

CHAPTER XXVIII

TWO days are passed. It is a summer evening; the coachman has set me down at a place called Whitcross; he could take me no farther for the sum I had given, and I was not possessed of another shilling in the world. The coach is a mile off by this time; I am alone. At this moment I discover that I forgot to take my parcel out of the pocket of the coach, where I had placed it for safety; there it remains, there it must remain; and now, I am absolutely destitute.

Whitcross is no town, nor even a hamlet; it is but a stone pillar set up where four roads meet: whitewashed, I suppose, to be more obvious at a distance and in darkness. Four arms spring from its summit: the nearest town to which these point is, according to the inscription, distant ten miles; the farthest, above twenty. From the well-known names of these towns I learn in what county I have lighted; a north-midland shire, dusk with moorland, ridged with mountain: this I see. There are great moors behind and on each hand of me; there are waves of mountains far beyond that deep valley at my feet. The population here must be thin, and I see no passengers on these roads: they stretch out east, west, north, and south-white, broad, lonely; they are all cut in the moor, and the heather grows deep and wild to their very verge. Yet a chance traveller might pass by; and I wish no eye to see me now: strangers would wonder what I am doing, lingering here at the sign-post, evidently objectless and lost. I might be questioned: I could give no answer but what would sound incredible and excite suspicion. Not a tie holds me to human society at this moment- not a charm or hope calls me where my fellow-creatures are- none that saw me would have a kind thought or a good wish for me.

I have no relative but the universal mother, Nature: I will seek her breast and ask repose.

I struck straight into the heath; I held on to a hollow I saw deeply furrowing the brown moorside; I waded knee-deep in its dark growth; I turned with its turnings, and finding a moss-blackened granite crag in a hidden angle, I sat down under it. High banks of moor were about me; the crag protected my head: the sky was over that.

Some time passed before I felt tranquil even here: I had a vague dread that wild cattle might be near, or that some sportsman or poacher might discover me. If a gust of wind swept the waste, I looked up, fearing it was the rush of a bull; if a plover whistled, I imagined it a man. Finding my apprehensions unfounded, however, and calmed by the deep silence that reigned as evening declined at nightfall, I took confidence. As yet I had not thought; I had only listened, watched, dreaded; now I regained the faculty of reflection.

What was I to do? Where to go? Oh, intolerable questions, when I could do nothing and go nowhere!- when a long way must yet be measured by my weary, trembling limbs before I could reach human habitation- when cold charity must be entreated before I could get a lodging: reluctant sympathy importuned, almost certain repulse incurred, before my tale could be listened to, or one of my wants relieved!

I touched the heath: it was dry, and yet warm with the heat of the summer day. I looked at the sky; it was pure: a kindly star twinkled just above the chasm ridge. The day fell, but with propitious

softness; no breeze whispered. Nature seemed to me benign and good;

I thought she loved me, outcast as I was; and I, who from man could anticipate only mistrust, rejection, insult, clung to her with filial fondness. To-night, at least, I would be her guest, as I was her child: my mother would lodge me without money and without price. I had one morsel of bread yet: the remnant of a roll I had bought in a town we passed through at noon with a stray penny- my last coin. I saw ripe bilberries gleaming here and there, like jet beads in the heath: I gathered a handful and ate them with the bread. My hunger, sharp before, was, if not satisfied, appeased by this hermit's meal. I said my evening prayers at its conclusion, and then chose my couch.

Beside the crag the heath was very deep: when I lay down my feet were buried in it; rising high on each side, it left only a narrow space for the night-air to invade. I folded my shawl double, and spread it over me for a coverlet; a low, mossy swell was my pillow.

Thus lodged, I was not, at least at the commencement of the night, cold.

My rest might have been blissful enough, only a sad heart broke it.

It plained of its gaping wounds, its inward bleeding, its riven chords. It trembled for Mr. Rochester and his doom; it bemoaned him with bitter pity; it demanded him with ceaseless longing; and, impotent as a bird with both wings broken, it still quivered its shattered pinions in vain attempts to seek him.

Worn out with this torture of thought, I rose to my knees. Night was come, and her planets were risen: a safe, still night: too serene for the companionship of fear. We know that God is everywhere; but certainly we feel His presence most when His works are on the grandest scale spread before us; and it is in the unclouded night-sky, where His worlds wheel their silent course, that we read clearest His infinitude, His omnipotence, His omnipresence. I had risen to my knees to pray for Mr. Rochester. Looking up, I, with tear-dimmed eyes, saw the mighty Milky-way. Remembering what it was- what countless systems there swept space like a soft trace of light- I felt the might and strength of God. Sure was I of His efficiency to save what He had made: convinced I grew that neither earth should perish, nor one of the souls it treasured. I turned my prayer to thanksgiving: the Source of Life was also the Saviour of spirits.

Mr. Rochester was safe: he was God's, and by God would he be guarded. I again nestled to the breast of the hill; and ere long in sleep forgot sorrow.

But next day, Want came to me pale and bare. Long after the little birds had left their nests; long after bees had come in the sweet prime of day to gather the heath honey before the dew was dried- when the long morning shadows were curtailed, and the sun filled earth and sky- I got up, and I looked round me.

What a still, hot, perfect day! What a golden desert this spreading moor! Everywhere sunshine. I wished I could live in it and on it. I saw a lizard run over the crag; I saw a bee busy among the

sweet bilberries. I would fain at the moment have become bee or lizard, that I might have found fitting nutriment, permanent shelter here. But I was a human being, and had a human being's wants: I must not linger where there was nothing to supply them. I rose; I looked back at the bed I had left. Hopeless of the future, I wished but this- that my Maker had that night thought good to require my soul of me while I slept; and that this weary frame, absolved by death from further conflict with fate, had now but to decay quietly, and mingle in peace with the soil of this wilderness. Life, however, was yet in my possession, with all its requirements, and pains, and responsibilities. The burden must be carried; the want provided for; the suffering endured; the responsibility fulfilled. I set out.

Whitcross regained, I followed a road which led from the sun, now fervent and high. By no other circumstance had I will to decide my choice. I walked a long time, and when I thought I had nearly done enough, and might conscientiously yield to the fatigue that almost overpowered me- might relax this forced action, and, sitting down on a stone I saw near, submit resistlessly to the apathy that clogged heart and limb- I heard a bell chime- a church bell.

I turned in the direction of the sound, and there, amongst the romantic hills, whose changes and aspect I had ceased to note an hour ago, I saw a hamlet and a spire. All the valley at my right hand was full of pasture-fields, and cornfields, and wood; and a glittering stream ran zig zag through the varied shades of green, the mellowing grain, the sombre woodland, the clear and sunny lea.

Recalled by the rumbling of wheels to the road before me, I saw a heavily-laden waggon labouring up the hill, and not far beyond were two cows and their drover. Human life and human labour were near. I must struggle on: strive to live and bend to toil like the rest.

About two o'clock P.M. I entered the village. At the bottom of its one street there was a little shop with some cakes of bread in the window. I coveted a cake of bread. With that refreshment I could perhaps regain a degree of energy: without it, it would be difficult to proceed. The wish to have some strength and some vigour returned to me as soon as I was amongst my fellow-beings. I felt it would be degrading to faint with hunger on the causeway of a hamlet. Had I nothing about me I could offer in exchange for one of these rolls? I considered. I had a small silk handkerchief tied round my throat; I had my gloves. I could hardly tell how men and women in extremities of destitution proceeded. I did not know whether either of these articles would be accepted: probably they would not; but I must try.

I entered the shop: a woman was there. Seeing a respectably-dressed person, a lady as she supposed, she came forward with civility. How could she serve me? I was seized with shame: my tongue would not utter the request I had prepared. I dared not offer her the half-worn gloves, the creased handkerchief: besides, I felt it would be absurd. I only begged permission to sit down a moment, as I was tired.

Disappointed in the expectation of a customer, she coolly acceded to my request. She pointed to a seat; I sank into it. I felt sorely urged to weep; but conscious how unseasonable such a manifestation would be, I restrained it. Soon I asked her 'if there were any dressmaker or plain-

workwoman in the village?'

'Yes; two or three. Quite as many as there was employment for.'

I reflected. I was driven to the point now. I was brought face to face with Necessity. I stood in the position of one without a resource, without a friend, without a coin. I must do something. What? I must apply somewhere. Where?

