

CHAPTER XXI

PRESENTIMENTS are strange things! and so are sympathies; and so are signs; and the three combined make one mystery to which humanity has not yet found the key. I never laughed at presentiments in my life, because I have had strange ones of my own. Sympathies, I believe, exist (for instance, between far-distant, long-absent, wholly estranged relatives asserting, notwithstanding their alienation, the unity of the source to which each traces his origin) whose workings baffle mortal comprehension. And signs, for aught we know, may be but the sympathies of Nature with man.

When I was a little girl, only six years old, I one night heard Bessie Leaven say to Martha Abbot that she had been dreaming about a little child; and that to dream of children was a sure sign of trouble, either to one's self or one's kin. The saying might have worn out of my memory, had not a circumstance immediately followed which served indelibly to fix it there. The next day Bessie was sent for home to the deathbed of her little sister.

Of late I had often recalled this saying and this incident; for during the past week scarcely a night had gone over my couch that had not brought with it a dream of an infant, which I sometimes hushed in my arms, sometimes dandled on my knee, sometimes watched playing with daisies on a lawn, or again, dabbling its hands in running water.

It was a wailing child this night, and a laughing one the next: now it nestled close to me, and now it ran from me; but whatever mood the apparition evinced, whatever aspect it wore, it failed not for seven successive nights to meet me the moment I entered the land of slumber.

I did not like this iteration of one idea- this strange recurrence of one image, and I grew nervous as bedtime approached and the hour of the vision drew near. It was from companionship with this baby-phantom I had been roused on that moonlight night when I heard the cry; and it was on the afternoon of the day following I was summoned downstairs by a message that some one wanted me in Mrs. Fairfax's room. On repairing thither, I found a man waiting for me, having the appearance of a gentleman's servant: he was dressed in deep mourning, and the hat he held in his hand was surrounded with a crape band.

'I daresay you hardly remember me, Miss,' he said, rising as I entered; 'but my name is Leaven: I lived coachman with Mrs. Reed when you were at Gateshead, eight or nine years since, and I live there still.'

'Oh, Robert! how do you do? I remember you very well: you used to give me a ride sometimes on Miss Georgiana's bay pony. And how is Bessie? You are married to Bessie?'

'Yes, Miss: my wife is very hearty, thank you; she brought me another little one about two months since- we have three now- and both mother and child are thriving.'

'And are the family well at the house, Robert?'

'I am sorry I can't give you better news of them, Miss: they are very badly at present- in great trouble.'

'I hope no one is dead,' I said, glancing at his black dress. He too looked down at the crape round his hat and replied-

'Mr. John died yesterday was a week, at his chambers in London.'

'Mr. John?'

'Yes.'

'And how does his mother bear it?'

'Why, you see, Miss Eyre, it is not a common mishap: his life has been very wild: these last three years he gave himself up to strange ways, and his death was shocking.'

'I heard from Bessie he was not doing well.'

'Doing well! He could not do worse: he ruined his health and his estate amongst the worst men and the worst women. He got into debt and into jail: his mother helped him out twice, but as soon as he was free he returned to his old companions and habits. His head was not strong: the knaves he lived amongst fooled him beyond anything I ever heard.'

He came down to Gateshead about three weeks ago and wanted missis to give up all to him. Missis refused: her means have long been much reduced by his extravagance; so he went back again, and the next news was that he was dead. How he died, God knows!- they say he killed himself.'

I was silent: the tidings were frightful. Robert Leaven resumed-

'Missis had been out of health herself for some time: she had got very stout, but was not strong with it; and the loss of money and fear of poverty were quite breaking her down. The information about Mr. John's death and the manner of it came too suddenly: it brought on a stroke. She was three days without speaking; but last Tuesday she seemed rather better: she appeared as if she wanted to say something, and kept making signs to my wife and mumbling. It was only yesterday morning, however, that Bessie understood she was pronouncing your name; and at last she made out the words, "Bring Jane- fetch Jane Eyre: I want to speak to her." Bessie is not sure whether she is in her right mind, or means anything by the words; but she told Miss Reed and Miss Georgiana, and advised them to send for you. The young ladies put it off at first; but their mother grew so restless, and said, "Jane, Jane," so many times, that at last they consented. I left Gateshead yesterday: and if you can get ready, Miss, I should like to take you back with me early to-morrow morning.'

'Yes, Robert, I shall be ready: it seems to me that I ought to go.'

'I think so too, Miss. Bessie said she was sure you would not refuse: but I suppose you will have to ask leave before you can get off?'

'Yes; and I will do it now'; and having directed him to the servants' hall, and recommended him to the care of John's wife, and the attentions of John himself, I went in search of Mr. Rochester.

He was not in any of the lower rooms; he was not in the yard, the stables, or the grounds. I asked Mrs. Fairfax if she had seen him;- yes: she believed he was playing billiards with Miss Ingram. To the billiard-room I hastened: the click of balls and the hum of voices resounded thence; Mr. Rochester, Miss Ingram, the two Misses Eshton, and their admirers, were all busied in the game. It required some courage to disturb so interesting a party; my errand, however, was one I could not defer, so I approached the master where he stood at Miss Ingram's side. She turned as I drew near, and looked at me haughtily: her eyes seemed to demand, 'What can the creeping creature want now?' and when I said, in a low voice, 'Mr. Rochester,' she made a movement as if tempted to order me away. I remember her appearance at the moment- it was very graceful and very striking: she wore a morning robe of sky-blue crape; a gauzy azure scarf was twisted in her hair. She had been all animation with the game, and irritated pride did not lower the expression of her haughty lineaments.

'Does that person want you?' she inquired of Mr. Rochester; and Mr. Rochester turned to see who the 'person' was. He made a curious grimace- one of his strange and equivocal demonstrations- threw down his cue and followed me from the room.

'Well, Jane?' he said, as he rested his back against the school-room door, which he had shut.

'If you please, sir, I want leave of absence for a week or two.'

'What to do?- where to go?'

'To see a sick lady who has sent for me.'

'What sick lady?- where does she live?'

for people to see her that distance?'

'Her name is Reed sir- Mrs. Reed.'

'Reed of Gateshead? There was a Reed of Gateshead, a magistrate.'

'It is his widow, sir.'

'And what have you to do with her? How do you know her?'

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'Mr. Reed was my uncle- my mother's brother.'

'The deuce he was! You never told me that before: you always said you had no relations.'

'None that would own me, sir. Mr. Reed is dead, and his wife cast me off.'

'Why?'

'Because I was poor, and burdensome, and she disliked me.'

'But Reed left children?- you must have cousins? Sir George Lynn was talking of a Reed of Gateshead yesterday, who, he said, was one of the veriest rascals on town; and Ingram was mentioning a Georgiana Reed of the same place, who was much admired for her beauty a season or two ago in London.'

'John Reed is dead, too, sir: he ruined himself and half-ruined his family, and is supposed to have committed suicide. The news so shocked his mother that it brought on an apoplectic attack.'

'And what good can you do her? Nonsense, Jane! I would never think of running a hundred miles to see an old lady who will, perhaps, be dead before you reach her: besides, you say she cast you off.'

'Yes, sir, but that is long ago; and when her circumstances were very different: I could not be easy to neglect her wishes now.'

'How long will you stay?'

'As short a time as possible, sir.'

'Promise me only to stay a week-'

'I had better not pass my word: I might be obliged to break it.'

'At all events you will come back: you will not be induced under any pretext to take up a permanent residence with her?'

'Oh, no! I shall certainly return if all be well.'

'And who goes with you? You don't travel a hundred miles alone.'

'No, sir, she has sent her coachman.'

'A person to be trusted?'

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'Yes, sir, he has lived ten years in the family.'

Mr. Rochester meditated. 'When do you wish to go?'

'Early to-morrow morning, sir.'

'Well, you must have some money; you can't travel without money, and I daresay you have not much: I have given you no salary yet. How much have you in the world, Jane?' he asked, smiling.

I drew out my purse; a meagre thing it was. 'Five shillings, sir.' He took the purse, poured the hoard into his palm, and chuckled over it as if its scantiness amused him. Soon he produced his pocket-book: 'Here,' said he, offering me a note; it was fifty pounds, and he owed me but fifteen. I told him I had no change.

'I don't want change; you know that. Take your wages.'

I declined accepting more than was my due. He scowled at first; then, as if recollecting something, he said-

'Right, right! Better not give you all now: you would, perhaps, stay away three months if you had fifty pounds. There are ten; is it not plenty?'

'Yes, sir, but now you owe me five.'

'Come back for it, then; I am your banker for forty pounds.'

'Mr. Rochester, I may as well mention another matter of business to you while I have the opportunity.'

'Matter of business? I am curious to hear it.'

'You have as good as informed me, sir, that you are going shortly to be married?'

'Yes; what then?'

'In that case, sir, Adele ought to go to school: I am sure you will perceive the necessity of it.'

'To get her out of my bride's way, who might otherwise walk over her rather too emphatically? There's sense in the suggestion; not a doubt of it. Adele, as you say, must go to school; and you, of course, must march straight to- the devil?'

'I hope not, sir; but I must seek another situation somewhere.'

'In course!' he exclaimed, with a twang of voice and a distortion of features equally fantastic and

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ludicrous. He looked at me some minutes.

'And old Madam Reed, or the Misses, her daughters, will be solicited by you to seek a place, I suppose?'

'No, sir; I am not on such terms with my relatives as would justify me in asking favours of them- but I shall advertise.'

'You shall walk up the pyramids of Egypt!' he growled. 'At your peril you advertise! I wish I had only offered you a sovereign instead of ten pounds. Give me back nine pounds, Jane; I've a use for it.'

'And so have I, sir,' I returned, putting my hands and my purse behind me. 'I could not spare the money on any account.'

'Little niggard!' said he, 'refusing me a pecuniary request! Give me five pounds, Jane.'

'Not five shillings, sir; nor five pence.'

'Just let me look at the cash.'

'No, sir; you are not to be trusted.'

'Jane!'

'Sir?'

'Promise me one thing.'

'I'll promise you anything, sir, that I think I am likely to perform.'

'Not to advertise: and to trust this quest of a situation to me. I'll find you one in time.'

'I shall be glad so to do, sir, if you, in your turn, will promise that I and Adele shall be both safe out of the house before your bride enters it.'

'Very well! very well! I'll pledge my word on it. You go to-morrow, then?'

