

CHAPTER XXIV

AS I rose and dressed, I thought over what had happened, and wondered if it were a dream. I could not be certain of the reality till I had seen Mr. Rochester again, and heard him renew his words of love and promise.

While arranging my hair, I looked at my face in the glass, and felt it was no longer plain: there was hope in its aspect and life in its colour; and my eyes seemed as if they had beheld the fount of fruition, and borrowed beams from the lustrous ripple. I had often been unwilling to look at my master, because I feared he could not be pleased at my look; but I was sure I might lift my face to his now, and not cool his affection by its expression. I took a plain but clean and light summer dress from my drawer and put it on: it seemed no attire had ever so well become me, because none had I ever worn in so blissful a mood.

I was not surprised, when I ran down into the hall, to see that a brilliant June morning had succeeded to the tempest of the night; and to feel, through the open glass door, the breathing of a fresh and fragrant breeze. Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy. A beggar-woman and her little boy- pale, ragged objects both- were coming up the walk, and I ran down and gave them all the money I happened to have in my purse- some three or four shillings: good or bad, they must partake of my jubilee. The rooks cawed, and blither birds sang; but nothing was so merry or so musical as my own rejoicing heart.

Mrs. Fairfax surprised me by looking out of the window with a sad countenance, and saying gravely- 'Miss Eyre, will you come to breakfast?' During the meal she was quiet and cool: but I could not undeceive her then. I must wait for my master to give explanations; and so must she. I ate what I could, and then I hastened upstairs. I met Adele leaving the schoolroom.

'Where are you going? It is time for lessons.'

'Mr. Rochester has sent me away to the nursery.'

'Where is he?'

'In there,' pointing to the apartment she had left; and I went in, and there he stood.

'Come and bid me good-morning,' said he. I gladly advanced; and it was not merely a cold word now, or even a shake of the hand that I received, but an embrace and a kiss. It seemed natural: it seemed genial to be so well loved, so caressed by him.

'Jane, you look blooming, and smiling, and pretty,' said he: 'truly pretty this morning. Is this my pale, little elf? Is this my mustard-seed? This little sunny-faced girl with the dimpled cheek and rosy lips; the satin-smooth hazel hair, and the radiant hazel eyes?' (I had green eyes, reader; but you must excuse the mistake: for him they were new-dyed, I suppose.)

'It is Jane Eyre, sir.'

'Soon to be Jane Rochester,' he added: 'in four weeks, Janet; not a day more. Do you hear that?'

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I did, and I could not quite comprehend it: it made me giddy. The feeling, the announcement sent through me, was something stronger than was consistent with joy- something that smote and stunned: it was, I think, almost fear.

'You blushed, and now you are white, Jane: what is that for?'

'Because you gave me a new name- Jane Rochester; and it seems so strange.'

'Yes, Mrs. Rochester,' said he; 'young Mrs. Rochester- Fairfax Rochester's girl-bride.'

'It can never be, sir; it does not sound likely. Human beings never enjoy complete happiness in this world. I was not born for a different destiny to the rest of my species: to imagine such a lot befalling me is a fairy tale- a day-dream.'

'Which I can and will realise. I shall begin to-day. This morning I wrote to my banker in London to send me certain jewels he has in his keeping,- heirlooms for the ladies of Thornfield. In a day or two I hope to pour them into your lap: for every privilege, every attention shall be yours that I would accord a peer's daughter, if about to marry her.'

'Oh, sir!- never mind jewels! I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds unnatural and strange: I would rather not have them.'

'I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead,- which it will become: for nature, at least, has stamped her patent of nobility on this brow, Jane; and I will clasp the bracelets on these fine wrists, and load these fairy-like fingers with rings.'

'No, no, sir! think of other subjects, and speak of other things, and in another strain. Don't address me as if I were a beauty; I am your plain, Quakerish governess.'

'You are a beauty in my eyes, and a beauty just after the desire of my heart,- delicate and aerial.'

'Puny and insignificant, you mean. You are dreaming, sir,- or you are sneering. For God's sake, don't be ironical!'

'I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty, too,' he went on, while I really became uneasy at the strain he had adopted, because I felt he was either deluding himself or trying to delude me. 'I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love best with a priceless veil.'

'And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket- a jay in borrowed plumes. I would as soon see you, Mr. Rochester, tricked out in stage-trappings, as myself clad in a court-lady's robe; and I don't call you handsome, sir, though I love you most dearly: far too dearly to flatter you. Don't flatter me.'

He pursued his theme, however, without noticing my deprecation.

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'This very day I shall take you in the carriage to Millcote, and you must choose some dresses for yourself. I told you we shall be married in four weeks. The wedding is to take place quietly, in the church down below yonder; and then I shall waft you away at once to town. After a brief stay there, I shall bear my treasure to regions nearer the sun: to French vineyards and Italian plains; and she shall see whatever is famous in old story and in modern record: she shall taste, too, of the life of cities; and she shall learn to value herself by just comparison with others.'

'Shall I travel?- and with you, sir?'

'You shall sojourn at Paris, Rome, and Naples: at Florence, Venice, and Vienna: all the ground I have wandered over shall be re-trodden by you: wherever I stamped my hoof, your sylph's foot shall step also.'

Ten years since, I flew through Europe half mad; with disgust, hate, and rage as my companions: now I shall revisit it healed and cleaned, with a very angel as my comforter.'

I laughed at him as he said this. 'I am not an angel,' I asserted; 'and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself. Mr. Rochester, you must neither expect nor exact anything celestial of me- for you will not get it, any more than I shall get it of you: which I do not at all anticipate.'

'What do you anticipate of me?'

'For a little while you will perhaps be as you are now,- a very little while; and then you will turn cool; and then you will be capricious; and then you will be stern, and I shall have much ado to please you: but when you get well used to me, you will perhaps like me again,- like me, I say, not love me. I suppose your love will effervesce in six months, or less. I have observed in books written by men, that period assigned as the farthest to which a husband's ardour extends. Yet, after all, as a friend and companion, I hope never to become quite distasteful to my dear master.'

'Distasteful! and like you again! I think I shall like you again, and yet again: and I will make you confess I do not only like, but love you- with truth, fervour, constancy.'

'Yet are you not capricious, sir?'

'To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts- when they open to me a perspective of flatness, triviality, and perhaps imbecility, coarseness, and ill-temper: but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break- at once supple and stable, tractable and consistent- I am ever tender and true.'

'Had you ever experience of such a character, sir? Did you ever love such an one?'

'I love it now.'

'But before me: if I, indeed, in any respect come up to your difficult standard?'

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'I never met your likeness. Jane, you please me, and you master me- you seem to submit, and I like the sense of pliancy you impart; and while I am twining the soft, silken skein round my finger, it sends a thrill up my arm to my heart. I am influenced- conquered; and the influence is sweeter than I can express; and the conquest I undergo has a witchery beyond any triumph I can win. Why do you smile, Jane?

What does that inexplicable, that uncanny turn of countenance mean?'

'I was thinking, sir (you will excuse the idea; it was involuntary), I was thinking of Hercules and Samson with their charmers-'

'You were, you little elfish-'

'Hush, sir! You don't talk very wisely just now; any more than those gentlemen acted very wisely. However, had they been married, they would no doubt by their severity as husbands have made up for their softness as suitors; and so will you, I fear. I wonder how you will answer me a year hence, should I ask a favour it does not suit your convenience or pleasure to grant.'

'Ask me something now, Janet- the least thing: I desire to be entreated-'

'Indeed I will sir; I have my petition all ready.'

'Speak! But if you look up and smile with that countenance, I shall swear concession before I know to what, and that will make a fool of me.'

'Not at all, sir; I ask only this: don't send for the jewels, and don't crown me with roses: you might as well put a border of gold lace round that plain pocket-handkerchief you have there.'

'I might as well "gild refined gold." I know it: your request is granted then- for the time. I will remand the order I despatched to my banker. But you have not yet asked for anything; you have prayed a gift to be withdrawn: try again.'

'Well, then, sir, have the goodness to gratify my curiosity, which is much piqued on one point.'

He looked disturbed. 'What? what?' he said hastily. 'Curiosity is a dangerous petition: it is well I have not taken a vow to accord every request-'

'But there can be no danger in complying with this, sir.'

'Utter it, Jane: but I wish that instead of a mere inquiry into, perhaps, a secret, it was a wish for half my estate.'

'Now, King Ahasuerus! What do I want with half your estate? Do you think I am a Jew-usurer, seeking good investment in land? I would much rather have all your confidence. You will not exclude me from your confidence if you admit me to your heart?'

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'You are welcome to all my confidence that is worth having, Jane; but for God's sake, don't desire a useless burden! Don't long for poison- don't turn out a downright Eve on my hands!'