'Did she know of any place in the neighbourhood where a servant was wanted?'

'Nay; she couldn't say.'

'What was the chief trade in this place? What did most of the people do?'

'Some were farm labourers; a good deal worked at Mr. Oliver's needle-factory, and at the foundry.'

'Did Mr. Oliver employ women?'

'Nay; it was men's work.'

'And what do the women do?'

'I knawn't,' was the answer. 'Some does one thing, and some another. Poor folk mun get on as they can.'

She seemed to be tired of my questions: and, indeed, what claim had I to importune her? A neighbour or two came in; my chair was evidently wanted. I took leave.

I passed up the street, looking as I went at all the houses to the right hand and to the left; but I could discover no pretext, nor see an inducement to enter any. I rambled round the hamlet, going sometimes to a little distance and returning again, for an hour or more. Much exhausted, and suffering greatly now for want of food, I turned aside into a lane and sat down under the hedge. Ere many minutes had elapsed, I was again on my feet, however, and again searching something- a resource, or at least an informant. A pretty little house stood at the top of the lane, with a garden before it, exquisitely neat and brilliantly blooming. I stopped at it. What business had I to approach the white door or touch the glittering knocker? In what way could it possibly be the interest of the inhabitants of that dwelling to serve me? Yet I drew near and knocked.

A mild-looking, cleanly-attired young woman opened the door. In such a voice as might be expected from a hopeless heart and fainting frame- a voice wretchedly low and faltering- I asked if a servant was wanted here?

'No,' said she; 'we do not keep a servant.'

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'Can you tell me where I could get employment of any kind?' I continued. 'I am a stranger, without acquaintance in this place. I want some work: no matter what.'

But it was not her business to think for me, or to seek a place for me: besides, in her eyes, how doubtful must have appeared my character, position, tale. She shook her head, she 'was sorry she could give me no information,' and the white door closed, quite gently and civilly: but it shut me out. If she had held it open a little longer, I believe I should have begged a piece of bread; for I was now brought low.

I could not bear to return to the sordid village, where, besides, no prospect of aid was visible. I should have longed rather to deviate to a wood I saw not far off, which appeared in its thick shade to offer inviting shelter; but I was so sick, so weak, so gnawed with nature's cravings, instinct kept me roaming round abodes where there was a chance of food. Solitude would be no solitude- rest no rest- while the vulture, hunger, thus sank beak and talons in my side.

I drew near houses; I left them, and came back again, and again I wandered away: always repelled by the consciousness of having no claim to ask- no right to expect interest in my isolated lot. Meantime, the afternoon advanced, while I thus wandered about like a lost and starving dog. In crossing a field, I saw the church spire before me: I hastened towards it. Near the churchyard, and in the middle of a garden, stood a well-built though small house, which I had no doubt was the parsonage. I remembered that strangers who arrive at a place where they have no friends, and who want employment, sometimes apply to the clergyman for introduction and aid. It is the clergyman's function to help- at least with advice- those who wished to help themselves. I seemed to have something like a right to seek counsel here. Renewing then my courage, and gathering my feeble remains of strength, I pushed on. I reached the house, and knocked at the kitchen-door. An old woman opened: I asked was this the parsonage?

'Yes.'

'Was the clergyman in?'

'No.'

'Would he be in soon?'

'No, he was gone from home.'

'To a distance?'

'Not so far- happen three mile. He had been called away by the sudden death of his father: he was at Marsh End now, and would very likely stay there a fortnight longer.'

'Was there any lady of the house?'

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'Nay, there was naught but her, and she was housekeeper!'; and of her, reader, I could not bear to ask the relief for want of which I was sinking; I could not yet beg; and again I crawled away.

Once more I took off my handkerchief- once more I thought of the cakes of bread in the little shop. Oh, for but a crust! for but one mouthful to allay the pang of famine! Instinctively I turned my face again to the village; I found the shop again, and I went in; and though others were there besides the woman I ventured the request-

'Would she give me a roll for this handkerchief?'

She looked at me with evident suspicion: 'Nay, she never sold stuff i' that way.'

Almost desperate, I asked for half a cake; she again refused.

'How could she tell where I had got the handkerchief?' she said.

'Would she take my gloves?'

'No! what could she do with them?'

Reader, it is not pleasant to dwell on these details. Some say there is enjoyment in looking back to painful experience past; but at this day I can scarcely bear to review the times to which I allude: the moral degradation, blent with the physical suffering, form too distressing a recollection ever to be willingly dwelt on. I blamed none of those who repulsed me. I felt it was what was to be expected, and what could not be helped: an ordinary beggar is frequently an object of suspicion; a well-dressed beggar inevitably so. To be sure, what I begged was employment; but whose business was it to provide me with employment? Not, certainly, that of persons who saw me then for the first time, and who knew nothing about my character. And as to the woman who would not take my handkerchief in exchange for her bread, why, she was right, if the offer appeared to her sinister or the exchange unprofitable. Let me condense now. I am sick of the subject.

A little before dark I passed a farmhouse, at the open door of which the farmer was sitting, eating his supper of bread and cheese. I stopped and said-

'Will you give me a piece of bread? for I am very hungry.' He cast on me a glance of surprise; but without answering, he cut a thick slice from his loaf, and gave it to me. I imagine he did not think I was a beggar, but only an eccentric sort of lady, who had taken a fancy to his brown loaf. As soon as I was out of sight of his house, I sat down and ate it.

I could not hope to get a lodging under a roof, and sought it in the wood I have before alluded to. But my night was wretched, my rest broken: the ground was damp, the air cold: besides, intruders passed near me more than once, and I had again and again to change my quarters: no sense of safety or tranquillity befriended me. Towards morning it rained; the whole of the following day was wet. Do not ask me, reader, to give a minute account of that day; as before, I sought work; as before,

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I was repulsed; as before, I starved; but once did food pass my lips. At the door of a cottage I saw a little girl about to throw a mess of cold porridge into a pig trough. 'Will you give me that?' I asked.

She stared at me. 'Mother!' she exclaimed, 'there is a woman wants me to give her these porridge.'

'Well, lass,' replied a voice within, 'give it her if she's a beggar. T' pig doesn't want it.'

The girl emptied the stiffened mould into my hands and I devoured it ravenously.

As the wet twilight deepened, I stopped in a solitary bridle-path, which I had been pursuing an hour or more.

'My strength is quite failing me,' I said in a soliloquy. 'I feel I cannot go much farther. Shall I be an outcast again this night?'

While the rain descends so, must I lay my head on the cold, drenched ground? I fear I cannot do otherwise: for who will receive me? But it will be very dreadful, with this feeling of hunger, faintness, chill, and this sense of desolation- this total prostration of hope.

In all likelihood, though, I should die before morning. And why cannot I reconcile myself to the prospect of death? Why do I struggle to retain a valueless life? Because I know, or believe, Mr. Rochester is living: and then, to die of want and cold is a fate to which nature cannot submit passively. Oh, Providence! sustain me a little longer!

Aid!- direct me!'

My glazed eye wandered over the dim and misty landscape. I saw I had strayed far from the village: it was quite out of sight. The very cultivation surrounding it had disappeared. I had, by cross-ways and by-paths, once more drawn near the tract of moorland; and now, only a few fields, almost as wild and unproductive as the heath from which they were scarcely reclaimed, lay between me and the dusky hill.

'Well, I would rather die yonder than in a street or on a frequented road,' I reflected. 'And far better that crows and ravens- if any ravens there be in these regions- should pick my flesh from my bones, than that they should be prisoned in a workhouse coffin and moulder in a pauper's grave.'

To the hill, then, I turned. I reached it. It remained now only to find a hollow where I could lie down, and feel at least hidden, if not secure. But all the surface of the waste looked level. It showed no variation but of tint: green, where rush and moss overgrew the marshes; black, where the dry soil bore only heath. Dark as it was getting, I could still see these changes, though but as mere alternations of light and shade; for colour had faded with the daylight.