'Yes, sir; early.'

'Shall you come down to the drawing-room after dinner?'

'No, sir, I must prepare for the journey.'

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'Then you and I must bid good-bye for a little while?'

'I suppose so, sir.'

'And how do people perform that ceremony of parting, Jane? Teach me; I'm not quite up to it.'

'They say, Farewell, or any other form they prefer.'

'Then say it.'

'Farewell, Mr. Rochester, for the present.'

'What must I say?'

'The same, if you like, sir.'

'Farewell, Miss Eyre, for the present; is that all?'

'Yes.'

'It seems stingy, to my notions, and dry, and unfriendly. I should like something else: a little addition to the rite. If one shook hands, for instance; but no- that would not content me either.'

So you'll do no more than say Farewell, Jane?'

'It is enough, sir: as much good-will may be conveyed in one hearty word as in many.'

'Very likely; but it is blank and cool- "Farewell."'

'How long is he going to stand with his back against that door?'

I asked myself; 'I want to commence my packing.' The dinner-bell rang, and suddenly away he bolted, without another syllable: I saw him no more during the day, and was off before he had risen in the morning.

I reached the lodge at Gateshead about five o'clock in the afternoon of the first of May: I stepped in there before going up to the hall. It was very clean and neat: the ornamental windows were hung with little white curtains; the floor was spotless; the grate and fire-irons were burnished bright, and the fire burnt clear. Bessie sat on the hearth, nursing her last-born, and Robert and his sister played quietly in a corner.

'Bless you!- I knew you would come!' exclaimed Mrs. Leaven, as I entered.

'Yes, Bessie,' said I, after I had kissed her; 'and I trust I am not too late. How is Mrs. Reed?-' Alive

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still, I hope.'

'Yes, she is alive; and more sensible and collected than she was.

The doctor says she may linger a week or two yet; but he hardly thinks she will finally recover.'

'Has she mentioned me lately?'

'She was talking of you only this morning, and wishing you would come: but she is sleeping now, or was ten minutes ago, when I was up at the house. She generally lies in a kind of lethargy all the afternoon, and wakes up about six or seven. Will you rest yourself here an hour, Miss, and then I will go up with you?'

Robert here entered, and Bessie laid her sleeping child in the cradle and went to welcome him: afterwards she insisted on my taking off my bonnet and having some tea; for she said I looked pale and tired. I was glad to accept her hospitality; and I submitted to be relieved of my travelling garb just as passively as I used to let her undress me when a child.

Old times crowded fast back on me as I watched her bustling about- setting out the tea-tray with her best china, cutting bread and butter, toasting a tea-cake, and, between whiles, giving little Robert or Jane an occasional tap or push, just as she used to give me in former days. Bessie had retained her quick temper as well as her light foot and good looks.

Tea ready, I was going to approach the table; but she desired me to sit still, quite in her old peremptory tones. I must be served at the fireside, she said; and she placed before me a little round stand with my cup and a plate of toast, absolutely as she used to accommodate me with some privately purloined dainty on a nursery chair: and I smiled and obeyed her as in bygone days.

She wanted to know if I was happy at Thornfield Hall, and what sort of a person the mistress was; and when I told her there was only a master, whether he was a nice gentleman, and if I liked him. I told her he was rather an ugly man, but quite a gentleman; and that he treated me kindly, and I was content. Then I went on to describe to her the gay company that had lately been staying at the house; and to these details Bessie listened with interest: they were precisely of the kind she relished.

In such conversation an hour was soon gone: Bessie restored to me my bonnet, etc., and, accompanied by her, I quitted the lodge for the hall. It was also accompanied by her that I had, nearly nine years ago, walked down the path I was now ascending. On a dark, misty, raw morning in January, I had left a hostile roof with a desperate and embittered heart- a sense of outlawry and almost of reprobation- to seek the chilly harbourage of Lowood: that bourne so far away and unexplored. The same hostile roof now again rose before me: my prospects were doubtful yet; and I had yet an aching heart. I still felt as a wanderer on the face of the earth; but I experienced firmer trust in myself and my own powers, and less withering dread of oppression. The gaping wound of my wrongs, too, was now quite healed; and the flame of resentment extinguished.

'You shall go into the breakfast-room first,' said Bessie, as she preceded me through the hall; 'the young ladies will be there.'

In another moment I was within that apartment. There was every article of furniture looking just as it did on the morning I was first introduced to Mr. Brocklehurst: the very rug he had stood upon still covered the hearth. Glancing at the bookcases, I thought I could distinguish the two volumes of Bewick's British Birds occupying their old place on the third shelf, and Gulliver's Travels and the Arabian Nights ranged just above. The inanimate objects were not changed; but the living things had altered past recognition.

Two young ladies appeared before me; one very tall, almost as tall as Miss Ingram- very thin too, with a sallow face and severe mien. There was something ascetic in her look, was augmented by the extreme plainness of a straight-skirted, black, stuff dress, a starched linen collar, hair combed away from the temples, and the nun-like ornament of a string of ebony beads and a crucifix. This I felt sure was Eliza, though I could trace little resemblance to her former self in that elongated and colourless visage.

The other was as certainly Georgiana: but not the Georgiana I remembered- the slim and fairy-like girl of eleven. This was a full-blown, very plump damsel, fair as waxwork, with handsome and regular features, languishing blue eyes, and ringleted yellow hair.

The hue of her dress was black too; but its fashion was so different from her sister's- so much more flowing and becoming- it looked as stylish as the other's looked puritanical.

In each of the sisters there was one trait of the mother- and only one; the thin and pallid elder daughter had her parent's Cairngorm eye: the blooming and luxuriant younger girl had her contour of jaw and chin- perhaps a little softened, but still imparting an indescribable hardness to the countenance, otherwise so voluptuous and buxom.

Both ladies, as I advanced, rose to welcome me, and both addressed me by the name of 'Miss Eyre.' Eliza's greeting was delivered in a short, abrupt voice, without a smile; and then she sat down again, fixed her eyes on the fire, and seemed to forget me.

Georgiana added to her 'How d'ye do?' several commonplaces about my journey, the weather, and so on, uttered in rather a drawling tone: and accompanied by sundry side-glances that measured me from head to foot- now traversing the folds of my drab merino pelisse, and now lingering on the plain trimming of my cottage bonnet. Young ladies have a remarkable way of letting you know that they think you a 'quiz' without actually saying the words. A certain superciliousness of look, coolness of manner, nonchalance of tone, express fully their sentiments on the point, without committing them by any positive rudeness in word or deed.

A sneer, however, whether covert or open, had now no longer that power over me it once possessed: as I sat between my cousins, I was surprised to find how easy I felt under the total neglect of the one and the semi-sarcastic attentions of the other- Eliza did not mortify, nor Georgiana ruffle me.

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The fact was, I had other things to think about; within the last few months feelings had been stirred in me so much more potent than any they could raise- pains and pleasures so much more acute and exquisite had been excited than any it was in their power to inflict or bestow- that their airs gave me no concern either for good or bad.

'How is Mrs. Reed?' I asked soon, looking calmly at Georgiana, who thought fit to bridle at the direct address, as if it were an unexpected liberty.

'Mrs. Reed? Ah, mama, you mean; she is extremely poorly: I doubt if you can see her to-night.'

'If,' said I, 'you would just step upstairs and tell her I am come, I should be much obliged to you.'

Georgiana almost started, and she opened her blue eyes wild and wide. 'I know she had a particular wish to see me,' I added, 'and I would not defer attending to her desire longer than is absolutely necessary.'

'Mama dislikes being disturbed in an evening,' remarked Eliza. I soon rose, quietly took off my bonnet and gloves, uninvited, and said I would just step out to Bessie- who was, I dared say, in the kitchen- and ask her to ascertain whether Mrs. Reed was disposed to receive me or not to-night. I went, and having found Bessie and despatched her on my errand, I proceeded to take further measures.

It had heretofore been my habit always to shrink from arrogance: received as I had been to-day, I should, a year ago, have resolved to quit Gateshead the very next morning; now, it was disclosed to me all at once that that would be a foolish plan. I had taken a journey of a hundred miles to see my aunt, and I must stay with her till she was better- or dead: as to her daughters' pride or folly, I must put it on one side, make myself independent of it. So I addressed the housekeeper; asked her to show me a room, told her I should probably be a visitor here for a week or two, had my trunk conveyed to my chamber, and followed it thither myself: I met Bessie on the landing.

'Missis is awake,' said she; 'I have told her you are here: come and let us see if she will know you.'

I did not need to be guided to the well-known room, to which I had so often been summoned for chastisement or reprimand in former days. I hastened before Bessie; I softly opened the door: a shaded light stood on the table, for it was now getting dark. There was the great four-post bed with amber hangings as of old; there the toilet-table, the arm-chair, and the footstool, at which I had a hundred times been sentenced to kneel, to ask pardon for offences by me uncommitted. I looked into a certain corner near, half expecting to see the slim outline of a once dreaded switch which used to lurk there, waiting to leap out imp-like and lace my quivering palm or shrinking neck. I approached the bed; I opened the curtains and leant over the high-piled pillows.

Well did I remember Mrs. Reed's face, and I eagerly sought the familiar image. It is a happy thing that time quells the longings of vengeance and hushes the promptings of rage and aversion. I had left this woman in bitterness and hate, and I came back to her now with no other emotion than a sort

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of ruth for her great sufferings, and a strong yearning to forget and forgive all injuries- to be reconciled and clasp hands in amity.

The well-known face was there: stern, relentless as ever- there was that peculiar eye which nothing could melt, and the somewhat raised, imperious, despotic eyebrow. How often had it lowered on me menace and hate! and how the recollection of childhood's terrors and sorrows revived as I traced its harsh line now! And yet I stooped down and kissed her: she looked at me.

'Is this Jane Eyre?' she said.

'Yes, Aunt Reed. How are you, dear aunt?'

I had once vowed that I would never call her aunt again: I thought it no sin to forget and break that vow now. My fingers had fastened on her hand which lay outside the sheet: had she pressed mine kindly, I should at that moment have experienced true pleasure. But unimpressionable natures are not so soon softened, nor are natural antipathies so readily eradicated. Mrs. Reed took her hand away, and, turning her face rather from me, she remarked that the night was warm. Again she regarded me so icily, I felt at once that her opinion of me- her feeling towards me- was unchanged and unchangeable.

