边的围墙探出头来。在紧闭的马厩里，拉车用的马不时蹬几下蹄子，此外便一切都静谧无声了。

这时先生们到了。梅森由罗切斯特先生和医生扶着，步态似乎还算自如，他们搀着他上了车，卡特也跟着上去了。

“照料他一下，”罗切斯特先生对卡特说，“让他呆在你家里，一直到好为止。过一两天我会骑马过来探望他的。理查德，你怎么样了？”

“新鲜空气使我恢复了精神，费尔法克斯。”

“让他那边的窗子开着，卡特，反正没风——再见，迪克。”

“费尔法克斯——”

“噢，什么事？”

“照顾照顾她吧，待她尽量温柔些，让她——”他哭了起来，说不下去了。

“尽我的力量。我已经这么做了，将来也会这么做的，”他答道，关上了驿车的门，车子开走了。

“上帝保佑，统统都了结了！”罗切斯特先生一面说，一面把沉重的院门关上，并拴好。之后，他步履迟缓、心不在焉地踱向同果园接界的墙门。我想他已经用不着我了，准备回房去。却又听见他叫了声“简！”他已经开了门，站在门旁等我。

“来，这里空气新鲜，呆一会儿吧，”他说，“这所房子不过是座监狱，你不这样觉得吗？”

“我觉得是座豪华的大厦，先生。”

“天真烂漫所造成的魔力蒙住了你的眼睛，”他回答说。“你是用着了魔的眼光来看它的，你看不出镀的金是粘土；丝绸帐幔是蛛网；大理石是污秽的石板；上光的木器不过是废木屑和烂树皮。而这里（他指着我们踏进的树叶繁茂的院落）一切都那么纯真香甜。”

他沿着一条小径信步走去，小径一边种着黄杨木、苹果树、梨树和樱桃树；另一边是花坛，长满了各类老式花：有紫罗兰、美洲石竹、报春花、三色堇，混杂着老人蒿，多花蔷薇和各色香草。四月里持续不断晴雨交替的天气，以及紧随的春光明媚的早晨，使这些花草鲜艳无比。太阳正进入光影斑驳的东方，阳光照耀着花满枝头露水晶莹的果树，照亮了树底下幽静的小径。

“简，给你一朵花好吗？”

他采摘了枝头上第一朵初开的玫瑰，把它给了我。

“谢谢，先生。”

“你喜欢日出吗，简？喜欢天空，以及天气一暖和就消失的高高的轻云吗？——喜欢这宁静而温馨的气氛吗？”

“喜欢，很喜欢。”

“你度过了一个奇怪的夜晚，简。”

“是呀，先生。”

“弄得你脸无神色了——让你一个人与梅森呆着，你怕吗？”

“我怕有人会 from 内间走出来。”

“可是我拴了门——钥匙在我口袋里。要是我把一只羊羔——我心爱的小羊——毫无保护地留在狼窝边，那我岂不是个粗心大意的牧羊人了？你很安全。”

“格雷丝·普尔还会住在这儿吗，先生？”

“呵，是的，别为她去烦神了——忘掉这事儿吧。”

“我总觉得只要她在，你就不得安宁。”

“别怕——我会照顾好自己的。”

“你昨晚担心的危险现在没有了吗，先生？”

“梅森不离开英格兰，我就无法担保。甚至他走了也不行。活着对我来说，简，好象是站在火山表面，哪一天地壳都可能裂开，喷出火来。”

“可是梅森先生好像是容易摆布的，你的影响，先生，对他明显起着作用，他决不会同你作对，或者有意伤害你。”

“呵，不错！梅森是不会跟我作对，也不会明明知道而来伤害我——不过，无意之中他可能因为一时失言，即使不会使我送命，也会断送我一生的幸福。”

“告诉他小心从事，先生，让他知道你的忧虑，指点他怎样来避开危险。”

他嘲弄地哈哈大笑起来，一下子抓住我的手，一下子又把它甩掉了。

“要是我能那样做，傻瓜，那还有什么危险可言，顷刻之间就可排除。自我认得梅森以来，我只要对他说‘那么干’，他就会那么办。不过在这件事情上我可不能对他发号施令，不能同他说‘当心伤着我，理查德，’因为我必须将他蒙在鼓里，使他不知道可能会伤着我，现在你似乎大惑不解，我还会让你更莫名其妙呢。你是我的小朋友，对吗？”

“我愿意为你效劳，先生，只要是对的，我都服从你。”

“确实如此，我看你是这么做的。你帮助我，使我愉快——为我忙碌，也与我一起忙碌，干你惯于说的‘只要是对的’事情时，我从你的步履和神采，你的目光和表情上，看到了一种真诚的满足。因为要是我吩咐你去干你心目中的错事，那就不会有步态轻盈的奔忙，干脆利落的敏捷，没有活泼的眼神，兴奋的脸色了。我的朋友会神态恬静面容苍白地转向我说：‘不，先生，那不可能，我不能干，因为那不对。’你会象一颗定了位的星星那样不可改变。噢，你也能左右我，还可以伤害我，不过我不敢把我的弱点告诉你，因为尽管你既老实又友好，你会立刻弄得我目瞪口呆的。”

“要是梅森也像我一样没有什么使你害怕的话，你就安全了。”

“上帝保佑，但愿如此！来，简，这里有个凉棚，坐下吧。”