My eye still roved over the sullen swell and along the moor-edge, vanishing amidst the wildest scenery, when at one dim point, far in among the marshes and the ridges, a light sprang up. 'That is

an ignis fatuus,' was my first thought; and I expected it would soon vanish. It burnt on, however, quite steadily, neither receding nor advancing. 'Is it, then, a bonfire just kindled?' I questioned. I watched to see whether it would spread: but no; as it did not diminish, so it did not enlarge. 'It may be a candle in a house,' I then conjectured; 'but if so, I can never reach it. It is much too far away: and were it within a yard of me, what would it avail? I should but knock at the door to have it shut in my face.'

And I sank down where I stood, and hid my face against the ground. I lay still a while: the night-wind swept over the hill and over me, and died moaning in the distance; the rain fell fast, wetting me afresh to the skin. Could I but have stiffened to the still frost-the friendly numbness of death- it might have pelted on; I should not have felt it; but my yet living flesh shuddered at its chilling influence. I rose ere long.

The light was yet there, shining dim but constant through the rain.

I tried to walk again: I dragged my exhausted limbs slowly towards it.

It led me aslant over the hill, through a wide bog, which would have been impassable in winter, and was splashy and shaking even now, in the height of summer. Here I fell twice; but as often I rose and rallied my faculties. This light was my forlorn hope: I must gain it.

Having crossed the marsh, I saw a trace of white over the moor. I approached it; it was a road or a track: it led straight up to the light, which now beamed from a sort of knoll, amidst a clump of trees- firs, apparently, from what I could distinguish of the character of their forms and foliage through the gloom. My star vanished as I drew near: some obstacle had intervened between me and it. I put out my hand to feel the dark mass before me: I discriminated the rough stones of a low wall- above it, something like palisades, and within, a high and prickly hedge. I groped on. Again a whitish object gleamed before me: it was a gate- a wicket; it moved on its hinges as I touched it. On each side stood a sable bush- holly or yew.

Entering the gate and passing the shrubs, the silhouette of a house rose to view, black, low, and rather long; but the guiding light shone nowhere. All was obscurity. Were the inmates retired to rest? I feared it must be so. In seeking the door, I turned an angle: there shot out the friendly gleam again, from the lozenged panes of a very small latticed window, within a foot of the ground, made still smaller by the growth of ivy or some other creeping plant, whose leaves clustered thick over the portion of the house wall in which it was set. The aperture was so screened and narrow, that curtain or shutter had been deemed unnecessary; and when I stooped down and put aside the spray of foliage shooting over it, I could see all within. I could see clearly a room with a sanded floor, clean scoured; a dresser of walnut, with pewter plates ranged in rows, reflecting the redness and radiance of a glowing peat-fire. I could see a clock, a white deal table, some chairs. The candle, whose ray had been my beacon, burnt on the table; and by its light an elderly woman, somewhat rough-looking, but scrupulously clean, like all about her, was knitting a stocking.

I noticed these objects cursorily only- in them there was nothing extraordinary. A group of more



interest appeared near the hearth, sitting still amidst the rosy peace and warmth suffusing it. Two young, graceful women- ladies in every point- sat, one in a low rocking-chair, the other on a lower stool; both wore deep mourning of crape and bombaz en, which sombre garb singularly set off very fair necks and faces: a large old pointer dog rested its massive head on the knee of one girl- in the lap of the other was cushioned a black cat.

A strange place was this humble kitchen for such occupants! Who were they? They could not be the daughters of the elderly person at the table; for she looked like a rustic, and they were all delicacy and cultivation. I had nowhere seen such faces as theirs: and yet, as I gazed on them, I seemed intimate with every lineament. I cannot call them handsome- they were too pale and grave for the word: as they each bent over a book, they looked thoughtful almost to severity. A stand between them supported a second candle and two great volumes, to which they frequently referred, comparing them, seemingly, with the smaller books they held in their hands, like people consulting a dictionary to aid them in the task of translation. This scene was as silent as if all the figures had been shadows and the firelit apartment a picture: so hushed was it, I could hear the cinders fall from the grate, the clock tick in its obscure corner; and I even fancied I could distinguish the click-click of the woman's knitting-needles. When, therefore, a voice broke the strange stillness at last, it was audible enough to me.

'Listen, Diana,' said one of the absorbed students; 'Franz and old Daniel are together in the night-time, and Franz is telling a dream from which he has awakened in terror- listen!' And in a low voice she read something, of which not one word was intelligible to me; for it was in an unknown tongue- neither French nor Latin. Whether it were Greek or German I could not tell.

'That is strong,' she said, when she had finished: 'I relish it.'

The other girl, who had lifted her head to listen to her sister, repeated, while she gazed at the fire, a line of what had been read.

At a later day, I knew the language and the book; therefore, I will here quote the line: though, when I first heard it, it was only like a stroke on sounding brass to me- conveying no meaning:-

"Da trat hervor Einer, anzusehen wie die Sternen Nacht." Good! good!' she exclaimed, while her dark and deep eye sparkled. 'There you have a dim and mighty archangel fitly set before you! The line is worth a hundred pages of fustian. "Ich wage die Gedanken in der Schale meines Zornes und die Werke mit dem Gewichte meines Grimms." I like it!'

Both were again silent.

'Is there any country where they talk i' that way?' asked the old woman, looking up from her knitting.

'Yes, Hannah- a far larger country than England, where they talk in no other way.'

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'Well, for sure case, I know'n't how they can understand t'one t'other: and if either o' ye went there, ye could tell what they said, I guess?'

'We could probably tell something of what they said, but not all- for we are not as clever as you think us, Hannah. We don't speak German, and we cannot read it without a dictionary to help us.'

'And what good does it do you?'

'We mean to teach it some time- or at least the elements, as they say; and then we shall get more money than we do now.'

'Varry like: but give ower studying; ye've done enough for to-night.'

'I think we have: at least I'm tired. Mary, are you?'

'Mortally: after all, it's tough work fagging away at a language with no master but a lexicon.'

'It is, especially such a language as this crabbed but glorious Deutsch. I wonder when St. John will come home.'

'Surely he will not be long now: it is just ten (looking at a little gold watch she drew from her girdle). It rains fast, Hannah: will you have the goodness to look at the fire in the parlour?'

The woman rose: she opened a door, through which I dimly saw a passage: soon I heard her stir a fire in an inner room; she presently came back.

'Ah, childer!' said she, 'it fair troubles me to go into yond' room now: it looks so lonesome wi' the chair empty and set back in a corner.'

She wiped her eyes with her apron: the two girls, grave before, looked sad now.

'But he is in a better place,' continued Hannah: 'we shouldn't wish him here again. And then, nobody need to have a quieter death nor he had.'

'You say he never mentioned us?' inquired one of the ladies.

'He hadn't time, bairn: he was gone in a minute, was your father.'

He had been a bit ailing like the day before, but naught to signify; and when Mr. St. John asked if he would like either o' ye to be sent for, he fair laughed at him. He began again with a bit of a heaviness in his head the next day- that is, a fortnight sin'- and he went to sleep and niver wakened: he wor a'most stark when your brother went into t' chamber and fand him. Ah, childer! that's t' last o' t' old stock- for ye and Mr. St. John is like of different soart to them 'at's gone; for all your mother wor mich i' your way, and a'most as book-learned. She wor the pictur' o' ye, Mary: Diana is more

like your father.'

I thought them so similar I could not tell where the old servant (for such I now concluded her to be) saw the difference. Both were fair complexioned and slenderly made; both possessed faces full of distinction and intelligence. One, to be sure, had hair a shade darker than the other, and there was a difference in their style of wearing it; Mary's pale brown locks were parted and braided smooth: Diana's dusker tresses covered her neck with thick curls. The clock struck ten.

'Ye'll want your supper, I am sure,' observed Hannah; 'and so will Mr. St. John when he comes in.'

And she proceeded to prepare the meal. The ladies rose; they seemed about to withdraw to the parlour. Till this moment, I had been so intent on watching them, their appearance and conversation had excited in me so keen an interest, I had half-forgotten my own wretched position: now it recurred to me. More desolate, more desperate than ever, it seemed from contrast. And how impossible did it appear to touch the inmates of this house with concern on my behalf; to make them believe in the truth of my wants and woes- to induce them to vouchsafe a rest for my wanderings! As I groped out the door, and knocked at it hesitatingly, I felt that last idea to be a mere chimera. Hannah opened.

'What do you want?' she inquired, in a voice of surprise, as she surveyed me by the light of the candle she held.