I knew by her stony eye- opaque to tenderness, indissoluble to tears- that she was resolved to consider me bad to the last; because to believe me good would give her no generous pleasure: only a sense of mortification.

I felt pain, and then I felt ire; and then I felt a determination to subdue her- to be her mistress in spite both of her nature and her will. My tears had risen, just as in childhood: I ordered them back to their source. I brought a chair to the bed-head: I sat down and leaned over the pillow.

'You sent for me,' I said, 'and I am here; and it is my intention to stay till I see how you get on.'

'Oh, of course! You have seen my daughters?'

'Yes.'

'Well, you may tell them I wish you to stay till I can talk some things over with you I have on my mind: to-night it is too late, and I have a difficulty in recalling them. But there was something I wished to say- let me see-'

The wandering look and changed utterance told what wreck had taken place in her once vigorous frame. Turning restlessly, she drew the bedclothes round her; my elbow, resting on a corner of the quilt, fixed it down: she was at once irritated.

'Sit up!' said she; 'don't annoy me with holding the clothes fast. Are you Jane Eyre?'

'I am Jane Eyre.'

'I have had more trouble with that child than any one would believe. Such a burden to be left on my hands- and so much annoyance as she caused me, daily and hourly, with her incomprehensible disposition, and her sudden starts of temper, and her continual, unnatural watchings of one's movements! I declare she talked to me once like something mad, or like a fiend- no child ever spoke or looked as she did; I was glad to get her away from the house. What did they do with her at Lowood? The fever broke out there, and many of the pupils died. She, however, did not die: but I said she did- I wish she had died!'

'A strange wish, Mrs. Reed; why do you hate her so?'

'I had a dislike to her mother always; for she was my husband's only sister, and a great favourite with him: he opposed the family's disowning her when she made her low marriage; and when news came of her death, he wept like a simpleton. He would send for the baby; though I entreated him rather to put it out to nurse and pay for its maintenance. I hated it the first time I set my eyes on it- a sickly, whining, pining thing! It would wail in its cradle all night long- not screaming heartily like any other child, but whimpering and moaning. Reed pitied it; and he used to nurse it and notice it as if it had been his own: more, indeed, than he ever noticed his own at that age. He would try to make my children friendly to the little beggar: the darlings could not bear it, and he was angry with them when they showed their dislike. In his last illness, he had it brought continually to his bedside; and but an hour before he died, he bound me by vow to keep the creature. I would as soon have been charged with a pauper brat out of a workhouse: but he was weak, naturally weak. John does not at all resemble his father, and I am glad of it: John is like me and like my brothers- he is quite a Gibson. Oh, I wish he would cease tormenting me with letters for money! I have no more money to give him: we are getting poor. I must send away half the servants and shut up part of the house; or let it off. I can never submit to do that- yet how are we to get on?'

Two-thirds of my income goes in paying the interest of mortgages. John gambles dreadfully, and always loses- poor boy! He is beset by sharpers: John is sunk and degraded- his look is frightful- I feel ashamed for him when I see him.'

She was getting much excited. 'I think I had better leave her now,' said I to Bessie, who stood on the other side of the bed.

'Perhaps you had, Miss: but she often talks in this way towards night- in the morning she is calmer.'

I rose. 'Stop!' exclaimed Mrs. Reed, 'there is another thing I wished to say. He threatens me- he continually threatens me with his own death, or mine: and I dream sometimes that I see him laid out with a great wound in his throat, or with a swollen and blackened face. I am come to a strange pass: I have heavy troubles. What is to be done? How is the money to be had?'

Bessie now endeavoured to persuade her to take a sedative draught: she succeeded with difficulty. Soon after, Mrs. Reed grew more composed, and sank into a dozing state. I then left her.

More than ten days elapsed before I had again any conversation with her. She continued either delirious or lethargic; and the doctor forbade everything which could painfully excite her. Meantime, I got on as well as I could with Georgiana and Eliza. They were very cold, indeed, at first. Eliza would sit half the day sewing, reading, or writing, and scarcely utter a word either to me or her sister.

Georgiana would chatter nonsense to her canary bird by the hour, and take no notice of me. But I was determined not to seem at a loss for occupation or amusement: I had brought my drawing materials with me, and they served me for both.

Provided with a case of pencils, and some sheets of paper, I used to take a seat apart from them, near the window, and busy myself in sketching fancy vignettes, representing any scene that happened momentarily to shape itself in the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of imagination: a glimpse of sea between two rocks; the rising moon, and a ship crossing its disk; a group of reeds and water-floats, and a naiad's head, crowned with lotus-flowers, rising out of them; an elf sitting in a hedge-sparrow's nest, under a wreath of hawthorn-bloom.

One morning I fell to sketching a face: what sort of a face it was to be, I did not care or know. I took a soft black pencil, gave it a broad point, and worked away. Soon I had traced on the paper a broad and prominent forehead and a square lower outline of visage: that contour gave me pleasure; my fingers proceeded actively to fill it with features. Strongly-marked horizontal eyebrows must be traced under that brow; then followed, naturally, a well-defined nose, with a straight ridge and full nostrils; then a flexible-looking mouth, by no means narrow; then a firm chin, with a decided cleft down the middle of it: of course, some black whiskers were wanted, and some jetty hair, tufted on the temples, and waved above the forehead. Now for the eyes: I had left them to the last, because they required the most careful working. I drew them large; I shaped them well: the eyelashes I traced long and sombre; the irids lustrous and large.

'Good! but not quite the thing,' I thought, as I surveyed the effect: 'they want more force and spirit'; and I wrought the shades blacker, that the lights might flash more brilliantly- a happy touch or two secured success. There, I had a friend's face under my gaze; and what did it signify that those young ladies turned their backs on me? I looked at it; I smiled at the speaking likeness: I was absorbed and content.

'Is that a portrait of some one you know?' asked Eliza, who had approached me unnoticed. I responded that it was merely a fancy head, and hurried it beneath the other sheets. Of course, I lied: it was, in fact, a very faithful representation of Mr. Rochester. But what was that to her, or to any one but myself? Georgiana also advanced to look. The other drawings pleased her much, but she called that 'an ugly man.' They both seemed surprised at my skill. I offered to sketch their portraits; and each, in turn, sat for a pencil outline. Then Georgiana produced her album. I promised to contribute a water-colour drawing: this put her at once into good humour. She proposed a walk in the grounds. Before we had been out two hours, we were deep in a confidential conversation: she had favoured me with a description of the brilliant winter she had spent in London two seasons

ago- of the admiration she had there excited- the attention she had received; and I even got hints of the titled conquest she had made. In the course of the afternoon and evening these hints were enlarged on: various soft conversations were reported, and sentimental scenes represented; and, in short, a volume of a novel of fashionable life was that day improvised by her for my benefit. The communications were renewed from day to day: they always ran on the same theme- herself, her loves, and woes. It was strange she never once adverted either to her mother's illness, or her brother's death, or the present gloomy state of the family prospects. Her mind seemed wholly taken up with reminiscences of past gaiety, and aspirations after dissipations to come. She passed about five minutes each day in her mother's sick-room, and no more.

Eliza still spoke little: she had evidently no time to talk. I never saw a busier person than she seemed to be; yet it was difficult to say what she did: or rather, to discover any result of her diligence. She had an alarm to call her up early. I know not how she occupied herself before breakfast, but after that meal she divided her time into regular portions, and each hour had its allotted task.

Three times a day she studied a little book, which I found, on inspection, was a Common Prayer Book. I asked her once what was the great attraction of that volume, and she said, 'the Rubric.' Three hours she gave to stitching, with gold thread, the border of a square crimson cloth, almost large enough for a carpet. In answer to my inquiries after the use of this article, she informed me it was a covering for the altar of a new church lately erected near Gateshead. Two hours she devoted to her diary; two to working by herself in the kitchen-garden; and one to the regulation of her accounts. She seemed to want no company; no conversation. I believe she was happy in her way: this routine sufficed for her; and nothing annoyed her so much as the occurrence of any incident which forced her to vary its clockwork regularity.

She told me one evening, when more disposed to be communicative than usual, that John's conduct, and the threatened ruin of the family, had been a source of profound affliction to her: but she had now, she said, settled her mind, and formed her resolution. Her own fortune she had taken care to secure; and when her mother died- and it was wholly improbable, she tranquilly remarked, that she should either recover or linger long- she would execute a long-cherished project: seek a retirement where punctual habits would be permanently secured from disturbance, and place safe barriers between herself and a frivolous world. I asked if Georgiana would accompany her.

'Of course not. Georgiana and she had nothing in common: they never had had. She would not be burdened with her society for any consideration. Georgiana should take her own course; and she, Eliza, would take hers.'

Georgiana, when not unburdening her heart to me, spent most of her time in lying on the sofa, fretting about the dulness of the house, and wishing over and over again that her aunt Gibson would send her an invitation up to town. 'It would be so much better,' she said, 'if she could only get out of the way for a month or two, till all was over.' I did not ask what she meant by 'all being over,' but I suppose she referred to the expected decease of her mother and the gloomy sequel of funeral rites. Eliza generally took no more notice of her sister's indolence and complaints than if no such

murmuring, lounging object had been before her. One day, however, as she put away her account-book and unfolded her embroidery, she suddenly took her up thus-

'Georgiana, a more vain and absurd animal than you was certainly never allowed to cumber the earth. You had no right to be born, for you make no use of life. Instead of living for, in, and with yourself, as a reasonable being ought, you seek only to fasten your feebleness on some other person's strength: if no one can be found willing to burden her or himself with such a fat, weak, puffy, useless thing, you cry out that you are ill-treated, neglected, miserable. Then, too, existence for you must be a scene of continual change and excitement, or else the world is a dungeon: you must be admired, you must be courted, you must be flattered- you must have music, dancing, and society- or you languish, you die away. Have you no sense to devise a system which will make you independent of all efforts, and all wills, but your own? Take one day; share it into sections; to each section apportion its task: leave no stray unemployed quarters of an hour, ten minutes, five minutes- include all; do each piece of business in its turn with method, with rigid regularity. The day will close almost before you are aware it has begun; and you are indebted to no one for helping you to get rid of one vacant moment: you have had to seek no one's company, conversation, sympathy forbearance; you have lived, in short, as an independent being ought to do. Take this advice: the first and last I shall offer you; then you will not want me or any one else, happen what may. Neglect it-go on as heretofore, craving, whining, and idling- and suffer the results of your idiocy, however bad and insufferable they may be. I tell you this plainly; and listen: for though I shall no more repeat what I am now about to say, I shall steadily act on it. After my mother's death, I wash my hands of you: from the day her coffin is carried to the vault in Gateshead Church, you and I will be as separate as if we had never known each other. You need not think that because we chanced to be born of the same parents, I shall suffer you to fasten me down by even the feeblest claim: I can tell you this- if the whole human race, ourselves excepted, were swept away, and we two stood alone on the earth, I would leave you in the old world, and betake myself to the new.'