'Why not, sir? You have just been telling me how much you liked to be conquered, and how pleasant over-persuasion is to you. Don't you think I had better take advantage of the confession, and begin and coax and entreat- even cry and be sulky if necessary- for the sake of a mere essay of my power?'

'I dare you to any such experiment. Encroach, presume, and the game is up.'

'Is it, sir? You soon give in. How stern you look now! Your eyebrows have become as thick as my finger, and your forehead resembles what, in some very astonishing poetry, I once saw styled, "a blue-piled thunderloft." That will be your married look, sir, I suppose?'

'If that will be your married look, I, as a Christian, will soon give up the notion of consorting with a mere sprite or salamander. But what had you to ask, thing,- out with it?'

'There, you are less than civil now; and I like rudeness a great deal better than flattery. I had rather be a thing than an angel. This is what I have to ask,- Why did you take such pains to make me believe you wished to marry Miss Ingram?'

'Is that all? Thank God it is no worse!' And now he unknit his black brows; looked down, smiling at me, and stroked my hair, as if well pleased at seeing a danger averted. 'I think I may confess,' he continued, 'even although I should make you a little indignant, Jane- and I have seen what a fire-spirit you can be when you are indignant. You glowed in the cool moonlight last night, when you mutinied against fate, and claimed your rank as my equal. Janet, by the bye, it was you who made me the offer.'

'Of course I did. But to the point if you please, sir- Miss Ingram?'

'Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end.'

'Excellent! Now you are small- not one whit bigger than the end of my little finger. It was a burning shame and a scandalous disgrace to act in that way. Did you think nothing of Miss Ingram's feelings, sir?'

'Her feelings are concentrated in one- pride; and that needs humbling. Were you jealous, Jane?'

'Never mind, Mr. Rochester: it is in no way interesting to you to know that. Answer me truly once more. Do you think Miss Ingram will not suffer from your dishonest coquetry? Won't she feel forsaken and deserted?'

'Impossible!- when I told you how she, on the contrary, deserted me: the idea of my insolvency cooled, or rather extinguished, her flame in a moment.'

'You have a curious, designing mind, Mr. Rochester. I am afraid your principles on some points are eccentric.'

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'My principles were never trained, Jane: they may have grown a little awry for want of attention.'

'Once again, seriously, may I enjoy the great good that has been vouchsafed to me, without fearing that any one else is suffering the bitter pain I myself felt a while ago?'

'That you may, my good little girl: there is not another being in the world has the same pure love for me as yourself- for I lay that pleasant unction to my soul, Jane, a belief in your affection.'

I turned my lips to the hand that lay on my shoulder. I loved him very much- more than I could trust myself to say- more than words had power to express.

'Ask something more,' he said presently, 'it is my delight to be entreated, and to yield.'

I was again ready with my request. 'Communicate your intentions to Mrs. Fairfax, sir: she saw me with you last night in the hall, and she was shocked. Give her some explanation before I see her again.'

It pains me to be misjudged by so good a woman.'

'Go to your room, and put on your bonnet,' he replied. 'I mean you to accompany me to Millcote this morning; and while you prepare for the drive, I will enlighten the old lady's understanding. Did she think, Janet, you had given the world for love, and considered it well lost?'

'I believe she thought I had forgotten my station, and yours, sir.'

'Station! station!- your station is in my heart, and on the necks of those who would insult you, now or hereafter.- Go.'

I was soon dressed; and when I heard Mr. Rochester quit Mrs. Fairfax's parlour, I hurried down to it. The old lady had been reading her morning portion of Scripture- the Lesson for the day; her Bible lay open before her, and her spectacles were upon it. Her occupation, suspended by Mr. Rochester's announcement, seemed now forgotten: her eyes, fixed on the blank wall opposite, expressed the surprise of a quiet mind stirred by unwonted tidings. Seeing me, she roused herself: she made a sort of effort to smile, and framed a few words of congratulation; but the smile expired, and the sentence was abandoned unfinished. She put up her spectacles, shut the Bible, and pushed her chair back from the table.

'I feel so astonished,' she began, 'I hardly know what to say to you, Miss Eyre. I have surely not been dreaming, have I? Sometimes I half fall asleep when I am sitting alone and fancy things that have never happened. It has seemed to me more than once when I have been in a doze, that my dear husband, who died fifteen years since, has come in and sat down beside me; and that I have even heard him call me by my name, Alice, as he used to do. Now, can you tell me whether it is actually true that Mr. Rochester has asked you to marry him? Don't laugh at me. But I really thought he came in here five minutes ago, and said that in a month you would be his wife.'

'He has said the same thing to me,' I replied.

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'He has! Do you believe him? Have you accepted him?'

'Yes.'

She looked at me bewildered.

'I could never have thought it. He is a proud man: all the Rochesters were proud: and his father, at least, liked money. He, too, has always been called careful. He means to marry you?'

'He tells me so.'

She surveyed my whole person: in her eyes I read that they had there found no charm powerful enough to solve the enigma.

'It passes me!' she continued; 'but no doubt it is true since you say so. How it will answer, I cannot tell: I really don't know.'

Equality of position and fortune is often advisable in such cases; and there are twenty years of difference in your ages. He might almost be your father.'

'No, indeed, Mrs. Fairfax!' exclaimed I, nettled; 'he is nothing like my father! No one, who saw us together, would suppose it for an instant. Mr. Rochester looks as young, and is as young, as some men at five-and-twenty.'

'Is it really for love he is going to marry you?' she asked.

I was so hurt by her coldness and scepticism, that the tears rose to my eyes.

'I am sorry to grieve you,' pursued the widow; 'but you are so young, and so little acquainted with men, I wished to put you on your guard. It is an old saying that "all is not gold that glitters"; and in this case I do fear there will be something found to be different to what either you or I expect.'

'Why?- am I a monster?' I said: 'is it impossible that Mr. Rochester should have a sincere affection for me?'

'No: you are very well; and much improved of late; and Mr. Rochester, I daresay, is fond of you. I have always noticed that you were a sort of pet of his. There are times when, for your sake, I have been a little uneasy at his marked preference, and have wished to put you on your guard: but I did not like to suggest even the possibility of wrong. I knew such an idea would shock, perhaps offend you; and you were so discreet, and so thoroughly modest and sensible, I hoped you might be trusted to protect yourself. Last night I cannot tell you what I suffered when I sought all over the house, and could find you nowhere, nor the master either; and then, at twelve o'clock, saw you come in with him.'

'Well, never mind that now,' I interrupted impatiently; 'it is enough that all was right.'

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'I hope all will be right in the end,' she said: 'but believe me, you cannot be too careful. Try and keep Mr. Rochester at a distance: distrust yourself as well as him. Gentlemen in his station are not accustomed to marry their governesses.'

I was growing truly irritated: happily, Adele ran in.

'Let me go,- let me go to Millcote too!' she cried. 'Mr. Rochester won't: though there is so much room in the new carriage. Beg him to let me go, mademoiselle.'

'That I will, Adele'; and I hastened away with her, glad to quit my gloomy mistress. The carriage was ready: they were bringing it round to the front, and my master was pacing the pavement, Pilot following him backwards and forwards.

'Adele may accompany us, may she not, sir?'

'I told her no. I'll have no brats!- I'll have only you.'

'Do let her go, Mr. Rochester, if you please: it would be better.'

'Not it: she will be a restraint.'

He was quite peremptory, both in look and voice. The chill of Mrs. Fairfax's warnings, and the damp of her doubts were upon me: something of unsubstantiality and uncertainty had beset my hopes. I half lost the sense of power over him. I was about mechanically to obey him, without further remonstrance; but as he helped me into the carriage, he looked at my face.

'What is the matter?' he asked; 'all the sunshine is gone. Do you really wish the bairn to go? Will it annoy you if she is left behind?'

'I would far rather she went, sir.'

'Then off for your bonnet, and back like a flash of lightning!' cried he to Adele.

She obeyed him with what speed she might. 'After all, a single morning's interruption will not matter much,' said he, 'when I mean shortly to claim you- your thoughts, conversation, and company- for life.'

Adele, when lifted in, commenced kissing me, by way of expressing her gratitude for my intercession: she was instantly stowed away into a corner on the other side of him. She then peeped round to where I sat; so stern a neighbour was too restrictive; to him, in his present fractious mood, she dared whisper no observations, nor ask of him any information.

'Let her come to me,' I entreated: 'she will, perhaps, trouble you, sir: there is plenty of room on this side.'

He handed her over as if she had been a lapdog. 'I'll send her to school yet,' he said, but now he was smiling.