'May I speak to your mistresses?' I said.

'You had better tell me what you have to say to them. Where do you come from?'

'I am a stranger.'

'What is your business here at this hour?'

'I want a night's shelter in an out-house or anywhere, and a morsel of bread to eat.'

Distrust, the very feeling I dreaded, appeared in Hannah's face.

'I'll give you a piece of bread,' she said, after a pause; 'but we can't take in a vagrant to lodge. It isn't likely.'

'Do let me speak to your mistresses.'

'No, not I. What can they do for you? You should not be roving about now; it looks very ill.'

'But where shall I go if you drive me away? What shall I do?'

'Oh, I'll warrant you know where to go and what to do. Mind you don't do wrong, that's all. Here is a

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penny; now go-'

'A penny cannot feed me, and I have no strength to go farther.

Don't shut the door:- oh, don't, for God's sake!

'I must; the rain is driving in-'

'Tell the young ladies. Let me see them-'

'Indeed, I will not. You are not what you ought to be, or you wouldn't make such a noise. Move off.'

'But I must die if I am turned away.'

'Not you. I'm fear'd you have some ill plans agate, that bring you about folk's houses at this time o' night. If you've any followers- housebreakers or such like- anywhere near, you may tell them we are not by ourselves in the house; we have a gentleman, and dogs, and guns.' Here the honest but inflexible servant clapped the door to and bolted it within.

This was the climax. A pang of exquisite suffering- a throe of true despair- rent and heaved my heart. Worn out, indeed, I was; not another step could I stir. I sank on the wet doorstep: I groaned-I wrung my hands- I wept in utter anguish. Oh, this spectre of death!

Oh, this last hour, approaching in such horror! Alas, this isolation- this banishment from my kind! Not only the anchor of hope, but the footing of fortitude was gone- at least for a moment; but the last I soon endeavoured to regain.

'I can but die,' I said, 'and I believe in God. Let me try to wait His will in silence.'

These words I not only thought, but uttered; and thrusting back all my misery into my heart, I made an effort to compel it to remain there- dumb and still.

'All men must die,' said a voice quite close at hand; 'but all are not condemned to meet a lingering and premature doom, such as yours would be if you perished here of want.'

'Who or what speaks?' I asked, terrified at the unexpected sound, and incapable now of deriving from any occurrence a hope of aid. A form was near- what form, the pitch-dark night and my enfeebled vision prevented me from distinguishing. With a loud long knock, the newcomer appealed to the door.

'Is it you, Mr. St. John?' cried Hannah.

'Yes- yes; open quickly.'

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'Well, how wet and cold you must be, such a wild night as it is!

Come in- your sisters are quite uneasy about you, and I believe there are bad folks about. There has been a beggar-woman- I declare she is not gone yet!- laid down there. Get up! for shame! Move off, I say!

'Hush, Hannah! I have a word to say to the woman. You have done your duty in excluding, now let me do mine in admitting her. I was near, and listened to both you and her. I think this is a peculiar case- I must at least examine into it. Young woman, rise, and pass before me into the house.'

With difficulty I obeyed him. Presently I stood within that clean, bright kitchen- on the very hearth-trembling, sickening; conscious of an aspect in the last degree ghastly, wild, and weather-beaten. The two ladies, their brother, Mr. St. John, the old servant, were all gazing at me.

'St. John, who is it?' I heard one ask.

'I cannot tell: I found her at the door,' was the reply.

'She does look white,' said Hannah.

'As white as clay or death,' was responded. 'She will fall: let her sit.'

And indeed my head swam: I dropped, but a chair received me. I still possessed my senses, though just now I could not speak.

'Perhaps a little water would restore her. Hannah, fetch some.

But she is worn to nothing. How very thin, and how very bloodless!'

'A mere spectre!'

'Is she ill, or only famished?'

'Famished, I think. Hannah, is that milk? Give it me, and a piece of bread.'

Diana (I knew her by the long curls which I saw drooping between me and the fire as she bent over me) broke some bread, dipped it in milk, and put it to my lips. Her face was near mine: I saw there was pity in it, and I felt sympathy in her hurried breathing. In her simple words, too, the same balm-like emotion spoke: 'Try to eat.'

'Yes- try,' repeated Mary gently; and Mary's hand removed my sodden bonnet and lifted my head. I tasted what they offered me: feebly at first, eagerly soon.

'Not too much at first- restrain her,' said the brother; 'she has had enough.' And he withdrew the cup

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of milk and the plate of bread.

'A little more, St. John- look at the avidity in her eyes.'

'No more at present, sister. Try if she can speak now- ask her her name.'

I felt I could speak, and I answered- 'My name is Jane Elliott.'

Anxious as ever to avoid discovery, I had before resolved to assume an alias.

'And where do you live? Where are your friends?'

I was silent.

'Can we send for any one you know?'

I shook my head.

'What account can you give of yourself?'

Somehow, now that I had once crossed the threshold of this house, and once was brought face to face with its owners, I felt no longer outcast, vagrant, and disowned by the wide world. I dared to put off the mendicant- to resume my natural manner and character. I began once more to know myself; and when Mr. St. John demanded an account- which at present I was far too weak to render- I said after a brief pause-

'Sir, I can give you no details to-night.'

'But what, then,' said he, 'do you expect me to do for you?'

'Nothing,' I replied. My strength sufficed for but short answers.

Diana took the word-

'Do you mean,' she asked, 'that we have now given you what aid you require? and that we may dismiss you to the moor and the rainy night?'

I looked at her. She had, I thought, a remarkable countenance, instinct both with power and goodness. I took sudden courage.

Answering her compassionate gaze with a smile, I said- 'I will trust you. If I were a masterless and stray dog, I know that you would not turn me from your hearth to-night: as it is, I really have no fear. Do with me and for me as you like; but excuse me from much discourse- my breath is short- I feel a spasm when I speak.' All three surveyed me, and all three were silent.

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'Hannah,' said Mr. St. John, at last, 'let her sit there at present, and ask her no questions; in ten minutes more, give her the remainder of that milk and bread. Mary and Diana, let us go into the parlour and talk the matter over.'

They withdrew. Very soon one of the ladies returned- I could not tell which. A kind of pleasant stupor was stealing over me as I sat by the genial fire. In an undertone she gave some directions to Hannah.

Ere long, with the servant's aid, I contrived to mount a staircase; my dripping clothes were removed; soon a warm, dry bed received me. I thanked God- experienced amidst unutterable exhaustion a glow of grateful joy- and slept.

## 第二十八章

两天过去了。夏天的一个傍晚，马车夫让我在一个叫作惠特克劳斯的地方下了车，凭我给的那点钱他已无法再把车往前拉，而在这个世上，我连一个先令也拿不出来了。此刻，马车已驶出一英里，撇下我孤单一一人。这时我才发现忘了从马车贮物箱里把包裹拿出来了，我把它放在那儿原本是为了安全，不想就那么留下了，准是留在那儿，而我已经莫名其妙了。

惠特克劳斯不是一个镇，连乡村也不是。它不过是一根石柱，竖在四条路汇合的地方：粉刷得很白，想必是为了在远处和黑夜显得更醒目。柱顶上伸出四个指路标，按上面的标识看，这个交汇点距最近的城镇十英里，离最远的超过二十英里。从这些熟悉的镇名来判断，我明白我在什么郡下了车。这是中部偏北的一个郡，看得出来荒野幽暗，山峦层叠。我身后和左右是大荒原，我脚下深谷的远处，是一片起伏的山林。这里人口必定稀少，因为路上不见行人。一条条道路伸向东南西北——灰白、宽敞、孤零，全都穿过荒原，路边长着茂密的欧石南。但偶尔也有路人经过，现在我却不希望有人看见我那么在路标下徘徊，显得毫无目的，不知所措，陌生人会不知道我在干什么。我也许会受到盘问，除了说些听来不可信和令人生疑的话之外，会无言以对。这一时刻我与人类社会完全失去了联系——没有一丝魅力或是希望把我召唤到我的同类那里，——没有谁见到我会对我表示一丝善意或良好的祝愿。我没有亲人，只有万物之母大自然。我会投向她的怀抱，寻求安息。