She closed her lips.

'You might have spared yourself the trouble of delivering that tirade,' answered Georgiana. 'Everybody knows you are the most selfish, heartless creature in existence: and I know your spiteful hatred towards me: I have had a specimen of it before in the trick you played me about Lord Edwin Vere: you could not bear me to be raised above you, to have a title, to be received into circles where you dare not show your face, and so you acted the spy and informer, and ruined my prospects for ever.' Georgiana took out her handkerchief and blew her nose for an hour afterwards; Eliza sat cold, impassible, and assiduously industrious.

True, generous feeling is made small account of by some, but here were two natures rendered, the one intolerably acrid, the other despicably savourless for the want of it. Feeling without judgment is a washy draught indeed; but judgment untempered by feeling is too bitter and husky a morsel for human deglutition.

It was a wet and windy afternoon: Georgiana had fallen asleep on the sofa over the perusal of a novel; Eliza was gone to attend a saint's-day service at the new church- for in matters of religion

she was a rigid formalist: no weather ever prevented the punctual discharge of what she considered her devotional duties; fair or foul, she went to church thrice every Sunday, and as often on week-days as there were prayers.

I bethought myself to go upstairs and see how the dying woman sped, who lay there almost unheeded: the very servants paid her but a remittent attention: the hired nurse, being little looked after, would slip out of the room whenever she could. Bessie was faithful; but she had her own family to mind, and could only come occasionally to the hall. I found the sick-room unwatched, as I had expected: no nurse was there; the patient lay still, and seemingly lethargic; her livid face sunk in the pillows: the fire was dying in the grate. I renewed the fuel, re-arranged the bedclothes, gazed awhile on her who could not now gaze on me, and then I moved away to the window.

The rain beat strongly against the panes, the wind blew tempestuously: 'One lies there,' I thought, 'who will soon be beyond the war of earthly elements. Whither will that spirit- now struggling to quit its material tenement- flit when at length released?'

In pondering the great mystery, I thought of Helen Burns, recalled her dying words- her faith- her doctrine of the equality of disembodied souls. I was still listening in thought to her well-remembered tones- still picturing her pale and spiritual aspect, her wasted face and sublime gaze, as she lay on her placid deathbed, and whispered her longing to be restored to her divine Father's bosom- when a feeble voice murmured from the couch behind:

'Who is that?'

I knew Mrs. Reed had not spoken for days: was she reviving? I went up to her.

'It is I, Aunt Reed.'

'Who- I?' was her answer. 'Who are you?' looking at me with surprise and a sort of alarm, but still not wildly. 'You are quite a stranger to me- where is Bessie?'

'She is at the lodge, aunt.'

'Aunt,' she repeated. 'Who calls me aunt? You are not one of the Gibsons; and yet I know you- that face, and the eyes and forehead, are quite familiar to me: you are like- why, you are like Jane Eyre!' I said nothing: I was afraid of occasioning some shock by declaring my identity.

'Yet,' said she, 'I am afraid it is a mistake: my thoughts deceive me. I wished to see Jane Eyre, and I fancy a likeness where none exists: besides, in eight years she must be so changed.' I now gently assured her that I was the person she supposed and desired me to be: and seeing that I was understood, and that her senses were quite collected, I explained how Bessie had sent her husband to fetch me from Thornfield.

'I am very ill, I know,' she said ere long. 'I was trying to turn myself a few minutes since, and find I

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cannot move a limb. It is as well I should ease my mind before I die: what we think little of in health, burdens us at such an hour as the present is to me. Is the nurse here? or is there no one in the room but you?' I assured her we were alone.

'Well, I have twice done you a wrong which I regret now. One was in breaking the promise which I gave my husband to bring you up as my own child; the other-' she stopped. 'After all, it is of no great importance, perhaps,' she murmured to herself: 'and then I may get better; and to humble myself so to her is painful.'

She made an effort to alter her position, but failed: her face changed; she seemed to experience some inward sensation- the precursor, perhaps, of the last pang.

'Well, I must get it over. Eternity is before me: I had better tell her.- Go to my dressing-case, open it, and take out a letter you will see there.'

I obeyed her directions. 'Read the letter,' she said.

It was short, and thus conceived:-

'MADAM,- Will you have the goodness to send me the address of my niece, Jane Eyre, and to tell me how she is? It is my intention to write shortly and desire her to come to me at Madeira. Providence has blessed my endeavours to secure a competency; and as I am unmarried and childless, I wish to adopt her during my life, and bequeath her at my death whatever I may have to leave.- I am, Madam, etc., etc.,

'JOHN EYRE, Madeira.'

It was dated three years back.

'Why did I never hear of this?' I asked.

'Because I disliked you too fixedly and thoroughly ever to lend a hand in lifting you to prosperity. I could not forget your conduct to me, Jane- the fury with which you once turned on me; the tone in which you declared you abhorred me the worst of anybody in the world; the unchildlike look and voice with which you affirmed that the very thought of me made you sick, and asserted that I had treated you with miserable cruelty. I could not forget my own sensations when you thus started up and poured out the venom of your mind: I felt fear as if an animal that I had struck or pushed had looked up at me with human eyes and cursed me in a man's voice.- Bring me some water! Oh, make haste!'

'Dear Mrs. Reed,' said I, as I offered her the draught she required, 'think no more of all this, let it pass away from your mind.'

Forgive me for my passionate language: I was a child then; eight, nine years have passed since that

day.'

She heeded nothing of what I said; but when she had tasted the water and drawn breath, she went on thus-

'I tell you I could not forget it; and I took my revenge: for you to be adopted by your uncle, and placed in a state of ease and comfort, was what I could not endure. I wrote to him; I said I was sorry for his disappointment, but Jane Eyre was dead: she had died of typhus fever at Lowood. Now act as you please: write and contradict my assertion- expose my falsehood as soon as you like. You were born, I think, to be my torment: my last hour is racked by the recollection of a deed which, but for you, I should never have been tempted to commit.'

'If you could but be persuaded to think no more of it, aunt, and to regard me with kindness and forgiveness-'

'You have a very bad disposition,' said she, 'and one to this day I feel it impossible to understand: how for nine years you could be patient and quiescent under any treatment, and in the tenth break out all fire and violence, I can never comprehend.'

'My disposition is not so bad as you think: I am passionate, but not vindictive. Many a time, as a little child, I should have been glad to love you if you would have let me; and I long earnestly to be reconciled to you now: kiss me, aunt.'

I approached my cheek to her lips: she would not touch it. She said I oppressed her by leaning over the bed, and again demanded water.

As I laid her down- for I raised her and supported her on my arm while she drank- I covered her ice-cold and clammy hand with mine: the feeble fingers shrank from my touch- the glazing eyes shunned my gaze. 'Love me, then, or hate me, as you will,' I said at last, 'you have my full and free forgiveness: ask now for God's, and be at peace.'

Poor, suffering woman! it was too late for her to make now the effort to change her habitual frame of mind: living, she had ever hated me- dying, she must hate me still.

The nurse now entered, and Bessie followed. I yet lingered half an hour longer, hoping to see some sign of amity: but she gave none.

She was fast relapsing into stupor; nor did her mind again rally: at twelve o'clock that night she died.

I was not present to close her eyes, nor were either of her daughters. They came to tell us the next morning that all was over. She was by that time laid out. Eliza and I went to look at her: Georgiana, who had burst out into loud weeping, said she dared not go. There was stretched Sarah Reed's once robust and active frame, rigid and still: her eye of flint was covered with its cold lid; her brow and strong traits wore yet the impress of her inexorable soul. A strange and solemn object was that corpse to me. I gazed on it with gloom and pain: nothing soft, nothing sweet, nothing pitying, or

hopeful, or subduing did it inspire; only a grating anguish for her woes- not my loss- and a sombre tearless dismay at the fearfulness of death in such a form.

Eliza surveyed her parent calmly. After a silence of some minutes she observed- 'With her constitution she should have lived to a good old age: her life was shortened by trouble.' And then a spasm constricted her mouth for an instant: as it passed away she turned and left the room, and so did I. Neither of us had dropt a tear.

第二十一章

预感真是怪物！还有感应，还有征兆，都无不如此。三者合一构成了人类至今无法索解的秘密。我平生从未讥笑过预感，因为我自己也有过这种奇怪的经历。我相信心灵感应是存在的（例如在关系甚远、久不往来、完全生疏的亲戚之间，尽管彼此疏远，但都认不有着同一个渊源）。心灵感应究竟如何产生，却不是人类所能理解的。至于征兆，也许不过是自然与人的感应。

我还只是一个六岁的小女孩时，一天夜里听见贝茜·利文对马撒·艾博特说，她梦见了一个小孩，而梦见孩子无论对自己还是对亲人，肯定是不祥之兆。要不是紧接着发生的一件事给我留下了难以磨灭的印象，这种说法也许早就淡忘了。第二天贝茜被叫回家去看她咽气的小妹妹。

近来，我常常忆起这种说法和这件事情。因为上个星期，我几乎每晚都在床上梦见一个婴孩。有时抱在怀里哄它安静下来；有时放在膝头摆弄；有时看着它在草地上摸弄雏菊，或者伸手在流水中戏水。一晚是个哭着的孩子，另一晚是个笑着的孩子；一会儿它紧偎着我，一会又逃得远远的。但是不管这幽灵心情怎样，长相如何，一连七夜我一进入梦乡，它便来迎接我。

我不喜欢同一念头反复不去——不喜欢同一形象奇怪地一再出现。临要上床和幻象就要出现的时刻，我便局促不安起来。由于同这位梦中的婴孩形影不离，那个月夜，我听到了一声啼哭后便惊醒过来。第二天下午我被叫下楼去，捎来口信说有人要见我，等候在太敦，而她也许还没等你赶到就死了。更何况你说她把你抛弃了。”