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Adele heard him, and asked if she was to go to school 'sans mademoiselle?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'absolutely sans mademoiselle; for I am to take mademoiselle to the moon, and there I shall seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live with me there, and only me.'

'She will have nothing to eat: you will starve her,' observed Adele.

'I shall gather manna for her morning and night: the plains and hillsides in the moon are bleached with manna, Adele.'

'She will want to warm herself: what will she do for a fire?'

'Fire rises out of the lunar mountains: when she is cold, I'll carry her up to a peak, and lay her down on the edge of a crater.'

'Oh, qu'elle y sera mal- peu comfortable! And her clothes, they will wear out: how can she get new ones?'

Mr. Rochester professed to be puzzled. 'Hem!' said he. 'What would you do, Adele? Cudgel your brains for an expedient. How would a white or a pink cloud answer for a gown, do you think? And one could cut a pretty enough scarf out of a rainbow.'

'She is far better as she is,' concluded Adele, after musing some time: 'besides, she would get tired of living with only you in the moon. If I were mademoiselle, I would never consent to go with you.'

'She has consented: she has pledged her word.'

'But you can't get her there; there is no road to the moon: it is all air; and neither you nor she can fly.'

'Adele, look at that field.' We were now outside Thornfield gates, and bowling lightly along the smooth road to Millcote, where the dust was well laid by the thunderstorm, and where the low hedges and lofty timber trees on each side glistened green and rain-refreshed.

'In that field, Adele, I was walking late one evening about a fortnight since- the evening of the day you helped me to make hay in the orchard meadows; and as I was tired with raking swaths, I sat down to rest me on a stile; and there I took out a little book and a pencil, and began to write about a misfortune that befell me long ago, and a wish I had for happy days to come: I was writing away very fast, though daylight was fading from the leaf, when something came up the path and stopped two yards off me. I looked at it. It was a little thing with a veil of gossamer on its head. I beckoned it to come near me; it stood soon at my knee. I never spoke to it, and it never spoke to me, in words; but I read its eyes, and it read mine; and our speechless colloquy was to this effect-

'It was a fairy, and come from Elf-land, it said; and its errand was to make me happy: I must go with it out of the common world to a lonely place- such as the moon, for instance- and it nodded its head

towards her horn, rising over Hayhill: it told me of the alabaster cave and silver vale where we might live. I said I should like to go; but reminded it, as you did me, that I had no wings to fly.

"Oh," returned the fairy, "that does not signify! Here is a talisman will remove all difficulties"; and she held out a pretty gold ring. "Put it," she said, "on the fourth finger of my left hand, and I am yours, and you are mine; and we shall leave earth, and make our own heaven yonder." She nodded again at the moon. The ring, Adele, is in my breeches-pocket, under the disguise of a sovereign: but I mean soon to change it to a ring again.'

'But what has mademoiselle to do with it? I don't care for the fairy: you said it was mademoiselle you would take to the moon?'

'Mademoiselle is a fairy,' he said, whispering mysteriously.

Whereupon I told her not to mind his badinage; and she, on her part, evinced a fund of genuine French scepticism: denominating Mr. Rochester 'un vrai menteur,' and assuring him that she made no account whatever of his 'contes de fee,' and that 'du reste, il n'y avait pas de fees, et quand meme il y en avait': she was sure they would never appear to him, nor ever give him rings, or offer to live with him in the moon.

The hour spent at Millcote was a somewhat harassing one to me.

Mr. Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to choose half a dozen dresses. I hated the business, I begged leave to defer it: no- it should be gone through with now. By dint of entreaties expressed in energetic whispers, I reduced the half-dozen to two: these, however, he vowed he would select himself.

With anxiety I watched his eye rove over the gay stores: he fixed on a rich silk of the most brilliant amethyst dye, and a superb pink satin.

I told him in a new series of whispers, that he might as well buy me a gold gown and a silver bonnet at once: I should certainly never venture to wear his choice. With infinite difficulty, for he was stubborn as a stone, I persuaded him to make an exchange in favour of a sober black satin and pearl-grey silk. 'It might pass for the present,' he said; 'but he would yet see me glittering like a parterre.'

Glad was I to get him out of the silk warehouse, and then out of a jeweller's shop: the more he bought me, the more my cheek burned with a sense of annoyance and degradation. As we re-entered the carriage, and I sat back feverish and fagged, I remembered what, in the hurry of events, dark and bright, I had wholly forgotten- the letter of my uncle, John Eyre, to Mrs. Reed: his intention to adopt me and make me his legatee. 'It would, indeed, be a relief,' I thought, 'if I had ever so small an independency; I never can bear being dressed like a doll by Mr. Rochester, or sitting like a second Danae with the golden shower falling daily round me. I will write to Madeira the moment I get home, and tell my uncle John I am going to be married, and to whom: if I had but a prospect of one day bringing Mr. Rochester an accession of fortune, I could better endure to be kept by him now.' And somewhat relieved by this idea (which I failed not to execute that day), I ventured once more to meet my master's and lover's eye,

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which most pertinaciously sought mine, though I averted both face and gaze. He smiled; and I thought his smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched: I crushed his hand, which was ever hunting mine, vigorously, and thrust it back to him red with the passionate pressure.

'You need not look in that way,' I said; 'if you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter. I'll be married in this lilac gingham: you may make a dressing-gown for yourself out of the pearl-grey silk, and an infinite series of waistcoats out of the black satin.'

He chuckled; he rubbed his hands. 'Oh, it is rich to see and hear her!' he exclaimed. 'Is she original? Is she piquant? I would not exchange this one little English girl for the Grand Turk's whole seraglio, gazelle-eyes, houri forms, and all!'

The Eastern allusion bit me again. 'I'll not stand you an inch in the stead of a seraglio,' I said; 'so don't consider me an equivalent for one. If you have a fancy for anything in that line, away with you, sir, to the bazaars of Stamboul without delay, and lay out in extensive slave-purchases some of that spare cash you seem at a loss to spend satisfactorily here.'

'And what will you do, Janet, while I am bargaining for so many tons of flesh and such an assortment of black eyes?'

'I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved- your harem inmates amongst the rest. I'll get admitted there, and I'll stir up mutiny; and you, three-tailed bashaw as you are, sir, shall in a trice find yourself fettered amongst our hands: nor will I, for one, consent to cut your bonds till you have signed a charter, the most liberal that despot ever yet conferred.'

'I would consent to be at your mercy, Jane.'

'I would have no mercy, Mr. Rochester, if you supplicated for it with an eye like that. While you looked so, I should be certain that whatever charter you might grant under coercion, your first act, when released, would be to violate its conditions.'

'Why, Jane, what would you have? I fear you will compel me to go through a private marriage ceremony, besides that performed at the altar. You will stipulate, I see, for peculiar terms- what will they be?'

'I only want an easy mind, sir; not crushed by crowded obligations.'

Do you remember what you said of Celine Varens?- of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Celine Varens. I shall continue to act as Adele's governess; by that I shall earn my board and lodging, and thirty pounds a year besides.

'I'll furnish my own wardrobe out of that money, and you shall give me nothing but-'

'Well, but what?'

'Your regard; and if I give you mine in return, that debt will be quit.'

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'Well, for cool native impudence and pure innate pride, you haven't your equal,' said he. We were now approaching Thornfield. 'Will it please you to dine with me to-day?' he asked, as we re-entered the gates.

'No, thank you, sir.'

'And what for, "no, thank you?" if one may inquire.'

'I never have dined with you, sir: and I see no reason why I should now: till'

'Till what? You delight in half-phrases.'

'Till I can't help it.'

'Do you suppose I eat like an ogre or a ghoul, that you dread being the companion of my repast?'

'I have formed no supposition on the subject, sir; but I want to go on as usual for another month.'

'You will give up your governessing slavery at once.'

'Indeed, begging your pardon, sir, I shall not. I shall just go on with it as usual. I shall keep out of your way all day, as I have been accustomed to do: you may send for me in the evening, when you feel disposed to see me, and I'll come then; but at no other time.'

'I want a smoke, Jane, or a pinch of snuff, to comfort me under all this, "pour me donner une contenance," as Adele would say; and unfortunately I have neither my cigar-case nor my snuff-box. But listen- whisper. It is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently; and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I'll just- figuratively speaking- attach you to a chain like this' (touching his watch-guard). 'Yes, bonny wee thing, I'll wear you in my bosom, lest my jewel I should tyne.'

He said this as he helped me to alight from the carriage, and while he afterwards lifted out Adele, I entered the house, and made good my retreat upstairs.