我径直走进欧石南丛，看见棕色的荒原边上有一条深陷的沟壑，便一直沿着它往前走，穿行在没膝的青色树丛中，顺着一个个弯道拐了弯，在一个隐蔽的角落找到了一块布满青苔的花岗岩，在底下坐了下来。我周围是荒原高高的边沿，头上有岩石保护着，岩石上面是天空。即使在这儿，我也过了好一会才感到宁静。我隐约担心附近会有野兽。或者某个狩猎人或偷猎者会发现我。要是一阵风刮起了荒草，我就会抬起头来，深怕是一头野牛冲将过来了。要是一只行鸟叫了一下，我会想象是一个人的声音。然而我发现自己的担忧不过是捕风捉影，此外黄昏过后夜幕降临时深沉的寂静，使我镇定了下来，我便有了信心。但在这之前我没有思考过，只不过细听着，担心着，观察着。而现在我又恢复了思索的能力。

我该怎么办？往哪儿去？呵，当我无法可想，无处可去的时候，那些问题多么难以忍受呀！

我得用疲乏颤抖的双腿走完很长的路，才能抵达有人烟的地方——我要恳求发点冷冷的慈悲，才能找到一个投宿之处；我要强求勉为其难的同情，而且多半还会遭人嫌弃，才能使人听听我的经历，满足我的需要。

我碰了碰欧石南，只觉得它很干燥，还带着夏日热力的微温。我看了看天空，只见它清明纯净，一颗星星在山凹上空和蔼地眨眼。露水降下来了，带着慈爱的温柔。没有微风在低语。大自然似乎对我很慈祥，虽然我成了流浪者，但我想她很爱我。我从人那儿只能期待怀疑、嫌弃和侮辱，我要忠心耿耿一往情深地依恋大自然。至少今晚我可以在那儿作客了——因为我是她的孩子，我的母亲会收留我，不要钱，不要付出代价。我还有一口吃剩的面包，那面包是我用一便士零钱——我最后的一枚硬币，从下午路过的小镇买来的。我看到了成熟的越桔——像欧石南丛中的煤玉那样，随处闪着光。我采集了一大把，和着面包吃。我刚才还饥肠辘辘，隐士的食品虽然吃不饱，却足以充饥了。吃完饭我做了夜祷告，随后便择榻就寝了。

岩石旁边，欧石南长得很高。我一躺下，双脚便陷了进去，两边的石楠高高竖起，只留下很窄的一块地方要受夜气侵袭。我把披肩一摺为二，铺在身上作盖被，一个长满青苔的低矮小墩当了枕头。我就这么住下了，至少在夜刚来临时，是觉得冷的。

我的安息本来也许是够幸福的，可惜让一颗悲伤的心破坏了，它泣诉着自己张开的伤口、流血的心扉、折断的心弦。它为罗切斯特先生和他的灭亡而颤抖，因为痛惜而为他恸哭。它带着无休止的渴望召唤他，尽管它像断了双翅的小鸟那样无能为力，却仍旧抖动着断翅，徒劳地找寻着他。

我被这种念头折磨得疲乏不堪，于是便起来跪着。夜已来临，星星已经升起，这是一个平安宁静的夜，平静得与恐怖无缘。我们知道上帝无处不在，但当他的劳作壮丽地展现在我们面前时，我们才最感觉到他的存在。在万里无云的夜空中，在他的宇宙无声地滚滚向前的地方，我们清楚地看到了他的无边无涯，他的万能，他无处不在。我已起来跪着为罗切斯特先生祈祷。抬起头来，我泪眼朦胧地看到了浩瀚的银河。一想起银河是什么——那里有无数的星系像一道微光那么扫过太空——我便感到了上帝的巨大力量。我确信他有能力拯救他的造物，更相信无论是地球，还是它所珍爱的一个灵魂，都不会毁灭。我把祈祷的内容改为感恩。生命的源泉也是灵魂的救星。罗切斯特先生会安然无恙。他属于上帝，上帝会保护他。我再次投入小山的怀抱，不久，在沉睡中便忘掉了忧愁。

但第二天，苍白赤裸的匮乏，幽灵似地来到我身边。小鸟早已离开他们的巢穴，早露未干蜜蜂便早已在一天的黄金时刻飞到欧石南丛中采蜜，早晨长长的影子缩短了，太阳普照大地和天空——我才起身，朝四周看了看。

一个多么宁静、炎热的好天！一望无际的荒原多像一片金灿灿的沙漠！处处都是阳光。我真希望自己能住在这里，并以此为生。我看见一条蜥蜴爬过岩石，一只蜜蜂在甜蜜的越桔中间忙碌。此刻我愿做蜜蜂或蜥蜴，能在这里找到合适的养料和永久的住处。但我是人，有着人的需求。我可不能逗留在一个无法满足这种需求的地方，我站了起来，回头看了一眼我留下的床铺。我感到前途无望，但愿造物主认为有必要在夜里我熟睡时把我的灵魂要去；但愿我这疲乏的身躯能因为死亡而摆脱同命运的进一步搏斗；但愿它此刻无声无息地腐败，平静地同这荒原的泥土融为一体。然而，我还有生命，还有生命的一切需要、痛苦和责任。包袱还得背着；需要还得满足；痛苦还得忍受；责任还是要尽。于是我出发了。



我再次来到惠特克劳斯，这时骄阳高照。我选了一条背阳的路，我已无心根据其他情况来作出选择了。我走了很久，以为自己差不多走得够了，可以心安理得地向几乎把我压垮的疲劳屈服——可以放松一下这种强迫的活动了，于是在我附近看到的一块石头上坐了下来，听任心脏和四肢感到麻木。就在这时我听见钟声响了——教堂的钟声。

我转向声音传来的方向。在那里，我一小时之前就已不去注意其变幻和外观富有浪漫色彩的山峦之间，我看到了一个村庄和尖顶。我左侧的山谷满眼都是牧地、玉米地和树林。一条闪光的小溪弯弯曲曲地流过深浅各异的绿荫，流过正在成熟的稻谷，暗淡的树林，明净而充满阳光的草地。前面路上传来了隆隆的车轮声，我回过神来，看见一辆重载的大车，吃力地爬上了小山。不远的地方有两头牛和一个牧人。附近就有人在生活和劳作，我得挣扎下去，像别人那样努力去生活和操劳。

约摸下午两点，我进了村庄。一条街的尽头开着一个小店，窗里放着一些面包。我对一块面包很眼馋。有那样一块点心，我也许还能恢复一点力气，要是没有，再往前走就困难了。一回到我的同类之间，心头便又升起了要恢复精力的愿望。我觉得昏倒在一个小村的大路上很丢脸。难道我身上就连换取几块面包的东西都没有了吗？我想了一想。我有一小块丝绸围巾围在脖子上，还有一双手套。我难以表达贫困潦倒中的男女是怎么度日的。我不知道这两件东西是否会被人接受。可能他们不会要，但我得试一试。

我走进了店里，里面有一个女人。她见是一位穿著体面的人，猜想是位贵妇，于是便很有礼貌地走上前来。她怎么来照应我呢？我羞愧难当。我的舌头不愿吐出早已想好的要求。我不敢拿出旧了的手套，皱巴巴的围巾。另外，我还觉得这很荒唐。我只求她让我坐一会儿，因为我累了。她没有盼到一位雇客，很是失望，冷冷地答应了我的要求。她指了指一个座位，我一屁股坐了下来。我很想哭，但意识到那种表现会不合情理，便忍住了。我立刻问她“村子里有没有裁缝或者做做一般针线活的女人？”

“有，有两三个。按活计算也就够多的了。”

我沉思了一下。现在我不得不直说了。我已经面临困境，落到了没有食物，没有朋友，没有一文钱的地步。我得想点办法。什么办法呢？我得上什么地方去求助。上哪个地方呢？

“你知道附近有谁需要佣人吗？”

“不，我说不上来。”

“这个地方的主要行业是什么？大多数人是干什么活儿的？”

“有些是农场工，很多人在奥利弗先生的缝纫厂和翻砂厂工作。”

“奥利弗先生雇用女人吗？”

“不，那是男人的工作。”

“那么女人干什么呢，”

“我说不上来，”对方回答，

“有的干这，有的干那，穷人总得想方设法把日子过下去呀。”