“不错，先生，但那已是很久以前了，而且当时的情况不同。现在要是我无视她的心愿，我会不安心的。”

“你要呆多久？”

“尽量短些，先生。”

“答应我只呆一星期。”

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“我还是不要许诺好，很可能我会不得不食言。”

“无论如何你要回来，在任何情况下都要经得住劝诱，不跟她一辈子住 P 舢&喱小姐，我的太太很健康，谢谢。两个月之前她又给我生了个小家伙——现在我们有三个了——大人和孩子都好。”

“盖茨黑德府全家都好吗，罗伯特？”

“很抱歉，我没法儿给你带来好消息，小姐。眼下他们都很糟——糟糕得很哪。”

“但愿没有人去世了，”我瞥了一下他黑色的丧服说。他也低头瞧了一下围在帽上的黑纱，并回答道：

“约翰先生在伦敦住所去世了，到昨天正好一周。”

“约翰先生？”

“不错。”

“他母亲怎么受得了呢？”

“哎呀你瞧，爱小姐，这不是一桩平平常常的不幸，他的生活非常放荡，最近三年他放纵得出奇，死得也吓人。”

“我从贝茜那儿听到他日子不好过。”

“不好过！不能再坏了，他在一批坏男女中间厮混，糟塌了身体，荡光了家产，负了债，坐了牢。他母亲两次帮他弄出来，但他一出来便又找到了老相识，恢复了旧习气。他的脑子不大健全，那些同他相处的无赖，不择手段欺骗他。三个礼拜之前，他来到盖茨黑德府，要夫人把什么都给他，被夫人拒绝了，因为她的财产早已被他挥霍掉很多。所以又只好返回去，随后的消息便是他死掉了。天知道他是怎么死的！——他们说自杀了。”

我默默无语，这消息着实可怕。罗伯特·利文又往下说：

“夫人自己健康也不好，这已经有好长一段时间了。身体发胖，但并不强壮。她损失了钱，又怕变成穷光蛋，所以便垮了下来。约翰先生的死讯和这种死法来得很突然，害得她中风了。一连三天没有说话。不过上星期二似乎好些了，仿佛想说什么，不住地招呼我妻子，嘴里还叽哩咕噜。直到今天早上贝茜才弄明白，她叨念着你的名字。最后贝茜把她的话搞清楚了，‘把简叫来——去把简·爱叫来，我有话要同她说。’贝茜不敢肯定她的神志是否清醒，这些话有没有意思。不过她告诉了里德小姐和乔治亚娜小姐，向她们建议把你去叫来。起初两位年轻小姐拖拖拉拉，但她们的母亲越来越焦躁不安，而且‘简，简’地叫个不停，最后她们总算同意了。昨天我从盖茨黑德府动身。小姐，要是来得及准备，我想明天一早带你同我一起回去。”

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“是的，罗伯特，我会准备好的，我似乎应当去。”

“我也是这么想的，小姐。贝茜说她可以肯定，你不会拒绝。不过我想，你动身之前得请个假。”

“是呀，我现在就去请假。”我把他领到了仆人室，将他交给约翰的妻子照应，并由约翰亲自过问后，便进去寻找罗切斯特先生了。

他不在底下几层的房间里，也不在院子里，马厩里或者庭园里。我问费尔法克斯太太有没有见到过他——不错，她想他跟英格拉姆小姐在玩台球。我急忙赶到台球房，那里回响着台球的咔嚓声和嗡嗡的说话声。罗切斯特先生、英格拉姆小姐、两位埃希顿小姐和她们的倾慕者正忙着玩那游戏呢。要去打搅这批兴致勃勃的人是需要有勇气的，但我的事儿又不能拖延。于是我便向我主人走去，他站在英格拉姆小姐旁边。我一走近，她便回过头来盛气凌人地看着我，她的眼睛似乎在说，“那个迟迟疑疑的家伙现在要干什么？”当我轻轻地叫了声，“罗切斯特先生”时，她移动了一下，仿佛按捺不住要命令我走开。我还记得她那时的样子——优雅而出众。她穿着一件天蓝的皱纱睡袍，头发上缠着一条青色薄纱头巾。她玩兴正浓，虽然触犯了自尊，但脸上骄矜之气未减。

“那人找你吗？”她问罗切斯特先生。罗切斯特先生回头看看“那人”是谁，作了个奇怪的鬼脸——异样而含糊的表情——扔下了球棒，随我走出了房门。

“怎么啦，简？”他关了房门后，身子倚在门上说。

“对不起，先生，我想请一、两周假。”

“干嘛？——上哪儿去呀？”

“去看一位生了病的太太，是她派人来叫我的。”

“哪位生病的太太？——她住在哪儿？”

“在××郡的盖茨黑德府。”

“××郡？离这儿有一百英里呢！这么远叫人回去看她，这人可是谁呀？”

“她叫里德，先生——里德太太。”

“盖茨黑德的里德吗？盖茨黑德府是有一个叫里德的，是个地方法官。”

“我说的是他的寡妇，先生。”

“那你与她有什么关系？怎么认得她的呢？”

“里德先生是我的舅舅——我母亲的哥哥。”

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“哎呀他是你舅舅！你从来没有跟我说起过他，你总是说你没有亲戚。”

“没有一个亲戚肯承认我，先生。里德先生去世了，他的夫人抛弃了我。”

“为什么？”

“因为我穷，是个包袱，她不喜欢我。”

“可是里德他留下了孩子？——你一定有表兄妹的了？昨天乔治·林恩爵士说起盖茨黑德府一个叫里德的人——他说这人是城里一个十足的无赖，而英格拉姆提到了同一个地方叫乔治亚娜·里德的，一两个社交季节之前，因为美貌，在伦敦大受倾慕。”

“约翰·里德也死了，先生，他毁了自己，也差不多毁了他的家，据说他是自杀的。噩耗传来，他母亲大为震惊，一下子中风了。”

“你能帮她什么忙？胡闹，简？我才不会想跑一百英里去看一个老太太呢，而她也许还没等你赶到就死了。更何况你说她把你抛弃了。”

“不错，先生，但那已是很久以前了，而且当时的情况不同。现在要是我无视她的心愿，我会不安心的。”

“你要呆多久？”

“尽量短些，先生。”

“答应我只呆一星期。”

“我还是不要许诺好，很可能我会不得不食言。”

“无论如何你要回来，在任何情况下都要经得住劝诱，不跟她一辈子住在一起。”

“呵，对！要是一切顺利，我当然会回来的。”

“谁同你一起走？可不能独个儿跑一百英里路呀？”

“不，先生，她派了一个赶车人来。”

“一个信得过的人吗？”

“是的先生，他在那儿已经住了十年。”

罗切斯特先生沉思了一会。“你希望什么时候走？”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

“明天一早，先生。”

“好吧，你得带些钱在身边，出门可不能没有钱。我猜想你钱不多。我还没有付你工资呢。你一古脑儿还有多少钱，简？”他笑着问。

我取出钱包，里面瘪瘪的。“五先令，先生。”他伸手拿过钱包，把里面的钱全倒在手掌上，噗吃一声笑了出来，仿佛是钱使他高兴似的。他立刻取出了自己的皮夹子，“拿着吧，”他说着递给我一张钞票：五十英镑，而他只欠我十五英镑。我告诉他我找不出。

“我不要你找，你知道的。拿着你的工资吧。”

我拒绝接受超过我应得的东西。他先是皱了皱眉，随后仿佛想起了什么似地说：

“行，行！现在还是不要全给你的好。要是你有五十镑，也许就会呆上三个月。十英镑，够吗？”

“够啦，先生，不过现在你欠我五英镑了。”

“那就回来拿吧，你有四十镑存在我这儿。”

“罗切斯特先生，我还是趁这个机会向你提一下另一桩事务吧。”

“事务？我听了很感到好奇。”

“你实际上已经通知我，先生，你很快就要结婚了。”

“是的，那又怎么样？”

“那样的话，先生，阿黛勒该去上学了，可以肯定你会觉察到这样做的必要性。”

“让她别碍着我新娘，不然她会过份地蔑视她。毫无疑问，你这建议有道理。像你说的，阿黛勒得上学，而你，当然，得直奔——魔鬼？”

“希望不是这样，先生。不过我得上什么地方另找个工作。”

“当然！”他大叫道，嗓门里带着鼻音，面部抽搐了一下，表情既古怪又可笑。他打量了我几分钟。

“你会去求老夫人里德，或者她的女儿，也就是那些小姐们给你找个工作，我猜是吧？”

“不，先生，我亲戚们没有那层可以请求帮忙的关系——不过我会登广告。”

“你还可以大步跨上埃及金字塔！”他咆哮着。“你登广告是冒险：但愿我刚才只给了你一镑，而不是十镑。把五镑还给我，简，我要派用处。”

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“我也要派用处，先生，”我回嘴道，双手抓住钱包藏到了背后。“那钱我说什么也不放。”

“小气鬼！”他说，“问你要点儿钱你就拒绝！给我五镑，简。”

“连五镑也不给，先生，五便士也不给。”

“让我就瞧一瞧你的钱吧。”

“不，先生，我不能相信你。”

“简！”

“先生？”

“答应我一件事。”

“先生，凡是自己力所能及的，我都能答应。”

“不要去登广告，你就把找工作的事交给我办吧，到时候我会给你找一个。”

“我很乐意这么做，先生。只要你反过不答应我，在新娘进屋之前我和阿黛勒都太太平平离开这所房子。”

“好呀！好呀！我答应。那你明天动身？”

“是的，先生，一大早。”

“晚饭后你下楼来客厅吗？”

“不来了，先生，我还得收拾行装呢。”

“那你我得暂时告别了？”

“我想是这样，先生。”

“一般人采用怎样的仪式来告别，简？教一教我吧，我不大在行。”

“他们说再见，或者其他喜欢的方式。”

“那就说吧。”

“再见，罗切斯特先生，暂时告别了。”

“我该说什么呢？”

“一样说法，要是你高兴，先生。”

“再见了。简·爱，暂时告别了，就是这些吗？”

“是的。”

“在我看来，你好象有点太吝啬、干巴巴、不友好。我还想要点别的，一点礼仪之外的东西。比如，握握手，不，——那也不能使我满意。那你就只说‘再见’了，简？”