这凉棚是搭在墙上的一个拱顶，爬满了藤蔓。棚下有一把粗木椅子，罗切斯特先生坐了下来，还给我留出了地方。不过我站在他跟前。

“坐下吧，”他说“这条长凳够两个人坐的，你不会是为要不要坐在我旁边而犹豫不决吧？难道那错了吗，简？”

我坐了下来，等于是对他的回答。我觉得谢绝是不明智的。

“好吧，我的小朋友，当太阳吸吮着雨露——当老园子里的花统统苏醒并开放，鸟儿飞越桑菲尔德为雏鸟送来早餐，早起的蜜蜂开始了它们第一阵劳作时——我要把这件事诉说给你听，你务必要努力把它的设想成自己的。不过先看着我，告诉我你很平静，并不担心我把你留着是错的，或者你呆着是不对的。”

“不，先生，我很情愿。”

“那么好吧，简，发挥你的想象力吧——设想你不再是受过精心培养和教导的姑娘，而是从幼年时代起就是一个放纵任性的男孩。想象你身处遥远的异国，假设你在那里铸成了大错，不管其性质如何，出于什么动机，它的后果殃及你一生，玷污你的生活。注意，我没有说‘犯罪’，不是说流血或是其他犯罪行为，那样的话肇事者会被绳之以法，我用的字是‘错误’。你行为的恶果，到头来使你绝对无法忍受。你采取措施以求获得解脱，非正常的措施，但既不是非法，也并非有罪。而你仍然感到不幸，因为希望在生活的边缘离你而去，你的太阳遇上日蚀，在正午就开始暗淡，你觉得不到日落不会有所改变，痛苦和卑贱的联想，成了你记忆的唯一食品。你到处游荡，在放逐中寻求安逸，在享乐中寻觅幸福——我的意思是沉湎于

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

无情的肉欲——它消蚀才智，摧残情感。在几年的自愿放逐以后，你心力交瘁地回到了家里，结识了一位新知——何时结识，如何结识，都无关紧要。在这位陌生人身上，你看到了很多出类拔萃的品质，为它们你已经寻寻觅觅二十来年，却终不可得。这些品质新鲜健康，没有污渍，没有斑点，这种交往使人复活，催人新生。你觉得好日子又回来了——志更高，情更真。你渴望重新开始生活，以一种更配得上不朽的灵魂的方式度过余生。为了达到这个目的，你是不是有理由越过习俗的藩篱——那种既没有得到你良心的认可，也不为你的识见所赞同的、纯粹因袭的障碍？”

他停了一下等我回答，而我该说什么呢？呵！但愿有一位善良的精灵能给我提示一个明智而满意的答复！空想而已！西风在我周围的藤蔓中耳语，可就是没有一位温存的埃里厄尔^①把它的呼息借我一用，充当说话的媒介。鸟儿在树梢歌唱，它们的歌声虽然甜蜜，却无法让人理解。

罗切斯特先生再次提出了他的问题：

“这个一度浪迹天涯罪孽深重，现在思安悔过的人，是不是有理由无视世俗的偏见，使这位和蔼可亲、通情达理的陌生人，与他永远相依，以获得内心的宁静和生命的复苏？”

“先生，”我回答，“一个流浪者要安顿下来，或者一个罪人要悔改，不应当依赖他的同类。男人和女人都难免一死；哲学家们会在智慧面前踌躇，基督教徒会在德行面前犹豫。要是你认识的人曾经吃过苦头，犯过错误，就让他从高于他的同类那儿，企求改过自新的力量，获得治疗创伤的抚慰。”

“可是途径呢——途径：实施者上帝指定途径。我自己——直截了当地告诉你吧——曾经是个老于世故、放荡不羁、焦躁不安的汉子，现在我相信自己找到了救治的途径，它在于——”他打住了。鸟儿唱个不停，树叶飒飒有声。我几乎惊异于它们不刹住歌声和耳语，倾听中止的袒露。不过它们得等上好几分钟——这沉默延续了好久。我终于抬头去看这位吞吞吐吐的说话人，他也急切地看着我。”

“小朋友，”他说，完全改了口气——脸色也变了，失去了一切温柔和庄重，变得苛刻和嘲弄——“你注意到了我对英格拉姆小姐的柔情吧，要是我娶了她，你不认为她会使我彻底新生吗？”

他猛地站了起来，几乎走到了小径的另一头，走回来时嘴里哼着小调。”

“简，简，”他说着在我跟前站住了，“你守了一夜，脸色都发白了，你不骂我打扰了你的休息？”

“骂你？哪会呢，先生。”

“握手为证。多冷的手指！昨晚在那间神秘的房间门外相碰时，比现在要暖和得多。简，什么时候你再同我一起守夜呢？”

“凡是用得着我的时候，先生。”

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“比方说，我结婚的前一夜。我相信我会睡不着。你答应陪我一起熬夜吗？对你，我可以谈我心爱的人，因为现在你已经见过她，认识她了。”

“是的，先生。”

“她是一个不可多得的人，是不是，简？”

“是的，先生。”

“一个体魄强壮的女人——十足的强壮女人，简。高高的个子，褐色的皮肤，丰满的胸部，迦太基女人大概会有的头发。天哪！登特和林恩在那边的马厩里了！穿过灌木，从小门进去。”

我走了一条路，他走了另一条。只听见他在院子里愉快地说：

“今天早晨梅森比谁都起得早。太阳还没有出来他就走了，我四点起来送他的。”