她似乎对我的回话不耐烦了，其实我又何必强人所难呢？这时进来了一两位邻居，很明显看中了我的椅子，我起身告辞了。

我沿街走去，一面走一面左顾右盼，打量着所有的房子，但找不到进门的借口或动机。我这么漫无目的地绕着村庄走了一个来小时，有时走远了一些，又折回来。因为没有东西下肚，我筋疲力尽难受极了，于是折进一条小巷，在树篱下坐了下来。可是没过几分钟我又站起来，再去找些什么——食物，或者至少打听到一点消息。小巷的高处有一间漂亮的小房子，房子前有一个精致整洁、繁花盛开的花园，我在花园旁边停了下来，我有什么理由走近白色的门，去敲响闪光的门环呢？房主人又怎么会有兴趣来照应我呢？但我还是走近去敲了门。一位和颜悦色穿著干净的年轻女子开了门。我用一个内心绝望，身怀虚弱的人那种可怜低沉、吞吞吐吐的音调——问她是不是要一个佣人？

“不要，”她说“我们不雇佣人。”

“你能不能告诉我，哪儿能找到工作吗？”我继续问。“这个地方我很陌生，没有熟人，想找个工，什么样的都行。”

但为我想一个，或者找一个工作不是她的事儿，更何况在她看来，我的为人、我的状况和我说的原委一定显得很可疑，她摇了摇头，“很遗憾我没法给你提供消息，”白色的门尽管轻轻地、很有礼貌地合上了，但毕竟把我关出了门外。要是她让门再开一会儿，我相信准会向她讨点面包，因为现在我已落到十分下贱的地步了。

我不忍再返回龌龊的庄子，况且那儿也没有希望得到帮助。我本想绕道去一个看得见的不远的林子。那里浓荫盖地，似乎有可能提供诱人的落脚地方。但是我那么病弱，那么为天性的渴求所折磨、本能使我只绕着有机会得到食品的住处转。当饥饿像猛兽一样嘴爪俱下抓住我时、孤独也不成其孤独，歇息也谈不上歇息了。

我走近了住家，走开了又回来，回来了又走开。总有被一种意识所击退，觉得没有理由提出要求，没有权利期望别人对我孤独的命运发生兴趣。我像一条迷路的饿狗那么转来转去，一直到了下午，我穿过田野的时候，看到前面的教堂尖顶，便急步朝它走去。靠近教堂院子和一个花园的中间，有一所虽然不大但建造得很好的房子，我确信那是牧师的住所，我想起来，陌生人到了一个无亲无故的地方，想找个工，有时会去找牧师引荐和帮助。给那些希望自立的人帮忙——至少是出主意是牧师份内的事儿。我似乎有某种权利上那儿去听主意。于是我鼓起勇气，集中起一点点残留的力气，奋力往前走。我到了房子跟前，敲了敲厨房的门。一位老妇开了门，我问她这是不是牧师的住所。

“是的。”

“牧师在吗？”

“没有。”

“很快会回来吗？”

“不，他离开家了。”

“去很远的地方？”

“不太远——三英里。他因为父亲突然去世被叫走了，眼下住在沼泽居，很可能还要再呆上两周。”

“家里有哪位小姐在吗？”

“没有，除了我没有别人，而我是管家。”读者呀，我不忍求她帮我摆脱越陷越深的困境，而我又不能乞讨，于是我再次退缩

我又取下了围巾——又想起了小店的面包。呵，就是一片面包屑也好！只要有一口就能减轻饥饿的痛苦，我本能地又把脸转向了村庄，我又看见了那个店，走了进去，尽管除了那女人里面还有其他人，我冒昧地提出了请求“你肯让我用这块围巾换一个面包卷吗？”

她显然满腹狐疑地看着我，“不，我从来不那么卖东西。”

在几乎走投无路之中，我央求她换半个，她再次拒绝了。“我怎么知道你从什么地方弄来的围巾？”她说。

“你肯收这双手套吗？”

“不行，我要它干什么？”

读者呀，叙述这些细节是不愉快的。有人说，回首痛苦的往事是一种享受。但就是在今天，我也不忍回顾我提到的那些时日，道德的堕落挽和着肉体的煎熬，构成了我不愿重提的痛苦回忆。我不责备任何一个冷眼待我的人，觉得这尽在意料之中，也是无可避免的。一个普通的乞丐往往是怀疑的对象，而一个穿著体面的乞丐，就必定是这样了。当然，我只恳求工作，但给我活干又是谁的事儿呢？当然不是那些初次见我，对我的为人一无所知的人的事。至于那个女人不肯让我用围巾换面包，那也是奇怪的，要是我的提议在她后来居心叵测，或是这桩交换无利可图，那她的做法也是不错的。让我长话短说吧，我讨厌这个话题。

天快黑的时候，我走过一家农户。农夫坐在敞开着门口，正用面包和奶酪作晚餐。我站住说：

“能给我一片面包吗？因为我实在饿得慌。”他惊异地看了我一眼，但二话没说，便切了一厚片面包给我。我估计他并不认为我是个乞丐，而只是一位怪僻的贵妇，看中了他的黑面包

了。我一走到望不见他屋子的地方，便坐下吃了起来。

既然我无法期望在屋檐下借宿，那就让我到前面提到的林子里去过夜吧。但是那晚很糟糕，休息断断续续，地面很潮湿，空气十分寒冷，此外，不止一次地有外人路过，弄得我一次次换地方，没有安全感，也得不到清静。临近早晨天下雨了，第二天下了一整天。读者呀，别要我把那天的情况说个仔细。我像以前一样寻找工作，像以前一样遭到拒绝，像以前一样挨饿。不过有一回食物倒是进了嘴。在一间小茅屋门口，我看见一个小女孩正要把糊糟糟的冷粥倒进猪槽里。

“可以把它给我吗？”我问。

她瞪着我。“妈妈！”她嚷道，“有个女的要我把粥给她。”

“行呵，孩子，”里边的一个声音回答，“要是她是个乞丐，那就给了她吧，猪也不会要吃的。”

这女孩把结了块的粥倒在我手上，我狼吞虎咽地吃掉了。

湿润的黄昏越来越浓时，我在一条偏僻的马道上走了一个多小时后停了下来。

“我体力不行了，”我自言自语地说。“自己觉得走不了多远了。难道今晚又没有地方投宿？雨下得那么大，难道我又得把头靠在阴冷湿透的地面上吗？我担心自己别无选择了。谁肯接纳我呢？但是带着这种饥饿、昏眩、寒冷、凄楚的感觉——一种绝望的心情，那着实可怕。不过很可能我捱不到早上就会死去。那么我为什么不能心甘情愿地死掉呢？为什么我还要挣扎来维持没有价值的生命？因为我知道，或是相信，罗切斯特先生还活着，另外，死于饥寒是天性所不能默认的命运。呵，上天呀！再支撑我一会儿！帮助我——指引我吧！”

我那呆滞的眼睛徘徊在暗沉沉、雾蒙蒙的山水之间。我发现自己已远离村庄，因为它已在我视线中消失，村子周围的耕地也不见了。我已经穿小径，抄近路再次靠近了一大片荒原。此刻，在我与黑糊糊的小山之间，只有几小片田野，几乎没有很好开垦，和原来的欧石南差不多一样荒芜和贫瘠。

“是呀，与其倒毙街头或死在人来人往的路上，倒不加死到那边去，”我沉思着。“让乌鸦和渡鸦——要是那些地区有渡鸦的话——啄我骨头上的肉比装在贫民院的棺材里和穷光蛋的墓穴中要强。”

随后我折向那座小山，并到了那里。现在就只剩找个能躺下来的地方了，就是并不安全，至少也是隐蔽的。可是荒原的表面看上去都一样平坦，只有色彩上有些差别：灯心草和苔藓茂密生长的湿地呈青色；而只长欧石南的干土壤是黑色的。虽然夜越来越黑，但我仍能看清这些差别，尽管它不过是光影的交替，因为颜色已经随日光而褪尽了。

我的目光仍在暗淡的高地游弋，并沿着消失在最荒凉的景色中的荒原边缘逡巡。这时，远在沼泽和山脊之中，一个模糊的点，一道光跃入我眼帘。“那是鬼火，”是我第一个想法，我估计它会立即消失。然而，那光继续亮着，显得很稳定，既不后退，也不前进。“难道是刚点燃的篝火？”我产生了疑问。我注视着，看它会不会扩散。但没有，它既不缩小，也不扩大。