“这够了，先生，这两个亲切的字眼所表达的友好情意，跟许多字里一样多。”“很可能是这样，但这既空洞又冷淡——‘再见’”

“他背靠着门会站多久呢？”我暗自问道，“我要开始收拾了。”晚餐铃响了，他猛地跑开，一句话也没有说。那天我没有再见到他，第二天早晨，他还没起床我就动身走了。

五月一日下午五点左右，我到了盖茨黑德府门房，上府宅之前我先进去瞧瞧。里面十分整洁，装饰窗上挂着小小的白色窗帘，地板一尘不染，炉栅和炉具都擦得锃亮，炉子里燃着明净的火苗。贝茜坐在火炉边上，喂着最小的一个孩子，罗伯特和妹妹在墙角不声不响地玩着。

“哎呀！——我知道你会来的！”我进门时利文太太叫道。

“是呀，贝茜，”我吻了吻她说，“我相信来得还不至于太晚，里德太太怎么样了？——我希望还活着。”

“不错，她还活着，而且更明白事理，更泰然了。医生说她会拖上一周两周，但认为她很难好得了。”

“近来她提到过我吗？”

“今天早上还说起过你呢，希望你能来。不过她现在睡着了，或者说十分钟之前我在楼上的时候，正睡着呢。整个下午她总是那么懒洋洋地躺着，六七点钟左右醒来。小姐，你在这儿歇个把小时，然后我跟你一起上去好吗？”

这时罗伯特进来了，贝茜把睡着的孩子放进摇篮，上去迎接他。随后她硬要我脱掉帽子，用些茶点，说我显得既苍白又疲惫。我很乐意接受她的殷勤招待，顺从地任她脱去了行装，就像儿时任她脱掉衣服一样。

我瞧着她忙乎着，摆好茶盘，拿出最好的瓷器，切好面包和奶油，烤好茶点吐司，不时还轻轻地拍一拍，推一推罗伯特或简，就象小时候对待我一样；于是旧时的记忆又立刻浮上心头。贝茜的性子依然那么急，手脚依然那么轻，容貌依然那么姣好。

茶点备好以后，我正要走近桌子，她却要我坐着别动，用的还是过去那种专断的口气。她说

得让我坐着，在火炉旁招待我。她把一个园园的架子放在我面前，架子上摆了杯子和一盘吐司，完全就像她过去一样，把我安顿在育儿室的椅子上，让我吃一些暗地里偷来的精美食品。我象往昔一样微笑着依了她。

她想知道我在桑菲尔德府是不是愉快，女主人是怎样一个人。当我告诉她只有一个男主人时，她问我那位先生好不好，我是不是喜欢。我告诉她这人长得比较难看，却很有教养，待我很好，我很满意。随后我继续给她描绘那批最近呆在府上寻欢作乐的客人，贝茜对这些细节听得津津有味，她恰巧就爱听这些东西。

谈着谈着一小时很快就过去了，贝茜把帽子等还给我。我由她陪着出了门房上府宅去。差不多九年之前我也是由她这么陪着，从我此刻登上的小径走下来的。一月的某个灰暗阴冷、雾气弥漫的早晨，我带着绝望和痛苦的心情——一种被放逐和几乎是被抛弃的感觉，离开了这个仇视我的家，去寻找罗沃德阴冷的避风港，那个遥远而陌生的地方。此刻我面前又出现了同一个仇视我的家，我的前途未卜，我的心还隐隐作痛。我仍然觉得自己是世间的一个漂泊者，但已更加自信自强，少了一份无可奈何的压抑感。冤屈所撕裂的伤口现在已经愈合，愤怒的火焰已经熄灭。

“你先去餐室，”贝茜领我穿过府宅时说，“小姐们会在那儿的。”

眨眼之间我便进了那个套间。每件家具看上去同我初次介绍给布罗克赫斯特先生的那个早上一模一样。他站过的那块地毯依然盖着壁炉的地面。往书架上一看，我还能认出比尤伊克的两卷本《英国鸟类史》，放在第三个书架上的老地方，以及这部书正上方的《格列佛游记》和《天方夜谭》。无生命的东西依旧，有生命的东西已面目全非。

我面前站着两位年青小姐，一位个子很高，与英格拉姆小姐相仿——同样很瘦，面色灰黄，表情严肃。神态中有着某种禁欲主义的色彩。极度朴实的穿著和打扮，增强了这种色彩。她穿着黑色紧身呢裙，配着上过浆的亚麻领子，头发从两鬓往后梳，戴着修女似的饰物，一串乌木念珠和一个十字架。我觉得这人肯定是伊丽莎，尽管从她那张拉长了的没有血色的脸上，已经很难找到与她昔日模样相似的地方了。

另外一位肯定是乔治亚娜，不过已不是我记忆中身材苗条，仙女一般的十一岁姑娘乔治亚娜了。这是一位已经完全长成、十分丰满的年轻姑娘，有着白得像蜡制品的肤色，端正漂亮的五官，含情脉脉的蓝眼睛，黄色的卷发。她的衣服一样是黑色的，但式样与她姐姐的大不相同——显得飘逸合身得多——看上去很时髦，犹如另一位看上去像位清教徒。

姐妹两人各自都保留了母亲的一个特征——只有一个。瘦削苍白的姐姐有着她母亲的烟晶宝石色眸子，而生气勃勃的妹妹却承继了母亲颧骨和下巴的轮廓——也许要柔和一点，但使她的面容透出一种难以描摹的冷峻，要不然这会是一个十分妖艳美丽的脸蛋。

我一走近她们，两位小姐都立起来迎接我，都用名字“爱小姐”称呼我。伊丽莎招呼我时，嗓音短暂而唐突，没有笑容。随后她便又坐下，加了几句关于旅途和天气之类的寒暄，说话时慢声慢气，还不时侧眼看我，从头打量到脚——目光一会儿落在黄褐色美利奴毛皮外衣的褶缝上，一会停留在我乡间小帽的普通饰物上。年轻小姐们自有一套高明的办法，让你知道她认为你“可笑”而不必说出那两个字来。某种高傲的神态，冷淡与举止和漠然的声调，就

充分表达了她们的情感，而不必借助十足粗鲁的言行。

然而无论是明嘲还是暗讽，对我已失去了一度有过的影响力。我坐在两位表姐妹中间，惊讶地发现自己对一位的完全怠慢，另一位半带嘲弄的殷勤处之泰然——伊丽莎白伤不了我的感情，乔治亚娜也没有使我生气。事实上我有别的事情要想。最近几个月里，我内心被唤起的感情，比她们所能煽起的要强烈得多——所激起的痛苦和欢乐要比她们所能加予和馈赠的要尖锐和激烈得多——她们的神态好歹与我无关。

“里德太太怎么样了？”我立刻问道，镇静地瞧着乔治亚娜，而她认为我这样直呼其名是应当嗤之以鼻的，仿佛这是种出乎意料的冒昧行为。

“里德太太？呵！我已捕牡美骰Γ 肿苾鞞涸 闪 暮(19)櫻∴ 其 硕墓魑牙铄T已裁
ū兀 耆 稿淞恕 难 雍芸膳隆 壹 剿 臀 械蕉 场! ?br>
她变得十分激动。“我想现在还是离开她好。”我对站在床另一边的贝茜说。

“也许是这样，小姐，不过晚上她老是这么说话的——早上比较镇静。”

我立起身来。“站住！”里德太太叫道。“还有件事我要同你说。他威胁我——不断地用他的死或我的死来威胁我。有时我梦见他躺着，喉咙上一个大窟窿，或者一脸鼻青眼肿。我已经闯入了一个奇怪的关口，困难重重。该怎么办呢？钱从哪儿来？”

此刻，贝茜竭力劝她服用镇静剂，费了好大劲才说服她。里德太太很快镇静下来了，陷入了昏睡状态，随后我便离开了她。

十多天过去了我才再次同她交谈。她仍旧昏迷不醒或是恹恹无力。医生禁止一切会痛苦地使她激动的事情。同时，我尽力跟乔治亚娜和伊丽莎白处好关系。说实在她们起初十分冷淡。伊丽莎白会老半天坐着，缝呀，读呀，写呀，对我或是她妹妹不吭一声。这时候乔治亚娜会对着她的金丝雀胡说一通，而不e叁苦夫人醒着呢，”她说，“我已经告诉她你来了。来，看看她还认不认得你。”

我不必由人领往那个熟识的房间，因为以前我总是被叫到那里挨骂和受罚。我赶在贝茜之前轻轻推开了门。桌子上点着一盏有罩的灯，天色已渐渐暗下来。像往昔一样，还是那张琥珀色帐幔罩着四根大床柱的床，还是那张梳妆台，那把安乐椅，那条脚凳。在这条脚凳上，我成百次地被罚跪，请求宽恕我并不存在的过错。我窥视了一下附近的墙角，多少希望看到曾使我胆战心惊的细长木条的影子，过去它总是潜伏在那儿，伺机象魔鬼一般窜出来，鞭挞我颤抖的手掌或往后缩的脖子。我走近床榻，撩开帐幔，俯身向着高高叠起的枕头。

我清楚地记得里德太太的面容，所以急切要寻找那熟悉的形象。令人高兴的是，时光消蚀了复仇的念头，驱散了泛起的愤怒与厌恶之情。过去我带着苦涩与憎恨离开了这个女人，现在又回到了她身边，仅仅是出于对她极度痛苦的同情，出于不念旧恶、握手言和的强烈愿望。

那里是一张熟悉的面孔，依旧那样严厉和无情——难以打动的眼睛和微微扬起的专横独断的眉毛，曾有多少次俯视我，射来恫吓和仇视的目光！此刻重睹那冷酷的线条，我童年时恐怖与悲伤的记忆又统统复活了！然而我还是弯下身子，吻了吻她。她朝我看看。

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“是简·爱吗？”她说。

“是的，里德舅妈。你好吗，舅妈？”

我曾发誓永远不再叫她舅妈。我想此刻忘却和违背自己的誓言并不是罪过。我紧握住她搁在被头外面的手。要是她和气地握一握我的手，此刻我会由衷地感到愉快，但是顽固的本性不是立刻就能感化的，天生的反感也并非轻易就能消除。里德太太抽出了手，转过脸去，说了声夜晚很暖和。她再次冷冰冰地凝视着我，我立刻感觉到她对我的看法——对我所怀的情感——没有改变，也是不可改变的。从她那温情透不过、眼泪冷不了，犹如石头一般的眼睛里，我知道她决心到死都认定我很坏了，因为相信我是好人并不能给她带来愉快，而只会是一种屈辱感。我先是感到痛苦，随后感到恼火，最后便感到决心要制服她——不管她的本性和意志如何顽强，我要压倒她。像儿时一样，我的眼泪涌了上来，但我把它制住了。我将一把椅子挪到床头边，坐了下来，俯身向着枕头。