He duly summoned me to his presence in the evening. I had prepared an occupation for him; for I was determined not to spend the whole time in a tete-a-tete conversation. I remembered his fine voice; I knew he liked to sing- good singers generally do. I was no vocalist myself, and, in his fastidious judgment, no musician, either; but I delighted in listening when the performance was good. No sooner had twilight, that hour of romance, began to lower her blue and starry banner over the lattice, than I rose, opened the piano, and entreated him, for the love of heaven, to give me a song. He said I was a capricious witch, and that he would rather sing another time; but I averred that no time was like the present.

'Did I like his voice?' he asked.

'Very much.' I was not fond of pampering that susceptible vanity of his; but for once, and from motives of expediency, I would e'en soothe and stimulate it.

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'Then, Jane, you must play the accompaniment.'

'Very well, sir, I will try.'

I did try, but was presently swept off the stool and denominated 'a little bungler.' Being pushed unceremoniously to one side- which was precisely what I wished- he usurped my place, and proceeded to accompany himself: for he could play as well as sing. I hid me to the window-recess. And while I sat there and looked out on the still trees and dim lawn, to a sweet air was sung in mellow tones the following strain:-

'The truest love that ever heart Felt at its kindled core, Did through each vein, in quickened start, The tide of being pour.

Her coming was my hope each day, Her parting was my pain;

The chance that did her steps delay Was ice in every vein.

I dreamed it would be nameless bliss, As I loved, loved to be;

And to this object did I press As blind as eagerly.

But wide as pathless was the space That lay our lives between, And dangerous as the foamy race Of ocean-surges green.

And haunted as a robber-path

Through wilderness or wood;

For Might and Right, and Woe and Wrath,

Between our spirits stood.

I dangers dared; I hindrance scorned;

I omens did defy:

Whatever menaced, harassed, warned,

I passed impetuous by.

On sped my rainbow, fast as light;

I flew as in a dream;

For glorious rose upon my sight

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That child of Shower and Gleam.

Still bright on clouds of suffering dim

Shines that soft, solemn joy;

Nor care I now, how dense and grim

Disasters gather nigh.

I care not in this moment sweet,

Though all I have rushed o'er

Should come on pinion, strong and fleet,

Proclaiming vengeance sore:

Though haughty Hate should strike me down,

Right, bar approach to me,

And grinding Might, with furious frown,

Swear endless enmity.

My love has placed her little hand

With noble faith in mine,

And vowed that wedlock's sacred band

Our nature shall entwine.

My love has sworn, with sealing kiss,

With me to live- to die;

I have at last my nameless bliss:

As I love- loved am !'

He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineament. I quailed momentarily- then I rallied. Soft scene, daring demonstration, I would not have; and I stood in peril of both: a weapon of defence must be prepared- I whetted my tongue: as he reached me, I asked with asperity, 'whom he was going to marry now?'

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'That was a strange question to be put by his darling Jane.'

'Indeed! I considered it a very natural and necessary one: he had talked of his future wife dying with him. What did he mean by such a pagan idea? I had no intention of dying with him- he might depend on that.'

'Oh, all he longed, all he prayed for, was that I might live with him! Death was not for such as I.'

'Indeed it was: I had as good a right to die when my time came as he had: but I should bide that time, and not be hurried away in a suttee.'

'Would I forgive him for the selfish idea, and prove my pardon by a reconciling kiss?'

'No: I would rather be excused.'

Here I heard myself apostrophised as a 'hard little thing'; and it was added, 'any other woman would have been melted to marrow at hearing such stanzas crooned in her praise.'

I assured him I was naturally hard- very flinty, and that he would often find me so; and that, moreover, I was determined to show him divers rugged points in my character before the ensuing four weeks elapsed: he should know fully what sort of a bargain he had made, while there was yet time to rescind it.

'Would I be quiet and talk rationally?'

'I would be quiet if he liked, and as to talking rationally, I flattered myself I was doing that now.'

He fretted, pished, and pshawed. 'Very good,' I thought; 'you may fume and fidget as you please: but this is the best plan to pursue with you, I am certain. I like you more than I can say; but I'll not sink into a bathos of sentiment: and with this needle of repartee I'll keep you from the edge of the gulf too; and, moreover, maintain by its pungent aid that distance between you and myself most conducive to our real mutual advantage.'

From less to more, I worked him up to considerable irritation; then, after he had retired, in dudgeon, quite to the other end of the room, I got up, and saying, 'I wish you good-night, sir,' in my natural and wonted respectful manner, I slipped out by the side-door and got away.

The system thus entered on, I pursued during the whole season of probation; and with the best success. He was kept, to be sure, rather cross and crusty; but on the whole I could see he was excellently entertained, and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgment, satisfied his common sense, and even suited his taste less.

In other people's presence I was, as formerly, deferential and quiet; any other line of conduct being uncalled for: it was only in the evening conferences I thus thwarted and afflicted him. He continued to send for me punctually the moment the clock struck seven; though when I appeared before him now, he had no such honeyed terms as 'love' and 'darling' on his lips: the best words at my service were 'provoking puppet,' 'malicious elf,' 'sprite,' 'changeling,' etc.

For caresses, too, I now got grimaces; for a pressure of the hand, a pinch on the arm; for a kiss on the cheek, a severe tweak of the ear. It was all right: at present I decidedly preferred these fierce favours to anything more tender. Mrs. Fairfax, I saw, approved me: her anxiety on my account vanished; therefore I was certain I did well.

Meantime, Mr. Rochester affirmed I was wearing him to skin and bone, and threatened awful vengeance for my present conduct at some period fast coming. I laughed in my sleeve at his menaces. 'I can keep you in reasonable check now,' I reflected; 'and I don't doubt to be able to do it hereafter: if one expedient loses its virtue, another must be devised.'

Yet after all my task was not an easy one; often I would rather have pleased than teased him. My future husband was becoming to me my whole world; and more than the world: almost my hope of heaven.

He stood between me and every thought of religion, as an eclipse intervenes between man and the broad sun. I could not, in those days, see God for His creature: of whom I had made an idol.

第二十四章

我穿衣起身，把发生的事想了一遍，怀疑是不是一场梦。在我再次看见罗切斯特先生，听到他重复那番情话和诺言之前，是无法确定那是不是真实的。

我在梳头时朝镜子里打量了一下自己的脸，感到它不再平庸了。面容透出了希望，脸色有了活力，眼睛仿佛看到了果实的源泉，从光彩夺目的涟漪中借来了光芒。我向来不愿去看我主人，因为我怕我的目光会使他不愉快。但是现在我肯定可以扬起脸来看他的脸了，我的表情不会使他的爱心冷却。我从抽屉里拿了件朴实干净的薄夏装，穿在身上。似乎从来没有一件衣服像这件那么合身，因为没有一件是在这种狂喜的情绪中穿上的。

我跑下楼去，进了大厅，只见阳光灿烂的六月早晨，已经代替了暴风雨之夜。透过开着的玻璃门，我感受到了清新芬芳的微风，但我并不觉得惊奇。当我欣喜万分的时候，大自然也一定非常高兴。一个要饭的女人和她的小男孩——两个脸色苍白，衣衫褴褛的活物——顺着小径走上来，我跑下去，倾囊所有给了她们——大约三四个先令，好歹他们都得分享我的欢乐。白嘴鸦呱呱叫着，还有更活泼一点的鸟儿在啁鸣，但是我心儿的欢唱比谁都美妙动听。

使我吃惊的是，费尔法克斯太太神色忧伤地望着窗外，十分严肃地说：“爱小姐，请来用早餐好吗？”吃饭时她冷冷地一声不吭。但那时我无法替她解开疑团。我得等我主人来解释，所以她也只好等待了。我勉强吃了一点，便匆匆上了楼，碰见阿黛勒正离开读书室。

“你上哪儿去呀？上课的时间到了。”

“罗切斯特先生已经打发我到育儿室去了。”

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“他在哪儿？”

“在那儿呢，”她指了指她刚离开的房间。我走进那里，原来他就站在里面。

“来，对我说声早安，”他说。我愉快地走上前。这回我所遇到的，不光是一句冷冰冰的话，或者是握一握手而已，而是拥抱和接吻。他那么爱我，抚慰我，显得既亲切又自然。

“简，你容光焕发，笑容满面，漂亮极了。”他说。“今天早晨真的很漂亮。这就是我苍白的小精灵吗？这不是我的小芥子吗？”不就是这个脸带笑靥，嘴唇鲜红，头发栗色光滑如缎，眼睛淡褐光芒四射，满面喜色的小姑娘吗？（读者，我的眼睛是青色的，但是你得原谅他的错误，对他来说我的眼睛染上了新的颜色。）

“我是简·爱，先生。”

“很快就要叫作简·罗切斯特了”他补充说，“再过四周，珍妮特，一天也不多，你听到了吗？”