“这也许是一间房子里的烛光。”我随后揣想着，“即便那样，我也永远到不了那儿了。它离这儿太远，可就是离我一码远，又有什么用？我只会敲，开门，又当着我面关上。”

我就在站立的地方颓然倒下，把头埋进地里，静静地躺了一会。夜风刮过小山，吹过我身上，呜咽着在远处消失。雨下得很大，重又把我浇透。要是这么冻成了冰块——那么友好地麻木而死——雨点也许还会那么敲击着；而我毫无感觉。可是我依然活着的肉体，在寒气的侵袭下颤抖，不久我便站了起来。

那光仍在那边，在雨中显得朦胧和遥远。我试着再走，拖着疲乏的双腿慢慢地朝它走去。它引导我穿过一个宽阔的泥沼，从斜刺里上了山。要是在冬天，这个泥沼是没法通过的，就是眼下盛夏，也是泥浆四溅，一步一摇晃。我跌倒了两次，两次都爬起来，振作起精神。那道光是我几乎无望的希望，我得赶到那里。

穿过沼泽我看到荒原上有一条白印子，我向它走去，见是一条大路或是小径，直通那道正从树丛中一个小土墩上射来的光。在昏暗中从树形和树叶能分辨出，那显然是杉木树丛，我一走近，我的星星便不见了，原来某些障碍把它和我隔开了，我伸出手在面前一团漆黑中摸索。我辨认出了一堵矮墙的粗糙石头——上面象是一道栅栏，里面是高而带刺的篱笆。我继续往前摸。那白色东西歪又在我面前闪光了，原来是一条门——一条旋转门，我一碰便在铰链上转了起来。门两边各有一丛黑黑的灌木——是冬青或是紫杉。

进了门，走过灌木，眼前便现出了一所房子的剪影，又黑又矮却相当长。但是那道引路的光却消失了，一切都模模糊糊。难道屋里的人都安息了？我担心准是这样。我转了一个角度去找门，那里又闪起了友好的灯光，是从一尺之内一扇格子小窗的菱形玻璃上射出来的，那扇窗因为长青藤或是满墙的爬藤类植物的叶子，显得更小了。留下的空隙那么小，又覆盖得那么好，窗帘和百叶窗似乎都没有必要了。我弯腰撩开窗户上浓密的小枝条，里面的一切便看得清清楚楚了。我能看得清房间的沙子地板擦得干干净净。还有一个核桃木餐具柜，上面放着一排排锡盘，映出了燃烧着的泥炭火的红光。我能看得见一只钟、一张白色的松木桌和几把椅子，桌子上点着一根蜡烛，烛光一直是我的灯塔。一个看去有些粗糙，但也像她周围的一切那样一尘不染的老妇人，借着烛光在编织袜子。

我只是粗略地看了看这些东西，——它们并没有不同寻常的地方。令我更感兴趣的是火炉旁的一群人，在洋溢着玫瑰色的宁静和暖意中默默地坐着。两个年轻高雅的女子——从各方面看都像贵妇人——坐着，一个坐在低低的摇椅里；另一个坐在一条更矮的凳子上。两人都穿戴了黑纱和毛葛的重丧服，暗沉沉的服饰格外烘托出她们白皙的脖子和面孔。一只大猎狗把它巨大无比的头靠在一个姑娘膝头，——另一个姑娘的膝头则偎着一只黑猫。

这个简陋的厨房里居然呆着这样两个人，真是奇怪。她们会是谁呢，不可能是桌子旁边那个长者的女儿，因为她显得很土，而她们却完全是高雅而有教养。我没有在别处看到过这样的面容，然而我盯着她们看时，却似乎觉得熟悉每一个面部特征。她们说不上漂亮——过份苍白严肃了些，够不上这个词。两人都低头看书，显得若有所思，甚至还有些严厉。她们之间的架子上放着第二根蜡烛，和两大卷书，两人不时地翻阅着，似乎还在与手中的小书作比较，像是在查阅词典，翻译什么一样。这一幕静得仿佛所有的人都成了影子，生了火的房间活像一幅画。这儿那么静谧，我能听到煤渣从炉栅上落下的声音，昏暗的角落时钟的嘀嗒声，我甚至想象我能分辨出那女人嚓嚓嚓的编织声，因而当一个嗓音终于打破奇怪的宁静时，我

足以听得分明。

“听着，黛安娜，”两位专心致志的学生中的一位说，“费朗茨和老丹尼尔在一起过夜。费朗茨正说起一个梦，这个梦把他给吓醒——听着！”她声音放得很低，读了什么东西，我连一个字也没听懂，因为这是一种完全陌生的语言——既不是法文，也不是拉丁。至于是希腊文还是德文，我无法判断。

“那说得很有力，”她念完后说，“我很欣赏。”另一位抬头听着她妹妹的站娘，一面凝视炉火，一面重复了刚才读过的一行。后来，我知道了那种语言 and 那本书，所以我要在这里加以引用，尽管我当初听来，仿佛是敲在铜器上的响声——不传达任何意义：

“Da trat hervor Einer, anzusehn wie die Sternen Nacht” “妙！妙！”她大嚷着，乌黑深沉的眼睛闪着光芒。“你面前恰好站了一位模糊而伟大的天使！这一行胜过一百页浮华的文章。‘Ich wage die Gedanken in der Schale meines Zornes und die Werke mit dem Gewichte meines Grimms’ 我喜欢它！”

两人沉默了，

“有哪个国家的人是那么说话的？”那老妇人停下手头的编织、抬起头来问。

“有的、汉娜——一个比英国要大得多的国家、那里的人就只这么说。”

“噢，说真的，我不知道他们彼此怎么能明白，要是你们谁上那儿去，我想你们能懂他说的话吧？”

“他们说的我们很可能只懂一些，不是全部都懂——因为我们不像你想象的那么聪明，汉娜，我们不会说德语，而且不借助词典还读不懂。”

“那这对你们有什么用？”

“某一天我们想教德语——或者像他们说的，至少教基础，然后我们会比现在赚更多的钱，”

“很可能的，不过今晚你们读得够多了。该停止了。”

“我想是够多了，至少我倦了，玛丽，你呢？”

“累极了，那么孜孜不倦学一门语言，没有老师，只靠一部词典，毕竟是吃力的。”

“是呀，尤其是像德语这样艰涩而出色的语言。不知道圣·约翰什么时候会回家来。”

“现在肯定不会太久了，才十点呢（她从腰带里掏出一只小小的金表来，看了一眼）。“雨下得很大，汉娜。请你看一下客厅里的火炉好吗？”

那妇人站起来，开了门。从门外望进去，我依稀看到了一条过道。不一会我听她在内间拨着

火，她马上又返回了。

“呵，孩子们！”她说，“这会儿进那边的房间真让我难受。椅子空空的，都靠后摆在角落里，看上去很冷清。”

她用围裙揩了揩眼睛，两位神情严肃的姑娘这时也显得很关心。

“不过他在一个更好的地方了，”汉娜继续说：“我们不该再盼他在这里。而且，谁也不会比他死得更安详了。”

“你说他从未提起过我们？”一位小姐问。

“他来不及提了，孩子，他一下子就去了——你们的父亲。像前一天一样，他一直有点痛，但不严重。圣·约翰先生问他，是否要派人去叫你们两个中的一个回来，他还笑他呢。第二天他的头开始有点沉重——那是两周以前——他睡过去了，再也没有醒来。你们兄弟进房间发现他的时候，他差不多已经咽气了。呵，孩子！那是最后一个老派人了——因为跟那些过世的人相比，你和圣·约翰先生似是另一类人，你母亲完全也像你们一样，差不多一样有学问。你活像她，玛丽，黛安娜像你们父亲。”

我认为她们彼此很像，看不出老仆人（这会儿我断定她是这种身份的人）所见的区别。两人都是皮肤白皙，身材苗条。两人的脸都绝顶聪明，很有特征。当然一位的头发比另一位要深些，发式也不一样。玛丽的浅褐色头发两边分开，梳成了光光的辫子，黛安娜的深色头发流成粗厚的发卷，遮盖着脖子。时钟敲了十点。