“你派人叫我来，”我说，“现在我来了，我想呆在这儿看看你的身体情况如何。”

“呵，当然：你看见我女儿了吗？”

“看到了。”

“好吧，那你可以告诉她们，我希望你呆着，直到我能谈谈一些我心里想着的事情。今天夜里已经太晚了，而且回忆起来有困难。不过有些事情我很想说——让我想想看——”

游移的目光和走了样的语调表明，她那一度精力旺盛的肌体，已经元气大伤。她焦躁地翻转身，用被头将自己裹好，我的一只胳膊时正好搁在被角上，把它压住了，她立刻非常恼火。

“坐直了！”她说，“别那么死压着被头让我生气——你是简·爱吗？”

“我是简·爱。”

“谁都不知道这个孩子给我造成了多大麻烦。这么大一个包袱落在我手里——她的性情让人摸不透，她的脾气说发就发，她还总是怪里怪气窥探别人的行动，这些每日每时都给我带来那么多烦恼：我说呀，有一次她同我说话，像是发了疯似的，或者活象一个魔鬼——没有哪个孩子会像她那样说话或看人。我很高兴把她从这里打发走了。在罗沃德他们是怎么对付她的呢？那里爆发了热病，很多孩子都死了。而她居然没有死。不过我说过她死了——但愿她已经死了！”

“一个奇怪的愿望，里德太太，你为什么竟会这么恨她呢？”

“我一直讨厌她母亲，因为她是她丈夫唯一的妹妹，很讨他喜欢。家里因为她下嫁而同她脱离了关系，他坚决反对。她的死讯传来时，他哭得像个傻瓜。他要把孩子去领来，尽管我求他还是送出去让人喂养，付养育费好。我头一回见了便讨厌她——完全是个哭哭啼啼身体有病的东西！她会在摇篮里整夜哭个不停——不像别的孩子那样放开喉咙大哭，而是啾啾呀呀，

哼哼唧唧。里德怜她，亲自喂她，仿佛自己孩子似地关心她。说实在，自己的孩子在那个年纪他还没有那么花心思呢。他要我的孩子跟这个小讨饭友好相处，宝贝们受不了，露出对她的讨厌，里德为此非常生气。他病重的日子，还不住地叫人把她抱到他床边，而临终前一小时让我立誓抚养她。我情愿养育一个从济贫院里出来的小叫化子。可是他软弱，生性软弱。约翰一点不象他父亲，我为此感到高兴。约翰象我，象我的兄弟们——一个十足的吉卜森家的人。呵，但愿他不要老是写信讨钱来折磨我！我已经没有钱可以给他了。我们穷了。我得打发掉一半的佣人，关掉部分房子，或者租出去。我从来不忍心这么做——可是日子怎么过呢？我三分之二的收入都付了抵押的利息。约翰赌得厉害，又总是输——可怜的孩子！他陷进了赌棍窝里。约翰名誉扫地，完全堕落了——他的样子很可怕——我见到他就为他感到丢脸。”

她变得十分激动。“我想现在还是离开她好。”我对站在床另一边的贝茜说。

“也许是这样，小姐，不过晚上她老是这么说话的——早上比较镇静。”

我立起身来。“站住！”里德太太叫道。“还有件事我要同你说。他威胁我——不断地用他的死或我的死来威胁我。有时我梦见他躺着，喉咙上一个大窟窿，或者一脸鼻青眼肿。我已经闯入了一个奇怪的关口，困难重重。该怎么办呢？钱从哪儿来？”

此刻，贝茜竭力劝她服用镇静剂，费了好大劲才说服她。里德太太很快镇静下来了，陷入了昏睡状态，随后我便离开了她。

十多天过去了我才再次同她交谈。她仍旧昏迷不醒或是恹恹无力。医生禁止一切会痛苦地使她激动的事情。同时，我尽力跟乔治亚娜和伊丽莎处好关系。说实在她们起初十分冷淡。伊丽莎会老半天坐着，缝呀，读呀，写呀，对我或是她妹妹不吭一声。这时候乔治亚娜会对着她的金丝雀胡说一通，而不理睬我。但我决计不显出无所事事，或是不知如何消磨时光的样子。我带来了绘画工具，既使自己有事可做，又有了消遣。

我拿了画笔和画纸，远离她们，在一个靠窗的地方坐下，忙乎着画一些幻想的人头象，表现瞬息万变万花筒似的想象世界中刹那间出现的景象。例如，两块岩石之间的一片大海，初升的月亮，横穿月亮的一条船，一丛芦苇和景象，一个仙女头戴荷花从中探出头来，一个小精灵坐在一圈山楂花下的篱雀窝里。

一天早晨，我开始画一张脸，至于一张什么样的脸，我既不在乎，也不知道。我取了一支黑色软铅笔，把笔尖留得粗粗的，画了起来。我立刻在纸上勾勒出了一个又宽又突的前额和下半个脸方方正正的轮廓。这个外形使我感到愉快，我的手指赶忙填上了五官，在额头下得画两道平直显眼的眉毛，下面自然是线条清晰的鼻子，笔直的鼻梁和大大的鼻孔，随后是看上去很灵活长得不小的嘴巴，再后是坚毅的下巴，中间有一个明显的裂痕。当然还缺黑黑的络腮胡，以及乌黑的头发，一簇簇长在两鬓和波浪似地生有前额。现在要画眼睛了，我把它们留到最后，因为最需要小心从事。我把眼睛画得很大，形状很好，长而浅黑的睫毛，大而发亮的眼珠。“行！不过不完全如此，”我一边观察效果，一边思忖道：“它们还缺乏量和神采。”我把暗处加深，好让明亮处更加光芒闪烁——巧妙地抹上一笔两笔，便达到了这种效果。这样，在我的目光下就显出了一位朋友的面孔，那几位小姐对我不理睬又有什么外系呢？我瞧着它，对着逼真的画面微笑，全神贯注，心满意足。

“那是你熟人的一幅肖像吗，”伊丽莎问，她已悄悄地走近了我。我回答说，这不过是凭空想象的一个头，一面赶忙把它塞到其它画纸底下。当然我扯了个谎，其实那是对罗切斯特先生的真实刻划。但那跟她，或是除我之外随便哪个人有什么关系呢？乔治亚娜也溜过来看看。她对别的画都很满意，却把那一幅说成是“一个丑陋的男人”，她们两个对我的技艺感到吃惊，我表示要为她们画肖像，两人轮流坐着让我打铅笔草图。随后乔治亚娜拿出了她的画册。我答应画一幅水彩画让她收进去，她听了情绪立刻好转，建议到庭园里去走走，出去还不到两个小时，我们便无话不说了。她向我描述了两个社交季节之前在伦敦度过的辉煌的冬天——如何受到倾慕——如何引人注目，甚至暗示还征服了一些贵族。那天下午和晚上，她把一些暗示又加以扩充，转述各类情意绵绵的交谈，描绘了不少多愁善感的场面。总之那天她为我临时编造了一部时髦生活的小说。谈话一天天继续着，始终围绕着一个主题——她自己，她的爱情和苦恼。很奇怪，她一次也没有提到母亲的病和哥哥的死，也没有说起眼下一家的暗淡前景。她似乎满脑子都是对昔日欢乐的回忆和对未来放荡的向往，每天在她母亲的病榻前只呆上五分钟。

伊丽莎依然不大开口。显然她没有工夫说话，我从来没有见过一位象她看上去那么忙的人，可是很难说她在忙些什么，或者不如说很难发现她忙碌的结果。她有一个闹钟催她早起。我不知道早饭前她干些什么，但饭后她把自己的时间分成固定的部分，每个小时都有规定的任务。她一天三次研读一本小书，我仔细一看，原来是本祈祷书。一次我问她，书中最吸引人的是什么，她说“仪式指示。”三个小时用于缝纫，用金线给一块方形红布上边，这块布足有地毯那么大。我问起它的用途，她告诉我是盖在一个新教堂祭坛上的罩布，这个教堂新近建于盖茨黑德附近。二个小时用来写日记，二个小时在菜园子里劳动，一个小时用来算帐。她似乎不需要人作伴，也不需要交谈。我相信她一定自得其乐，满足于这么按部就班地行事，而没有比那种偶发事件迫使她改变钟表般准确的规律性，更使她恼火的了。

一天晚上，她比往常话要多些，告诉我约翰的行为和家庭濒临毁灭的威胁是她烦恼的根源。但她说现在已经静下心来，下定了决心。她已注意保住自己的财产，一旦她母亲去世——她冷静地说，母亲已不可能康复或者拖得很久——她将实现自己盘算已久的计划，寻找一个归隐之处，使自己一板一眼的习惯不受干扰，用一个安全的屏障把她和浮华的世界隔开。我问她，乔治亚娜是不是会陪伴她。

当然不会，乔治亚娜和她没有共同之处，从来没有过。无论如何她不能同她作伴，让自己受累。乔治亚娜应当走她的路，而她伊丽莎也会走自己的路。

乔治亚娜不向我吐露心声的时候大都躺在沙发上，为家里的乏味而发愁，一再希望吉卜森舅妈会寄来邀请信，请她上城里去。她说要是她能避开一、两个月，等一切都过去，那是再好不过了。我并没有问她“一切都过去”的含意，但我猜想她指的是意料中母亲的死，以及阴沉的葬礼余波。伊丽莎对妹妹的懒散和怨言并不在意，仿佛她面前并不存在这个叽叽咕咕、无所事事的家伙。不过有一天，她放好帐册，打开绣花活计时，突然责备起她来：

“乔治亚娜，在地球上过日子的动物中，没有比你更爱虚荣更荒唐了。你没有权利生下来，因为你空耗了生命。你没有象一个有理智的人该做的那样，为自己生活，安分守己地生活，靠自己生活，而是仰仗别的人力量来支撑你的软弱。要是找不到谁愿意背这个肥胖、娇弱、自负、无用的包袱，你会大叫，说人家亏待了你，冷落了你，使你痛苦不堪。而且，在你看