我听到了，但我并不理解，它使我头昏目眩。他的宣布在我心头所引起的感觉，是不同于喜悦的更强烈的东西——是一种给人打击、使你发呆的东西。我想这近乎是恐惧。

“你刚才还脸红，现在脸色发白了，简。那是为什么？”

“因为你给了我一个新名字——简·罗切斯特，而且听来很奇怪。”

“是的，罗切斯特夫人，”他说，“年青的罗切斯特夫人——费尔法克斯·罗切斯特的少女新娘。”

“那永远不会，先生，听起来不大可能。在这个世界上，人类永远不能享受绝对幸福。我并不是生来与我的同类有不同的命运。只有在童话里，在白日梦里，才会想象这样的命运降临到我头上。”

“我能够而且也要实现这样的梦想，我要从今天开始。今天早上我已写信给伦敦的银行代理人，让他送些托他保管的珠宝来——桑菲尔德女士们的传家宝。我希望一两天后涌进你的衣兜，我给予一个贵族姑娘——如果我要娶她的话——的一切特权和注意力，都将属于你。”

“呵，先生！——别提珠宝了！我不喜欢说起珠宝。对简·爱来说，珠宝听来既不自然又很古怪，我宁可不要。”

“我会亲自把钻石项链套在你脖子上，把发箍戴在你额头——看上去会非常相配，因为大自然至少已把自己特有的高尚，烙在这个额头上了，简。而且我会把手镯按在纤细的手腕上，把戒指戴在仙女般的手指上。”

“不，不，先生，想想别的话题，讲讲别的事情，换种口气谈谈吧。不要当我美人似的同我说话，我不过是你普普通通，象贵格会教徒一样的家庭教师。”

“在我眼里，你是个美人。一位心向往之的美人——娇美而空灵。”

“你的意思是瘦小而无足轻重吧。你在做梦呢，先生——不然就是有意取笑。看在老天面上，别挖苦人了！”

“我还要全世界都承认，你是个美人，”他继续说，而我确实对他说话的口气感到不安，觉得他要不是自欺欺人，就是存心骗我。“我要让我的简·爱穿上缎子和花边衣服，头发上插玫瑰花，我还要在我最喜爱的头上，罩上无价的面纱。”

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“那你就认识我了，先生，我不再是你的简·爱，而是穿了丑角衣装的猴子——一只披了别人羽毛的八哥。那样倒不如看你罗切斯特先生，一身戏装打扮，而我自己则穿上宫廷贵妇的长袍。先生，我并没有说你漂亮，尽管我非常爱你，太爱你了，所以不愿吹捧你。你就别捧我了。”

然而他不顾我反对，扭住这个话题不放。“今天我就要坐着马车带你上米尔科特，你得为自己挑选些衣服。我同你说过了，四个星期后我们就结婚。婚礼将不事张扬，在下面那个教堂里举行。然后，我就立刻一阵风把你送到城里。短暂逗留后，我将带我的宝贝去阳光明媚的地方，到法国的葡萄园和意大利的平原去。古往今来凡有记载的名胜，她都得看看；城市风光，也该品尝。还得同别人公平地比较比较，让她知道自己的身价。”

“我要去旅行？——同你吗，先生？”

“你要住在巴黎、罗马和那不勒斯，还有佛罗伦萨、威尼斯和维也纳。凡是我漫游过的地方，你都得重新去走走；凡我马蹄所至，你这位精灵也该涉足。十年之前，我几乎疯了似地跑遍了欧洲，只有厌恶、憎恨和愤怒同我作伴。如今我将旧地重游，痼疾已经痊愈，心灵已被涤荡，还有一位真正的天使给我安慰，与我同游。”

我笑他这么说话。“我不是天使，”我断言，“就是到死也不会是。我是我自己。罗切斯特先生，你不该在我身上指望或强求天上才有的东西。你不会得到的，就像我无法从你那儿得到一样，而且我是一点也不指望的。”

“那你指望我什么呢？”

“在短期内，你也许会同现在一样——很短的时期，随后你会冷静下来，你会反复无常，又会严厉起来，而我得费尽心机，使你高兴，不过等你完全同我习惯了，你也许又会喜欢我——我说呀喜欢我，而不是爱我。我猜想六个月后、或者更短一些，你的爱情就会化为泡影，在由男人撰写的书中，我注意到，那是一个丈夫的热情所能保持的最长时期。不过毕竟作为朋友和伙伴，我希望决不要太过讨我亲爱主人的嫌。”

“讨厌？又会喜欢你呢！我想我会一而再，再而三地喜欢你。我会让你承认，我不仅喜欢你，而且爱你——真挚、热情、始终如一。”

“你不再反反复复了，先生？”

“对那些光靠容貌吸引我的女人，一旦我发现她们既没有灵魂也没有良心——一旦她们向我展示乏味、浅薄，也许还有愚蠢、粗俗和暴躁，我便成了真正的魔鬼。但是对眼明口快的，对心灵如火的，对既柔顺而又稳重、既驯服而又坚强，可弯而不可折的性格——我会永远温柔和真诚。”

“你遇到过这样的性格吗，先生？你爱上过这样的性格吗？”

“我现在爱它了。”

“在我以前呢，假如我真的在各方面都符合你那苛刻的标准？”

“我从来没有遇到过可以跟你相提并论的人，简，你使我愉快。使我倾倒，——你似乎很顺从，而我喜欢你给人的能屈能伸的感觉。我把一束柔软的丝线，绕过手指时，一阵颤栗，从我的胳膊涌向我心里。我受到

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了感染——我被征服了。这种感染之甜蜜，不是我所能表达，这种被征服感之魅力，远胜于我赢得的任何胜利。你为什么笑了，简？你那令人费解、不可思议的表情变化，有什么含义？”

“我在想，先生（你会原谅我这个想法，油然而生的想法），我想起了赫拉克勒斯、参孙和使他们着迷的美女。”

“你就这么想，你这小精灵——”

“唏，先生！就像那些先生们的举动并不聪明一样，你刚才说的话也并不聪明。不过，要是他们当初结了婚，毫无疑问，他们会一本正经地摆出夫君面孔，不再象求婚的时候那样柔情如水，我担心你也会一样。要是以后我请你做一件你不方便或者不乐意的事，不知你会怎样答复我。”

“你现在就说一件事吧，简——哪怕是件小事，我渴望你求我——”

“真的，我会的，先生。我已作好请求的准备。”

“说出来吧！不过你要是以那种神情抬头含笑，我会不知道你要求什么就满口答应，那就会使我上当。”

“绝对不会，先生。我只有一个要求，就是不要叫人送珠宝，不要让我头上戴满玫瑰花，你还不如把你那块普普通通的手帕镶上一条金边吧。”

“我还不如‘给纯金镶上金子’。我知道了，那么你的请求，我同意了——现在就这样。我会撤回送给银行代理人的订单。不过你还没有向我要什么呢，你只要求我收回礼物。再试一下吧。”

“那么，好呀，先生。请你满足我在某一个问题上大大激起的好奇心。”

他显得不安了。“什么？什么？”他忙不迭地问。“好奇心是一位危险的请求者：幸亏我没有发誓同意你的每个要求——”

“但是答应这个要求并没有什么危险，先生。”

“说吧，简。不过但愿这不只是打听——也许打听一个秘密，而是希望得到我的一半家产。”

“哎呀，亚哈随鲁王！我要你一半的家产干什么？你难道以为我是犹太高利贷者，要在土地上好好投资一番。我宁愿能同你推心置腹，要是你已答应向我敞开心扉，那你就不会不让我知道你的隐秘吧。”

“凡是一切值得知道的隐秘，简，都欢迎你。不过看在上帝面上，不要追求无用的负担！不要向往毒药——不要变成由我照管的十足足的夏娃！”

“干嘛呢，先生？你刚才还告诉我，你多么高兴被我征服，多么喜欢被我强行说服，你难道不认为，我不妨可利用一下你的表白，开始哄呀，求呀——必要时甚至还可哭哭闹闹，板起面孔——只不过为了尝试一下我的力量？”

“看你敢不敢做这样的试验。步步进犯，肆无忌惮，那就一切都完了。”

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“是吗，先生？你很快就变卦了。这会儿你的表情多么严厉！你的眉头已皱得跟我的手指一般粗，你的前额像某些惊人诗篇所描写的那样犹如‘乌云重叠的雷霆。’我想那就是你结婚以后的神气了，先生？”

“如果你结婚后是那付样子，像我这样的基督徒，会立刻打消同无非是个小妖精或者水蛇厮混的念头。不过你该要什么呢，伙计？——说出来吧？”

“瞧，这会儿连礼貌也不讲了，我喜欢鲁莽，远胜于奉承。我宁愿做个伙计，也不愿做天使。我该问的就是——你为什么煞费苦心要我相信，你希望娶英格拉姆小姐？”