“肯定你们想吃晚饭了，”汉娜说。“圣·约翰先生回来了也会一样。”

她忙着去准备晚饭了。两位小姐立起身来，似乎正要走到客厅去。在这之前我一直目不转睛地看着她们，她们的外表和谈话引起了强烈的兴趣，我竟把自己的痛苦处境忘掉了一半。这会儿却重又想了起来，与她们一对比，我的境遇就更凄凉、更绝望了。要打动房子里的人让她们来关心我，相信我的需要和悲苦是真的——要说动她们为我的流浪提供一个歇息之处，是多么不可能呀！我摸到门边，犹犹豫豫地敲了起来时，我觉得自己后一个念头不过是妄想。汉娜开了门。

“你有什么事？”她一面借着手中的烛光打量我，一面带着惊异的声调问。

“我可以同你的小姐们说说吗？”我说。

“你还是告诉我你有什么话要同她们讲吧，你是从哪儿来的？”

“我是个陌生人。”

“这时候上这里来干什么？”

“我想在外间或者什么地方搭宿一个晚上，还要一口面包吃。”

汉娜脸上出现了我所担心的那种怀疑的表情。“我给你一片面包，”她顿了一下说，“但我们不收流浪者过夜。那不妥当。”

“无论如何让我同你小姐们说说。”

“不行，我不让。她们能替你做什么呢？这会儿你不该游荡了，天气看来很不好。”

“但要是你把我赶走，我能上哪儿呢？我怎么办呢？”

“呵，我保证你知道上哪儿去干什么？当心别干坏事就行啦。这儿是一个便士，现在你走吧！”

“一便士不能填饱我肚皮，而我没有力气往前赶路了。别关门！——呵，别，看在上帝份上！”

“我得关掉，否则雨要泼进来了。”

“告诉年轻姑娘们吧，让我见见她们。”

“说真的我不让。你不守本份，要不你不会这么吵吵嚷嚷的。走吧！”

“要是把我赶走，我准会死掉的。”

“你才不会呢。我担心你们打着什么坏主意，所以才那么深更半夜到人家房子里来，要是你有什么同伙——强入住宅打劫的一类人——就在近旁，你可以告诉他们，房子里不光是我们这几个，我们有一位先生，还有狗和枪。”说到这里，这位诚实却执拗的佣人关了门，在里面上锁了。

这下子可是倒霉透顶了。一阵剧痛——彻底绝望的痛苦——充溢并撕裂了我的心。其实我已经衰弱不堪，就是再往前跨一步的力气都没有了。我颓然倒在潮湿的门前台阶上。我呻吟着——绞着手——极度痛苦地哭了起来。呵，死亡的幽灵！呵，这最后的一刻来得那么恐怖！哎呀，这种孤独——那么从自己同类中被撵走！不要说希望之锚消失了，就连刚强精神立足的地方也不见了——至少有一会儿是这样，但后一点，我马上又努力恢复了。

“我只能死了，”我说，“而我相信上帝，让我试着默默地等待他的意志吧。”

这些话我不仅脑子里想了，而且还说出了口，我把一切痛苦又驱回心里，竭力强迫它留在那里。——安安静静地不出声。

“人总是要死的，”离我很近的一个声音说道：“但并不是所有的人都注定要象你这样，慢悠悠受尽折磨而早死的，要是你就这么死于饥渴的话。”

“是谁，或者什么东西在说话？”我问道，一时被突如其来的声音吓了一跳。此刻我不会对发生的任何事情寄予得救的希望。一个影子移近了——究竟什么影子，漆黑的夜和衰弱的视力使我难以分辨。这位新来者在门上重重地长时间敲了起来。



“是你吗，圣.约翰先生？”汉娜叫道。

“是呀——是呀，快开门。”

“哎呀，那么个狂风暴雨的夜晚，你准是又湿又感觉冷了：进来吧——你妹妹们为你很担心，而且我相信附近有坏人。有一个女讨饭——我说她还没有走呢？躺在那里。快起来！真害臊！我说你走吧！”

“嘘，汉娜！我来对这女人说句话，你已经尽了责把她关在门外，这会儿让我来尽我的责把她放进来。我就在旁边，听了你也听了她说的。我想这情况特殊——我至少得了解一下。年轻的女人，起来吧，从我面前进屋去。”

我困难地照他的话办了，不久我就站在干净明亮的厨房里了——就在炉子跟前——浑身发抖，病得厉害，知道自己风吹雨打、精神狂乱，样子极其可怕。两位小姐，她们的哥哥圣.约翰先生和老仆人都呆呆地看着我。

“圣.约翰，这是谁呀，”我听见一个问。

“我说不上来，发现她在门边，”那人回答。

“她脸色真苍白，”汉娜说。

“色如死灰，”对方回答，“她会倒下的，让她坐着吧。”

说真的我的脑袋昏昏沉沉的。我倒了下去，但一把椅子接住了我。尽管这会儿我说不了话，但神志是清醒的。

“也许喝点水会使她恢复过来。汉娜，去打点水来吧。不过她憔悴得不成样子了。那么瘦，一点血色也没有！”

“简直成了个影子。”

“她病了，还光是饿坏了？”

“我想是饿坏了。汉娜，那可是牛奶，给我吧，再给一片面包。”

黛安娜（我是在她朝我弯下身子，看到垂在我与火炉之间的长卷发知道的）掰下了一些面包，在牛奶里浸了一浸，送进我嘴里。她的脸紧挨着我，在她脸上我看到了一种怜悯的表情，从她急促的呼吸中我感受到了她的同情。她用朴素的话说出了满腔温情：“硬吃一点吧。”

“是呀——硬吃一点”玛丽和气地重复着，从我头上摘去了湿透的草帽，把我的头托起来。我尝了尝他们给我的东西，先是恹恹地，但马上便急不可耐了。

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“先别让她吃得太多——控制一下，”哥哥说，“她已经吃够了”。于是她端走了那杯牛奶和那盘面包。

“再让她吃一点点吧，圣·约翰——瞧她眼睛里的贪婪相。”

“暂时不要了，妹妹。要是她现在能说话，那就试着——问问她的名字吧。”

我觉得自己能说了，而且回答——“我的名字叫简·爱略特，因为仍急于避免被人发现，我早就决定用别名了。”

“你住在什么地方，你的朋友在哪里，”

我没有吭声。

“我们可以把你认识的人去叫来吗？”

我摇了摇头。

“你能说说你自己的事儿吗？”

不知怎地，我一跨进门槛，一被带到这家主人面前，就不再觉得自己无家可归，到处流浪，被广阔的世界所抛弃了。我就敢于扔掉行乞的行当——恢复我本来的举止和个性。我再次开始了解自己。圣·约翰要我谈一下自己的事时——眼下我体质太弱没法儿讲——我稍稍顿了一顿后说——

“先生，今晚我没法给你细讲了。”

“不过，”他说，“那么你希望我们为你做些什么呢？”

“没有，”我回答。我的力气只够我作这样简要的回答。黛安娜接过了话：

“你的意思是，”她问，“我们既然已给了你所需要的帮助，那就可以把你打发到荒原和雨夜中去了？”

我看了看她。我想她的脸很出众，洋溢着力量和善意。我蓦地鼓起勇气，对她满是同情的目光报之以微笑。我说：“我会相信你们。假如我是一条迷路的无主狗，我知道你们今天晚上不会把我从火炉旁撵走。其实，我真的并不害怕。随你们怎么对待我照应我吧，但请原谅我不能讲得太多——我的气很短——一讲话就痉挛。”三个人都仔细打量我，三个人都不说话。

“汉娜，”圣·约翰先生终于说，“这会儿就让她坐在那里吧，别问她问题。十分钟后把剩下的牛奶和面包给她。玛丽和黛安娜，我们到客厅去，仔细谈谈这件事吧。”

他们出去了。很快一位小姐回来了——我分不出是哪一位，我坐在暖融融的火炉边时，一种神思恍惚的快感悄悄地流遍我全身。她低声吩咐了汉娜。没有多久，在佣人的帮助下，我挣

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扎着登上楼梯，脱去了湿淋淋的衣服，很快躺倒在一张温暖干燥的床上。我感谢上帝——在难以言说的疲惫中感受到了一丝感激的喜悦——便睡着了。