来，生活该是变化无穷，激动非凡的一幕，不然世界就是监狱。你要人家爱慕你，追求你，恭维你——你得有音乐、舞会和社交活动——要不你就神衰力竭，一天天憔悴。难道你就没有头脑想出一套办法来，不依赖别人的努力，别人的意志，而只靠你自己？以一天为例，你就把它分成几份，每份钟规定好任务，全部时间都包括在内，不留一刻钟、十分钟、五分钟的零星空闲时间。干每一件事都应当井然有序，有条不紊。这样，一天的日子，你几乎没有觉察它开始，就已经结束了。你就不欠谁的情，帮你消磨片刻空闲。你不必找人作伴和交谈，不必请求别人的同情和忍耐。总之，你象一个独立的人该生活的那样生活。听从我的劝告吧，我给你的第一个，也是最后一个忠告。那样，无论出什么事，你就不需要我，也不需要别人了。要是你置之不理——一意孤行，还是那样想入非非，叽叽咕咕，懒懒散散，你就得吞下你愚蠢行为的苦果，不管怎么糟糕，怎么难受。我要明白告诉你，你好好听着。尽管我不会再重复我要说的话，但我会坚定不移地去做。母亲一死，你的事我就撒手不管了。从她的棺材抬进盖茨黑德教堂墓地那天起，你我便彼此分手，仿佛从来就是陌路人。你不要以为我们碰巧摊着同一个爹娘，我会让你以丝毫站不住脚的理由拖累我。我可以告诉你——就是除了你我，整个人类毁灭了，独有我们两人站在地球上，我也会让你留在旧世界，自己奔往新世界去。”

她闭了嘴。

“你还是少费心思发表长篇大论了，”乔治亚娜回答说，“谁都知道你是世上最自私、最狠心的家伙，我明白你对我有刻骨仇恨，我掌握真凭实据。你在埃德温·维尔勋爵的事情上，对我耍了花招。你不能容忍我爬得比你高，获得贵族爵位，被你连面都不敢露的社交圈子所接纳。因此你暗中监视，进行密告，永远毁了我的前程。”乔治亚娜掏出手帕，擤了一小时鼻子，伊丽莎冷冷地坐着，无动于衷，顾自忙着自己的活儿。

确实，宽厚的感情不被有些人所重视。而这儿的两种性格，却因为少了它，一种刻薄得叫人难以容忍，而另一种枯燥乏味得可鄙。没有理智的感情固然淡而无味，但缺乏感情的理智也太苦涩粗糙，叫人难以下咽。

一个风雨交加的下午，乔治亚娜看着一部小说，便倒在沙发上睡着了。伊丽莎已经去新教堂参加万圣节仪式——因为在宗教方面，她十分看重形式，风雨无阻，按时履行着心中虔诚的义务。不论天好天坏，每个星期上教堂三次，平时如有祷告要做，也一样频繁。

我想起要上楼去，看看这个生命垂危的女人病情如何。她躺在那里，几乎没有人照料，佣人们化的心思时多时少；雇佣来的护士，因为没有人看管，想溜就溜。贝茜固然忠心耿耿，但也有自己的家要照应，只能偶尔到府上来。不出所料，我发觉病室里没有人照看，护士不在。病人静静地躺着，似乎在昏睡，铅灰色的脸陷入了枕头，炉中的火将灭未灭。我添了燃料，重新收拾了床单，眼睛盯了她一会儿。这时，她已无法盯我了。随后我走开去到了窗前。

大雨敲窗，狂风呼啸。“那个躺在那儿的人，”我想，“会很快离开人世间风风雨雨的战场。此刻，灵魂正挣扎着脱离物质的躯壳，一旦解脱，将会到哪里去呢？”

在思索这番伟大的秘密时，我想起了海伦，回忆起她临终时说的话——她的信仰——她的关于游魂平等的信条。心里仍倾听着记忆犹新的声调——仍然描摹着她苍白而脱俗的容

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

貌，消瘦的脸庞和崇高的目光。那时她平静地躺在临终的病榻上，低声地倾吐着要回到神圣的天父怀抱的渴望。——正想着，我身后的床上响起了微弱的响声：“是谁呀？”

我知道里德太太已经几天没有说话了，难道她醒过来了？我走到她跟前。

“是我，里德舅妈。”

“谁——我？”她回答。“你是谁？”她诧异地看着我，颇有些吃惊，但并没有失去控制。“我完全不认识你——贝茜呢？”

“她在门房，舅妈。”

“舅妈！”她重复了一声。“谁叫我舅妈来着？你不是吉卜森家的人，不过我知道你——那张面孔，那双眼睛和那个前额，我很熟悉。你像——唉，你像简·爱！”

我没有吭声，怕一说出我的身份会引起某种震惊，

“可是，”她说，“恐怕这是个错觉，我的想法欺骗了我。我很想看看简·爱，我想象出跟她相似的地方，但实际并不存在，况且八年当中她的变化一定很大，”这时我和气地让她放心，我就是她设想中的人。见她明白我的意思，头脑也还镇静，我便告诉她，贝茜如何派丈夫把我从桑菲尔德叫来。”

“我的病很重，这我知道，”没有多久她说“几分钟之前，我一直想翻身，却发觉四肢都动弹不得。也许我没有死就该安下心来。健康时我们想得很少的事，在眼下这样的时刻，却成了我沉重的负担。护士在吗？房间里除了你，没有别人吗？”

我让她放心只有我们两个。

“唉，我两次做了对不起你的事，现在很懊悔。一次是违背了我向丈夫许下的，把你当作自己孩子抚养成人的诺言。另一次——”她停住了。“也许这毕竟无关紧要。”她喃喃地自言自语说：“那样我也许会好过些，但是，向她低声下气实在使我痛苦。”

她挣扎着要改变一下她的位置，但没有成功。她的脸变了形。她似乎经历着某种内心的冲动——也许是最后一阵痛苦的先兆。

“唉，我得了却它。永恒就在前头，我还是告诉她好。走到我化妆盒跟前，打开它，把你看到的一封信拿出来。”

我听从她的吩咐。“把信读一读，”她说。

这封信很短，内中写道：

夫人：

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

烦请惠寄我侄女简·爱的地址，并告知其近况。我欲立即去信，盼她来马德里我处。皇天不负有心之人，目前我家境富裕。我未娶无后，甚望有生之年将她收为养女，并在死后将全部财产馈赠予她。

顺致敬意。

约翰·爱谨启于马德里

写信的时间是三年之前。

“为什么我从来没有听说过这回事？”我问。

“因为我对你的厌恶已经根深蒂固，因此不愿意帮助你发迹。我忘不了你对我的举动，简——你一度冲我而发的火气；你说你在世上最讨厌我时的腔调；你声言一想起我就使你恶心、我待你很冷酷时丝毫不像孩子的神情与口气。我也忘不了你惊跳起来，把心头的一腔毒气喷吐出来时，我自己的感受。我觉得害怕，仿佛我打过推过的动物，用人一样的目光瞧着我，用人一样的嗓门儿，诅咒我——拿些水来！唉，快点！”

“亲爱的里德太太，”我把她要的水端给她时说，“别再想这些了，你就忘了它吧，原谅我那些激烈的言词，当时我还是个孩子，现在八、九年已经过去了。”

她对我说的话毫不理会。不过喝了水，透过气来后，她又继续说：

“我告诉你我忘不了这些，并且报复了。任你由叔叔领养，安安稳稳舒舒服服过日子，我是不能忍受的。我写信给他，说是很遗憾使他失望了，但简·爱已经去世，在罗沃德死于斑疹伤寒。现在随你怎么办吧，写封信否认我的说法——尽快揭露我的谎话。我想，你生来就是我的冤家。只剩一口气了，还让我叨念过去的事来折磨我，要不是因为你，我是不会经不住诱惑，去干那种事的。”

“但愿你能听从劝告，忘掉这些，舅妈，宽容慈祥地对待我——”

“你的脾气很糟，”她说，“这种性格我到今天都难以理解，九年中，不管怎样对待你，你都耐着性子，默默无声，而到了第十年，却突然发作，火气冲天，我永远无法理解。”

“我的脾性并不是象你想的那么坏，我易动感情，却没有报复心。小时候，有很多次，只要你允许，我很愿意爱你。现在我诚恳希望同你和好。亲亲我吧，舅妈。”

我把脸颊凑向她嘴唇。她不愿碰它，还说我倚在床上压着她了，而且再次要水喝。我让她躺下时——因为我扶起她，让她靠着我的胳膊喝水——把手放在她冷冰冰，湿腻腻的手上，她衰竭无力的手指缩了回去了——迟滞的眼睛避开了我的目光。

“那么，爱我也好，恨我也好，随你便吧，”我最后说，“反正你已经彻底得到了我的宽恕。现在你去请求上帝的宽恕，安息吧。”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

可怜而痛苦的女人！现在再要努力改变她惯有的想法，已经为时太晚了。活着的时候，她一直恨我——临终的时候，她一定依然恨我。

此刻，护士进来了，后面跟着贝茜。不过我又呆了半小时，希望看到某种和解的表情，但她没有任何显露。她很快进入昏迷状态，没有再清醒过来。当晚十二点她去世了。我没有在场替她合上眼睛，她的两个女儿也不在。第二天早上她们来告诉我，一切都过去了。那时她的遗体已等候入殓，伊丽莎白和我都去瞻仰，乔治亚娜嚎啕大哭，说是不敢去看。那里躺着萨拉·里德的躯体，过去是那么强健而充满生机，如今却僵硬不动了。冰冷的眼皮遮没了她无情的眸子，额头和独特的面容仍带着她冷酷灵魂的印记。对我来说，那具尸体既奇怪而又庄严。我忧伤而痛苦地凝视着它，没有激起温柔、甜蜜、惋惜，或是希望、压抑的感觉，而只是一种为她的不幸——不是我的损失——而产生的揪心的痛苦，一种害怕这么死去，心灰意冷、欲哭无泪的沮丧。

伊丽莎白镇定地打量着她母亲。沉默了几分钟后，她说：

“按她那样的体质，她本可以活到很老的年纪，烦恼缩短了她的寿命。”接着她的嘴抽搐了一下，过后，她转身离开了房间，我也走了。我们两人没有流一滴眼泪。