“就是这些吗？谢天谢地，不算太糟！”此时他松开了浓黑的眉头，低头朝我笑笑，还抚摸着我的头发，仿佛看到躲过了危险，十分庆幸似的。“我想还是坦率地说好。”他继续说。“尽管我要让你生点儿气，简——我看到了你一旦发怒，会变成怎样一位火妖。昨晚清涼的月光下，当你反抗命运，声言同我平等时，你的面容灼灼生光。珍妮特，顺便提一句，是你自己向我提出了那样的建议。”

“当然是我，但是请你不要环顾左右了，先生——英格拉姆小姐。”

“好吧，我假意向英格拉姆小姐求婚，因为我希望你发疯似他同我相受，就象我那么爱你一样，我明白，嫉妒是为达到目的所能召唤的最好同盟军。”

“好极了！现在你很渺小——丝毫不比我的小手指尖要大。简直是奇耻大辱，这种想法可耻透顶，难道你一点也不想想英格拉姆小姐的感情吗，先生？”

“她的感情集于一点——自负。那就需要把她的气焰压下去。你妒嫉了吗，先生？”

“别管了，罗切斯特先生。你是不在乎知道这个的。再次老实回答我，你不认为你不光彩的调情会使英格拉姆小姐感到痛苦吗？难道她不会有被遗弃的感觉吗？”

“不可能！——我曾同你说过，相反是她抛弃了我，一想到我无力还债，她的热情顿时一落千丈，化为乌有。”

“你有一个奇怪而工于心计的头脑，罗切斯特先生。恐怕你在某些方面的人生准则有违常理。”

“我的准则从来没有受过调教，简。由于缺乏照应，难免会出差错。”

“再严肃问一遍，我可以享受向我担保的巨大幸福，而不必担心别人也像我刚才一样蒙受剧痛吗？”

“你可以，我的好小姑娘。世上没有第二个人对我怀着同你一样纯洁的爱——因为我把那愉快的油膏，也就是对你的爱的信任，贴到了我的心坎上。”

我把嘴唇转过去，吻了吻搭在我肩上的手。我深深地爱着他——深得连我自己也难以相信能说得清楚——深得非语言所能表达。

“再提些要求吧，”他立刻说。“我很乐意被人请求并作出让步。”

我再次准备好了请求。“把你的意图同费尔法克斯太太谈谈吧，昨晚她看见我同你呆在厅里，大吃一惊，我见她之前，你给她解释一下吧。让这样好的女人误解总让我痛苦。”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

“上你自己的房间去，戴上你的帽子，”他回答。“早上我想让你陪我上米尔科特去一趟。你准备上车的时候，我会让这位老妇人开开窍。难道她认为，珍妮特，你为了爱而付出了一切，完全是得不偿失？”

“我相信她认为我忘了自己的地位，还有你的地位，先生。”

“地位！地位！——现在，或者从今以后，你的地位在我的心里，紧卡着那些想要污辱你的人的脖子——走！”

我很快就穿好衣服，一听到罗切斯特先生离开费尔法克斯太太的起居室，便匆匆下楼赶到那里。这位老太太在读她早晨该读的一段《圣经》——那天的功课。面前摆着打开的《圣经》，《圣经》上放着一付眼镜。她忙着的事儿被罗切斯特先生的宣布打断后，此刻似乎已经忘记。她的眼睛呆呆地瞧着对面空无一物的墙上，流露出了一个平静的头脑被罕见的消息所激起的惊讶。见了我，她才回过神来，勉强笑了笑，凑了几句祝贺的话。但她的笑容收敛了，她的话讲了一半止住了。她戴上眼镜，合上《圣经》，把椅子从桌旁推开。

“我感到那么惊奇，”她开始说，“我真不知道对你说什么好，爱小姐。我肯定不是在做梦吧，是不是？有时候我独个儿坐着便朦朦胧胧地睡过去了，梦见了从来没有发生过的事情。在打盹的时候，我似乎不止一次看见我那位十年前去世的亲爱的丈夫，走进屋里，在我身边坐下，我甚至听他像以往一样叫唤我的名字艾丽斯。好吧，你能不能告诉我，罗切斯特先生真的已经向你求婚了吗？别笑话我，不过我真的认为他五分钟之前才进来对我说，一个月以后你就是他的妻子了。”

“他同我说了同样的话，”我回答。

“他同我说了同样的话，”我回答。

“他说啦！你相信他吗？你接受了吗？”

“是的。”

她大惑不解地看着我。

“绝对想不到这点。他是一个很高傲的人。罗切斯特家族的人都很高傲，至少他的父亲很看重金钱，他也常被说成很谨慎。他的意思是要娶你吗？”

“他这么告诉我的。”

她把我从头到脚打量了一番，从她的目光中我知道，她这双眼睛并没有在我身上发现足以解开这个谜的魅力。

“简直让我难以理解！”她继续说。“不过既然你这样说了，毫无疑问是真的了。以后的结局如何，我也说不上来。我真的不知道。在这类事情上，地位和财产方面彼此平等往往是明智的。何况你们两人的年龄相差二十岁，他差不多可以做你的父亲。”

“不，真的，费尔法克斯太太！”我恼火地大叫说，“他丝毫不像我父亲！谁看见我们在一起，都绝不会有这种想法。罗切斯特先生依然显得很年轻，跟有些二十五岁的人一样。”

“难道他真的是因为爱你而娶你的？”她问。

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学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

她的冷漠和怀疑使我心里非常难受，眼泪涌上了我的眼眶。

“对不起让你伤心了，”寡妇继续谈下去，“可是你那么年轻，跟男人接触又那么少，我希望让你存些戒心，老话说‘闪光的不一定都是金子’，而在这方面，我担心会出现你我所料想不到的事。”

“为什么？难道我是个妖怪？”我说，“难道罗切斯特先生不可能真心爱我？”

“不，你很好，而且近来大有长进。我想罗切斯特先生很喜欢你。我一直注意到，你好像深得他宠爱，有时候为你着想，我对他明显的偏爱感到不安，而且希望你提防着点，但我甚至不想暗示会有出事的可能，我知道这种想法会使你吃惊，也许还会得罪你。你那么审慎，那么谦逊，那么通情达理，我希望可以信赖你保护自己。昨天晚上，我找遍了整幢房子，既没有见到你，也没有见到主人，而后来十二点钟时瞧见你同他一起进来，这时我的痛苦实在难以言传。”

“好吧，现在就别去管它了，”我不耐烦地打断了她，“一切都很好，那就够了。”

“但愿能善始善终，”她说，“不过。请相信我，你还是小心为是。设法与罗切斯特先生保持一段距离，既不要太自信，也不要太相信他，像他那样有地位的绅士是不习惯娶家庭教师的。”

我真的要光火了，幸亏阿黛勒跑了进来。

“让我去——让我也去米尔科特！”她嚷嚷道。“罗切斯特先生不肯让我去，新马车里明明很空。求他让我去吧，小姐。”

“我会的，阿黛勒，”我急急忙忙同她一起走开了，很乐意逃离这位丧气的监视者。马车已经准备停当。他们绕道将它停在前门，我的主人在石子路上踱步，派洛特忽前忽后跟着他。

“阿黛勒可以跟我们一起去看，先生？”

“我告诉过她不行，我不要小丫头——我只要你。”

“请无论如何让她去，罗切斯特先生，那样会更好些。”

“不行，她会碍事。”

他声色俱厉。我想起了费尔法克斯太太令人寒心的警告和让我扫兴的疑虑，内心的希望便蒙上了一层虚幻渺茫的阴影。我自认能左右他的感觉失掉了一半。我正机械地服从他，而不再规劝时，他扶我进了马车，瞧了瞧我的脸。

“怎么啦？”他回答，“阳光全不见了，你真的希望这孩子去吗？要是把她拉下了，你会不高兴吗？”

“我很情愿她去，先生。”

“那就去戴上你的帽子，象闪电一样快赶回来！”他朝阿黛勒喊道。

她以最快的速度按他的吩咐去办了。

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“打搅一个早上毕竟无伤大雅，”他说：“反正我马上就要得到你了——你的思想、你的谈话和你的陪伴——永生永世。”

阿黛勒一被拎进车子，便开始吻起我来，以表示对我替她说情的感激。她很快被藏到了靠他一边的角落里。她随后偷偷地朝我坐的地方扫视了一下，那么严肃的一位邻座使她很拘束。他眼下性情浮躁，所以她即使看到了什么，也不敢悄声说话，就是想要知道什么，也不敢问他。

“让她到我这边来，”我恳求道。“或许她会碍着你，先生，我这边很空呢。”

他把她像递一只膝头的狗那样递了过来。“我要送她上学去，”他说，不过这会儿脸上浮着笑容。

阿黛勒听了就问他是不是上学校“*sans mademoiselle*？”

“是的，”他回答，“完全‘*sans mademoiselle*，’因为我要带小姐到月亮上去，我要在火山顶上一个白色的山谷中找个山洞，小姐要同我住在那里，只同我一个人。”

“她会没有东西吃，你会把她饿坏的，”阿黛勒说。

“我会日夜采集吗哪给她，月亮上的平原和山边白茫茫一片都是吗哪，阿黛勒。”

“她得暖暖和身子，用什么生火呢？”

“火会从月亮山上喷出来。她冷了，我会把她带到山巅，让她躺在火山口的边上。”

“*Oh, qu'elle y sera mal peu confortable!* 还有她的衣服呢，都会穿坏的，哪儿去弄新的呢？”

罗切斯特先生承认自己也搞不清楚了。“哼！”他说，“你会怎么办呢，阿黛勒？动动脑筋，想个应付的办法。一片白云，或者一片粉红色的云做件长袍，你觉得怎么样？一抹彩虹做条围巾绰绰有余。”

“她现在这样要好得多，”阿黛勒沉思片刻后断言道。“另外，在月亮上只跟你生活在一起，她会觉得厌烦的。要是我是小姐，就决不会同意跟你去。”

“她已经同意了，还许下了诺言。”

“但是你不可能把她弄到那儿，没有道路通月亮，全都是空气。而且你与她都不会飞。”

“阿黛勒，瞧那边的田野，”这会儿我们已经出了桑菲尔德大门，沿着通往米尔科特平坦的道路，平稳而轻快地行驶着，暴风雨已经把尘土洗涤干净，路两旁低矮的树篱和挺拔的大树，雨后吐翠，分外新鲜。

“在那边田野上，阿黛勒，两星期前的一个晚上，我溜达得晚了——就是你帮我在果园草地里晒干草的那天晚上。我把着干草，不觉累了，便在一个草堆上躺下来休息一会。当时我取出一本小书和一枝铅笔，开始写起很久以前落到我头上的不幸，和对未来幸福日子的向往。我写得很快，但阳光从树叶上渐渐隐去，这时一个东西顺着小径走来，在离我两码远的地方停了下来。我看了看它，原来是个头上罩了薄纱的东西。我招呼它走近我，它很快就站到了我的膝头上，我没有同它说话，它也没有同我说话，我猜透它的眼神，它也猜透了我的眼神。我们之间无声的谈话大致的意思是这样：

“它是个小精灵，从精灵仙境来的，”它说。它的差使是使我幸福，我必须同它一起离开凡间，到一个人迹罕至的地方——譬如月亮上——它朝干草山上升起的月牙儿点了点头。它告诉我，我们可以住在石膏山洞和银色的溪谷里。我说我想去，但我就像你刚才提醒那样，提醒它我没有翅膀，不会飞。”

“呵，”那精灵回答说，“这没有关系！这里有个护身符，可以排除一切障碍。”她递过来一个漂亮的金戒指。“戴上它吧”，“戴在我左手第四个手指上，我就属于你，你就属于我了。我们将离开地球，到那边建立自己的天地。”她再次朝月亮点了点头。阿黛勒，这个戒指就在我裤子袋袋里，化作了一金镑硬币，不过我要它很快又变成戒子。”

“可是那与小姐有什么关系呢？我才不在乎精灵呢，你不是说过你要带到月亮去的是小姐吗——？”

“小姐是个精灵，”他神秘地耳语着说。因此我告诉她别去管他的玩笑了。而她却显示了丰富道地的法国式怀疑主义，把罗切斯特先生称作“unvrai menteur”，向他明确表示她毫不在乎他的“Contes de fee”还说“du reste, il n'y avait pas de fees, et quand meme il y en avait”，她敢肯定，她们也决不会出现在他面前，也不会给他戒指，或者建议同他一起住在月亮上。

在米尔科特度过的一段时间很有些折磨人。罗切斯特先生硬要我到一家丝绸货栈去，到了那里命令我挑选六件衣服。我讨厌这事儿，请求推迟一下。不行——现在就得办妥。经我拼命在他耳边恳求，才由六件减为两件。然而他发誓要亲自挑选些衣服。我焦急地瞧着他的目光在五颜六色的店铺中逡巡，最后落在一块色泽鲜艳、富丽堂皇的紫晶色丝绸上和一块粉红色高级缎子上。我又重新悄悄地告诉他，还不如马上给我买件金袍子和一顶银帽子。我当然决不会冒昧地去穿他选择的衣服。费了九牛二虎之力，（因为他像顽石一般固执）我才说服他换一块素静的黑色缎子和珠灰色的丝绸。“暂时可以凑乎了”他说。但他要让我看上去像花圃一样耀眼。

我庆幸自己出了丝绸货栈，随后又离开了一家珠宝店。他给我买的东西越多，我的脸颊也因为恼恨和堕落感而更加烧灼得厉害了。我再次进了马车，往后一靠坐了下来，心里热辣辣，身子疲惫不堪。这时我想起来了，随着光明和暗淡的岁月的流逝，我已完全忘却了我叔叔约翰。爱写给里德太太的信，忘了他要收养我让我成为他遗产继承人的打算。“如果我有那么一点儿独立财产的话。”我想，“说实在我会心安理得的。我绝不能忍受罗切斯特先生把我打扮成玩偶一样，或者像第二个达那厄那样坐着，每天让金雨洒遍全身。我一到家就要写信到马德里，告诉我叔叔约翰，我要结婚了及跟谁结婚。如果我期望有一天给罗切斯特先生带来一笔新增的财产，那我可以更好地忍受现在由他养起来了。”这么一想，心里便感到有些宽慰（这个想法那天没有实现），我再次大胆地与我主人兼恋人的目光相遇。尽管我避开他的面容和目光，他的目光却执拗地搜寻着我的。他微微一笑。我想他的微笑是一个苏丹在欣喜和多情的时刻，赐予他刚给了金银财宝的奴隶的。他的手一直在找寻我的手，我使劲握了它一下，把那只被满腔激情压红了的手甩了回去。

“你不必摆出那付面孔来，”我说。“要是你这样，我就始终什么也不穿，光穿我那身罗沃德学校的旧外套。结婚的时候我穿那套淡紫方格布衣服——你自己尽可以用珠灰色丝绸做一件睡袍，用黑色的缎子做无数件背心。”

他哧地笑了起来，一面搓着手。“呵，看她那样子，听她说话真有趣！”他大声叫了起来。“她不是不可多得的吗？她不是很泼辣的吗？我可不愿用这个英国小姑娘去换取土耳其王后宫的全部嫔妃，即便她们有羚羊般眼睛，女神一般的形体！”

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

这个东方的比喻又一次刺痛了我。“我丝毫比不上你后宫中的嫔妃，”我说，“所以你就别把我同她们相提并论，要是你喜欢这类东西，那你就走吧，先生，立刻就到伊斯坦布尔的市场上去，把你不知道如何开开心心在这儿花掉的部分现金，投入到大宗奴隶购买上去。”

“珍妮特，我在为无数吨肉和各类黑色眼睛讨价还价时，你会干什么呢？”

“我会收拾行装，出去当个传教士，向那些被奴役的人——你的三宫六院们，宣扬自由。我会进入后宫，鼓动造反。纵然你是三尾帕夏，转眼之间，你会被我们的人戴上镣铐，除非你签署一个宪章，有史以来的专制君王所签发的最宽容的宪章，不然至少我是不会同意砸烂镣铐的。”

“我同意听你摆布，盼你开恩，简。”

“要是你用那种目光来恳求，罗切斯特先生，那我不会开恩。我敢肯定，只要你摆出那付面孔，无论你在被迫的情况下同意哪种宪章，你获释后要干的第一件事，便是破坏宪章的条件。”

“嗨，简，你需要什么呢？恐怕除了圣坛前的结婚仪式之外，你一定要我私下再举行一次婚礼吧。看得出来，你会规定一些特殊的条件——是些什么条件呢？”

“我只求内心的安宁，先生，而不被应接不暇的恩惠压得透不过气来。你还记得你是怎么说塞莉纳·瓦伦的吗？——说起你送给她的钻石和毛料？我不会做你英国的塞莉纳·瓦伦。我会继续当阿黛勒的家庭教师，挣得我的食宿，以及三十镑的年薪，我会用这笔钱购置自己的衣装，你什么都不必给我，除了……”

“噢，除了什么呀？”

“你的尊重。而我也报之以我的尊重，这样这笔债就两清了。”

“嘿，就冷漠无礼的天性和过分自尊的痼疾而言，你简直无与伦比。”他说。这时我们驶近了桑菲尔德，“你乐意今天同我一起吃饭吗？”我们再次驶进大门时，他问。

“不，谢谢你，先生。”

“干嘛‘不，谢谢你呢？’要是我可以问的话。”

“我从来没有同你一起吃过饭，先生。也看不出有什么理由现在要这样做，直等到……”

“直等到什么呀？你喜欢吞吞吐吐。”

“直等到我万不得已的时候。”

“你设想我吃起来象吃人的魔王，食尸的鬼魂，所以你害怕陪我吃饭？”

“关于这点，我没有任何设想，先生，但是我想再过上一个月往常的日子。”

“你应该马上放弃家庭教师这苦差使。”

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“真的：请原谅，先生，我不放弃。我还是像往常一样过日子，照例整天不同你见面，晚上你想见我，便可以派人来叫我，我会来的，但别的时候不行。”

“在这种情况下，简，我想吸一支烟，或者一撮鼻烟，安慰安慰自己，像阿黛勒会说的‘pour me donner une contenance’。但要命的是，我既没有带雪茄烟盒，也没有带鼻烟壶。不过听着——悄悄同你说——现在你春风得意，小暴君，不过我很快就会时来运转。有朝一日牢牢抓住了你，我就会——打个比方——把你象这样拴在一根链条上（摸了摸他的表链），紧紧捆住不放。是的，美丽的小不点儿，我要把你揣在怀里，免得丢掉了我的宝贝。”

他一边说一边扶我走下了马车，当他随后去抱阿黛勒下来时，我乘机进了屋，溜到了楼上。

傍晚时他按时把我叫了去。我早已准备了事儿让他干，因为我决不想整个晚上跟他这么促膝谈心。我记得他的嗓子很漂亮，还知道他喜欢唱歌——好歌手一般都这样。我自己不会唱歌，而且按他那种苛刻的标准，我也不懂音乐。但我喜欢听出色的表演。黄昏薄暮的浪漫时刻，刚把星光闪烁的蓝色旗帜降到窗格上，我便立起身来，打开钢琴，求他一定得给我唱个歌。他说我是个捉摸不透的女巫，他还是其他时候唱好，但我口口声声说没有比现在更合适了。

他问我，喜欢他的嗓子么？

“很喜欢，”我本不乐意纵容他敏感的虚荣心，但只那么一次，又出于一时需要，我甚至会迎合和怂恿这样的虚荣心。

“那么，简，你得伴奏。”

“很好，先生，我可以试试。”

我的确试了试。但立即被赶下了琴凳，而且被称作“笨手笨脚的小东西。”他把我无礼地推到了一边——这正中我下怀——，抢占了位置，开始为自己伴奏起来，因为他既能唱又能弹。我赶紧走向窗子的壁龛，坐在那里，眺望着沉寂的树木和昏暗的草地，听他以醇厚的嗓音，和着优美的旋律，唱起了下面的歌：

从燃烧着的心窝，

感受到了最真诚的爱，

把生命的潮流，

欢快地注进每根血管。

每天，她的来临是我的希望，

她的别离是我的痛苦。

她脚步的偶尔延宕，

使我的每根血管成了冰窟。

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我梦想，我爱别人，别人爱我，

是一种莫名的幸福。

朝着这个目标我往前疾走，心情急切，又十分盲目。

谁知在我们两个生命之间，

横亘着无路的广漠。

白茫茫湍急而又危险，

犹如翻江倒海的绿波。

犹如盗贼出没的小路，

穿过山林和荒漠。

强权和公理，忧伤和愤怒，

使我们的的心灵两相隔膜。

艰难险阻，我毫不畏惧，种种凶兆，我敢于蔑视。

一切骚扰、警告和威胁，

我都漠然处置。

我的彩虹如闪电般疾驰，

我在梦中飞翔。

光焰焰横空出世，

我眼前是阵雨和骄阳。

那温柔庄严的欢欣，

仍照耀着灰暗苦难的云雾。

尽管阴森险恶的灾难已经逼近，这会儿我已毫不在乎。

在这甜蜜的时刻我已无所顾忌，

虽然我曾冲破的一切险阻，

再度展翅迅猛袭击，

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宣布要无情地报复。

尽管高傲的憎恨会把我击倒，

公理不容我上前分辩。

残暴的强权怒火中烧，

发誓永与我不共戴天。

我的心上人带着崇高的信赖，

把她的小手放在我的手里。

宣誓让婚姻的神圣纽带，把我们两人紧系在一起。

我的心上人用永不变心的一吻，

发誓与我生死同受。

我终于得到了莫名的幸福，

我爱别人——别人也爱我。

他立起身，向我走来。我见他满脸都燃烧着热情的火焰，圆圆的鹰眼闪闪发光，脸上充溢着温柔与激情。我一时有些畏缩——但随后便振作起来了。柔情蜜意的场面，大胆露骨并表示，我都不希望发生。但两种危险我都面临着。我必须准备好防患的武器——我磨尖了舌头，待他一走近我，便厉声问道，他现在要跟谁结婚呢？

“我的宝贝简提出了这么个怪问题。”

“真的！我以为这是个很自然很必要的问题，他已经谈起未来的妻子同他一起死，他这个异教徒念头是什么意思？我可不想与他一起死——他尽可放心。”

“呵，他所向往，他所祈祷的是你与他一块儿活！死亡不是属于像你这样的人。”

“自然也是属于我的，我跟他一样，时候一到，照样有权去死。但我要等到寿终正寝，而不是自焚殉夫，匆匆了此一生。”

“你能宽恕他这种自私的想法，给他一个吻，表示原谅与和解吗？”

“不，我宁可免了。”

这时我听见他称我为“心如铁石的小东西，”并且又加了一句“换了别的女人，听了这样的赞歌，心早就化了。”

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我明确告诉他，我生就了硬心肠——硬如铁石，他会发现我经常如此。何况我决计在今后的四周中，让他看看我性格中倔强的一面。他应当完全明白，他订的是怎样的婚约，趁现在还来得及的时候把它取消。

“你愿意平心静气，合情合理说话吗？”

“要是你高兴，我会平心静气的，至于说话合情合理，那我不是自吹，我现在就是这么做的。”

他很恼火，嘴里呶呀啐的。“很好，”我想，“你高兴光火就光火，烦躁就烦躁吧，但我相信，这是对付你的最好办法。尽管我对你的喜欢，非言语所能表达，但我不愿落入多情善感的流俗，我要用这巧辩的锋芒，让你悬崖勒马。除此之外，话中带刺，有助于保持我们之间对彼此都很有利的距离。”

我得寸进尺，惹得他很恼火，随后趁他怒悻悻地退到屋子另一头的时候，站起来象往常那样自自然然、恭恭敬敬地说了声“祝你晚安，先生，”便溜出边门走掉了。

这方式开了一个头，我便在整个观察期坚持下来了，而且大获成功。当然他悻悻然有些发火，但总的说来，我见他心情挺不错。而绵羊般的顺从，斑鸠似的多情，倒反而既会助长他的专横，又不能象现在这样取悦他的理智，满足他的常识，甚至投合他的趣味。

别人在场的时候，我照例显得恭敬文雅，其他举动都没有必要。只有在晚上交谈时，才那么冲撞他，折磨他。他仍然那么钟一敲七点便准时把我叫去，不过在他跟前时，他不再满嘴“亲爱的”、“恶毒的精灵”、“宝贝儿”那样的甜蜜称呼了。用在我身上最好的字眼是“令人恼火的木偶”、“小妖精”、“小傻瓜”等等。如今我得到的不是抚慰，而是鬼脸；不是紧紧握手，而是拧一下胳膊；不是吻一下脸颊，而是使劲拉拉耳朵。这倒不错。眼下我确实更喜欢这种粗野的宠爱，而不喜欢什么温柔的表露。我发现费尔法克斯太太也赞成，而且已不再为我担忧了，因此我确信自己做得很对。与此同时，罗切斯特先生却口口声声说我把他折磨得皮包骨头了，并威胁在即将到来的某个时期，对我现在的行为狠狠报复。他的恫吓，我暗自觉得好笑。“现在我可以让你受到合乎情理的约束，”我思忖道，“我并不怀疑今后还能这么做，要是一种办法失效了，那就得另外再想出一种来。”

然而，我的担子毕竟并不轻松，我总是情愿讨他喜欢而不是捉弄他。我的未婚夫正成为我的整个世界，不仅是整个世界，而且几乎成了我进入天堂的希望。他把我和一切宗教观念隔开，犹如日蚀把人类和太阳隔开一样。在那些日子里，我把上帝的造物当作了偶像，并因为他，而看不见上帝了。